

Sunday, August 9, 2020

19th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: 1 Kings 19:9, 11-13

2nd Reading: Romans 9:1-5

Responsorial: Psalm 85:9-14

Gospel: Matthew 14:22-23

Worshipping the One True God at Mass

Theirs [is] the worship. (Romans 9:3)

Paul begins his long meditation on the mystery of Israel's rejection of Christ by listing some of the blessings God has given to his fellow Jews: "adoption, . . . covenants, . . . the law, . . . the promises" (Romans 9:3). And in the middle of this list is a curious phrase: "the worship."

How unique—and, yes, how blessed—was Israel's worship! Unlike their pagan neighbors, who devised their own kinds of sacrifices to please their many gods, the people of Israel had the privilege of offering God the kind of worship that he desired. Following the commandments God gave Moses, they offered sacrifices of love and communion, of repentance and reconciliation with God. They worshipped God for his salvation. They praised him for his greatness and power. The fact that he had chosen them and made a covenant with them proved that he loved them deeply and wanted to form them in his image!

For our part, we have the privilege of worshipping God every time we celebrate Mass. Like the Israelites, we can praise him for his glory. We can thank him for saving us from sin and opening heaven for us. We can worship him for his promise never to leave us or abandon us.

Of course, we don't slaughter sheep or cattle, and we don't burn barley or wheat. That kind of worship played its part in the past. On the cross, Jesus offered one, perfect sacrifice to God and sealed an everlasting covenant with us through his blood. Now, when we gather to worship, we do it by recalling Jesus' sacrifice, by receiving him in the Eucharist, and by pledging ourselves to live out the covenant he has so freely made with us.

So set your heart on worshipping the one true God at Mass today. His love for you is everlasting, and his salvation is eternal. It is a privilege and an honor to come into his presence with praise!

"Lord, we praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you!"

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission. For more information on how to subscribe to their devotional magazine, go to www.wau.org).

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. The first reading opens with these words: *At the mountain of God, Horeb, Elijah came to a cave where he took shelter. Then the LORD said to him, ‘Go outside and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will be passing by. After not seeing the Lord in a strong and heavy wind, earthquake, or fire, there was a tiny whispering sound. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave.*
 - Why do you think the Lord, the Creator of the universe, would talk so softly to Elijah in a tiny whispering sound instead of in a more dramatic way?
 - *Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave* when he heard the Lord speaking to him. Why do you think this was his reaction?
 - Has there ever been a time when you felt you heard from God during a time of prayer? What was the result?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: *I will hear what God proclaims; the LORD — for he proclaims peace. Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him, glory dwelling in our land.* The psalm goes on to describe what are the fruits of what the Lord proclaims: *Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and justice shall look down from heaven. The Lord himself will give his benefits; our land shall yield its increase. Justice shall walk before him, and prepare the way of his steps.*
 - The responsorial psalm, like the first reading, also speaks of hearing the Lord: *I will hear what God proclaims; the LORD — for he proclaims peace.* What does it mean to you that the Lord proclaims peace?
 - The psalm refers to “fear of the Lord” with these words: *Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him, glory dwelling in our land.* What has been your understanding of this term and why is it important?
 - What is the psalmist trying to convey with his symbolic description of the fruits of what the Lord proclaims?
3. The second reading opens with words: *I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie; my conscience joins with the Holy Spirit in bearing me witness that I have great sorrow and constant anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people. ... They are Israelites; theirs the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; theirs the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.*
 - Paul expresses his *great sorrow and constant anguish* for the salvation of the Jewish people, even if it meant being *accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people.* Why do you think he felt this way?
 - In light of Paul’s words, what is your understanding of why we as Christians should be also be grateful to the Jewish people for what we have inherited from them?
 - What are some ways you can express your thankfulness for this “inheritance” to some Jewish people you know?
4. In the Gospel reading, Jesus walks on water and when his disciples in the boat see him, *they were terrified.* He then speaks these words to his disciples, *“Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”* However, when Peter walks on water, *he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught Peter, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” After they got into the boat, the wind died down. Those who were in the boat did him homage, saying, “Truly, you are the Son of God.”*
 - Jesus spoke these words to his disciples when *they were terrified: Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.* Do you believe that he wants to speak these words to you, especially when you are going through a difficult time?
 - What are the times in your life where Jesus’ words to Peter, when *he became frightened,* have applied to you?
 - Why do you think the apostles were able to make this great statement of faith: “Truly, you are the Son of God”?
 - In what ways has the Lord acted in your life, so you are able to say to Jesus: “Truly, you are the Son of God.”
5. The meditation is a reflection on this verse from the second reading: *Theirs [is] the worship* (Romans 9:3). It includes these words: “Unlike their pagan neighbors, who devised their own kinds of sacrifices to please their many gods, the people of Israel had the privilege of offering God the kind of worship that *he* desired.” It ends with these words: “So set your heart on worshipping the one true God at Mass today. His love for you is everlasting, and his salvation is eternal. It is a privilege and an honor to come into his presence with praise!”
 - How would you describe the similarities between how the people of Israel worshipped God and how we as Catholics worship him at Mass? How would you describe the major differences between them?
 - How would you describe the ways you worship God because “His love for you is everlasting, and his salvation is eternal”?

Take some time now to pray and offer the Lord your praise, blessings, and adoration. Use the prayer below from the end of the mediation as the starting point.

“Lord, we praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you!”

[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.]