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

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 21st week of Ordinary Time.

- Prepared for the Lord's coming
- The present, God's time
- An ally in our struggle

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“WATCH therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is

coming” (*Mt 24:42*). Jesus’ words here could seem to give rise to suspense and tension. Does our Lord want to make us anxious because of his second coming? Christ insists: “But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into” (*Mt 24:43*).

It’s only natural that we are filled with joyful expectation when something we are looking forward to is drawing near: a family plan, an important event, a well-needed rest... Even if it hasn’t happened yet, the anticipation of that moment brings joy to the present. This is one of the dimensions of Christian hope: living with the hope that Christ will come and that we will be with Him forever, even though that coming has not yet taken place. This longing spurs us on, encourages us to be

prepared, and gives a sense of eternity to the jobs we have in our hands.

With his insistence that we be vigilant, our Lord wants to strengthen our trust that He will come. He invites us to be on guard against dangerous “thieves”: sin and lukewarmness. The former robs us of our eager expectation, and the latter dampens it, leading us to think that the wait will go on indefinitely and that we can let up in our struggle. Saint Josemaría highlights the joy that should mark a Christian’s struggle: “At times you feel discouragement beginning to weigh on your heart, which robs you of your eagerness to struggle and which you can barely overcome even by making acts of hope... Never mind: this is a good time to ask God for more grace. Then, forward! Renew your joy for the struggle, even though you might lose a skirmish.”^[1] —

Jesus doesn't want us to be tense and anxious, but rather He wants us to be prepared for his coming, and even excited about it. We need to ask Him to strengthen our hope, a hope that does not disappoint (cf. *Rom 5:5*), which enables us to fight with joy.

THE BEST WAY to wait is not worrying anxiously about the future, or feeling guilty about what has been left undone in the past, but rather living hopefully in the present moment. It is quite normal that at times we experience fear about the future or sorrow about the past. Nevertheless, our Lord encourages us to concentrate on today. "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he

comes will find so doing” (Mt 24:45-46). Our Lord shows us the best way to wait for Him: by working faithfully in what we have in our hands in the present moment, which is where He has placed us and provides the material for our holiness. Saint Josemaría said succinctly: “Do you really want to be a saint? Carry out the little duty of each moment; do what you ought and concentrate on what you are doing.”^[2] —

The faithful servant is to a certain extent unconcerned about results or what others think of him. His main concern is to work well and with love, moved by the desire to serve his Lord through his work. Hence he strives to put care into small details, to serve the food at the right time, to be available for whatever is needed. To a large extent, the present moment is sufficient for him: he doesn't need anything more. And

therefore he seeks to renew his faithfulness in every moment. If he has made mistakes in the past, he has tried to learn from them and to not give them too much importance.

Uncertainty about the future doesn't weigh him down and paralyze him, because when the future arrives, he will face it with God's help. He has discovered the secret to happiness, which is the best way to prepare for the Lord's coming: to put himself into whatever he is doing.

“Do your duty 'now,' without looking back on 'yesterday,' which has already passed, or worrying over 'tomorrow,' which may never come for you.”^[3] In a certain sense, this is what we ask of God every time we pray the Our Father. We don't worry out the past or the future, but simply ask for our daily bread, the bread we need today. We want to accept each day whatever God sends us, the “bread” of the present moment, putting

ourselves into what we need to do now, welcoming the people He puts alongside us. The present is God's time, and if we live it as such, the Lord will reward us like the faithful servant: "Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions" (*Mt 24:47*).

WHEN someone is looking forward eagerly to a future event, they may end up feeling disappointed when they aren't certain whether it will ever actually happen. The initial desire fades, and gestures and customs are neglected. In this sense, a Christian's hope of reaching heaven and meeting our Lord can become, when the day and hour are unclear, a reality so distant that it may almost disappear. This is what Jesus tells us in the Gospel: "But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is

delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the hypocrites" (*Mt 24:48-51*).

In this time of eager waiting, God has given us a great ally to help us not slacken in our initial resolve: a spirit of examination. At the end of each day, or during our times of prayer, we can nourish our dialogue with our Lord by asking ourselves: "what happened in my heart during this day? 'Lots of things happened...'
Which? Why? What traces did they leave in my heart? Carrying out an examination of conscience, that is, the good habit of calmly rereading what happened during our day, learning to note in our evaluations and choices what we give most importance to, what we are looking

for and why, and what we eventually find. Above all, learning to recognize what satisfies my heart. For only the Lord can give us confirmation of what we are worth.”^[4] —

In the examination of conscience we can speak with God about our joys, sorrows, hopes, worries... And we can ask Him whether all these feelings are consistent with our Christian identity, with the ideals that we want our life to be guided by. “Sincerely examine the way you are following the Master. Consider whether you might have given yourself in a dry, official way, with a faith that has no sparkle to it; if there is no humility or sacrifice, nor daily work; if you are all façade and pay no attention to the details of each moment... In a word, if you lack Love. If this is the case, your ineffectiveness should come as no surprise to you. React right away,

and let yourself be led by the hand of our Lady.”^[5] —

[1] *Furrow*, no. 77.

[2] *The Way*, no. 815.

[3] *The Way*, no. 253.

[4] Francis, Audience, 5 October 2022.

[5] *The Forge*, no. 930.

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