

Meditations: Wednesday of the First Week of Lent

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during this time of Lent.

- God loves us, no matter what happens
- Spirit of examination to repent
- The consoling moment of confession

HAVE MERCY on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love, the psalmist exclaims, according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions (Ps 51:3). One week has now gone by since Lent began, a

time God grants so we can convert and once again rejoice in his love. Saint John Chrysostom tried to explain what had led Saint Paul to dedicate his life to Christ: “To enjoy Christ’s love meant for him life, the world, the company of the angels, present and future goods, the kingdom, the promises, the sum of all good.”^[1] One of the greatest goods that we can experience especially during these days is God’s forgiveness, his mercy, the freedom with which He loves us. Saint Gregory the Great said, with reference to the good thief on Calvary: “*Today you will be with me in paradise (Lk 23:43).* Who can say or measure such great goodness of God? From the very punishment of crime, the thief came to the rewards of virtue.”^[2]

“God does not love you because you think and act the right way. He loves you, plain and simple. His love is

unconditional; it does not depend on you. You may have mistaken ideas; you may have made a complete mess of things, but the Lord continues to love you. How often do we think that God is good if we are good and punishes us if we are bad. Yet that is not how he is. For all our sins, he continues to love us. His love does not change. It is not fickle; it is faithful. It is patient.”^[3] Faced with this surprising reality, so different from our own heart, we are filled with gratitude. And so that we can have no doubt of his forgiveness, He makes it audible through the voice of a priest: “I absolve you of your sins.” We cannot hold on to our guilt, because Christ has erased it.

THE SACRIFICE acceptable to God is a contrite spirit; a contrite and humbled heart, O God, you will not despise (Ps

51:19). Our repentance opens wide the doors of our heart to God. We do not tell Him how He has to love us nor do we dare to place conditions on his love. “We are free because we have been freed, freed by grace – not by paying – freed by love, which becomes the supreme and new law of Christian life.”^[4] We discover that it is easy for God to forgive because He has loved us “to the end” (*Jn* 13:1). God’s love for us does not depend on our own merits or conduct. There is only one way to block it: when we do not allow ourselves to be forgiven. This is the only insurmountable barrier to almighty God, who has given us the great power of freedom.

Hence we need to know ourselves well and, also knowing God, we need to repent of our sins, realizing that the best thing for us would have been to act differently. We know that holiness does not consist in a mere fulfillment of obligations, but that it

is the life of the Holy Spirit in our soul. Searching our heart for what hinders his work might seem easy, but we don't always manage it; we are not always courageous and honest enough to look closely at what is present there. Sometimes we find excuses for not examining our life carefully. Saint Josemaría assured us that “the daily examination of conscience will give us self-knowledge, true humility and, as a consequence, obtain for us perseverance from heaven.”^[5] Saint Augustine, who was a realist, knew that this is a lifelong task: “There is never a lack of something to forgive; for we are men.”^[6]

“NEVER AGAIN be surprised to find in your heart an abyss of wretchedness. Cry out, beg, follow the steps of the prodigal son. Your

Father God comes out to meet you the moment you admit you have sinned, in that thing which your pride blinded you from seeing as sin. Then begins a great feast for you, the deep joy of repentance, and you put on a clean suit: a deeper charity, more divine and more human.”^[7]

What strange mechanism drives us not to recognize our sins? Perhaps it is the fear of not being loved, the shame of acknowledging our weakness, or the frivolity of not wanting to give up those apparent shelters for our selfishness. In any case, Jesus offers us once and again a powerful remedy: the sincere confession of our sins to the priest, who makes Christ present. “There is no better act of repentance and atonement than a good confession. There we receive the strength we need to continue fighting.”^[8] Jesus patiently waits for us. He knows that

we long for our father's home, that we miss its warm affection.

Saint Paul VI once said that “the moments of a sincere confession are perhaps the most consoling, most comforting and most decisive in life.”^[9] Therefore passing on to others our love for confession is “the best favor you can do for a friend, the best sign of your affection.”^[10] We can ask the Holy Spirit to help us put more love into our own confession, in order to be an effective witness of this marvelous path to happiness. And we can ask Mary, refuge of sinners, to help us bring this joy to our friends and family.

^[1] Saint John Chrysostom, Homily 2 on the Praises of Saint Paul.

^[2] Saint Gregory the Great, Homily 20 on the Gospels.

^[3] Francis, Homily, 24 December 2019.

^[4] Francis, Audience, 13 October 2021.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *Letters* 2, no. 35.

^[6] Saint Augustine, Sermon 57.

^[7] Saint Josemaría, Letter 14 February 1974, no. 7.

^[8] Saint Josemaría, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, “Time for repentance,” no. 7.

^[9] Saint Paul VI, Speech, 27 February 1975.

^[10] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, 1 July 1974.