

Meditations: Monday of the Thirty-First Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-first week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: the logic of humility and charity; valuing great and small things; receiving God's gifts.

- The logic of humility and charity
- Valuing great and small things
- Receiving God's gifts

JESUS HAD been invited to dine at the home of a prominent Pharisee. After encouraging the guests not to always take the best seats at the table (cf. *Lk 14:8-11*), He turns to his host and says, *When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid (Lk 14:13)*. Earlier He spoke to the attendees about humility, and now He wants to show that it is accompanied by charity.

It may seem strange for Jesus to impart these teachings at a banquet, but he seizes this opportunity to communicate what He will later do: to give Himself on the Cross with extreme humility, without expecting any recompense. He wants his listeners to enter into this new logic, which leads to true happiness, unlike the one that leads us to think only of ourselves. As Saint Josemaría once

said, “The more generous you are for God, the happier you will be.”^[1]

“Do not be afraid!” St. John Paul II told a group of young people in Switzerland. “God does not let himself be outdone in generosity! After almost 60 years of being a priest, I am happy to bear my witness to all of you here: it is beautiful to be able to spend oneself without reserve for the cause of the Kingdom of God! [...] May you have Christ's Cross in your hands. Let the words of Life be on your lips; and in your hearts, the saving grace of the Risen Lord!”^[2]

WHEN YOU give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, Jesus says. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just (Lk 14:14). We know that in a

mysterious way, the resurrection will be God's way of repaying us; we will regain everything we have given, but in a full and complete way. We may seem to give our lives, but in reality, we receive them anew from the hands of God the Father: "God Himself is the reward and end of all our toil,"^[3] as St. Thomas Aquinas said.

In this Gospel passage, Jesus encourages us to free ourselves even from the legitimate gratitude we might expect; it is not so much about rejecting it but ensuring that it is not the sole motive behind our actions. Jesus invites us to discover his way of loving and giving to others without calculating the services rendered and rewards expected. Anyone who loves in this way enjoys love much more, because they also receive it freely, without impositions or constraints.

When St. Josemaría reflected on the gratuitousness of God's love for humanity, he understood the immense value of everything we do, because neither small or great things measure up to the greatness of what we have received. "Some people could perhaps imagine that ordinary life contains very little that can be offered to God: just trifles or silly things. But small children who want to please their parents give them whatever they have: a lead soldier with no head, a spool without any thread, a few pebbles, a couple of buttons. This is everything valuable they have in their pockets, their treasures. And a father does not consider how childish the present is: he thanks his child for it with the tenderest of hugs. Let us act in the same way towards God, because these childish things, these silly little things, become great things, because love is great."^[4] —

AT TIMES, due to a way of thinking that struggles to understand the logic of gratuitousness, we may find it difficult to accept God's unconditional love. We might think that our merits and efforts are the only legitimate paths to attaining something of value. Being immersed in a commercial, purely human logic, our "hearts may shrink, close, and be unable to receive so much gratuitous love." We can pray: "May our life of holiness expand our hearts, so that God's gratuitousness and the gifts He wants to bestow on us may reach our hearts."^[5]

The Gospel tells us that Jesus will invite those who cannot repay Him on earth to his banquet. This only makes sense: how could we repay God for everything He gives us in the Eucharist, Confession, the sacraments, and all his gifts? We do

not prepare ourselves interiorly to receive the sacrament so we can merit them, but in order to expand our souls so God's gifts can fill our lives and help us love like Him.

St. Josemaría said that “Jesus's heart was not dry: his heart was deep, knowing how to appreciate and how to love.”^[6] Jesus values all the acts of love we want to offer Him, whether great or small. We can ask our Lady to make our hearts more and more like hers, open to God's gifts and all his plans.

^[1] St. Josemaría, *The Furrow*, no. 18.

^[2] St. John Paul II, Address, 5-VI-2004.

^[3] St. Thomas Aquinas, *On the Creed*, 2, l.c.

^[4] St. Josemaría, Letter 1, no. 19.

^[5] Pope Francis, Homily, 11-VI2019.

^[6] Quoted in J. Echevarría, *Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Rialp, 2nd ed., Madrid 2000, pg. 106.

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