

Sunday, February 5, 2017

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 58:7-10

Responsorial: Psalm 112:4-9

2nd Reading:

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Gospel:

Matthew 5:13-16

The Importance of Letting Your Light Shine before Others

Your light must shine before others. (Matthew 5:16)

Mahatma Gandhi once told a Christian friend, “I like your Christ, but I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” In a similar vein, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said that if he saw more redeemed people he might be more inclined to believe in their Redeemer.

What a sobering reflection of the witness of the Church in their day! Neither Gandhi nor Nietzsche saw enough believers’ lights shining to convince them that the gospel message really does have the power to change people’s lives.

That’s the challenge of today’s Gospel reading: to show the joy, the love, and the peace of Jesus to people like Gandhi and Nietzsche. It’s the challenge for each of us to live like “our Christ” and to show the world just how distinctive and fulfilling a redeemed life can be. In a very real way, our credibility—as well as the credibility of Jesus’ message—is on the line every single day. And a credibility gap hinders our ability to help other people come to embrace Jesus in their hearts.

Here’s a true story: Jim, a devout Catholic, moved into a home next door to a wealthy Muslim family. They enjoyed a friendly and cordial relationship. Over the course of the next year, the Muslim family’s business imploded, and they had to declare bankruptcy. They lost everything. They were living in the house, waiting to be evicted, with little food or money. What’s worse, all of their friends had abandoned them.

But Jim and his wife acted differently. They emptied their refrigerator and pantry and gave as much as they could to their struggling neighbors. They also loaned them money. They continued doing this for nearly a year, until things turned around, and the family gradually dug their way out of bankruptcy.

As moving as this story is, here is the best part: the family became Christians—all because of the love of Jim and his wife.

“Lord, help me to shine your light everywhere I go.”

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Questions for Reflection/Discussion by Catholic Men:

1. In the first reading, we hear the Lord tell Isaiah these words: “Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!”
 - What are the blessings described by the Lord in that will result from our service to others.
 - What blessings have you received when you have gone out of your way to pray and care for others?
2. The responsorial psalm, like the first reading, describes how we can be a light in the darkness to others. It goes on to give various examples of how our “Light shines through the darkness for the upright.”
 - What are some of these examples?
 - How would you describe examples in your life when others were a light to you? What part did they play in your growth as a Christian?
3. We are often tempted to only consider how great a preacher St. Paul was. In the second reading, however, Paul paints a different picture of himself when he says, “I came to you in weakness and fear, and much trembling.” The source of his strength came from his relationship with the Lord and from the power of God that dwelt within him.
 - In what ways are you also able to identify with Paul?
 - What additional steps might the Lord be calling you to take in order to strengthen your relationship with the Lord, and like Paul, to “know nothing . . . except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”
4. In the Gospel reading, Jesus uses a metaphor of light, similar to the first reading and responsorial psalm, when he declares: “You are the light of the world” and this light “gives light to all in the house.”
 - What does it mean to you when Jesus says, “You are the light of the world.”
 - Who are the people in your life and what are the situations that need your prayer and God’s light to shine through you?
5. Notice that in the Gospel, Jesus also says that the fruit of people seeing your light shine through “good deeds” is not to bring honor to yourself, but to “glorify your heavenly Father.”
 - Why are these words of Jesus so important?
 - What practical steps can you take to be an even greater light in order to draw family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and others to the Lord through your “good deeds”?
6. The meditation contrasts the unbelief of Mahatma Gandhi and Friedrich Nietzsche, due to the negative witness they saw in Christians, to the conversion of a Muslim family to Christianity, due to the witness, kindness, and generosity of their neighbor Jim and his wife. It also challenges us with these words: “That’s the challenge of today’s Gospel reading: to show the joy, the love, and the peace of Jesus to people like Gandhi and Nietzsche. It’s the challenge for each of us to live like “our Christ” and to show the world just how distinctive and fulfilling a redeemed life can be.”
 - What impact do these words from the meditation have on you?
 - How sensitive are you to the impact your actions and words can have in drawing others to Jesus Christ and his Church?
7. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to be faithful to his call to be a light to the world and for your light to shine before others. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

“Lord, help me to shine your light everywhere I go.”

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is in partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>); a ministry of **The Word Among Us** (www.wau.org) to the military, prisoners, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. He is also a member of the **National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal** (<http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org/>) and a member of the board of

directors of the **Christlife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization** (<https://christlife.org/>). Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men**, for which he is currently a Trustee (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>). He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org.]