

Sunday, August 30, 2020

22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Jeremiah 20:7-9

2nd Reading: Romans 12:1-2

Responsorial: Psalm 63:2-6, 8-9

Gospel: Matthew 16:21-27

Making Our Homes a House of Prayer

God forbid, Lord! (Matthew 16:22)

What a stunning reversal! You don't confess someone as "the Son of the living God" and then turn around and scold them (Matthew 16:16)! What could have triggered such a strong reaction from Peter? The news that Jesus was going to "suffer greatly . . . and be killed" by Jerusalem's religious leaders (16:21).

Of course, Peter had the purest of intentions when he rebuked Jesus; he couldn't bear the thought of his beloved Master and friend suffering such a horrible fate.

But there may also have been a deeper motive in Peter's actions. Perhaps he was eager to preserve Jesus' image as an untouchable miracle worker so that he could be safe too. If he could keep Jesus from the cross, he wouldn't have to face his own cross.

Peter had been with Jesus long enough to see that being a disciple meant risking people's scorn and misunderstanding. It meant pouring out his life to God for the sake of the people around him. If Jesus was destined for the cross, then Peter might have to accept a similar fate. Better to shield Jesus from harm so that he could shield himself as well.

But Jesus would have none of it. So he told Peter that anyone who wanted to become like him had to take up his cross and follow in his footsteps (Matthew 16:24).

It's tempting to keep Jesus at arm's length so that he can't get too close and ask too much of us. Jesus made it very clear: there is a cost to discipleship. It's not always easy to follow the Lord and obey his commandments. But the glory of knowing Jesus' love and the joy of sharing his mercy with people far outweigh any sacrifice we might have to make. Peter ultimately learned this, and so can we.

So take up your cross today. Try your best to follow in Jesus' path of self-giving love.

"Lord, I don't want to keep you at a distance. Teach me how to give of myself as you did."

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. The first reading opens with these words: *You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed. All the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I must cry out, violence and outrage is my message; the word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day. It ends with these words: I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.*
 - The first reading begins with Jeremiah crying out and complaining to the Lord over his *derision and reproach*. Why do you think Jeremiah cannot hold back from speaking his word to his people despite the consequences?
 - What about you? What are the obstacles that can keep you from talking to someone about your faith in Christ? What steps can you take to help you overcome these obstacles?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: *O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water. ... For your kindness is a greater good than life; my lips shall glorify you. Thus will I bless you while I live; lifting up my hands, I will call upon your name. As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied, and with exultant lips my mouth shall praise you. You are my help, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy. My soul clings fast to you; your right hand upholds me.*
 - How does the psalmist describe the reasons for his soul *thirsting* for God and how the Lord has satisfied this thirst? How does the psalmist describe his response to what the Lord did to satisfy his thirst?
 - How would you describe your own soul's *thirsting* and the reasons for your thirst?
 - How has the Lord satisfied your thirst? What has been your response when the Lord waters your thirsty soul?
3. The second reading opens with these words: *I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.* It closes with these words: *Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.*
 - What do you think it means *to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God*? How do you think these words apply specifically to you? What can you do to make them a greater reality in your life?
 - What do you think St. Paul meant by the closing words?
 - How would you describe the biggest influences of *this age* on your mind? What can you do to reduce these influences and increase the influence of Scriptures, and the work of the Holy Spirit, in renewing your mind?
4. The Gospel reading begins with these words: *Jesus began to show his disciples that he must ... suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*
 - Why do you think Peter responded the way he did to Jesus' hard words to his disciples about his passion, death, and resurrection? Why do you think Jesus responded to Peter's words in the way he did?
 - What message was Jesus was trying to convey with his other words *to his disciples*? How do they apply to you?
 - What cross is the Lord asking you to bear? How can the support of other Christians help you in bearing it?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel reading, including these words: *God forbid, Lord!* (Matthew 16:22). It ends with these words: "It's tempting to keep Jesus at arm's length so that he can't get too close and ask too much of us. Jesus made it very clear: there is a cost to discipleship. It's not always easy to follow the Lord and obey his commandments. But the glory of knowing Jesus' love and the joy of sharing his mercy with people far outweigh any sacrifice we might have to make. Peter ultimately learned this, and so can we. So take up your cross today. Try your best to follow in Jesus' path of self-giving love."
 - What are the things in your life that tempt you "to keep Jesus at arm's length so that he can't get too close and ask too much"?
 - The meditation also tells us "there is a cost to discipleship." How would you describe this cost?
 - Why does "the glory of knowing Jesus' love and the joy of sharing his mercy with people far outweigh any sacrifice we might have to make"? What steps can you take to "to follow in Jesus' path of self-giving love"?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to "to follow in Jesus' path of self-giving love" in a deeper way. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Lord, I don't want to keep you at a distance. Teach me how to give of myself as you did."

[Maurice Blumberg 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 is also a current leader of his parish ChristLife, Healing, and Men's Ministries. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]