

Sunday, April 8, 2018

Second Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Acts 4:32-35

Responsorial: Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

2nd Reading: 1 John 5:1-6

Gospel: John 20:19-31

Letting the “Peace of Christ Control Your Hearts” (Colossians 3:15)

Peace be with you. (John 20:19)

It's tempting to stay shortsighted when we think about these words of Jesus to his apostles. It's tempting to link our peace with the events of our day. If things are going well, we are at peace. But the moment one of life's trials comes along, we lose our peace.

Jesus experienced all of the emotions we experience, both the good and the bad. He showed love and tenderness to a woman who washed his feet. He showed disappointment with the Pharisees who flaunted their religiosity. He was especially compassionate toward the crowds that followed him, and he was surprisingly angry with the money changers in the Temple. He applauded people's generosity, and he hated to see anyone suffering.

Yet for all of these different emotions, one thing remained constant: Jesus always held on to his peace. That's because the peace that Jesus had was not about things going his way. His peace was about knowing that his Father was always with him and that God would always be faithful to his promises.

It's ironic, isn't it? We can lose our peace, not only when things go wrong, but even when things are going our way. We can forget about God. We can begin to rely only on ourselves and end up feeling proud and self-righteous. And this kind of self-reliance can lead to a downward spiral of agitation and insecurity.

The peace that God offers us is rooted in knowing that we are loved by him, forgiven by him, and saved by him. So when things are going your way, be sure to remain peaceful by thanking God for all of your blessings. And when you are feeling angry, resentful, or bitter, take those feelings to the Lord and ask him to help you.

Love everyone. Seek what is best and just for everyone. Seek the Lord each day, and he will help you “let the peace of Christ control your hearts” in every situation (Colossians 3:15).

“Lord, help me to hold on to your peace at all times and in every situation.”

(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 says that the first “community of believers was of one heart and mind.” It goes on to say that “With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all.”
 - What do you think it means that the “community of believers was of one heart and mind”?
 - What can you do to promote a greater sense of community and unity in your family? In your parish? With other Christians?
2. The first reading also says that as a sign of how much they loved one another, the first communities cared for the “needy person among them.”
 - What steps can you take to serve the needy in your parish and in your community? Keep in mind their needs are not just physical (food and shelter), but spiritual as well (experiencing Jesus’ love through you).
 - What additional steps can you take to help them come to know Christ as their risen Lord?
3. The response to the responsorial psalm is “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting.” The responsorial psalm ends with these words: “This is the day the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it.”
 - What are some of the reasons the psalmist gives for why he is glad and rejoicing?
 - During this Easter Season of grace, what are some of the things that you are rejoicing in?
4. The second reading begins with these words, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God, and everyone who loves the Father loves also the one begotten by him.”
 - What do these words mean to you?
 - Do you believe that you are a beloved child of God the Father through your faith in Jesus Christ?
 - Were there times in your life when Jesus revealed his great love to you as well? What impact did it have? What are some ways you have shared God’s love with others?
5. In the Gospel reading, Jesus speaks these words to his disciples: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”
 - In what ways are Jesus’ words telling us we are not alone or without help in the Christian life we have embraced?
 - As baptized and confirmed Catholics, we too have received the Holy Spirit. How would you describe the work of the Holy Spirit in your life?
 - What are some steps you can take to be even more open to the Holy Spirit’s work? What are some ways you can remind your family and others of this wonderful gift of the Spirit?
6. The meditation is a reflection on Jesus’ words from the Gospel reading, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). It reminds us that “the peace that Jesus had was not about things going his way. His peace was about knowing that his Father was always with him and that God would always be faithful to his promises.” The meditation ends with these words: “The peace that God offers us is rooted in knowing that we are loved by him, forgiven by him, and saved by him. So when things are going your way, be sure to remain peaceful by thanking God for all of your blessings. And when you are feeling angry, resentful, or bitter, take those feelings to the Lord and ask him to help you. Love everyone. Seek what is best and just for everyone. Seek the Lord each day, and he will help you ‘let the peace of Christ control your hearts’ in every situation (Colossians 3:15).”
 - How would you describe the “peace” that Jesus demonstrated throughout his life and during his passion and death on the cross?
 - How would you describe the peace that Jesus wants to give us? What is the basis for it?
 - During this grace-filled Easter Season, what steps can you take to allow the Lord to “help you ‘let the peace of Christ control your hearts’ in every situation (Colossians 3:15)”?
7. Take some time now to pray for a greater openness to receiving and holding on to the Lord’s divine peace no matter what the circumstances. Use the prayer from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

As posted on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal National Service Committee’s website: www.nsc-chariscenter.org

“Lord, help me to hold on to your peace at all times and in every situation.”

[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 The Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]