

Meditations: Sunday of the Third Week of Lent (Year C)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this Lenten season.

- God’s “style” is to be close to us
- Examining our heart
- The humility of conversion

A NUMBER OF YEARS have gone by since Moses had fled from the Pharaoh in Egypt to the land of Midian. When the Pharaoh finally died, the situation of the Israelites did not seem to improve. Scripture tells us *that the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and*

cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning (Ex 2:23-24). At that time, Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro (Ex 3:1), traveling aimlessly through a strange land, in search of pastures to feed a foreign flock.

One day he encountered a bush that is burning, something not at all unusual in a place parched by the sun. But Moses noticed something unusual about this bush: *he looked and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed (Ex 3:2)*. Intrigued, he drew near to look more closely at this amazing sight (cf. Ex 3:3). Then God speaks, and Moses' life and the history of mankind change forever. God is entering anew into human history. He has decided to “take sides,” and has chosen a people and revealed to them his Name, involving his own fate with theirs. God takes on the risk of coming close to us.

The Israelites will need to employ poetry and song to try to give voice to such a great marvel: *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits* (Ps 103:1-2). They begin to discover “God’s own ‘style,’ which is essentially that of closeness (cf. *Deut 4:7*). God defines himself this way to his people: ‘For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as I am to you?’ (cf. *Deut 4:7*).”^[1] As Saint Josemaria assured us: “You will never, even in the worst state of agitation, lose sight of the fact that our Father in Heaven is always close to you, very close, with his everlasting Love and his unbounded affection.”^[2]

I DO NOT want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, Saint Paul

writes, *that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea . . . Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them (1 Cor 10:1-5)*. And the apostle adds that *these things occurred as examples for us, so that we would be aware of what can also happen to us, as the new people of God. Christ himself, after being told about some Galileans who had recently been put to a bloody death by Pilate, asks: Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did (Lk 13:2-3)*.

Jesus' clear words and Saint Paul's warning do us good, since they provoke in us a reaction that does not always arise spontaneously. Sometimes, when things seem to be going badly, we look for the cause,

for someone to blame. And if we manage to find a culprit, we breathe more easily, because then we can think that the problem has nothing to do with us.

On this and other occasions, Jesus corrects this mistaken vision of his disciples. And he encourages us to take advantage of these situations to seek a deeper personal conversion, instead of wasting time and energy looking for someone to blame.

Conversion means looking once again at God and reconsidering our life starting from his love for us and for all men and women. “Do not judge” (cf. *Mt 7:1*), Jesus tells us. And “do not grumble” (cf. *1 Cor 10:10*) adds Saint Paul. Because when we give in to this negative outlook, we can fall into the trap of gossiping and backbiting. If we are happy blaming others or external circumstances, we miss the opportunity to examine our own heart, which is where we find

the only evil that we can truly drown in a superabundance of grace.

A MAN had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none (Lk 13:6). When we stop focusing on external problems, then our own neediness becomes evident to us. And we are better able to recognize God's generosity towards us and the reality that we have nothing to pay Him back with. We no longer appear in our own eyes as good as when we compared ourselves to others; we learn to be humble.

This truth will not sadden us if we do what Jesus tells us: to turn our eyes to God, who is our Father. This is the gift of conversion, which we especially ask God for in Lent, relying on the penance that little by

little shapes our hearts. "Oh, God," we implore with the whole Church, "author of every mercy and of all goodness, who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving have shown us a remedy for sin, look graciously on this confession of our lowliness, that we, who are bowed down by our conscience, may always be lifted up by your mercy."^[3]

Thus we will discover, as the chosen people did, that the greatest prodigy worked by God is his incredible closeness to us. "We are in Jesus' hands!"^[4] Saint Josemaría often said. And Jesus does not lose hope in us, nor does his Mother Mary, whom we can ask to soften our heart whenever we see it in danger of becoming hardened.

^[1] Francis, Speech, 17 February 2022.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 240.

^[3] Sunday Third Week of Lent, Collect Prayer.

^[4] Saint Josemaría, *While he spoke to us on the way*, p. 107.

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