

Meditations: Monday of the Thirtieth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirtieth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: Christ takes our sorrow upon Himself; a woman loosed from her bonds; God loves our freedom.

- Christ takes our sorrow upon Himself
- A woman loosed from her bonds
- God loves our freedom

JUST AS on any other Saturday, the woman headed toward the synagogue. For eighteen years, she had been suffering from an illness caused by a spirit, and she was *bent over and could not fully straighten herself* (Lk 13:11). On that day, Jesus also went to the synagogue to preach the kingdom of God and invite people to conversion. While He was teaching, Christ noticed the woman, called her, and said, '*Woman, you are freed from your infirmity.*' And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God (Lk 13:12-13).

It was a completely unexpected miracle. This woman had not asked for anything. Maybe she suspected that Jesus would come to her town, and that was why she did everything she could to place herself where the Master could see her in the

synagogue. Unlike other figures in the Gospel who Jesus healed, however, she did not utter a word or cry out. Nevertheless, the Lord not only noticed her presence but He read in her heart her immense desire for freedom. With His word alone, He dispelled the illness: *You are freed.*

Jesus teaches us that mercy is God's response to the world's pain. Suffering touches his heart. Any of our problems, even the smallest, grieve Him. He is not an insensitive God. In fact, Christ “experienced affliction and humiliation in this world. He took on human suffering, assumed it in his flesh, and experienced it to the fullest. He knew all kinds of affliction, both moral and physical: He experienced hunger and fatigue, the bitterness of misunderstanding, betrayal and abandonment, scourging and crucifixion.”^[1] The story of this

woman occurs today too: any person who suffers can experience the consolation of Christ's presence, who looks at us with the desire to bear our pain on His shoulders.

THE WOMAN'S illness prevented her from enjoying many good things in life. It was very difficult for her to look up to the sky; her eyes remained fixed on the ground she walked on, though not by any choice or fault of her own. By freeing her from her affliction, Christ allows her to see what was previously denied to her. Feeling free and full of joy, *she praised God* (Luke 13:13), and *all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him* (Luke 13:17).

The evangelist's account reveals that the illness had a spiritual origin, in a

sense. When the synagogue leader is indignant because all of this takes place on the Sabbath, Jesus responds, *Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?* (Lk 13:16).

The Fathers of the Church see in this bent-over woman, unable to straighten up, a figure of those souls so weakened by earthly desires that they can no longer concern themselves with divine realities.

“The sinner, preoccupied with earthly things and not seeking heavenly ones, is incapable of looking upward. He follows desires that lead him downward, and so his soul, losing its rectitude, bends, and he sees nothing more than what he constantly thinks about.”^[2] —

Sometimes, we may feel bound by our faults. In those moments, God expects us, like that woman, to approach Him and sincerely confide

our fears. “Don’t be upset at knowing yourself as you are: just like that, made of clay,” Saint Josemaría wrote. “Do not worry, because you and I are children of God (and this is the good divinisation), chosen by a divine calling from all eternity [...]. We, who belong to God in a special way and are his instruments in spite of our poor personal wretchedness, will be effective if we do not lose the awareness of our weakness.”^[3] In this way, the attraction the reality of sin may stir in us will not be an obstacle to our relationship with God: it will lead us to greater humility, seeking union with Him and trusting in his strength.

JUST AS the woman in this Gospel suffered from her illness, any sin means bondage. It “makes man feel a stranger to himself, in his inner

self.”^[4] — That's why, at another time, Jesus will say, *Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house forever; the son continues forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed* (Jn 8:34-36). Christians have been called to freedom (cf. *Gal* 5:13). Since creation, God has given us the capacity to choose and desire good, but also the possibility of turning away from it. “It is a mystery of divine Wisdom,” noted Saint Josemaría, “that when creating man *in his image and likeness* (cf. *Gen* 1:26-29), He wanted to run the sublime ‘risk’ of human freedom.”^[5] —

“In fact,” the Prelate of Opus Dei writes, “at the dawn of history this risk led to the rejection of God’s Love through the original sin. Thus the strength of human freedom’s attraction to the good was weakened, and the will was left to a certain

degree inclined towards sin.

Afterwards, personal sins weaken human freedom even more, and therefore sin always implies, to a greater or lesser degree, a form of slavery (cf. *Rom* 6:17, 20).”^[6] —

Nevertheless, man remains free, and even though that freedom may be fragile at times, God is the first to respect and love it. Knowing that the Lord “does not want slaves but children”^[7] fills us with security because it allows us to embrace the deepest truth of our identity. “How liberating it is, then, to know that God loves us. How liberating is God’s pardon that allows us to return to ourselves and to our true home.”^[8] — In that home, we know that the Virgin Mary awaits us, desiring to free us from anything that could distance us from her Son.

[1] Pope Francis, Address, 17-V-2014.

[2] St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospels*, no. 31.

[3] St. Josemaría, Letter 2, no. 20.

[4] St. John Paul II, Audience, 3-VIII-1988.

[5] St. Josemaría, Letter, 24-X-1965, no. 3.

[6] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral letter, 9-I-2018, no. 2.

[7] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 129.

[8] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral letter, 9-I-2018, no.4.

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