

Sunday, February 17, 2019

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Jeremiah 17:5-8

Responsorial: Psalm 1:1-4, 6

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

Gospel: Luke 6:17, 20-26

Opening Ourselves in a Deeper Way to God's Grace

Blessed are you who are poor. (Luke 6:20)

Who actually wants to embrace a life of poverty, mourning, and hunger? Who actually believes that poverty is the way to blessing and happiness? Jesus does, because that's the way he lived, and it's the way he wants all of us to live as well.

Deep down, we all know that money doesn't make people happy. There are plenty of miserable millionaires. Rich or poor, it's good relationships that make people happy. And what could be a more important relationship than our relationship with God? No wonder Jesus was so happy! He had an unbroken relationship with his heavenly Father.

Jesus didn't restrict his vision to the world around him. He also kept his eyes fixed on his heavenly Father. With his heart lifted up to God's presence and his mind filled with truth by the Holy Spirit, Jesus was able to look at life clearly and joyfully. He wasn't bound by money or by the desire for a problem-free life where he always got his way. He was happy just knowing his Father and following his Father's will.

Jesus gave us the beatitudes to teach us the secret of happiness. He knows that prosperous sinners are miserable people, however much the world envies them. The world cannot see the emptiness of a heart that is devoid of God's love. It's important to know that Jesus isn't against money itself. He only wants us to set goals that go far beyond the accumulation of wealth.

Jesus once told his disciples that he had "food" that they knew nothing about and that this "food" was to do his Father's will (John 4:32, 34). As we learn how to keep our minds fixed on the promises of God, we too will discover the secret to Jesus' peace and happiness. By following in Jesus' footsteps, we can know the same happiness he knew—the same happiness that fills all the saints and angels in heaven.

"Jesus, fill my heart with your vision of life. Teach me to be content with riches or poverty, with good times and bad. Lord, give me only your 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.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The first reading contains these words from the Lord: *Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of season, but stands in a lava waste, a salt and empty earth. Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: it fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.*
 - How would you describe what it means to trust in human beings versus trust in the LORD?
 - Why do you think *the one who trusts in human beings* is cursed and *the one who trusts in the LORD* is blessed?
 - What are some examples in your life of the negative or “barren” fruit that came from not trusting in the Lord and the positive fruit that came from trusting in Him?
2. The responsorial psalm, like the first reading, describes significant differences in bearing fruit by the blessed man who versus by the wicked man. The blessed man *delights in the law of the LORD and meditates on his law day and night. He is like a tree planted near running water, that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves never fade. Whatever he does, prospers.* The wicked man is *like chaff which the wind drives away.* The reading ends with these words: *For the LORD watches over the way of the just, but the way of the wicked vanishes.*
 - What are the similarities between the first reading and the responsorial psalm? What are the differences?
 - What did you learn about yourself when you have said yes to temptation and no to *the law of the LORD*?
3. In the second reading, we hear these words of St. Paul regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ: *Brothers and sisters: If Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*
 - St. Paul, in the reading above, asserts that the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the heart of our Christian faith. Do you believe this as well? If yes, why? If no, why not?
 - Does your faith in Jesus, and his cross and resurrection, help to dispel anxiety and fear about your own individual resurrection from the dead? Is it as certain as Christ’s own resurrection? Why or why not?
 - How is your day/life shaped by the sure and certain resurrection of Jesus and your own resurrection into eternal life?
4. The Gospel reading, like the first reading and the responsorial psalm, distinguishes between two groups of people. For the first group Jesus used these words: *Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven.* For the second group, he used these words: *But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.*
 - Why do you think Jesus says that those who are blessed are the poor, hungry, weeping, and persecuted?
 - Jesus says that those who will receive all sorts of woes are the ones *who are rich, who are filled now, who laugh now, and who are spoken well of?* How does this differ from how we judge those who we think are the blessed ones?
 - God wants us to be detached; i.e., to look at things objectively and not be ruled just by our human preference for abundance over scarcity, pleasure over pain, applause over ridicule, etc. Who or what rules your life?
5. In the meditation, we hear these words, “Jesus didn’t restrict his vision to the world around him. He also kept his eyes fixed on his heavenly Father. With his heart lifted up to God’s presence and his mind filled with truth by the Holy Spirit, Jesus was able to look at life clearly and joyfully. He wasn’t bound by money or by the desire for a problem-free life where he always got his way. He was happy just knowing his Father and following his Father’s will. Jesus gave us the beatitudes to teach us the secret of happiness.”
 - What do the words above, and other similar words in the meditation, mean to you?
 - Jesus Christ was the perfect man of the beatitudes. Do you believe you too are called by Christ to be a person of the beatitudes? How can you individually, or as a group, be a greater channel of God’s love as you reach out to the poor, to the hungry, to the sorrowful, or to the persecuted in response to the gifts you have received?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord to fill your heart with his vision for you, and the grace to know and experience more deeply his great love for you. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

“Jesus, fill my heart with your vision of life.

Teach me to be content with riches or poverty, with good times and bad. Lord, give me only your 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.]