

Meditations: Wednesday of the Nineteenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 19th week of Ordinary Time.

- God himself practiced fraternal correction
 - A proof of affection and trust
 - Peace and prudence
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THE WORKS of mercy invite us to get out of ourselves and meet our brothers and sisters with open arms. The Catechism reminds us that they “are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities (cf. *Is* 58:6-8 and *Heb* 13:3).

Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently.”^[1] — Thus they teach us to look at others with God’s eyes, seeking only their good. One of the spiritual works of mercy is to correct those who err. Precisely because we only want the good of our brothers and sisters, besides assisting them, serving them, praying for them, etc., we also try to help them as far as possible to turn away from sin, or gently encourage them to uproot a defect.

As we read in the Old Testament, God himself put this custom into practice

“whenever men insisted – and we can say, whenever we insisted – on taking the path of evil. The history of the Chosen People is a clear manifestation of this divine care. In many situations, Yahweh could have let them go off on their own, but always (sometimes with punishments and sometimes with warnings from the prophets) he drew them back to himself, putting them back on the path of salvation. In the Gospel, we see that Jesus doesn’t refrain from rebuking, from correcting, those he wishes to lead along the right path; not only the Pharisees who rejected his message, but also his friends: Peter, even harshly, when the apostle suggests to Him that He should avoid the Passion; and Martha in Bethany, with gentleness, for worrying too much about household chores. Our Lord used the tone and language that best suited each person.”^[2] — We can ask God to help us look upon others with

a look “that loves and admonishes, that knows and understands, that discerns and forgives (cf. *Lk* 22:61), as God has done and continues to do with each of us.”^[3] —

THE GOSPEL custom of fraternal correction, which springs from a genuine interest in others' salvation and holiness, is a manifestation of this divine mercy. We find references to it in the Old Testament: “Question a friend: perhaps he did not do it; but if he did anything, so that he may do it no more. Question a neighbor: perhaps he did not say it, but if he said it, so that he may not say it again . . . Question your neighbor before you threaten him” (*Sir* 19:13-14,17). Jesus himself, when speaking about always being ready to forgive others, establishes the channel for this work of mercy: “If your brother sins

against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother” (*Mt 18:15*).

With our Lord’s teaching and example, fraternal correction has become a tradition in the Christian family. It is an obligation of both love and justice. St. Ambrose wrote in the fourth century: “If you discover a fault in a friend, correct him secretly. In fact, corrections do good and are more beneficial than a silent friendship. If a friend feels offended, correct him anyway; insist without fear, even if the bitter taste of correction displeases him. It is written in the Book of Proverbs that the wounds of a friend are more tolerable than the kisses of flatterers (*Prov 27:6*).”^[4] — Fraternal correction is also a specific expression of the communion of saints. Since we form one body and are not indifferent to what happens to others, whenever it

is possible and prudent to do so, we help others with our advice to overcome the difficulties or dangers they may encounter. We want to care for our brothers and sisters as Christ did, cooperating in their salvation so that none of them is lost (cf. *Jn 17:12*). St. Augustine warns of the grave responsibility that would be involved in failing to provide this help: “You are worse in keeping silence, than he in failing.”^[5] —

Fraternal correction should always be done in a refined and prudent way, using words imbued with true affection and understanding, that avoid humiliating the person being corrected. When done in this way, it will not be seen as a judgment but as a service, “a proof of supernatural trust and affection.”^[6] — Hence before doing it, we should speak with our Lord in our prayer, examining our own heart in order to realize that we are the first one who needs

correction and, at the same time, to discover whether, along with the desire to help, our heart harbors other intentions that are not so holy. “The supreme rule regarding fraternal correction is love: to want the good of our brothers and sisters. And often it is also a matter of tolerating the problems of others, the defects of others in the silence of prayer, so as to find the right way to correct them.”^[7]

WHEN making a fraternal correction, St. Josemaría advised: “Always act with simplicity, which is a very appropriate virtue for a son of God. Behave naturally in the way you speak and in what you do. Get to the root of problems; don't stay on the surface. Remember that, if we really want to fulfil our obligations as Christians in a holy and manly way,

we must anticipate unpleasant moments.”^[8] —

Fraternal correction is a noble gesture towards others, because instead of criticizing them behind their back, we tell them face to face, with kindness, what we think they should change. “Unfortunately, however, often the first thing that is created around those who make a mistake is gossip, in which everyone comes to know the mistake, complete with details, apart from the person concerned! This is not right, brothers and sisters; this does not please God. I never tire of repeating that gossip is a plague on the life of people and communities, because it leads to division, it leads to suffering, it leads to scandal; it never helps improve, it never helps grow.”^[9] — Although making and receiving fraternal correction is difficult, since it involves entering into the life of another person and can even be

embarrassing, it is also true that God blesses this help from brother to brother, and leaves a taste of peace in the heart. The person who does it is filled with peace because instead of complaining, he has tried to help a brother; and the person who receives it knows that he can count on the prayers and affection of someone who truly cares about his own well-being.

The virtue of prudence plays an important role in discerning the right time and way to give and receive a fraternal correction. Generally, prudence will lead us to ask a person we trust for advice on its appropriateness, with the realization that it should be about truly necessary and important matters, and not about trifles or occasional errors. Likewise, moved by prudence, we will not correct someone too frequently about the same defect, because we all need

time and God's grace to improve. We ask Mary, whom we venerate as Virgin Most Prudent, to teach us how to support one another on our Christian journey, aware that "a brother helped by a brother is like a strong city" (*Prov 18:19*).

[1] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2447.

[2] Javier Echevarría, podcast *Correcting the one who errs* (at www.opusdei.es).

[3] Benedict XVI, Message, 3 November 2011.

[4] Saint Ambrose, *De officiis ministerum III*, nos. 125-135.

[5] St. Augustine, *Sermon 82*, no. 7.

[6] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 566.

[7] Francis, Audience, 3 November 2021.

^[8] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 160.

^[9] Francis, Angelus, 10 September 2023.

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