

Meditations: Thursday of the Twelfth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the eleventh week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: works reflect faith; building our lives on ideals; when the storm threatens.

- Works reflect faith
 - Building our lives on ideals
 - When the storm threatens
-

ON ONE occasion, Christ told the crowd: *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Mt 7:21).* Jesus sensed that some of his listeners had a desire for conversion that they expressed in words but somehow failed to put into practice. Perhaps they made many spontaneous good resolutions, but lacked depth or consistency. Maybe they recognized the Master's authority but did not trust that his teachings guaranteed a full and happy life.

That is why Jesus felt the need to share an essential aspect of the path He announced with the people. The Christian life is not a merely theoretical idea; it is a transformative reality that requires us to take a stand and translate our beliefs into actions. "Having faith is not the same as being

knowledgeable: having faith means receiving the message of God brought to us by Jesus Christ, living it and carrying it forward.”^[1] Jesus’ invitation appeals to the whole person; it is a call that resonates in the depths of our intelligence, will, and heart.

The way we act reveals our level of interest in the goal. Just as someone who wants to be in good physical shape sets out a plan for exercise and diet, following the Lord means making concrete choices. It involves both moving *away* from anything that can separate us from God and fostering practices that strengthen our relationship *with* him: prayer, the sacraments, Christian formation... This coherence between belief and action authentically reflects our faith. In Saint Josemaría’s words, “our lips should express a true desire on our part to correspond effectively to our Creator’s

promptings, striving to follow out his plans with unshakeable faith, being fully convinced that he cannot fail us. If we love God's Will in this way, we shall come to understand that the value of our faith lies not only in how clearly we can express it, but also in our determination to defend it by our deeds, and we shall act accordingly.”^[2] —

WHEN FAITH informs our habitual action, our interior life grows deeper. The Holy Spirit builds a lasting identity on the firm foundation of our lived convictions, like a house built on solid foundations. In the Gospel, Jesus compares the fates of two houses, one built on sand and the other on rock. The first can barely withstand the flood, but the second has a structure that allows it

to endure the onslaught of the waters.

In our relationship with God, we also meet with setbacks and experience the weakness of our nature.

Sometimes we want to do one thing but end up doing the opposite. This can lead to discouragement and fatigue. Admitting the existence of these difficulties is not pessimism but healthy realism. “Christian optimism is not a sugary optimism; nor is it a mere human confidence that everything will turn out all right. It is an optimism that sinks its roots in an awareness of our freedom, and in the sure knowledge of the power of grace. It is an optimism which leads us to make demands on ourselves, to struggle to respond at every moment to God’s calls.”^[3] —

At times, we may feel the joy of staying close to the Lord especially intensely; while at other times it

seems as if He has moved away. Then what used to fulfil us seems indifferent or costly, and our hearts may present us with other paths that promise the happiness we long for. The Holy Spirit is not far from us in those moments. We can turn to him so that, in those difficult circumstances, we may build the house on the rock of his presence in our soul. Many times our feelings blow in the same direction as our desire for God, but other times we find ourselves walking towards a goal we deem good without the help of that favourable wind, or even going against the grain.^[4] If our life is based on firm convictions, on noble ideals that can be expressed in any situation, the house will not be swept away by the unpredictable and uncontrollable power of the water. Rather, we will perceive that moment as an opportunity to reinforce our ideals and mature the love we have chosen, because the

Paraclete dwells within us. When the rain passes and the sun returns, we will see that it was worthwhile to build the house on solid rock.

WHEN A storm rages, we feel the need to seek shelter. Noticing our fragility and that our feelings do not accompany us, prayer can provide a safe refuge. Prayer is not something to turn to only in extraordinary situations. Jesus highlighted the importance of praying at all times and not losing heart with his apostles (cf. *Lk 18:1*). If we think about it, from an objective point of view, there are no situations that require more or less prayer, because prayer is a joyful necessity for us always and in every moment. Through it, we realise to what extent the Holy Spirit accompanies and lovingly guides our lives.

However, experience shows that some situations tend to distance us from prayer even though, paradoxically, when we are in them we need prayer more than ever. This is what Jesus tells the apostles in Gethsemane: *Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak* (Mt 26:41). When temptation calls us more strongly, when feelings disappear, when our faith seems to weaken... prayer is more powerful than ever, though it may not seem so. Not praying because we believe we are far away, because we feel nothing, or because our faith falters, is illogical: that is when we most need to take refuge in prayer. We can restart from there and discover where the Holy Spirit is leading us. "When it feels as if the Lord has given up on you, don't give way to sadness," Saint Josemaria writes. "Seek him with greater determination! He who is Love does

not leave you on your own. Be convinced that ‘he has left you on your own’ out of Love, so that you may see clearly in your life what is his and what is yours.”^[5] —

When the storm worsens and the foundations of the house seem to give way, we have at hand the cry of the psalmist: *May your compassion come to us quickly, for we are in desperate need. Help us, God our Saviour, for the glory of your name* (Ps 79:8-9). If we sometimes lack the words with which to pray, we can delve into the Psalms and find in them a template for our plea: “In the Psalms, the believer finds an answer. He knows that even if all human doors were barred, God’s door is open. Even if the whole world had issued a verdict of condemnation, there is salvation in God. ‘The Lord listens’: sometimes in prayer it is enough to know this.”^[6] — In those moments we can also turn to the

Virgin Mary. She will present our pleas to her Son and help us live through the storms with peace and serenity.

[1] Pope Francis, Homily, 21-II-2014.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 198.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 659.

[4] Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 127.

[5] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 250.

[6] Pope Francis, Audience, 14-X-2020.

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