

Meditations: Monday of the First Week of Ordinary Time

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

- God calls us to be apostles
- Zebedee and Joseph's mission as fathers
- We can rely on God's help

AFTER CELEBRATING the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we are sent out, like Jesus, to proclaim the joy we have received. And so, once again, “Ordinary Time” begins. *Repent, and believe the Gospel (Mk 1:15)*, is Christ's invitation. For Simon,

Andrew, James and John, the fishermen who had been called while they worked at the lakeside or in their boat, this repentance, this conversion, took the form of a mission: to help Jesus fill his Father's nets. They certainly never forgot that moment. "We must never forget the time and the way in which God entered our lives: let us keep fixed in our hearts and minds that encounter with grace, when God changed our existence."^[1]

We don't begin to understand why God chose us, why he has decided to use us, why he is so attracted by our company. But we do hear him telling us clearly that he needs us in his boat, he needs us to put our best efforts into his task of fishing, sailing the seas, sharing with others the joyful news that sin has been conquered. "The apostolic concern," says Saint Josemaría, "which burns in the heart of ordinary Christians is

not something separate from our everyday work. It is part and parcel of our work, which becomes a source of opportunities for meeting Christ. As we work at our job, side by side with our colleagues, friends and relatives, and sharing their interests, we can help them come closer to Christ who is waiting for us on the shore. Before becoming apostles, we are fishermen. After becoming apostles, we are fishermen still. The same profession, before and after.”^[2]

Repenting, being converted, and believing the Gospel, in order to be apostles in the middle of the world, means letting God into our lives every day, in spite of our clear weaknesses. “How often, in the face of the Lord’s great works, does the question spontaneously arise: ‘But how is it possible that God uses a sinner, a frail and weak person, to do his will?’ And yet, none of this happens by chance, because

everything has been prepared in God's plan. He weaves our history, the story of each one of us: he weaves our history and, if we correspond with trust to his plan of salvation, we will become aware of it."^[3] —

GOD OUR FATHER delights in us, and in today's Gospel he entrusts us with the same mission as his Son. *Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.* (Mk 1:17). We would like to say yes to him right away like Andrew, Peter, James and John. And also Zebedee, James and John's father. It may seem as if Zebedee, a fisherman who has taught his sons all he knows, is left out of Jesus's fishing-fleet. But nothing could be further from the truth. Perhaps he himself shoots his sons an urgent look, encouraging them not to miss

their chance. We can easily imagine the surprise felt by this father whose sons have been helping him at his work. In the past few years he has rejoiced to see his sons continuing the family business. But Zebedee is open to God's plans, even when they break in upon him unexpectedly. He intuits that with the fishing Jesus announces, everyone will be winners.

Their father, a simple man who is proud of his sons, fulfills his mission. He experiences similar feelings to those of Joseph when he lost Jesus in Jerusalem and found him talking with the doctors of the law. Jesus replied to his anguished parents that he had to be about his Father's business. Joseph took this as a clear sign. It didn't mean his role was cancelled; on the contrary, it showed the full value of what he had achieved, it confirmed that he was fulfilling his mission perfectly.

“When fathers refuse to live the lives of their children for them, new and unexpected vistas open up. Every child is the bearer of a unique mystery that can only be brought to light with the help of a father who respects that child’s freedom—a father who realizes that he is most a father and educator at the point when he ... sees that his child has become independent, and can walk the paths of life unaccompanied.”^[4] —

ZEBEDEE KNEW his sons perfectly: their hot tempers, their impulsiveness, their eagerness. He quickly understood why they began to be called “sons of thunder” and perhaps even recognized his own part in the title. He and his wife Salome must often have prayed for them at home in the evenings. He knew that the mission Jesus had

invited his sons to share in was a vast one, and that they had never before been far from the region around the little Sea of Galilee. They proclaimed that they could drink the chalice of Jesus, but Zebedee was familiar with their abilities.

Because of all this, he trusted in God's help as the determining factor. "The calling always implies a mission to which we are destined; that is why we are asked to prepare ourselves seriously, knowing that it is God himself who sends us, it is God himself who supports us with his grace. Brothers and sisters, let us allow ourselves to be led by this awareness: the primacy of grace transforms existence and makes it worthy of being placed at the service of the Gospel. The primacy of grace covers all sins, changes hearts, changes lives, and makes us see new paths. Let us not forget this!"^[5] How much we want to thank God for our

parents, to whom, as St Josemaría loved to say, we owe at least “ninety per cent of our vocation.”^[6] When Jesus died on the Cross, Salome, James and John’s mother, was there with Mary. She heard Jesus telling her son that Mary was his new mother. Perhaps she felt, as Zebedee had that day in the boat, that John was leaving her, but again like Zebedee, she did not feel that she was losing him. Just the opposite: she was filled with holy pride because her son was chosen to take care of the Mother of Jesus. And in fact she knew very well which of the two was really going to take care of the other.

[1] Pope Francis, Audience, June 30, 2021.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 264.

[3] Pope Francis, Audience, June 30, 2021.

[4] Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, no. 7.

[5] Pope Francis, Audience, June 30, 2021.

[6] *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*, no. 104.

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