

Sunday, April 29, 2018

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Acts 9:26-31

Responsorial: Psalm 22:26-28, 30-32

2nd Reading: 1 John 3:18-24

Gospel: John 15:1-8

Opening Ourselves More to the Work of the Holy Spirit in Our Hearts

Let us love . . . in deed and truth. (1 John 3:18)

In today's second reading, John offers us solid guidance on how to "remain" in God's love (1 John 3:24). He tells us that one of the secrets to this is to listen to the movements of our hearts. That's because the heart, or the conscience, is the place where the Holy Spirit speaks to us most intimately.

On one end of the spectrum, John talks about having "confidence in God (3:21)," which means the Spirit is pouring God's love into us and reassuring us that we are following his commands. On the other end of the spectrum, our hearts can "condemn" us when the Spirit makes it clear that we have acted selfishly and taken advantage of someone (3:20). Surely we have all had experiences on both ends of this spectrum.

John makes it clear that it's not only a matter of our own consciences. Throughout his letter, he emphasizes the Holy Spirit's work of writing his words in our hearts and helping us to follow them.

So what does this mean for us? It means that if the Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts, then we should take it seriously when we sense a tug in our hearts. We should pay attention to the movements of our hearts, because it may well be that the Spirit is trying to help us make the right decisions and draw closer to the Lord.

It's exciting to know that the Holy Spirit is constantly at work forming our hearts and helping us to make good decisions. He's even at work when we aren't aware of him! It's reassuring to know that he won't stop working in us until our every thought and action pleases Jesus and builds up his kingdom.

So try to remain in God's love today. Try to listen to the movements of your heart. And try to put into practice whatever you think God is asking of you.

"Holy Spirit, come and move in my life. Inspire me to do good deeds in spirit and in truth."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The first reading begins with these words: “When Saul arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. Then Barnabas took charge of him and brought him to the apostles, and he reported to them how he had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. He moved about freely with them in Jerusalem, and spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord.”
 - Why do you think the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of Saul and did not believe “he was a disciple”?
 - The reading goes on to say that Saul (the apostle Paul) “spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord.” What do you believe was the source of his boldness?
 - In what ways do you believe that you also have been called to boldly tell others of Christ, e.g., at work, in your neighborhood, or in everyday encounters with other people? What do you believe is the source of this boldness?
2. The responsorial psalm opens with these words: “I will fulfill my vows before those who fear the LORD. The lowly shall eat their fill; they who seek the LORD shall praise him.” It ends with these words: “Let the coming generation be told of the LORD that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born the justice he has shown.”
 - What do you think these words from the psalm mean: “they who seek the LORD shall praise him”?
 - The ending words of the responsorial psalm also reinforces the call we have as Catholics to share our faith with others and “proclaim to a people yet to be born the justice he has shown.” In what ways have you been willing to tell members of your family how Jesus satisfied the “justice” of God by dying on the cross for our sins?
 - What are the obstacles that you may need to overcome in order to do this with a confidence that the Lord will use you to touch the “coming generation”?
3. The second reading encourages us to “love not in word or speech but in deed and truth” and to “keep his commandments and do what pleases him.” It closes with these words: “And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us. Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he gave us.”
 - What do you think these opening words from the reading mean: “Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth”?
 - In what ways can you reach out even more to others in your parish and community “in deed and truth”?
4. The Gospel reading begins with these words of Jesus to his disciples (and to us): “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.” Jesus goes on to say that “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”
 - What do Jesus’ opening words mean to you? “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower”.
 - In what ways have the pleasant and difficult circumstances of your life allowed your heavenly Father to prune you and mold you, so that you become more and more like his beloved Son?
 - How has this pruning by the Lord allowed your faith, and the fruit that it bears, to grow? What additional steps can you take to increase your openness to his pruning?
5. The meditation closes with these words: “It’s exciting to know that the Holy Spirit is constantly at work forming our hearts and helping us to make good decisions. He’s even at work when we aren’t aware of him! It’s reassuring to know that he won’t stop working in us until our every thought and action pleases Jesus and builds up his kingdom. So try to remain in God’s love today. Try to listen to the movements of your heart. And try to put into practice whatever you think God is asking of you.”
 - In what ways has the Holy Spirit been “constantly at work” to form your heart and help you “make good decisions”?
 - How important to you is it know that the Holy Spirit “won’t stop working in us until our every thought and action pleases Jesus and builds up his kingdom”? How can you open yourself more to this work?
6. Take some time now to pray and ask the Father, through his Holy Spirit, to prune you and make you more like Jesus -- so that you can “love not in word or speech but in deed and truth” and “bear much fruit.” Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Holy Spirit, come and move in my life. Inspire me to do good deeds in spirit and in truth.”

[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/) and a member of the **National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal** (www.nsc-chariscenter.org). Maurice was also the founding executive director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men**, a former chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and director of partner relations for The Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]