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Meditations: Thursday of the First Week in Advent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this time of Advent.

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- Growing accustomed to the struggle and lukewarmness
- The deception of building on sand
- With prayer we build on rock

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Mt 7:21).

These words of Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel for today's Mass show us, first of all, the existence of a plan of God in which He wants to include us; and, at the same time, the ever-present possibility of rejecting that plan in our own lives.

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him (Eph 1:4). This is God's will for each Christian, the meaning of our own lives, the why and wherefore of our existence. God's plan is that we be saints, that is, that our love for God overflow in a sincere love for all men and women, starting with those we have at our side. The paths to achieve this goal are quite varied and, in many cases, truly surprising.

But as the years go by, a certain “growing accustomed to the struggle” may appear in our life, a colorless routine that leads to lukewarmness. The enthusiasm with which we lived our love story with God may cool. The desire to follow Jesus is still at the origin of our actions, but it is a bit more subdued, more tenuous. We are content to simply keep going, perhaps relying only on past experiences. Great ideals, then, seem like a dream to us and our spirit of examination fails to awaken our heart. We don’t consider ourselves especially great sinners and we even wish to be saints, but with such a weak desire that the moment for expressing it in deeds is put off.

Saint Josemaría anticipated this possible situation and encouraged us to intensify our prayer. “It hurts me to see the danger of lukewarmness in which you place yourself when you do not strive seriously for perfection

in your state in life. Say with me: I don't want to be lukewarm! *Confige timore tuo carnes meas*, 'pierce thou my flesh with thy fear': grant me, my God, a filial fear that will make me react!"^[1] —

IN TODAY'S GOSPEL, Jesus makes use of a graphic example to describe the behavior of someone who fails to discover the greatness of God's will for his life: *And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its fall!* (Mt 7:26-27). The adjective used, *foolish*, shows that even when we want to strive for a meaningful life, we can fall into the trap of doing so without counting on what is essential:

without building on God's plans. The causes can be negligence, superficiality, laziness... And in any case, a lot of effort and expense will be invested in a building that will soon collapse.

Although sometimes it is not obvious, building on solid rock – on God – can be even simpler. The life of the lukewarm person who builds on sand may seem easier in theory. Although this person shuns sacrifice and other demands of love, in practice they are unable to avoid tensions in their heart. Almost without realizing it, the heart becomes divided and calculating, and one spends one's energies in making pacts and compromises that leave one unsatisfied. Often they are more concerned about what they will say or comparing themselves with others than trying to have a serene outlook on their own situation. The sacrifices that before were pleasant now

become bitter, because they don't stem from the same love.

When we find ourselves weak in our desires for holiness, we can approach the warmth of the heart of Jesus.

“The tepid,” Saint Josemaria said, “have hearts of clay, of miserable flesh. There are hardened hearts, but noble, which, when they approach the warmth of the Heart of Christ, melt like bronze in tears of love, of atonement: they catch fire!”^[2]

Encouraged by the light of his loving look, we boldly tell our Lord: enkindle my heart once again. Don't let my soul remain in sadness. We can be sure that He will accept our humble and trusting prayer.

“SEEK THE LORD while he is to be found; call on him while he is near.”^[3] Seeking our Lord in prayer

and re-establishing a personal dialogue with Him shields us from lukewarmness. “*Et in meditatione mea exardescit ignis* – ‘And in my meditation a fire shall flame out.’ That is why you go to pray: to become a bonfire, a living flame giving heat and light.”^[4] — This intimate dialogue with Jesus will spur us to renew our struggle to achieve the change we want in our lives; it will move us to be in harmony with God’s desires and to guide our life close to Him.

Sometimes we may feel the weight of our mistakes and our good wishes may far outweigh our deeds. But it is also true that when we open ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit we know that our humble plea is always heard. God enkindles our desires, carrying out in our life what seemed impossible to us. “You who tend to lose heart, I will tell you something that is very consoling:

when a person does what he can, God will not deny his grace. Our Lord is a Father, and if, in the silence of the heart, one of his sons says to him: ‘My Father in Heaven, here am I, help me...’ If he goes to the Mother of God, who is our Mother, he will go forward.”^[5] —

On that firm foundation our Lord will be able to build a great building that is strong and solid: *Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock (Mt 7:24-25).* Thus we can go forward with confidence. We will not deceive ourselves with the pacts we can make when we grow accustomed to the struggle. And, although difficulties may arise, neither torrents of water nor raging winds

will rob us of what is essential: our Lord is always with us and fights by our side.

Let us ask our Lady for help: “Love for our Mother will be the breath that kindles into a living flame the embers of virtue hidden in the ashes of your lukewarmness.”^[6] —

^[1] — Saint Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 326.

^[2] — Saint Josemaría, Meditation, 4 March 1960.

^[3] — Roman Missal, Thursday of the First Week of Advent, Acclamation before the Gospel.

^[4] — Saint Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 92.

^[5] — Saint Josemaría, *Via Crucis*, 10th Station, no. 3.

^[6] — Saint Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 492.

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