

Sunday, May 7, 2017

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Acts 2:14, 36-41

Responsorial: Psalm 23:1-6

2nd Reading: 1 Peter 2:20-25

Gospel: John 10:1-10

What It Means to be “Cut to the Heart” by the Gospel Message

They were cut to the heart. (Acts 2:37)

Here it was, Peter’s very first sermon, and what did he say? He preached the heart of the gospel message. He spoke about Jesus—how he performed miracles, how he was put to death, and how he rose from the dead for our salvation. Then he brought everything to a grand conclusion: “God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). Luke tells us that when the people heard these words, they were “cut to the heart” (2:37).

We all know what it means to be cut to the heart. We see or hear something stirring, and we feel moved to do something about it right away. It’s like the way we feel when we hear about a family that has tragically lost a loved one. We feel very sad for that family. Our pierced hearts go out to them, and we feel moved to treasure our own family even more.

Can any message cut us to the heart more dramatically than the gospel? What can compare to the story of a God who loves us so much that he sent his only Son to rescue us from sin—at the cost of his own life? What can compare to hearing that we have the hope of eternal life if we just turn from sin and turn to Jesus?

Whether we are at peace with God or not, whether we are full of faith or weakened by doubts, whether we feel confident in life or overwhelmed by our challenges, recalling this message has the power to touch us and move us closer to Jesus.

Why? Because the gospel message helps us to see our lives from a heavenly perspective. It tells us that we are destined for something wonderful. It moves us to try a little harder to be pleasing to the Lord.

So make a promise today: “I will never let a day go by without remembering and trusting in the good news that ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life’” (John 3:16).

“Come, Holy Spirit; fill my heart and my mind with the gospel message. Move me to do whatever you ask.”

(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).

Sunday, May 7, 2017

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. In the first reading, Peter, on the day of Pentecost, ends his powerful proclamation of the Gospel message with these words: “Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” He then encourages the people to “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
 - We, as baptized Christian, have also received “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” How would you describe what it means to receive this gift?
 - In what way has this gift made a difference in the way you live out your life each day?
 - What steps can you take to experience more deeply this gift and allow the Holy Spirit to take a more active role in guiding and leading you?
2. The responsorial psalm is the very familiar 23rd Psalm. In it, the psalmist encourages us with these words: “He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side. With your rod and your staff that give me courage. You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”
 - In what ways do these words remind you of the first words spoken by John Paul II after his election as Pope: “Do not be afraid.”
 - Even though we know that the “Lord is my Shepherd,” what are the fears that can keep you from being the Catholic Christian you are called to be?
 - How can you use the words from Psalm 23 to help you to overcome these fears?
3. The second reading from 1 Peter opens with these words: “If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps.” St. Peter then goes on to describe Christ’s response to the unjust insults and sufferings he received. “When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly.”
 - How does Jesus’ response compare to your typical response to insults and suffering, especially when you think they are unjust?
 - Do you think it is possible to respond in the way Jesus did? Why or why not?
4. In the Gospel reading, Jesus reminds his listeners (and us) that he is the good shepherd who “calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” and “the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.” The Gospel goes on to say that the Pharisees, who were also listening to his words, “did not realize what he was trying to tell them.”
 - Why do you think the Pharisees did not understand Jesus’ message?
 - In what ways do you “recognize” Jesus’ voice in prayer and through the Scriptures?
 - What practical steps can you take to try to become more open to hearing the Lord’s voice when you pray?
5. In the meditation, the following three questions are posed:
 - “Can any message cut us to the heart more dramatically than the gospel? What can compare to the story of a God who loves us so much that he sent his only Son to rescue us from sin—at the cost of his own life? What can compare to hearing that we have the hope of eternal life if we just turn from sin and turn to Jesus?”
 - What is your response to what is posed by these questions?
6. The Meditation ends with these words: So make a promise today: “I will never let a day go by without remembering and trusting in the good news that ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life’” (John 3:16).
 - Why is it important to “never let a day go by without remembering and trusting in the good news” of John 3:16?
7. Take some time now and pray that you too would be “cut to the heart” by the message of the Gospel and the depth, breadth, and width of Jesus’ great love. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Come, Holy Spirit; fill my heart and my mind with the gospel message. Move me to do whatever you ask.”

[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

As posted on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal National Service Committee’s website: www.nsc-chariscenter.org

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**. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]