

# Sunday, July 22, 2018

## 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

#### Mass Readings:

1st Reading

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Responsorial:

Psalms 23:1-6

2nd Reading:

Ephesians 2:13-18

Gospel:

Mark 6:30-34

*He . . . broke down the dividing wall of enmity. (Ephesians 2:14)*

In almost poetic language, St. Paul invites the Ephesians to marvel at the unity they are experiencing. Many of them were Gentiles, people who looked down on the Jews almost as much as the Jews looked down on them. And yet here they were worshipping Jesus—alongside of Jewish brothers and sisters! Through Christ, the centuries-old wall dividing them had been broken down, leaving only a bond of love.

But this wasn't the only time when Jesus brought Jews and Gentiles together. Probably the most important one happened about thirty years earlier, on the first Good Friday. That's when "Herod and Pontius Pilate, together with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel," overcame their differences . . . so that they could put Jesus to death (Acts 4:27). Of course, not everyone was in on the plot, but many were united in their hatred of Jesus.

Isn't it amazing how Jesus can take something horrible and make it a source of blessing? The devil had created a false and feeble unity in order to eliminate Jesus, but his plan backfired. This mock unity brought about the true unity that the Ephesians—and Christians everywhere else—were now enjoying. Where once there was Gentile versus Jew, slave versus free, and woman versus man, now there were only brothers and sisters witnessing to the Spirit's power to heal ancient divisions.

If Jesus can overcome centuries of division between Jews and Gentiles, surely he can heal the divisions in our lives. It may not happen overnight or in the way we expect, but it can happen—especially if we work toward it ourselves. So take one relationship today, whether you need to offer forgiveness, let go of resentment, or ask for forgiveness, and see what you can do to break down the walls. It won't happen overnight—just as it took time for the early Church. But if you persevere, it will happen.

*"Come, Lord, and heal every division and wounded relationship."*

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* ([www.wau.org](http://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: *Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the LORD. Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherd my people: You have scattered my sheep and driven away. You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your evil deeds.* It ends with prophetic words about a future king: *Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; as king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security. This is the name they give him: "The LORD our justice."*
  - Why do you think the Lord so strongly condemned the current "shepherds" leading the people of Israel?
  - How were the prophetic words at the end of the reading fulfilled by Jesus Christ?
  - In what ways does your relationship with Christ provide you with his peace so that you "dwell in security"?
2. The Responsorial Psalm, the well-known "Shepherd Psalm," opens with these familiar words: *The Lord is my shepherd.* It goes on to describe what this means: *In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul. He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage.*
  - What do the opening words of this psalm mean to you: *The Lord is my shepherd*?
  - How would you describe the ways the Lord has provided you with repose, refreshment, guidance, and courage?
3. The second reading from the letter to the Ephesians begins with these words of St. Paul: *In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ.* Paul goes on to tell how we have all been reconciled and made one in Christ: *For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*
  - If through the cross we have been reconciled to God, then in what ways may God be calling you to help bring reconciliation between members of your families?
  - Do you believe the Holy Spirit, received through Baptism and faith, gives you *access in one Spirit to the Father*? What steps can you take to overcome any obstacles that keeps this Scriptural truth from becoming a reality?
4. In Mark's Gospel, we see that Jesus' attention was not only focused on the crowds, but also on the apostles who had been busy in his name and needed a little time to rest: *The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."*
  - In what ways do you allow busyness to keep you from "resting" in Christ's presence through prayer?
  - In spite of this busyness, how can you allow for more times of "rest" in Christ's presence (for example, before or after Mass, in visits to the Blessed Sacrament, each morning in prayer, turning to the Lord during the day, etc.)?
5. The meditation is a reflection on these words from the second reading: *He . . . broke down the dividing wall of enmity* (Ephesians 2:14). It begins with these words: "In almost poetic language, St. Paul invites the Ephesians to marvel at the unity they are experiencing. Many of them were Gentiles, people who looked down on the Jews almost as much as the Jews looked down on them. And yet here they were worshipping Jesus—alongside of Jewish brothers and sisters! Through Christ?" It ends with these words: "If Jesus can overcome centuries of division between Jews and Gentiles, surely he can heal the divisions in our lives. It may not happen overnight or in the way we expect, but it can happen—especially if we work toward it ourselves. So take one relationship today, whether you need to offer forgiveness, let go of resentment, or ask for forgiveness, and see what you can do to break down the walls. It won't happen overnight—just as it took time for the early Church. But if you persevere, it will happen."
  - Are there any relationships in your life where "you need to offer forgiveness, let go of resentment, or ask for forgiveness"?
  - What are some steps you can take to break down *the dividing wall of enmity* and bring healing and reconciliation to relationships, whether they are in your family, your workplace, or your parish?
6. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord to bring healing to any wounded relationships in your life and in other members of your family. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.

***"Come, Lord, and heal every division and wounded relationship."***

[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 a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)), and director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at [mblumberg@wau.org](mailto:mblumberg@wau.org) or [mblumberg@aol.com](mailto:mblumberg@aol.com).]