

Meditations: Thursday of the Nineteenth Week of Ordinary Time

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

- Leaving behind a logic of material gain
- Forgiving others' debts
- Welcoming the gratuitousness of love

PETER once asked Jesus how many times we have to forgive a brother's offenses. Our Lord responded with the parable of a servant who owed his master ten thousand talents – an exorbitant sum, impossible to repay. “And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt” (*Mt 18:27*).

The beginning of this parable reflects in some way God's relationship with humanity. As Saint Josemaría said: “We too are unable to find the wherewithal to pay the enormous debt we have contracted for so much divine goodness, a debt which we have increased through our personal sins. Even though we fight resolutely,

we can never properly repay the great debt that God has forgiven us.”^[1] The master forgave that debt so that his servant would set aside the logic of material gain and embrace that of mercy. Thus he will be able to work not as one who has to pay a debt, but to show the love that guides his life. For this is, ultimately, what God invites us to do: to let love and mercy mark our relationship with Him and with those around us, and not fear or mere justice.

God’s mercy is boundless. “He forgives all our sins as soon as we show even a small sign of repentance.”^[2] He is not interested in any compensation for his forgiveness. He does, however, want his mercy to lead us to live focused on what is truly important, acting as a person in love and not as a servant. “He doesn’t care for riches, nor for the fruits or the animals of the earth,

because they all belong to him. He wants something intimate, which we have to give him freely: ‘My son, give me your heart.’ Do you see? God is not satisfied with sharing. He wants it all. It's not our things he wants. It is ourselves. It is only when we give ourselves that we can offer other gifts to our Lord.”^[3] —

AS THAT SERVANT was leaving his master's presence, he came upon a man who owed him a hundred denarii. This was no small sum – three months' wages – but it was insignificant compared to the debt he himself had been forgiven. “His fellow servant fell down and besought him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt.” Those who witnessed what had happened told

the master, who summoned his servant again: “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” Then the master “delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt” (*Mt 18:28-34*).

At first glance, the master’s reaction might be seen as a punishment. But what he is doing is to act according to the servant’s way of thinking. Since he didn’t want to leave behind the logic of material gain and embrace that of mercy, the master applied the same principle that the servant had acted on. In fact, it could be said that the man rejected the salvation offered to him: he preferred that his relationships be marked by debts and obligations, rather than by gratuitousness. “We cannot demand God’s forgiveness for ourselves if we in turn do not grant forgiveness to

our neighbor. It is a condition: think of your end, of God's forgiveness, and stop hating. Reject resentment, that bothersome fly that keeps coming back. If we do not strive to forgive and to love, we will not be forgiven and loved either.”^[4] —

In our daily lives, we probably encounter people who “owe” us something: someone who made an offending comment or joke, a friend who stood us up at the last minute, a colleague who constantly interrupts us at work... Besides these daily situations, we may also encounter people who owe us a greater “debt” due to the almost irreparable suffering they have caused us. In either case, the Gospel invites us to consider that “the greatest injury or offence that you can suffer from them is as nothing compared with what God has forgiven you.”^[5] —

Moreover, every time we forgive someone, we identify ourselves more

closely with our Lord. That is why St. Josemaría said that the most divine reality in our Christian lives “is to forgive those who have hurt us,”^[6] — since God became man precisely to forgive us.

TODAY, it can be difficult to leave behind the logic of material gain adopted by the unjust servant in the parable. Perhaps we prefer to be equal with others: not owing anyone anything, and not being owed anything by anyone. Hence we may be suspicious when someone does something for us and wonder what they expect in return. We are not used to gifts. We often prefer to think that we have achieved something through our own efforts, because this makes us autonomous, and allows us to experience a certain power over

others. We don't want to depend on others.

But those who have learned to let themselves be loved are convinced that they “cannot always give, but must also receive. A person who wants to give love must in turn receive it as a gift.”^[7] Everything great in our life is always the result of a prior gift: “He first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). A person who welcomes God's gratuitous love is freed from a Christian life reduced to *things I have to do and things I am forbidden to do*. Their lives rather are guided by the eagerness to please God in all their actions, as a child seeks to please its father, or a husband his wife, and vice versa.

Becoming aware of the immensity of God's love, who loves us madly, can help us understand the value that small things have for Him, precisely because they are ours. We know that

we can never “repay the debt,” but we are excited to dream of helping to “support the family.” It is God’s love that transforms our trinkets into precious jewels. We do everything to make God happy. These small things free our soul because they help us to let ourselves be loved in return for practically nothing. Then care for small things doesn’t constrict us. On the contrary, it is impossible to care for them with perseverance if our effort stems from a desire to control, to cancel the debt. Rather they are spontaneous and simple small details of someone who knows they are looked upon lovingly by an all-powerful and eternal God, but at the same time by a God whose family we belong to. We can ask our Lady to help us “to be ever more aware of the gratuitousness and greatness of the forgiveness God grants us, to become merciful like him, a good Father, slow to anger and great in love.”^[8]

^[1] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 168.

^[2] Francis, Angelus, 17 September 2017.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 35.

^[4] Francis, Angelus, 13 September 2020.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 452.

^[6] St. Josemaría, quoted by Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 16 February 2023, no. 7.

^[7] Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, no. 7.

^[8] Francis, Angelus, 17 September 2017.

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