

Sunday, February 24, 2019

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

Responsorial: Psalm 103:1-4, 8, 10, 12-13

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

Gospel: Luke 6:27-38

Opening Ourselves in a Deeper Way to God's Grace

Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. (Luke 6:37)

Jesus couldn't have been more clear. If you want to avoid condemnation, don't condemn other people.

Let's say you see a rumped, grizzled person sleeping on a park bench. You wonder how he got there. You wonder why he isn't trying to fix his life. You begin to wish he weren't there. You feel a kind of aversion to him, and you take a wide berth around him as you walk by. Jesus says, "Don't condemn him."

Or you are listening to the news when a story about a politician you don't like comes on. You feel your shoulders tighten, and you think of all the ways this person is corrupt and misguided. You recall the evil policies he or she has supported, and you feel disgust for this person. Jesus says, "Don't condemn."

Or you learn of a teenager who is pregnant out of wedlock. You begin to think of how her parents must have failed in their job. Unkind labels for this young woman pop into your head, and you think of how you would never let yourself fall into such a horrible sin. Jesus says, "Don't condemn her."

To the best of your ability, put aside harsh judgments and condemning thoughts. If not for the other person's sake, then for your own sake. Try to rise above the realm of judgment, where everyone gets what's coming to them—because everyone in that realm will be judged harshly. Even you.

Instead, step into the realm of God's mercy. Move into the realm where everyone is invited to forgiveness and treated with love, dignity, and generosity. Even you. Give the gift of forgiveness, and it will be given to you.

Give the gift of a second chance—or a third or fourth or hundredth—and it will be given to you. Give the gift of the benefit of the doubt, and it will be given to you.

Even if you don't want to give, do it anyway. Jesus commands it, and he promises eternal rewards to those who do.

"Lord, help me to be merciful as you are merciful."

(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. In the first reading, David passes up an opportunity to avenge himself on Saul, in this exchange between David and an officer in his Army: *Abishai whispered to David: "God has delivered your enemy into your grasp this day. Let me nail him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I will not need a second thrust!" But David said to Abishai, "Do not harm him, for who can lay hands on the LORD's anointed and remain unpunished?"* The reading ends with David speaking these words to Saul: *Today, though the LORD delivered you into my grasp, I would not harm the LORD's anointed.*
 - What do you think were David's reasons for his actions? In what ways are David's actions a reflection of God's mercy toward us?
 - In light of this, what attitude might God be asking you to adopt towards your enemies, or to those who have wronged you in the past?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: *Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all my being, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.* The psalmist goes on to describe why: *He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills. He redeems your life from destruction, crowns you with kindness and compassion. Merciful and gracious is the LORD, slow to anger and abounding in kindness. Not according to our sins does he deal with us, nor does he requite us according to our crimes. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he put our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.*
 - How would you summarize the reasons the psalmist gives for why he says, *Bless the LORD, O my soul*?
 - Can you give specific examples from your own life as well for blessing the Lord?
 - Considering God's blessings in your own life, how might you take the first step this week to bring kindness, compassion and pardon to others (family, friends, neighbors, etc.)?
3. The second reading opens with this comparison between Adam and Jesus: *It is written, The first man, Adam, became a living being, the last Adam a life-giving spirit. But the spiritual was not first; rather the natural and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, earthly; the second man, from heaven. As was the earthly one, so also are the earthly, and as is the heavenly one, so also are the heavenly.* The reading ends with these words: *Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.*
 - How would you describe how St. Paul describes the differences between Adam and Jesus?
 - St. Paul tells us that *we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one* (1 Corinthians 15:49). Do you believe this? Does this fill you with hope? Why or why not?
 - What practical steps can you take to understand more fully the meaning of these words, and to allow them to become a greater reality in your life?
4. The Gospel reading, like the first reading and responsorial psalm, speak of God's mercy toward us and our own mercy towards others. It includes these very famous "one liners": *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well. Do to others as you would have them do to you. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.*
 - How would you summarize how Jesus presents standards to his disciples (and us as well) on how they are to act as his followers?
 - How ready are you to be judged by that standard? In what ways does it cause you to rethink any past hurts, resentments, and angers – especially as you take them to the Lord in prayer and worship?
5. The meditation is a reflection on these words from the Gospel reading, *Stop condemning and you will not be condemned* (Luke 6:37). It includes these words: "To the best of your ability, put aside harsh judgments and condemning thoughts. If not for the other person's sake, then for your own sake. Try to rise above the realm of judgment, where everyone gets what's coming to them—because everyone in that realm will be judged harshly. Even you. Instead, step into the realm of God's mercy. Move into the realm where everyone is invited to forgiveness and treated with love, dignity, and generosity. Even you. Give the gift of forgiveness, and it will be given to you. Give the gift of a second chance—or a third or fourth or hundredth—and it will be given to you. Give the gift of the benefit of the doubt, and it will be given to you. Even if you don't want to give, do it anyway. Jesus commands it, and he promises eternal rewards to those who do."
 - What do the words above from the meditation mean to you?
 - The meditation ends with these words: "Even if you don't want to give, do it anyway. Jesus commands it, and he promises eternal rewards to those who do." What do these words mean to you and how can you apply them?

Take some time now to pray for the gift of mercy. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Lord, help me to be merciful as you are merciful."