

Meditations: Friday of the First Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during these days of the Lenten season.

- Critical judgments and the fifth commandment
- Thinking the best of others
- God's love frees us from envy

MY SOUL waits for the Lord, more than sentinels wait for the dawn. Let Israel wait for the Lord. For with the Lord is kindness, and with him plenteous redemption (Ps 131:6-8).

Christians hope in a God who is forgiveness and mercy; we want to

look at the world through his eyes. This is also how the struggle for holiness could be defined: the progressive identification of our way of looking with his. This effort starts with the purification of our heart, which Lent incessantly invites us to undertake. But we know this is not an automatic process. Sometimes it may seem to us that we are too inclined to rash judgments, to looking at things only from our point of view, without being aware of the damage we do to others and to ourselves. Jesus connects these quarrels and enmities with the fifth commandment, which forbids killing someone (cf. *Mt* 5:21-24).

“Who can judge man? The whole earth is full of rash judgments. Indeed, the one of whom we despaired, at the least expected moment suddenly converts and becomes the best of all. While the one in whom we had trusted so

greatly, at the least expected moment suddenly falls.”^[1] The Kingdom of God is among us, and only our Lord can occupy the place of judge. Why do we so often fall into critical judgments? “How easy it is to criticize others! . . . In addition to giving us the gift of gentleness, the Holy Spirit invites us to be in solidarity, to bear other’s burdens. How many burdens there are in a person’s life: illness, lack of work, loneliness, pain...! And how many other trials that require the proximity and love of our brothers and sisters!”^[2]

IT IS NOT EASY to deactivate the internal mechanism that leads us to criticize others. But the Holy Spirit can give us light to discover what happens in our hearts when these negative emotions arise. “Pointing fingers and judging others are frequently signs of an inability to accept our own weaknesses, our own

frailty. Only tender love will save us from the snares of the accuser (cf. *Rev* 12:10). That is why it is so important to encounter God's mercy, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where we experience his truth and tenderness."^[3] A deep awareness of God's forgiveness, of not having any right to deserve so much goodness from God, will lead us to consider others in the same way, with a compassionate look. Sometimes, judging others can be a symptom of believing ourselves deserving of grace, a consequence of viewing God as someone who doesn't love, but merely pays.

One way to avoid falling into critical judgment is to always think the best of others. Saint Thomas Aquinas said that "it may happen that someone who interprets in the best light what others do is more frequently deceived; but it is better to err frequently through thinking well of a

wicked man, than to err less frequently through having an evil opinion of a good man, because in the latter case an injury is inflicted, but not in the former.”^[4] It is better to be wrong by thinking well of others, than to harm others by thinking badly of them. “Paradoxically, the evil one can also speak the truth to us, yet he does so only to condemn us. We know that God’s truth does not condemn, but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives us.”^[5] “Acquire the habit of speaking cordially about everything and everyone,” Saint Josemaría recommended, “especially about those who work in God’s service. And when that’s not possible, keep quiet! Sharp and unthinking comments can also border on gossip or slander.”^[6]

IF YOU, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? (Ps 130:3). Therefore it consoles us to realize how much God has forgiven

each one of us, to consider his totally gratuitous love for us, despite our betrayals. But paradoxically, envy can sometimes lead us to be saddened by the good of others, mainly because of the love or honor they receive. If we were fully aware of how much God loves each one of us, our hearts would never allow room for this fault.

The holy Curé of Ars, speaking about rash judgment, said: “if we had the happiness of being free from pride and envy, we would never judge anyone. Rather we would limit ourselves to weeping for our own spiritual miseries, and praying for poor sinners, convinced that God will not ask us for an account of the actions of others, but only of our own.”^[7] But until we are able to learn to rejoice in the good of others, in their surpassing our own attainments, envy will accompany us throughout our life on earth. We see

the example of Jesus, who accepts an unjust judgment that harms his own honor, so that we may be freed from any condemnation; and freed from any need to judge others and to judge ourselves.

“The Most Holy Trinity has crowned our Mother. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, will ask us to render an account of every idle word. That is another reason for asking Holy Mary to teach us to always speak in the presence of the Lord.”^[8]

^[1] Saint Augustine, Sermon 46, on Shepherds in the Church, 24-25.

^[2] Francis, Audience, 3 November 2021.

^[3] Francis, *Patris corde*, no. 2.

^[4] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 60, a. 4, ad 1.

[5] Francis, *Patris corde*, no. 2.

[6] Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 902.

[7] Holy Curé of Ars, Sermon on Rash Judgment.

[8] Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 926.

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