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Meditations: Wednesday of the Twenty-Third Week of Ordinary Time

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

- Trust the happiness God offers
- The Gospel promises joy
- Joy and sorrow in Christian life

"IN THE Beatitudes, Jesus Christ gives us the keys that open the gates of heaven... and the gateway to

happiness on this earth."^[1] Our hearts rebel against the idea of finding joy in poverty, hunger, grief, or persecution, but Jesus insists: *Blessed are you when men hate you [...] Rejoice on that day, and leap for joy (Lk 6:23).*

The apparent paradox "invites us to reflect on the profound sense of having faith, which consists in our trusting completely in the Lord. It is about demolishing worldly idols in order to open our hearts to the true and living God. He alone can give our life that fullness so deeply desired and yet difficult to attain. Brothers and sisters, indeed there are many in our day too who purport to be dispensers of happiness. [...] And here it is easy to slip unwittingly into sinning against the first Commandment: namely idolatry, substituting God with an idol. Idolatry and idols seem to be things

from another age, but in reality they are of all ages!"^[2] —

"God wants to open a beautiful panorama for us," the Prelate of Opus Dei writes, "though it may be hidden from our eyes. We need to trust Him, to get closer to Him. We need to let go of our fear of missing out on other good things when we come close to Christ. His capacity to surprise us is greater than we expect."^[3] — Christian life is not about accumulating suffering on earth in order to be able to enjoy heaven afterwards. Jesus wants us to be happy here too, but He does not want our happiness to depend on ephemeral, transitory things. He wants to root it in the truth, which alone can quench our thirst.

WHEN WE reflect on the archangel Gabriel's annunciation to Mary, we realize that "the first word of the New Testament is an invitation to joy: 'be glad,' 'rejoice.' The New Testament is really 'Gospel,' 'good news' that brings us joy. God is not far from us, he is not unknown, enigmatic, perhaps dangerous. God is close to us."^[4] — This current of new joy in the world runs through the whole Gospel and bursts to the surface in the Beatitudes.

When we think about our happiest memories, we realize that not all of them came from wealth, pleasure, or comfort. "Joy is not transitory tipsiness: it is something quite different! True joy does not come from things or from possessing, no! It is born from the encounter, from the relationship with others, it is born from feeling accepted, understood and loved, and from accepting, from understanding and from loving."^[5] —

Sometimes, we see the joy Jesus promises us as something to be attained in the future, but his words are already true in our lives today. The person who trusts in God is ready to see setbacks as reminders that true happiness comes from Him.

As children of God created in his image, we aspire to something more than finite, fleeting happiness: we want to share our heavenly Father's joy. Jesus told us that He wanted his joy to be in us so our joy may be complete (cf. *Jn* 15:11). God cares more about our happiness than we do ourselves.

OUR FAITH teaches us that sin is the only evil that can lead to real sadness. It is the main obstacle to joy. All other misfortunes only appear to be evils because we have not yet seen

them from God's point of view. "Our Lord wants us to be happy," St. Josemaría said. "When I look at my children, I see that they are happy, with a supernatural joy so deep that it is compatible with all the sorrows and setbacks of our life on earth."^[6] St. John Chrysostom tells us: "In this world even joy can end up in sadness; but for one whose life is based on Christ, even sorrows lead to joy."^[7]

We might sometimes be tempted to believe that we deserve to be sad because we have failed to correspond to God's grace. This way of thinking is built on the assumption that happiness only comes when we carry out all our plans perfectly. On our journey to identification with Jesus Christ, the Lord calls us to a joy that is "not based on our virtues; it is not vain self-satisfaction, but is built on our human weakness and fragility. Knowing our own

weakness, experiencing the presence of conflict within ourselves, can and should give way to joy."^[8] As the founder of Opus Dei stressed: "Be sure of this: God does not want our wretchedness, but he is aware of it, and indeed he makes use of our weakness to make saints of us."^[9]

God's infinite, unearned love is the source of our joy. Our mother Mary welcomed the Lord wholeheartedly and unconditionally. That is why she could say, filled with humility, that all generations would call her blessed (cf. *Lk* 1:48). We can ask Mary to help us experience the same joy.

^[1] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, *In the Light of the Gospel*, pg. 41.

^[2] Pope Francis, Angelus, 17-II-2019.

[3] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, "Letting oneself be surprised by a good Father", 25-I-2019

[4] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 18-XII-2005.

[5] Pope Francis, Meeting with seminarians and novices, 6-VII-2013.

[6] St. Josemaría, Homily, 26-V-1974.

[7] St. John Chrysostom, Homily 79 on the Gospel of John.

[8] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, *In the Light of the Gospel*, pg. 109.

[9] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 215.

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