

Sunday, September 27, 2020

26th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Ezekiel 18:25-28

Responsorial: Psalm 25:4-9

2nd Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32

Serving One Another with a Servant's Heart as Jesus Has Served Us

Humbly regard others as more important than yourselves. (Philippians 2:3)

From the fall of our first parents to the most recent family squabble, the world has held onto one philosophy when it comes to relationships: make sure you get your way, no matter what. Stand your ground. Even if you discover you were wrong, don't give in. Do not submit.

How different is the way of the Lord! Take today's second reading. St. Paul tells us that Jesus didn't demand that we submit to him. Instead, he submitted to us. He who is Lord of all took "the form of a slave," pouring himself out in miracles of healing and deliverance (Philippians 2:7). He who is the wisdom of God patiently taught the way of forgiveness and holiness. And he who is pure and undefiled stooped to wash dirty, dusty feet.

And in his final act of submission, he offered no resistance when we mocked him, beat him, and crucified him. Not because he was weak, but because he was strong. Not because he had lost, but because he knew that this was the way to win. And God proved him right. Because Jesus chose humility over pride and service over force, his Father raised him up and exalted him as Lord.

Jesus didn't come to win an argument; he came to win our hearts. By humbling himself like this, he showed that his love is real, solid, and eternal. Now he asks us to follow his example. Just as he came not to be served but to serve, he asks us to serve each other. He asks us to win each other's hearts rather than try to break each other's wills.

This isn't always easy. Sometimes it means caring for a fussy in-law, cooperating with an unhappy coworker, or cleaning your teenager's bedroom—again. Neither is it always successful. There's no guarantee that you will win the other person's heart. But you will be pleasing Jesus, and that is its own reward.

"Lord, teach me how to become a servant after your own heart."

(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 or Discussion:

1. The first reading contains these words of the Lord: *Thus says the Lord: You say, "The LORD's way is not fair!" Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair? When someone virtuous turns away from virtue to commit iniquity, and dies, it is because of the iniquity he committed that he must die. But if he turns from the wickedness he has committed, he does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life; since he has turned away from all the sins that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.*
 - What is your reaction to how the Lord responds to those who accuse him of being unfair?
 - The Lord also describes the importance of repenting of our sins and turning away from all the sins that he has committed. In what ways do these words apply to us today? Are there any ways they do not?
 - How often do you do an examination of conscience and repent of (and turn away from) your sins?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: *Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.* It continues with these words: *Remember that your compassion, O Lord, and your love are from of old. The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not; in your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord.*
 - How often do you turn to God to ask him to *teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me?*
 - How often during the day do you turn to the Lord and ask him to *Remember that your compassion, O Lord, and your love are from of old and in your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord?*
 - What steps can you take to be even more alert to and more open to God's presence, guidance, teaching, compassion, love, and kindness each day?
3. The second reading begins with these words of St. Paul: *If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others.*
 - What do you think St. Paul means when he says to *complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing?*
 - What can you do to restore bonds of love/unity between those who have become estranged to you or to others?
 - St. Paul goes further in the reading and says an astonishing and very challenging thing: *Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others..* What do you think St. Paul meant by these words?
 - How do these words apply to you? What do you need to do to begin adopting this same attitude?
4. In the Gospel reading, Christ tells the chief priests and elders the story of two sons who were asked by their father to *go out and work in the vineyard today.* One son said, *"I will not," but afterwards changed his mind and went.* The other son said, *"Yes, sir," but "did not go."* Jesus continues with these words: *Which of the two did his father's will? They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."*
 - What message do you think Jesus was trying to convey with his story?
 - In what way was this story an admonishment to the chief priests and elders?
 - In what way is it also an admonishment to us when we give lip service to our faith, but do not really live it?
 - What can you do to make your faith have a greater impact on how you live out your life?
5. The meditation is a reflection on these words from the second reading: *Humbly regard others as more important than yourselves* (Philippians 2:3). It includes these words: *"Jesus didn't come to win an argument; he came to win our hearts. By humbling himself like this, he showed that his love is real, solid, and eternal. Now he asks us to follow his example. Just as he came not to be served but to serve, he asks us to serve each other. He asks us to win each other's hearts rather than try to break each other's wills."* The meditation closes with these words: *"There's no guarantee that you will win the other person's heart. But you will be pleasing Jesus, and that is its own reward."*
 - What do these words from the meditation mean to you?
 - How can you make these words a greater reality in your life?
 - How important to you are the closing words of the meditation?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to be a servant to others as he was to us. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Lord, teach me how to become a servant after your own heart."

[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@aol.com.]