

Meditations: Wednesday of the Thirty-Fourth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-fourth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: the testimony of martyrdom; martyrs in ordinary life; the fruitfulness of an apostolic life in the world.

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 - Martyrs in ordinary life
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JESUS HAD already answered many of his listeners' questions when, near the end of the conversation, one of them began to praise the beauty of the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus took advantage of the comment, surprisingly, to speak about its future destruction and, even more mysteriously, about the end of time. Christ's eschatological discourse – or, in other words, his remarks about the end of the world – struck all the evangelists, and we find it in all three synoptic Gospels. The Church's liturgy invites us to reflect on it over the last few days of Ordinary Time.

We won't know when the end will come; God has not revealed it. But today's Gospel impels us to “bear witness” at all times and in all circumstances, fostering an attitude of constant expectation. Martyrdom is the greatest testimony of faith in Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Greek root of the word “martyr” means

“witness.” Jesus is well aware that, from the early days of Christianity to the present, some of our brothers and sisters will suffer persecution: *They will seize you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness (Lk 21:12-13).*

“The martyrs sustain the Church; they sustained it in history and they sustain it today [...]. Many Christians in the world today are blessed because they are persecuted, insulted, or imprisoned. Many are in jail just for carrying a cross or confessing Jesus Christ. That is the glory of the Church, our support, and also our humiliation [...]. In the early centuries of the Church, an ancient writer said that ‘the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians.’ With their martyrdom, with their

testimony, with their suffering, even to the point of giving their lives, they ‘sow’ Christians for the future.”^[1] —

“THIS WORLD in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. It is beauty, like truth, which brings joy to the heart of man and is that precious fruit which resists the wear and tear of time, which unites generations.”^[2] — The radiance of humble and joyful Christian lives gives our world hope. All the actions we carry out and all the efforts we make in union with God are opportunities to bear witness; in our ordinary lives we can accompany all Christians, especially those who suffer difficulties and need our help.

Saint Josemaría reminded us that “Lay people have their own way of contributing to the holiness and

apostolate of the Church. They do so by their free and responsible action within the temporal sphere, to which they bring the leaven of Christianity. Giving Christian witness in their everyday lives, spreading the word which enlightens in the name of God, acting responsibly in the service of others and thus contributing to the solution of common problems: these are some ways in which ordinary Christians fulfil their divine mission.”^[3]

God calls each of us to live our faith consistently, whatever our circumstances: at work, at home, with friends... The martyrdom He calls us to is probably that of constancy, of ordinary little things done with love, striving to make others happy. “You want to be a martyr. I will place a martyrdom within your reach: to be an apostle and not to call yourself an apostle, to be a missionary — with a mission —

and not to call yourself a missionary, to be a man of God and to seem a man of the world: to pass unnoticed!”^[4] —

WHAT SURPRISES will the end of our life bring, when we discover the immense good we have done over the years God gave us on earth? We will be amazed by the fruits of our Christian witness, though we often believe that they have gone unnoticed or – mistakenly – that they were unproductive. In the end, we will realize that our apostolate was much more effective than we thought.

In one of his letters, St. Peter assured the early Christians: *Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake,*

you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy (1 Pt 3:13-15). The loyalty that God expects involves, on the one hand, the conviction that we are always protected by Him, and on the other hand, the desire to persevere in our humble and hidden witness.

It is not worth dwelling on the obstacles along the way.

“Discouragement is the enemy of your perseverance,” St. Josemaría wrote. “If you don't fight against discouragement you will become pessimistic first, and lukewarm afterwards. Be an optimist.”^[5] We do not know when the end will come, but we can always be joyful during our time on earth, because we know that God is the Lord of history. We want the world to come closer and closer to Him, hoping that, at the end of time, we will meet our Mother Mary, who has been waiting for us.

[1] Pope Francis, Homily, 30-I-2017.

[2] St. Paul VI, *Message to Artists*, 8-XII-1965.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 59.

[4] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 848.

[5] *Ibid*, no. 988.

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