

Meditations: Wednesday of the Twenty-First Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 21st week of Ordinary Time.

- Jesus praises simplicity
- Christian consistency
- Reflecting God's love

JESUS must have had a very peaceful temperament, since children

approached him so naturally. He never tired of preaching that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who seek peace. Therefore the harshness with which He sometimes speaks can surprise us and cause a certain perplexity. Not only because of the content of what He says, but also because of the tone of his warnings against religious leaders who, carried away by vanity, set themselves up as examples of virtues that, in reality, they don't live in their hearts. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within you are full of dead men's bones and uncleanness" (*Mt 23:27*).

In meditating on the Gospels, we quickly become aware of Jesus' great patience with the most diverse people. He lovingly cares for the sick. He is eager to embrace sinners with his mercy. And both the poor and the

rich find in the Teacher of Nazareth a tender and attentive heart. Only hypocrisy, that is, the desire to appear what one is not or the excessive concern for what others will say, seems to clash with his simple and humble heart. In fact, one of the few praises that we hear from Jesus is directed to Nathanael, in their first meeting. Even though the future apostle had just referred to Him with skepticism and criticized his place of origin (“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”), Jesus praises his sincerity before the other apostles: “Behold, a true Israelite, in whom there is no guile” (*Jn* 1:46-47).

These were some of the first words our Lord spoke to his new followers, perhaps to help them understand that it is not human weaknesses or limitations that can distance us from God, but rather refusing to acknowledge them or letting duplicity enter into our actions.

Therefore, as Saint Josemaría taught, Christians are called to bear witness to simplicity in their life: “Through your behavior as a Christian citizen, show people the difference between living sadly and living joyfully; between being timid and being daring; between acting cautiously, with duplicity – hypocritically! – and acting with simplicity and integrity. In a word, between being worldly and being children of God.”^[1] —

WHAT is the central motive that leads me to act? This is a question that enables us to give unity to our life. Everything we do in our daily life – our actions, words, omissions – points to an identity that we are trying to strengthen. In the examination of conscience we try to check to what extent all our external actions are guided by the ultimate

intention of loving God and others ever more truly. Because it can happen that a gap is generated between what we appear to be on the outside and what we have in our hearts: “On the outside you appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (*Mt 23:28*).

“Our Christian vocation, the unity of life built on the presence of God our Father, can and ought to be a daily reality.”^[2] To prevent hypocrisy from creeping into our soul, we should try to make all our decisions in God’s presence. When we sense that a loving Father is watching over us, that Jesus, our best Friend, is accompanying us, and that the Holy Spirit dwells in our heart, then our outward appearance is naturally an expression of the love we carry within. Unity of life gives rise to a consistency that cannot be improvised; for it stems from the

deep convictions in our heart that we don't want to betray.

The authority that every Christian bears “doesn't consist in giving orders and making oneself heard, but rather in being consistent, in being a witness, and therefore in accompanying others on the path of our Lord.”^[3] Without consistency, there can be no true apostolate, because everything we seek to pass on to others would be born from a heart cold and lacking in love. So we can ask ourselves in this time of prayer whether love for God and the desire to give Him glory is the main driving force that inspires all our thoughts and affections.

LOVE for Christ is what gives true harmony to our thoughts, feelings and actions. If our Lord is at the

center of our lives, it will be easier to be consistent in our interactions with others. Naturally, a certain adaptation of our behavior is necessary depending on the people we are with. Spending a day off with one's family is not the same as a work meeting that is decisive for guiding a project; we naturally trust friends more than we do strangers. But this natural adaptation to the environment around us shouldn't lead us to lose our own identity or to hide what gives meaning to our whole life: love for Jesus.

The desire to always be the same person will lead us to cultivate a human virtue that was very dear to St. Josemaría: naturalness. As he once said: "When we work wholly and exclusively for the glory of God, we do everything with naturalness, like someone who is in a hurry and will not be delayed by 'making a great show of things.'" Thus we never

cease accompanying our Lord, which is something unique and incomparable.”^[4] We don't seek to do good so that others will praise us or form a good opinion of us. On the contrary, our only concern is that all our deeds reflect God's glory and lead many people to come to know Him, while we ourselves go almost unnoticed. This is the Master's demanding advice: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (*Mt* 5:16).

In order for our naturalness and consistency to be authentic, we shouldn't be afraid to admit our mistakes and weaknesses. Otherwise, we could fall into the temptation of the Pharisees and scribes who refused to acknowledge their own limitations: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn

the monuments of the righteous, saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets’” (*Mt 23:29-30*). The desire to appear sure of themselves before others led them to defend a false conception of themselves and to hide their limitations. We know, however, that even through our weaknesses we can reflect Christ’s glory, because he is our Savior. Thus we will be like our Mother, who declared without shame, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord” (*Lk 1:38*), knowing that in this truth, perhaps rather unattractive in the world’s eyes, lay all her wealth.

[1] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 306.

[2] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 11.

[3] Francis, Homily, 14 January 2020.

[4] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 555.

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