dMeditations: Friday of the Twenty-Third Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 23rd week of Ordinary Time.

- Jesus came to save, not to condemn

- Discovering the beam in our own eye

- Defending the way of being of others

"I HAVE come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world" (*Jn* 12:46-47). Jesus' words here were spoken during the days before the Passover, when the pressure from some of the Jews had

become unbearable. The Jewish authorities watched and harassed Him, and openly and criticized his every word; they passed judgment on his intentions and accused Him even when He worked miracles. Nothing Jesus did or said satisfied them. In contrast to their behavior, our Lord says that He has come into the world to save, not to condemn. He always reaches out to those in need, without judging them or placing conditions.

Jesus' attitude here is very attractive, and in our effort to let Christ live in us, we should try to treat everyone in the same way. If not even the Son of God looks at his neighbor with the intention of judging, we have even less reason to do so. When we condemn others, it is our own heart that is harmed by a spiral of selfishness. Therefore we should ask Jesus to mold our heart in his own image. "In a graphic and joking way," Saint Josemaría wrote, "I have

pointed out to you the different impression we can have of the same thing, depending on whether we look at it with affection or not. And I was telling you – forgive me, because it is very graphic – that visitors say about a child with his finger in his nose: how dirty! But his mother says: he will become a researcher! Look at your brothers and sisters with love and you will come to the conclusion – filled with of charity – that we are all 'researchers!'"[1]

IN ONE of St. Luke's parables, our Lord presents his disciples with a striking image: "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log

that is in your own eye?" (*Lk* 6:41-43). We all have a tendency to judge other people's behavior more quickly than our own. But our Lord is clear and insistent: if we want to improve the environment and the people around us, we first have to improve ourselves, to cleanse our own eyes and let ourselves be reached by God's mercy.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria asked: "Why do you judge when the Master has not yet judged? If I do not judge, he says, neither should you, who are my disciple, judge."[2] Before considering the behavior of our brothers and sisters, Jesus encourages us to look sincerely into our own heart. Only then, with personal humility, will we be able to see more clearly what is arounds us. Sincere personal examination, which leads to self-knowledge, is the first step before correcting someone. By discovering the log in our own eye,

we can come to see the specks in the eyes of others with a totally new perspective: we are filled with hope because we know that the one who looks upon all of us is a God filled with mercy.

"When we are obliged to correct or rebuke," St. Augustine wrote, when commenting on this passage, "let us pay scrupulous attention to the following question: Have we ever fallen into this fault? Have we been cured of it? Even if we have never committed it, let us remember that we are human and that we could have fallen into it. If, on the contrary, we have committed it in the past, let us remember our own fragility so that benevolence may guide us in correcting."[3]

TIME AND AGAIN, Jesus asks us to learn to look at others "with a look that does not stop at the exterior, but that reaches the heart."[4] By learning to respect the way of being of others, we realize we are not trying to mold them in accord with our own criteria or preferences. And thus those around us will feel truly free and realize that the only thing that interests us is that they be happy and holy. Saint Josemaría said that he wanted to leave as a legacy to his children "a love for freedom and good humor."[5] These two qualities will lead us to look at our brothers and sisters in a way that focuses on the positive, and even the humorous, side of each one, always defending their freedom.

Then the possible defects of others will not pose insurmountable barriers, but rather will be opportunities to pray for that person and to show them a genuine

affection that knows no conditions. When trying to help someone correct a fault, we can speak frankly and tell them clearly what we see, so that in God's presence they can consider it and make a decision; in any case, this should never involve an attitude of reproach, distancing ourselves or judging their intentions. "If we want to follow the path of Jesus, rather than accusers, we must be defenders of others before the Father. When you see something wrong in another person, go to pray and defend them before the Father, as Jesus does. Pray for them, but don't judge them!"[6] Fortunately only God, who knows the depths of each one's heart, is able to give the appropriate weight to the events in each person's life.

Our Lady is the first one to defend us; she looks at our talents and our flaws with a mother's heart. We can ask Mary to gently help us discover the beam in our own eye, so that we too

may learn to respond with prayer and affection when we see the small specks in the eyes of our brothers or sisters.

[1] St. Josemaría, *Letters* 27, no. 35.

[2] St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 6, PG 72, 601-604.

[3] St. Augustine, *Explanation of the Sermon on the Mount*, no. 19.

[4] Francis, Angelus, 27 June 2021.

[5] St. Josemaría, *Letters* 24, no. 22.

[6] Francis, Homily, 23 June 2014.