

Meditations: Saturday of the Nineteenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 19th week of Ordinary Time.

- Children, “souls pleasing to God”
- A "nuisance" to our Lord
- A tenderness that frees

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ST. MATTHEW recounts how on one occasion “children were brought to Jesus that he might lay his hands on them and pray” (*Mt* 19:13). It is easy to imagine the scene: men and women who want their children to be touched by our Lord as He prays for them. Good parents want the best for their children, and the best thing is for Christ to take them in his arms and bless them. So we can imagine that those parents would feel more at ease about their children’s future because our Lord had blessed them.

Many parents have repeated this scene since then, to the point that now “the practice of infant Baptism is an immemorial tradition of the Church.”^[1] And when the encounter between children and Jesus is encouraged, a wonderful discovery is made, for a very special harmony exists between Jesus and children (cf. *Mt* 10:25; 18:3). In the Gospel we see how little children approach the

Master with confidence and He embraces them in the midst of his disciples (cf. *Mk* 9:36), whom he asks never to look down on them (cf. *Mt* 18:10) or harm them (cf. *Mk* 9:42).

For St. Josemaría, children “mean souls pleasing to God.”^[2] Little children never try to deceive others; they always show themselves as they are, without ulterior motives.

Children aren’t afraid to show they are in need; at the slightest problem they go to their parents with trust. Thus they give glory to God, and reveal to adults that our relationship with Him is much simpler than we sometimes think. That is why the founder of Opus Dei stressed the need to “believe as children believe, to love as children love, to give yourself up as children give themselves up... to pray as children pray.”^[3] —

THE DISCIPLES didn't view the children Jesus blessed with the same joy as He did. They probably saw the children as a nuisance to our Lord and thought: "Jesus has enough to do helping the people who can understand his preaching – the adults – and those who really need him – the sick. Why waste his time with children who can't understand Him?" The disciples were so convinced of this that they took the liberty of scolding the little children and their parents (cf. *Mt 19:13*). Christ, in contrast, reacted with words that have not ceased to resonate in the Church's life down through the centuries: "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them" (*Mt 19:14*).

Over time, many people have accepted this call from our Lord. First of all, parents and grandparents, who have been eager to pass on the faith to the young

children in the family, teaching them to pronounce the names of Jesus and Mary with affection. Alongside them, many others have been concerned about helping children and young people to come to know God: catechists, educators, priests, men and women religious... All of them have rejected the temptation to think that time spent with children is wasted. Although the fruit of these small seeds is often perceived only over the years (or perhaps they will never see it), they have found a deep joy in their efforts, since they have shared with the young the most precious thing they have: their faith.

Educating a child involves sacrifice. Any father, mother or teacher can describe very well what this entails: giving up personal plans, having a lot of patience, forgetting about one's own tiredness... So we can appreciate that our parents and teachers did so for us. Surely when we were

children we didn't realize all the effort that was being made for us. And to a large extent this is because our parents didn't see their sacrifices as renunciations, but as ways of showing their love for us. "Where there is Love, it is a willing sacrifice, though it remains hard, and the cross is the Holy Cross. A soul that knows how to love and give itself in this way, is filled with peace and joy."^[4] —

ST. MATTHEW concludes his account of our Lord's encounter with the children by saying that "he laid his hands on them and went away" (*Mt* 19:15). His concern and care for them doesn't lead to overprotecting or trying to control them. He gives those children the best He has and lets them freely make that gift grow. Such is "the love of the Lord, a daily, discreet and respectful love; a love

that is free and freeing, a love that
heals and raises up.”^[5] —

Jesus offers us here the example of a good educator who leads people forward in the full exercise of their freedom. We could say that the opposite of educating is seducing: not leading the person towards an external good, but towards oneself, in order to take from the other person something for oneself. Our Lord doesn't seek anything from those who come to Him: “He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything.”^[6] — That is why we see children and other fragile people being so happy with Him, because they sense his authentic affection. He loves them freely, without seeking anything in return. In a certain way, we too can have the vulnerability of children, and so we desire a love that loves us for what we are, and not for what we can give.

A love that seeks only to possess is destined to be unhappy, because it fails to respect the basic principle of authentic love: to desire the good of the other person. “Tenderness, on the other hand, is a sign of a love free of selfish possessiveness. It makes us approach a person with immense respect and a certain dread of causing them harm or taking away their freedom. Loving another person involves the joy of contemplating and appreciating their innate beauty and sacredness, which is greater than my needs. This enables me to seek their good even when they cannot belong to me.”^[7]

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The Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph are two examples of this chaste and tender love. Children often learn to draw close to Jesus by seeing Him as a Child like themselves, in the arms of his parents. And then they can offer Him the same caresses that Mary and Joseph would give Him, the same caresses that they themselves

receive from their parents. Therefore it isn't surprising that the first contact with Jesus brings with it the happy aroma of childhood, of the tender love received at home.

[1] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1252.

[2] St. Josemaría, *Notes from a family gathering*, 19 March 1975.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*, To the Reader.

[4] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 249.

[5] Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Christus vivit*, no. 116.

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

[7] Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Amoris laetitia*, no. 127.

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