

Meditations: Sunday of the Twenty-Sixth Week of Ordinary Time (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-sixth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: the sincerity of our emotions; feelings give us valuable information; acting according to one's identity.

- The sincerity of our emotions
- Feelings give us valuable information
- Acting according to one's identity

A MAN had two sons... (Mt 21:28).
Thus begins the parable Jesus addressed to the chief priests and elders of the people. It was probably not the first time they had the opportunity to converse with the Master. Consequently, they knew that deep truths about themselves were often hidden behind his seemingly anonymous stories. His parables were not a literary exercise — although many of them are beautiful narratives — but rather words spoken from his heart and meant to move his listeners' hearts.

The father in the parable makes the same request of both sons: *Son, go and work in the vineyard today (Mt 21:28)*. Neither of them seems to have a particular passion for sowing or harvesting, or perhaps they had not planned to work that day. The father's request surprises them, and

each reacts in his own way. While the first son is visibly upset and tells his father directly that he is not going to go, the second son hides what he carries in his heart. He may feign a smile, but his formality does not entirely hide his displeasure when he tells his father, *I go, sir* (Mt 21:28).

In the end, neither son keeps his word. The one who said he didn't want to work decides to go to the vineyard, while the son who seemed willing to do his father's will ends up disobeying him. In both cases, the actions of the sons contradict their words, but there is an important difference between them: the one who was sincere with his father ends up doing good. In contrast, the son who worried about maintaining his image before the father ends up following a different path. In our relationship with God, too, the first step toward true conversion is sincerity of heart, trusting that we

can open ourselves to Him without reservations. We can even tell Him, like the second son, that we do not feel like doing our work because “one thing is clear: In Jesus’ presence, the heart’s true sentiments flourish, true attitudes emerge.”^[1]

ST. PAUL’S words in the second reading of today’s Mass are a master class on what it means to be a Christian: *Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus* (*Phil 2:5*). Identification with Jesus Christ is not a question of external imitation, like when a small child unconsciously replicates certain gestures of the adults around him: it is an interior journey on which Christ takes possession of our hearts. The profound transformation brought about by grace and personal struggle brings us to *feel* like Jesus.

“Entering into the sentiments of Jesus: this should be our daily practice of living as Christians.”^[2]

Our spontaneous emotional reactions to people or events give us a first impression of our inner world. For example, when the first son tells his father that he doesn't want to go work in the vineyard, we can deduce that he feels aversion to that activity, that he is tired, or that he sees no meaning in it. A part of his inner self leads him to consider that effort as something negative. Feelings contain valuable information about ourselves: they help us discern which values guide our lives, even when they move us unconsciously. Knowing what makes us happy or sad helps us understand ourselves and then ponder whether our reactions align with Christ's.

Comparing our feelings with Jesus's helps us examine whether we truly

want to practise his virtues and make them our own. St. Josemaría, for example, once invited us to reflect on the feelings the virtue of poverty awakens in us: "You tell me that you want to practise holy poverty, you want to be detached from the things you use. Ask yourself this question: do I have the same affections and the same feelings as Jesus Christ has, with regard to riches and poverty?"^[3] We can examine ourselves about the other virtues and moments of our lives in a similar way.

FEELINGS DO not have the last word in the parable of the two sons. Their spontaneous first reactions are overcome through reflection. One of the sons realises the good that comes from working in the vineyard and the joy his obedience will bring to his father. The other, initially motivated

by the desire to make a good impression on his father, remembers how difficult the work is and decides to seek other goods. In both cases, what is decisive is not the initial emotion but how they choose to act in accordance with an ideal they consider relevant to their lives. Recognizing our moods does not mean we have to act according to them, but it helps us deepen in self-knowledge and make decisions consistent with our identities, and with what makes us truly happy.

The fact that sometimes we find ourselves needing to act *in spite of* or *against* our feelings does not diminish the importance of emotions in Christian life. On the contrary, when, for instance, St. Josemaria admitted that he often had to “go against the grain,” struggling against his initial inclinations, he immediately clarified that he did so “for Love.”^[4] And while love cannot

be reduced to a feeling, it contains a fundamental emotional dimension. Thus, when the son who initially didn't want to work decided to obey his father's will, he probably did so out of filial affection and love, which were ultimately more important than his laziness or apathy. He found a deeper and better feeling in his heart than what he had initially perceived.

So it gives us hope to see a foreshadowing of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane in the parable. He might have had some feelings in his human heart pushing him to reject suffering and the Cross, but that same heart was also imbued with deep feelings of sonship toward his Father and affection for each of us. Those feelings determined his actions. We can ask our Lady, the Mother of all children who want to live a life of obedience to God's will, to help us discern which feelings make us more like Jesus. Then we

will have magnanimous hearts and work joyfully in the Lord's vineyard.

^[1] Pope Francis, Homily, 22-III-2020.

^[2] Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 1-VI-2005.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 888.

^[4] Cf. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 152.

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