

Meditations: Monday of the Third Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the third week of ordinary time. The topics are: sin against the Holy Spirit; struggling is a way of responding to love; holiness is in always beginning again.

- Sin against the Holy Spirit
- Struggling is a way of responding to love
- Holiness is in always beginning again

TRULY I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin (Mk 3:28–29). Jesus' words here are striking, and they cannot fail to make an impression on us. Some scribes had accused Him of acting by the power of Satan. In response, after pointing out the absurdity of this accusation, the Lord pronounced these "shocking and disturbing" words, referring to the "unforgivable" nature of the sin against the Holy Spirit.^[1]

For Saint Thomas Aquinas, the sin against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven because it "excludes the elements through which the forgiveness of sin takes place."^[2] It is not God who refuses to forgive, but man who turns his back on God's merciful power. This sin consists in "the refusal to accept the salvation

which God offers to man through the Holy Spirit, working through the power of the Cross."^[3] God, who is a good Father, never tires of offering his salvation. The Holy Spirit continuously works to purify our understanding of our faults, leading us to repentance and distributing the fruits of Redemption. But man can close himself off to this offer, refuse conversion, harden his conscience, and insist on a supposed right to persist in evil. This is what Scripture calls *hardness of heart* (cf. *Ps 81:13; Jer 7:24; Mk 3:5*).

We can ask our Lord for a heart sensitive to good and evil, fully aware that sin is present in our lives. If we are docile to the Holy Spirit's grace, He will help us recognize our need for God's forgiveness, marvel at his power, and inspire in us ongoing conversion.

"YOU WILL face opposition to your hunger for holiness, my child. First, from laziness, the front on which the battle begins; then rebellion, the unwillingness to carry the gentle yoke of Christ; a mad yearning, not for holy freedom, but for licentiousness; sensuality; and, at every moment (and more subtly as years go by) pride. Then come a host of other disordered inclinations, for our weaknesses never come alone. Let us not deceive ourselves: we will always have weaknesses. When we are old, too, we'll face the same bad inclinations as when we were twenty. Therefore, the ascetical struggle will always be necessary, and we will need to ask the Lord for humility. It is a constant battle."^[4]

We will always have some inclination to evil as a result of sin. Its form and prominence may shift over time, but it will always test our spiritual health. For this reason,

vigilance is necessary. We need to cultivate a spirit of examination and embrace the willingness to fight valiantly to be good children of our Father God. "This is our purpose on earth: to struggle for love until our last breath,"^[5] St. Josemaría said on the first day of the year in 1972, sharing his aspiration for his interior life that year. Our mission on earth is to struggle, and we want to do so until the end, when we go to our rest and receive our reward in Heaven — but we always want our struggle to be born of love. "Fighting is a synonym for Love."^[6] When we see it as a response to God's fatherly love, our struggle brings peace; we fight optimistically, trustingly, and serenely, without tension or sadness. For children of God, struggle is a free response to the God who loves us infinitely.

THE SIN against the Holy Spirit is radically closing our soul to God's saving action, while holiness is "permanent openness to God, striving to make the gift He offers us grow, for our good and others".^[7] When we see holiness as a "loving relationship with God that becomes Life, yet is always growing, always under threat, always starting anew,"^[8] we know that we can pursue it in our daily lives (work, family, friendship, etc.).

God's mercy is the sunlight under which our holiness grows. When we strive for perfection, we understand it as a desire to live more fully in God's love, not an effort to do everything flawlessly or not to have defects. "Mercy is the garment of light which the Lord has given to us in Baptism. We must not allow this light to be extinguished; on the contrary, it must grow within us

every day and thus bring to the world God's glad tidings."^[9] —

Our Mother guides us on this path. She is "the saint among the saints, blessed above all others. She teaches us the way of holiness and she walks ever at our side. She does not let us remain fallen and at times she takes us into her arms without judging us. Our converse with her consoles, frees and sanctifies us. Mary our Mother does not need a flood of words. She does not need us to tell her what is happening in our lives. All we need do is whisper, time and time again: 'Hail Mary...'"^[10] —

^[1] St. John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, n. 46.

^[2] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q.14, a. 3.

^[3] St. John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, n. 46.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *Collected Letters*, Letter no. 2, no. 10.

^[5] St. Josemaría, Notes from his preaching, 1-I-1972.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 158.

^[7] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, *Christians in 21st Century Society*.

^[8] Ibid.

^[9] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 15-IV-2007.

^[10] Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 176.

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(02/01/2026)