

Meditations: Friday of the Thirteenth Week of Ordinary Time

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

- Following Jesus closely
- Keeping our eyes on Christ
- Recognizing our need for God

MATTHEW describes his own reaction to the Master's call quite succinctly: "he rose and followed him" (*Mt 9:9*). From that moment on, his life would be completely different from the one he had led before.

Seated at his booth collecting taxes, perhaps his main purpose in life had been to enjoy the wealth he earned. But now alongside Jesus, his priorities would be totally different. It is true that up to then he was not looked upon kindly by most of his countrymen, but the money and esteem of the Roman authorities made up for their rejection. Now, confronting the look and words of Jesus, Matthew decides to abandon these certainties and launch himself into the adventure of following the Messiah.

"He rose." The gesture of standing up shows one's recognition of an important person; it means stopping what one was doing and giving that

person one's full attention. When a person stands up, it shows that they are alert, ready to go wherever needed. Matthew shows he is willing to do anything for Jesus because, thanks to God and his own conversion, his scale of values has changed completely. The most important thing is no longer growing rich or living a comfortable life, but dedicating all his energies to Christ's mission.

Saint Matthew was surely aware of the risks involved in his decision. But he also left behind any calculating attitude. The life of every disciple involves opening oneself to a divine adventure, often filled with surprises and uncertainties. Following Jesus means walking attentively in his footsteps, without always knowing exactly where He will lead us, but aware that the happiness He can give is greater than anything we can imagine. "We must trust in Him and

go out to meet Him, overcoming the fear of thinking that, if we do so, we will miss many good things in life. His capacity to surprise us is much greater than any of our expectations.”^[1] —

THE ANSWER that St. Matthew gives to Jesus is not self-centered. He does not think about whether he is ready or not, or whether he will be able to make a better decision later.

Perhaps, in some mysterious way, he was waiting for a call like the one the Master addressed to him. And to discover it in all its richness, he had to look and listen attentively to Him, and not at his own calculations. The temptation can always arise to stop following Jesus and to carefully calculate the costs and benefits, especially when it becomes more

demanding and seems to not be worth the effort.

This is what happened to Peter when he walked on the water. As long as he kept his eyes fixed on Jesus, he was able to stand and move forward. But as soon as he became aware of his own weakness and the force of the wind, fear and insecurity took hold of his heart and he was at the point of sinking. At Peter's cry – “Lord, save me!” (*Mt 14:30*) – “Jesus reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘O man of little faith, why did you doubt?’” (*Mt 14:31*).

Following a vocation is like walking on water; it requires going beyond our own capacities, trusting that our Lord is the one who does things and who keeps the accounts. On this path, of course, the spiritual accompaniment of someone who can advise us and help us to discern our

vocation is also indispensable. “Serve your God unwaveringly,” St. Josemaría insisted. “Be faithful to him, and worry about nothing else. For it is indeed true that ‘if you set your hearts on the kingdom of God and on his righteousness, he will give you all these other things – material necessities, the required means – as well.’”^[2]

TO CELEBRATE his response to Jesus’ call, St. Matthew decides to provide a dinner in his house. Some tax collectors like himself are present, and others who, in the people’s eyes, were also considered public sinners. Hence the Pharisees, on seeing our Lord eating with Matthew’s friends, asked the disciples: “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (*Mt 9:11*). But upon hearing these words, Christ replied: “Those

who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (*Mt 9:12-13*).

"The first thing we should do is acknowledge that none of us, none of us present here, can say: I am not a sinner. The Pharisees did say that, and Jesus strongly admonished them."^[3] Accepting ourselves as we are, with our virtues and defects, draws us close to our Lord. He doesn't come to us because we have done things well, but because we are sinners who need his mercy. The first step in drawing close to our Lord is to recognize our need for Him. Then we will face our personal miseries close to Christ, knowing that the experience of sin will not make us doubt our mission. "The power of God is made manifest in our weakness," St. Josemaría said. "and it

spurs us to fight, to battle against our defects, although we know that we will never achieve total victory during our pilgrimage on earth. The Christian life is a continuous beginning again each day that renews itself over and over.”^[4]

Mary, Mother of Mercy, will help us to recognize our sins with her motherly look that does not condemn. And our Lady will obtain from her Son the grace we need to fight with hope, knowing that Jesus reveals himself to us “in our effort to be better, to have a love that seeks to be pure.”^[5]

^[1] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, “Letting Oneself Be Surprised by a Good Father,” *La Estrella*, January 25, 2019

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 472.

^[3] Francis, Homily, July 7, 2017.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 114.

^[5] *Ibid.*

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