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Meditations: Thursday of the Fifth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during the 5th Week in Ordinary Time. The topics are: Jesus does not shrink from caring for souls; recognizing our need for God; the power of a mother's faith.

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- Jesus does not shrink from caring for souls

- Recognizing our need for God
 - The power of a mother's faith
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THROUGHOUT JESUS' public life, a recurring pattern emerged: the Lord would try to draw apart to breathe, pray, reflect, and spend time with his apostles, and the crowds would make it impossible for Him to be alone. At other times, He tried to go unnoticed, but that desire was not fulfilled: *And He entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet He could not be hidden (Mk 7:24)*. It is moving to see the human need to withdraw in solitude in our Lord. It is even more moving to see how He holds nothing back when souls need Him.

One of Jesus' most well-known miracles, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, is preceded by such a scene. Jesus invites the twelve

to go to a desolate place (Mk 6:32), but the people recognize them and rush to the location ahead of them. When Jesus and his disciples arrive, they see a large crowd. Jesus, who seemed to have planned a quiet day, instead devotes the entire day to these people, to the point where his apostles suggest sending the crowd away because it has grown so late.

These are wonderful examples for those who want to sanctify ordinary life. St. Josemaría reminds us that “Christ is interested precisely in those who do not have the time,”^[1] people who live busy lives, working intensely. That is what Jesus’ life was like, which is why Christians are called to realize that “brief indeed is our time for loving.”^[2] Jesus did not have “office hours” because Redemption was not a mere task for Him to fulfill. We are called to approach our life as Christians with the same attitude.

WHEN WORD of Jesus' arrival spread, people began to gather around the house He was staying in. But for one woman in particular, Jesus' presence meant something different, something decisive: it gave her an opportunity to ask for her daughter's healing. The girl was possessed by an unclean spirit. The mother went straight to Jesus and humbly prostrated herself at his feet to ask for the miracle. St. Josemaría writes: "When you consider how many people do not take advantage of a wonderful opportunity, but allow Jesus to pass by, think: where does this clear calling which was so providential, and showed me my way, come from?"^[3] Many figures in the Gospel failed to recognize the magnitude of what they saw, but we also have examples like that of this woman, Jairus, or the friends of the paralyzed man.

The passages in the Gospel that describe such requests to Christ have a common factor: recognizing personal need. The woman who asked for her daughter's healing understood that Christ was the only way for her to move forward, her only chance to change her daughter's fate. *You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked* (Rev 3:17), the Book of Revelation strikingly reminds us.

This woman's confident attitude and her awareness that she needs Jesus paint a picture of authentic faith. “Awareness of being little, awareness of being in need of salvation is indispensable in welcoming the Lord. It is the first step in opening ourselves up to him. Often, however, we forget about this. In prosperity, in well-being, we have the illusion of being self-sufficient, that we suffice

to ourselves, that we do not need God. [...] If we think about it, we grow, not so much on the basis of our successes and the things we have, but above all in difficult and fragile moments. There, in our need, we mature [...]. This would be a beautiful prayer: ‘Lord, look at my frailties...’ and list them before him. This is a good attitude before God. Indeed, it is precisely in our frailty that we discover how much God takes care of us.”^[4]

THE DIALOGUE between Jesus and the woman who approached Him is a model of persevering faith. She was a Syrophenician by origin, which means she did not belong to the chosen people. When the Lord heard her request, He replied with words that might sound harsh to us: *Let the children be fed first, for it is not right*

to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs (Mk 7:27). Jesus indicated that his priority at that moment was to recover the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But this was not the first time that Jesus seemed to place obstacles in the way of requests, as seen in the wedding at Cana, when He told his mother that His hour had not yet come (cf. *Jn 2:4*).

Nevertheless, just as in that wedding, Jesus allowed Himself to be won over once again by the heart of a mother who expressed her love with thoughtful insistence: *Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs (Mk 7:28).* In response, Jesus immediately said: *For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter (Mk 7:29).* Once again, the Gospel narrative presents faith as the key that opens the doors of our hearts to God so that He can work.

This woman's great faith is a reflection of Mary's faith. "We can ask ourselves a question: do we allow ourselves to be illumined by the faith of Mary, who is our Mother? Or do we think of her as distant, as someone too different from us? In moments of difficulty, of trial, of darkness, do we look to her as a model of trust in God who always and only desires our good?"^[5] —

^[1] — St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 199.

^[2] — St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 39.

^[3] — St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 200.

^[4] — Pope Francis, Angelus, 3-X-2021.

^[5] — Pope Francis, Audience, 23-X-2013.

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