

# **Meditations: Wednesday of the Second Week of Ordinary Time**

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 2nd week of Ordinary Time.

- The priority of the person
  - Jesus reveals what God is like
  - Sunday, the day of God and man
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FOLLOWING the law of Moses, Jesus went to the synagogue every Sabbath with his disciples. There, the people

of God gathered to hear and meditate on the law of the Lord. In today's Gospel, we see a man with a paralyzed hand who had come perhaps hoping to encounter our Lord. Jesus, on seeing him, is moved by his affliction and decides to work a miracle. We can imagine that the healing of this man should have been a cause of joy for everyone. But for some, it became a source of suspicion and argument.

The Pharisees spied on our Lord's movements and criticized Him for working miracles on the Sabbath. Jesus was well aware of the distorted hierarchy that reigned in their hearts. They preferred fulfilling a rule they themselves had established to relieving a person's suffering. Many of these rules, deprived of their original spirit, had become a heavy burden of formalities. The Sabbath was important to Christ, but so was this man's suffering. In Christ's heart,

both deeply human and deeply divine, love always prevails. We can look to Jesus and learn to foster a healthy hierarchy of values because, as we see in this scene, not everything has the same level of importance.

Before working the miracle, Jesus had posed this question to the Pharisees: “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” (*Mk 3:4*). The silence of their response saddened our Lord. “He looked at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand’” (*Mk 3:5*). And immediately his hand regained its movement. Jesus emphasizes that the value and good of each person is above any precept or custom. “The social order and its development must invariably work to the benefit of the human person, and not the other way around.”<sup>[1]</sup> The priority is

always each individual person. That is how Christ acted, and that is how we, his disciples, want to live.

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ALTHOUGH most ordinary activities could not be carried out on the Sabbath, Jesus took advantage of his visits to the synagogues to heal. Nothing could restrain his merciful heart. “Considered mystically,” Saint Bede said, “this man with the withered hand represents mankind, ineffective in doing good, but healed by God’s mercy.”<sup>[2]</sup> All of Jesus’ miracles are opportunities to manifest his mercy and enable us to experience his saving power. They are not limited to specific days or places. Every day is a good day to do good, to alleviate suffering, to give hope.

In this Gospel passage, we see a twofold slavery: that of the man with the paralyzed hand, enslaved by his illness; and that of the Pharisees, enslaved by their formal religiosity. Jesus “frees them both: he shows those who are rigid that this is not the path to freedom; and he frees the man with the paralyzed hand from his illness.”<sup>[3]</sup> God wants us to seek our security only in Him because only thus will we truly be free. Through his actions our Lord gradually reveals his identity; he refines the image of God that his contemporaries had formed and that we ourselves may also have formed. Jesus is the Messiah the people had been waiting for throughout so many centuries, and He comes to shorten the distance between God and humanity forever.

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IN THE NEW PEOPLE OF GOD, which is the Church, the Sabbath has given way to Sunday. From the beginning, Christians gave special significance to the day after the Sabbath. On it, they gathered to remember the Lord's resurrection, which many of them had been witnesses to.

Although during the first years they kept the Jewish customs, with the arrival of the first Gentiles they began to regard the first day of the week as *dies Domini*, the Lord's Day.

Sunday is Christ's day because we celebrate his resurrection. It is a day of joy and hope. "It is 'Easter' which returns week by week, celebrating Christ's victory over sin and death, the fulfilment in him of the first creation and the dawn of 'the new creation' (cf. 2 Cor 5:17)." <sup>[4]</sup> It is a day dedicated to God and, at the same time, it is also "man's day" <sup>[5]</sup> – a day on which we take the opportunity to rest by nurturing our family, cultural,

and social life. Christians sanctify Sunday “by devoting time and care to their families and relatives, often difficult to do on other days of the week.”<sup>[6]</sup> The Catechism of the Church also reminds us that Sunday is “traditionally consecrated by Christian piety to good works and humble services of the sick, the infirm, and the elderly,”<sup>[7]</sup> just as our Lord did in the synagogue.

The “precious pearl” at the heart of this day is the Eucharist.

“Participation in Sunday Mass must not be felt as an imposition or burden by Christians, but rather as a necessity and joy. Gathering together with our brothers and sisters to listen to the Word of God and to be nourished by Christ, sacrificed for us, is a beautiful experience that gives life meaning and imbues our hearts with peace. We Christians cannot live without Sunday.”<sup>[8]</sup> The Mother of Jesus, naturally, is especially present

on this day. “From Sunday to Sunday, the pilgrim people follow in Mary’s footsteps.”<sup>[9]</sup> We want to share in her joy at the resurrection of her Son.

<sup>[1]</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 26.

<sup>[2]</sup> Saint Bede the Venerable, *In Marcum*, 1, 3.

<sup>[3]</sup> Francis, Homily, 9 September 2013.

<sup>[4]</sup> Saint John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, no. 1.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 55-73.

<sup>[6]</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2186.

<sup>[7]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>[8]</sup> Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 12 June 2005.

<sup>[9]</sup> Saint John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, no. 86.

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