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Meditations: Friday of the Seventeenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 17th week of Ordinary Time.

- An unsuspected dimension of daily life
 - The normality of the saints
 - Faith in ordinary life
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SAINT LUKE tells us that Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his public life (cf. *Lk* 3:23). Until then, our Lord had lived with his family, first in Bethlehem and then, after a brief period in Egypt, in a village called Nazareth. One day, Jesus left his home and went into the Judean desert to be baptized by John. Later, he settled in Capernaum, where after his apostolic journeys he returned to rest with his disciples.

On one occasion our Lord returned to Nazareth, as a stopover on his journey through the towns and villages of Galilee. He was returning to what had been his home for many years, but he did so as the Teacher everyone was speaking about. The fame of his teaching and his miracles preceded him. So much so that his fellow townsmen were amazed and said: "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not

his mother called Mary? And are not his brethren James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?” (*Mt 13:54-56*).

Work, family, friendship, social relations... Jesus' neighbors show us the setting in which our Lord's life had developed during those first thirty years. And they are surprised. But all these activities, so normal in the eyes of everyone, had a redemptive meaning. The hours spent in the workshop, the conversations with his friends, the family gatherings... All this contributed to the salvation of mankind and to restoring our communion with God.^[1] Christ thus shows us that our daily life can also have a deeper dimension than what can be appreciated at first sight. “The fact that Jesus grew up and lived just like us shows us that human existence and all the ordinary

activity of men have a divine meaning. No matter how much we may have reflected on all this, we should always be surprised when we think of the thirty years of obscurity which made up the greater part of Jesus' life among men. He lived in obscurity, but, for us, that period is full of light. It illuminates our days and fills them with meaning, for we are ordinary Christians who lead an ordinary life, just like millions of other people all over the world.”^[2]

JESUS' FELLOW TOWNSMEN were unable to recognize the holiness hidden in his ordinary life, just like the one they were leading, which they had been witnesses to for years. And “they took offense at him” (*Mt* 13:57). Our Lord made use of a popular saying to help them see that their reaction was in some sense only

“natural” : “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house” (*Mt 13:57*).

Like Jesus' neighbors, the possibility of such a “normal holiness” can sometimes surprise us too. We might think that to be holy we need to accomplish some great deed or lead a perfect, blameless life. In reality, thanks to God we can observe in our daily lives many people who, through their occupations carried out with love, show us the “normality” of Christian life. Pope Francis wrote: “I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door

neighbors, those who, living in our midst, reflect God's presence . . . Let us be spurred on by the signs of holiness that the Lord shows us through the humblest members of that people.”^[3] —

In many cases, we have seen these “signs of holiness” for the first time in our parents. They were the ones who planted the seed of faith in us and brought us up without sparing any sacrifice. This was the case, for example, with St. Josemaría. In his adolescence, he failed to understand some things in his parents' behavior, and he rebelled against them internally. But as the years went by, he grew more aware of the holiness that had been hidden from him. “I see it now, and more clearly every day, with more gratitude to our Lord, to my parents, to my sister Carmen... I have found good models close to my heart, who simply accepted misfortunes with a noble joy, and

didn't exaggerate the weight of the holy cross or neglect their obligations. My parents, my quietly heroic parents, are my great pride.”^[4] —

ST. MATTHEW closes his narrative by telling us that Jesus “did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief” (*Mt* 13:58). St. Mark, in the parallel passage, adds that it is our Lord who is scandalized by the incredulity of his former neighbors (cf. *Mk* 6:6). Throughout the Gospel we see that Christ is surprised on several occasions by the lack of faith He encounters. Repeatedly he addresses the people or his disciples with a complaint filled with astonishment: “O man of little faith!” (*Mt* 14:31; *Mt* 16:8; *Mt* 17:20; *Lk* 12:28); “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe!” (*Jn* 4:48).

Jesus teaches us that faith is a virtue to be exercised in daily life. From a human point of view, we may think that we need extraordinary and amazing events to kindle our faith. But our Lord has a different viewpoint. He loves what is ordinary because He constantly sees in it the marvelous action of his Father and the invitation to collaborate with Him: “Look at the birds of the air... your heavenly Father feeds them” (*Mt 6:26*); “Consider the lilies of the field... even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (*Mt 6:28,30*); “My Father is working still, and I am working” (*Jn 5:17*).

In close union with Jesus, we are called to let his divine life take root in the ordinary circumstances of our own life, in a constant exercise of faith and, with it, hope and charity. “Thus all Christ’s faithful, whatever be the conditions, duties and

circumstances of their lives – and indeed through all these, will daily increase in holiness, if they receive all things with faith from the hand of their heavenly Father and if they cooperate with the divine will. In this temporal service, they will manifest to all men the love with which God loved the world.”^[5] — Our Father God treasures every moment of our daily existence, as did the Virgin Mary during those hidden years of her Son. While “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (*Lk* 2:52), his mother was very aware of this daily holiness, and she treasured it in her heart (cf. *Lk* 2:51). Our Lady will help us to discover the sanctity of what is normal, and to relive the hidden life of Jesus in each of our days.

^[1] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 517-518.

[2] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 14.

[3] Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, nos. 7-8.

[4] St. Josemaría, cited in Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 1, pp. 60-61.

[5] Second Vatican Council, Dogm. Const. *Lumen gentium*, no. 41.

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(03/19/2026)