

Meditations: Sunday of the Thirteenth Week of Ordinary Time (Year A)

- Strengthening the shepherds
- Love for our parents
- Embracing the cross

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THE PROPHET ELISHA went one day to Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived who invited him to her home for a meal. And so, every time Elisha passed that way, he would stay for a meal. The woman realized he was a

man of God, and after speaking with her husband, they decided to prepare a room for him: “Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us, he can go in there” (2 Kings 4:10). Elisha was grateful for the use of the room, and wanted to find a way to repay such hospitality. When the Shunammite woman refused to accept anything, Elisha learned that the couple had been unable to have children, so he told her, “About this time next year you will hold a son in your arms” (2 Kings 4:16). And at the appointed time, she gave birth to a son.

God knows how to reward the acts of charity we offer our brothers and sisters, especially if, like Elisha, they have been called by Him to carry out a mission. “Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me,” Jesus said to the apostles when He sent them out to

announce the coming of the Kingdom (Mt 10:40). Indeed, our Lord assured them that not even a cup of cold water given to his disciples would go unrewarded (cf. Mt 10:42). Christ himself received shelter from friends and acquaintances, for He had nowhere to lay his head, and he was quick to acknowledge the kindness shown him. One could say that God relies on human relationships to strengthen the shepherds of his people. First, by praying for them, that they “may always be ministers of the joy of the Gospel to all peoples.”^[1] And also by being close to them and providing material support, to remind them that they are not alone and to sustain them in their priestly work.

IN HIS DISCOURSE to the apostles, our Lord also spoke about a

requirement for following Him:
“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:37). Certainly, this doesn’t mean that his disciples should sever all family ties. In fact, on another occasion Jesus rebuked the teachers of the Law for depriving their parents of what they needed under the pretext of giving it to the altar (cf. Mk 7:8-13). But when “love for parents and children is inspired and purified by love for the Lord, it then becomes wholly fruitful and produces good fruits within the family itself and well beyond it.”^[2]
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Hence what Jesus wants to emphasize is that love for God comes first, because if it is authentic, it will lead to a greater love for one’s parents and children.

Saint Josemaría used to say that members of Opus Dei owed ninety

percent of their vocation to their parents. If they have been generous in responding to the divine call, it is because they have seen that generosity in their family at home. And this, in most cases, could be extended to all vocations in the Church. Therefore when God calls their children in a special way, he didn't see it as a sacrifice for the parents. On the contrary, it is "an immense honor, a reason for a great and holy pride, a mark of predilection, a very special affection that God has shown."^[3] For it is as if our Lord were acknowledging the "good work" they have done, by sowing the seed of God's love in their children's souls. And their children have nurtured it through their own freedom, thanks to their parents' example and prayer.

JESUS also warns his apostles that adversities will not be lacking in the mission they are about to undertake. “Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 10:38-39). At the same time, He encourages them not to be afraid, for those who are in God’s hands “know that evil and irrationality do not have the final word, but that the only Lord of the world and of life is Christ.”^[4]

Everyone has to confront in their life family problems, work complications, unexpected illness.... Sometimes, the Cross will also manifest itself in aspects of our own or others' personalities that we find it hard to bear, or in defects or defeats in our struggle that cause us shame. Jesus wants to help us reject the feeling of being alone or trapped by the adversities we encounter. It is

true that, most of the time, we cannot live oblivious to all of this, as if the evil that comes from the devil and original sin did not exist, or desiring at any cost a peaceful and untroubled existence. Our Lord takes us by the arm and helps us to embrace that problem, that defect, just as He embraced the Cross together with Simon of Cyrene.

“In the Passion, the Cross ceased to be a symbol of punishment and became instead a sign of victory. The Cross is the emblem of the Redeemer: *in quo est salus, vita et resurrectio nostra*: there lies our salvation, our life and our resurrection.”^[5] Not even the Mother of God was spared from sharing the weight of the Cross. We can ask our Lady to teach us how to bear our own cross with the supernatural sense of knowing we are children of God.

^[1] Francis, Message, 19 June 2020.

^[2] Francis, Angelus, 28 June 2020.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 18.

^[4] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 22 June 2008.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Second Station, no. 5.

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