

Sunday, September 1, 2019

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29

2nd Reading: Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24

Responsorial: Psalm 68:4-7, 10-11

Gospel: Luke 14:1, 7-14

Opening Our Doors to Others, *Beyond Our Comfort Zone*

When you hold a banquet . . . (Luke 14:13)

Doesn't it seem as if Jesus is giving his fellow dinner guests etiquette lessons here? He's telling them whom to invite and whom not to invite to their parties. He's advising them on how to choose a seat at the table. He's even showing them how to avoid the embarrassment of having the host move them to a lesser place!

But Jesus is doing something more important than teaching good manners. He is challenging his listeners—and us—to move beyond the safe circles we tend to build for ourselves. We are all familiar with the gatherings Jesus describes in this passage: parties filled with “friends . . . brothers . . . relatives . . . wealthy neighbors” (Luke 14:12). They're cozy. They're comfortable. And they create a closed loop. There is no room for people who are different from us, especially the poor or anyone who might make us feel uncomfortable (14:13).

Of course, there's nothing wrong with family meals or neighborhood gatherings. Jesus loves seeing us come together and enjoy each other's company. He even promised to be with us when “two or three are gathered” in his name (Matthew 18:20)! The problem comes when this is the only kind of interaction we have. He doesn't want to see us trapped in the same closed loop that ensnared the people in today's Gospel.

Jesus isn't expecting you to throw open your doors and host a meal for any and all takers. But he is asking you to stretch out your hand a little more to the “poor” people around you. It could be a family from your parish or neighborhood who is struggling through unemployment. It could even be a wealthy neighbor who, now retired, lives alone and whose family never visits. You don't even have to share a meal. All Jesus is asking for is your willingness to give without expecting anything in return. It's what he does for you; now he is asking you to do the same.

“Lord, help me to reach beyond my circle of comfort to touch the lonely and needy 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 Discussion:

1. The first reading opens with these words: *“My child, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts. Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God.”* It ends with these words: *What is too sublime for you, seek not, into things beyond your strength search not. The mind of a sage appreciates proverbs, and an attentive ear is the joy of the wise. Water quenches a flaming fire, and alms atone for sins.*
 - What do the opening words mean to you?
 - One way to practice humility is to exalt the Lord and honor others by treating them with respect. Do you find it easy or hard to speak words that honor family members or others? What about those who tend to rub you the wrong way?
 - What do the ending words mean to you? How do they apply to your own life?
2. The Responsorial Psalm begins with these words: *The just rejoice and exult before God; they are glad and rejoice. Sing to God, chant praise to his name; whose name is the LORD.* It ends with these words: *The father of orphans and the defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling. God gives a home to the forsaken; he leads forth prisoners to prosperity. A bountiful rain you showered down, O God, upon your inheritance; you restored the land when it languished; your flock settled in it; in your goodness, O God, you provided it for the needy.*
 - The beginning words call us to *rejoice and exult before God* and to *Sing to God, chant praise to his name*. Do you find this easy or difficult to do? Why?
 - The Responsorial Psalm is also a good reminder that when Christ came to earth, he did not just spend time with the rich, the important, and powerful, but with those who were considered lowly and outcasts. What are some steps you can take to be more like the Lord and follow in his footsteps?
3. The second reading opens with these words: *Brothers and sisters: You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them.* It ends with these words: *No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel.*
 - How would you describe the differences between the opening words, describing how God appeared to the Israelites in the Old Testament, and the ending words, describing how we can approach *the living God* through Jesus?
 - We have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, and we receive Christ in the Eucharist every time we go to Mass. What additional steps can you take to reinforce your appreciation of this fact, and prepare yourself before attending Mass?
 - Are there also some additional steps you can take to make your times of prayer more personal to you as well?
4. In the Gospel reading, Jesus ends his parable on taking a lower place at a wedding banquet, rather than a higher place, with these words: *For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. Then he said to the host who invited him, “When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous”.*
 - In what way does Jesus’ parable give us an important lesson in personal humility and holiness?
 - The ending words of the Gospel, like the Responsorial Psalm, also reminds us of the importance of service to those of God’s people who need our attention. How would you describe your service to those less fortunate than you?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel reading, including these words: *When you hold a banquet . . .* (Luke 14:13). It ends with these words: *“Jesus isn’t expecting you to throw open your doors and host a meal for any and all takers. But he is asking you to stretch out your hand a little more to the “poor” people around you. It could be a family from your parish or neighborhood who is struggling through unemployment. It could even be a wealthy neighbor who, now retired, lives alone and whose family never visits. You don’t even have to share a meal. All Jesus is asking for is your willingness to give without expecting anything in return. It’s what he does for you; now he is asking you to do the same.”*
 - What are some obstacles in your life that keep you from stretching “out your hand a little more to the ‘poor’ people around you”? What can you do to overcome them?
 - What are some possible ways you could work with others to reach out to the poor and needy?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord to give you his heart for the poor and needy, and those less fortunate than you. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

“Lord, help me to reach beyond my circle of comfort to touch the lonely and needy 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]