

Meditations: Thursday of the Seventeenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the seventeenth week of Ordinary Time.

- The Church, a trawling net
- A holiness that reflects Christ's face
- The doors are wide open

SOME OF THE APOSTLES were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Living with them, Jesus became familiar with the tasks of their trade; and his trips to other coastal towns may have brought him into contact with other fishermen. In any case, many of those who came to listen to his preaching lived in the villages around the lake. Therefore it isn't surprising that the Master illustrates his teachings with examples of boats, nets and fish: "The kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind; when it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into vessels but threw away the bad" (Mt 13:47-48).

Jesus compares his Kingdom to a net that catches fish of all kinds. The apostles knew from experience that the lake contained many species of fish, and not all of them were of the same quality. When they cast the net

and drew it in, they didn't stop to worry about what they were catching: they would do that later, on the shore, when the time came for sorting. Drawing the net onto the sand, they would begin to sort the fish: the good ones would be collected in baskets, and the bad ones thrown out.

The net is, in a certain sense, an image of the Church. In the Church too, all kinds of fish coexist, and this will be the case until the end of time. We ourselves, by striving to grow in humility, endeavor not to be the part that is thrown away. The Church is "a holy people, made up of creatures with infirmities. This apparent contradiction marks an aspect of the mystery of the Church," Saint Josemaría said. "The Church, which is divine, is also human, for it is made up of men, and men have their defects: we men are all dust and ashes."^[1] At the same time, we know

that these weaknesses are not the definitive picture of the people of God. Through his grace, we can always perceive signs of holiness in the people around us and on whom we rely; they show us “the most beautiful face of the Church.”^[2]

THE CHURCH is holy because her founder, Christ, is holy. “Christ, delivering Himself up for her that He might sanctify her, united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God’s glory.”^[3] We, her children, love her because Jesus is in her and in her we find the means of sanctification: the Church’s doctrine and sacraments.

We Christians are called to strive to attain this holiness. But it is not a question of leading a perfect life,

without defects; in fact, the Church is holy even if there are people with weaknesses in her midst. And hence what is decisive for holiness is not so much the absence of mistakes – an impossible goal – but the ardent desire to remain in union with Christ, so that it is He who takes the reins of our life in the same way that he guides the Church.

“The measure of holiness stems from the stature that Christ achieves in us, in as much as with the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole life on his.”^[4] Each saint reflects the face of Jesus. Thus holiness is, above all, “experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord’s death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him. But it can also entail reproducing in our own lives various aspects of Jesus’ earthly life.”^[5] Contemplating Christ’s

mysteries will help us to embody them in our daily lives, in accord with our own temperament and way of being, which we strive to purify. By frequently reading the Gospels we can fill our heart with Christ's way of being, so that his image is forged in us and reflected in the world.

IN THE CHURCH the beauty of holiness coexists with the ugliness of sin; the greatness of generous hearts with the meanness of others; the fortitude that can be heroic with the weakness that can end in betrayal. Therefore our Mother the Church is holy and, at the same time, in her faithful, always in need of purification and conversion. In any case, besides humbly striving for holiness ourselves, "when the Lord permits human weakness to appear, our reaction ought to be the same as

if we were to see our mother ill or treated with disdain: to love her all the more, to bestow on her a greater manifestation of affection, both external and internal. If we love the Church, there will never arise in us a morbid interest in airing, as the faults of the Mother, the weaknesses of some of her children.”^[6] —

Christ often said that He had not come to heal the healthy, but those who were sick. With his words and actions, He showed that He was more interested in sinners than in those who believed themselves righteous. In his daily life the Master did not hesitate to draw close to those who, outwardly, might seem to be far from God. He addressed his words to them, inviting them to live with Him and follow Him.

The family that Jesus formed with his followers was not a community of perfect men and women, closed in on

itself. The Church too is called to be a house with open doors so that all who wish may enter, without any distinctions, because God's mercy desires that "all men be saved" (1 Tim 2:4). The doors of our own heart should always be open so that anyone may quench their thirst for God. We can ask Mary, Mother of the Church, to help us reflect in our lives the face of the holy people of God.

^[1] St. Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, no. 6.

^[2] Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 9.

^[3] *Lumen Gentium*, no. 39.

^[4] Benedict XVI, Audience, 13 April 2011.

^[5] Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 20.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, no. 7

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