

Meditations: Monday of the Second Week of Advent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this time of Advent.

- Faith and hope in God's saving power
- Joy and trust
- Overcoming difficulties in spreading this truth to many others

THE GOSPEL of Saint Luke shows us Jesus in Capernaum, probably in Peter's house. A good number of

people have gathered there to listen to the Master's preaching, including some *Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem* (Lk 5:17). The doctor evangelist adds a striking remark: *and the power of the Lord was with him to heal* (Lk 5:17). Saint Luke is setting the scene to describe an extraordinary event. And the liturgy, by providing us with this passage for the second week of Advent, invites us to trust more fully in the omnipotent power of our Father God to heal us.

Many people were present in the house. and some men *were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they sought to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus* (Lk 5:18-19). Their bold and decisive

action shows their love for their friend. We can also see the patient's own docility and strong faith in the healing power of the Master. He let them lower him down through the roof, which surely involved great risk. But he was confident that the miracles Jesus had performed in other places could be repeated for him.

Perhaps some of those present thought that our Lord would be bothered by that interruption. But when the sick man was placed on the ground before Him, the Master was amazed by their faith. The gospel narrates that *when he saw their faith he said: “Man, your sins are forgiven you” (Lk 5:20)*. Our Lord shows that his first concern is spiritual healing. “The paralyzed man is the image of every human being whom sin prevents from moving about freely, from walking on the path of good and from giving the best of himself.

Indeed, by taking root in the soul, evil binds the person with the ties of falsehood, anger, envy and other sins and gradually paralyzes him. Jesus, therefore, scandalizing the scribes who were present, first said: ‘your sins are forgiven’.”^[1]

THE MERCY of our Lord is the ultimate reason for our joy and our trust in Him. “Are you worried that your sins are so many that our Lord will not listen to you? It is not so, because Jesus has a heart filled with mercy . . . See, too, what Saint Matthew tells us when Jesus had a paralysed man brought before him. The sick man doesn’t say a word. He is simply there, in the presence of God. And Christ, moved by the man’s contrition, by the sorrow of one who knows he deserves nothing, responds immediately, as merciful as ever,

‘Take courage, your sins are forgiven’.”^[2] —

And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question: “Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?” (Lk 5:21). With a little humility, they could have reasoned like the disciples: if this man can forgive sins, it is because God is with him. But in their eagerness to hold on to their power, in their inability to allow themselves to be surprised by divine plans, their only concern is to hinder the Master’s work. When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – he said to the man who was paralyzed – “I say to you, rise, take up your bed and go home” (Lk 5:22-24).

Jesus makes it clear that the Messiah's most important work is to forgive sins. And to show his authority to do so, he also restores the man's physical health. But the most valuable thing, and this was the patient's own experience, was that his inner joy was restored through the grace of forgiveness he received. Thus the words of the prophet in the first reading today were fulfilled in him: *Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.” Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert* (Is 35:3-6).

Advent is a time of joy because the Church invites us to strengthen our souls with God's strength. "How marvelous is the love of our Lord Jesus Christ: his divine intensity and capacity to lavish it on his brothers and sisters! We would never be able to take on our own shoulders all the evil that men have committed throughout history . . . But Christ responds to so much evil, which exhausts Him in soul and body in an indescribable suffering, with such an immense love that it erases that torrent of wretchedness: 'Man, your sins are forgiven' (*Lk 5:20*)."^[3]

"THE MESSAGE is clear: human beings, paralyzed by sin, need God's mercy which Christ came to give to them so that, their hearts healed, their whole life might flourish anew. But the Word of God invites us to

have a strong faith and to trust, like the people carrying the paralytic, that Jesus alone is capable of true healing.”^[4]

That newly healed man reacted in a natural way: *And immediately he rose before them, and took up that on which he lay, and went home, glorifying God (Lk 5:25)*. Whoever has experienced divine mercy, the forgiveness of sins, the healing of an illness, wants to share their joy, to communicate the reason for their happiness to those they love most. The newly healed man was not frightened by the difficulties of the environment, nor by the criticism of the scribes and the Pharisees. Rather he returned home to give testimony to what God had done for him. “If we do not wish to waste our time in useless activities, or in making excuses about the difficulties in our environment – for there have always been difficulties ever since

Christianity began – we must remember that Christ has decreed that success in attracting our fellow men will depend, as a rule, on how much interior life we ourselves have.”^[5]

At other times, the obstacles can come from within when our own wretchedness rises up and make us see what our Lord is asking of us as impossible. For those moments of temptation, Saint Josemaría’s invitation to grow in our life of faith can help us: “miracles like Christ did, like the first apostles did. Maybe you yourself, and I, have benefited from such wonders. Perhaps we were blind, or deaf, or paralysed; perhaps we had the stench of death, and the word of our Lord has lifted us up from our abject state. If we love Christ, if we follow him sincerely, if we stop seeking ourselves and seek him alone, then in his name we will be able to give to others, freely, what

we have freely received.”^[6] Our Lady intercedes for us before her Son so that this may become a reality in our own life.

^[1] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 19 February 2006.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 253.

^[3] Javier Echevarría, *Getsemani*, Planeta, Barcelona 2005, VII, 12.

^[4] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 19 February 2006.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 5.

^[6] *Ibid.*, no. 262.

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