

Meditations: Thursday of the First Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during the First Week in Ordinary Time.

- God knows what is best for us.
- We find our Lord even in our weaknesses.
- Love is freely given and does not seek to possess.

THROUGHOUT THE whole of Sacred Scripture God teaches us to pray and helps us by suggesting possible words and attitudes. In today's gospel we see a leper coming to Jesus and begging on his knees, *If you will, you can make me clean (Mk 1:40)*. This way of asking God for help is rich in content. The very fact of praying already implies that we trust in his desire to help us. Yet saying so explicitly in prayer means acknowledging that only he really knows what is good for us. And from the speed of Jesus's reply, we gather that the leper's approach won him over. *I will; be clean (Mk 1:41)*.

Although their conversation was so brief, Jesus and the leper understood each other completely: God found the door into the leper's heart wide open.

When we don't demand things from God as though our plans were wiser than his, we become capable of

discovering his love for us in greater depth. When we leave ourselves in his hands and trust in his wisdom, we feel safer and understand that our true dignity comes from being loved and wanted by God, not because of anything we have done but because of who we are, because we came forth from his hands.

“Freedom guided by love is the only one that sets others and ourselves free, that knows how to listen without imposing, that knows how to love without coercing, that builds and does not destroy.”^[1] Nobody knows us like Jesus does; he understands what we need at every moment. So it is worth asking him for help with the same humble, completely trusting attitude as the leper.

SAINT JOSEMARÍA commented on the words of the leper in the gospel as follows: “Lord, if you will—and you are always willing—you can make me clean. You know my weaknesses; I feel these symptoms; I suffer from these failings.’ We show him the wound, with simplicity, and if the wound is festering, we show the pus too. ‘Lord, you have cured so many souls; help me to recognize you as the divine physician, when I have you in my heart or when I contemplate your presence in the tabernacle.’”^[2] And then we hear Our Lord telling us that he will heal us. He washes us, clothes us in his garments, puts his ring on our finger, summons musicians and kills the fatted calf. He reminds us of our dignity as sons and daughters: *Quickly, bring the best robe, and put it on him (Lk 15:22)*, says Holy Scripture. In spite of all this, we may feel tempted to try and heal ourselves, considering that we are

old enough, we're adults and shouldn't need anyone else to wash us clean. We may even dream of never getting soiled, and then we are upset when we do. If so, we are making a basic error about the real nature of our response to God's love. We are aiming for self-sufficiency, which is our worst enemy. "It is Christ's love that has freed us and it is love that also frees us from the worst slavery, that of the self."^[3] —

We may sometimes forget that Our Lord is waiting for us no matter what happens, not just when we win a battle. Perhaps, overcome by discouragement, we miss some unique opportunities of finding him. "Have I managed to offer Our Lord, in expiation, the very sorrow I feel for having offended him so many times? Have I offered him the shame of all my inner embarrassment and humiliation at seeing how little progress I make along the path of

virtue?”^[4] Everything that concerns us, including our defeats, matters to God. He knows the depth and sincerity of our desire to love him more than anything else.

“HIS WORDS, ‘If you will, you can make me clean,’ were proof that he was ready to accept whatever Jesus might or might not do. But his faith in Jesus did not go unrewarded! Brothers and sisters,” St John Paul II insisted, “may your faith in Jesus be no less firm and constant than the faith of the people we hear about in the Gospels!”^[5] We can ask God to give us faith like that; we want to realize that we receive everything from God, continuously.

“My poor heart longs for tenderness,” Saint Josemaría said, addressing God in his prayer. “And

that longing for tenderness which you placed in our hearts, how deeply it is satisfied, how abundantly it is fulfilled when we seek you, by the tenderness (which led you to death) of your Divine Heart!"^[6] We long for God's love and affection, but it can sometimes happen that we try to satisfy our longing in impure ways that prevent us from seeing other people as God's children who deserve to be loved for themselves. Then we can end up seeking only our own satisfaction, and are left feeling even emptier.

By saying sorry and asking for forgiveness we can open ourselves to the true, unconditional love of God. *If you will, you can make me clean.* This is the key to pure love. "Only when love is chaste, is it truly love. A possessive love ultimately becomes dangerous: it imprisons, constricts and makes for misery. God himself loved humanity with a chaste love;

he left us free even to go astray and set ourselves against him.”^[7] By asking for forgiveness we advance along the path of holy purity, which enables us to rejoice in God’s love for every single one of us. Our Immaculate Mother helps us to love everyone with the freedom that will give us a foretaste of Christ’s love.

^[1] Pope Francis, Audience, October 20, 2021.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 93.

^[3] Pope Francis, Audience, October 20, 2021.

^[4] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 153.

^[5] St John Paul II, Speech, February 21, 1981.

^[6] Saint Josemaría. Personal notes, October 9, 1932.

^[7] Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, no. 7.

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