

Sunday, September 20, 2020

25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9

Responsorial: Psalm 145: 2-3, 8-9, 17-18

2nd Reading: Philippians 1:20-24, 27

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

Being Grateful That God's Ways Are Far Above Our Own

My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways. (Isaiah 55:8)

There's no doubt about it—there are times when we just can't understand why God doesn't see things our way. Why doesn't he just give us the job we want or the healing we are asking for or the reconciliation we long for? *It would make so much sense, Lord, just to do what I'm asking.*

But we also know that, in this life at least, we won't always understand God's ways. They are as far above us as the heavens are to the earth (Isaiah 55:9).

Today's Gospel illustrates this point exactly. Who would pay the same wage to the laborer who arrived early and the one who arrived an hour before quitting time? Only God can be so generous as to want to care equally for all those who come to him, whether they arrive early or come much later.

And that's why we can be thankful that God's ways are so far above our own. Look at how the Lord cared for his chosen people over the centuries. Even though there were many occasions when he could have abandoned them, he never did, no matter how far they had strayed. They only had to seek him to find mercy (Isaiah 55:6-7).

Each week at Mass, we are privileged to witness God's mercy in action, when he transforms ordinary bread and wine into Jesus' Body and Blood. What a God we have, who loves us so much that he gives us not only his mercy but his very self in the Eucharist! This is so much beyond anything we could ever expect or imagine. Yes, God's ways are above our ways. He gives his love and mercy without measure, without cost, to anyone who comes to him. Early bird or latecomer, sinner or saint—all are welcome. As we are nourished by Jesus in the Eucharist, may our ways grow to become ever more like his.

"Father, I praise you for your mercy, which knows no bounds!"

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. The first reading opens with these words: *Seek the Lord while he may be found, call him while he is near. Let the scoundrel forsake his way, and the wicked his thoughts; let him turn to the Lord for mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.*
 - Why do you think it is important to *Seek the Lord while he may be found, call him while he is near* -- especially in prayer?
 - These words may imply that there may also be times when we feel that the Lord is not near to us or can't be found? Why is it especially important to seek and call upon the Lord during these times as well?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: *Every day will I bless you, and I will praise your name forever and ever. The psalm goes on to tell us why he does it: Great is the Lord and highly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable. 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. It ends with these words: The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.*
 - In the beginning words, the psalmist tells us: *Every day will I bless you, and I will praise your name forever and ever.* What are the reasons he gives for doing this? Do these reasons apply to you as well as to why you should bless and praise the Lord every day? If so, what has been your response? If not, why not?
 - In what way does this Old Testament description of the Lord describe the attributes of Jesus Christ revealed in the New Testament?
3. The second reading opens with these words of St. Paul: *Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose. I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better. Yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit. He concludes with these words: Only, conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.*
 - How would you describe the way St. Paul lived these opening words of the reading?
 - In what ways do his words apply to how you live your life as a Christian?
 - What do you think St. Paul meant by his concluding words? What can we do individually, and together with others, to make all these words, and all the words of the reading, an even greater reality in our lives?
4. In the Gospel reading, Jesus says that *The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. He then describes how the landowner hired laborers at 9 am, noon, 3 and 5 pm. In the evening the landowner gave each laborer the same wage, which caused the initial laborers to complain to the landowner who responds with these words: My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?' Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last.*
 - What message do you think Jesus was trying to convey with the parable?
 - What do you think is the meaning of the landowner's final words to the laborers?
 - How do these final words turn your sense of justice and generosity on its head? Why? In what specific ways do you need to change in order to have more of God's heart of mercy and forgiveness toward others?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the first reading. It includes with these words: "Only God can be so generous as to want to care equally for all those who come to him, whether they arrive early or come much later. And that's why we can be thankful that God's ways are so far above our own. ... Each week at Mass, we are privileged to witness God's mercy in action, when he transforms ordinary bread and wine into Jesus' Body and Blood. What a God we have, who loves us so much that he gives us not only his mercy but his very self in the Eucharist!"
 - The meditation says that "Only God can be so generous as to want to care equally for all those who come to him, whether they arrive early or come much later. And that's why we can be thankful that God's ways are so far above our own." Can you give some examples of how these words have applied to you or to others?
 - The meditation also says that "Each week at Mass, we are privileged to witness God's mercy in action, when he transforms ordinary bread and wine into Jesus' Body and Blood. What a God we have, who loves us so much that he gives us not only his mercy but his very self in the Eucharist!" In what ways can these words inspire us in our prayer before Mass and our preparation to receive Christ in the Eucharist?

Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for his mercy towards you, your family, and those "in most need of his mercy." Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Father, I praise you for your mercy, which knows no bounds!"

[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.]

