

Meditations: Tuesday of the Eleventh Week of Ordinary Time

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

- Recognizing the evil we have committed
- Seeking God's justice
- Finding joy in every conversion

AS SOON as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to

the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it (1 Kings 21:16). Then God sent the prophet Elijah to show the king the gravity of his crime: “*Have you killed and also taken possession? Thus says the Lord: In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood.*” Ahab said to Elijah, “*Have you found me, my enemy?*” (1 Kings 21:19-20). Ahab didn’t react at first; he thought the prophet’s correction was personal and subjective. But Elijah puts things in perspective: “*I have found you because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I will bring evil upon; I will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel*” (1 Kings 21:21-24).

Ahab heard the Lord’s voice in the prophet’s words, so he *rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted and lay in sackcloth,*

and went about dejectedly (1 Kings 21:27). This is a very different type of sadness from his earlier malaise, which led him to do evil. He is filled with healthy sorrow, born of repentance and good will, and it pleases God and gives Him room to pour out his mercy: *Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days (1 Kings 21:29).*

God's patience with the king is moving. He respects man's freedom, and in God's encounters with Ahab we can see that our actions have consequences, both good and bad, on the way we shape our lives, others, and the world around us. "The truth about moral good, as that truth is declared in the law of reason, is practically and concretely recognized by the judgment of conscience, which leads one to take responsibility for the good or the evil one has done. If

man does evil, the just judgment of his conscience remains within him as a witness to the universal truth of the good, as well as to the malice of his particular choice. But the verdict of conscience remains in him also as a pledge of hope and mercy: while bearing witness to the evil he has done, it also reminds him of his need, with the help of God's grace, to ask forgiveness, to do good and to cultivate virtue constantly.”^[1]

YOU HAVE heard that it was said: “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Mt 5:43-45). Jesus wants us to learn from

God's mercy, which we see in the story of Naboth's vineyard and many other passages of Scripture. God never forgets man, no matter how great his guilt may be; He always seeks the conversion of those who err, in order to bring about greater justice. And He wants our cooperation in this task, even when it requires opening our eyes and changing our often limited ways of thinking.

"I think of those who are locked up in prison. Jesus has not forgotten them either. By including the act of visiting of those in prison among the works of mercy, he wanted first and foremost to invite us to judge no one. [...] A Christian is called, above all, to assume responsibility, so that whoever has done wrong understands the evil he has carried out, and returns to his senses. [...] I feel that they all need closeness and tenderness, because God's mercy

works wonders. How many tears I have seen shed on the cheeks of prisoners who had perhaps never wept before in their lives; and this is only because they feel welcomed and loved.”^[2]

We are called to see Christ also in those who human justice declares debtors. St. Josemaria, commenting on Jesus’ invitation to meet Him in those who hunger, thirst, or are imprisoned, said that when we fail to respond, we “live far from God with [our] false piety, even though [we] may pray a lot.”^[3] Reconciliation begins within, when we are moved by grace.

DESIRING THE conversion of sinners, like our Father God does, is compatible with wanting justice to be done. We want evil to disappear and

its consequences to be erased, so justice may be restored, without destroying people who have done wrong. We seek to imitate God's way of thinking: He does not desire *the death of the sinner, but that he turn from his way and live* (Ezek 33:11). If we want to follow our Lord's example, "we have to understand everyone; we must live peaceably with everyone; we must forgive everyone. We shall not call injustice justice; we shall not say that an offence against God is not an offence against God, or that evil is good. When confronted by evil we shall not reply with another evil, but rather with sound doctrine and good actions: drowning evil in an abundance of good."^[4]

Punishing evil is not unmerciful, because it encourages those who err to convert. But envy — a mean, ungenerous reaction to others' good — is unmerciful.^[5] God wants us to

rejoice at the conversion of the sinner, as the shepherd rejoices when he finds the lost sheep (cf. *Lk 15:4-7*), or the father at the return of the prodigal son (cf. *Lk 15:11-31*). It is good to share God's joy at the small movements toward conversion in our lives and others'. *Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours; but it was necessary to celebrate and rejoice (Lk 15:31)*.

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48), Jesus tells us in today's Gospel. Mary, who is the Mirror of Justice and Mother of Mercy, will help us enlarge our hearts so that they may resemble the perfection of God's heart more and more closely.

^[1] St. John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, n. 61.

[2] Francis, Audience, November 9, 2016.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 744.

[4] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 182.

[5] Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.*, II-II, q. 30, a. 3, ad 2.

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