

Sunday, October 18, 2020

29th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Responsorial: Psalm 96:1, 3-5, 7-10

Gospel: Matthew 22:15-21

Living Out Our Christian Beliefs as Living Witnesses to Jesus Christ

Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? (Matthew 22:18)

These Pharisees and Herodians thought they had come up with a foolproof plan to ensnare Jesus. If he said it was lawful to pay the census tax, the people would turn against him since they hated the tax. If he said it was not lawful, he would be in trouble with the Roman authorities. In order to look sincere, they prefaced their question by flattering Jesus. But Jesus saw right through their plan and called them on it.

Clearly, hypocrisy was something that angered Jesus. In a series of “woes,” he called the religious leaders who opposed him hypocrites for not following the very precepts they were teaching (Matthew 23:13-29). And in his Sermon on the Mount, he warns people not to pray or fast like “the hypocrites” who do it just to look good in front of others (6:5, 16).

The word “hypocrisy” comes from the Greek word hypokrisis, which means acting on a stage. When we are hypocritical, we are putting on an act, saying one thing and then doing the opposite. But when our actions betray our words, we have to ask ourselves if we really believe what we say we do.

We are all susceptible to hypocrisy—it’s one of those unfortunate consequences of our fallen human nature. For example, we might lecture our children about not spending too much time on their screens and then spend hours and hours watching TV. Or we may claim that we are a team player at work but then create division by criticizing a fellow coworker.

It can be a painful process to search our consciences and discover ways in which our actions aren’t lining up with our beliefs. But the Lord understands our struggles and will forgive us and help us to change. Best of all, the more we are able to authentically live out our Christian beliefs, the more we can become living witnesses to Jesus—and the kingdom he has ushered in.

“Jesus, help me to act on what I say I believe.”

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading contains these words: *Thus says the Lord to his anointed, Cyrus, whose right hand I grasp, subduing nations before him, and making kings run in his service, opening doors before him and leaving the gates unbarred: For the sake of Jacob, my servant, of Israel, my chosen one, I have called you by your name, giving you a title, though you knew me not. I am the Lord and there is no other, there is no God besides me. It is I who arm you, though you know me not.*
 - Why do you think God would call and anoint the pagan King Cyrus as his chosen vessel for protecting and caring for his people, Israel (and eventually to allow the exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple)?
 - Why is it so easy to see ourselves, God's people, as the only ones that God will bless and use?
 - How open are you to working with anyone that God chooses to use to further his purposes, no matter where they are in their relationship with God?
2. In the responsorial psalm, each of us is called to *Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all you lands. Tell his glory among the nations; among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.* The psalmist goes on to give us some reasons why: *For great is the LORD and highly to be praised; awesome is he, beyond all gods. For all the gods of the nations are things of nought, but the LORD made the heavens.* The psalmist goes on to tell us to *give to the LORD glory and praise; give to the LORD the glory due his name!*
 - Why should we as Christians give to the LORD glory and praise?
 - Do you believe that God has called you to *Tell his glory among the nations; among all peoples, his wondrous deeds*? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
 - Is there more God may be calling you to do to tell others of God's great love for them?
3. In the second reading, St. Paul tells the Thessalonians that *We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers, unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father, knowing, brothers and sisters loved by God, how you were chosen. For our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction.*
 - St. Paul says he prays *unceasingly* for the Thessalonians. What do you think this means?
 - How often do you pray for your family and for others? Is there room for increasing these prayers?
 - Do your prayers include those in the Church who labor in faith, hope, and love for God's kingdom?
 - What steps can you take to increase your prayers for your pastor and others serving the Church?
 - What are some additional ways you can practically assist your pastor and parish?
4. In the Gospel reading, the Pharisees and Herodians tried to test and “entrap” Jesus by posing to him this question: *“Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?”* Jesus’ reaction is quite revealing: *“Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin that pays the census tax.” Then they handed him the Roman coin. He said to them, “Whose image is this and whose inscription?” They replied, “Caesar’s.” At that he said to them, “Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”*
 - Why do you think Jesus called the Pharisees and Herodians, *hypocrites*? What do you think he meant when he said, *repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God*? How do they apply to you?
 - In what ways have you tested God with words such as: “If you really cared for me then ...”; “If you will do this for me then...”? Why are these prayers, and others like it, more self-centered than God-centered?
 - What can you do to make your relationship with God more of faith and trust in him and his plan for your life, and less of trying to use God for your own purposes and satisfying your needs?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel reading and this response of Jesus to the question posed to him: *Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?* (Matthew 22:18). The meditation reminds us that “We are all susceptible to hypocrisy.” The meditation ends with these words: “It can be a painful process to search our consciences and discover ways in which our actions aren’t lining up with our beliefs. But the Lord understands our struggles and will forgive us and help us to change. Best of all, the more we are able to authentically live out our Christian beliefs, the more we can become living witnesses to Jesus—and the kingdom he has ushered in.”
 - Do you agree with these words of the meditation, “We are all susceptible to hypocrisy”? Why or why not?
 - What do the following words from the meditation mean to you, “Best of all, the more we are able to authentically live out our Christian beliefs, the more we can become living witnesses to Jesus”?
 - What are some new ways you can respond to these words?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to use your actions to reflect what you believe and to make a difference in the world. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

“Jesus, help me to act on what I say I believe.”

[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.]