

Meditations: Friday of the Eighth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 8th week of Ordinary Time.

- Hunger for holiness
- Becoming the dwelling place of God
- A leap of faith

AFTER A NIGHT spent in Bethany, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem

with his disciples. St. Matthew recounts that, as they were walking along, our Lord began to feel hungry. St. Josemaría appreciated this detail included by the evangelist, for it helped him to love and contemplate our Lord's humanity: "I am always deeply moved by the example of our Lord, and especially when I see that as well as being perfect God he is true and perfect Man, and as such teaches us to make use even of our frailty and our own natural weaknesses, and to offer ourselves completely, just as we are, to the Father, who will gladly accept our holocaust."^[1]

Our Lord, seeing a fig tree in the distance, "went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again'" (*Mk 11:13-14*). The apostles would have been surprised

to hear our Lord say this. For at that time of year, the fig tree was unable to bear fruit. “Why does he curse it like this?” they must have wondered.

Jesus’ words were not simply a rebuke to the tree for not satisfying his hunger. The fig tree symbolizes the people of Israel. God has come close to them, hungry to find fruits of holiness and good works, but it seems He has found nothing more than external practices, an abundance of leaves that bear no fruit. “God warns us against falling into an empty and self-seeking religiosity. The fig tree represents sterility, a barren life, incapable of giving anything. A life that bears no fruit, incapable of doing good. A person who lives for himself, with a tranquil and selfish life, who doesn’t want problems. And Jesus curses the fig tree because it is barren, because it hasn’t done its part to bear fruit.”^[2]

In this time of prayer, we can ask

ourselves: do we offer our Lord the fruit of our response to his patient, persevering, and magnanimous love?

AS SOON AS Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, he went to the Temple. Seeing that it was full of buyers and sellers doing business, “he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he taught, and said to them, ‘Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a den of robbers’” (*Mk 11:15-17*).

The Jewish Temple was the place where God dwelt. That is why Jesus’ reaction is so forceful; He wants to defend his Father’s house from the indifference of those present. It hurts

Him that a place meant to foster an encounter between God and his people has become a marketplace. Thus He carries out a purification of the Temple, which goes beyond simply expelling the merchants. Jesus has come to defend this space of intimacy with God, for He wants to make visible the Father's closeness to us.

Surprisingly, our Lord compares the Temple of Jerusalem to his own Body, thus revealing the deepest truth about Himself: the Incarnation, that is, that He is the Word of God dwelling among us. God wants every Christian, by participating in Christ's life, to become a new Temple: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (*Jn 14:23*). Sin, in contrast, transforms a place as sacred as our soul into a space for worldly entanglements. In the

sacraments and in prayer, Jesus comes to our aid, to uproot what seems immovable in our heart, what we find it hard to purify.

THE NEXT DAY, Jesus and the apostles once again passed by the tree that had borne no fruit. Seeing it withered to the roots, Peter exclaimed, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered.” Sensing his disciples’ astonishment at the fulfillment of his words, Jesus replied: “Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him” (*Mk 11:22-23*).

Our Lord is preparing his disciples for the mission He will entrust to

them when He is no longer with them: to spread the Gospel throughout the whole world. Humanly speaking, this seems impossible to accomplish, and may have overwhelmed them. But Jesus assures them that if they have faith and trust in God's love, He himself will help them exceed even their most optimistic calculations. And if at times things don't go as they had hoped, their hearts should be filled with the certainty that God will never abandon them.

Indeed, living by faith involves an element of "risk," for it requires a "leap." trusting less in our own certainties in order to embrace the assurances that God offers us and that surpass anything we could imagine. "Faith, then, means finding a 'you' who sustains me and who, amid the impossibility of making a human move, gives the promise of an indestructible love that not only asks

for eternity, but grants it.”^[3] Our Lady took that “leap of faith” with her “*fiat*” in reply to the angel’s words. Her life then took on a new and unimaginable horizon: that young girl from Nazareth, through her faith, would become the Mother of God and of all mankind.

^[1] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 50.

^[2] Francis, Homily, 29 May 2015.

^[3] Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 1987, p. 57.