

Meditations: Thursday of the Twenty-Third Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 23rd week of Ordinary Time.

- Lighting up the paths of the earth
- The hour for love
- God goes before us

IN THE GOSPEL of Saint Luke, our Lord, in his discourse on the plain, gives a clear portrait of how his disciples should act: “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back” (*Lk 6:27-30*).

This is a demanding message. As Christians, we are called to follow in the footsteps of the Master, who “went about doing good, for God was with him” (*Acts 10:38*). We are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. *Mt 5:13-14*), sent to bear witness to Christ wherever we are and “to the ends of the earth” (*Acts 1:8*), immersed in the

realities of the world like salt and leaven – which are not seen, but felt.

The early Christians sought to make these teachings of our Lord their own. “Christians are not distinguished from other men,” a second century author wrote, “either by the place where they live, or by their language, or by their customs; they have no cities of their own, nor do they use an unusual way of speaking, or lead a separate way of life. They live in Greek and barbarian cities, as their lot has fallen; they follow the customs of the inhabitants of the country, both in dress and in their entire style of life. And yet they show evidence of a way of life that is admirable and, in the opinion of all, truly extraordinary.”^[1]

Today, as then, “creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (*Rom 8:19*), for the witness of our Christian life, at once

simple and admirable. For we are “children of God, bearers of the only flame that can light up the paths of the earth for souls, of the only brightness which can never be darkened, dimmed or overshadowed. The Lord uses us as torches, to make that light shine out... It depends on us that many should not remain in darkness, but walk instead along paths that lead to eternal life.”^[2]

THE WORLD YEARNS for the witness of the children of God; in their way of life the deepest aspiration of every human being is fulfilled. Christ “in a unique and unrepeatable way has penetrated the mystery of man and entered his heart.”^[3] Therefore what He asks of us is not, in reality, something extraordinary, since it responds to the original vocation of every man and woman, expressed in

the voice of their conscience. Thus we understand why Christ summarizes all his demanding discourse in a simple golden rule: “as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them” (*Lk 6:31*).

Ultimately, it is simply a matter of responding to the vocation to love. The entire law is summed up in the twofold commandment of love for God and neighbor (cf. *Mt 22:37-40*), and our Lord’s commandment is that we love one another as He has loved us. It is through love that the world recognizes us as disciples of the Master (cf. *Jn 13:34-35*), for He loved us to the point of giving his life for each one of us.

To show us the practical consequences of this teaching, Jesus continues his discourse: “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do

good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same . . . But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return" (*Lk 6:33-35*). This is the authentic witness of the children of God that the world is waiting for, today and now: a love that knows no barriers, that opens itself to everyone around us. "This is the hour for love!" Leo XIV proclaimed at the opening Mass of his pontificate. "The love of God, which makes us brothers and sisters, is the heart of the Gospel."^[4]

IS IT POSSIBLE to love as Jesus asks of us? Perhaps we often experience the difficulty of loving as He does: with his infinite patience, his boundless mercy... Logically, if we were to rely solely on our own strength, we would have more than

enough reason to become discouraged. But it is He himself who helps us. He generously shares his love with us, pouring it into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rom 5:5*). “He has loved us first and he continues to do so; we too, then, can respond with love. God does not demand of us a feeling which we ourselves are incapable of producing. He loves us, he makes us see and experience his love, and since he has ‘loved us first,’ love can also blossom as a response within us.”^[5]

Therefore, when we notice that our heart finds it hard to love as our Lord asks of us, we can live with the confidence that He is the first to love us: “His love always precedes us, accompanies us and remains with us, despite our sin.”^[6] It is very liberating to abandon ourselves to God’s love, receiving his infinite love and giving it generously to others. For we know

that we don't have to worry about judging, because it is God who judges (cf. *1 Cor 4:4*); that we always have the possibility of forgiving "with the full freedom of love."^[7]; that we can always be joyful, even when doing something we don't like, because we can do everything for love.

Living like this, moreover, fills us with a sure hope: "Judge not," Jesus tells us, "and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you" (*Lk 6:37-38*). Therefore if our life has been marked by love, mercy and generosity in our relationships with others, our Lord will judge us in the same way. We can ask our Lady to obtain for us a great love and help us to imitate

Jesus, bearing witness in the world as God's children.

^[1] *Letter to Diognetus*, ch. 5-6.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 1.

^[3] St. John Paul II, Enc. *Redemptor hominis*, no. 8.

^[4] Leo XIV, Homily 18 May 2025.

^[5] Benedict XVI, Enc. *Deus caritas est*, no. 17.

^[6] Francis, Apost. Letter *Misericordia et Misera*, no. 5.

^[7] St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 10th Station.