

Sunday, April 28, 2019

Second Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy)

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Acts 5:12-16

2nd Reading: Revelation 1:9-13, 17-19

Responsorial: Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

Gospel: John 20:19-31

Experiencing the Lord's Divine Mercy

Do not be afraid. (Revelation 1:17)

It happened just about every time God revealed himself. John had a vision of the risen Jesus, and it made him faint with terror (Revelation 1:17). Isaiah had a vision of the majesty of God, and he cried out, "Woe is me, I am doomed!" (Isaiah 6:5). Ezekiel saw God coming in the clouds, surrounded by rings of fire, and he fell on his face in awe (Ezekiel 1:28).

Even more "ordinary" revelations of God's holiness had a similar effect. Peter fell to his knees and cried out, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man," after Jesus miraculously filled his nets with fish (Luke 5:8).

These may be dramatic scenes, but what happened next is even more dramatic. Jesus told John, "Do not be afraid," and then proceeded to give him messages for the churches (Revelation 1:17). Isaiah had his sins purged, and God called him to be a prophet (Isaiah 6:8). Seeing Ezekiel facedown on the ground, God told him to stand up; he just wanted to talk with him (Ezekiel 2:1). And Jesus told Peter, "Do not be afraid," and then called him to become a disciple (Luke 5:10).

Do you see the pattern? In each story, God made it clear that the person's past sins and mere mortality didn't pose obstacles to him. He was more focused on the work he had for them to do.

This is what divine mercy looked like in biblical times, and it's what it looks like today. It's God forgiving our every sin, cleansing our consciences, and easing our fears. It's also God looking with sadness on a darkened, sinful world and sending us out as his ambassadors.

Do not be afraid. Jesus says these words to you today. Don't be afraid of God. He loves you and he forgives you. And don't be afraid to share that mercy with the people around you. Forgive them just as you have been forgiven. Let them see in you the merciful face of God.

"Jesus, let the good news of your mercy fill the whole world today!"

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. In the first reading, we read that many *signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles*. It goes on to say that the result of this was that *more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them*. The reading ends with these words: *A large number of people from the towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem also gathered, bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits, and they were all cured*.
 - How would you describe the impact that the *signs and wonders* and healings had on the early Church?
 - Do you believe that these types of signs and wonders have a role to play in the Church today? If so, in what way?
 - In what ways has your life been impacted through miracles or healings in your life?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: *Let the house of Israel say, "His mercy endures forever." Let the house of Aaron say, "His mercy endures forever." Let those who fear the LORD say, "His mercy endures forever."* The psalm ends with these words: *This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it*.
 - What do these words, *His mercy endures forever*, mean to you? How have you experienced God's mercy?
 - The psalmist was so filled with joy and confidence that he could exclaim, *This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it*. During this Easter Season of grace, what are some of the things that you are rejoicing in?
 - What can you do to make this your disposition each morning when you first wake up?
3. The Second Reading opens with these words: *I, John, your brother, who share with you the distress, the kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus, found myself on the island called Patmos because I proclaimed God's word and gave testimony to Jesus. I was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet, which said, "Write on a scroll what you see." Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and when I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest. When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead*.
 - John was exiled to the island of Patmos, *because he proclaimed God's word and gave testimony for Jesus*. If you went on trial for proclaiming God's word and giving testimony for Jesus, would the prosecutor find enough evidence to convict you? Why or why not? What can you do now to create more "evidence"?
 - The Second Reading also describes how John was *caught up in the Spirit on the Lord's Day* and saw Jesus in all his glory. Why do you think his reaction was that he *fell down at his feet as though dead*?
 - How do you think you will react when one day you will see Jesus in all his glory?
4. In the Gospel reading, the risen Jesus appears to his disciples (except for the apostle Thomas) and speaks these words: *Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.* And when he had said this, he *breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. A week later he appears again, and Thomas was with them*. Jesus speaks these words to Thomas: *"Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe."* Thomas answered and said to him, *"My Lord and my God!"* Jesus said to him, *"Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."*
 - How would you describe the *Peace* that Jesus demonstrated throughout his life and during his passion and death on the cross? How would you describe the *Peace* that Jesus wants to give us? What is the basis for it?
 - Why do you think the apostle Thomas refused to believe the other apostles' testimony on Jesus' resurrection? What do you think Jesus meant when he said, *Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed*?
 - In what way has the Lord revealed the truth of who he is to you so that you are able to say, *My Lord and my God*?
5. The meditation is a reflection on these words from the second reading, *Do not be afraid*. It goes on to describe how the Lord appeared to John the apostle, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Peter -- and showed them his divine mercy. The meditation ends with these words: *"This is what divine mercy looked like in biblical times, and it's what it looks like today. It's God forgiving our every sin, cleansing our consciences, and easing our fears. It's also God looking with sadness on a darkened, sinful world and sending us out as his ambassadors. Do not be afraid. Jesus says these words to you today. Don't be afraid of God. He loves you and he forgives you. And don't be afraid to share that mercy with the people around you. Forgive them just as you have been forgiven. Let them see in you the merciful face of God."*
 - What do these ending words of the meditation mean to you and how do they apply to your life?
 - Is there someone in your life that may need your mercy and forgiveness? Are you willing to give that person a gift that he or she (or any of us) does not deserve -- forgiveness?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord to bring the Gospel message to all the nations of the world. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Jesus, let the good news of your mercy fill the whole world today!"

[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.]