

Meditations: Saturday of the Thirty-First Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-first week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: the freedom of not clinging to earthly goods; detachment reminds us that everything belongs to God; being grateful for what we have.

- The freedom of not clinging to earthly goods
- Detachment reminds us that everything belongs to God

- Being grateful for what we have

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NO SERVANT can serve two masters, Jesus tells us in today's Gospel (Lk 16:13). These are clear and precise words that leave no room for ambiguity. Anyone who desires to be a disciple of Christ tries to ensure that earthly goods do not distract them from the true center of their lives. *You cannot serve both God and mammon*, Jesus continues (Lk 16:13). We want to ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand the invitation He is extending to us. God's reign and money's dominion are very different: we receive the first and it opens us to others, while — through greed, the excessive desire for things, reliance on wealth alone, and other deceptions — the second tricks us into closing in on ourselves.

The immediate but fleeting effect of attaching our hearts to earthly goods is self-sufficiency. Once we have obtained what we desired, we experience moments of superficial, but obvious, glory. They are often emotionally charged. Gradually, however, this refuge imprisons us. Those goods cannot penetrate our hearts; they cannot nourish it. They may temporarily numb it, but sooner or later, we wake up to loneliness. They may not be inherently evil, but if we turn them into little idols, they take control of our lives. Following Jesus involves practicing the virtue of detachment, enjoying a harmonious use of the things around us. We learn that "Christian discipleship entails deciding not to accumulate earthly treasures, which give the illusion of a security that is actually fragile and fleeting. It requires a willingness to be set free from all that holds us back from achieving true happiness and bliss, in order to recognize what is

lasting, what cannot be destroyed by anyone or anything (cf. *Mt* 6:19-20).”^[1] —

The soul that lives without attachment to things, without surrendering its happiness to them, becomes enriched with God's wealth, love, and peace. It needs nothing because it has everything. When it uses material goods, time, or talents, it treats them as gifts, gratefully acknowledging that it has what it needs, because everything belongs to us in God. Without claiming or hoarding goods, the detached soul enjoys them even more.

WE CAN ask Jesus to teach us the art of entrusting ourselves to his care. At another point in his teaching, He asked his listeners to consider the lilies and the birds, which never lack

food or clothing because, in their own way, they live from God (cf. *Mt* 6:25-33). “A little bit of love is enough for him to pour out his grace bountifully on the soul of his friend.”^[2] — He is content with a bit of affection and bestows his riches upon us. “Set very little store on what you have given,” St. Teresa of Avila advises, “since you receive so much.”^[3] —

Jesus gives everyone the ability to enjoy the virtue of detachment, which reminds us that everything is God's. Each one of us will live it in their own circumstances, whether in abundance or scarcity. Our specific situation is optimal for trusting in God. When we are troubled by uncertainty, doubt, or fear, we can ask Him to convince us that joy does not depend on having much or having little. We can internalize the belief that “to be happy, what [we]

need is not an easy life but a heart which is in love.”^[4]

“God's plans do not coincide with those of man; they are infinitely better, but often incomprehensible to the human mind. [...] We certainly should not wait passively for what he sends us, but cooperate with him in bringing to completion the work he has begun in us. We must be eager to seek first the things of heaven. These must come first, as Jesus said: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt 6:33). Other matters must not be the object of excessive concern, because our heavenly Father knows our needs.”^[5]

ONE OF the paths to Christian detachment — which is, at the same time, an “attachment” to what we truly desire — is gratitude. When we

do not take the love we want to receive for granted, we learn to be open to it in whatever form it manifests itself. Similarly, when we let go of the poor securities offered by material goods or even creatures, we discover a thousand ways in which others were showing us their simple love.

On February 28, 1964, St. Josemaría entered his room and was surprised to see a bedspread covering his bed, which was usually bare. Two days later, he called one of his daughters to thank her: “Thank you, my daughter, and God bless you. What a surprise I got the other day when I went into my room. I couldn’t believe my eyes, and I said to myself, ‘Josemaría, you sure have become rich!’ In thirty-six years it’s the first time I’ve had a bedspread. You know that for years I’ve instead on being the last.”^[6]

“Every person’s life, and especially every Christian’s, should be characterized by an attitude of thanksgiving [...]. It is a ‘Eucharistic’ attitude that gives you peace and security in times of hardship, frees you from all selfish and individualistic affection, and makes you docile to the will of the Most High, even regarding difficult moral demands [...]. Gratitude means believing, loving, giving... and doing so with joy and generosity!”^[7] We ask our Lady, who received all the gifts God showered upon her gratefully, for the courage not to cling to earthly things but to trust in our Heavenly Father.

^[1] Pope Francis, Message, 14-XI-2021.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Station V.

[3] St. Teresa of Jesus, *The Way of Perfection*, 33.2.

[4] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 795.

[5] Pope John Paul II, Audience, 24-III-1999.

[6] St. Josemaría, quoted in A. Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, Volume III, Scepter, New York 2005, pg. 218.

[7] Pope John Paul II, Homily, 9-XI-1980.

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