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Meditations: Saturday of the First Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during the First Week in Ordinary Time.

- St. Matthew's prompt, determined "yes"
- God's demands are really gifts
- Thanking God at Mass

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JESUS PASSES through our lives and calls us. He did it yesterday, he does

it today, and he will go on doing it. Just as he did with St Matthew, our Lord comes to meet us in our work. He says, *Follow me* (Mk 2:14). We see the prompt answer given by Matthew, the future apostle and evangelist who did not hesitate to leave his secure life behind: “Meeting Christ and following him was all one.”^[1] — Maybe Jesus’s presence was enough to give him the confidence to take the plunge, and he didn’t need to spend any time thinking about what he was leaving behind. Maybe his astuteness enabled him to glimpse a bargain from afar, and he realized that what he would gain, this time, was happiness.

We may sometimes be tempted to wonder whether we are capable of following Jesus to the end, whether we’ll be able to be faithful, or whether we’ll fall into routine and discouragement. Does that kind of doubt stop us from saying “yes”

promptly when Jesus asks us for something? Obviously we need discernment to direct our lives correctly. A vocation is not usually plain to see, so that we should not be worried if we sense doubt arising. “You became a bit frightened when you saw so much light, so bright that you thought it would be difficult to look, or even to see. Disregard your obvious weaknesses, and open the eyes of your soul to faith, to hope and to love. Carry on, allowing yourself to be guided by God through whoever directs your soul.”^[2]

Matthew doesn't know what is going to happen to his life, his business, or his possessions. Maybe he doesn't know where he'll be tomorrow, or how his colleagues will react, or whether he'll be capable of staying with the Teacher for good.

Everything is new to him, but he has enough breadth of vision and humility to avoid being held back by fear of leaving his comfort zone, his

own limitations, or what other people will think. He lets himself be won over by the unmerited offer Our Lord has made him. “Our master bears the whole weight of the cross, leaving me only the tiniest, last bit. He is not a mere onlooker in my struggle, but a contestant and the victor and champion in the whole battle.” ^[3] —

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“YET AGAIN, we find ourselves faced with the paradox of the Gospel: we are free in serving, not in doing whatever we want. We are free in serving, and freedom comes from there; we find ourselves fully to the extent to which we give ourselves. We find ourselves fully to the extent to which we give ourselves, to which we have the courage to give ourselves; we possess life if we lose it (cf. *Mk* 8:35). This is pure Gospel.”^[4] —

Every demand that God makes on us is really a gift. To see freedom as being in conflict with commitment, to see God's will as being in conflict with happiness, is the great lie that the devil tries to sell us. The devil is determined to stop us from seeing the gifts God wants to give us, and the beauty of committing ourselves. It can happen that we think commitments limit our freedom. Sometimes we are not confident that we will be able to keep our word if our circumstances or feelings change, even though at present we may be perfectly happy with our situation. But we will be able to respond with love, to commit our freedom fearlessly, only if we have first let ourselves be conquered by love. We will only respond with the gift of our lives if we have first discovered that we have received much more than what is being asked of us. If we should mistakenly think that we were giving as much as we

receive, we would soon find reasons to say no, that we made the wrong choice, that perhaps it is not worthwhile. But once we realize the immensity of what we have received, we are overcome with astonishment, and want to be totally, sincerely grateful.

“IT IS TRULY right and just... always and everywhere to give you thanks,” we frequently pray at Mass. These words begin many of the Prefaces, expressing our desire to continue giving thanks constantly. Even before saying yes to God in so many things that we don’t yet know, we find it helpful to thank him for them in advance. There will be days when we find our journey more uphill, when we find ourselves climbing Calvary. At such times we can think how Jesus made the gift of his Body in advance,

at the Last Supper, and in the context of thanksgiving. Every time we go to Mass we realize what his approach was. *Giving you thanks he said the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying...*

Saying thank you, being grateful, is the best way to receive a gift. It means recognizing it for what it is, appreciating the unconditional love of the giver. Thanking God for something we find hard has the great advantage of helping us to leave aside any calculating attitude about how much we are renouncing. Matthew thanked Jesus for his call by throwing a banquet. He didn't hesitate to invite his friends, sinners like himself: this was his gift to Jesus. "One day, a grateful God will cry out: 'Now, my turn.' Oh, what will we see then? What is this life which will no more have an end? God will be the soul of our soul—unfathomable mystery! The eye of man has not

seen the uncreated light, his ear has not heard the incomparable harmonies, and his heart cannot have any idea of what God reserves for those whom He loves.”^[5] —

There is no better occasion than the Mass for thanking God for our vocation, even if we are still trying to discern what God in his love wants to give us. Bringing our vocation to Mass every day, placing it there with Jesus’s own self-giving so that God the Father may receive them together, forming one single sacrifice, can be the greatest source of joy. And how wonderful it is to think that our Mother Mary, Our Lady, is the person who has taught us to give thanks from the first moment: *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour!* (Lk 1:46-47).

[1] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 6.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 1015.

[3] St Paul Le-Bao-Tinh, Letter, 1843, quoted in the Liturgy of the Hours, November 24.

[4] Pope Francis, Audience, October 20, 2021.

[5] St Therese of Lisieux, Letter 94 to Céline, July 14, 1889.

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