

Sunday, May 21, 2017

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

2nd Reading: 1 Peter 3:15-18

Responsorial: Psalm 66:1-7, 16, 20

Gospel: John 14:15-21

Resisting Satan's Temptations and Harassments

There was great joy in that city. (Acts 8:8)

Today's first reading tells us three things: evil exists (Acts 8:7); we have the Holy Spirit in us (8:14-15); and we can experience "great joy" as God manifests his power (8:8).

Ever since the time of the Enlightenment, there has been a tendency to dismiss belief in the devil. An overemphasis on reason and science led people to believe that there was no reality beyond the material universe.

Yet Scripture gives us plenty of evidence to the contrary. Jesus confronted demonic forces when he met a man with an unclean spirit (Mark 1:21-28), a blind demoniac (Matthew 12:22-29), and the daughter of a Canaanite woman (15:21-28).

Evil spirits are real, and they are most effective when we are indifferent to them.

There are real-life situations of people who are possessed by evil spirits through witchcraft, curses, and the like. These people need the help of an exorcist. But those are rare cases. For the rest of us, Satan tends to harass us, not possess us. He whispers thoughts that tempt us to be negative, resentful, or self-condemning. We may think these thoughts come from ourselves, and partly they do. But at the same time, they are fostered by Satan's negative accusations.

So what can you do? First, have faith that the Holy Spirit is in you, helping you fight Satan's temptations. Second, pray. Hold on to the words of the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Then, pay attention to what is going on in your heart. Look for signs of how the temptation is diminishing. Rejoice in even the smallest sign of freedom!

Jesus has already conquered Satan. Now he wants us to step into the freedom he has won for us. By following these three simple steps, we can begin to know the "great joy" that comes when we resist Satan's temptations.

"Lord, lead me not into temptation. Deliver me from every evil harassment."

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. The first reading begins with these words: “Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ to them. With one accord, the crowds paid attention to what was said by Philip when they heard it and saw the signs he was doing.” It goes on to say that “There was great joy in that city.”
 - Why do you think the crowds “paid attention” to what Philip was saying and doing?
 - How would you describe why there was such “great joy in that city”?
 - How expectant or attentive are you when Scripture is read or when the homily is delivered at Mass? What steps can you take to be more attentive, so you too can be filled with “great joy”?
2. In the responsorial psalm, “joy” also appears beginning with the response: “Let all the earth cry out to God with joy” and the opening verse: “Shout joyfully to God, all the earth, sing praise to the glory of his name; proclaim his glorious praise.”
 - How does the psalmist go on to describe the basis for this joy?
 - What is the basis for your joy as you live out each day?
 - Someone once described joy as the echo of God’s life in us. How can you make God’s life “echo” more deeply in your life?
3. The second reading begins with these words from St. Peter: “Beloved: Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Peter then encourages us to “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.”
 - How ready are you to share your faith with others? What are the obstacles that hold you back?
 - If each day in prayer you would “Sanctify Christ as Lord” in your heart, what impact do you think it would have on helping to overcome any obstacles to sharing your faith with others?
4. The Gospel reading begins with these powerful words of Jesus to his disciples: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth.”
 - What an incredible promise in the Gospel reading: “I will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16, 17). How much do you reverence God’s very presence within you through the indwelling Spirit?
 - What might you do to turn to the Lord and the Holy Spirit more frequently during the day?
5. The meditation describes these steps that we can take in resisting the attacks of Satan in our lives: “First, have faith that the Holy Spirit is in you, helping you fight Satan’s temptations. Second, pray. Hold on to the words of the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ Then, pay attention to what is going on in your heart. Look for signs of how the temptation is diminishing. Rejoice in even the smallest sign of freedom!” It goes on to remind us that “Jesus has already conquered Satan. Now he wants us to step into the freedom he has won for us. By following these three simple steps, we can begin to know the “great joy” that comes when we resist Satan’s temptations.”
 - In what ways do you think the three steps described in the meditation will help to resist the temptations of Satan?
 - Are you willing to try these steps and then watch to see how differently your day goes?
6. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord to guard and protect you from the temptations and harassments of the Evil One. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Lord, lead me not into temptation. Deliver me from every evil harassment.”

[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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