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Meditations: Sunday of the Thirty-First Week of Ordinary Time (Year B)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-first week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: God invites man to participate in his love; our response to all this greatness is free; loving God and loving others go hand in hand.

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- God invites man to participate in his love
 - Our response to all this greatness is free
 - Loving God and loving others go hand in hand
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WHAT IS the first of all the commandments? (Mk 12:28). This question is the beginning of a candid conversation between Jesus and a scribe. The first is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength' (Mk 12:29-30). Although this response might not be surprising to someone familiar with Jewish

tradition, if we reflect on it, Christ's words reveal something astonishing: God, the Creator of heaven and earth, all-powerful and eternal, asks man to love Him. He, who has everything, who has made everything, and can do everything, presents Himself as needing us. He invites us, his creatures formed from dust (cf. *Gn* 2:7), to participate in his love and happiness.

The wise Israelite is amazed by what he hears. His well-intentioned heart is filled with light, and he understands that the One speaking to him has answers and a way of speaking that inspire trust. He cannot contain his enthusiastic response: *Well said, Teacher!* (*Mk* 12:32). It was not common for a scribe to openly acknowledge that Jesus was right, and to do so with such simplicity. Most of his peers had reacted quite differently, and perhaps this is why Saint Mark tells

us that *no one dared to ask Him any more questions (Mk 12:34)*. We, on the other hand, want to bombard Jesus with the questions that swirl within us. We want to ask Him to explain the same things over and over again, because concepts never sound the same when He expresses them, and his words never return without bearing fruit (cf. *Is 55:11*).

The devil fights persistently against the trusting relationship that God wants to establish with mankind. He tries to convince us, just as he did with our first parents, that God has hidden motives: *You will not die*, he told them, deceitfully, *for God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Gn 3:4-5)*. "Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something

away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? [...] Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life."^[1]

WE CAN use Saint Josemaría's words, from a meditation preached in 1975, to ask God to open our minds to comprehend the gift of his first commandment: "When I see that I understand so little of your greatness, your goodness, your wisdom, your power, your beauty... When I see that I understand so little, I am not saddened: I rejoice that You are so great that You cannot fit into

my poor heart, into my feeble mind.
My God! [...] All this greatness, all
this power, all this beauty... is mine!
And I... am yours!"^[2]

Even more amazing than God's desire to establish a trusting, loving relationship with humanity is the complete freedom He gives us to respond to his invitation. He never coerces, pressures, or manipulates. We quickly realize that we are free: it is within our power to accept all the good God offers, but we can also pretend not to hear his voice. When someone desires to be loved but does not force others to give that love, they are especially receptive to any sign of affection. They receive everything as a gift, and even the smallest gesture fills their heart with joy. In a certain sense, this is how God is with us; not because He doesn't deserve our love, but because we will never be able to fully satisfy Him. The distance between us is

infinite, but God has gladly crossed it in his Son, Jesus Christ. He assures us that his yoke is easy and his burden light (cf. *Mt* 11:30).

THE SECOND is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these (*Mk* 12:31). Jesus was asked about the most important commandment, and He named two commandments. He almost seems to place them on the same level, like two sides of the same coin. "Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me."^[3] —

Serving others and trying to imitate God's way of loving helps us

understand Him and his love for us. We cannot separate giving love from receiving it, either with God or with others. If we try to separate giving from receiving too much, we risk reducing love to abstract theory, diminishing our relationships. God's love for us becomes concrete in our brother and sisters' needs, in our willingness to be close to them, to help and accompany them. "Every person is worthy of our giving. Not for their physical appearance, their abilities, their language, their way of thinking, or for any satisfaction that we might receive, but rather because they are God's handiwork, his creation. God created that person in his image, and he or she reflects something of God's glory. Every human being is the object of God's infinite tenderness, and he himself is present in their lives. Jesus offered his precious blood on the cross for that person."^[4] —

Our Mother stands at the foot of the Cross, where we all won the possibility of a relationship with God. She exemplifies both commandments: she loved God because she loved others, and she loved others because she loved God. We can ask Mary to take us by the hand and lead us into this torrent of love.

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[1] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 24-IV-2005.

[2] Saint Josemaría, Meditation, 19-III-1975.

[3] Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 18.

[4] Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 274.

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