

Sunday, June 21, 2020

12th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Jeremiah 20:10-13

2nd Reading: Romans 5:12-15

Responsorial: Psalm 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35

Gospel: Matthew 10:26-33

Staying Close to the Lord and Allowing His Love to Shape Our Hearts

My persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. (Jeremiah 20:11)

Jeremiah was not having a good week. He had been arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison. Then, having been released, he pronounces an oracle of destruction against Jerusalem and offers a bitter prayer accusing the Lord of “seducing” him into this dangerous ministry (Jeremiah 20:7). And he prays for the chance to see his enemies’ downfall—and to savor it (20:12)!

Today’s reading is not what Jesus had in mind when he said, “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). We have only to think of Jesus’ words of forgiveness on the cross to see how he really wants his people to respond to persecution and enmity.

It’s comforting to know that even a great prophet like Jeremiah had bad days. It gives us some perspective on our own lives. Who among us hasn’t wished vengeance on someone who has hurt us? We know we shouldn’t, we know it’s wrong, but sometimes we find it very hard to resist the pull toward resentment and revenge.

The truth is, change takes time, and we have to keep working at it. We have to keep checking our thoughts, examining our motives, and holding our tongues until we develop the virtues that mirror Jesus’ perfect, unconditional love. We also have to keep pressing in to stay close to the Lord so that his love continues to shape our hearts.

But remember this: you are not alone! You are part of a Church filled with saints, both famous and obscure, who show that change is possible. You also have friends you can turn to for support when you need it. And most important—and most reassuring—you have the Holy Spirit, who is always ready to remind you of Jesus’ love and to give you his grace and encouragement.

Jeremiah had far more good days than bad days because he never gave up. Neither should we.

“Lord, teach me how to love everyone, even the people who are making my life difficult.”

(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 of Jeremiah: *I hear the whisperings of many: 'Terror on every side! Denounce! let us denounce him!' All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine. "Perhaps he will be trapped; then we can prevail, and take our vengeance on him." But the LORD is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph.* The reading ends with these words: *"Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD, for he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked!"*
 - In what ways is the first reading one of hope, rather than despair?
 - The life of Jeremiah is often considered a prefiguration of the life of Jesus. How does the first reading foreshadow the sufferings of Christ?
2. The responsorial psalm opens with these words: *For your sake I bear insult, and shame covers my face. I have become an outcast to my brothers, a stranger to my children, because zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who blaspheme you fall upon me. I pray to you, O LORD, for the time of your favor, O God! In your great kindness answer me with your constant help. Answer me, O LORD, for bounteous is your kindness; in your great mercy turn toward me.* The psalm closes with these words: *For the LORD hears the poor, and his own who are in bonds he spurns not. Let the heavens and the earth praise him, the seas and whatever moves in them!"*
 - In what way is the responsorial psalm, like the first reading, one of hope and trust in the midst of great suffering? In what way is it different?
 - How can you apply the words of the responsorial psalm and the first reading to your own life, especially in allowing their message of faith and trust in the Lord to help sustain you during hard times?
3. The second reading from Romans opens with these difficult words: *Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned—for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law.* It ends with these words of hope: *But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many.*
 - What does St. Paul mean by the words, *the gift is not like the transgression*?
 - How would you explain the second reading to someone who didn't understand it?
4. The Gospel reading begins with these words of Jesus' to his apostles: *Fear no one. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.* It ends with these words: *Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.*
 - What do you think Jesus meant by his opening words to his apostles, *Fear no one*?
 - All of us can probably say "Amen" to the last words of the reading: *But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.* However, what is your reaction to the sentence that precedes it?
 - In what ways are Jesus' words in the Gospel reading a strong call to each of us to be willing to share our faith?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the first reading and these words: *My persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph* (Jeremiah 20:11). It includes these convicting words: *"Who among us hasn't wished vengeance on someone who has hurt us? We know we shouldn't, we know it's wrong, but sometimes we find it very hard to resist the pull toward resentment and revenge. The truth is, change takes time, and we have to keep working at it. We have to keep checking our thoughts, examining our motives, and holding our tongues until we develop the virtues that mirror Jesus' perfect, unconditional love. We also have to keep pressing in to stay close to the Lord so that his love continues to shape our hearts."*
 - In what ways do these words from the meditation apply to you? How easy or hard is it for you to forgive those who have treated you unfairly or to not be filled with "resentment and revenge"?
 - What do these words mean to you, "We also have to keep pressing in to stay close to the Lord so that his love continues to shape our hearts"? What are some new ways you can respond to these words?

Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for his love for you and ask him for the grace to love others as he has loved you. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Lord, teach me how to love everyone, even the people who are making my life difficult."

[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.]