

Meditations: Friday of the Twelfth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 12th week of Ordinary Time.

- The leper's plea
- Jesus touches our wounds
- The loneliness of the leper

A LARGE CROWD was following Jesus. As they were going down the mountain, a leper came up to Jesus

and, kneeling before Him, said, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean” (Mt 8:2). We can imagine what that man’s situation must have been. His illness has not only afflicted his body but also alienated him from his loved ones and contact with other people. He is aware of the risk he is taking by getting so close to Jesus with the crowd around Him: at any moment he could be stoned. But he has placed his hope in the Teacher who people say works all kinds of cures.

Faced with such a dramatic situation, the normal thing would have been for the leper to approach Jesus in desperation, and demand a quick miracle to justify the risk of presenting himself before Him. That is why the attitude with which he addresses our Lord so is surprising: “If you wish, you can make me clean.” His plea “shows us that when we present ourselves before Jesus,

there is no need for long speeches. A few words are enough, as long as they are accompanied by complete trust in his omnipotence and goodness.”^[1] The leper does not insist on his request, but rather abandons himself into God’s hands: whatever his will is, he will accept it. We can ask our Lord to help us present our concerns to Him with the same good will as that man, trusting that God knows better than anyone what we truly need.

JESUS does not shy away from contact with that man. He doesn’t seek to heal him from a distance, but draws close to him and, touching him, says: “I am willing; be cleansed” (*Mt 8:3*). “That gesture and those words of Christ contain the whole history of salvation – showing God’s will to heal us and cleanse us

from the evil that disfigures us and ruins our relationships.”^[2] When Jesus’ hand touches the leper, every barrier between God and men is broken down. “He places Himself in direct contact with the contagion of our malady; and precisely in this way our malady becomes the place of contact”^[3] – the wound that lets our Lord enter our heart and heal us.

We can often feel like the leper: we can feel stained by our faults, unable to move forward on our own strength. Then is the moment to draw close to our Lord with the faith and sincerity of that man. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Jesus once again touches our wound and thus reestablishes the communion that unites us to Him. Any sins we may have committed are cleansed when we humbly confess them. “If you ever fall, my child, go quickly to Confession and spiritual direction,” Saint Josemaría said. “Show your

wound! So that you may be completely healed and all possibility of infection is removed, even if it hurts like a surgical operation.”^[4]

THE LEPER was healed of his malady as soon as Jesus stretched out his hand. But our Lord asked him to do one last thing: “Go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to the people” (*Mt 8:4*). The Jewish authorities still needed to certify that the healing had taken place so that the man can be accepted again by society. Jesus not only restored his physical health, but also something else that was very important: his belonging to a community. During all those years, the leper had not only experienced the pain and distress of his illness; he probably suffered even more from loneliness and

abandonment by his own family and friends. And now our Lord puts an end to that wound in his heart.

In our daily lives, we too can encounter people who, like that leper, are excluded or feel excluded, sometimes with subtle motivations, but which end up trapping the person and suffocating their living space. At times this exclusion is caused by poverty, old age, lack of work, or illness. In these situations, often what people are seeking is a look of compassion – someone who offers not only material help, but above all affection, concern, and time. They are seeking someone who, like Christ, comes close to touch their wounds and reminds them that they are part of a community, where they find people who care about their well-being and by whom they feel loved. “If I were a leper,” Saint Josemaría said, “my mother would hug me. She would kiss my wounds

without fear or hesitation.”^[5] We can ask our Lady to help us look with compassion upon the “lepers” we encounter in our own lives, and to be ready to embrace them.

^[1] Francis, Audience, 22 June 2016.

^[2] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 12 February 2012.

^[3] Francis, Angelus, 15 February 2015.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 192.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 190.