

Meditations: Thursday of the Thirty-Fourth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-fourth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: the brevity of our lives; God will be with us at the end of the journey; the urgency of making others happy.

- The brevity of our lives
- God will be with us at the end of the journey
- The urgency of making others happy

THINKING ABOUT the brevity of our lives and the fact that our time on earth will eventually come to an end can lead to fear. *When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that its desolation is at hand [...]. There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves,* Jesus says, in the eschatological discourse the Church presents to us in today's liturgy (*Lk 21:20-25*). A few years later, when they saw armies surrounding the city, some Christians who remembered the Lord's words did indeed flee across the river to Transjordan.^[1]

However, the apostles had experienced a similar situation to what Jesus describes, with a turbulent sea and huge waves. The memory was engraved in their

minds: they were on a boat, and everything seemed to indicate that they would drown in the storm. But Jesus stood, calmed the waters, and comforted their spirits: “*Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?* Faith begins when we realise we are in need of salvation. We are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we founder: we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars. Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God’s strength: turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies.”^[2]

St. Josemaría contemplated the ultimate realities that the Church invites us to consider now with great

trust. “For 'others', death is a stumbling block, a source of terror. For us, death — Life — is an encouragement and a stimulus. For them it is the end: for us, the beginning.”^[3] —

IN MANY ancient sarcophagi, the figure of Christ is represented by the image of the Good Shepherd. In Roman art, “the shepherd was generally an expression of the dream of a tranquil and simple life, for which the people, amid the confusion of the big cities, felt a certain longing. Now the image was read as part of a new scenario which gave it a deeper content: ‘The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want ... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, because you are with me ...’ (Ps 23 [22]:1, 4). The true shepherd is one who knows even the

path that passes through the valley of death; one who walks with me even on the path of final solitude, where no one can accompany me, guiding me through: he himself has walked this path, he has descended into the kingdom of death, he has conquered death, and he has returned to accompany us now and to give us the certainty that, together with him, we can find a way through. The realization that there is One who even in death accompanies me, and with his ‘rod and his staff comforts me,’ so that ‘I fear no evil’ (cf. Ps 23 [22]:4)—this was the new ‘hope’ that arose over the life of believers.”^[4]

The moment will come – when and how God wills it – when the Lord will call us into his presence. The Church places special words on the lips of the priest assisting a dying person at that crucial moment: “May you live in peace this day, may your home be with God [...], with Mary, the virgin

Mother of God, with Joseph, and all the angels and saints... May you return to [your Creator] who formed you from the dust of the earth.”^[5] Considering that we will leave this world with nothing can help us live more freely and move at God's pace. What is truly important? What should I treasure in my heart so that, when the moment comes, I can cross the threshold from earthly life to eternity without anxiety? Only love is destined to last forever. We become eternal by giving ourselves each day, in everything we do.

KNOWING THAT our time is limited intensifies the sense of mission in our baptized life. It urges us to make the most of each day, as if it were our last. What aspiration is greater than that of bringing eternal happiness to those around us? We will do it

gradually, one by one, considering the circumstances of each specific person, trying to discern what steps God wants to take in their hearts... but with the urgency of knowing that every moment is unique and that time is slipping through our fingers. “If the Lord has called you a *friend* you must respond to the call and walk with a hurried pace, with all the urgency needed, at God’s pace!”^[6]

“Friendship multiplies our joys and offers comfort in our sorrows. A Christian’s friendship desires the greatest happiness—a relationship with Jesus Christ—for those close to him or her. Let us pray, as Saint Josemaria did, ‘Give us, Jesus, hearts to the measure of Yours!’ That is the path. Only by identifying ourselves with Christ’s feelings—*let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5)*—will we be able through our friendship to bring that full happiness to our home, our

work, and every place we find ourselves.”^[7]

That description could summarize our lives on earth as Christians: we identify ourselves with Jesus’s feelings, without fear of death because it leads us to heaven, and with the eagerness to lead those we love to that happiness. We want to arrive in God’s presence surrounded by our family and friends, to share life with Jesus and Mary for all eternity.

^[1] Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.5.

^[2] Pope Francis, Extraordinary Moment of Prayer, 27-IV-2020.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 738.

^[4] Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 6.

^[5] Rite of Anointing of the Sick and Pastoral Care of the Sick, in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1020.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 629.

^[7] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 1-IX-2019, no. 23.

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