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Meditations: Sunday of the Twenty-Fifth Week of Ordinary Time

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

24/09/2023

- Christ calls everyone to his vineyard
- Gratitude for the gift of life
- God desires the best for each of us

ON ONE occasion, the Lord compared the Kingdom of Heaven to the owner of a vineyard who went out at dawn to hire workers for his vineyard (cf. *Mt 20:1-16*). When he met the first workers, he sent them to work for a denarius a day, as was customary. Hours later, when he found others *standing idle in the marketplace*, he also sent them to his vineyard. However, on these occasions, instead of guaranteeing a specific wage, he told them, "*Whatever is right, I will give you.*"

The listeners would have made assumptions about this statement. Some might have assumed that those who started working later would receive less money than those who had worked since dawn. Therefore, when the workers of the eleventh hour received a denarius, it seemed that the early risers would receive a

greater reward for their labor. However, all received the same wage. The first workers began to murmur against the owner because it seemed that he had not taken into account the fact that they had borne the burden of the day and the heat. The owner told one of them, *"Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?"*

"Jesus wants to make us contemplate the gaze of that landowner: the gaze with which he looks upon each of the labourers searching for work and calls them to go to his vineyard. It is a gaze which is filled with attention, kindness. It is a gaze which calls, invites one to get up and begin a journey because he wants life for each of us; he wants a full, committed life, safe from emptiness

and inertia."^[1] Christ welcomes everyone, whether they come to Him early or encounter Him at the eleventh hour, like the good thief (cf. *Lk 23:43*). As the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, God wants *the wicked [to] forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord (Is 55:7-8)*.

JUSTICE IS traditionally defined as the virtue that consists of giving each person what they deserve; it is an inner disposition that highlights the relational dimension of our identity. Our first question, then, should be what we owe God and how we can establish a just relationship with the

One who is the source of all goods, including the gift of our existence.

The dialogue between the priest and the faithful that begins the preface in the Holy Mass can be a good starting point: "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God... It is right and just."^[2] At first glance, gratitude and justice may seem contradictory, because gifts are undeserved favors.

Gratitude is the recognition that someone has given more than we are strictly due. When it comes to God, however, everything changes. He is the origin of everything we are and all we possess. Saint Paul asks, *What have you that you did not receive?* (1 Cor 4:7). Our life is an undeserved gift and therefore, in our relationship with God, gratitude is a duty. We can never repay Him for what He does for us, and there is nothing unjust about that. But there is something profoundly owed, profoundly just: to thank Him for everything.

Discovering that our relationship with God is conditioned by his free gift leads us to enjoy life as his children and liberates us from a conception of faith overly focused on the letter of the commandments. Instead of being overwhelmed by what can appear as an endless list of precepts through which we try to "pay" the price of our redemption, we can view our response to God's love as a desire to give Him our lives. We know that we will never be able to thank Him enough for all He gives us. Thus, for example, faithfulness to a spiritual plan of life can be seen as an expression of gratitude for the love God pours upon us, rather than a burden of conscience or the accumulation of commitments. "If you are really striving to be just," St. Josemaria wrote, "you will often reflect on your utter dependence upon God, and be filled with gratitude and the desire to repay the

favours of a Father who loves us to the point of madness."^[3] —

THE ATTITUDE of profound gratitude to God frees us from an excessive desire to judge his way of acting. At times, when we find ourselves in unexpected personal or social situations, we might ask how God could have allowed those circumstances. Maybe we believe that other people are more blessed than we are, or that God does not hear our petitions in prayer, and we consider Him unjust. Then we are like the laborers who worked all day and did not understand the owner's immeasurable generosity toward those hired late in the day. Instead of rejoicing that these workers would have money to pay for their next meal, they were saddened by the

disappointment of their expectations for a greater reward.

In any case, it is illogical to blame God for any evils. Many are consequences of human freedom; our own or others' acts and omissions. In prayer, we should be convinced that God is the Lord of our history and of our lives. Although He does not owe us anything, because He is Love, He always seeks our good and transforms evil into good in surprising ways. "Justice is, in a certain way, greater than man, than the dimensions of his earthly life, than the possibilities of establishing in this life fully just relations among men, environments, societies and social groups, nations, and so on. Every man lives and dies with a certain sense of an insatiable hunger for justice, since the world is not able to satisfy fully a being created in the image of God, either in the depths of

his person or in the various aspects of his human life."^[4] —

The prayer of those who know themselves to be children of God is characterized by trust in the One who loves us infinitely and always desires the best for us. This is how Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane: *Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done* (Lk 22:42). We can imagine that the Virgin Mary uttered a similar prayer from the foot of the Cross. Even though this situation was causing her terrible suffering, she trusted the Lord and knew that in the end, everything would be for the best, because "God does not let himself be outdone in generosity."^[5] —

^[1] Pope Francis, Angelus, 24-IX-2017.

[2] Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 167.

[4] Saint John Paul II, Audience, 8-XI-1978.

[5] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 623.

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