

Meditations: Sunday of the Thirtieth Week of Ordinary Time (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirtieth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: serving God twice; witnessing to God's love; a heart without barriers.

10/29/2023

- Serving God twice
- Witnessing to God's love
- A heart without barriers

THE PHARISEES are particularly pleased. Jesus had silenced those who had become to some extent his rivals, the Sadducees. But now it's their turn to put the teacher from Nazareth to the test and catch him in some statement that would complicate his authority. One of the Pharisees, knowing the difficulty of distinguishing the main meaning of God's law from the hundreds of precepts, asks Jesus, *Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?* (Mt 22:36). Behind the apparently friendly tone lay the trap in which he wanted the Lord to fall.

Jesus begins his response conventionally. *You shall love the Lord your God*, he says (Mt 22:37). For a devout Jew, there was nothing new or strange in that statement. Immediately afterward, however, he naturally utters a more impactful

statement: *And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Mt 22:39). The emphasis in the sentence is on a simple statement that is nonetheless full of meaning: *A second is like it.*

At first, the Pharisee might have thought that the statement was somewhat exaggerated. How can loving God and loving others be equally important? However, there is a profound change of paradigm hidden in that truth: God became man, and with his incarnation, sacrifice on the Cross, and resurrection, He elevated us to the status of God's children. Therefore, if we truly want to love God, we will also have to make an effort to learn to love each of his children. "As long as there is a brother or sister to whom we close our hearts, we will still be far from being disciples as Jesus asks us."^[1] In contrast, we know that love for Christ and love for

others are so interconnected that “in any act of fraternity, the head and the heart often cannot distinguish whether it is a matter of service to God or service to our brothers and sisters, because, in the second case, what we are doing is serving God twice over.”^[2] —

WHEN WE strive to live as Christ's disciples, the relationship between our love for God and our love for others naturally manifests itself in our behavior. This is what St. Paul emphasizes in today's second reading at Mass: *You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake* (1 Thess 1:5). The desire to set a good example should never be an attempt to set ourselves apart from others, perhaps seeking admiration or approval. On the contrary, living charity, taking an active interest in

everyone around us, is the most authentic testimony. This way, our behavior will manifest God's love for each person. "Fraternity well lived is a very direct apostolate," the Prelate of Opus Dei writes. "Many people will see our affection for one another and will be able to exclaim, as they did of the first Christians, 'see how they love one another.' They will be attracted by that Christian love."^[3] —

When St. Josemaria explained what it means to be a Christian witness, he wrote, "When I speak to you of good example, I mean to tell you, too, that you have to understand and excuse, that you have to fill the world with peace and love."^[4] — It would be illogical for others to speak well of us but treat us with distance, as if we were cold, unapproachable models. God's closeness is revealed through our love, so our primary testimony must consist of sharing his peace and love with the world.

The founder of Opus Dei asked, “And how will we show [Jesus] to souls? By our example. Through our voluntary service of Jesus Christ, we should be witnesses to him in all our activities, for he is the Lord of our entire lives, the only and ultimate reason for our existence. Then, once we have given this witness of service, we will be able to give instruction by our word.”^[5]

THE FIRST reading of today’s Mass, taken from the book of Exodus, shows that loving others can be demanding. The sacred author details a list of particularly vulnerable people in society who may suffer from unfair treatment or lead a more complicated life: *You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not*

mistreat any widow or fatherless child (Ex 22:20-21). God invites us to think about the people in need around us at all times, not only those with whom we may feel more affinity. Naturally, this does not mean neglecting relationships with the people we connect with more easily; on the contrary, the affection we have for them should inspire us to reach out to everyone around us so that there are no distinctions in our hearts. This is how Jesus lived: everyone who came to Him could feel specially loved in a unique way, even though the Lord was only with them for a short time.

This love for our neighbor “consists in closeness, listening, sharing, caring for others. And so often we neglect to listen to others because it is boring or because it takes up our time, or we neglect to accompany them, to support them in their suffering, in their trials...”^[6] — When it

is particularly difficult for us to love a specific person, perhaps because we do not feel a natural affinity toward them, we can seek refuge in God and say with the psalmist: *I love you, O Lord, my strength* (Ps 18:2). Christ's assurance offers us unconditional love, which enables us to reach out to others, giving them that same love without barriers. As the Prelate of Opus Dei reminds us, "Our love for God – supernatural charity – is a response to that divine love for each and every one of us, which our Lord himself sets before us as the model and goal of our love for others."^[7] We can ask the Virgin Mary for the grace to discover that we were created to love, as we have freely received God's infinite love.

^[1] Pope Francis, Angelus, 25-X-2020.

[2] St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, May 1935-September 1950, no. 75.

[3] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral letter, 16-II-2023, no. 16.

[4] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 560.

[5] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 182.

[6] Pope Francis, Angelus, 25-X-2020.

[7] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 16-II-2023, no. 1.

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