

Sunday, August 20, 2017

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

2nd Reading: Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

Responsorial: Psalm 67:2-3, 5-6, 8

Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28

Making Our Homes a House of Prayer

My house shall be called a house of prayer. (Isaiah 56:7)

Around the year AD 350, a popular and powerful bishop named John Chrysostom preached a series of sermons on the Sacrament of Marriage. John had been inspired by St. Paul's letters to describe for his congregation the beauty of marriage and family life. He called it a wonderful path to holiness. He spoke about the way each spouse is called to be like Jesus—selflessly giving all that they have to their spouse and family and to love their family with the same dedication that Jesus has for his Church (Ephesians 5:25).

Chrysostom told his congregation that God wants every family to see themselves as a “little church,” a sacred place where Christ is honored and where each family member is drawn to deeper holiness. He urged his people to keep their marriages pure and to guard their children's faith against the corrupting influences of the world. So moving were his sermons that more than 1,500 years later, the Fathers of Vatican II called Catholics to see their families as “domestic churches.”

God wants all of us to see our homes as miniature versions of the Church. Every home is meant to be a place of peace and love, a place of humility and service. It's meant to be a house of prayer, a place where Jesus is welcomed and revered.

May we all stand firm against any philosophy that reduces our homes to marketplaces or to merely functional living situations. May we all find creative ways to incorporate prayer in our homes—whether that means praying one decade of a Rosary each evening or reading a psalm together every morning. May we make it a point to express our love and appreciation to each other with our words and with warm embraces.

It doesn't take much to make our homes into houses of prayer. It just takes a willing heart and openness to God's blessing. Even if we make mistakes along the way, we can be sure that we will make progress.

“Lord, show us how to love each other as you love the Church.”

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading from Isaiah opens with these words: “Observe what is right, do what is just; for my salvation is about to come, my justice about to be revealed.”
 - What do you think this means?
 - How do these words apply to how you live out your Christian life?
2. Isaiah also speaks of the all-inclusiveness of God’s love. All people are welcome in God’s house, especially those who: “join themselves to the LORD, ministering to him, loving the name of the LORD, and becoming his servants—all who keep the sabbath free from profanation and hold to my covenant.” The first reading ends with these words: “for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”
 - Are there any people you know who need prayers; especially for their conversion to Christ, for their transformation into his image and likeness, and for their salvation? Are you willing to include these people in your times of prayer? If not, why not?
 - Are there any people that you believe are excluded from your love or God’s love? Why?
3. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: “May God have pity on us and bless us; may he let his face shine upon us. So may your way be known upon earth; among all nations, your salvation.”
 - What nations can you think of that need prayers and need God’s blessing and the knowledge of his wonderful salvation in Jesus Christ? Are you willing to include these nations in your times of prayer? If not, why not?
 - Do you believe there are nations today that are beyond God’s blessing and salvation? Why?
4. The second reading ends with these words of St. Paul regarding God’s mercy toward the Jewish people and Christians: “I glory in my ministry in order to make my race jealous and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you once disobeyed God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now disobeyed in order that, by virtue of the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.”
 - What do you think these words mean? How do they apply to us?
 - Are you willing to join your prayers with Paul’s and pray for God’s mercy and for the conversion of the Jewish people -- and any specific Jewish persons you know who need to come to know God’s great love for them?
5. In the Gospel reading, Jesus does not seem to be sympathetic to the Canaanite woman who cries out to him to heal her daughter. He uses such words as “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” and “It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.” Yet, in the end he tells the women, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish” and “the woman’s daughter was healed from that hour.”
 - Do you believe that Jesus wants to test our faith at times, just as he did for this woman and his disciples?
 - Do you believe that just as Jesus pushed this woman, so he pushes us sometimes; in order to provoke us to deeper faith by challenging us to trust him even when we think he is ignoring us or rejecting our request?
 - How can reflecting on difficult Scriptures, like this Gospel reading, help us understand more and more God’s desire to help us grow in our faith in him and our trust in his great love for us?
6. In the meditation, hear these words: “God wants all of us to see our homes as miniature versions of the Church. Every home is meant to be a place of peace and love, a place of humility and service. It’s meant to be a house of prayer, a place where Jesus is welcomed and revered. May we all stand firm against any philosophy that reduces our homes to marketplaces or to merely functional living situations.”
 - In what ways have you tried to make your home a “miniature version” of the Church?
 - What additional steps can you take to make your home “a place of peace and love, a place of humility and service” and “a house of prayer, a place where Jesus is welcomed and revered”?
 - Are you willing to try some of the suggestions from the meditation, such as, “praying one decade of a Rosary each evening or reading a psalm together every morning”? If not, why not?
7. Take some time now to ask the Lord for the grace to make our homes a place where his love for us and his Church is reflected in our love for one another. Use the prayer from the end of the mediation as the starting point.

“Lord, show us how to love each other as you love the Church.

[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

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