

Sunday, February 3, 2019

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

Responsorial: Psalm 71:1-6, 15-17

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:31–13:13

Gospel: Luke 4:21-30

Experiencing Spiritual Renewal through Our Faith in Christ

Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:8)

Many people—scholars and everyday believers alike—consider today’s first reading to be the greatest chapter in all of Scripture. Using just thirteen verses, Paul gave us a beautiful description of love that we could spend a lifetime praying about.

Simple and succinct, Paul puts love where it belongs: on the top of the list. Speaking in tongues like the apostles, prophesying like Isaiah, understanding the mysteries of faith like St. Thomas Aquinas, giving away everything we own like Mother Teresa—it means nothing if love is not involved.

Paul also acknowledges that none of us love perfectly. Using analogies, he calls our love childish. It’s as if we were looking at life through a dark, distorted mirror. Paul acknowledges, in other words, that we all make mistakes. We all use bad judgment. We all hurt other people—especially our loved ones. We try our best, but sometimes our best just isn’t good enough. Not yet, at least.

Like Paul, St. Peter also puts love at the top of the list. He sees love as being the most powerful force in the world. It’s so powerful, in fact, that it “covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

Love understands all of this and can heal all of this—even the mistakes and poor judgments that are more a matter of bad choices than sins. If you have been hurt, remember that your love can bring healing, both to yourself and to the one who hurt you. Even if your love is partial or tinged with some regret or a bit of anger, it can still make a difference. Jesus always sees the love, and he always blesses it.

Love is not about being perfect. It’s about trying our best and asking forgiveness when we fall.

In prayer today, ask Jesus to fill you with the desire and the strength to love with the same love that he has for you. Try to be quick to love, quick to forgive, and quick to ask forgiveness. Remember, love always wins.

“Lord, teach me to love more deeply each 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. The first reading begins with these words from the Lord to Jeremiah: *The word of the LORD came to me, saying: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.* The reading ends with these words: *They will fight against you, but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you.*
 - The beginning words tells us that even before he was born, Jeremiah was known by God and had been called by God to serve him. Do you believe that God has also called you to his service as well?
 - Jeremiah was given the gift of prophecy to be a *prophet to the nations*. What do you believe are the spiritual gifts God has given you to serve him? How have you used them? How can you use them even more in the future?
 - In the ending words, God promises to be with Jeremiah as he responds to his call. Do you believe this is true for you as well? Why?
2. The responsorial psalm opens with these words: *In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your justice rescue me, and deliver me; incline your ear to me, and save me. Be my rock of refuge, a stronghold to give me safety, for you are my rock and my fortress. O my God, rescue me from the hand of the wicked. For you are my hope, O Lord; my trust, O God, from my youth.* The psalm ends with these words: *My mouth shall declare your justice, day by day your salvation. O God, you have taught me from my youth, and till the present I proclaim your wondrous deeds.*
 - In what ways is the responsorial psalm like our personal response to the promises of God from the first reading?
 - The psalmist tells the Lord that he is his refuge, rescuer, and deliverer, that he is his hope and his trust, and that he is dependent on him who is his strength. In what ways is this also true for you?
 - How has God given you the opportunities and the strength to share what he has done for you with others?
3. The second reading begins with these words from St. Paul: *Brothers and sisters: Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way.* He goes on to describe this more excellent way: *If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.* St. Paul then goes on to describe his well-known definition of what real love is and what love is not?
 - How open are you to *Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts*? If you are not, why not?
 - St. Paul also tells us that no matter how important the individual gifts each of us has, unless we exercise love in their use we are *a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal*, and we are *nothing* and *gain nothing*. These are strong words. Why do you believe they are true?
 - The list of what love “is not” in the reading should resonate with each of us and cut to the heart of our weaknesses, whether we are impatient, quick-tempered, keep score of injuries received, etc. How can you use this list to pray for the grace to change in certain areas, and learn what St. Paul calls *the more excellent way* of love?
4. The Gospel reading begins with this initial reaction to Jesus’ words: *And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.* Jesus then goes on to challenge the people and their reaction changed drastically: *When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong.*
 - Why do you think the people’s reaction to Jesus went from being positive to being *filled with fury*?
 - How do you respond when someone challenges your preconceptions either of yourself, others, or of God? Is there room for improvement? In what way?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the second reading, including this verse: *Love never fails.* It begins with these words: “Many people—scholars and everyday believers alike—consider today’s first reading to be the greatest chapter in all of Scripture. Using just thirteen verses, Paul gave us a beautiful description of love that we could spend a lifetime praying about. Simple and succinct, Paul puts love where it belongs: on the top of the list.” The meditation ends with these words: “Love is not about being perfect. It’s about trying our best and asking forgiveness when we fall. In prayer today, ask Jesus to fill you with the desire and the strength to love with the same love that he has for you. Try to be quick to love, quick to forgive, and quick to ask forgiveness. Remember, love always wins.”
 - Why do you think 1 Corinthians 13 is considered by many to be “the greatest chapter in all of Scripture”?
 - Why do you think “Paul puts love where it belongs: on the top of the list”?
 - How can you respond in a deeper to these last words of the meditation? “Try to be quick to love, quick to forgive, and quick to ask forgiveness. Remember, love always wins.”

Take some time now to pray and ask for the grace to know and experience Jesus’ love more deeply, so that you can love others as he has loved you. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Lord, teach me to love more deeply each 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), 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.]