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Meditations: Sunday of the Twenty-First Week of Ordinary Time (Year C)

Some reflections that can assist
our prayer during the 21st
week of Ordinary Time.

- A question for Jesus
- The joy of sacrifice
- Everyone is invited

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CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS were asking
Him a number of questions. This was

quite understandable, since those listening to Him knew He could answer their deepest concerns. Some of these questions concerned our Lord's identity, as when the Baptist's disciples asked: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (*Lk 7:20*). Other questions involved how to properly interpret the Law, what one had to do to inherit eternal life, and what power Jesus drew on to work his miracles. Today's Gospel recounts one of these questions: "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" (*Lk 13:23*). Indeed, this was a hotly debated issue, since it seemed that the Scriptures offered various interpretations. Some maintained that salvation was limited to a select few; others, that it was practically impossible. Perhaps some even thought they were already saved, as part of a chosen group, and so led a quiet life, without major complications.

Rather than reducing his answer to a numerical question, Christ invites his listeners to make the most of the time they have at their disposal: “Strive to enter by the narrow door” (*Lk 13:24*). Thus our Lord suggests that places in heaven are not limited to certain privileged people: it is within everyone’s reach, but it requires a diligent effort sustained by grace. “Jesus does not want to give us false hopes by saying: ‘Yes, do not worry, it is easy, there is a beautiful highway with a large gate at the end....’ He does not say this. He tells us things as they truly are: the doorway is narrow. In what sense? In the sense that, in order to be saved, one has to love God and neighbor, and this is uncomfortable! It is a ‘narrow doorway’ because it is demanding. Love is always demanding. It requires commitment, indeed, ‘effort,’ that is, a determined and persevering willingness to live according to the Gospel.”^[1] —

THE REASON WHY Jesus invites us to undertake this effort is clear: if we learn to truly love here on earth, with self-sacrifice and dedication, our hearts are filled with joy and peace. The “reward” is not reserved only for the hereafter, but begins to be felt amid this very effort, which transforms those who learn how to love truly as well as those around them. Heaven is for those who have chosen to be truly happy here on earth, because they have known how to renounce their selfishness and set aside their calculations in favor of a life filled with God.

We have experienced this reality ourselves on more than one occasion. When we willingly sacrifice ourselves for others (dedicating time, sharing something we value, or taking on the most difficult task), we experience a deep and serene joy, far

different than any material security. It's true that at first we may feel resistance, discomfort and fatigue. But if we act out of love, we discover that the effort is always worthwhile. We sense, even without realizing it, that we are following the same path our Lord followed.

“Just as to enter into the city, one had to ‘measure’ oneself against the only narrow door that was still open, so too the Christian life is ‘measured against Christ,’ founded and modelled on him. This means that the measuring stick is Jesus and his Gospel – not what we think, but what he says to us. And so, we are talking about a narrow door not because only a few are destined to go through it – no, but because to belong to Christ means to follow him, to commit one’s life to love, in serving and giving oneself as he did, who passed through the narrow door of the cross. Entering into the plan God

proposes for our life requires that we restrict the space of selfishness, reduce the presumption of self-sufficiency, lower the heights of arrogance and pride, and that we overcome laziness, in order to traverse the risk of love, even when it involves the cross.”^[2] —

OUR LORD is not interested in numbers, because He loves each of his children. He wants all men and women to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Love knows nothing of calculations. So it shouldn't surprise us to hear Jesus say that people “will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God” (*Lk 13:29*). He sets only one “condition: that of striving to follow him and imitate him, taking up one's cross as he did, and dedicating one's

life to serving our brothers and sisters.”^[3] —

On our journey towards eternal life, we will sometimes experience the weight of our own mistakes. This reality, far from discouraging us, can be an opportunity to assist all the souls who walk beside us and who Jesus is also calling to salvation. When we struggle to remove these defects with God’s grace, “we needn't give them too much importance, and we will overcome them even though it may seem that we never manage to uproot them entirely.” Moreover, St. Josemaría continued, “over and above those weaknesses, if you are really determined to correspond to God's grace, you will be helping to cure the big shortcomings of others. When you realize you are as weak as they are and capable of any sin, no matter how horrible, you will be more understanding and gentle with others, and at the same time more

demanding, because you will want everyone to make up their minds to love God with all their heart.”^[4]

Our Lady can help us to pass through the narrow door. “She was the first one who, following her Son, took up the way of the Cross and was raised to the glory of Heaven. The Christian people invoke her as *Ianua caeli*, Gate of Heaven. Let us ask her to guide us in our daily decisions on the road that leads to the ‘gate of Heaven.’”^[5]

^[1] Francis, Angelus, 25 August 2019.

^[2] Francis, Angelus, 21 August 2022.

^[3] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 26 August 2007.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 162.

^[5] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 26 August 2007.

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