

Meditations: Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during the 5th Week in Ordinary Time. The topics are: the true meaning of the Law; God asks us to surrender our hearts; charity is the law of the Holy Spirit.

- The true meaning of the Law
- God asks us to surrender our hearts
- Charity is the law of the Holy Spirit

THROUGHOUT HIS public life, Jesus was continually judged by the Pharisees. On numerous occasions, when they couldn't find any grounds on which to accuse Him (cf. *Lk 6:7*), they focused on his disciples' behavior: they sought flaws in Jesus' followers when they could not find any in the Lord. On one occasion, the Pharisees were scandalized because the apostles had eaten bread without having gone through all the prescribed rituals for hand purification. We might remember our own mothers insisting on the importance of washing our hands before eating. Very likely, on occasion, we washed them reluctantly, to avoid being scolded... But eventually we grew up and discovered that the gesture wasn't a mere whim: it was important and meaningful, because it was meant to safeguard our hygiene.

The Pharisee who confronted Jesus never “grew up” in their interior understanding of the meaning of the Law. They kept washing their hands, but always out of fear of punishment. Fear oppresses the heart and prevents it from reaching out to others, to life.^[1] Those Pharisees never understood that God's commandments were not a whim but a loving orientation for the good of their souls. They never grasped that “the law was not made to enslave us but to make us free, to make us children [...]. Rigidity is not a gift from God. Meekness is; goodness is; benevolence is; forgiveness is. But not rigidity.”^[2] Behind each commandment lies God's desire for us to have a clean heart so we can contemplate Him (cf. Mt 5:8). That is what really matters.

CHRISTIANS ARE called to adhere to precepts with an increasingly pure heart, not simply out of a desire to fulfill them or to feel satisfied because we have checked the right boxes. Certainly, we can fall into the error of the Pharisees and think that the Christian life consists of a series of things that *have to be done*, narrowing the broad horizon of holiness to a confined space where the only thing that matters is strictly carrying out a series of duties. But we might also fall into the opposite attitude, believing that the only thing that matters in our actions is to *feel love* in an abstract sense, reducing it to a mere pleasant sensation that comes and goes.

That's why, in Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees, He cites some words from the book of Isaiah, offering us a path to understand what the Lord expects from us: *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are*

far from me (Is 29:13). The testimony of Sacred Scripture is unanimous in this regard: God asks us to sincerely surrender our hearts. Those who continually seek honest dialogue with God do not fall into scrupulosity because they discover his deep and merciful love. Nor do they fall into laxity because they know that this love deserves a response, and mere words are not enough for that. “I will continue to tell you very often that I love you. How often have I repeated this today! But, with your grace, it will be my behaviour above all that shows it. It will be the little things of each day which, with silent eloquence, will cry out before you, showing you my Love.”^[3]

SAINT PAUL was a *Pharisee, the son of Pharisees* (Acts 23:6). He was raised in an environment that sought

to give glory to God through the exact fulfillment of the commandments and *strictest obedience to the Jewish law* (*Phil 3:5*), as he says. However, something happened in Paul's life that radically changed his view of what God expected from him: he met Jesus Christ personally. From that moment on, Saint Paul did not stop following the law, but his goal changed to *be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith* (*Phil 3:8-9*).

Saint Paul discovered that *charity is the fulfillment of the law* (*Rom 13:10*). Living charity involves recognizing, first and foremost, that it can only be given to us by God; it is a gift from the Lord. “The commandment of love for God and neighbor [...] is ‘written’ on the heart by the Holy Spirit. This

becomes ‘the law of the Spirit’ [...]. Moreover, it is the Holy Spirit Himself who becomes the Teacher and Guide of man from within the heart.”^[4] Our Lady saw the freedom of love – never enslavement – in the Law. We can ask her to help us “live according to the Holy Spirit,” which, as Saint Josemaria taught, means allowing God “to take possession of our lives and to change our hearts, to make us resemble him more and more.”^[5]

^[1] Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 11-IV-2012.

^[2] Pope Francis, Audience, 24-X-2016.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 498.

^[4] Pope John Paul II, Audience, 9-VIII-1989.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 134.

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(01/19/2026)