

Meditations: Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this season of Lent.

- The greatness of serving
- Service as a call from God
- Jesus wants to unite us to his Passion

EVERY MOTHER wants what is best for her children. Therefore we can understand why the mother of James and John approached Jesus to ask Him for a place of honor for them: *“Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one*

at your left, in your kingdom” (Mt 20:21). These words might surprise us, since they reflect practically the opposite of what the Messiah had taught the apostles right from the beginning. No wonder the other ten were angry with the two Zebedee brothers. But deep in their own hearts, perhaps they too wanted the same thing.

As on other occasions, the Teacher takes advantage of this situation to form the hearts of his apostles. Who is the most important? Our Lord’s response is simple and, at the same time, demanding: *whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave (Mt 20:26-27).* With divine patience, Jesus corrects their excessively human ambitions, overturning their scale of values: the first becomes last and the last is now first.

When we live in accord with these new values, we are imitating our Lord himself. “Christ took the lowest place in the world – the Cross – and by this radical humility he redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid.”^[1] His eagerness to serve even reaches the point of giving Himself to us: “This is my body,” “this is my blood” (cf. *Mt 26:26-27*). “Whoever wishes to be great must serve others, not seek to be served by them. This is the great paradox of Jesus. The disciples were arguing about who would have the highest place, who would be chosen for privileges . . . Jesus upsets their ‘logic,’ their mindset, by telling them that life is lived authentically in a concrete commitment to our neighbor. That is, by serving.”^[2]

IN THE BIBLE, service is linked to a mission from God. We see this in Jesus, who *came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28)*. He washes the apostles' feet and makes his Father's plan his own, even to the point of dying on the Cross. "How can one not read in the story of the 'servant Jesus' the story of every vocation: the story that the Creator has planned for every human being, the story that inevitably passes through the call to serve."^[3] —

Service is what characterizes anyone who tries to walk close beside our Lord. "While the great people of the earth build themselves 'thrones' for their own power, God chooses an uncomfortable throne, the Cross, from which to reign by giving his life."^[4] — Experiencing the "power" of serving leads us to embody the lifestyle of Jesus. This is not something humiliating, but rather

the noblest thing we can do in life. Service is an art practiced by those who realize they have received the love of Christ crucified, and have seen their heart expanded by his Love.

“To serve is a marvelous thing,” Saint Josemaría said. “The greatest joy in my life is to be a servant of the whole world. I want to serve God and, out of love for God, to serve with love all the creatures on earth.”^[5]

Discovering this reality makes us sensitive to the needs of others, especially those most in need. “In a world which demands of Christians a renewed witness of love and fidelity to the Lord, may all of us feel the urgent need to ‘outdo’ one another in charity, service and good works (cf. *Heb* 6:10). This appeal is particularly pressing in this holy season of preparation for Easter”^[6]

AFTER hearing their mother's request, Jesus says to James and John: *"You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?"* They said to him, *"We are able."* He said to them, *"You will drink my cup"* (Mt 20:22-23). This conversation takes place as they are going up to Jerusalem. Jesus knows what is about to happen in the Holy City. A few moments before, He had told his apostles that the Son of man will be betrayed: *they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day* (Mt 20:18-19).

It is the third and final announcement of the Passion. The disciples are frightened and worried; they don't understand or perhaps don't want to understand too much about opposition and difficulties. It doesn't fit into their heads that the kingdom the Master is speaking

about must be reached by defeat. Today too we are in need of a conversion in order to understand God's paths. Lent is a new opportunity to transform our way of understanding Jesus, our way of viewing the world and the values that govern relationships, in order to see the world with his redeeming eyes.

The image of the cup points to the pain and death that is Christ's lot. "To drink my cup" is to share in his redemptive Passion for the salvation of the world. Is there any other way to reach the highest places in his Kingdom? In the Eucharist we are strengthened on the path that leads to the heights of God's love and to serving those around us. We consume Christ, the Bread that is broken, who has shed his blood for all men and women. Mary traveled the path to the Cross close beside her son Jesus. During this Lent, she

accompanies us as a good mother who only wants what is best for her children.

^[1] Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, no. 35.

^[2] Francis, Homily, 20 September 2015.

^[3] Saint John Paul II, Message, 11 May 2003.

^[4] Francis, Angelus, 21 October 2018.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *Letters* 36, no. 5.

^[6] Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2012.