

Meditations: Friday of the Sixth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 6th week of Ordinary Time.

- Jesus brings light amid suffering
- God takes the risk of our freedom
- Uniting our lives to the cross of Christ

AFTER Peter's confession of faith, and after predicting his own passion

and death, Jesus wants to shed light on the meaning of suffering in our lives. The Son of God has not yet faced the Cross, but He can already point to it. He gathers his disciples around Him, while many other people crowd around to listen. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (*Mk 8:34-35*).

No Christian is exempt from the path of the cross. In reality, no one on earth can avoid hardship and suffering; we all experience firsthand, in our own lives, the presence of evil as well as our fragility and weakness, as a consequence of sin. But we know that, in the beginning, things were not that way. And it is this harmony that Christ, in some way, has sought to restore, but always respecting our

freedom to open our souls to Him or not.

“The Cross of Jesus is the word with which God has responded to evil in the world. Sometimes it can seem to us that God does not respond to evil and remains silent. In reality, God has spoken and responded; and his response is the Cross of Christ. His word is love, mercy, forgiveness. And it is also Judgment. God judges us by loving us: if I receive his love, I am saved; if I reject it, I condemn myself. He does not condemn me, but I condemn myself. God does not condemn, but loves and saves. The word of the Cross is the response of Christians to the evil that continues to act in us and around us. Christians must respond to evil with good, taking up the Cross upon themselves, like Jesus.”^[1]

WHEN Saint Josemaría contemplates the First Station of the Cross where Jesus is condemned to death, he considers our capacity to accept or reject God's plans, our possibility to respond in very different ways to God's love for us: "Far off now are the days when the words of the Man-God brought light and hope to men's hearts, those long processions of sick people whom he healed, the triumphant acclaim of Jerusalem when the Lord arrived, riding on a gentle donkey. If only men had wanted to respond differently to God's love!"^[2]

"It is a mystery of divine Wisdom that, in creating man in his own image and likeness (cf. *Gen 1:26*), he chose to take the sublime risk of human freedom."^[3] "That risk, from the very beginning of history, has indeed led to the rejection of God's love." But even so, freedom "remains an essential good for every human

person, which must be protected. God is the first to respect and love it.”^[4]

Considering the course of human history, it might seem surprising that, from the very beginning, mankind freely chose a path far removed from trust in God’s love. We might even think at times that it would be better not to have “so much freedom,” seeing how often we harm ourselves. Indeed, when we see someone about to take the wrong path in life, we often want to steer them in another direction. It is good to consider again why He has made us so free. The magnitude of the risk He takes reveals, in turn, the magnitude of the gift He bestows. For only from the response of our freedom can true love arise that leads us to happiness.

“WE KNOW THAT, in fact, nothing is lacking from the immeasurable effectiveness of Christ’s sacrifice. But in his Providence (which exceeds our understanding), God himself wants us to take part in applying this effectiveness. This is possible because he has made us sharers in Jesus’ filiation to the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit: ‘And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him’ (*Rom 8:17*).”^[5]

From Christ’s open side on the cross spring the sacraments of the Church: there lies the greatest treasure of grace. We can unite ourselves personally to the cross of Jesus by offering everything we do in union with Christ’s sacrifice, making our whole life a Mass. Moreover, “whenever we show kindness to the suffering, the persecuted and

defenseless, and share in their sufferings, we help to carry that same Cross of Jesus. In this way we obtain salvation, and help contribute to the salvation of the world.”^[6]

All the saints have tried in their own lives to stay close to the Cross. “Love the Cross,” St. Josemaría said. “When you really love it, your Cross will be... a Cross without a Cross. And surely you, like Him, will find Mary on the way.”^[7]

^[1] Francis, Homily, 30 March 2013.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, First Station.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *Letters* 37, no. 3.

^[4] Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 9 January 2018.

^[5] Fernando Ocáriz, Message, 20 September 2021.

[6] Benedict XVI, *Via Crucis*,
Meditation, Fifth Station, 2005.

[7] Saint Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*,
Fourth Sorrowful Mystery.

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