

Meditations: Sunday of the Thirty-First Week of Ordinary Time (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-first week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: looking toward what unites us; the love of service; sowing peace and joy.

11/05/2023

- Looking toward what unites us
- The love of service
- Sowing peace and joy

SOME OF the scribes and Pharisees carried themselves with a certain sense of superiority. Due to their position, they believed they deserved honorable treatment from the rest of the Jewish people. Jesus invited the people and his disciples to take a different approach: *You are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven (Mt 23:8-9).* In this way, Christ not only declares that all men are equal but points to the reason for this reality: we are brothers and sisters because we are children of the same God.

The prophet Malachi denounced a similar behavior in some of the authorities of his time: *Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the*

covenant of our fathers? (Ml 2:10).

Like Jesus, Malachi invites us to look toward what unites us with others, rather than what might separate us, for “each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.”^[1] —

At times, we may find it difficult to live Christian fraternity with the people around us. This can be especially true of those we spend more time with because we see their flaws up close. In this regard, it can help us to focus on all that unites us with that person: a genuine friendship that has stayed with us through important moments, unconditional love that grows over time, a shared vocation that encompasses our entire existence. This can help us realize that relationships are nourished not only by the feelings of the moment but,

more importantly, by a common reality that has marked our lives.

IN JESUS'S time, as in other moments in history, service was seen as a lesser task. People with particular skills took on the jobs that were considered more important, while less gifted people dedicated themselves to serving. After affirming the equality of all people, Jesus completely changed the way they understood society: *He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Mt 23:11-12)*. True power, therefore, is not expressed in demanding or receiving privileges but in a spirit of service, which “is an expression of love, of the affection of seeing the needs of the others as very much our own.”^[2] —

Everyone serves others in some way. In an interview, St. Josemaría said that “any job that is well done is a wonderful service to society, and this is as true of domestic work as it is of the work of a professor or judge. The only work that is not a service is that of a person who works for his own self-interest.”^[3] —

Our spirit of service is an expression of fraternal love, and it “can only be gratuitous; it can never be a means of repaying others for what they have done or will do for us.”^[4] — Professional service deserves fair compensation, of course, but when the spirit of service is born of love for the other person, it goes beyond the logic of giving and receiving. It enters a new, freer dimension. Parents care for their children without expecting anything in return, selflessly. They do not do it as a duty or an obligation, but because they love the children. Saint Josemaría once said, “Where

there is love, I would dare to say that we do not even need to make resolutions. My mother never made a resolution to love me, and you can see how affectionately she cared for me.”^[5] Parents find deep joy in service; it is one of the characteristics of a loving heart that is not primarily concerned with the recipient’s response. They are rewarded by contemplating the beauty of the home they are building.

IN THE second reading, St. Paul thanks the Thessalonians for the way they received the Gospel message: *And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers (1 Thess 2:13).* Faith is not merely

theoretical knowledge but something *at work*; it is manifested in all our actions. For this reason, St. Josemaría called the first Christians “sowers of peace and joy:” their homes were like those of their contemporaries, but they lived “with a new spirit, which spread to all those who were in contact with them.”^[6] —

The Prelate of Opus Dei points out that “one manifestation of the spirit of service, which in some way includes all the others, is that of sowing peace and joy. Since we can give this peace and joy only if we have it ourselves, and both are a gift from God, the best way to grow in it is to take refined care of our times of intimacy with God: the sacraments and personal prayer.”^[7] — Joy does not depend solely on favorable external circumstances but on our relationship with the Lord. “Like anyone else, a man or woman of faith experiences weariness and

sickness, hardship and anxiety, doubts and setbacks. But they always know they are very much loved by God. They rely on him, as his son or daughter, and, with his help, recover their joy if they have lost it.”^[8] —

The lives of the apostles and the early Christians were not without difficulties. The three days following the Lord's death would have dimmed the hope in their hearts, and the persecutions they faced while preaching the Gospel would have frightened and unnerved them. In those moments of darkness, we can imagine our Lady sowing peace and joy in each of their souls. She knew that her Son had conquered death and would be with us until the end of the world.

[1] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 24-IV-2005.

[2] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral letter, 16-II-2023, no. 9.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 109.

[4] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 228.

[5] St. Josemaría, notes from a family gathering, qtd. in S. Bernal, *Monseñor Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. Apuntes sobre la vida del Fundador del Opus Dei*; Rialp, Madrid 1980, 6^a ed., pg. 37.

[6] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 30.

[7] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral letter, 16-II-2023, no. 11.

[8] Bishop Javier Echevarría, “Sowing Peace and Joy,” *La Tercera*, 15-X-2008.

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