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Meditations: Thursday of the Sixteenth Week of Ordinary Time

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

- Knowing Christ's sentiments
- Value of interior mortification
- Prayer, a gift from God

IN OUR PRAYER we can speak to Jesus about our own lives. It is only

natural to feel the need to talk to our best Friend about the issues that are important to us, about the people who give meaning to our lives, and about the sorrows and joys that, in a combination sometimes difficult to understand, make up our existence. But at the same time, in contemplating the life of Jesus, we also try to draw close to Him in order to sense his concerns, understand how He thinks, and discover what He wants to convey to us with each of his gestures. The careful reading of the Gospel helps us to come to know, little by little, Christ's own sentiments.

On several occasions the apostles tried to discover the motives that inspired our Lord's teachings. "Why do you speak to them in parables?" (*Mt* 13:10), they asked Him. They realized that his parables contained a certain ambiguity. Jesus adapted his language to the concerns

and language of his listeners; but in presenting these stories He also seemed to want to hide deeper truths. He employed a mysterious and indirect language that failed to satisfy his apostles' eagerness that He reveal himself to the world in a clearer way. Surely what moved the apostles to ask Jesus to be more explicit in his words was their great admiration and affection. But our Lord's answer probably wasn't what they expected: "This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (*Mt 13:13*).

Perhaps some of those listening to Jesus were not really open to his words. Perhaps they simply wanted to confirm their own way of thinking or detect possible inconsistencies in his words. All these attitudes, in the end, prevented Christ's word from reaching their hearts. And no one is

completely safe from listening in this way. The word of God is always alive; it impels us to first conform our own lives to the Gospel, and then share it with those around us. “Seeking to domesticate the Word of God is a daily temptation.”^[1] We may try to listen only to what we want to hear, and not to what God wants to tell us. If we draw close to Jesus with a truly open heart, like the apostles, He will reveal his deepest sentiments to us, his constant longing to renew the earth.

IN MANY highly demanding sports, people often say that, besides physical fitness, one also needs to train the head and the heart. Similarly, for our life of prayer, it is not enough to simply dedicate a certain amount of time to Jesus. Naturally, this is an essential step in

opening our heart to his voice. But, as our Lord suggested to his apostles, we also need to care for our interior senses, that is, to open the ears of our soul and calibrate the eyes of our heart in order to perceive Christ's closeness. Interior mortification puts us in touch with God's presence in our souls. This is not simply a negative struggle aimed at rejecting what our imagination or memory offer, striving not to let ourselves be carried away by curiosity, curbing the impulses of our eyes or ears. All these efforts are directed towards one clear goal: to focus on what is really important, what truly brings happiness, savoring Christ's presence in our lives. We need to strive to listen, look, imagine and remember what truly fills our heart with God.

St. Josemaría wrote: "If you don't deny yourself, you will never be a soul of prayer."^[2] Some of those who followed Jesus were unable to grasp

the meaning of his words because their ears and eyes were filled with distractions. The same can happen to us, despite our sincere desire to be close to our Lord; the images and noises that resonate in our heads can make it difficult for us to contemplate Christ. Just as to stay in shape physically we need to do regular exercise, so too we need to “train” our attention. Thus, with each small effort to reject or redirect distractions – at work, in social life, in a time of prayer – we strengthen our ability to connect with the reality at hand, because God is there. And then we will find it easier to contemplate Christ’s face in all the circumstances of our daily life.

“TRULY I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see and did not see it, and

to hear what you hear and did not hear it” (*Mt 13:16-17*). Our Lord could address these same words to people of any time and place. In fact, those prophets and righteous men were unable to contemplate God as we can in the Tabernacle or when receiving Him sacramentally in our souls. Prayer, with the Eucharist as its center, introduces us to a much closer, more personal relationship with our Lord. “While men and women had always been accustomed to drawing near to God somewhat intimidated, somewhat fearful of this fascinating and tremendous mystery, Christians instead address him by daring to call him intimately by the name ‘Father’.”^[3]

Therefore prayer, more than our human effort, is a gift that our Lord grants us. Every moment we share with Him is an undeserved privilege. It is not we who do God a favor by dedicating some minutes of our day

to Him; it is He who, moved by his infinite mercy, invites us to enjoy his presence, offering us the free gift of his friendship.

And the more we become aware of our own weakness, the more we will feel the need to take refuge in this gift. “In prayer we experience, more so than in other dimensions of life, our weakness, our poverty, our being created, because we stand before the omnipotence and the transcendence of God. And the more we progress in listening to and dialoguing with God, for prayer becomes the daily breathe of our soul, the more we perceive the meaning of our limits, not just before the concrete situations of every day but in our relationship with the Lord too. Growing within us is the need to trust, to trust ever more in him; we understand that ‘we do not know how to pray as we ought’ (*Rom* 8:26).”^[4] — The Virgin Mary, teacher of prayer, will help us to receive with

an open heart the gift her Son offers us.

[1] Francis, Homily, 27 January 2019.

[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 172.

[3] Francis, Audience, 13 May 2020.

[4] Benedict XVI, Audience, 16 May 2012.

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