

Sunday, January 22, 2017

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 8:23–9:3

Responsorial: Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14

2nd Reading:

1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

Gospel:

Matthew 4:12-23

The Power of Unity and Love in Healing Divisions in Churches and Families

Urge . . . that you be united. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

At the Last Supper, Jesus prayed that his people would be united (John 17:21). He also prayed that the mark of his disciples would be their love for one another (13:34-35). And in today's second reading, Paul makes a plea for unity in the Corinthian church.

What will be the single most compelling thing that will move people to believe in Jesus? Our unity. Our love for each other.

We were not in Corinth two thousand years ago. We were not in South Africa one hundred years ago when Mahatma Gandhi said, "I like your Christ; it's you Christians I don't like. You Christians are so unlike your Christ." Still, what they saw exists today. There is far too much division in our Church and our homes.

Imagine how brightly the Church would shine if every family were to dedicate themselves to unity. Imagine how attractive the Church would be if we put aside legalism and made it our highest priority to love each other as brothers and sisters. Imagine how magnetic the Church would be if we put aside judgments and looked upon each other as children of God who are trying their best to live out the command to love God and each other.

Unity doesn't mean agreeing on every issue. It means honoring and respecting everyone—including those we disagree with. That's because, as the Catechism teaches, the dignity of every human person doesn't depend on whether we like each other. It depends on the fact that we have all been created in the image and likeness of God (CCC 1700-1701).

Of course, the idea of unity in our parishes can sound nearly impossible. But that's not a problem for God; nothing is impossible with him. So take St. Paul's words today, and make them your own. Make it your goal to be in unity with everyone, especially within your family.

"Come, Lord, and heal all divisions. Make our churches and families beacons of your love."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission. For more information on how to subscribe to their devotional magazine, go to www.wau.org).

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. In the First Reading, Isaiah speaks of the great promise that “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.” This great promise, which is repeated in the Gospel Reading, has been fulfilled in Christ. In Christ, the “yoke” of sin that has “burdened” us has been “smashed.” The result of this is “abundant joy” and “great rejoicing”.
 - Does your Christian witness reflect the “abundant joy” and “great rejoicing” you received in Christ?
 - How can you make your life a greater reflection of what you have received in Christ?
2. The Responsorial Psalm also reflects the promises of the first reading: “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? The LORD is my life's refuge; of whom should I be afraid?” It goes on to remind us that we shall “see the bounty of the Lord in the land of the living,” not just when we get to heaven. And this will occur when we “gaze on the loveliness of the Lord and contemplate his temple.”
 - In what ways is the Lord your light and salvation and your life's refuge? Why should this cause you to say: “whom should I fear” and “of whom should I be afraid”?
 - What role does regular time spent in prayer, worship, and Scripture reading play in this?
3. In the Second Reading, St. Paul urged that Christian brothers and sisters in the church at Corinth overcome their many “divisions” and “rivalries,” and be united in Christ “in the same mind and in the same purpose.”
 - How can you help build greater unity within your parish?
 - During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, January 18-25, what steps can you take individually, and together, to pray for and promote Christian unity with non-Catholic Christians?
4. In the Gospel, Jesus’ preaching begins with these words: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
 - How important is it for you to have a regularly scheduled examination of conscience, for example, as part of your prayer life? How important should it be?
 - How important to you is the Sacrament of Reconciliation? How important should it be?
5. In the Gospel, we are also told that when called by the Lord the disciples responded “immediately,” and left everything to follow him.
 - What are some of the obstacles that can keep you from responding immediately when the Lord calls you or reveals his will to you?
 - What steps can you take, with the Lord’s help and grace, to overcome them?
6. The meditation opens with these words: “At the Last Supper, Jesus prayed that his people would be united (John 17:21). He also prayed that the mark of his disciples would be their love for one another (13:34-35). And in today’s second reading, Paul makes a plea for unity in the Corinthian church.” In John 17:21, Jesus prays that “they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.” In John 13:34-35, Jesus says these words: “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
 - In the meditation, the following question is asked and answered: “What will be the single most compelling thing that will move people to believe in Jesus? Our unity. Our love for each other.” Do you agree with this answer?
 - What other reasons will cause people to believe in Jesus
7. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord to bring healing to the divisions among Christian denominations, within our churches, and within our families. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

“Come, Lord, and heal all divisions. Make our churches and families beacons of your love.”

[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

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