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Meditations: Friday of the Twentieth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can guide our prayer during the 20th week of Ordinary Time.

- Loving what is most sacred in us
 - Rejoicing and suffering with the Church
 - An unconditional love
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THE LEADERS of the people of Israel often asked Jesus questions to test his fidelity and integrity. On one occasion, after He had answered a complicated question about the resurrection, the Pharisees asked Him an open and direct question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” And Christ didn’t hesitate to answer: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets” (*Mt 22:36-40*).

Jesus’ answer would have evoked in his listeners those well-known verses from Deuteronomy: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall

be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (*Deut* 6:5-7). But our Lord adds a second commandment: we need to love others as we love ourselves. This is not a completely new requirement, since the Book of Leviticus exhorts: “You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (*Lev* 19:18). Perhaps the striking thing about this exhortation is the measure of love required: we are to love others as we love ourselves

Loving others as we love ourselves is an invitation to love in others what is most sacred and intimate in ourselves, what gives us our deepest value: the fact that first and foremost

it is God who loves us. That is what St. John, like the other apostles sensed: “If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another . . . If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us” (*1 Jn* 4:11-12). We share with others what makes us proudest of ourselves: the reality that we are God’s beloved sons and daughters. This is the reason and measure of love for our brothers and sisters.

THROUGHOUT the centuries, the people of Israel have pondered who their neighbor was that they should love. This question was still being debated in Jesus’ time. St. Luke tells us that one of Christ’s listeners asked who this neighbor was, and our Lord replied with the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37). For the baptized, we find our neighbor very

close to us in all the children of the Church. Since we are called to love in others what we love most deeply in ourselves, how much more should we love those who share our faith! The mysterious vision in the book of Ezekiel is an image of the Church.

“Imagine an entire valley full of bones. God asks him, then, to invoke the Spirit upon them. At that point, the bones move, they begin to come together, to join themselves. First nerves and then flesh grew on them and in this way they form a complete body, full of life (cf. *Ezek 37:1-14*).

See, this is the Church! She is a masterpiece, the masterpiece of the Spirit who infuses in each one of us the new life of the Risen One and places us side by side, each at the service and support of the other, thus making of all of us one single body, built up in communion and love.”^[1] —

It is only natural that we view the concerns of the Church, both her joys

and her sufferings, as our own. We would like to be able to rise above any small differences and misunderstandings. This involves not merely the ups and downs of a great human organization filled with good concerns and intentions, but the very destiny of Christ's Mystical Body. "I would like – help me with your prayer – all of us within Holy Church to feel that we are members of the same body, as the Apostle asks of us. I would like us to be vividly and profoundly aware, without any lack of interest, of the joys, the troubles, the progress of our Mother who is one, holy, catholic, apostolic, Roman. I would like us to live in unison with one another and all of us with Christ."^[2] —

And because we love everyone, we want many men and women to draw near to the Church, so that they may let themselves be helped by God and come to the source of life that gives

true happiness: “I ask our Lord each day to expand my heart, that he may continue to supernaturalize the love he has put in my soul for all mankind, without distinction of race, nationality, cultural condition or wealth. I sincerely esteem all men and women, Catholics or not, those who do believe in something and those who do not. I feel sorry for these unbelievers. But Christ founded only one Church: he has only one Spouse.”^[3] —

“THEY WANDERED in desert wastes,” the psalmist exclaims, “finding no way to a city to dwell in; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress” (*Ps* 107:4-7).

Perhaps each of us may go through similar circumstances when it seems,

with greater or less intensity, that we are perishing, that our soul is afflicted with hunger and thirst, and our life seems in danger of being forgotten. And we join the psalmist in crying out to the Lord that we too never want to lose sight of his love for us. Because although God's love for us is perfect, our perception of that love is sometimes imperfect and limited.

“The first step that God takes towards us is that of a love that anticipates and is unconditional. God is the first to love. God does not love because there is something in us that engenders love. God loves us because he himself *is love*, and, by its very nature, love tends to spread and give itself. God does not even condition his benevolence on our conversion. If anything, this is a consequence of God's love.”^[4] — We need to keep fresh in our memory God's interventions in our own life and in each of our

days. One of the Collects in a Mass of Thanksgiving reads: “O God, Father of all gifts, from whom everything that we are and have comes: teach us to recognize the gifts of your immense goodness and to love you with a sincere heart and with all our strength.”^[5] Giving thanks enables us to discover that, even in the midst of hunger and thirst in the desert, God continues to watch over us. Fostering our gratitude helps us to recover our hope when we sense it is running out. We can ask our Lady to help us to welcome the unconditional love of her Son, who continually sustains and watches over us on our earthly journey

^[1] Francis, Audience, 22 October 2014.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 630.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *Loyalty to the Church*, no. 4, in *Loving the Church*.

[4] Francis, Audience, 14 June 2017.

[5] Roman Missal, Mass of
Thanksgiving, Collect prayer.

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