

Meditations: Thursday of the Seventh Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the seventh week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: called to be a living Gospel; being consistent witnesses of our faith; sin cannot fill our hearts.

- Called to be a living Gospel
- Being consistent witnesses of our faith
- Sin cannot fill our hearts

WHOEVER GIVES you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward (Mk 9:41). A cup of water may not seem like much, although it can be significant after walking under the scorching sun of Judea. But what matters to Jesus is not so much the material value of the gesture as its meaning: offering a cup of water to one of His disciples is a sign of openness, of welcome. As He traveled the roads of Palestine to proclaim the Kingdom of God, Jesus must have appreciated the hospitality and affection He received from his friends, both in Bethany (at Martha, Mary, and Lazarus' home) and in other places. Perhaps we would like to have been one of those characters in the Gospel: Jesus' friends, people who had the privilege of receiving Him in their homes, offering Him simple things but giving them with real affection. Many of them opened the doors of their

homes to Him, but above all, they opened the doors of their hearts.

Jesus continues to knock on our door. He becomes close to us in the sacraments, in the Holy Scriptures, in the people in need around us...

Without a doubt, we also see good examples of people who, like the disciples or those who welcomed the disciples, lead us to Christ. Perhaps we find them in our family, among our friends, teachers, catechists...

There are people in our lives who made a difference to us because they were men or women of God. That is what all of Jesus' disciples are called to be: people who belong to Christ and, therefore, can be received in his name. "All of us, the baptized, are missionary disciples, and we are called to be a living Gospel in the world."^[1]

AFTER EMPHASIZING the incredible value of bearing his name and presence to others, Jesus warns his disciples about the terrible gravity of doing the opposite: *Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea* (Mk 9:42). If a person professes to be a Christian but does not think, feel, and act like someone on the path to God, they fall into inconsistency and hinder others from approaching Christ. They distort his most lovable face and build walls instead of the bridges that lead to salvation. The Second Vatican Council states clearly that on occasion, Christians "conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion."^[2]

Inconsistency is damaging. We have all met people who have distanced themselves from the Church because they saw some Christians living

double lives, because they felt they were treated harshly or excessively rigidly, or because they were victims of injustice in personal, work, or social matters. It is true that, due to sin, we are all weak to some extent and tend to behave in a contradictory way. Therefore, "prayer is necessary to live with Christian consistency, because it is a gift from God. (...) 'Lord, let me be coherent,' we can pray. Lord, may I never be a stumbling block. May I be a person who thinks like a Christian, feels like a Christian, and acts like a Christian."^[3] Because, just as inconsistency does great harm, Christian consistency does great good. Christian witness silently stirs hearts. It sows a holy restlessness in others, and the Holy Spirit begins his work from that restlessness.

IF YOUR hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched' (Mk 9:43, 45, 47-48). After warning his hearer about the seriousness of inconsistent lives that leads others away from salvation, Jesus uses stark imagery to encourage us to look at our present life with eyes fixed on eternity. The prerequisite for putting those words into practice, the assumption Jesus makes when He speaks them, is that we ardently desire to be happy with God: we long

to *enter into life* or *enter into the Kingdom.*

God wants us to remove sin from our lives, which includes avoiding any near occasion of offending God because He knows that sin cannot fill our hearts. If we understand that "there is nothing better in the world than to be in the grace of God,"^[4] we will want to take the necessary steps to keep away from anything that might distance us from the Lord, with humility and strength. St. Josemaría encouraged us never to be discouraged upon discovering the inclination to evil within us. "Don't be ashamed," he said, "because the all-powerful and merciful Lord has given us all the means we need for overcoming this inclination: the Sacraments, a life of piety and sanctified work. Persevere in using these means, ever ready to begin again and again without getting discouraged."^[5]

Mary helps us on the path to true happiness. "In the Salve Regina, we call her 'our life,' which may seem excessive because Christ is life. But Mary is so united to Him and so close to us that there is nothing better than entrusting our life to her and acknowledging her as 'our life, sweetness, and hope.'"^[6]

^[1] Pope Francis, Angelus, 9 February 2014.

^[2] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 19.

^[3] Pope Francis, Homily, 27 February 2014.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 286.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 119.

^[6] Pope Francis, Homily, 1 January 2019.

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