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Meditations: Monday of the Twentieth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can guide
our prayer during the 20th
week of Ordinary Time.

- Following God with our heart
 - Risking everything on our Lord
 - Whoever lets Christ in loses
nothing
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AFTER Jesus blessed the children who had been brought to Him, a prominent person came up to Him (cf. *Lk 18:18*). He had probably been observing the Master for several days. After seeing the affection shown towards the small children, he felt the need to open his heart to our Lord. So he asked a question that had been troubling him for some time: “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” (*Mt 19:16*).

Generally speaking, most of us need clarity when we set out to do something. We want to know the precise steps to follow in order to achieve a certain goal. God knows that we are like that. That is why he gave Moses some commandments, so that the Israelites would know more clearly which deeds were pleasing to the Lord and which ones were not. In fact, Jesus answers the young man’s question by referring to the Decalogue: “If you would enter life,

keep the commandments.’ He said to him, ‘Which?’ And Jesus said, ‘You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (*Mt 19:17.18-19*). But when the young man tells Him that he has been doing all this since his adolescence, our Lord answers: “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (*Mt 19:21*).

Jesus asks that young man to take a further step in his relationship with God. Fulfilling the commandments, of course, is a good and necessary thing. But He invites the young man to abandon himself in God’s hands and go beyond the security that “doing good things” can give. After all, eternal life is not about reaching a goal due to one’s own merits, but

rather about listening to God, following Him closely and, in that relationship, realizing that serving Him and enjoying his company is a divine gift. Only by sharing in his Life do we realize the magnitude of his love, which goes beyond observing some laws. By his death and resurrection, Christ opens the doors of heaven for us. And it is He who, with his grace, sustains our good works and encourages us to take new paths. That is why Jesus calls that young man to a complete communion with Him. “Following Christ is not an outward imitation, since it touches man at the very depths of his being. Being a follower of Christ means *becoming conformed to him* who became a servant even to giving himself on the Cross.”^[1] Our Lord wants to help this person ensure that his relationship with God is not limited to fulfilling a few rules, but that it becomes the center of his very existence. And this is what will

fill him with a happiness that no earthly reality can give. “Such is the greatness of the life to which God calls us! We cannot lead a mediocre life! . . . He wants us to know Christ's love for us that surpasses all knowledge, so that we may be filled to the full with all the good things of God.”^[2] —

WHEN HE heard Jesus' challenge to leave everything and follow Him, the young man “went away sad, for he had great possessions” (*Mt 19:22*). His initial enthusiasm gave way to bitterness. That man had been excited because he thought he had finally found the answer that would fully satisfy his thirst for happiness. But when God asked him for his heart and, with it, everything he had inside, he didn't know what to say. He was ready to do any “good deed”

to enter eternal life. But giving himself completely, risking everything on our Lord, caused a dizziness he couldn't face.

The young man's wealth prevented him from daring to follow Jesus closely. And observing his behavior, we can also sense another reason: a mistaken way of conceiving his relationship with God. Perhaps he thought that, in order to reach eternal life, it was necessary to sacrifice his happiness on earth; that is, he didn't realize that what our Lord was asking of him was not simply to give up his possessions: it was a call to base his happiness on the constant and sure presence of God, and not on the sand of earthly goods. "Your boat – your talents, your hopes, your achievements – is worth nothing whatsoever, unless you leave it in Christ's hands, allowing him the freedom to come aboard. Make sure you don't turn it into an idol. In your

boat by yourself, if you try to do without the Master, you are – supernaturally speaking – making straight for shipwreck. Only if you allow, and seek, his presence and captaincy, will you be safe from the storms and setbacks of life. Place everything in God’s hands. Let your thoughts, the brave adventures you have imagined, your lofty human ambitions, your noble loves, pass through the heart of Christ.”^[3] —

Jesus’ request to the rich young man was not arbitrary. Although the young man had kept the commandments (and that in itself was a reason for joy), he felt dissatisfied because he had entrusted his earthly happiness to riches and his eternal happiness to the good deeds he performed. Hence our Lord addresses him with a “call to greater maturity, to pass from the precepts he observed in order to obtain rewards to a free and total love. Jesus

asks him to leave behind everything that weighs down his heart and hinders love. What Jesus proposes is not so much a person deprived of everything but a person free and rich in relationships. If the heart is loaded down with possessions, God and neighbor become only one thing more among others. Our having too much and wanting too much suffocate our heart and make us unhappy and incapable of loving.”^[4] —

SOMETIMES we may have the impression, like the rich young man, that following Jesus means giving up good things in order to reach eternal happiness. The path to holiness is then perceived as a continuous struggle to overcome ourselves until we reach heaven. This view is a caricature of a very different reality. Certainly, Christian life involves

struggle, fighting against our inclinations when they lead us to perform bad acts. But the goal is not simply to have a greater capacity to resist, but to guide our emotions in a way that enables us to enjoy the good that we do. When we experience opposition to acting virtuously, we struggle in a different way when we are seeking to learn to enjoy the good, even if this now requires going against the grain, and not merely to get used to giving ourselves a hard time. And thus growth in virtue leads to focusing our faculties and affections on what can truly satisfy our deepest aspirations, and to giving a secondary place (always subordinate to the main one) to what is simply a means to the end.

“If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only through this friendship are the doors of life

opened wide. Only through this friendship is the great potential of the human condition truly revealed. Only through this friendship do we experience what is beautiful and sets us free . . . Open wide the doors to Christ, and you will find true life.”^[5] —

In the saints we see people who have made our Lord the center of their life and found a happiness the world cannot give. “Those who follow Christ are able (not by their own merit but by the grace of God) to communicate to those around them what they at times suspect but cannot quite grasp: that true happiness, a genuine spirit of serving our neighbor, can only come by passing through the Heart of our Redeemer, *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo.*”^[6] — We ask our Lady to help us to open the doors of our heart to her Son, so that He may lead us to happiness both on earth and in heaven.

[1] Saint John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 21.

[2] St. Josemaría, *Letter 7*, no. 32.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 21.

[4] Francis, Message, 29 June 2021.

[5] Benedict XVI, Homily, 24 April 2005.

[6] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 93.

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