

Meditations: Sunday of the Tenth Week of Ordinary Time (Year B)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the tenth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: sin distances us from God and others; “low-cost” offers of happiness; the unforgivable sin.

- Sin distances us from God and others
- “Low-cost” offers of happiness
- The unforgivable sin

AFTER THE serpent deceived them, Adam and Eve realized they were naked. As soon as they realized that God was approaching, they hid from his presence. Then the Lord *called to the man and said, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." God asked him, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it"* (Gen 3:9-12). Adam's change in attitude is striking. Just a little earlier, upon seeing Eve for the first time, he had exclaimed, *This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh* (Gen 2:23). Now, however, he implies that he has nothing to do with her. She is no longer *bone of my bones*; but rather a burden laid on him by God: *The woman you put here with me*. Neither does he take responsibility for his

disobedience: he blames Eve. *She gave me some fruit, and I ate it.*

The first effect of sin is slavery: whoever sins "has become the slave of his decision and he has decided for the worst, for the absence of God, where there is no freedom to be found."^[1] Therefore, sin involves a break with the Lord and with those around us. This is what happened to Adam. Sin ended up distancing him from those he loved the most. He was afraid of God and hid from his presence, and he looked at Eve with distrust and blamed her, distancing himself from her. When we sin, we distance ourselves from the happiness for which we were created, damaging the harmony between us and God, within ourselves, and with those we care about.

Saint Josemaría regarded sin as the worst of evils, which we "must fear

and avoid with the grace of God"^[2]
because it separates us from the
happiness that comes from a
relationship with God and others.

"Sincerely, in a manly way, we must
develop, both in our heart and in our
mind, a sense of horror for mortal
sin. We must also cultivate a deep-
seated hatred of deliberate venial
sin, those negligences which while
they don't deprive us of God's grace,
do serve to obstruct the channels
through which grace comes to us."^[3]

ANOTHER CONSEQUENCE of slavery
of sin is that we begin placing all our
hope in earthly realities. We may
come to believe that happiness
consists solely in possessing wealth,
accumulating pleasures, and living
intense experiences. Although it is
true that all this can provide relative
well-being, our hearts are not

satisfied. "If you are really open to the deepest aspirations of your hearts, you will realize that you possess an unquenchable thirst for happiness, and this will allow you to expose and reject the 'low cost' offers and approaches all around you. When we look only for success, pleasure and possessions, and we turn these into idols, we may well have moments of exhilaration, an illusory sense of satisfaction, but ultimately we become enslaved, never satisfied, always looking for more."^[4]

Everything that comes from God's hands is good, and so Christian life cannot consist of rejecting these realities. On the contrary, Jesus enjoyed spending time with his disciples over meals (cf. *Lk* 10:38-41), and He knew that wine was essential for some social gatherings (cf. *Jn* 2:1-12). Evil is not in the food or pleasure itself, but in our

relationship with it – when, in other words, we absolutize these goods and indulge in them apart from the most important dimensions of our lives (our relationship with God, love for our spouse, friendships, work, etc.). Then we may come to believe that wealth or pleasure can compensate for the happiness we do not find in the most critical aspects of our existence.

"God wants us to be happy always. He knows us and he loves us. If we allow the love of Christ to change our heart, then we can change the world. This is the secret of authentic happiness."^[5] The Lord invites us to focus our gaze not so much on the immediate and superficial but on what deeply satisfies us: the certainty of his unconditional love for us. *We do not fix our eyes on what is seen*, Saint Paul writes in the second reading, *but on what is unseen; since what is seen is temporary, but what is*

unseen is eternal (2 Cor 4:18). Christ shows us that it is possible not to be possessed by these visible things. He helps us see the invisible in these realities, which then become opportunities to think of others and give glory to God.

WHILE HE was on earth, Jesus showed his mercy to all people. He did not hesitate to forgive the sins of all those who approached Him, aware of their weakness. Even if they did not explicitly ask for forgiveness, Christ could read their hearts, seeing their repentance for their sins and their desire to change their lives. In this way, God showed that their mistakes no longer prevented them from approaching Him: they could be occasions to rekindle their faith if recognized with humility and trusted in divine mercy. Today, whenever we

go to the sacrament of Confession, Jesus cleanses our souls again and gives us his grace to start anew.

However, there is one sin that Jesus said cannot be forgiven: *Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin (Mk 3:28-29).*

This is the attitude that some scribes had fallen into. By attributing the good works Jesus did to the devil, they openly rejected the salvation He offered. Therefore, their sin will not be forgiven: not because God cannot forgive all sins, but because these men, in their stubbornness, rejected and despised the graces of the Holy Spirit. In some way, they refused to accept divine mercy and claimed a "right to persist in evil."^[6] —

Such an attitude may occur when considering our sins. After many

years of striving for holiness, we may feel that we are regressing more than progressing. Despite our good intentions, we feel our strength falter and believe there will come a time when God will tire of granting us his forgiveness. This is what despair is: lowering our arms because we think we have exhausted divine mercy. But the Lord's love does not depend on whether we have earned it or not: his desire to draw us to Himself never diminishes; his gratuitous love knows no limits. "This is the undying heart of our hope, the incandescent core that gives warmth and meaning to our life. Underlying all our strengths and weaknesses, stronger than all our past hurts and failures, or our fears and concerns about the future, there is this great truth: we are beloved sons and daughters."^[7] — Holy Mary, our hope, brings her son Jesus' unconditional love to each of us.

[1] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 37.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 386.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 243.

[4] Pope Francis, Message, January 21, 2014.

[5] Pope Benedict XVI, Address, March 24, 2012.

[6] Saint John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, no. 46.

[7] Pope Francis, Homily, December 24, 2020.

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