

Sunday, February 10, 2019

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Isaiah 6:1-8

Responsorial: Psalm 138:1-5, 7-8

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Gospel: Luke 5:1-11

Opening Ourselves in a Deeper Way to God's Grace

His grace to me has not been ineffective. (1 Corinthians 15:10)

God's grace seems to be all over today's readings, doesn't it? It was grace that burned away Isaiah's sin and turned him into one of the most important prophets in Israel's history.

It was grace that stopped St. Paul dead in his tracks when he was on his way to imprison Christians and turned him into one of the greatest evangelists of all time.

And it was grace that brought Peter to his knees before Jesus and turned this brusque fisherman into a humble fisher of men and leader of the early Church.

Clearly, God's grace was not ineffective in these men's lives!

How about you? Can you point to ways that God's grace has been "not ineffective" in you? It doesn't have to be as dramatic as the conversions experienced by Peter or Paul or Isaiah. It doesn't have to be dramatic at all! Of course, it's wonderful when that happens, but God's grace more often resembles a gently flowing stream than a mighty surging ocean.

For example, think about those times when you felt especially close to God during a Mass or in a time of prayer. That's grace.

Or what about that twinge of conscience that led you to the confessional after a long absence? That's grace. Remember that time when you found it easier to forgive someone than you thought it would be? That too is grace.

Anything that brings you closer to God or moves you further from sin is the result of God pouring his grace into your heart. Anything that makes you more loving, kind, and compassionate comes from his grace. In fact, if you were to stop and review your day, you'd probably find that his grace was all around you.

Today is a new day and the beginning of a new week. Take advantage of this fresh start. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to all the grace that God has stored up for you this week. And when you find that grace, welcome it with your heart. Let it be "not ineffective."

"Jesus, teach me to open my heart to your grace!"

(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, February 10, 2019

Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. In the 1st reading, Isaiah is given a heavenly glimpse of *the Lord seated on a lofty throne with the train of his garment filling the temple*. His response was: *Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!* The reading ends with these words of Isaiah: *Then one of the seraphim flew to me, holding an ember that he had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth with it, and said, "See, now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed, your sin purged." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" "Here I am," I said; "send me!"*
 - Why do you think Isaiah's initial response to his heavenly vision was: *Woe is me, I am doomed*?
 - Isaiah's "wickedness" was "removed" and his "sin purged" by an ember that a seraphim used to touch his lips. In what way does the ember reflect the power of the Cross, and the sacraments, in our lives?
 - Do you believe the work of the Cross will allow you to stand before the Lord with your *sin purged*? Why or why not?
2. The responsorial psalm opens with these words: *I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart, for you have heard the words of my mouth; in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise; I will worship at your holy temple and give thanks to your name. Because of your kindness and your truth; for you have made great above all things your name and your promise. When I called, you answered me; you built up strength within me.*
 - The beginning words speaks of giving thanks, praise, and worship to the Lord for all he has done. How does the psalmist then describe what the Lord has done for him? How would you describe what the Lord has done for you?
 - The text above ends with these words of the psalmist: *When I called you, you answered me; you built up strength within me*. What are some examples of how God has answered you and strengthened you when facing difficulties?
3. In the 2nd reading, after describing Jesus' various appearances after his resurrection, St. Paul describes Jesus' appearance to him and its impact on him: *Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God that is with me. Therefore, whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*
 - St. Paul's description of Jesus' appearance to him, his conversion, and its impact on him, is quite dramatic as he describes how God's grace *has not been ineffective* in him. How would you describe your own conversion?
 - What impact did your conversion to Christ have on your life?
4. In the Gospel reading, Jesus tells Simon Peter to *Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch*. After a fruitful catch of fish in which Simon Peter, James, and John *filled both boats so that the boats were in danger of sinking*, the following exchange takes place between Jesus and Simon Peter, James, and John: *When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon.* The Gospel reading ends with these words: *Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.*
 - Why do you think Peter reacted to the catch of fish the way he did? What do you think your reaction would be?
 - Jesus tells Simon Peter (and James, and John) that *from now on you will be catching men*. What do you think these words meant to them? How do these words apply to you? Why do you think *they left everything and followed him*?
 - Were there times in your life when you were alert to the promptings of the Spirit and chose to *follow him and catch men and women by sharing your faith*? Were there some times when you did not? What did you learn from them?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the 2nd reading, including these words: *His grace to me has not been ineffective*. It describes how God's grace worked in the lives of Isaiah, St. Paul, and St. Peter. The meditation then continues with these words: *Clearly, God's grace was not ineffective in these men's lives! How about you? Can you point to ways that God's grace has been "not ineffective" in you? It doesn't have to be as dramatic as the conversions experienced by Peter or Paul or Isaiah. It doesn't have to be dramatic at all! Of course, it's wonderful when that happens, but God's grace more often resembles a gently flowing stream than a mighty surging ocean.* It ends with these words: *Today is a new day and the beginning of a new week. Take advantage of this fresh start. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to all the grace that God has stored up for you this week. And when you find that grace, welcome it with your heart. Let it be "not ineffective."*
 - How would you answer the question posed in the text above: "Can you point to ways that God's grace has been 'not ineffective' in you"? What are some specific examples?
 - What are some ways you can follow-up on the ending words of the meditation?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for a new openness to him and his grace. Ask him also for grace, courage, and wisdom in sharing your faith with others. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Jesus, teach me to open my heart to your grace!"

[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.]