

Meditations: Friday of the Sixteenth Week of Ordinary Time

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

- Understanding God's word
- Firm convictions
- Being good soil

THE APOSTLES did not always understand Jesus' words. Despite

their close relationship with Him, their human outlook often failed to grasp his divine reasoning. But instead of becoming impatient or showing signs of being tired of being misunderstood, our Lord had no qualms about repeating his teachings in a clearer way. Ultimately, what mattered to Him was that his message reach the hearts of those listening. This reality can console us when we too may feel lost, or we fail to clearly understand God's will at a given moment. We can be sure that Jesus will seek us out to explain the meaning of that unexpected situation or those words we find hard to understand, as He did with the apostles after telling the parable of the sower.

“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown along the path” (Mt

13:19). The word that is not understood is like the seed that remains on the surface: it cannot develop all the potential it contains; it cannot grow to provide shade for others. Therefore the meditative and frequent reading of the Gospel makes it easier for this seed to penetrate the soil of our heart so that it may grow and bear fruit. “The Word of God makes a pathway within us. We listen to it with our ears and it passes to our hearts. And from the heart, it passes to the hands, to good deeds. This is the path which the Word of God follows: from our ears to our heart and hands.”^[1] We can ask ourselves: Do I have the same desire as the apostles to understand what Jesus wants to tell me so that his words may bear fruit in my life? Do I want to be ready for the word of God to germinate in my mind, in my heart and in my hands?

AT TIMES we have had the experience of starting a project with enthusiasm. We feel happy to bring it forward because we are excited to be part of it, or because of the wonderful results that one day it will yield. However, when faced with the routine of certain tasks or the appearance of difficulties, we may lose our initial drive. Then the meaning of what we are doing becomes blurred, and we wonder whether it was a good idea to undertake that adventure.

Something similar can happen in our relationship with God. Moments when everything seems exciting and easy may alternate with apathy or disinterest. Jesus speaks about this situation in his parable: “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on

account of the word, immediately he falls away" (*Mt 13:20-21*).

Our Lord points here to the constancy that should be a characteristic of our faith in prayer. At the moment of the Cross, when human enthusiasm has disappeared, we have the opportunity to trust in the power of prayer, to grow in our human and supernatural faith. Although humanly it is understandable that we all have the tendency to be happy when things are going well, and to lose our joy when they are not, we are truly masters of ourselves only when our life is guided by deep convictions and God's help. Monotony or a lack of enthusiasm in our relationship with our Lord are not obstacles, but rather opportunities to strive to unite ourselves more closely with Him. They are a good time to make the foundation of our life more than merely a state of mind or external

circumstances – which are often uncontrollable. Rather we need to plant our seed in the fertile ground of God’s call to share our life with Him.

“AS FOR what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit, and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty” (*Mt 13:23*). The fruit of the good seed does not depend only on our own strength. As St. Josemaría wrote, we mustn’t forget that “Jesus is at one and the same time the sower, the seed and the final result of the sowing: the Bread of eternal life.”^[2] Our soul, through God’s mercy, can be the good soil that helps the seed to develop all its potential.

Every day presents us with many opportunities to practice a charity that prepares the ground and allows our Lord to grow within us. “That joke, that witty remark held on the tip of your tongue; the cheerful smile for those who annoy you; that silence when you're unjustly accused; your friendly conversation with people whom you find boring and tactless; the daily effort to overlook one irritating detail or another.”^[3] These are the savory fruits that show Christ's seed has fallen on good soil and that prepare the ground needed for prayer.

“Each one of us is ground on which the seed of the Word falls; no one is excluded! The Word is given to each one of us. We can ask ourselves: what type of terrain am I? Do I resemble the path, the rocky ground, the bramble bush? If we want, with God's grace, we can become good soil, ploughed and carefully

cultivated, to help ripen the seed of the Word. It is already present in our heart, but making it fruitful depends on us; it depends on the embrace we reserve for this seed.”^[4] The Virgin Mary was the good and fertile soil in which God himself could grow. Our Lady will help us to be soil without thorns or stones, and thus to bear good fruit for our own life and for the lives of others.

^[1] Francis, Audience, 31 January 2018.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 151.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 173.

^[4] Francis, Angelus, 12 July 2020.

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