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Meditations: Thursday of the Third Week in Advent

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

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- God is faithful to his promises
- Example of Saint John the Baptist
- Fidelity is always creative

THE PROPHET Isaiah frequently stresses how greatly Yahweh is hurt by the infidelity of his people. But the time comes when God decides to comfort Jerusalem, forgive all her sins and seal with her an eternal covenant. We remember this moment today in the first reading of the Mass. The language used by the prophet is almost maternal: *For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you. My steadfast love will not depart from you (Is 54:1-10).* Faced with our infidelities, God responds with mercy. *His anger lasts only a moment, but his kindness lasts for a lifetime (Ps 30:5).* God's love is stronger than our sin.

In Advent the liturgy reminds us again and again of God's desire to be close to us. He longs for us not to reject his company and let ourselves

be loved. “God is close to us. He is faithful and carries out great works of salvation in those who hope in Him. God loves with a boundless love, which not even sin can restrain, and fills our heart with joy and consolation.”^[1] Human history is sadly filled with infidelities. But God has infinite patience and never tires of trying to educate us as parents do with their children. His heart is always inclined towards forgiveness. God remains faithful to his covenant “in spite of everything,” from generation to generation. As Saint Paul says, *if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself* (2 Tim 2:13).

“This ‘mystery’ of God’s fidelity constitutes the hope of history.”^[2] This is the greatest guarantee for our loyalty, since *the Lord is faithful in all his words and gracious in all his deeds* (Ps 145:13). “What is the foundation of our fidelity?” Saint

Josemaría once asked. And he answered: “I would say, in broad outline, that it is based on God’s love, which makes us overcome all the obstacles: selfishness, pride, tiredness, impatience...”^[3] —

DURING these weeks of Advent, John the Baptist is very present in the liturgy of the Word. We hear the highlights of his unique mission to prepare the way for Jesus. We look to his example to learn how to wait with increasing desire for the Redeemer’s birth. John is the last of the prophets and the first to die for Christ. In today’s Gospel, Jesus speaks about his cousin to the crowd: *What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who are gorgeously appareled*

and live in luxury are in kings' courts. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. (Lk 7:24-26).

Among the characteristics of John's personality, which are a model for Christians, fidelity stands out. The Precursor does not hesitate to point to the Messiah. He is not afraid of losing his disciples or being left alone because he knows and identifies himself with the Messiah's mission. *Behold, the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29), who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie (Lk 3:16).* These are the words of a humble heart, aware of the fleetingness of his own life, like each one of us. John knows that his happiness lies in putting God first, and doesn't see himself as indispensable.

The Baptist is not "a reed shaken by the wind," unsteady and eager to

please everyone. John is a messenger of God who lives for his mission, even if it requires great personal sacrifices. Loyalty to God and to the truth even leads him to give up his own life. As Saint John Paul II said, “radical fidelity to Christ shines out in the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist.”^[4] —

“YOU ESTABLISHED your covenant forever.”^[5] — This certainty was present throughout John the Baptist’s entire life. God’s faithfulness knows no end point. He is always the same. Seeing the unfailing intensity of his love, we feel compelled to respond with our faithful love, stemming from our freedom. Today we read in the Communion Antiphon Paul’s advice to Titus: *For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men . . . Let us live justly and devoutly in*

this age, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of the glory our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Tit 2:12-13). Fidelity to God requires authentic intimacy with Jesus in prayer. In our conversation with our Lord we experience his love, both tender and demanding, which spurs us to be generous.

A holy and faithful life is made up of so many small gestures that do not shine outwardly, since most of the time they are hidden, but always stem from love: a smile, a small point of order, thanking or asking for forgiveness when we have offended another person, a kind response.... Referring to Blessed Alvaro, Saint Josemaría once said: “I would like you to imitate him in many things, but above all in loyalty. In the long years of his vocation, there have been many occasions – humanly speaking – for getting angry, for becoming irritated, for being

disloyal. But he has always had a smile and an incomparable fidelity – for supernatural reasons, not because of human virtue. It would be very good for you to imitate him in this.”^[6] —

“Fidelity over time is the name of love, of a consistent, true and deep love.”^[7] — Throughout one’s life, authentic love is renewed many times each day. Thus it is alive and grows ever stronger. Fidelity is not inertia or simply letting time pass. Being faithful does not mean being inflexible; nothing is further from fidelity than simply continuing a choice from the past. A faithful person is creative, capable of renewing their love and fostering great dreams within God’s plans.

And if, at some point, the road becomes more difficult, the reaction of a faithful person is to ask for help to do everything possible to continue

forward. Let us turn our eyes to Mary, *Virgo Fidelis*, Virgin Most Faithful, and place in her hands our desire to love as she did.

[1] Francis, Audience, 16 March 2016.

[2] Benedict XVI, Homily on the Epiphany of the Lord, 6 January 2008.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 532.

[4] Saint John Paul II, Angelus, 29 August 1999.

[5] Thursday of the Third Week of Advent, Entrance Antiphon.

[6] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, 19 February 1974.

[7] Benedict XVI, Address, 12 May 2010.

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