

Meditations: Monday of the Third Week of Lent

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

- The Eucharist satisfies our deepest longings
- Conversion is the work of the present moment
- We all cooperate in the holiness of others

MY SOUL longs for you, O God (Ps 41:3). My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God (Ps 84:2). Many psalms speak to us of a God able to satisfy the longings, not only of our

soul, but also of our heart and even our flesh. We have been created to enjoy God; we come to Holy Mass with this certainty, where God gives himself to us to satisfy these longings. But we may not always feel this enthusiasm when we approach the Eucharist. Perhaps we notice our tangled heart, our scattered soul, or our exhausted body. And it can seem to us that we are very far from the psalmist's joy.

Our situation can be similar, at times, to that of Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria. He was *a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper* (2 Kings 5:1). He was a man filled with vigor, at the height of his career, but all the joys in life had suddenly turned into bitter torment for him. Naaman's disease had robbed him of his ability to enjoy the

good things in life, but not his desire for them.

In the Eucharist we find all that we can desire. The Eucharist is the nourishment that satisfies us, the medicine for our infirmities. We beseech with the liturgy today: “May your unfailing compassion, O Lord, cleanse and protect your Church, and, since without you she cannot stand secure, may she be always governed by your grace.”^[1] Saint John Paul II asked: “Were we to disregard the Eucharist, how could we overcome our own deficiencies?”^[2] And Saint Josemaría advised: “Love the Mass. And be hungry to receive our Lord in Communion, although you may be cold inside, although your emotions may not correspond to your desires. Receive communion with faith, with hope, with burning charity.”^[3]

THERE WERE many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, yet none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian (Lk 4:27). Why was Naaman, among so many others, chosen by God to be saved from the evil that afflicted him? Why does our Lord once again draw close to us, among so many others, with his loving call to conversion? In great part, it is a mystery; we don't know why. We can't lay claim to any particular merits. It may even seem to us that on our part we have only put up obstacles. This is in fact what happened with Naaman; when told by Elisha to wash himself in the Jordan seven times, he became angry, and went away (cf. 2 Kings 5:11).

We too have begun Lent with great expectations, but perhaps we have become a bit discouraged at not noticing big changes in our life. Perhaps what happened to Naaman,

or to some of Jesus' fellow townsmen, also happens to us: they wanted to see wonders and didn't realize what they had before their eyes. In our case too, we may be expecting a more dramatic conversion that will bring a radical change to our life. And while waiting for this to happen, we are putting off our true conversion, the one that is truly within our reach, in smaller things.

It is true that we cannot become saints overnight. "Sanctification is the work of a lifetime,"^[4] Saint Josemaría reminded us, and it is God who brings this about in us, without our knowing very well how this happens. But "conversion is the matter of a moment,"^[5] and we can decide anew to convert every time we prepare to pray or place ourselves in the presence of God. If Jesus is with us, what more do we need to convert, to let ourselves be healed?

NAAMAN listened to those who encouraged him to trust the prophet's instructions. *So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean (2 Kings 5:14).* Other people played a key role in the story of Naaman's healing: *Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little maid from the land of Israel, and she waited on Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5:2-3).*

Naaman the Syrian was healed through the faith and love of this young girl from Israel. It is surprising to see that this maid, taken from her land and turned into a slave, far from harboring feelings of hatred,

sincerely wanted her master to be cured. We see the same attitude later in Naaman's servants who, when their master walks out of the prophet's house in anger, help him to reconsider. If it weren't for the concern of all these people, Naaman would never have been cured.

Every story of conversion, ours too, is assisted by simple people filled with faith, whom God has placed at our side. And we can play the same role in the lives of those around us. "No one is saved by himself or herself, individually, or by his or her own efforts. God attracts us by taking into account the complex interweaving of personal relationships entailed in the life of a human community."^[6] Our Lady is the person who loves and helps us the most. Mary gently guides us towards her Son so that Jesus can heal us.

[1] Monday of the Third Week of Lent,
Collect Prayer.

[2] Saint John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 60.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 91.

[4] Saint Josemaría *The Way*, no. 285.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 113.

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