

Sunday, May 5, 2019

Third Sunday of Easter

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Acts 5:27-32, 40-41

Responsorial: Psalm 30:2, 4-6, 11-13

2nd Reading: Revelation 5:11-14

Gospel: John 21:1-19

Sharing in the Victory of Jesus' Resurrection

They left . . . rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor. (Acts 5:41)

That's rather odd! Wouldn't you expect the apostles to be grateful that they left that trial alive? Or relieved that they didn't get punished any more severely? They may have thought these things, of course, but it seems that they were most happy to have been found "worthy" to be arrested, threatened, and flogged by their own people (Acts 5:41).

What gave the apostles a perspective like this? The answer lies in one simple line from today's passage. Explaining themselves to the Sanhedrin, Peter and the others said, "The God of our ancestors raised Jesus, though you had him killed by hanging him on a tree" (Acts 5:30).

Jesus' resurrection changed everything! The apostles had seen him endure an agonizing death and still come out the other side filled with the glory of God. With their very eyes, they saw definitive proof that death had been overcome. It wasn't the end of Jesus' story, and it wasn't the end of theirs either.

Around seventy-five years after this event, a bishop from Antioch named Ignatius said something similar. He had been arrested for his belief in Christ, and while on his way to execution in Rome, he wrote to the Christians there and begged them not to interfere. Ignatius had lived a long life, and death didn't scare him. In fact, he was eager to go. "Allow me to become food for the wild beasts," he wrote, "through whom it will be granted me to attain to God" (To the Romans, 4).

Both Peter and Ignatius tell us that the gates of heaven have been opened to us. Death, and everything death represents, has lost its power over us. They also tell us that fear has lost its power, for all fears draw their strength from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). Jesus, our risen Lord, has overcome everything, and he now invites you to share in that victory. Death is not the end of your story. It's really just the beginning.

"Jesus, we praise you for the victory of your resurrection!"

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The first reading begins with these words: *When the captain and the court officers had brought the apostles in and made them stand before the Sanhedrin, the high priest questioned them, "We gave you strict orders, did we not, to stop teaching in that name? Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and want to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles said in reply, "We must obey God rather than men."* It ends with these words: *The Sanhedrin ordered the apostles to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them. So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.*
 - Why do you think the high priest warns the apostles to stop teaching in Jesus' name?
 - Peter begins his response to the high priest with these words: "We must obey God rather than men." What do you think he meant by these words? In what ways do these words apply to your life?
 - Why were the apostles *rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name*?
 - To what extent are you willing to suffer dishonor for Jesus, because you are a Christian?
2. The responsorial psalm opens with these words: *I will extol you, O LORD, for you drew me clear and did not let my enemies rejoice over me. O LORD, you brought me up from the netherworld; you preserved me from among those going down into the pit. Sing praise to the LORD, you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger lasts but a moment; a lifetime, his good will. At nightfall, weeping enters in, but with the dawn, rejoicing.*
 - Why do you think the psalmist, like Peter and the apostles in the first reading, expresses his total confidence and faith in the Lord, no matter what happens to him? Why do you think his response is praise, thanksgiving, and rejoicing?
 - Was there ever a time when the Lord rescued you from a difficult situation? What was your response?
 - What do the ending words of the above reading mean to you?
3. The second reading gives us a glimpse into the words that are used in the celebration of praise and worship that goes on in Heaven: *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing and To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever.*
 - What is your reaction to this scene in Heaven? What do you think is the basis for this celebration?
 - In what ways can we share in this heavenly celebration?
4. The Gospel reading describes how *Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias*. It ends with this exchange between Jesus and Simon Peter: *"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." He then said to Simon Peter a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." Jesus said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that Jesus had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."*
 - What do you think were Jesus' reasons for his question to Peter, "Do you love me?" Why did he ask it three times?
 - Why do you think Peter seemed to be so uncomfortable with Jesus' questions?
 - What would be your answer if Jesus were to ask you the same question he asked Peter, "Do you love me?"
5. The meditation is a reflection on the first reading and includes these words regarding Jesus' resurrection: *Jesus' resurrection changed everything! The apostles had seen him endure an agonizing death and still come out the other side filled with the glory of God. With their very eyes, they saw definitive proof that death had been overcome. It wasn't the end of Jesus' story, and it wasn't the end of theirs either.* The meditation ends with these words: *Death, and everything death represents, has lost its power over us. They also tell us that fear has lost its power, for all fears draw their strength from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). Jesus, our risen Lord, has overcome everything, and he now invites you to share in that victory. Death is not the end of your story. It's really just the beginning.*
 - The meditation tells us that "Jesus' resurrection changed everything!" Why do you think this is true?
 - Regarding Jesus' resurrection, what do you think it means that "he now invites you to share in that victory"?
 - The meditation ends with these two sentences: "Death is not the end of your story. It's really just the beginning." What do these words mean to you?

Take some time now to pray and thank and praise the Lord for what he did for you through his cross and resurrection. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as a starting point.

"Jesus, we praise you for the victory of your resurrection!"

[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.]