

Sunday, September 6, 2020

23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-9
2nd Reading: Romans 13:8-10

Responsorial: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9
Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

Answering God's Call to Be Watchmen for Our Families

You . . . I have appointed watchman. (Ezekiel 33:7)

Just as God appointed Ezekiel as a watchman for “the house of Israel,” so has he appointed parents to watch over their own “house,” their family (Ezekiel 33:7). Like a prophet, their role is to hear from God, to encourage their children, to warn them about sin, and to help them live in a way that pleases the Lord. This call isn't limited to parents either. God wants all of us to be looking out for each other.

Being a watchman can feel overwhelming. The very word *watch* means “to guard and protect.” In the case of parents especially, God has entrusted them with their children's physical welfare and their eternal welfare. How can anyone ever live up to such expectations?

Through intercession. Parents know they cannot control every aspect of their children's lives. There are limits to their influence, especially as their children mature and strike out on their own. But there is no limit to the power of prayer!

Interceding for your family is not a waste of time. You may have a very long list if you include your brothers and sisters and your grandchildren. Still, make it a point to pray for each of them by name, and be specific about the intention you are praying for. Then offer a prayer for everyone: “Lord, protect and guide my family. Bless them and protect them from evil. Fill them with your peace and your love.”

How powerful are the prayers of a watchman? Just ask Jesus. On the night before he died, he prayed for the strength to endure the cross. He prayed for the protection of his apostles. He prayed for all of us (John 17:1-26). Two thousand years later, his prayers are still being answered.

So imitate Jesus, the great Watchman of his Church. Commit your family to the care of your heavenly Father. God will never let you down.

“Lord, help me to watch over my family. I trust in your protection.”

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. In the first reading, we hear these words from the Lord to Ezekiel: *You, son of man, I have appointed watchman for the house of Israel; when you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me. If I tell the wicked, 'O wicked one, you shall surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way, the wicked shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death. But if you warn the wicked, trying to turn him from his way, and he refuses to turn from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but you shall save yourself.*
 - God appointed Ezekiel to be a “watchman” for his people, and to warn them of their wickedness. God also held him responsible for their death if he did not speak up. Why do you think God did this?
 - When it comes to us as Christians, what do you think the Lord means that we should *speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way* or we should *warn the wicked, trying to turn him from his way*?
 - How has the Lord called you to be a watchman to speak out against *the wicked*? Do you do this?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these uplifting words: *Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD; let us acclaim the rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to him. Come, let us bow down in worship For he is our God, and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.* It ends with these hard words: *Oh, that today you would hear his voice: “Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the desert, Where your fathers tempted me; they tested me though they had seen my works.*
 - What are the reasons for you to *sing joyfully to the LORD* and *come into his presence with thanksgiving*?
 - What do you think the Lord means when he says to the Israelites: *Harden not your hearts*?
 - How do these words apply to us as well?
 - What steps can you take to be more alert to the Lord’s words through Scripture, at Mass, and in prayer?
3. The letter to the Romans opens with these words of St. Paul: *Brothers and sisters: Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.* It closes with these words: *The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.*
 - What do you think St. Paul meant by his opening words? How would you describe the meaning of St. Paul’s use of the word *love*?
 - What do you think these words of St. Paul mean: *“love is the fulfillment of the law”*?
 - How can you better live out these words of the second reading in your own life?
4. The Gospel reading begins with these words of Jesus to his disciples: *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If that fails, try it again and take one or two others along with you. If that fails, tell the church, and if that fails, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.* The reading ends with these words: *I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*
 - In the beginning words of the Gospel reading, Jesus speaks of the importance of being accountable to one another for our actions, including to those in the church. Why do you think this is important?
 - In what ways can you take some small steps to increase this accountability in your own life?
 - What do you think Jesus meant by the ending words of the reading? Do you struggle to believe them? Why?
 - How can you apply them to your life in a deeper way, especially when it comes to praying with others? Do you believe they are still true even if your prayers don’t seem to be answered? Why?
5. The meditation begins with these challenging words: *“Just as God appointed Ezekiel as a watchman for “the house of Israel,” so has he appointed parents to watch over their own “house,” their family (Ezekiel 33:7). ... This call isn’t limited to parents, either. God wants all of us to be looking out for each other.”* It goes on to include these words: *“How can anyone ever live up to such expectations? Through intercession ...there is no limit to the power of prayer! Interceding for your family is not a waste of time.”*
 - In what ways has God called you to be a “watchman” in some way for your family – at all ages in their lives?
 - How important to you is “Interceding for your family”? Do you believe it can make a difference?
 - What additional steps can you take to increase your times of intercessory prayer for your family, including praying “for each of them by name”?
6. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to say yes to his call to be a “watchman” over your family and to trust in his protection. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Lord, help me to watch over my family. I trust in your protection.”

[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.]