

Meditations: Saturday of the Eighteenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist
our prayer during the 18th
Week of Ordinary Time.

- A father's desperation
- Regaining trust in God
- Prayer and faith

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A MAN'S son had been possessed by
a demon for some time now. The

demon would seize him and throw him to the ground, making him foam at the mouth and leaving him rigid. At times, he would even make him throw himself into the fire or into the water. The father had probably done everything possible to find a cure, but without success. One day, however, he heard about a Teacher whose disciples were apparently performing great miracles. He brought his son to them, but the apostles were unable to do anything. They tried, but they were unable to cast out the evil spirit (cf. *Mt* 17:14-16).

We can imagine the father's sadness. Those disciples had performed all kinds of miracles, but they failed when they tried to heal the boy. "Why is this happening to me?" the father may have asked himself. "Why can they heal others and not my only son?" Perhaps we have found ourselves in a similar situation.

People we know ask for and receive a favor from God – a job, the resolution of a problem, a family need – while our petition seems to bear no fruit. “Why does God help others and not me?” we may ask ourselves, like the boy’s father.

No answer can completely resolve this question. However, God can sometimes allow this apparent silence in order to increase our faith, hope and charity. In Sacred Scripture we also see many people whose prayers seemed to be unanswered by God. But they persevered and let themselves be transformed day by day, accepting God’s will, whatever it was. And this was, in many cases, the main fruit they obtained: learning how to love with all their heart what God wanted for them. Like the boy’s father, when about to give up hope, “in that moment God will give us a new name, which contains the meaning of our entire life; he will

change our heart and will offer us the blessing reserved to those who have allowed themselves to be changed by him. He knows how to do so, because he knows each one of us.”^[1]

WHEN THE FATHER saw that not even the apostles could cure his son, he tried a last resort: to approach Jesus. He did so without much hope, since he didn't want to delude himself again about a cure that seemed impossible: “If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.” Christ, knowing his doubts, answered: “If you can! All things are possible to him who believes!” (*Mk* 9:22-23). “The man feels his faith wavering and he is afraid that his lack of trust will prevent his son from being cured. He weeps. Don't be ashamed of tears like these, for

they are the fruit of our love of God, of contrite prayer, of true humility.”^[2] —
This was the first miracle that our Lord worked here: to help that father grow in humility and recover his trust in God.

Jesus, on hearing that man's plea, “rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, ‘You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again.’ And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out” (*Mk 9:25-26*). When the apostles asked Him why they hadn't been able to cast it out, our Lord replied forcefully: “Because of your little faith” (*Mt 17:20*). Perhaps the disciples, on seeing how violently the spirit tormented the child, had been filled with fear and felt incapable of such a great miracle. Living by faith doesn't mean never being afraid, but rather humbly acknowledging our need for God and the greatness of his plans. “It is faith

that gives us the ability to look with hope at the reverses in life, that helps us to accept even defeat, suffering, with the awareness that evil never has, never will have, the last word.”^[3] —
Jesus has power over all evil. He only needs a patient and humble soul, like that father, in order to pour out his power on us, in ways we may not even imagine.

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ST. JOSEMARÍA used to say that entrusting a request to God with faith does not exempt us from doing everything in our power to achieve what we want. Trusting in God “doesn’t mean neglecting the appropriate human means for reaching a goal. In any undertaking, together with the supernatural means, it’s essential to always use the noble human means within our reach. If these fail, we seek others

and pursue them with the same faith.”^[4] —

At the same time, in the founder of Opus Dei's own life, we can see the priority he gave to prayer, for he considered it “the foundation of the spiritual edifice.”^[5] — When he had a project that he wanted to go forward or a concern that worried him, he asked his sons and daughters to pray more intensely. He had the firm conviction that prayer was always fruitful. Even if he didn't always perceive the results directly, he knew that in any case it would have produced fruit in the person who prayed, because prayer always brings us closer to God. Moreover, it could have borne fruit externally as well in an unexpected way, in a place or in a person unknown.

Jesus tells us the condition for effective prayer: faith. This is how the apostles were able to achieve the

impossible: “If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from hence to yonder place,’ and it will move” (*Mt* 17:20). The Virgin Mary welcomed the angel’s word with faith and allowed God to take on our flesh in her womb. We can ask our Lady to intercede for us so that we may present our needs to her Son with the assurance that, whatever the outcome, there will always be fruit.

^[1] Francis, Audience, 10 June 2020.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 204.

^[3] Francis, Angelus, 6 October 2019.

^[4] St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a Meditation, 27 August 1937.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 83.

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