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Meditations: Tuesday of the Twentieth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 20th week of Ordinary Time.

- A path to hope
- The Love that precedes us
- Placing our hope in God

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THE SUDDEN departure of the rich young man must have surprised the

apostles. Perhaps they remembered when they themselves had been called, and perhaps some of them thought that this person had more human qualities than they did. He was probably from a good family, had financial resources and, what was even more important, he seemed to observe all the commandments and felt in his heart the sincere desire to come closer to God. That was why he had approached Jesus on his own initiative. But faced with our Lord's invitation to sell everything he had in order to follow Him freely, he had decided to take another path. With the dust raised by his shoes still visible in the air, the apostles looked at each other in disbelief, somewhat ashamed of their own limitations and unable to decipher the mystery of why they had said yes to Jesus, while someone with such outstanding human qualities had rejected Him.

“Who then can be saved?” (*Mt 19:25*). Perhaps from time to time we ask ourselves this question in the depths of our heart, like the apostles when they saw even someone with the human stature of the rich young man turn away from Jesus. Sometimes we can lose our peace because, even though we try to lead a Christian life, and we strive to follow Christ and have received a divine calling, we are weak and time and again we distance ourselves from Him. If it is so difficult for me, if (although I am aware of how greatly God loves me) I feel so weak, how much more so is this true for people who don't even know God. Does it make sense to strive to follow our Lord amid all the ups and downs of this world?

Our Lord's answer contains a key lesson for our own life: “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (*Mt 19:25*). This sentence sums up the reason for

much of our discouragement and, at the same time, shows us a path to hope. Perhaps on many occasions we lose our joy, because we try to achieve what is impossible with only our personal effort: our own salvation. But this frustration turns into a good abandonment when we realize that God can go beyond our own strength. “You admit in all sincerity that everything you do turns out badly. ‘But,’ you add, ‘this can’t surprise you, Jesus. It is impossible for me to do anything right. You have to help me. Please do it for me and you will see how well it turns out.’”^[1]

“WHO THEN can be saved?” (*Mt* 9:25). The apostles asked themselves this question not only when they saw how a talented young man preferred to keep his wealth to himself rather

than follow Jesus, but also in response to the demanding words of their Master after that scene: “Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (*Mt 19:23*). Although our Lord wants them to understand that their own salvation is always God’s work and the result of his mercy, He doesn’t hide from them how demanding the path is. Following Him closely – as one more apostle – implies a radical self-giving that involves our whole life, being open to what our Lord is asking of each one of us.

The path of interior poverty to reach heaven is both a divine gift and a free choice. God gives us his love undeservedly: this is the central truth of our life. It is not a love that “comes from our fulfillment, our talents, our religious fervor,” but rather it is a gift of the Holy Spirit: “He teaches us to love and we have to

ask for this gift. The Spirit of love pours love into our hearts; he makes us feel loved and he teaches us how to love. He is the ‘motor’ of our spiritual lives. He set it in motion within us. But if we do not begin *from* the Spirit, or *with* the Spirit or *through the Spirit*, we will get nowhere.”^[2] —

Through the specific actions in our daily life, we can welcome or reject the love that God offers us. Our interior struggle makes sense when we understand it from this point of view. We see it not so much as a way of “earning” salvation, but as a way of showing our love for God, which we want all our efforts to be inspired by. After all, it is He who sustains us, especially in moments when the path to holiness becomes more arduous. “Some behave, throughout their lives, as though our Lord had only talked of self-giving and upright behavior to those who did not find it

hard (they don't exist!), or to those who don't need to fight. They forget that Jesus said, for everyone: the Kingdom of heaven is won by violence, by the holy battle of every moment.”^[3] —

AT CERTAIN times in our lives, following Jesus may be especially difficult for us. Perhaps we are carrying a Cross that we don't fully understand; we are experiencing some kind of misunderstanding because of our faith, or we simply feel cold in our efforts to be close to God. We then have the impression that the struggle isn't worth it. We can all experience the weariness that the effort to follow Christ each day can sometimes bring. In such circumstances, St. Peter's sincerity after seeing the rich young man reject Jesus' call can serve as an

example. Like him, we can dare to ask our Lord in our prayer: “We have left everything and followed you; what then shall we have?” (*Mt 19:27*). It is not a question of conditioning our struggle on receiving a reward, but rather of placing all our inner expectations on God’s love, trusting that He always wants what is best for each of us and that, like a good Father, He wants to shower us with gifts.

Jesus said to them: “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (*Mt 19:28-29*). The “hundredfold” is God’s unconditional

love, his close presence, which accompanies us on good days and bad, and which makes our struggle bearable; but it also includes the eternal happiness that awaits us in heaven. That is why Saint Josemaría recommended, especially when life becomes more difficult, to think about the moment when we will see God face to face: “At the time of temptation, think of the Love that awaits you in heaven: foster the virtue of hope – this is not a lack of generosity.”^[4] It is not selfishness to place our heart and our hopes in heaven, where the Holy Trinity awaits us to give us the definitive embrace. On the contrary, it means that our love for God is such that it has become the driving force of all our decisions, whether large or small; it is He whom we seek, the only One who can quench our thirst for happiness. In paradise we will also meet our Mother, the Virgin

Mary, whose motherly tenderness we will enjoy for all eternity.

[1] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 353.

[2] Francis, Homily, 5 June 2022.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Furrow* no. 130.

[4] St. Josemaría, *The Way* no. 139.

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