

Meditations: Monday of the Sixteenth Week of Ordinary Time

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

- The thought of many hearts
- Recognizing our weakness
- Listening to God's voice

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WHEN Jesus was still a newborn child, the old man Simeon said to

Mary: “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed” (*Lk 2:34-35*). During his time on earth, contact with Christ rarely left people unmoved. His words and actions invited every man and woman to enter into their own heart in order to know it better. The Gospel accounts dwell with particular insistence on the effect that the encounter with Jesus had on the scribes and Pharisees. With their high level of education and reputation to uphold, our Lord seemed to be an uncomfortable figure for them. Jesus helped people to discover the thoughts in their own hearts; sometimes he revealed the contempt they felt for others, and how, paradoxically, those who were the religious leaders had closed

themselves off from God's light (cf. *Lk 18:9; Jn 9:41*).

Our Lord scandalized the Pharisees with his conduct and teaching (cf. *Mt 15:12*); but at the same time, his miracles moved them to believe in Him (cf. *Jn 3:2*), especially the people whose spiritual convictions had not been contaminated by a worldly outlook. Jesus invited them to open their heart to a sincere conversion, to embrace without reservation the person of the Son of God, which also meant embracing others, without making distinctions. For many Pharisees, this situation became an impossible challenge (cf. *Jn 9:16*).

One day, unable to bear this tension any longer, they asked Jesus for a definitive manifestation: "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you" (*Mt 12:38*). But they, the teachers of Israel, already had more than enough signs in order to open their

heart to the light of faith; they had seen how Christ had so often answered their questions with deep wisdom and worked many miracles. In any case, Jesus will give them the definitive sign they want: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (*Mt 12:40*). If we let our heart be surprised by Jesus, we will find in his resurrection the greatest sign in order to embrace Him and welcome the faith that transforms our lives. But it is a sign that only the simple of heart can recognize: those who refuse to get trapped in their own petty reasoning, or put their honor above that of God.

“IF WE SAY we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is

not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:8-9). This is the experience of the apostle John who, as he makes clear in his Gospel, reflected deeply on the light that Jesus brought into the world – a light that frees us from the slavery of sin (cf. Jn 8:31-47) and enables us to live with the freedom of the children of God (cf. 1 Jn 3:1-10). This was also the experience of the people in Nineveh who “repented at the preaching of Jonah” (Mt 12:41). Sacred Scripture tells us that the prophet’s teaching was not especially learned or forceful, but it was enough for the people of that city to change their lives and open themselves to God’s infinite mercy (cf. Jon 3:10).

God knows us better than anyone. And thus He knows that what heals our heart is the double confession of, on the one hand, our weakness and,

on the other, the reality of his forgiveness: “Lord, I have sinned; have mercy on me.” This acknowledgement removes an obstacle that can often separate us from Him: our pride. “If one of us says, ‘Ah, thank you Lord, because I am a good person, I do good things, I do not commit major sins...’ – this is not a good path, this is the path of self-sufficiency, it is a path that does not justify you.”^[1] In contrast, searching our hearts to discover there all the times when we seek ourselves instead of loving God and others is the path to conversion, which is the secret of true joy.

The saints have always felt a great need for God’s mercy. St. Josemaría defined himself as a poor sinner who loved Jesus Christ madly. He insisted that if we have the desire to always return to the Father’s house, to take refuge in his mercy, we will find a happiness that our weaknesses

cannot rob from us: “For a Christian, joy is a treasure. Only by offending God do we lose it, because sin is the fruit of selfishness, and selfishness is the root of sadness. Even then, a bit of joy survives under the debris of our soul: the knowledge that neither God nor his Mother can ever forget us. If we repent, if an act of sorrow springs from our heart, if we purify ourselves in the holy sacrament of Penance, God comes out to meet and forgive us. Then there can be no sadness whatsoever.”^[2]

GOD blesses with his abundant grace those who open themselves with simplicity to the lights that He sends. When a soul strives to remain sensitive to God’s voice, then a small suggestion from the Holy Spirit is enough for it to be filled with love, gratitude, contrition and resolutions

to struggle. They are souls sensitive to the light, with an openness that is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes these suggestions will come explicitly through people who love us, who care about us, and who give us their opinion on something we should change. Other times, the Holy Spirit guides us in another way, spurring us to set out in search of the light. This is what the Queen of Sheba did, who undertook a long journey to listen to Solomon, in whose wisdom she recognized God's action (cf. *1 Kgs* 10:1-13). In Jesus we have someone who is much greater than Solomon, and we don't have to go to the ends of the earth to hear his voice (cf. *Mt* 12:42). His light reaches us, among many ways, through direct contact with Sacred Scripture, through reading a spiritual book, or through spiritual accompaniment, when another person helps us to discover these divine suggestions.

But it is always the Holy Spirit who “teaches us where to begin, what paths to take and how to walk.”^[3] Any path along which we strive to listen to God will bear fruit only if we are personally aware that it is the Paraclete who is guiding us gently to open ourselves to great horizons. The Virgin Mary, whose heart was always open to the divine word, will help us to listen with humility and gratitude to God’s voice.

^[1] Francis, Audience, 29 March 2023.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 178.

^[3] Francis, Homily, 6 June 2022.