

Sunday, August 2, 2020

18th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 55:1-3

Responsorial: Psalm 145:8-9, 15-18

2nd Reading: Romans 8:35, 37-39

Gospel: Matthew 14:13-21

Believing that “We Conquer Overwhelmingly” in Jesus Christ

In all these things we conquer overwhelmingly. (Romans 8:37)

Julius Caesar. Alexander the Great. Napoleon Bonaparte. Genghis Khan. What do these men have in common? They were among the world’s greatest conquerors. They waged military campaigns that took them far and wide, forming mighty empires along the way.

Would you include Jesus in that list? Or St. Paul? Or yourself, for that matter? We don’t think of Christ, or Christians in general, as conquerors. Jesus died an ignoble death at the hands of the Romans. St. Paul was beheaded by the same empire. They looked more like the conquered than conquerors. Even today many Christians are martyred by those in power.

And yet through his sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, Jesus conquered the greatest enemies of all: sin and death. And because of our baptism into Christ, that’s a victory we all share in—no matter what befalls us in this life.

Paul’s words must have comforted the early Christians whenever they experienced persecution for their faith. Even when it looked like they were “losing,” they knew they were actually “winning.” They trusted that not even the worst calamity could separate them from Jesus (Romans 8:39)!

These verses can bring you comfort as well. You may be experiencing the kind of anguish and distress that St. Paul described. Or maybe you are repeatedly “losing” to a certain temptation. Whatever the case, know that as you cling to the Lord, you will “win” in the end. One day Jesus will welcome you into his heavenly kingdom, and everything will be made right and beautiful.

Until then, remember that God will never separate himself from you; his love is too strong, too real and solid. And through that love, you too will triumph over sin, death, and all the trials of life. You too will be a conqueror.

“Jesus, may I never be separated from your love!”

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. The first reading opens with these words of the Lord: *All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come receive grain and eat. Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk! Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy? Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare.*
 - In the opening verses, the Lord is asking *All you who are thirsty* to come to him, and he will give us everything we need, and we *shall delight in rich fare*. How would you describe your *thirst* for the Lord?
 - What specific things can you do to help increase that thirst and *come* to the Lord in a deeper way?
2. The responsorial describes these attributes of the Lord: *The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. The Lord is good to all and compassionate toward all his works. ... The Lord is just in all his ways and holy in all his works. The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.*
 - In what ways have you personally experienced these attributes of the Lord?
 - How would you describe the current needs in your life that now require the Lord's grace, mercy, kindness, and compassion? In these areas, how do you want the Lord to touch you?
 - Are there any of these attributes of God that you struggle to believe in, especially when you feel you are being treated unfairly or are suffering or grieving from something that happened to you or a member of your family?
3. We hear these powerful words of St. Paul in the second reading: *What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
 - St. Paul reviews the circumstances of our lives (*anguish, persecution, etc.*) and concludes that none of it can *separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*. To what extent do you believe this for your own life?
 - How can you use St. Paul's words to help guide your times of prayer each day and how you live out your day?
4. In the Gospel, we read that when Jesus *saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick*. In addition, *Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied.*
 - Do you believe that even today that Jesus is still *moved with pity* for the sick and desires to heal them in some way? Can you share any specific times when you saw Jesus heal or touch someone who was sick?
 - In the Gospel, Jesus feeds the large crowd earthly bread. But at every Mass, we are fed by Christ with Himself, the bread of eternal life. How hungry are you to receive Jesus, the bread of life, in the Eucharist? What are some things you can do to increase this hunger?
 - Do you believe Jesus wants to multiply the gifts he has giving you so that you can "feed" the people around you who need to know the Lord's great love for them? What are some ways you can do so and bring glory to God?
5. The meditation is a reflection on this verse from the second reading: *In all these things we conquer overwhelmingly* (Romans 8:37). It includes these words: "Paul's words must have comforted the early Christians whenever they experienced persecution for their faith." The meditation ends with these words: "These verses can bring you comfort as well. You may be experiencing the kind of anguish and distress that St. Paul described. Or maybe you are repeatedly "losing" to a certain temptation. Whatever the case, know that as you cling to the Lord, you will "win" in the end. One day Jesus will welcome you into his heavenly kingdom, and everything will be made right and beautiful. Until then, remember that God will never separate himself from you; his love is too strong, too real and solid. And through that love, you too will triumph over sin, death, and all the trials of life. You too will be a conqueror."
 - The meditation says that "Paul's words must have comforted the early Christians whenever they experienced persecution for their faith." Why do you think this was so?
 - What do the ending words from the meditation mean to you personally? Do you believe them? Why or why not?
 - In what ways do the ending words "bring you comfort as well"?

Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for his great love for you and ask him for the grace to do nothing that could separate you from his love. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Jesus, may I never be separated from your love!"

[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.]