

Sunday, June 25, 2017

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Jeremiah 20:10-13

2nd Reading: Romans 5:12-15

Responsorial: Psalm 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35

Gospel: Matthew 10:26-33

Experiencing Jesus' Love and Mercy, and Loving Him in Return

Whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father. (Matthew 10:33)

Most of Jesus' words are encouraging and inspiring. But occasionally, he says something that shakes us up. For example, Jesus told us that our righteousness had better not be like that of the Pharisees, or we will not get into heaven (Matthew 5:20). He told us that unless we eat his Body and drink his Blood, we will not have eternal life (John 6:54). He even said, "Woe to you who are rich" (Luke 6:24).

Of course Jesus is a God of mercy and love. But today's Gospel is one of those seemingly harsh messages that make us worry about our eternal happiness. What are we supposed to do with statements like these?

Let's look at St. Peter. He, the "Rock" of the Church, denied that he even knew Jesus! But rather than scolding Peter or saying, "I am going to deny you before my Father," Jesus simply asked Peter, "Do you love me?" (John 21:15, 16, 17). He knew that Peter felt deep remorse. He knew that Peter had wept bitter tears of sadness over his weakness. So Jesus' question was clearly an invitation to reconciliation.

In a similar way, Jesus knows that we are all weak. He knows that we all betray him in one way or another. And he treats us just as he treated Peter.

The key to understanding this unsettling passage from the Gospel is this: Where is your heart? Peter loved Jesus. He wanted nothing more than to serve Jesus. He wasn't a coward. He was just a human being, and human beings can be overcome by fear and temptation at times.

So for Peter, as well as for all of us, this is the important distinction: Are you a sinner who doesn't know how to love God? Or are you a lover of God who falls into sin? Peter was a lover of God. So were all the other apostles who fled at Jesus' arrest. They may have failed Jesus at that moment, but Jesus never failed them. And he won't fail us!

"Jesus, I love you. Teach me to remain steadfast."

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading begins with Jeremiah crying out to the Lord in the midst of great inner and external suffering and persecution, including betrayal by his friends. Yet he goes on to proclaim that the “LORD is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion.” The psalm ends with these words: “Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD, for he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked!”
 - In what ways is the first reading one of hope, rather than despair?
 - The life of Jeremiah is often considered a prefigurement of the life of Jesus. How do the first reading passages foreshadow the sufferings of Christ?
2. The responsorial psalm, like the first reading, begins with the psalmist crying out in great despair and suffering. However, these opening words are followed by these prayers: “I pray to you, O LORD, for the time of your favor, O God! In your great kindness answer me with your constant help. Answer me, O LORD, for bounteous is your kindness; in your great mercy turn toward me.” The psalm ends with these words: “See, you lowly ones, and be glad; you who seek God, may your hearts revive! For the LORD hears the poor, and his own who are in bonds he spurns not. Let the heavens and the earth praise him, the seas and whatever moves in them!”
 - In what way is the responsorial psalm, like the first reading, one of hope and trust in the midst of great suffering? In what way is it different?
 - How can you apply the words of the responsorial psalm and the first reading to your own life?
 - How can you allow their words of faith and trust in the Lord to help sustain you during hard times?
3. The second reading from Romans opens with these difficult words: “Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned.” However, it ends with these words of hope: “But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many.”
 - What does St. Paul mean by the words, “the gift is not like the transgression”?
 - How would you explain the second reading to someone who didn’t understand it?
4. The Gospel begins with these words of Jesus’ to his apostles: “Fear no one. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.” It ends with these words: “Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.”
 - In what ways are these words a strong call to each of us to be willing to share our faith with others?
 - Do you find these passages convicting to you in terms of how you share your faith with others? Why or why not?
 - What are some of the obstacles that seem to keep you from openly sharing your faith with others? What steps can you take to overcome these obstacles?
5. The meditation begins with these words: “Most of Jesus’ words are encouraging and inspiring. But occasionally, he says something that shakes us up. It then describes specific examples where Jesus challenged his followers (and us). It then goes on to contrast these examples with the compassionate way Jesus dealt with St. Peter after he had denied he was his disciple or even knew Jesus. The meditation then ends with these words: “So for Peter, as well as for all of us, this is the important distinction: Are you a sinner who doesn’t know how to love God? Or are you a lover of God who falls into sin? Peter was a lover of God. So were all the other apostles who fled at Jesus’ arrest. They may have failed Jesus at that moment, but Jesus never failed them. And he won’t fail us!”
 - How would you answer these questions posed in the meditation: “Are you a sinner who doesn’t know how to love God? Or are you a lover of God who falls into sin?”
 - What is the basis for your answers?
6. Take some time now to thank the Lord for his love for you and ask for the grace to love him in return and be steadfast in how you live your life for him? Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Jesus, I love you. Teach me to remain steadfast.”

[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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