

# Sunday, March 4, 2018

## Third Sunday of Lent

### Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

#### Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Exodus 20:1-17

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Responsorial: Psalm 19:8-11

Gospel: John 2:13-25

#### *Lent, A Time to Allow the Lord to Set Us Free from Sinful Habits*

*I . . . brought you out of . . . that place of slavery. (Exodus 20:2)*

Despite the fact that slavery continues to exist, it should be obvious that no one has the right to own another person. This was the reason, after all, for the Israelites' exodus from Egypt: God rescued them from slavery. What is not so obvious, however, is the way we can fall into a kind of slavery to sin. It's a slavery that happens whenever we are trapped in sinful habits that we cannot get out of.

The good news is that just as he rescued the Israelites from physical slavery, God wants to rescue us from spiritual slavery.

The idea of being someone's slave is naturally abhorrent to us. No one wants to be owned by someone else. This is the same attitude that we should have when it comes to slavery to sin as well. No one wants to be under its power. No one wants to feel powerless in some area of their lives. As St. Paul has said, we were created to be free, and Jesus came for just this purpose: to "set us free" (Galatians 5:1).

So do you want to experience freedom from a sinful habit that has some control over your life? If so, here are two suggestions.

First, confess your sins each day in prayer. Tell Jesus how hard it is to overcome this sin. Believe in the promise of Scripture: "If we acknowledge our sins," God will "cleanse us from every wrongdoing" (1 John 1:9).

Second, pray for the strength to resist. Trust that God sees your efforts and blesses them with his own power to help us say no when temptation rises up within us.

We may never stop sinning. But the process of sanctification, which comes as we pray, confess our sins, and seek God's strength, can help reduce our sins. It makes sin lose its power over us and makes us stronger in our efforts to resist.

*"Lord, I don't want to be a slave. Help me to be free."*

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**Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:**

1. In the first reading we find the story of God's covenant with his people getting clearer and more specific in the now familiar story of the Ten Commandments? The first two commandments focus on our relationship with God and our faithfulness in honoring him in our actions: "I, the LORD am your God ... You shall not have other gods besides me. You shall not take the name of the LORD, your God, in vain."
  - How important are these two commandments to you? What can you do to be more faithful to them?
  - What steps can you take to rely more on the Lord's grace, and the power of the Holy Spirit, and less on your own strength as you try to observe God's commandments and Church laws each day?
2. In the responsorial psalm, we hear these words of the psalmist regarding God's laws: "The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul; The decree of the LORD is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the command of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eye... the ordinances of the LORD are true, all of them just."
  - What role do you believe that spiritual exercises such as prayer and Scripture reading played in forming the psalmist' positive view of God's laws and commandments?
  - How about you? In what ways do regular times of prayer and Scripture reading, and frequent reception of the Sacraments, affect your view of God's laws and commandments and Church laws and teachings?
  - Why is it dangerous to our walk of faith to substitute our own judgments and preferences for God's laws and truths, especially if they are at odds with the Scriptures and certain areas of our lives?
3. In the second reading, St. Paul reminds us that "to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." However, he also challenges us with these words: "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God stronger than human strength."
  - What do you believe these words mean?
  - What steps can you take to increase your reliance on Jesus Christ, and decrease your reliance on just your own "human wisdom" and "human strength"?
4. The Gospel reading begins with these words: "Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money changers seated there. He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, 'Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace.'" The words of Psalm 69:10 are then applied to Jesus' actions by his disciples: "Zeal for your house will consume me."
  - Why do you think Jesus took such drastic actions in the "temple area"?
  - What can you do, especially during the grace-filled Lenten and Easter seasons, to increase your own zeal for the things of God, and for God's people and his Church?
5. The meditation provides two suggestions on how "to experience freedom from a sinful habit that has some control over your life" as follows: "First, confess your sins each day in prayer. Tell Jesus how hard it is to overcome this sin. Believe in the promise of Scripture: 'If we acknowledge our sins,' God will 'cleans[e] us from every wrongdoing' (1 John 1:9). Second, pray for the strength to resist. Trust that God sees your efforts and blesses them with his own power to help us say no when temptation rises up within us." The meditation ends with these words: "We may never stop sinning. But the process of sanctification, which comes as we pray, confess our sins, and seek God's strength, can help reduce our sins. It makes sin lose its power over us and makes us stronger in our efforts to resist."
  - What steps can you take during the remaining weeks of Lent to open yourself more to the Lord's love and his desire to free you from sinful habits?
  - How can you implement the following Scripture from 1 John 1:9? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."
6. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to be set free from slavery to sinful habits. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

***"Lord, I don't want to be a slave. Help me to be free."***

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the **ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization** ([www.christlife.org/](http://www.christlife.org/)), a member of the **National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal** ([www.nsc-chariscenter.org](http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org)), and

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