

Meditations: Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this Lenten season.

- “No man ever spoke like this man”
- Harden not your heart
- Jesus’ words

IT IS THE THIRD year of our Lord’s public life. These days are marked by controversies with the Pharisees and other leaders of the people. Jesus is in Jerusalem, during the celebration

of the feast of Tabernacles. The city streets are filled with booths made of branches, to remember Israel's passage through the desert after being freed from Egypt. In this festival, thanks is given to God for the harvest of crops and grapes, since it was celebrated in either September or October, at the end of the agricultural season. God's blessing is asked for the future, with an eye towards the promised Messiah.

In this festive atmosphere, with the large influx of pilgrims, the high priests and doctors of the Law fear that Jesus could be proclaimed Messiah, so they send some Temple guards to arrest Him. They probably weren't many, since they didn't see themselves in a position to exert force without provoking a riot. They may have arrived at the place where our Lord was speaking to the disciples, and stayed to one side, waiting until He finished. That way

they could detain Him discreetly, without upsetting the crowd. While waiting, they listened to Him speaking, and Jesus' words reached their hearts. Something stirred in their souls and they abandoned the initial purpose that had led them there. They report back to the high priests and Pharisees, who ask indignantly: *Why did you not bring him? (Jn 7:45)*. And the guards reply in their defense: *No man ever spoke like this man! (Jn 7:46)*

The contrast between these two groups of people is striking. The high priests and doctors of the Law perhaps have a hardened heart. They don't want to listen to Jesus, since their heart is wrapped in a crust of prejudice. When they seek a dialogue with the Teacher, it is not sincere, and they only want to twist his words. But the Temple guards are simple and honest people; their interior dispositions allow them to

listen to Christ without barriers. And in that personal encounter they are won over. These secondary characters from the Gospel remind us of the need to listen to the Word of God with a simple heart, so that, when we accept it, it truly becomes the light that guides our lives.

O THAT TODAY you would harken to his voice! Harden not your hearts (Ps 95:7-8). During Lent, the Church repeats to us tirelessly these words from the psalm. She thus seeks to remind us that our heart can tend to become hardened, even when we have spent some time, perhaps many years, wanting and trying to live as Christians. The high priests and Pharisees could not see anything positive in Jesus, who is Truth, Light and Goodness. Their darkened eyes

were only able to focus on apparently negative things.

Faced with what happens around us, we can always choose between a judgmental look or a contemplative look. Somehow, this choice conditions our way of perceiving reality. Through prayer, we can unite ourselves with God's way of looking. He "does not condemn, but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives us."^[1] Only He knows what lies deep in each person's heart.

We know very well that those who realize they are children of a God who is their Father and who has overcome evil, do not hate anyone or look at the world with pessimistic eyes. Faith and charity impel us, rather, to focus first of all on what is good, to admire the beauty around us; to cultivate, as Saint Josemaría said, "a positive and open attitude towards current changes in society

and in ways of living.”^[2] Christianity is newness, light, salvation, love for each person. “With the eyes of faith, we can see the light which the Holy Spirit always radiates in the midst of darkness, never forgetting that *where sin increased, grace has abounded all the more* (Rom 5:20). Our faith is challenged to discern how wine can come from water and how wheat can grow in the midst of weeds.”^[3]

THE TEMPLE GUARDS were able to appreciate Jesus’ words. They realized they weren’t listening to just any rabbi; there was something greater here, something radically different. The Gospel stresses that *he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes* (Mk 1:22). Jesus’ words were endorsed by the signs He did and the example of his own life. There has never been a

man more closely identified with his message, since the message was his very Person. Jesus is the love of God incarnate, reconciliation with the Father, who reveals the meaning of each person's life.^[4]

Jesus revealed the truth with authority and in depth. But He managed to do so in a simple way, with a language linked to the daily life of those listening to Him. Each one could welcome that announcement according to their dispositions. But Jesus' words reached the hearts of his listeners. Moreover, women and men with a well-disposed heart could perceive another characteristic in Christ's words: his benevolence. They realized that He was speaking to them from the heart, and wasn't interested in looking good or receiving applause. Rather He was moved only by the desire to help, to comfort, to save. In his words they

discovered God's love for each person.

Also today "Jesus does not deny anyone his word, and it is a word that heals, consoles, and enlightens."^[5] By reading and meditating on the Gospel we can personally encounter Christ, so that He may truly become the light of our lives. Like the Temple guards, we can exclaim: *No man ever spoke like this man* (*Jn 7:46*). Mary, who welcomed the Word of God within herself, can help us on this path.

^[1] Francis, *Patris corde*, no. 2.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 428.

^[3] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 84.

^[4] Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *Letters* 37, no. 10.

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