

Sunday, July 15, 2018

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Amos 7:12-15
2nd Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14

Responsorial: Psalm 85:9-14
Gospel: Mark 6:7-13

He chose us in him, before the foundation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4)

In June of last year, the United Nations estimated that there were 7.6 billion people living on Earth. In an even more jaw-dropping statistic, the Population Reference Bureau has estimated that approximately 108 billion people have lived on Earth since the beginning.

So can you imagine that before God created the world, in the midst of these 108 billion people who would live in it, he knew you perfectly and chose you to be with him?

When we hear that God chose us before the foundation of the world, it can sound so theoretical. We think of “us” as a universal group: God’s people. And while we are all part of this large group, we are not just anonymous members of the crowd. God’s love for us is not generalized. It is personal and specific. He loves you for who you are. He loves you in the best way you can be loved.

As overwhelming as this may sound, let this truth sink in today. Even if there were 100 trillion people, it doesn’t matter. You—with all your quirks and idiosyncrasies—were in God’s mind and in his heart from the beginning. He created you with a specific purpose, and he longs for you to be with him forever!

Here’s one way to ponder this amazing truth: take today’s second reading, and wherever you see the word “us,” substitute your name. For example, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed [your name] in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose [your name] in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him” (Ephesians 1:3-4). Reread the whole passage slowly a couple of times. Proclaim it out loud. Let God expand your understanding of how much he loves you. Then bask in that love today.

“Father, I am so amazed to know that I am in your heart. Help me to trust and rely on your personal love today and every day.”

(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. In the first reading, like Ezekiel did in last Sunday's reading, Amos tells of his call to be a prophet to Israel: *I was no prophet, nor have I belonged to a company of prophets; I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores. The Lord took me from following the flock, and said to me, Go prophesy to my people Israel.*
 - In what ways does this reading remind us that no matter who we are, or what stage of life we may be in, God has a specific call for each of our lives?
 - How would you describe God's call for your life? How well are you responding to this call.
 - What are some steps you can take to respond in a greater way to this call?
2. In the Responsorial Psalm, we learn what benefits accrue to those who listen to the Lord: *I will hear what God proclaims; the LORD—for he proclaims peace. Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him, glory dwelling in our land. Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and justice shall look down from heaven. The LORD himself will give his benefits; our land shall yield its increase. Justice shall walk before him, and prepare the way of his steps.*
 - How would you summarize the benefits, described by the psalmist, when we *hear what God proclaims*?
 - What has been your experience when you have heard what God proclaims and have stepped out in faith to do what the Lord was asking of you? Can you think of some specific examples?
3. The second reading begins with these words of St. Paul: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him.* St. Paul goes on to describe God's great blessings and plans *that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.*
 - How would you summarize the blessings Paul describes in this reading?
 - How would you describe how God has blessed you in Christ?
 - What steps can you take to open yourself more to God's plan and the blessings he wants to pour out upon you?
4. The Gospel reading begins with these words: *Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits.* The last verse describes the results of Jesus sending out the twelve apostles: *The Twelve drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.* These words are echoed by Jesus in Mark 16:17-18 after his resurrection, *These signs will accompany those who believe; in my name they will drive out demons . . . They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.* Notice that with these words, Jesus includes all "those who believe."
 - In what ways, have you seen Jesus' words from the Gospel reading fulfilled through the prayers of the Church?
 - As a "believer" in Jesus Christ, in what ways have these words applied to you, especially in your prayers for the recovery of someone who was sick or injured, and in need of healing?
5. The meditation is a reflection on this verse from the second reading, *He chose us in him, before the foundation of the world* (Ephesians 1:4): "When we hear that God chose us before the foundation of the world, it can sound so theoretical. We think of 'us' as a universal group: God's people. And while we are all part of this large group, we are not just anonymous members of the crowd. God's love for us is not generalized. It is personal and specific. He loves you for who you are. He loves you in the best way you can be loved." The meditation ends with these words: "Here's one way to ponder this amazing truth: take today's second reading, and wherever you see the word 'us,' substitute your name. For example, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed [your name] in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose [your name] in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him' (Ephesians 1:3-4). Reread the whole passage slowly a couple of times. Proclaim it out loud. Let God expand your understanding of how much he loves you. Then bask in that love today."
 - What do the words, *He chose us in him, before the foundation of the world*, mean to you?
 - What do you think would be the effect of doing the experiment described above from the meditation? Why?
6. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for a greater knowledge and experience of his great love for you, and for the grace to live it out in a deeper way. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point

"Father, I am so amazed to know that I am in your heart.

Help me to trust and rely on your personal love today and every day."

[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 chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]

“Father, thank you for revealing your mind to me. By your Spirit, help me to grasp your wisdom more deeply—and to proclaim it to everyone I meet today!”