

Meditations: Friday of the Thirtieth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirtieth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: God's law is for our good; the freedom to fulfill a duty; a day for remembrance.

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JESUS PROPOSED a new way of looking at reality in his preaching. Some Pharisees were only concerned with the strict observance of rules, which had become increasingly numerous. In contrast, Christ placed the love of God, which leads to our well-being, at the center of his message. After all, this was the purpose of the law that God gave Moses: to help people live in a way that would make them happy. The Jewish authorities, however, had established so many regulations that the original intent of divine precepts had become obscured. The most important thing for them was to follow them to the letter; they did not see any need to search for the good that they brought to their own lives.

For this reason, most Israelites were eager to hear Jesus's good news. Perhaps they sensed that his words contained a liberating message that addressed their deepest concerns.

Nevertheless, the Pharisees refused to accept this message and sought an opportunity to accuse him of violating divine law. One Sabbath, while Jesus was dining at a Pharisee's home, *there was a man before him who had dropsy (Lk 14:2)*. The scene might even have been staged to put the Master in a difficult position: if He healed the man, they could denounce Him for not respecting the Sabbath; if He did nothing, it would serve to reinforce their own convictions about the Sabbath.

Jesus's reasoning was simple. *Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?* He asked them. When they did not answer, He went to the sick man, healed him, and sent him away. Then He asked another question: *Which of you, having an ass or an ox that has fallen into a well, will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day? (Lk 14:3-5)*. Jesus's questions make it clear that the authorities'

understanding of the law did not come from God, because it ignored people's well-being. In contrast, the appeal of Christ's message lies in the fact that He is intensely interested in making us happy. "Jesus' whole life, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily acts of generosity, and finally his complete self-giving, is precious and reveals the mystery of his divine life. [...] Sometimes we lose our enthusiasm for mission because we forget that the Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters. If we succeed in expressing adequately and with beauty the essential content of the Gospel, surely this message will speak to the deepest yearnings of people's hearts."^[1] —

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JESUS DOES not reject the law. In fact, when the rich young man asked Him what he had to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus referred to the commandments (cf. *Mk 10:18*). Fulfilling these precepts is the foundation for our own happiness. Aspiring to live a life without any obligations, in addition to being quite unrealistic, would not guarantee a happy existence: our actions would lack the larger purpose that gives life meaning. Furthermore, such an approach would end up creating a series of constraints that one has not chosen for oneself. “Often,” the Prelate of Opus Dei reminds us, “an illusory freedom without limits is aspired to, as though it were the ultimate goal of progress. And not infrequently, we are pained to see that this claim goes hand in hand with many forms of oppression and of apparent freedoms that in reality are only chains that enslave.”^[2]

The behavior of the Pharisees in this scene, however, shows that their lives had been reduced to mere rule-following. They did not place their happiness in God but in the security and satisfaction they felt in carrying out their precepts, regardless of their meaning. Moreover, they saw salvation as a reward for their good deeds, rather than as a gift from God. Jesus, on the other hand, invites us to discover the true meaning of divine law. This way, we will not see observing the commandments as something arbitrary and foreign to ourselves, but as a response to God's love which is at the origin of our existence. St. Josemaria wrote: "How great a truth is this, which opens the way to freedom and gives it meaning throughout our lives. I will sum it up for you, with the joy and certainty which flow from knowing there is a close relationship between God and his creatures. It is the knowledge that we have come from the hands of

God, that the Blessed Trinity looks upon us with predilection, that we are children of so wonderful a Father. I ask my Lord to help us decide to take this truth to heart, to dwell upon it day by day; only then will we be acting as free men.”^[3] Like the obligations scattered throughout our days, when we fulfill them out of love for God and others, the commandments mark a path to happiness on earth and in heaven.

THE ORIGINAL meaning of the precept of the Sabbath day had become obscured. The commandment echoed God's rest when He created the world: *For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (Ex 20:11)*. It was also a

reminder of Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt: *You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day (Dt 5:15).* God had entrusted Israel with the Sabbath in order to observe that day as a sign of the covenant. It was a day “set apart for the praise of God, his work of creation, and his saving actions on behalf of Israel.”^[4] The Christian Sabbath became Sunday, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. This event represented the full realization of the Jewish Sabbath because it “symbolizes the new creation”^[5] that liberated us from the slavery of sin.

Both the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday refer to moments of history that are so significant that they merit being relived every week.

They help us remember where we come from and what source gives our lives meaning and unites us with others. “Remembrance is what makes a people strong, because it feels rooted in a journey, rooted in a history, rooted in a people.

Remembrance helps us understand that we are not alone, we are a people: a people with a history, with a past, with a life.”^[6] — In this sense, “participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church. The faithful give witness by this to their communion in faith and charity. Together they testify to God's holiness and their hope of salvation. They strengthen one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”^[7] —

Our Lady can help us cultivate the desire to remember the new life that her Son has given us, which unites us with our brothers and sisters in faith, every Sunday.

[1] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 265.

[2] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral letter, 9-I-2018, no. 1.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 26.

[4] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2171.

[5] *Ibid*, no. 2174.

[6] Pope Francis, Homily, 2-XI-2018.

[7] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2182.

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