

Meditations: Monday of the First Week of Advent

Some reflections that can guide our prayer as we begin a new liturgical year in the Church.

- Jesus comes to be in our midst
- We can always go to Him
- Growing in friendship with Jesus through prayer

AS THE LITURGICAL CYCLE begins anew, we revisit the mysteries of Christ's life, his joys, sorrows and glorious triumph. We start these days looking forward to his Nativity, and then go on to contemplate his Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension,

until we finally reach Pentecost, when He sends the Holy Spirit to accompany us *always, to the close of the age* (*Mt 28:20*).

We know that this annual repetition of his mysteries is much more than a pious memory. “The liturgical year, devotedly fostered and accompanied by the Church, is not a cold and lifeless representation of past events, or a simple and bare record of a former age. It is rather Christ Himself who is ever living in his Church.”^[1] In each liturgical time of the Church we are personally drawn into a moment or specific aspect of the life of the very Christ who walked the streets of Galilee. For *Jesus Christus heri et Hodie, Ipse et in saecula*, “Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (*Heb 13:8*). Christ is alive and we can come to know Him and love Him. What is more, we can live *in Him*.

Specifically, during these days of Advent, we are once again living in expectation of the Messiah. “His hour is coming, he will not delay,”^[2] the Church prays. Once more, Jesus is coming into our world, to become present in our lives. He comes with the desire to accompany us along our daily path. He wants us to share our joys with Him, to entrust Him with our sorrows. He wants to be able to console us and give us the strength we need to carry out our daily mission. We should thank Him for what we are experiencing again during these days: that God has become man so that we might become children of God and live alongside Him.

SOME OF THOSE who encountered Jesus when He lived on earth doing good, can teach us how to draw close to the Master. As *he entered into Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, beseeching him and*

saying, “Lord, my servant is lying paralysed at home, in terrible distress” (Mt 8:5-6). Today’s liturgy offers this episode in our Lord’s life for our consideration. That good man, a Gentile, was suffering on account of the illness of a servant he truly esteemed. Faced with his sad powerlessness to help him, he reacts wisely and humbly, filled with faith. He goes to look for Jesus and openly tells Him of his sorrow. He doesn’t need to ask for anything; he simply explains the situation and opens up his heart.

We too have our difficulties and sorrows; we too have friends we want to see cured. And we want to feel our Lord’s hand assisting us. So we react trustingly, as did this centurion, and we have recourse to Jesus. It is good to remind ourselves of just how much we need Him and how ardently He wants to help us. It is very consoling to know that at any

moment we can turn to Him with complete simplicity: Jesus, I have some problems that I don't know how to solve and they are taking away my peace of mind. I have faith, but I know that at times I need to have more trust in you. I still have to learn to put my life entirely in your hands.

Today we want to imitate the centurion in the Gospel and open our heart to our Lord. In the silence of our conversation with Jesus, we lay before Him our life and our needs. And we are at peace, knowing that now He is also taking care of us.

LORD, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed (Mt 8:8). We are always so moved when we contemplate, yet again, the faith of this centurion! A faith that left Jesus Himself amazed: *Truly I say to you, not even in Israel have I found*

such faith (Mt 8:10). A great faith and, at the same time, a humble, simple faith, expressed in words that the liturgy puts on our lips before receiving Holy Communion.

We can draw close to Jesus daily in the Eucharist, and we would like to do so with the same trust in Jesus' power and the same humility that we see in this figure in the Gospel. Saint Josemaría said: 'I cannot see how anyone could live as a Christian and not feel the need for the constant friendship of Jesus in the Word and in the Bread, in prayer and in the Eucharist. And I easily understand the ways in which successive generations of faithful have expressed their love for the Eucharist, both with public devotions making profession of the faith and with silent, simple practices in the peace of a church or the intimacy of their hearts.'^[3]

In the Blessed Eucharist and in the intimacy of our heart we can nourish our friendship with Jesus. He is always at our side to help us with his grace, to cheer us with his presence and show us his love for us. Although at times we cannot physically be close to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, we can always draw close to God in the silence of our recollected heart, as our Holy Mother Mary so often did (cf. *Lk 2:19*). On the threshold of this new liturgical year that is beginning, we can ask our Lady to accompany us and help us to enter into each moment of the life of her divine Son.

^[1] Pius XII, Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, no. 165.

^[2] Liturgy of the Hours, Monday of 1st week of Advent, None, short reading (cf. *Is 14:1*).

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 154.

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