Meditations: 5 January

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during these days of the Christmas season.

- Like Jesus, giving our life for others
- Loving truly and with deeds
- “Come and see”: it is Jesus who attracts souls.

TOMORROW WE WILL CELEBRATE THE EPIPHANY. The Magi from the East make a long journey in search of the Child. When they find him in Bethlehem *they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their*

treasures, they offered him gifts (*Mt* 2:11). The Magi give Mary and Joseph gifts laden with meaning. Tradition has interpreted the gold as symbolising the newborn Child's kingship, the frankincense his divinity, and the myrrh his redemptive death: King, God and Saviour. This Child, the incarnation of the Creator, comes to die for us.

Right from the cradle, the Cross is already visible. In a certain sense, this relationship can be glimpsed by comparing some of Saint Luke's words at the beginning and end of his Gospel. At Jesus' birth, he says: *And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn* (*Lk* 2:7). And at the moment of Jesus' death, he writes: *He took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been*

laid (*Lk* 23:53). The body of Jesus is wrapped carefully and placed both in the manger and in the tomb. The same mystery is also expressed in a different way in the first letter of John, which we are reading these days at Mass: *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us* (*1 Jn* 3:16). This affirmation has the force of a direct witness. John was at Golgotha. He saw how the Master embraced the Cross; he felt Christ's love at first hand until his last breath. John knows that Christ's love is not just words.

We ought to lay down our lives for the brothers (*1 Jn* 3:16), he then adds. These words from today's liturgy point the way that Jesus' disciples are to follow. Saint Josemaría confided to us: "How insistent the Apostle Saint John was in preaching the *mandatum novum*, the new commandment that we should love one another! I would fall on my knees, without putting on

an act – it is what my heart dictates – and ask you, for the love of God, to love one another, to help one another, to lend one another a hand, to know how to forgive one another. And so, reject all pride, be compassionate, show charity; help each other with prayer and sincere friendship."[1]

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth (*1 Jn* 3:18-19). "Love admits of no excuses. Whenever we set out to love as Jesus loved, we have to take the Lord as our example … The Son of God's way of loving is well-known, and John spells it out clearly. It stands on two pillars: God loved us first (cf. *1 Jn* 4:10.19), and he loved us by giving completely of himself, even to laying down his life (cf. *1 Jn* 3:16). Such love cannot go unanswered. Even though offered unconditionally, asking nothing in return, it so sets

hearts on fire that all who experience it are led to love back, despite their limitations and sins."[2]

Moved by the power of Jesus' love, the first disciples immediately set out to tell their friends and family about the encounter they have had. Thus we see Andrew who, after spending a day at the Jordan in his company, led his brother Simon to Christ (cf. *Jn* 1:42). Today's Gospel tells us of Philip's encounter with Jesus and his interaction soon afterwards with his friend Nathanael. Philip *said to him, We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph* (*Jn* 1:45). Faced with Nathanael's indifference, who considered Nazareth an insignificant village not even mentioned in the Scriptures, *Philip said to him: Come and see* (*Jn* 1:51).

Bringing people to a personal encounter with Jesus is perhaps the greatest manifestation of love for Him. Philip could not contain himself after having heard the Master's call: *Follow me* (*Jn* 1:43). The fire in his heart leads him to speak, to encourage, to share the joy that fills him. He needs to tell Nathanael that – without knowing very well how or why – he has unexpectedly received the greatest of gifts.

SAINT JOSEMARÍA LIKED TO REMIND US that God does things "sooner, more and better" than we can imagine. His infinite goodness surpasses our expectations and dreams. Our Lord's disciples start from this assurance when it comes to giving witness to our faith. We aren't carrying out our own work: the souls are His, we simply work in his vineyard. Philip speaks to his friend because he is convinced that Jesus does not disappoint anyone. And this

is also our certainty. We know very well that it is Jesus who attracts souls; it is the experience of living close to the Lord that transforms one's life. Just as happened to us, we trust that the people we love will also be won over by Him. This is the hope that spurs us on in our apostolate.

The disciples "from that day on became 'witnesses' so gripped by love (cf. *Phil* 3:12) for their Master and by the attractive beauty of his message that they were ready to face even death, in order not to betray their commitment to Him … Christ not only continues to invite some to the total gift of self with a personal and secret word, which awakens deep echoes in the heart. He also goes out to meet all men and women, each one of you, to ask them personally the question he addressed to the young blind man: *Do you believe in the Son of Man?* (*Jn* 9:35). To those who answer in the

affirmative, He gives the commission to become a witness to the world of their choice."[3]

With his example in Bethlehem, the Child God opens our eyes with a lesson of complete self-giving to others: making Himself so small in order to attract all men and women. Mary is a witness to this divine love; she even holds Him in her hands.

[1] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, 454.

[2] Pope Francis, Message for the First World Day of the Poor, 19 November 2017.

[3] Saint Paul VI, Address to the students of Rome, 25 February 1978.

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