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Meditations: Sunday of the Thirty-Second Week of Ordinary Time (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-second week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: the oil of good works; anticipating the encounter with the beloved; a vibrant, constant “yes.”

11/12/2023

- The oil of good works

- Anticipating the encounter with the beloved
 - A vibrant, constant “yes”
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IN JESUS’S time, weddings were traditionally celebrated at night, and therefore, the guests carried lit lamps. Referring to this custom, Jesus spoke about maidens who went out to await the bridegroom. *Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps (Mt 25:2-4).* When the women heard that the bridegroom was coming, the foolish ones realized they had no oil and went to buy some. However, at that moment, the bridegroom arrived, and only the wise maidens entered the feast with him. The others were turned away

when they returned, because it was already too late.

This parable illustrates the need to prepare for Jesus's coming. "We must be prepared for the encounter with him: not only for the final encounter, but also for the everyday great and small encounters, with a view to that encounter for which the lamp of faith is not enough; we also need the oil of charity and good works."^[1]

Many authors have seen the oil "as a symbol of love that one cannot purchase but receives as a gift, preserves within one and uses in works."^[2] This is the wisdom spoken of in today's first reading: *Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is readily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her* (Wis 6:12).

Wisdom and prudence lead us to make use of our earthly life to illuminate others with the oil of our

good works. St. Josemaría composed a prayer to the Holy Spirit, asking for strength not to delay in responding to the divine call: “Enlighten my understanding to know your commands; strengthen my heart against the wiles of the enemy; inflame my will... I have heard your voice, and I don’t want to harden my heart and resist by saying ‘later... tomorrow.’ *Nunc coepi!* Now! Lest there be no tomorrow for me!”^[3] In a point of *The Way*, he wrote, “Do your duty ‘now’, without looking back on ‘yesterday’, which has already passed, or worrying over ‘tomorrow’, which may never come for you.”^[4] Each day brings with it many opportunities to keep our lamp lit: doing our work well, serving others with kindness, taking care of the time dedicated to prayer... In these moments, we can go out to meet God as He passes through our lives, knowing that one day He will be waiting for us at the end of our lives.

THE FOOLISH maidens had forgotten why they were waiting; the purpose was the encounter with the bridegroom. Their behavior is an image of those who live by absolutizing the present, “losing the sense of expectation, [and] precluding any view of the hereafter: doing everything as if we will never depart for the other life. And so we care only about possessing, about emerging, about establishing ourselves... And always more. If we allow ourselves to be led by what seems most attractive to us, by what we like, by seeking our interests, our life becomes sterile; we do not accumulate any reserve of oil for our lamp, and it will be extinguished before the encounter with the Lord.”^[5] —

Today's psalm precisely captures the prayer of a person who keeps their

lamp lit because they have placed their hope in God: *O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirst for thee; my flesh thirsts for thee; as in a dry and weary land where no water is* (Ps 63:2). Everything the psalmist does and feels is born of love for God. And although this brings certain difficulties — fatigue, thirst, longing — it actually expresses the dissatisfaction of a person in love, who cannot find peace until they are united with the beloved: other goods are only relatively important because what really matters is being with the beloved.

The founder of Opus Dei believed that Christians do not fear that final encounter with the Lord, because it will be a grand wedding feast with the love of our life. “Trusting firmly in God's grace, we are ready from this very moment to be generous and courageous, and take loving care of little things: we are ready to go and

meet Our Lord, with our lamps burning brightly.”^[6] — We will wear a wedding garment “woven with our love of God, a love we will have learnt to reap even in the most trivial things we do. It is precisely those who are in love who pay attention to details, even when they're doing apparently unimportant things.”^[7] —

KEEPING THE lamp lit means renewing our desire to encounter Christ. “It is not enough just to be in the Church,” St. Josemaria preached, “letting the years roll by. In our life, in the life of Christians, our first conversion — that unique moment which each of us remembers, when we clearly understood everything the Lord was asking of us — is certainly very significant. But the later conversions are even more important, and they are increasingly

demanding. To facilitate the work of grace in these conversions, we need to keep our soul young; we have to call upon our Lord, know how to listen to him and, having found out what has gone wrong, know how to ask his pardon.”^[8] —

Fidelity leads to seeking new ways to find the oil that lights our lamp. It is not “a mechanical copying of the patterns of the past. Fidelity to roots is always creative, ready to descend into the depths, open to new challenges, alert to the ‘signs of the times.’”^[9] — This way, our first ‘yes’ remains vibrant. We do not only act to fulfill obligations acquired in the past, without identifying with them in the present; rather, we bring our ‘yes’ into the present and embrace it anew in our current circumstances.

“Faithfulness over time is the name of love.”^[10] — The passage of years urges that initial love to expand,

because it is the result of a choice that is always always present to us. Mary represents that dynamic fidelity. She sought to keep her lamp lit at all times and to be ready for what God asked of her. Her vocation as the Mother of God was expressed in different ways throughout her life. And even today, she remains faithful to that call, helping her children keep their lamps lit.

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[1] Pope Francis, Angelus, 8-XI-2020.

[2] Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, 6-XI-2011.

[3] Prayer composed by St. Josemaría in April 1934.

[4] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 253.

[5] Pope Francis, Angelus, 8-XI-2020.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 40.

^[7] Ibid.

^[8] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 57.

^[9] St. John Paul II, Address, 10-VI-1997.

^[10] Pope Benedict XVI, Address, 12-V-2010.

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