

Meditations: 31

December

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on the last day of the year.

- The end of the year, an opportunity to take stock
- Bringing ourselves to God
- Thank you, forgive me, help me more

THE PROLOGUE of John's Gospel, which we read in today's Mass, is like a summary of Christmas. It tells us that while some people receive the Son of God and become adopted children, others ignore him and

remain in darkness. On the last day of the year, we want to place our whole life before the Child who has been born to us, our Saviour. It is a good time to look back, take stock, and, above all, thank God who has chosen to remain by our side.

Each year that passes brings us a little closer to heaven. We can ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten us as we examine the time that has gone by and brought us closer to God. We have been able to grow, like Jesus, *in age and wisdom and favour before God and man (Lk 2:52)*. On the last day of this year, our Lord wants to address those words of the Gospel to each of us: *Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy (Mt 25:21)*.

That is what we want today: to spend time with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in

Bethlehem, seeing our lives as God does, sharing his feelings, thoughts, and will, and thus filling our hearts with endless gratitude. We hope to be able to say, in the words of the Gospel of the Mass, that *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth (...). From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace (Jn 1:14 and 16).*

THE WORD became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14). We want to approach the entrance to the stable like the shepherds did, surrendering the hearts to the wonder before them: "Let us draw close to God who draws close to us. Let us pause to gaze upon the crib, and relive in our imagination the birth of Jesus: light and peace, dire poverty and

rejection. With the shepherds, let us enter into the real Christmas, bringing to Jesus all that we are, our alienation, our unhealed wounds, our sins. Then, in Jesus, we will enjoy the taste of the true spirit of Christmas: the beauty of being loved by God. With Mary and Joseph, let us pause before the manger, before Jesus who is born as bread for my life. Contemplating his humble and infinite love, let us simply tell him: Thank you. Thank you because you have done all this for me."^[1]

Like the shepherds, we want to bring all we are to Bethlehem today: all we have done or left undone in this year that is ending. There have surely been many good things alongside those that are not good. Perhaps we have come a little closer to God, albeit in a way that is difficult to measure. In any case, we are sure that *all things work for good for those who love God* (Rom 8:28). That is why

we are filled with gratitude. God has taken care of us; he has stayed with us and accompanied us. *Te Deum laudamus*. "You are God: we praise you; you are God: we acclaim you (...) Day by day we bless you. We praise your name forever."^[2] —

"THANK YOU, forgive me, help me more." This ejaculatory prayer, which Blessed Alvaro del Portillo liked to pray, can help us channel our intimate dialogue with Jesus today. St. Augustine encouraged constant gratitude, describing it as the best way to live: "Is there anything better for us to have in our heart, or utter with our lips, or record with our pen, than this? Thanks be unto God! No other phrase is more easily spoken, and nothing more pleasant in sound, profound in significance, and profitable in practice, than this."^[3] —

"Today is the right day to draw near to the tabernacle, the crèche, the manger, and to say thank you. Let us receive the gift that is Jesus, in order then to become gift like Jesus. To become gift is to give meaning to life. And it is the best way to change the world: we change, the Church changes, history changes, once we stop trying to change others but try to change ourselves and to make of our life a gift."^[4] — God has given us many gifts and many reasons to make of our lives gifts... but, in contrast, we have so often failed to correspond in our lives. Along with gratitude, we can ask God's forgiveness for the times we have lacked generosity or been distracted. We are well aware that we will never lack his grace if we are filled with holy desires, because *to those who received him he gave power to become children of God (Jn 1:12)*.

One valuable resolution for the coming year may be to let God help us more. We do not want to act alone. We may have tried to rely only on our own strength this past year, but we have found that this formula does not work. "Thank you, forgive me, help me more! These words express the tension of an existence centred on God, of someone who has been touched by the greatest Love and lives entirely out of that love."^[5] —

With help from our Lady, our Mother, we hope to lean more and more on her Son's grace this new year.

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^[1] — Pope Francis, Homily, 24 December 2016.

^[2] — Te Deum.

^[3] — Saint Augustine, Letter 41.

^[4] Pope Francis, Homily, 24
December, 2019.

^[5] Pope Francis, Letter on the
occasion of the beatification of
Alvaro del Portillo, 16-VI-2014.

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