

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

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-fourth week of Ordinary Time.

- God settles our debt in Confession
- Forgiveness is freeing
- The most divine thing in Christian life

JESUS TOLD the story of a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants (cf. *Mt 18:21-35*). They brought before him a man who owed him ten thousand talents. This was an exorbitant amount; in today's terms, we would see it as a debt more suitable for a large corporation than an individual. As he couldn't repay it, the king did what was customary in such cases: He *ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'* And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt (*Mt 18:25-27*).

The servant had only asked for more time to repay the borrowed sum, but his attitude touched the king's heart. He did not merely give the servant an extension; he completely forgave

the debt. We can imagine the amazement of the people listening to the parable for the first time.

Something just as great happens every time we approach the sacrament of Reconciliation, even if our debts are significant. When we confess our sins, "God forgives us, He forgets all the evil we've done.

Someone has said 'it's God's sickness.' He doesn't have a memory. He can lose his memory in these cases. God loses his memory regarding the ugly story of so many sinners, of our sins. He forgives us and goes on." ^[1] —

It was practically impossible for that servant to repay the borrowed amount. Only an act of mercy like the king's could set him free.

Likewise, we could never settle the debt we owe the Lord for our sins through our own efforts, both because of the gravity of our actions and because of who God is. Nevertheless, He grants us his

forgiveness freely through Confession and frees us from everything that might keep us away from Him. This is the divine measure of God's love. That's why the Church recommends approaching this sacrament regularly because it "helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful."^[2]

WHEN THE servant left the king's presence, he met a companion who owed him a hundred denarii. It was not a small amount (equivalent to three months' wages) but insignificant compared to what his master had just forgiven him. When

the other man fell at his feet and asked for a little more time to pay, the servant refused to grant an extension; instead, he had him thrown into prison until he could repay the debt. His fellow servants, witnessing all of this, were outraged and reported what had happened to the king. Upon seeing his subject's lack of compassion, the king *delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt (Mt 18:34).*

Forgiving others is a liberating act in which the first beneficiary is oneself. If that servant had forgiven the other's debt, his joy would have been doubled: he could rejoice for his companion, who would no longer have to repay anything, and for himself, because he could continue to enjoy his freedom. Instead, he found himself imprisoned and burdened with a suffocating debt. Similarly, when we forgive someone, we free ourselves from potential resentments

and hatred that can fester in our hearts, embracing the peace and joy that God offers us. St. Paul describes how Christians ought to behave: *forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other. And let the peace of Christ reign in your hearts (Col 3:13, 15).*

We can forgive others because God forgave us first, and God forgives us because He sees that we are merciful toward others. Now, in our prayer, we can ask Him for the grace to forgive "from the very first moment," knowing that "the greatest injury or offence that you can suffer from them is as nothing compared with what God has pardoned you."^[3]

SAINT JOSEMARIA once said that the most divine aspect of Christian life is

forgiveness. God became man to forgive our sins. That is why the saints teach that "nothing makes us so like God as being ready to forgive."^[4]

Most of the time, this forgiveness has to do with minor conflicts arising in everyday life: harsh reactions, ill-timed jokes, misunderstandings, forgetfulness, etc. Sometimes, it may not be clear who should forgive and who should seek forgiveness, while at other times there is little doubt. In either case, it is helpful to consider, as the Prelate of Opus Dei recommends, that "a sincere gesture of asking for forgiveness is often the only way to re-establish harmony in our relationships, even if we think – with more or less reason – that we are the offended party."^[5]

Some of the Lord's last words before his death were of forgiveness for those who had crucified Him. We can

imagine that the Virgin Mary, hearing her Son's words, also forgave those people. "Her most sweet Heart must have suffered immensely on seeing the collective cruelty and the ferocity of the executioners that led to the Passion and Death of Jesus. Mary, however, does not speak. Like her Son, she loves, keeps silent and forgives. Here we see the strength of love!"^[6]

^[1] Pope Francis, Homily, 17-III-2020.

^[2] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1458.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 452.

^[4] St. John Chrysostom, *Comment. in Matthaeum*, Homilia XIX, n. 7.

^[5] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral letter, 16-II-2023, no. 8.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 237.

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