

Sunday, May 17, 2020

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

2nd Reading: 1 Peter 3:15-18

Responsorial: Psalm 66:1-7, 16, 20

Gospel: John 14:15-21

Listening to and Trusting in the Holy Spirit, *Your Advocate and Defender*

He will give you another Advocate. (John 14:16)

“You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you.” This familiar phrase is part of the “Miranda warning” that police officers give to any person they arrest. It’s based on the belief that no one should stand alone when facing charges. Someone has to be there to make sure the accused is given a fair trial. It must be consoling for the accused person to have someone by their side at their trial to help them face their accuser with dignity and courage.

Isn’t it interesting that this is how Jesus describes the Holy Spirit in today’s Gospel? The Greek word for “Advocate,” *parakletos*, also means defense attorney. It’s especially interesting when we remember that the Scriptures portray the devil as our “adversary” who never stops hurling accusations against us (Zechariah 3:1; Revelation 12:9-10).

This means that we don’t have to stand before the devil’s accusations alone. Jesus has given us the Spirit so that we can stand up against the lies of the evil one. He has given us the best defense attorney in history. Someone who will assure us that we have been forgiven. Someone who will remind us of God’s love for us. Someone who sees our sins and failings but who also sees the true desires of our hearts and never gives up on us.

Always remember the Holy Spirit, your defender, especially when you start thinking that you’re no good or that God has given up on you. Remember him when you begin to doubt the goodness of God’s plans for you and your loved ones.

Every day of your life, be sure that you spend time listening for the Holy Spirit. Let him convince you over and over again that you belong to Christ and that no one can snatch you out of his hands.

“Spirit of truth, help me to withstand every temptation and every accusation.”

(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 begins with these words: *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ to them. With one accord, the crowds paid attention to what was said by Philip when they heard it and saw the signs he was doing. There was great joy in that city.* It ends with these words: *Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit ... they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*
 - Why do you think the crowds *paid attention* to what Philip was saying and doing?
 - How would you describe why there was such *great joy in that city*?
 - What steps can you take to be more attentive at Mass, or when praying, so you too can be filled with *great joy*?
 - Why do you think it was necessary for the laying on of hands for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit, even though they had already been baptized?
2. In the responsorial psalm, “joy” also appears beginning with the response: “Let all the earth cry out to God with joy” and the opening verses: *Shout joyfully to God, all the earth, sing praise to the glory of his name; proclaim his glorious praise. Say to God, “How tremendous are your deeds!” “Let all on earth worship and sing praise to you, sing praise to your name!* It closes with these words: *Hear now, all you who fear God, while I declare what he has done for me. Blessed be God who refused me not my prayer or his kindness!*
 - How does the psalmist describe the basis for this joy?
 - What is the basis for your joy as you live out each day?
 - Someone once described joy as the echo of God’s life in us. How can you make God’s life “echo” more deeply in your life?
3. The second reading opens with these words from St. Peter: *Beloved: Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame.* It ends with these words regarding the Lord’s death and resurrection: *Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the Spirit.*
 - What is your reaction to these words from the reading: *Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope*? Are you always ready?
 - What keeps you from sharing your faith? If each day in prayer you would *Sanctify Christ as Lord* in your heart, what impact do you think it would have on helping to overcome any obstacles to sharing your faith?
4. The Gospel reading begins with these powerful words of Jesus to his disciples: *If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth.* It closes with these words: *Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.*
 - What an incredible promise in Jesus’ words in the beginning of the Gospel reading. How much do you reverence God’s very presence within you through the indwelling *Spirit of truth*?
 - What are some steps you can take to turn to the Lord and the Holy Spirit more frequently during the day?
 - Why do you think Jesus stressed how important it was to *keep my commandments* and *Whoever ... observes them is the one who loves me*, and *will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him*?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel and these words: *He will give you another Advocate* (John 14:16). It ends as follows: “Always remember the Holy Spirit, your defender, especially when you start thinking that you’re no good or that God has given up on you. Remember him when you begin to doubt the goodness of God’s plans for you and your loved ones. Every day of your life, be sure that you spend time listening for the Holy Spirit. Let him convince you over and over again that you belong to Christ and that no one can snatch you out of his hands.”
 - What message does the ending words of the meditation convey to you?
 - What steps can you take to use the ending words, and other words, from the meditation to help you resist the temptations of Satan? Are you willing to try these steps and then watch to see how differently your day goes?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guard and protect you from the temptations, harassments, and accusations of the Evil One. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Spirit of truth, help me to withstand every temptation and every accusation.”

[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.]