

Meditations: Tuesday of the Nineteenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer in the 19th week of Ordinary Time.

- Being children who need others
- Learning how to “play”
- The poor show God to us

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SAINT Matthew's gospel contains five great discourses by Jesus. One of

them begins with a question put to him by his disciples: “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” (*Mt 18:1*). Our Lord answers with a living example: “And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’” (*Mt 18:2-3*). Seeing some who perhaps were trying to earn merits in order to have a privileged position next to Him, Christ dismantles all human logic. It is not our achievements that assure us a place of honor in the Kingdom, but the struggle to become like children and to humbly accept our limitations. Children abandon themselves, trusting that adults will fix the problems that arise, with no concern for their own reputation. Little children understand that their true wealth is what they receive from God and from others.

If we observe how children behave, we can see that first of all they seek the attention of their elders. “They have to be at the center. Why? Because they are proud? No! Because they need to feel protected. It is important that we too place Jesus at the center of our life.”^[1] Small children know they cannot do anything on their own. As they grow up, they gain greater independence; and when they reach adolescence, many go to the opposite extreme: they think they are self-sufficient and don’t need anyone’s help. The next step to maturity involves recognizing that those around us have much to offer us: for without them we wouldn’t be the same person.

Something similar can happen in our interior life. We learn to turn to God thanks to our parents, a catechist or a priest. Perhaps we think that a time will come when we won’t need the help others offer us. St. Josemaría

said that the great mistakes that men commit “can always be traced back to the pride of thinking oneself to be grown up and self-sufficient. In such cases, people seem almost incapable of asking for help from those who can give it: not only from God, but also from a friend, or from a priest. And the poor soul, alone in its misfortune, sinks into confusion.”^[2]

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Therefore the founder of Opus Dei recommended fostering the desire to become like little children so that one’s own life may become great: “Be very childlike! The more childlike, the better. I speak from my experience as a priest, who has had to pick himself up many times in these past thirty-six years (how long and yet how short they now seem to me!) which have been spent striving to fulfil a very precise requirement of God’s Will. There’s one thing that has helped me always, the fact that I am still a child, and I am always climbing onto my Mother’s lap and

finding refuge in the Heart of Christ,
my Lord.”^[3] —

IF WE look closely at children, we can discover another aspect of their way of seeing life: they love to play. And often they are not content with having a good time with their friends, but want their parents to take part in their game. For an adult, this means setting aside their own way of seeing the world and *becoming a child again*. “Playing with children means abandoning our logic in order to enter theirs. If we want to have fun it is necessary to understand what they like, and not to be selfish and make them do the things that we like.”^[4] — In a certain sense, it implies putting aside personal concerns – probably much more urgent than that game – and thinking about what the child

expects at that moment from their father or mother. We can also develop this attitude with the people around us. When we try to serve someone in a small need or show them affection, we are doing something similar: we identify what the other person may need and we try to satisfy it.

Sometimes it may not be easy to find time to “play,” that is, to show others these small signs of affection. But St. Josemaría saw these signs of appreciation as of decisive importance for one’s own happiness and that of others. That is why he encouraged his children: “I do not mind repeating it many times. Everyone needs affection, and we too need it in the Work. Strive so that, without sentimentality, your affection for your brothers may always increase. Any concern of a child of mine must be – truly! – very much our own. The day we live as

strangers or as indifferent to one another, we have killed Opus Dei.”^[5]
The effort to think about those around us, besides filling us with joy, helps us realize that God is the first one who “plays” with us. “Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me.”^[6]

TO A LARGE extent, we can get to know God in those who, from a purely material point of view, seem to have little to offer us: children, the sick, the elderly.... St. Josemaría liked these words of a friend of his, which he quoted in one of his own works: “the poor are my best spiritual book and the main motive of my prayers. It pains me to see them, and in each

one of them, Christ. And because it hurts, I realize I love him and love them.”^[7] From the beginning of his pastoral work, the founder of Opus Dei was clear about this hierarchy proclaimed by Jesus. “Children. The Sick. — As you write these words, don’t you feel tempted to use capitals? The reason is that in children and in the sick a soul in love sees Him.”^[8] These words were written soon after his experience in the early 1930s caring especially for the poor as chaplain of the St. Elizabeth Foundation in Madrid.

Caring for those who are weakest brings us closer to our Lord. First of all, because everything we do for them is as if we were doing it for God himself: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (*Mt* 25:40). In a certain sense, by doing so we are “divinized,” because we follow the same lifestyle as Jesus:

“the Son of man came not to be served but to serve” (*Mt 20:28*). And we become his “ambassadors,” because we bring others the comfort that God offers. Moreover, it gives us a heart like our Lord’s, who loves without expecting anything in return. It is true that perhaps materially these people can give us little in return. But in reality they give us the greatest thing possible: in their face we see God himself.

“Giving someone all your love is never an assurance that they will love you back,” said St. Teresa of Calcutta. “But don’t expect to be loved back; just expect love to grow in the other person’s heart. And if it doesn’t grow, be happy that it grew in yours. There are some things you would like to hear and that you will never hear from the person you would like to hear them from; but don’t be so deaf that you don’t hear them from the one who says them

from his heart.”^[9] On many occasions, the child, the sick person, or the elderly person we care for will not explicitly express their gratitude. Once again, they offer us another possibility to become like God, for He gives us his constant affection, even if we don’t realize it. The Virgin Mary will help us to have a mother’s heart, which is not afraid to give itself to the people we love.

^[1] Francis, Audience, 30 December 2015.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 147.

^[3] *Ibid.*

^[4] Francis, Audience, 30 December 2015.

^[5] St. Josemaría, AGP, library, P01, quoted in Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 16 February 2023, no. 9.

[6] Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, no. 18.

[7] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 827.

[8] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 419.

[9] Saint Teresa of Calcutta, *Poor among the poorest*, Pauline Editions, 2003, p. 31.

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