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

Some reflections that can
enrich our prayer during the
Fourth Week in Ordinary Time.

01/28/2024

- Astonishment at hearing Jesus' word
 - Fear of taking the leap
 - Praying about our worries
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THE GOSPEL this Sunday shows us Jesus in Capernaum, teaching in the synagogue on a Sabbath. Although at other times a similar scenario provoked rejection from Jesus' listeners (cf. *Mt* 13:53-57), on this occasion the evangelist tells us that *they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes* (*Mk* 1:22). Thus, the old prophecy of Moses, mentioned in the first reading, was fulfilled: *The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers; it is to him you shall listen* (*Dt* 18:15).

Jesus' words astonished the inhabitants of Capernaum because it was radically different from the teachings of the contemporary teachers. The people may have been accustomed to hearing somewhat repetitive sermons which had little to do with their real problems or

concerns. Moreover, they observed a certain inconsistency between what some scribes taught and what they later did. In contrast, the message of the Lord was not only innovative but also addressed the desires for salvation that dwelled in the hearts of those Israelites who remained open to God's action in their souls. On top of all that, right there, they could see that those words were confirmed by Jesus' deeds because, as soon as a man possessed by an unclean spirit appeared, Jesus liberated him (cf. *Mk* 1:24-26).

“All were amazed, and asked themselves, ‘What is this? [...] He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey Him.’ The power of Jesus confirms the authority of His teaching. He does not simply pronounce the words, He acts. In this way He makes manifest the project of God with words and with the power of works. [...] Jesus

communicates to us all the light that illumines the path, at times dark, of our existence; He communicates to us also the strength necessary to overcome difficulties, trials, temptations. Let us consider what a great grace it is for us to have recognized this God Who is so powerful and so good! A teacher and a friend, who shows us the path and cares for us, especially when we are in need.”^[1]
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MAY YOU listen today to the voice of the Lord: do not harden your hearts (Ps 95:8), the psalmist cries. God speaks to us every day. However, we are aware that, within us, there are some principles that struggle against his word and prevent it from taking root, germinating, and maturing to bear fruit. The first reading refers to one of these obstacles: fear. When

Moses announced the coming of a prophet whom the people should listen to, the Israelites responded with a certain fear: *I do not want to hear again the voice of the Lord, my God, or see this great fire anymore, lest I die (Dt 18:16).*

It is natural for us to feel slightly dizzy when we hear Jesus' teachings. We contemplate, on one hand, the wonder of leaping into the life He shows us; and on the other, our fragility, which tempts us to think that the leap is impossible. But we know that Jesus goes before us and accompanies us at all times. He is that prophet of whom Moses spoke: one of us, our brother (cf. *Dt 18:15*). He is not someone *who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may*

receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb 4:15-16).

St. Josemaría commented that this leap is a matter of faith: trusting that the life offered by the Lord, with its joys and pains, is happier than what we can achieve with our securities. “Let us accept God's will and be firmly resolved to build all our life in accordance with what our faith teaches and demands. We can be sure this involves struggle and suffering and pain, but if we really keep faith we will never feel we have lost God's favour. In the midst of sorrow and even calumny, we will experience a happiness which moves us to love others, to help them share in our supernatural joy.”^[2] —

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IN THE second reading, St. Paul echoes another obstacle that can

hinder listening to the voice of God: concerns. The apostle, after warning the Corinthians about the worries that may surround them, concludes: *I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord* (1 Cor 7:35).

Our day-to-day concerns may stir our inner world and monopolize our thoughts and affections. Instead of paying attention to what God wants to tell us through these events, we could focus only on our approach to these issues. However, we can nourish our prayer with these concerns, sharing them with Jesus, asking for his grace, and leaving them in his hands. Sometimes, we may also find a potential mission: many of our seeming distractions are related to the people we love, and so they are an opportunity to fill our prayer with their face and try to see

how we can serve them like Jesus would. In this way, Jesus helps us strengthen our relationships with the people closest to us. What could have been an obstacle now impels us to seek a dialogue with God and to ask for his help to go back to our regular activities with more Christian spirit.

At other times, it will be necessary to make a greater effort to set aside certain concerns, either because they are irrelevant or because they only lead us to continually revolve around the same thought. This struggle^[3] to direct our attention toward dialogue with God will help us have a detached heart, attentive to what Jesus wants to tell us. “In a moment that we do not know, the voice of our Lord will resound: on that day, blessed will be those servants whom he will find diligent, still focused on what really matters. They did not stray in pursuit of every attraction that entered their minds, but tried to

walk the right path, doing good and performing their own task.”^[4] Jesus pointed to his Mother as a model of a heart that receives the word of the Lord without fear and lets it resonate interiorly. We can turn to her intercession to teach us to be souls of prayer.

^[1] Pope Francis, Angelus, 28-I-2018.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 97.

^[3] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2729.

^[4] Pope Francis, Audience, 19-V-2021.

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