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Meditations: Monday of the Thirty-Second Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-second week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: coherent lives; love for the little ones; unlimited forgiveness.

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- Coherent lives
- Love for the little ones
- Unlimited forgiveness

MANY CLASSIC thinkers acknowledge that making mistakes is inevitable for humans on this earth. St. Paul left a testimony of his personal experience of this truth in his writings, telling the Christians in Rome: *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want (Rom 7:19)*. He was echoing the ancient wisdom of the people of Israel: *A righteous man falls seven times and rises again (Prov 24:16)*. Along with the experience of sin, we have the assurance of Jesus's forgiveness. When Peter asked the Master how many times he should forgive, Jesus replied, *I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven (Mt 18:22)*. But this attitude of mercy may seem to contradict Jesus's words on another occasion: *Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to him by whom they come! (Lk 17:1)*.

In Gospel language, a person who causes scandal is someone who, through their sin, leads others away from good and inclines them toward evil. Jesus points this out several times when speaking about some of the Pharisees: *Observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice (Mt 23:3)*. They were called to embody the Law of Moses, but their lifestyle was not in accordance with what they preached. Inconsistency of this kind “is one of the readiest weapons the devil has to weaken the people of God and to divert the people of God from the Lord: to say one thing and do another,” and so we should “ask ourselves, ‘How coherent is my life? How coherent is it with the Gospel? How coherent is it with the Lord?’”^[1]

Jesus publicly denounces the grave sin of scandal, but He also praises consistent lives: *Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile! (Jn*

1:47). The humble testimony of people who allow themselves to be loved by God is a light capable of bringing new radiance to our world; it makes it easier for others to discover his face.

IT WOULD be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin (Lk 17:2). Jesus's severe statement underscores the harm that can be done to those who are particularly vulnerable due to their age or weakness. The Gospels often show us Jesus's love for the little ones.

God continues to offer children the same affection today, through their parents and the people who care for them. From a very young age,

children “begin to receive the gift, along with nourishment and care, of the confirmation of the spiritual qualities of love. Acts of love pass through the gift of a personal name, the sharing of language, the intention behind a gaze, the illumination of a smile. They thus learn that the beauty of the bond between human beings focuses on our soul, seeks our freedom, accepts how others are different from us, recognizes and respects them as interlocutors. [...] And this is love, which bears a spark of the love of God!”^[2]

God’s love for the weak can only be embraced with the simplicity that comes from knowing that we too are children. St. Josemaría said, “All that is tangled and complicated, the twisting and turning about one’s own problems, all this builds up a barrier which often prevents people from hearing our Lord’s voice:”^[3] — it builds a wall of self-sufficiency around us.

In contrast, simplicity allows us to experience love. We can ask God for that spiritual infancy to see ourselves as the children whom Jesus loved, and we can also pray for those who are weaker and have no one to protect them in their vulnerability.

IF YOUR BROTHER sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him (Lk 17:3). Jesus reveals his merciful, loving heart to us, and He wants us to live the same way: that is what makes us happy. But experience shows that forgiveness is not always easy. Perhaps that is why the apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith after He spoke about the need to forgive and avoid scandal (cf. *Lk 17:5*). Sometimes faith and trust in

God are necessary to accept that we will always need forgiveness among ourselves.

When we forgive someone, we do not ignore the mistake they may have made. In a way, we are participating “in the healing and transforming love of God which reconciles and restores.”^[4] We are imitating Jesus’s attitude and cooperating with Him in our salvation and the other person’s. Knowing that Jesus always forgives will help us to live without resentment, without putting limits on the forgiveness we offer others. “God hates nothing so much as the man who remembers a wrong, the man with a hardened heart, the person who nurses anger,” St. John Chrysostom wrote.^[5]

When we receive God's forgiveness, we perceive the goodness and beauty of his love. The new understanding we gain broadens the scope of our

reason, frees us from pride, and helps us see the world through God's eyes. We can ask Mary, the model of faith, to obtain for us that way of looking at ourselves and our brothers and sisters.

[1] Pope Francis, Homily, 13-XI-2017.

[2] Pope Francis, Audience, 14-X-2015.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 90.

[4] Pope Benedict XVI, Message, 30-IV-2012.

[5] St. John Chrysostom, *On the Betrayal of Judas*, 2.

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