

# Sunday, March 11, 2018

## Fourth Sunday of Lent

### Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

#### Mass Readings:

1st Reading: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23

2nd Reading Ephesians 2:4-10

Responsorial: Psalm 137:1-6

Gospel: John 3:14-21

### Responding to God's Gracious Gift of Salvation

*This is not from you; it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8)*

Paul is emphatic: we have been saved by grace, not by our own efforts. If we could have saved ourselves, Jesus would not have had to die for our sins.

So how are we supposed to understand the interplay between God's grace and our efforts? First, it's essential for us to believe, as Paul writes, that we are saved by grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8). Second, we need to recall Paul saying, just two verses later, that God calls us to do "good works that God has prepared in advance" (2:10).

Paul isn't referring to individual acts of kindness or service here and there. He is speaking about a way of life. He is telling us that we, who were saved by grace, must respond to God's gracious gift. And the best and only response we can have to this gracious gift from God is to try to be just as gracious as he is by doing charitable works of service for people in need.

Paul goes so far as to say that our charitable works are "prepared in advance" by God (Ephesians 2:10). In other words, we may think that our desire to reach out to someone in distress arose in our minds by itself when it actually came from the Holy Spirit.

God has put a desire for charitable works on everyone's heart. But all too often people believe they are too busy to help. Or they believe their help won't make much of a difference. The sad result is that there are still many people who are not getting the help they need.

Don't let that happen! Resolve today to give back to the Lord through works of service. Lent is the perfect time to visit the sick or the elderly, to give to the poor, and to reach out to the wounded. It's also the perfect time to get your children or grandchildren to join you.

*"Lord, you have saved me. Now I want to serve you."*

(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 magazine, go to [www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)).

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**Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:**

1. The first reading begins with these words: “In those days, all the princes of Judah, the priests, and the people added infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations and polluting the LORD’s temple which he had consecrated in Jerusalem. Early and often did the LORD, the God of their fathers, send his messengers to them, for he had compassion on his people and his dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised his warnings, and scoffed at his prophets, until the anger of the LORD against his people was so inflamed that there was no remedy.” This “infidelity,” “abominations,” and “polluting the Lord’s temple” resulted in the Babylonian conquest, the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, and the exile of many of its people to Babylon. Also, in the first reading, the pagan king of Persia, Cyrus, is inspired by “the Lord, the God of heaven,” to allow the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, even though they had ignored the warnings from God and despised his word.
  - What lessons from these Scriptures can we apply to our current times?
  - In what ways do these Scriptures serve to remind us that there are areas in our lives that God may be asking us to change in order to live a life more pleasing to him? How would you describe those areas in your life?
2. In the Responsorial Psalm, the psalmist speaks for the Israelites exiled to Babylon: “By the streams of Babylon we sat and wept ... For there our captors asked of us the lyrics of our songs... If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand be forgotten! May my tongue cleave to my palate if I remember you not, if I place not Jerusalem ahead of my joy.”
  - Why do you think the city of Jerusalem, and the temple within it, were so important to God’s people?
  - As you reflect on these Scriptures, how strong is your conviction that God will be faithful to the promises he has made to his Church, the Body of Christ. What steps can you take to pray and intercede more often for the Church and its leaders?
3. The second reading opens with these words: “Brothers and sisters: God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ — by grace you have been saved.” It goes on to say that God “raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”
  - What do these words tell you about the attributes of God and his “great love” for you?
  - What do the words, “by grace you have been saved,” mean to you?
  - In what way is your life an example to others of God’s “great love” and the “immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ”? Is there more you can do to make your life an even greater witness for Christ?
4. The Gospel reading starts with these words: “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:14-16).
  - In what ways does John 3:16, which is part of this Gospel reading (and frequently appears at sporting events), beautifully and succinctly encapsulate the meaning of Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection?
  - During Lent, how can you deepen your gratefulness for the price God had to pay to forgive you of your sins and bring you to eternal life?
5. The meditation is a reflection on this verse from the second reading: “This is not from you; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). It begins with these words: “Paul is emphatic: we have been saved by grace, not by our own efforts. If we could have saved ourselves, Jesus would not have had to die for our sins. So how are we supposed to understand the interplay between God’s grace and our efforts? First, it’s essential for us to believe, as Paul writes, that we are saved by grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8). Second, we need to recall Paul saying, just two verses later, that God calls us to do ‘good works that God has prepared in advance’ (2:10).”
  - How would you answer the question posed above from the meditation: “So how are we supposed to understand the interplay between God’s grace and our efforts?”
  - What additional steps can you take during the grace-filled Lenten and Easter seasons to do the “good works that God has prepared in advance”?
6. Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for the salvation he has won for us through his passion, death, and resurrection. Also, ask the Lord for the grace to serve him and do the “good works that God has prepared in advance.” Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

***“Lord Jesus, you have saved me. Now I want to serve you.”***

[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 As posted on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal National Service Committee’s website: [www.nsc-chariscenter.org](http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org)

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