

Sunday, July 5, 2020

14th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Zechariah 9:9-10

Responsorial: Psalm 145:1-2, 8-11, 13-14

2nd Reading: Romans 8:9, 11-13

Gospel: Matthew 11:25-30

What Does It Mean to be Baptized into Jesus' Death and Resurrection?

We are not debtors to the flesh. (Romans 8:12)

Whether it's a mortgage, a loan from a family member, credit cards, or something else, most of us have some experience of being debtors. We feel the burden of knowing our creditors have some degree of power over us. At times it can feel like having a heavy yoke tied to our shoulders. We also know how freeing it is to be released from a debt. Making that final payment feels so good that we just want to celebrate!

In today's second reading, St. Paul uses this image of indebtedness to encourage us: "We are not debtors to the flesh" (Romans 8:12). The flesh—that part of you that is attracted to sin—has no more power over you. Because you have been baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection, you have died and risen with him. You have died to sin and no longer owe it any allegiance. Raised up with Christ, you now have a way out when temptation arises.

Think how wonderful it feels to walk through a temptation and come out on the other side unharmed. Or think about how comforting it is to know that you don't have to be bound by guilt or destined to repeat your past sins. Of course, this is easier said than done. We know how strong our fallen desires can be, especially when it comes to habitual sins that have woven their way into our lives. But Paul is announcing a truth that can sustain us if we should fall into sin, just as it can inspire us in the midst of temptation.

So if you lose a battle here or there, you can pray, "Lord, you know how weak I am, but I believe that this sin does not define me. Thank you, Jesus, for abolishing my debt to the flesh!"

Jesus has broken the yoke of sin. So take up his yoke—the yoke of faith and trust—and let him give you rest (Matthew 11:29). Let his good news wash over you today: you are not bound to sin. You don't owe it anything!

"All praise to you, Jesus, for setting me free from the flesh!"

(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: *Thus says the LORD: Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, meek, and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass.* It goes on to say that this king shall *proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*
 - In what ways has Jesus fulfilled these prophetic words? What parts of these prophetic words remain to be fulfilled?
 - In what way is the fact that the Savior is *meek* related to the powerful impact he has in bringing *peace to the nations*?
 - Are there any examples from your own life where you succeeded by meekness instead of power?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: *I will extol you, O my God and King, and I will bless your name forever and ever. Every day will I bless you, and I will praise your name forever and ever.* The reading ends with these words: *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 faithful in all his words and holy in all his works. The Lord lifts up all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.*
 - How would you describe the things the Lord has done that should cause all his people to *extol, bless, and praise* the Lord – their *God and King*? What are some things the Lord has done in your life that would cause you to do this?
 - How was this reading’s description of the Lord’s attributes and actions fulfilled by our Lord Jesus Christ?
 - Have you ever thanked the Lord for being *gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness*? Should you?
 - With whom might the Lord be asking you to respond to in the same way with these same attributes?
3. The second reading opens with these words: *You are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you.* The reading closes with these words: *We are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*
 - What message do you think St. Paul is trying to convey with the opening words?
 - What message do you think St. Paul is trying to convey with the closing words?
 - What *deeds of the body* do you need to *put to death*? How do you think the Lord wants you to do it?
4. The Gospel reading begins with these words of Jesus: *I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to little ones. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. ... No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.* It ends with these words: *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.*
 - Notice that in the Gospel reading, Jesus, like the *LORD*’s words in the first reading and the psalmist’ words in the responsorial psalm, begins with praising and blessing? Why do you think this was so important to them? Should it be just as important to us?
 - Jesus says that when it comes to revelation, his Father has *hidden these things from the wise and learned*, but he has *revealed them to little ones*. What do these words mean and how do they apply to you?
 - What are some of the ways that Jesus *reveals* the Father to us and makes him known to us?
 - What do the ending words of the Gospel reading mean to you?
5. The meditation is a reflection on these words from the second reading: *We are not debtors to the flesh* (Rom 8:12). It includes these words: “The flesh—that part of you that is attracted to sin—has no more power over you. Because you have been baptized into Jesus’ death and resurrection, you have died and risen with him. You have died to sin and no longer owe it any allegiance. Raised up with Christ, you now have a way out when temptation arises.”
 - Knowing that you have been “baptized into Jesus’ death and resurrection,” what do St. Paul’s words from Romans 8:12 mean to you?
 - Do you believe that since you have been “Raised up with Christ, you now have a way out when temptation arises”? What steps can you take to make this a greater reality in your life?

Take some time now to thank the Lord that you have been set free from the power of the flesh, through his Spirit that dwells in you (Romans 8:11). Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“All praise to you, Jesus, for setting me free from the flesh!”

[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.]