

Meditations: Friday of the Thirty-Third Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-third week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: purifying the temple for prayer; the Church is the temple for the world; with Christ, we are living stones of the Church.

- Purifying the temple for prayer
- The Church is the temple for the world
- With Christ, we are living stones of the Church

WHEN HE stayed in Jerusalem, Jesus taught in the Temple every day. It was the place of encounter with God through prayer and sacrifices; it was a symbol of the Lord's protection, his presence, and his constant readiness to listen to his people and help those who brought their needs to Him. God wanted to dwell among men so that men could find God.

Jesus would go there, accompanied by the apostles, with the joy of the Son going to pray in his Father's house. But the atmosphere there was not always conducive to prayer. The sacrifices prescribed by the Law had led to dynamics which made the Temple — especially its large courtyard — seem more like a place of business. It is not difficult to imagine the shouts and the movement of people and animals.

During one of those visits, Jesus decided to *drive out those who sold, saying to them, ‘It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer’’* (Lk 19:45). The scene must have been striking for those who witnessed it. Envisioning it now, we can recall that we too “are temples of the Holy Spirit: I am a temple; the Spirit of God is in me [...]. We too must purify ourselves continually because we are sinners. We purify ourselves through prayer, penance, the sacrament of reconciliation, and the Eucharist.”^[1]

THE TEMPLE where God dwells is not only a building constructed by human hands. Ultimately, the temple is the Body of Christ, which is the Church. The Church is the place of God’s presence. “It is this that was prefigured in the ancient Temple and brought about in the Church by the

power of the Holy Spirit: the Church is ‘God’s house,’ [...]. Let us ask ourselves: where can we meet God? Where can we enter into communion with him through Christ? Where can we find the light of the Holy Spirit to light up our life? The answer is: in the People of God, among us who are the Church.”^[2] —

Certainly, humans can “darken the bright countenance of the Church,”^[3] — because, although it is a people sanctified by Christ, it is made up of fragile creatures. Saint Josemaría pointed out that “this apparent contradiction marks an aspect of the mystery of the Church. The Church, which is divine, is also human, for it is made up of men, and men have their defects [...]. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who founded the holy Church, expects the members of this people to strive continually to acquire sanctity. [...] And in the spouse of Christ, at one and the same time,

both the marvel of the way of salvation and the miseries of those who take up that way are visible.”^[4]
In the life of each Christian, the Church is a temple for the whole world. That is why, with God’s help, we want to show God’s presence within ourselves as transparently as possible.

THE CHURCH of Christ is built with *living stones* (1 Pt 2:5), of which the first, *a stone rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious* (1 Pt 2:4), is Jesus. At the same time, each baptized person is a living stone *to be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 2:5). Lengthy rituals or animal sacrifices are no longer required. The offering God expects is first of all the daily

surrender of our lives, united to that of Christ: these are the “holy and unblemished sacrifices”^[5] — God wants, the host pleasing to Him.

God wants the temple of our heart to be, as St. Ambrose said, “not a house of merchants but of holiness.”^[6] — With the cleansing of the Temple, Jesus invites us to purify our intentions so that our search for God is as authentic as possible. To make our heart a house of prayer, we need to withdraw from noise and commotion, and find moments of inner silence in which we can contemplate Jesus. Great things happen in the silence, albeit imperceptibly; great changes in our lives and surroundings.

This is expressed in a hymn from today's Liturgy of the Hours: “Every place a Christian goes / is not lonely, but filled with love, / for he carries the whole Church / within his heart. /

And he always says ‘we,’ / even if he says ‘I.’” Mary is at the center of the “we” of the Church; she is the temple of the Holy Spirit and the Mother of the Church. She intercedes for us so that our lives may be increasingly holy and happier every day, so we may be better living stones of the Temple that is her Son.

[1] Pope Francis, Homily, 22-XI-2013.

[2] Pope Francis, Audience, 26-VI-2013.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *Loyalty to the Church*, no. 2.

[4] Ibid, no. 23.

[5] Roman Canon, Eucharistic Prayer I.

[6] St. Ambrose, commentary on this passage in *Catena Aurea*.

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