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Meditations: Sunday of the Twentieth Week of Ordinary Time (Year C)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 20th week of Ordinary Time.

- A peace that complicates
- A fire that beautifies
- The vertigo of fire

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SACRED SCRIPTURE presents Jesus of Nazareth as a sower of peace. The

covenant established by God in the Old Testament is a pact of peace (cf. *Is* 54:10), and the Messiah that Israel awaits is the “Prince of Peace” (*Is* 9:5). Our Lord desires peace for everyone who comes into contact with Him (cf. *Mk* 5:34) and expects his disciples to also be builders of peace (cf. *Mk* 9:50). This longing, however, can seem to contrast with the words of our Lord recorded in this Sunday’s Gospel: “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (*Lk* 12:51-53). How is it possible that the Prince of Peace

presents himself as a cause of division?

Jesus himself says that the peace He leaves behind is not what the world understands (cf. *Jn* 14:27). Sometimes we can conceive of peace as a mere absence of problems, as a kind of tranquility that isolates us from everything that might disturb our own comfort. This approach, however, can hardly lead to a full life: “Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others.”^[1] —

The peace that our Lord offers is the result of discovering who He is, and this implies “complicating” our lives, venturing into perhaps unknown terrain, but with the certainty that it is God himself who is walking with

us. This is the peace that Christ gives us: the certainty that He is always with us, no matter what happens. “I have noticed at times how an athlete's eyes light up at the sight of the obstacles he has to overcome. What a victory there is in store! See how he conquers the difficulties! God our Lord looks at us that way. He loves our struggle: we will win through always, because he will never deny us his all-powerful grace. Thus, it doesn't matter if we have to fight, because he does not abandon us.”^[2]

“I CAME to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled” (*Lk 12:49*). While it is true that the image of an uncontrolled fire could evoke in us images of destruction, fire can also be a force of purification, of transformation,

and even of beautification; the achievements of goldsmiths, craftsmen, culinary and medical workers owe much to the power of fire. It is not surprising that Jesus uses this image to speak of the renewal He wishes to bring about in our lives and in the world. A renewal that consists precisely in taking his side, in recognizing Him as Lord and allowing Him to grow within us, with the help of the Holy Spirit. For He “has shown us a model of human holiness that we can all imitate, together with the promise of an eternal destiny that transcends all our limits and abilities.”^[3]

It is good to foster our eagerness for this fire to be enkindled and grow within us, imploring with the psalmist: “You are my help and my deliverance, O God; do not delay” (*Ps* 40:18). It is in our prayer that this fire is set ablaze in us; in persevering and trusting prayer, our Lord

gradually conforms us to Himself. Saint Josemaría said: “Et in meditatione mea exardescit ignis. And in my meditation a fire shall flame out.’ That is why you go to pray: to become a bonfire, a living flame giving heat and light. So, when you are not able to go on, when you feel that your fire is dying out, if you cannot throw on sweet-smelling logs, throw on the branches and twigs of short vocal prayers and ejaculations, to keep the bonfire burning. And you will have made good use of your time.”^[4] Perhaps we would like that fire to take root within us impetuously, and we may become discouraged when it seems that the fire we hoped for doesn’t appear in our prayer. But a small flame can be more useful than a large fire. Sometimes it is the small, discreet flame, seemingly weak and flickering, that can cauterize our wounds and heal our heart.

LETTING that fire change us and transform the world we live in isn't always peaceful. Fire purifies, but it also burns: for life to flourish, the sediments of death need to be cauterized and burnt out. It is only natural that we may experience a certain vertigo or fear, and that others may sometimes perceive that fire as a threat. Testimony to this is offered to us by the first reading of the Mass, which narrates Jeremiah's imprisonment: "Let this man be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm" (*Jer* 38:4). Jeremiah is simply trying to communicate God's message, conveying to each person and to all the people what will work for their true good, for authentic life.

Yet the prophet is accused of seeking the opposite, of wishing evil upon the people. It can often be hard to realize that the fire of the Holy Spirit is a fire of life and purification, and not of death and destruction.

The history of salvation is marked by so many lives of God's daughters and sons who, like Jeremiah, were aware of their limitations but faithfully preserved the treasure of faith and made it available to many others.

The saints demonstrate God's commitment to beautify, heal, and elevate the lives of his children, and to renew the face of the earth:

“Wherever the Spirit of God enters he puts fear to flight; he makes us know and feel that we are in the hands of an Omnipotence of love: something happens, his infinite love does not abandon us. It is demonstrated by the witness of martyrs, by the courage of confessors of the faith, by the undaunted zeal of

missionaries, by the frankness of preachers, by the example of all the saints, even some who were adolescents and children. It is demonstrated by the very existence of the Church which, despite the limitations and sins of men and women, continues to cross the ocean of history, impelled by the breath of God and enlivened by his purifying fire.”^[5] — The Virgin Mary, who also received the fire of the Holy Spirit, can help us to have a heart that is enkindled and that spreads the peace of her Son around us.

^[1] — Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate, *Aparecida Document* (29 June 2007), 360; cited by Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 10.

^[2] — St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 182.

^[3] — Leo XIV, Homily, 9 May 2025.

[4] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 92.

[5] Benedict XVI, Homily, 31 May 2009.

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