

Meditations: Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer in this third week of Advent.

- Humility and pride
- Love is shown in specific deeds
- Parable of the two sons

IN A FEW DAYS we will kneel before the Child in the stable at Bethlehem. We will look with amazement at the greatness of God's love in a newborn infant. The Incarnation teaches us the way to become "great," namely by

making ourselves "small." Saint Paul well expresses the humility of the Son who, being God, *emptied himself, taking the form of a servant and humbled himself and became obedient unto death* (Phil 2:7-8). This is the secret that our Savior teaches us every Christmas. The Word made flesh shows us that the Lord of the universe triumphs through humility. And because of this self-lowering, *God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow* (Phil 2:9-10).

In the first reading we see the prophet Zephaniah's forceful exhortation to conversion. He accuses Jerusalem of pride and rebellion because *she listens to no voice, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord, she does not draw near to her God* (Zeph 3:2). The people boasted in their

haughtiness and gloated on the holy mountain (cf. *Zeph* 3:11). This same temptation is still always present. “The proud person is always vainly striving to dethrone God, who is merciful to all his creatures, in order to put himself first.”^[1]

To give us his love as Father, God expects us to freely acknowledge that we are needy creatures. The request we make in the Prayer over the offerings in today’s Mass is very pleasing to Him: “Be pleased, O Lord, with our humble prayers and offerings, and since we have no merits to plead our cause, come, we pray, to our rescue with the protection of your mercy.”^[2] We need to beg our Lord frequently to remove from us the temptation of pride. Saint Josemaría warned: “If, with its multiple delusions, pride manages to get a hold, the unfortunate victim begins to build up a facade, to fill himself with emptiness, and becomes

conceited like the toad in the fable which, in order to show off, puffed itself up until it burst.”^[3] How different is the attitude of our God who, in coming down to earth, becomes a weak Child in need of constant help, incapable of imposing himself with violence on others, in order to make everyone’s path to his crib lovable.

MY SOUL makes its boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his Name together! (Ps 34:2-4). Humility “helps us to recognize, simultaneously, both our weakness and our greatness.”^[4] Saint Josemaría referred to humility as the “good divinization of the creature” who recognizes the great gift of God’s love. Its main enemy is the “bad divinization” that stems from pride:

glorying in oneself instead of glorying in God.

The heart that knows it is blessed with so many graces from heaven seeks to respond generously, since “love is repaid with love.”^[5] It is impossible to love “in general,” or to show true love only in good intentions. Love is shown in specific deeds that reveal the heart of the person who loves. A love that is not expressed in small signs of affection can weaken little by little or remain stunted, and fail to lead to true joy. “At the end of our life we will be examined for our love,” Saint John of the Cross said, since love authenticates the value of our deeds.

True love has two fundamental features: it seeks to give, more than to receive; and it is shown more in deeds than in words. “When we say that it is more about giving than receiving, it is because love is always

contagious, and is received by the loved one.”^[6] And “when we say that it is more in deeds than in words” it is because “love always gives life, and growth.”^[7] A good thermometer to know the strength of our love for God is to ask ourselves how we try to serve and make those closest to us happy. *For whoever does not love the brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen (1 Jn 4:20).* Love for God and love for neighbor are inseparable; they are like the two sides of the same coin. “There is no surer way to reach God than love for one’s neighbor,”^[8] Saint Augustine said, because “love for one’s neighbor is like the ‘incubator’ of God’s love”^[9]: it is the place where it grows.

IN TODAY’S GOSPEL, our Lord tells us the story of two sons (*Mt*

21:28-32). Their father asks them to go work in the family vineyard, but the brothers have very different reactions. The first responds with rebellion and a lack of respect: “No, I don’t want to.” The second, apparently more obedient, says that he will go. After the first outburst, the son who responds “no” reconsiders and repents, and goes to work in the vineyard. While the son who at first said “yes” fails to take up his task. The first son, Jesus concludes, falls out of weakness but, strengthened by his faith, gets up and obeys his father. In contrast, the second son is not faithful to his promise and represents the leaders of the people who honor God *with their lips, but their hearts are far from me* (Is 29:13; Mt 15:8).

Jesus in this parable is also speaking to our hearts. We can find some of the behavior of each of these two sons in our own life. Often our

dispositions are wonderful, but due to weakness we are unable to carry out our good wishes. And many times the opposite happens: after a first reaction of rebellion, we correct ourselves and, with the help of grace, we lovingly embrace God's will. Both attitudes are usually present in our inner struggle and we need to be able to distinguish them in order to know how to react at all times. We could also imagine the existence of a third son: the one who says "yes, I'm going" and with his works always ratifies his words. This son – faithful on all occasions – is in reality Jesus, who invites us to enter into his unfailing love for the Father.

In our prayer today we can tell God: how I would like to be a son like Jesus! A son who always answers "yes!" And when we fail to do so, we need to beg God to have patience with us. To give way to discouragement would be a sign of

pride; it would be a sign that we were putting our hope in ourselves and not in God. Knowing his own weakness, Saint Josemaría begged: “Lord, you have cured so many souls; help me to recognize you as the divine Physician, when I have you in my heart or contemplate your presence in the Tabernacle.”^[10] This humble request will give us peace and, holding tightly to the hand of our Mother, we will get back on our feet with renewed hope.

^[1] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 100.

^[2] Prayer over the offerings, Tuesday of the 3rd week of Advent.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 100.

^[4] *Ibid.*, no. 94.

^[5] Popular proverb.

[6] Francis, Homily, 27 June 2014.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Saint Augustine, *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, 1, 26, 48.

[9] Saint Augustine, *Ibid.*, 1, 26, 5.

[10] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 93.

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