

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

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-eighth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: humility, the path that leads us to God; the examination of conscience: recognizing God's voice; courage to examine our hearts.

- Humility, the path that leads us to God
- The examination of conscience: recognizing God's voice
- Courage to examine our hearts

THE GOSPELS of Luke and Matthew both contain the famous “woe to you” discourse in which Jesus reproaches the scribes and Pharisees for the inconsistency of their lives. The Master accuses them harshly because they were more concerned about appearances than living in accordance with the truth. *Woe to you lawyers also! for you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! for you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. [...] Woe to you lawyers! for you have taken away the key of knowledge (Lk 11:46-47, 52).*

Instead of softening their hearts, the words they hear from the lips of Jesus Christ lead them to *press him hard, and to provoke him [...], lying in wait for him (Lk 11:53)*. Certainly, the

Lord had spoken to them severely. However, if they had looked within with a little courage and sincerity, they would have realized that Jesus' accusations were just. Humility allows us to accept correction and set out on the path of conversion that the Lord asks of us. "Humility is the only way that leads us to God. At the same time, precisely because it leads us to Him, humility leads us also to the essentials of life, to its truest meaning, to the most trustworthy reason for why life is worth living. Humility alone opens us up to the experience of truth, of authentic joy, of knowing what matters. Without humility we are 'cut off,' we are cut off from understanding God and from understanding ourselves."^[1]

Other passages of the Gospel show us how Jesus was moved by the simplicity of the children who come to Him and have not yet learned to lie, the vulnerability of the lepers

who ask for healing without worrying about what other will say, and the honesty of the people how pose questions out of a sincere desire to know the truth. He values authenticity and honesty. That is why, another time, He preaches, *Let what you say be simply 'yes' or 'no'; anything more than this comes from evil (Mt 5:37).*

THE DESIRE to justify ourselves, seen in the Pharisees and scribes in this episode, is as old as humanity itself. When God questions Adam about the fig leaves he has put on himself and asks if he ate from the tree, the first man makes excuses: *The woman who thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate (Gen 3:12).* He blames Eve to ease his own conscience.

Don Javier Echevarría recounts that St. Josemaría “always fought against any kind of excuse that would hinder the fulfillment of duty, even if they were not grave offenses against the Lord. [...] Love is seen in these details. That's why he radically rejected five types of reasoning, which he did not hesitate to call devils: ‘It's just that...,’ ‘I thought...,’ ‘I assumed...,’ ‘tomorrow,’ and ‘later.’”^[2] — The desire for an attentive, vigilant heart leads us to hear God's voice in these small struggles.

The examination of conscience is a tool that helps us know ourselves better and recognize God's call every day. If at times we realize that we have not responded properly, we can ask the Lord for the grace to begin again the next day. As St. Josemaría said, “Our life — a Christian's life — has to be as ordinary as this: trying every day to do well those very things it is our duty to do; carrying

out our divine mission in the world by fulfilling the little duty of each moment. Or rather, struggling to fulfil it. Sometimes we don't manage, and when night comes, in our examination, we'll have to tell our Lord, 'I am not offering you virtues; today I can only offer you defects. But with your grace I will be able to count myself a victor.'^[3]

CHRIST'S CALL and the way we follow Him require us to examine our love of God deeply. We need to face our weaknesses without fear through a sincere examination of conscience, which allows us to identify the roots of our weaknesses. Blessed Álvaro, in one of his early pastoral letters, advised us to "examine our conscience conscientiously."^[4] In other words, he encouraged us to have the courage to

look deep into our hearts, to find the roots of our weaknesses.

The effort to grow in self-knowledge can help us grow in freedom, as we discover God's continual presence and action in our lives, inspiring us to live with authenticity. On the other hand, "forgetting God's presence in our life goes hand in hand with our ignorance of ourselves — ignoring God and ignoring ourselves — ignorance of our personality traits and of our deepest desires."^[5] In our examination of conscience, we can rekindle the ideals we want to motivate us and ask God for grace to help us live according to our vocation. This way, we can accompany the Lord closely without being ensnared by things that separate us from Him. When Jesus called the first apostles, they "left everything — everything! And followed him... And it does happen sometimes that we, who wish to

imitate them, don't quite leave everything, and there remains some attachment in our heart, something wrong in our life which we're not willing to break with and offer up to God. Won't you examine your heart in depth? Nothing should remain there except what is his. If not, we aren't really loving him, neither you nor I.”^[6]

Our Lady knew how to direct her affections toward the mission the angel had announced to her: to be the Mother of God. From that day on, her entire life, even in the smallest details, revolved around that vocation. She can help us make our entire day an expression of our love for her Son, which extends to the people around us.

^[1] Pope Francis, Audience, 22-XII-2021.

^[2] Javier Echevarría, *Memoria del beato Josemaría*.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 616.

^[4] Bl. Alvaro del Portillo, *Letter* 8-XII-1976, no. 8.

^[5] Pope Francis, Audience, 5-X-2022.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 356.

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