

Sunday, February 26, 2017

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 49:14-15

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Responsorial: Psalm 62:2-3, 6-9

Gospel: Matthew 6:24-34

Knowing and Experiencing God's Great Love and Faithfulness

Even should she forget, I will never forget you. (Isaiah 49:15)

What a spectacular word from God! How did Isaiah come up with such a moving analogy for God's love? Especially in the ancient Near East, with its male-dominated outlook, comparing almighty God to a loving, tender mother must have sounded revolutionary.

Let this analogy sink in for a moment. When we hear of a mother's love for her newborn child, we immediately think of a warm, encompassing, and nurturing love. We think of a woman who will go to great lengths to protect her child, even if it means sacrificing her own life. And that's the surprising and beautiful thing about Isaiah's prophecy: this is how our God looks at us.

Initially, this prophetic word was intended to bring comfort to the Jews who had been defeated in battle and then exiled from their homes. Captives of war, living in a foreign country far from their home and their Temple, they could have thought that God had abandoned them. But Isaiah's words rang out with comfort and assurance: "I am with you."

At the same time, this prophecy is meant for all of us. Just as the Israelites were in need of hope and encouragement, so are we. No matter what our lives look like right now, the Lord wants to tell us, "I will never forget you." We all know that our world has a mixture of good and bad, of joy and sorrow, of love and hatred. How wonderful it is to know that in the midst of all the ups and downs of life, we have one constant: almighty God loves us just as intensely as a mother loves her child.

So sit quietly with your God today. Let the words from this reading wash over you and fill you up. Let God's love, a love as tender as a mother's love, comfort you and encourage you. You are never alone! God will never forget you!

"Thank you, Lord, that you promise never to forsake me. Help me rest in your tender love today.

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Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. In the first reading, the Lord offers words of encouragement to Israel (and to us) by reminding them of his tender and faithful love. He does this by comparing it to a mother's love: "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you."
 - What does it mean to you that the Lord loves you with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3) and with the faithfulness and tenderness of a mother's love? Do you believe this? Why or why not?
 - How easy is it for you to lose sight of these words when you are experiencing a difficult situation?
2. In the responsorial psalm, the psalmist echoes the words of the first reading. It begins with these words, "Only in God is my soul at rest; from him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed at all." The psalm ends with these words: "Trust in him at all times, O my people! Pour out your hearts before him."
 - Can you think of any times when your trust and confidence in the Lord's love and care for you kept you from being "disturbed" in a difficult situation?
 - When you come before the Lord in prayer, how easy is it for you to "Pour out your heart before him"? Why do you think the psalmist says this is important?
3. In the second reading, St. Paul tells us that we should be regarded as "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" and as good stewards we are "found trustworthy."
 - What do you think it means to be "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God"?
 - How "trustworthy" are you as a steward of the "mysteries" of God?
4. St. Paul goes on to say that he is not concerned about any human judgment for "the one who judges me is the Lord" and "he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will manifest the motives of our hearts, and then everyone will receive praise from God."
 - In what ways do St. Paul's words apply to each one of us as well?
 - How does knowing that Jesus died for your sins on the Cross affect your anticipation of your final judgment? Does it fill you with fear or a confident trust in the Lord's great love for you?
5. In the Gospel reading, Jesus tells us not to worry or be anxious about what we have and don't have or what will happen in the future. Rather he says to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides."
 - Why do you think Jesus says that to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" is the solution to our fears and concerns?
 - What are the circumstances that cause you to struggle in following Jesus' advice? How can you overcome them?
6. The meditation on the first reading ends with these words: "So sit quietly with your God today. Let the words from this reading wash over you and fill you up. Let God's love, a love as tender as a mother's love, comfort you and encourage you. You are never alone! God will never forget you!"
 - What, if any, are the obstacles that keep you from experiencing God's love in a deeper way, especially in prayer? How can you overcome them?
7. Take some time to pray and thank the Lord for his great love for you and for his faithfulness. Use the prayer below from the meditation as the starting point.

"Thank you, Lord, that you promise never to forsake me. Help me rest in your tender love today."

[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

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