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Meditations: Tuesday of the Second Week of Easter

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this Easter season.

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- Nicodemus after the Cross
- Unity has been a gift and a task since the beginning
- Christians will be known by their love for one another

THE CONVERSATION between Jesus and Nicodemus was probably a long one, though the Gospel has handed down to us only a few words of their dialogue. That doctor of the Law was expecting to meet with a prophet, someone chosen by God, but his expectations were completely exceeded. He encountered something greater, something radically different, a man from whose lips he heard revelations he could never even have suspected. We don't know how much he understood of the conversation, nor how many details Jesus wanted to explain at that moment. But we do know that, in the difficult hour of the Passion, when almost all the disciples fled, Nicodemus stood up publicly in order to provide a worthy burial place for the body of Christ. During those moments, he would remember the words of that nighttime conversation, when our Lord had prophesied his death on the Cross

and the fruit of that sacrifice: *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life (Jn 3:14-15).*

Nicodemus was acquainted with that episode in the history of his people, when Moses had put a bronze serpent on a pole so that anyone bitten by the poisonous desert snakes might look at it and be cured (cf. *Num 21:8-9*). By making use of that image, Jesus wanted to remind us that “no one is freed from sin by himself, and no one can be raised above himself by his own power; no one is completely rid of his sickness or his solitude or his servitude. On the contrary, all stand in need of Christ, their model, their mentor, their liberator, their Saviour, their source of life.”^[1] In order to believe, to be saved, to learn to love, we need to look at Christ on the Cross. His gestures and words there help us to

understand how great the love is that He wants to instill in our hearts. Nicodemus' personal meeting with the Cross completes the transformation of his own heart. From then on he overcomes his fear about what others may think and shows openly that he is a friend of Jesus. Contemplating the Cross always changes us.

THE APOSTLES too find their hearts transformed when, after our Lord's resurrection, they come to understand the real scope and meaning of Jesus' death on the Cross. Engraved on their hearts is the certainty that "it is Love that brought Jesus to Calvary," and that "on the Cross, all his gestures and all his words are of love, a love both calm and strong."^[2] Only by grasping deeply the greatness of divine Love revealed on the Cross can they fully understand the new commandment that Jesus had given them during the

Last Supper (cf. *Jn* 13:34), and the prayer for unity among his disciples that Christ offers to the Father on that same night (cf. *Jn* 17:21).

Jesus' words about fraternal love and unity were faithfully transmitted by the apostles to the first Christians. Indeed, the newborn community in Jerusalem is described in this way: *the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul (Acts 4:32)*. The unity and harmony that we see here was not merely a human achievement, the result of practising human virtues or drawing up effective agreements. It was, above all, a gift from God, a work of the Holy Spirit in those who had been born to the life of grace through Baptism. But while this unity is certainly a gift, it is also at the same time a task. The sad story of Ananias and Saphira in the following chapter (cf. *Acts* 5:1-10) shows clearly that this unity – so strong that it can be

described as being of one heart and soul – was a very valuable but fragile gift, which depended also on the personal freedom of each one opening their heart to receive it.

This “miracle of unity” is brought about by the Holy Spirit, but it also depends on our being well prepared to receive it. We can hamper it by our pride, selfishness, gossip, distrust... “The Acts of the Apostles show how in the holy city of Jerusalem, touched by the recent events of Easter, the Church was coming to birth. From the very beginning, the young Church ‘persevered in communion,’ that is, it formed a communion strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit. And thus it remains even to this day. In his Paschal Mystery, Christ is the heart of this community. He ensures that the Church lives, grows and takes shape like a body ‘joined and knit together by every joint with

which it is supplied, when each part is working properly' (*Eph 4:16*).”^[3]
Unity is a gift for the Church and the task of each person in the Church.

AND WITH GREAT POWER the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all (Acts 4:33) Christianity spread rapidly during the first centuries. This happened thanks to the courage of the early Christians, but also, above all, thanks to the testimony of their charity with one another, a charity they strove to spread to everyone. “See how they love one another!” people said, “how they are ready even to die for one another!”^[4]

In order to be credible, Christians have to be united. The charity with which we treat one another has to shine forth. Apostolate is nothing else than the overflow of this charity that reaches all men and women,

sharing personally in their concerns. Saint Josemaría saw this unity as essential for Opus Dei: “I want the Work always to be like this: a small family that is closely united, even though we are spread throughout the whole world.”^[5] He also said that no matter how far our apostolate extends, we should always strive to strengthen the atmosphere of trust and simplicity, of joy and affection.

“What an enormous responsibility the Lord gives us today! He tells us that the world will recognise the disciples of Jesus by the way they love one another. Love, in other words, is the Christian’s identity card, the only valid ‘document’ identifying us as Christians. It is the only valid document. If this card expires and is not constantly renewed, we stop being witnesses of the Master. So I ask you: Do you wish to say yes to Jesus’ invitation to be his disciples? Do you wish to be his

faithful friends? The true friends of Jesus stand out essentially by the *genuine love* that shines forth in their way of life. Love is always shown in specific deeds, putting love into action. To love means to give, not only something material, but also something of one's self: one's own time, one's friendship, one's own abilities.”^[6] —

Let us ask our Lady to teach us how to transmit the light and warmth of faith with a unity that attracts everyone.

^[1] — Vatican Council II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 8.

^[2] — Saint Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Eleventh Station.

^[3] — Saint John Paul II, Homily, 13 June 1999.

^[4] — Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 39

^[5] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family conversation, 17 May 1970.

^[6] Francis, Homily, 24 April 2016.

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