

Meditations: Friday of the Eighteenth Week of Ordinary Time

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

- Fortitude in order to live freely
 - Discovering the positive aspect
in our struggle
 - A path of hope
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OUR LORD manifested his divinity in many ways. He healed many sick people, fed a hungry crowd, and revealed Himself to the Twelve as the Messiah who was to come. Amid this atmosphere of expectation, Jesus told his disciples: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (*Mt 16:24*). Our Lord speaks clearly because He does not want the apostles to be deceived into thinking that the Kingdom of God involves earthly success. In following Him they have witnessed many miracles and wonders, but the time of the Cross will also come.

Fortitude is the virtue that helps us to maintain our desire to follow Jesus closely in every circumstance, both with miracles and with difficulties. In our daily life we find many things that fill us with joy, but inevitably we face obstacles that test us. Happiness on earth, therefore, does not depend

so much on prolonging these times of prosperity, but on the ability to give meaning to the good times as well as to the more complicated ones, when nothing goes as we had expected.

Fortitude helps us to transform setbacks into opportunities to make our desire for God even deeper and more active. Thus this virtue gradually guides our emotions so that we can enjoy God's closeness even when personal or external circumstances don't seem to favor it.

When the crowds wanted to proclaim Jesus king because of his miracles, our Lord "avoided triumphalism and was not fooled by it. He was free, since his freedom was to do the will of the Father . . .

Today let us think about our freedom. Am I free, or am I a slave to my passions, ambitions, riches, or passing fancies?"^[1] For Jesus, no obstacle deterred Him on his path to what He truly wanted: to free us

from sin. The virtue of fortitude can help us to live as He did: without being trapped and immobilized by external circumstances, and always with the desire to carry out God's will.

SOMETIMES we can reduce the virtue of fortitude to the effort to go against the grain, to the constant struggle to overcome ourselves. We then think that to achieve something truly valuable – to eliminate a defect, to grow in friendship with others or with God, to accomplish a task – it is enough to resist the obstacles that come our way until, finally, we attain our goal. But this approach, without further nuances, can lead to exhaustion or to becoming insensitive to the variety of gifts that God is granting us. Being strong consists, first of all, in strengthening

our convictions, in always renewing the love that moves us, in making the most authentic goods shine more brightly in us; in other words, in basing our strength on faith in God's love. Then we will choose more easily, even with pleasure, what we truly want, that "good portion" of which Jesus speaks (cf. *Lk* 10:42).

For example, someone who lacks fortitude may find it hard to avoid a brusque comment or to smile when they are tired. In these situations, fatigue is the overriding reason for their reactions, and they lose sight of other reasons for which it would be worthwhile to make an effort. In contrast, someone who has acquired a fortitude based on faith not only can overcome fatigue, but can do so because they see the good that it brings to themselves and to others, and even discover in it a way to love God. And then actions such as denying ourselves a small pleasure,

getting up at a fixed time, trying not to complain or doing a favor that we wouldn't spontaneously do, become a way of training ourselves to perceive a good that is within our reach, but that – at least at first – may not be obvious when a setback occurs.

This effort, which initially seemed to be reduced only to the challenge of overcoming oneself, ends up in fact making us freer, since our joy and peace will depend more on what we truly want, and less on the small tyrannies of the moment. The struggle to become stronger involves confronting the blind spots that prevent us from seeing certain aspects of the good, simply because they require struggle. Those who have acquired fortitude will be able to persevere in doing what is good even when good decisions are not the most attractive. Being strong is

the attitude of those who perceive the real value of things.

“TO BE HAPPY, what you need is not an easy life but a heart which is in love,” St. Josemaría wrote.”^[2] The Christian path is demanding because it requires an ever-deeper love; and, as the old song says, “a heart that doesn’t want to suffer pain, should spend its whole life free from love.”^[3] Jesus’ life shows us how we should confront adversity. He didn’t run away from the Cross. Nor did He limit himself to accepting it: He wanted to embrace it. And when He felt the burden of the weight of the Cross, He preferred to fall rather than let go.^[4] That wood was synonymous with death for others. But for Jesus it was the instrument of his love: the throne from which He would save us from our sins.

Fortitude helps us to accept pain. At the same time, it also leads us to see the reasons that give meaning to our struggle when difficulties arise. Every sacrifice freely accepted, every setback received with patience, every victory achieved out of love, strengthens in us the conviction that our happiness is found above all in God. Our daily struggle then becomes a progressive conquest of the greatest good, which gives us an anticipation of the future glory to which we aspire: our struggle becomes a path of hope.

And hence those who are strong don't lose hope; they don't lose their serenity in the face of failure or when the results of their work are slow to appear. Fortitude enables us to "struggle, for Love, until the last instant."^[5] with our eyes set on the goal to which we aspire. The Virgin Mary was a strong support for the apostles in the difficult moments of

the Passion, after Jesus had died. Our Lady doesn't abandon us either when it seems that her Son is not present: she fills us with her strength and invites us to set our sights on her Son's resurrection.

[1] Francis, Homily, 13 April 2018.

[2] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 795.

[3] "To the Tall Trees," traditional song.

[4] Cf. St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Seventh Station, no. 1.

[5] St. Josemaría, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, "Time for Reparation."

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