

Meditations: Sunday of the Fourth Week of Ordinary Time (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 4th week of Ordinary Time.

- God chooses the foolish of the world
- Unimaginable ways of the Lord
- Weakness is the Christian’s “merit”

WHEN undertaking a challenging project, the logical approach is usually to seek out the most qualified people. If, for example, one wants to start a business, to seek the help and advice of experts in that area. But Jesus, during his time on earth, doesn't seem to have acted in this way. "Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth," St. Paul writes to the Corinthians. "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (*1 Cor 1:26-27*).

We might have expected Jesus to call people known for their piety and their command of Sacred Scripture. But since his mission wasn't human, but divine, our Lord didn't give importance to what the world deemed important. He chose, first and foremost, people who didn't hold

high positions and who worked in the humble task of fishing. Among the twelve apostles, perhaps Saint Matthew was the one with the most human qualities in the eyes of the society of that time. But that isn't entirely true either, since his work as a tax collector made him, in the words of Saint Paul, "low and despised" for the other Jewish people (*1 Cor 1:28*).

"These were the disciples called by our Lord," Saint Josemaría said. "Such stuff is what Christ chose. And they remain just like that until they are filled with the Holy Spirit and thus become pillars of the Church. They are ordinary men, complete with defects and shortcomings, more eager to say than to do. Nevertheless, Jesus calls them to be fishers of men, co-redeemers, dispensers of God's grace."^[1] God doesn't work bound by human logic. To be an apostle, the essential thing is not having great

talents, but heeding Christ's invitation to follow Him. He will shine forth in our own lives, when we place our abilities, many or few, at his service.

THE DIVINE LOGIC Jesus followed in not focusing on human qualities is also reflected in the Sermon on the Mount. There He declares blessed those who, in the eyes of the people, were actually the most unfortunate: the poor, those who weep, who have suffered injustice, who are persecuted... (cf. *Mt 5:1-12*). The people present were surely greatly surprised, for until then they had thought exactly the opposite. Many believed – as is still the case today – that if life smiled upon them it was because God rewarded their good works; conversely, they considered misfortunes a consequence of bad

deeds. Therefore they were deeply disconcerted, since saying that the poor are blessed is almost like affirming that sinners will obtain God's greatest favor.

Jesus, who in selecting his disciples transcends human parameters in order to show that it is God who is acting, once again with this discourse reveals his divine logic. Happiness is found not in worldly goods, but in freely giving ourselves to God. Therefore a person can endure poverty or injustice and still be happy, for what is decisive is not external circumstances, but being close to Christ. The Beatitudes point us towards a path to happiness free from attachments, a path that doesn't depend on success, pleasure, money, or power. In the saints, we see people who, although they didn't always meet the standards of human success, were blessed on earth and freely shared their joy with others.

“In order to give himself to us, God often chooses unthinkable paths, perhaps the path of our limitations, of our tears, of our defeats.”^[2] It is precisely in these situations that our Lord reveals to us the power of his salvation. He is the one “who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, and gives food to the hungry” (*Ps 146:7*). But it isn’t always easy to accept adversity in this way. So we need to ask God to help us see that what the world considers a misfortune is actually a path leading us to happiness.

WHY does Jesus break so many molds? He did so during his time on earth, and continues to do so today with anyone who sincerely seeks to listen to Him. Among many other reasons, He wants to free us from our desire to have everything under

control. This tendency leads us to think that the mission of being an apostle and living a holy life depends solely on our greater or lesser capacity to plan well and carry out that plan energetically. And, although it is true that our Lord counts on our own effort and creativity, if we rely entirely on our own abilities, it is easy to become discouraged since we are not letting God work in our life. That is why Jesus urges us to overcome our self-sufficiency and acknowledge that we will always need his help.

“God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (*1 Cor 1:28-29*). And then, citing the Old Testament, the Apostle to the Gentiles concludes: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord” (*1 Cor 1:31*). This, ultimately, is the “merit” Christians

can boast of: acknowledging their weakness and limitations but, at the same time, knowing they can do all things because they have God's grace.

This is the attitude we see in the Virgin Mary in the *Magnificat*: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his handmaiden" (*Lk 1:46-48*). A child doesn't win over its mother by claiming to be strong and independent, but by responding to her love with love, and asking for help with simplicity. So we should present ourselves before our Mother in heaven just as we are: in great need of God's help and consolation. And then our Lord will also do great things in our own lives.

^[1] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 2.

[2] Francis, Audience, 29 January
2020.

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