

Meditations: Tuesday of the Sixth Week of Easter

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this season of Easter. The topics are: Jesus announces his return to the Father; the gift of understanding; understanding divine and human realities with God's light.

- Jesus announces his return to the Father
- The gift of understanding
- Understanding divine and human realities with God's light

DURING the sixth week of Easter, the Church continues to offer us some passages from Jesus' farewell discourse recorded in Saint John's Gospel. Today we listen to our Lord as He announces, during the Last Supper, his imminent return to heaven: *Now I am going to him who sent me . . . I go to the Father, and you will see me no more (Jn 16:5,10)*. We can imagine the apostles' confusion upon hearing these words. How is it possible that those wonderful years of living alongside Him could come to an end? The apostles "were afraid of losing the visible presence of Jesus," Saint Augustine says. "Their hearts were filled with sadness to think that their eyes would never again have the consolation of seeing Him."^[1]

And they asked one another: *What is this that he says to us? We do not know what he means (Jn 16:17-18)*. They couldn't understand Jesus'

words. They didn't yet have the key to do so. But even though the full meaning of his words escaped them, none of them dared to ask: *Where are you going?* (Jn 16:5). They were probably stunned by the turn the supper had taken. Three years before, at the beginning of their adventure with Christ by the Jordan, John and Andrew had asked a question that might now have seemed appropriate: *Master, where are you staying?* (Jn 1:38-39). But at the Last Supper, given the mysterious nature of his words, they remain silent.

“After the Resurrection, those words became more understandable and transparent for the disciples, as an announcement of his Ascension to heaven . . . Jesus alone possesses the divine energy and right to ‘ascend into heaven,’ no one else. Humanity abandoned to itself, to its natural forces, does not have access to the

‘Father’s house’ (*Jn 14:2*), to participating in God’s life and happiness. Only Christ can open up this access for mankind. He is the Son who ‘came down from heaven,’ who ‘came forth from the Father’ precisely for this.”^[2] Jesus leaves in order to send us – to his apostles and to us – the consolation of his Spirit and to open to us his Father’s house.

IT IS CLEAR that Jesus had no intention of leaving his disciples alone; the Holy Spirit is to continue the mission of the Son, filling their lives with strength and giving them gifts that will help them understand the concerns of God. Our Lord links the coming of the Holy Spirit with his departure to the Father, making clear that the Paraclete “will come as the consequence, and at the price of his own departure.”^[3] What the apostles

gathered there experienced as a great sadness, was in reality God's salvific plan. The "void" left by our Lord's leaving would not remain empty; it would soon be filled by the Holy Spirit. Hence Jesus tells them: *If I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you (Jn 16:7).* Everything will become clearer at Pentecost, when they will be inundated with his gifts.

The gift of understanding enables us to grasp more deeply the revealed mysteries that the apostles found it so hard to understand at first. It gives us an intuition into divine realities, a deep knowledge of the truths of faith and even of certain natural truths ordered to our supernatural end. Where the eye and human reason cannot reach, the gift of understanding enables us to see more deeply, as happens with night vision devices that in the darkest night provide surprising clarity. Even

though we will never be able to fully understand the mystery of God, to grasp it in its entirety, through this gift of the Holy Spirit we can draw closer little by little.

With the gift of understanding we have “the capacity of going beyond the externals of reality and scrutinizing the depth of God’s thought and his design for salvation.”^[4] Although we are often tempted to judge events only with human eyes, and we are not able to see with God’s eyes, this divine gift allows us to “understand things as God understands them, with God’s understanding.”^[5] Saint Josemaría compared it to the ability to see beyond only two dimensions, in a flat way that is tied to the earth: “When you live a supernatural life, God will give you the third dimension: height, and with it, perspective, weight and volume.”^[6]

IN TODAY'S FIRST READING, the Acts of the Apostles narrates in detail the imprisonment of Paul and Silas in Philippi (cf. Acts 16:22-34). *And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison . . . But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one's fetters were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought*

them out and said, “Men, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. The conversion of this Philippian family was very rapid. They understood enough in a few hours to want to be baptized right away. *Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God.*

The gift of understanding perfects our faith; it opens our intellects to understand more deeply the Word of God, what Jesus has said and done. A certainty grows that is founded not only on reasoning, but also on the inner experience that God communicates to us. Moreover, that certainty becomes more and more sincere when we let it permeate our heart and our affections. Thus both

divine realities and the realities of this world, everything that happens to us, is understood and welcomed *from God* in a deeper and more hopeful way.

In 1971 Saint Josemaría advised a priest who was about to preach a spiritual retreat: “Put love for the Holy Spirit into their hearts, which is to put love for the Father and the Son. Because the Son has been begotten by the Father from all eternity; and from the love of the Father and the Son, also eternally, proceeds the Holy Spirit. We don’t understand this very well, but it’s not hard for me to believe it.”^[7] These words summarize what someone who receives this gift from the Paraclete senses. On the one hand, they cannot fully understand the mystery; but, at the same time, they are certain of the Holy Spirit’s help and light.

We can ask Mary to help us to live each day immersed in the mystery of God, following the founder of Opus Dei's graphic image: with our feet on the ground and our heads in heaven.

^[1] Saint Augustine, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 94,4.

^[2] Saint John Paul II, General Audience, 5 April 1989, nos. 2-3.

^[3] Saint John Paul II, General Audience, 31 May 1989, no. 1.

^[4] Francis, General Audience, 30 April 2014.

^[5] Ibid.

^[6] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 279.

^[7] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, 21 February 1971.

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