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Meditations: December 27, Saint John, Evangelist

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during these days of the Christmas season. The topics are: the disciple whom Jesus loved; God's patience transforms us; loving as Jesus loves.

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- The disciple whom Jesus loved
- God's patience transforms us
- Loving as Jesus loves

PETER AND JOHN, after hearing what Mary Magdalene had witnessed, start running to our Lord's empty tomb. In this passage from today's Gospel, the fourth evangelist presents himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (cf. *Jn* 20:2). Why was John, whose feast we celebrate today, the beloved disciple, the favorite of Christ? Perhaps it was because he was the youngest, or because he was the one who needed that special affection the most. Or perhaps because of his fiery character or simply because Jesus wanted it. What we do know for sure

is that Saint John was convinced he was the object of our Lord's unmistakable affection.

Nevertheless, we can all say that we are loved in a special, unique and exclusive way by God. It is part of the mystery of his love for us. Faith assures us of this, but our hearts sometimes resist believing it.

“Christmas reminds us that God continues to love each one of us. To me, to you, to each of us, he says today: ‘I love you and I will always love you; you are precious in my eyes.’”^[1] Indeed, just as with Saint John, “the Lord wishes to make each one of us a disciple who lives in personal friendship with him. To achieve this, it is not enough to follow him and to listen to him outwardly: it is also necessary to live with him and like him. This is only possible in the context of a relationship of deep familiarity, imbued with the warmth of total

trust. This is what happens between friends.”^[2]

JOHN WAS IMPETUOUS, and Jesus knew this very well when He chose him. When people refused to receive Him in Samaria, the beloved disciple asked: *Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?* (Lk 9:54). On another occasion John, with great self-assurance, told Jesus that they had forbidden someone to cast out demons because he wasn't following them (cf. Mk 9:38). Jesus always listened patiently. How many hours He must have spent with John trying to channel his impetuous ardor and bring to birth the seed of authentic charity in him. “It can happen that even as God patiently tills the soil of history and our own hearts, we show ourselves impatient and want to judge

everything immediately: now or never, now, now, now. In this way, we lose that ‘small’ but most beautiful of virtues: hope.”^[3] —

John learned our Lord’s lessons well because he knew Jesus loved him. The Gospels show us the gradual change in John. For example, in the race to the tomb that we read about in today’s Gospel passage, we see he has overcome some of his impetuosity, since he has the courtesy to wait so Peter can enter first. *Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed (Jn 20:8)*. At the end of his life, he tirelessly repeated to the first Christians the core of the Gospel message: *Beloved, let us love one another; for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God (1 Jn 4:7)*. Saint Jerome recounts that John’s disciples asked him at the end of his life why he stressed this so often, and

the evangelist responded: “Because this is the Lord’s command and fulfilling it is the only thing necessary.”^[4] —

“LOVE ONE ANOTHER very much,” Saint Josemaría often insisted. “And in saying this, I am telling you what is at the heart of Christianity: *Deus caritas est* (1 Jn 4:8), God is affection. Do you remember John?” Then the founder of Opus Dei reminded those present of what the apostle said when he was already “old, very old, although he must have felt very young”^[5]: that the Christian message is summed up in these words: *In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins* (1 Jn 4:10). Therefore, in the eyes of a Christian, every person is the object of God’s infinite affection.

“God has gone ahead of us with the gift of his Son. Once and again, he goes before us in an unexpected way . . . He always comes back to begin anew with us. Nevertheless, He expects us to love along with Him. He loves us so that we may be able to become persons who love together with Him and thus create peace on the earth.”^[6] After his call for a rain of fire to destroy the city in Samaria, John recounts the scene of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. He is the only evangelist to do so. Perhaps that story was the result of one of his many conversations with our Lord, who wanted to explain to him why he should love everyone, just as God the Father loves them.

Finally, John is the disciple who receives from Jesus the sweet task of taking care of our Lady. Who took care of whom? Surely both fulfilled their mission with great joy and gratitude. Mary carried out Jesus’

final request by loving John as her Son would have wanted her to do. We can go to the intercession of our Lady and to Saint John, asking that God may place in our hearts his love that bears great fruit in others.

[¹] Francis, Homily, 24 December 2019.

[²] Benedict XVI, Audience, 5 July 2016.

[³] Francis, Homily, 2 February 2021.

[⁴] Saint Jerome, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 3, 6.

[⁵] Saint Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, 19 March 1964.

[⁶] Benedict XVI, Homily 24 December 2010.

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