

Sunday, February 16, 2020

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Sirach 15:15-20

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

Responsorial: Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34

Gospel: Matthew 5:17-37

Using Our Free Will to Choose Jesus and Follow Him as Lord and Savior

Before man are life and death, . . . whichever he chooses shall be given him. (Sirach 15:17)

Free will. It's God's greatest gift to us, and it's also our riskiest characteristic. Free will has enabled us to decide for ourselves what kind of people we will be. It has enabled us to create music and art, to build cities and roads, to marry and have children. It has also enabled us to destroy instead of create, to hurt and betray instead of heal and build up. Most important, it's through our free will that we decide whether to follow Jesus or our own thoughts and desires.

Sirach seems keenly aware of how much of a two-edged sword our free will can be. Each of us, he says, is free to choose between "fire and water, . . . life and death, good and evil" (Sirach 15:16, 17). And God will respect whatever we choose.

Of course, our heavenly Father longs for us to choose life in him, but he will never force himself on us. He is not like the petty gods dreamed up by the pagans, who use threats and manipulation to keep their people in line.

God also knows that free will has consequences. And so Sirach teaches, "Whichever he chooses shall be given him" (Sirach 15:17). While God honors our choices, he also respects the results those choices bring.

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us a real-life illustration: "Whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Matthew 5:22). If you choose to nurture anger, resentment, and condemnation, don't be surprised if other people begin treating you in the same way. But if you build an environment of trust and respect, that's what you will receive.

So choose life today. Use this awesome gift of your free will to choose gentleness, patience, and all the other fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Above all, choose Jesus. Welcome him into your life, and let his love soften your heart. It's the best choice you could ever make.

"Jesus, help me to choose you in every situation today."

(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: *If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live; he has set before you fire and water to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand. Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him.* It ends with these words: *The eyes of God are on those who fear him; he understands man's every deed. No one does he command to act unjustly, to none does he give license to sin.*
 - The opening words speak of the free will God has given us to choose to *keep the commandments, trust in God, and choose life and good.* Why do you think human free will is such an important part of God's plan for us?
 - What do the ending words mean to you?
 - What do you believe it means to have a fear of God? What role does godly fear play in how you live your life?
2. The responsorial psalm begins as follows: *Blessed are they whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they who observe his decrees, who seek him with all their heart. You have commanded that your precepts be diligently kept. Oh, that I might be firm in the ways of keeping your statutes!* It closes with these words: *Open my eyes, that I may consider the wonders of your law. Instruct me, O LORD, in the way of your statutes, that I may exactly observe them. Give me discernment, that I may observe your law and keep it with all my heart.*
 - Similar to the first reading, the responsorial psalm also speaks of those who obey God's commandments and seek the Lord. Why is seeking the Lord with all your heart so important in obeying God's commandments?
 - In what ways do the closing words remind us that obeying the Lord is not just a matter of our will power, and our own human efforts, but requires the Lord's grace and help above all?
 - What steps can you take to open yourself more to the Lord's grace and help, and seek him *with all your heart*?
3. The second reading begins with these words: *We speak a wisdom to those who are mature, not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory. and which none of the rulers of this age knew; for, if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God.*
 - Do you believe that God has chosen to reveal his wisdom to us, so we can speak his wisdom to others?
 - How well are you doing in speaking God's wisdom to others? Can you think of some specific examples?
 - What do the ending words mean to you? Do they give you a hope and expectation for the glory of Heaven?
4. In the Gospel reading, Jesus speaks these words to his disciples: *You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment. But I say to you, whoever is angry with brother will be liable to judgment. You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow. But I say to you, do not swear at all. Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one.*
 - In what ways did Jesus elevate the understanding of the Ten Commandments to much higher standards – standards that far exceed the literal understanding of them?
 - Do you believe that with God's grace, and the power of the sacraments and the Holy Spirit, it is possible to live a life according to the Ten Commandments and the higher standards that Jesus described? Why or why not?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the first reading. It begins with these words: "Free will. It's God's greatest gift to us, and it's also our riskiest characteristic...it's through our free will that we decide whether to follow Jesus or our own thoughts and desires." It ends as follows: "So choose life today. Use this awesome gift of your free will to choose gentleness, patience, and all the other fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Above all, choose Jesus. Welcome him into your life, and let his love soften your heart. It's the best choice you could ever make."
 - Do you agree with the opening words of the meditation? Why or why not?
 - What does it mean to you to "choose Jesus"? When you do this and "Welcome him into your life, and let his love soften your heart," why is it "the best choice you could ever make"?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to reveal his wisdom to you so you can to say yes to his will in all the situations in your life. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

"Jesus, help me to choose you in every situation 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.]