

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

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

- Getting at the root of our actions
 - Our conversations reveal what we have in our hearts
 - Building on Christ, our rock
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JESUS'S PREACHING often drew on simple images from ordinary life, which everyone could understand. The Master's words were powerful and easily engraved on his listeners' hearts; when they returned home, they probably remembered and shared them with their friends. Today, the liturgy gives us two such images: the tree bearing good or bad fruit and the house built on rock or sand. *For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush (Lk 6:43-44).* The fruits emerge from within the tree, from the roots, from the sap that nourishes the trunk and branches. With this comparison, Jesus invites us to look into the depths of our hearts to discover the true motives behind our actions. There, in our deepest dispositions, we learn to understand the reasons for specific reactions.

"Our neighbour sees what we do, but not why we do it. Only God is a witness to it [...] I cannot read your heart," said St. Augustine, "but God, who searches the hearts, knows what is in man."^[1] The nobility of our hearts is the key to determining the goodness of our lives. A superficial or external glance, which merely focuses on what we did or didn't do, does not always reveal our true motivations. We need to delve deeper to uncover the roots of good or evil, with the reassurance that God knows us perfectly and accompanies us in this task.

IN SACRED SCRIPTURE, the heart is the deepest core of the person, the place of decision, where our actions are silently forged. In Pope Benedict XVI's words, "the heart is the centre of man, where understanding, will

and feeling, body and soul, all come together. The centre where spirit becomes body and body becomes spirit, where will, feeling and understanding become one in the knowledge and love of God."^[2] That's why Jesus says: *The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil (Lk 6:45).*

Illuminated by Christ's word, we can ask Him, like St. Josemaria used to, "to give us a good heart, capable of having compassion for other people's pain,"^[3] capable of loving and choosing what is good in our lives and sharing it with others. *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me,* we pray with the psalmist (Ps 51:10). This new heart, which is *of flesh and not of stone* (cf. Ez 36:26), is a gift from God. But we need to be vigilant and correct our focus when we

notice it turning from what is good, humbly straightening out our less upright intentions.

One way to examine ourselves is to recall our most common topics of conversation because, as Jesus tells us, *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks* (Lk 6:45). Our Lord's words offer so much wisdom and self-knowledge! When our words are consistently kind, it is a sign that our hearts are full of goodness, which radiates outward, providing light and hope. Conversely, when complaints and reproaches easily come to our lips, it may show a lack of inner joy and freedom or that bitterness has crept into our hearts. Our conversations give us clue about the state of our hearts: they are practical tools for self-examination.

EVERYONE WHO comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep, and laid a foundation upon rock; and when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house, and could not shake it, because it had been well built (Lk 6:47-48). This image could be drawn from Jesus's personal experience: the future of a building depends on its foundations. A house can only withstand inclement weather if it rests on solid ground. If a house is built without a firm foundation, out of laziness or haste, the slightest difficulty will ruin it.

"What does it mean to build a house on the rock? Building on the rock means, first of all, to build on Christ and with Christ. [...] It means to build with Someone who, knowing us better than we know ourselves, says to us: 'You are precious in my eyes and honoured, and I love you' (*Is*

43:4). It means to build with Someone, who is always faithful, even when we are lacking in faith, because he cannot deny himself (cf. *2 Tim 2:13*). It means to build with Someone who constantly looks down on the wounded heart of man and says: 'I do not condemn you, go and do not sin again' (cf. *Jn 8:11*). It means to build with Someone who, from the Cross, extends his arms and repeats for all eternity: 'O man, I give my life for you because I love you.'"^[4]

Jesus presents us with a three-part journey: come to Him, listen to Him, and live by his words. We can seek our Mother's help on this path. Like her, we want to build our house on rock so that the Word incarnate may dwell there; like her, we want to keep the Word of God in our hearts and in our lives, from our deepest dispositions to our external actions.

[1] St. Augustine, Sermon 179.

[2] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 17-IV-2011.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 167.

[4] Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with young people, 27-V-2006.

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