

Sunday, September 8, 2019

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Wisdom 9:13-18

Responsorial: Psalm 90:3-6, 12-17

2nd Reading: Philemon 9-10, 12-17

Gospel: Luke 14:25-33

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

He cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26)

Hate your parents? Hate your own life? Carry a cross? That seems awfully harsh! Luke tells us that Jesus spoke these words to the “great crowds” that were with him (Luke 14:25). Notice that the crowds were not necessarily “following” him; they were just traveling along, watching to see what he would do next. Jesus knew their motives were mixed, so he stopped and addressed them with these challenging words.

Jesus knew where each person in that crowd drew a line. Maybe one didn’t want to leave the security of his parents’ home. Or another was worried about becoming an outcast if she followed Jesus. Maybe a third was eager to begin the journey with Jesus but would not hold on when the going got tough. Or another just went with Jesus out of curiosity.

Jesus stopped and spoke to these crowds because he wanted to shake them up a bit and help them to push past whatever obstacles might be keeping them from following him. He wanted them to see that discipleship was a serious decision, a decision he couldn’t make for them. They had to decide on their own if he was worth following.

Each of us is like the people traveling with Jesus. We all have areas of our lives, perhaps relating to a sin or a grudge or a lack of trust, that we can’t seem to release. But Jesus is calling us further down the road of discipleship. So close your eyes for a moment and imagine him calling to you. What is he saying?

As you listen to the readings at Mass today, notice if anything stands out to you. Is Jesus asking you to come closer? Is he shining light on something keeping you from him? If so, then take this insight with you when you receive Communion, and ask Jesus to write it on your heart. Trust that he will show you how to live it out this week.

“Jesus, I want to follow you even more deeply!”

(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: *Who can know God's counsel, or who can conceive what the LORD intends? For the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans.* It ends with these words: *Or whoever knew your counsel, except you had given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high? And thus were the paths of those on earth made straight.*
 - In what ways are the questions that open the reading very challenging?
 - How do the closing words help to answer these questions and the words that follow the questions?
 - How much time do you spend praying and asking the Holy Spirit for God's wisdom (for example, to better understand God's plan for your life or your children's)? Is there room for improvement? In what ways?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: *You turn man back to dust, saying, "Return, O children of men." For a thousand years in your sight are as yesterday, now that it is past, or as a watch of the night.* The psalmist goes on to ask the Lord to *Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart.* It ends with these words: *Fill us at daybreak with your kindness, that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days. And may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours; prosper the work of our hands for us! Prosper the work of our hands!*
 - What do the beginning words of the responsorial psalm mean to you? In what ways do they relate to these words of the psalm: *Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart.*
 - How well are you at doing this? Why do you think *numbering our days aright* is tied to gaining *wisdom of heart*?
 - In what ways do the ending words remind us of the importance of starting each day with prayer?
3. In the second reading, St. Paul expresses his desire to return Onesimus, who had been Philemon's slave. The reading ends with these words: *Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man and in the Lord. So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me.*
 - Why do you think St. Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus *no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man and in the Lord*?
 - In what ways, even today, are there people we can "enslave," for example, by feeling superior, by not forgiving, by holding ourselves aloof, or by choosing to avoid them? How may God be asking you to "set free" people in your life?
4. The Gospel reading opens with these challenging words of Jesus: *If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.* It ends with these words: *In the same way, anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.*
 - What do you think Jesus meant by the opening words of the reading?
 - When you have followed the Lord's will during a difficult time, what has been your experience?
 - What do you think Jesus meant by the ending words of the reading?
 - Are there possessions that you have that have the potential to get in the way of being a disciple of Christ? If so, how far are you willing to go in taking the required actions to follow Christ's words?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel reading and these words of Jesus: *He cannot be my disciple* (Luke 14:26). It begins with these words: "Hate your parents? Hate your own life? Carry a cross? That seems awfully harsh! Luke tells us that Jesus spoke these words to the "great crowds" that were with him (Luke 14:25). Notice that the crowds were not necessarily "following" him; they were just traveling along, watching to see what he would do next. Jesus knew their motives were mixed, so he stopped and addressed them with these challenging words."
 - Jesus' difficult words in the Gospel reading challenges us to count the cost of following him. How would you describe the costs in your own life of following Jesus?
 - Do you believe Jesus has given you the grace to overcome any costs of following him? In what ways?
 - How would you answer these questions in the ending words of the meditation? "Jesus is calling us further down the road of discipleship. So close your eyes for a moment and imagine him calling to you. What is he saying? As you listen to the readings at Mass today, notice if anything stands out to you. Is Jesus asking you to come closer? Is he shining light on something keeping you from him?"

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to follow him in a deeper way, and be his disciple, no matter what the cost may be. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

"Jesus, I want to follow you even more deeply!"

[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.]