

Sunday, March 3, 2019

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Sirach 27:4-7

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Responsorial: Psalm 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

Gospel: Luke 6:39-45

Treating Others as God Does, *With Patience, Grace, and Love*

Remove the wooden beam from your eye first. (Luke 6:42)

People love to judge other people and give advice, even when they don't have much to offer. It can be kind of cute to see children spouting off about topics they know nothing about, but it gets a little scarier when they grow up. Depending on how serious the topic is, it can become downright dangerous, like "the blind leading the blind."

As Jesus points out in today's Gospel, we can be particularly prone to offering unnecessary, as well as ill-conceived, advice in the spiritual or moral realm. It can seem so clear to us what needs to happen in someone's life that it's hard to hold back. But when it comes to our own lives, we are more cautious because we see the big picture, and we know there is no quick and easy fix.

Only God sees the true big picture. And because he does, he treats us with unending patience, grace, and mercy. What a comforting truth this is! You can rest peacefully, secure in the faith that your heavenly Father has you in the palm of his hand.

But here too is where a major challenge lies: God sees everyone's big picture. He has every person in the palm of his hand—even the people you understand the least. This means that you can leave everyone else to his care. You don't have to worry about changing them!

Of course, you should love the people around you and be involved in their lives. But try to do it by treating them with the same merciful, loving approach that God has. Seek to understand and empathize, not condemn and overadvise.

Think of one person whom you are most tempted to judge or give advice to. Now try to isolate one conversation you have had in the last day or two when you gave in to the temptation to try to fix him or her. How could you have offered grace and love instead? Finally, watch for the next conversation, and lead with love rather than correction.

"Lord, help me to reflect your grace and love to the people around me."

(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, we hear these words: *When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear; so do one's faults when one speaks. As the test of what the potter molds is in the furnace, so in tribulation is the test of the just. The fruit of a tree shows the care it has had; so too does one's speech disclose the bent of one's mind. Praise no one before he speaks, for it is then that people are tested.*
 - How would you describe the meaning of this passage and the message it is trying to convey?
 - Why do you think that Ben Sira, the author of Sirach, says that *one's faults appear when one speaks and so too does one's speech disclose the bent of one's mind*? In what ways do these words apply to you?
2. The responsorial psalm opens with these words: *It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praise to your name, Most High, To proclaim your kindness at dawn and your faithfulness throughout the night. It goes on to describe the fruits of doing this: The just one shall flourish like the palm tree, like a cedar of Lebanon shall he grow. They that are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. The reading ends with these words: They shall bear fruit even in old age; vigorous and sturdy shall they be, Declaring how just is the LORD, my rock, in whom there is no wrong.*
 - How do the opening words describe how we should begin and end each day in prayer and thanksgiving to the Lord?
 - How would you summarize how the psalmist describes the fruits of doing this?
 - What are the fruits in your life of spending time beginning and ending the day in prayer and thanksgiving? Is there room for improvement? How?
3. The second reading begins with these words: *Brothers and sisters: When this which is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility and this which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about: "Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - What do these words of St. Paul mean to you: *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ?*
 - How do the above words provide us with reasons why *this which is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility and this which is mortal clothes itself with immortality*? In what ways does this fill you with hope?
 - How can you allow the words of this reading to become a greater reality in your life?
4. The Gospel reading, like the first reading and responsorial psalm, describes what it means to bear good fruit in our lives. It begins with these words: *Jesus told his disciples a parable, "Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? He answers these questions by telling his disciples to Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye."*
 - How does the parable about the blind person guiding a blind man relate to the words that follow, including: *Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye.*
 - What do you think these closing words of the reading mean? *A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit ... A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.*
 - How does this Gospel reading apply to you? What are some steps you can take to allow yourself to be *fully trained* as his disciple?
5. The meditation is a reflection on these words from the Gospel reading, *Remove the wooden beam from your eye first*. It opens with these words: "People love to judge other people and give advice, even when they don't have much to offer." However, it reminds us that "Only God sees the true big picture. And because he does, he treats us with unending patience, grace, and mercy ... God sees everyone's big picture. He has every person in the palm of his hand—even the people you understand the least. This means that you can leave everyone else to his care. You don't have to worry about changing them! Of course, you should love the people around you and be involved in their lives. But try to do it by treating them with the same merciful, loving approach that God has. Seek to understand and empathize, not condemn and overadvise."
 - What do the words above from the meditation mean to you?
 - What are some lessons we can learn from them?
 - How can you put these ending words of the meditation into practice? "Think of one person whom you are most tempted to judge or give advice to. Now try to isolate one conversation you have had in the last day or two when you gave in to the temptation to try to fix him or her. How could you have offered grace and love instead? Finally, watch for the next conversation, and lead with love rather than correction."

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the for grace to love others as Jesus has loved you. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Lord, help me to reflect your grace and love to the people around me."

[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.]