

Sunday, November 4, 2018

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Deuteronomy 6:2-6

2nd Reading: Hebrews 7:23-28

Responsorial: Psalm 18:2-4, 47, 51

Gospel: Mark 12:28-34

Understanding the Difference between “Fear the Lord” and “Perfect Love Drives out Fear”

Fear the Lord, your God. (Deuteronomy 6:2)

What does it mean to fear the Lord? Should we really be afraid of him? Well, we should never minimize these words since they appear more than three hundred times in Scripture. But fearing God is not the same as living in terror of him. It's more about having a proper reverence for him.

As with so many other truths in the Bible, fearing the Lord is a different thing than the earthly kind of fear we are all familiar with. It is a positive disposition, not a negative one. It's a way of building our faith and deepening our relationship with God, not keeping us distant from him.

At its heart, fear of God helps us to say no to our sinful desires. It functions more as a way of protection than as a means of oppression. It's fear of God that moves us to say, “I don't want to say or do anything that will cause me to be separated from my heavenly Father.”

Parents instill a similar “loving fear” in their children. They teach their children to stay within certain boundaries of speech and behavior so that they can grow up to be responsible, respectful adults. For their part, children know that consequences will follow if they cross these boundary lines. And so a certain “loving fear” lays the foundation for wisdom in the children. It's in a similar way that Scripture tells us that “fear of the Lord” is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).

Fear of the Lord is a tool that keeps us safe as we grow and mature. And like all learning tools, it is helpful for only a time. Eventually, this godly fear should give way to love, because “perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18). This is a lifelong process, of course, but it's encouraging to know that even godly fear can dissipate as love grows.

So let's all take to heart God's greatest commands: “Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart” and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

“Jesus, help me live the most perfect way of love.”

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

Sunday, November 4, 2018

Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The First Reading ends with these words: *Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today.*
 - The Great Commandment to *love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength* is first spoken to the people of Israel by Moses. What do these words mean to you?
 - Moses also then tells them to *“Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today”* (Deuteronomy 6:6). How well do you “take to heart” these words?
2. The Responsorial Psalm continues the theme of the First Reading with these opening words: *I love you, O Lord, my strength. The psalmist goes on to proclaim some of the reasons for his great love for the Lord: O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer. My God, my rock of refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold! Praised be the LORD, I exclaim, and I am safe from my enemies.*
 - How would you summarize the reasons the psalmist gives for his reasons for loving the Lord?
 - How would you proclaim your reasons for loving the Lord?
3. The Second Reading begins with these words: *The levitical priests were many because they were prevented by death from remaining in office, but Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away. Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them.* It then describes the differences between Jesus, our high priest, and the Jewish high priests.
 - What are the differences between Jesus’ priesthood and the Levitical priesthood in the Second Reading, including the differences between Jesus our high priest and the Jewish high priests?
 - Why is Jesus’ priesthood so much more powerful than theirs, especially in its impact on our lives through the sacrifice of the Mass?
4. In the Gospel, Jesus responds to the scribes’ question: *“Which is the first of all the commandments?”* by repeating the words of Moses from the First Reading: *The first is this: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”* However, he goes on to add a second commandment from Leviticus 19:18: *The second is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* He then says: *“There is no other commandment greater than these.”*
 - Why do you think Jesus said that *“There is no other commandment greater than these”*?
 - What are the obstacles you encounter during the day that keeps you from obeying these commandments more faithfully in your everyday life?
 - Are there some steps you need to take to love God more wholeheartedly, or to open yourself more to a greater experience of his love for you so you can give it to others?
5. The meditation is a reflection on these opening words of the First Reading: *Fear the LORD, your God.* It begins with these words: *What does it mean to fear the Lord? Should we really be afraid of him? Well, we should never minimize these words since they appear more than three hundred times in Scripture. But fearing God is not the same as living in terror of him. It’s more about having a proper reverence for him.* It continues with these words: *As with so many other truths in the Bible, fearing the Lord is a different thing than the earthly kind of fear we are all familiar with. It is a positive disposition, not a negative one. It’s a way of building our faith and deepening our relationship with God, not keeping us distant from him.* It ends with these words: *Fear of the Lord is a tool that keeps us safe as we grow and mature. And like all learning tools, it is helpful for only a time. Eventually, this godly fear should give way to love, because “perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18). This is a lifelong process, of course, but it’s encouraging to know that even godly fear can dissipate as love grows. So let’s all take to heart God’s greatest commands: “Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.”*
 - Based on the words of the meditation, how would you describe the what it means to “Fear the Lord”?
 - How would you describe the difference between fear of the Lord and fear of human situations?
 - Do you agree with the ending words of the meditation? Why or why not?

Take some time now to pray and ask for the grace to love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Jesus, help me live the most perfect way of love.”

[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), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (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), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]