

Meditations: Friday of the Seventh Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the seventh week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: marriage is a natural reality; spouses reflect God's love for humanity; God is present in difficulties.

- Marriage is a natural reality
- Spouses reflect God's love for humanity
- God is present in difficulties

AS JESUS was journeying to Jerusalem, He stopped somewhere in Judea. Crowds gathered to listen to Him, and some Pharisees also approached Him, but their attitude contrasted with the simplicity of the others. They posed a challenging question *to test Him* (*Mk 10:2*): they wanted to know if it was lawful for a husband to divorce his wife.

Rabbinic schools debated the valid reasons for divorce, with positions ranging from allowing it for very trivial reasons to reserving it only for serious cases. The casuistry was intricate, and the Pharisees' hidden goal was to entangle Jesus. Perhaps they were surprised by His response, which attributes the concessions of the Mosaic law to the hardness of the human heart. Christ reaffirms the original plan of God, who *made them male and female*. *For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh*. *So, they are no*

longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate (Mk 10:6-9).

Jesus recalls a truth that sin had obscured: that marriage is a natural reality created by God from the beginning and, therefore, that it is good and holy. Its inherent characteristic is the total mutual self-giving between man and woman to create the ideal space for love.

"Lovers do not see their relationship as merely temporary. Those who marry do not expect their excitement to fade. Those who witness the celebration of a loving union, however fragile, trust that it will pass the test of time. Children not only want their parents to love one another, but also to be faithful and remain together. These and similar signs show that it is in the very nature of conjugal love to be definitive. The lasting union

expressed by the marriage vows is more than a formality or a traditional formula; it is rooted in the natural inclinations of the human person. For believers, it is also a covenant before God that calls for fidelity."^[1]

THE CATECHISM of the Catholic Church points out that the sacraments are "are 'powers that come forth' from the Body of Christ, (...) they are 'the masterworks of God' in the new and everlasting covenant."^[2] It also explains that the sacraments are "efficacious signs of grace."^[3] This can help us understand the immense value of the sacrament of marriage: God takes the spouses' commitment to manifest his divine love through that bond. "Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the

Cross; they are for one another and for the children witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers."^[4] "According to Latin tradition, the spouses as ministers of Christ's grace mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony," the Catechism goes on.^[5]

"When a man and a woman celebrate the sacrament of marriage, God is, as it were, 'mirrored' in them; he impresses in them his own features and the indelible character of his love. Marriage is the icon of God's love for us. Indeed, God is also communion: the three Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live eternally in perfect unity. And this is precisely the mystery of marriage: God makes of the two spouses one single existence."^[6]

For this reason, St. Josemaría taught that marriage "is a permanent

contract that sanctifies in cooperation with Jesus Christ. He fills the souls of husband and wife and invites them to follow him. He transforms their whole married life into an occasion for God's presence on earth."^[7] Every aspect of family life becomes part of this transformation wrought by God: from the relationship between the spouses to the economic efforts to provide for their children, from education and household tasks to the openness to other families, rest, and more.

WHILE RECOGNIZING the greatness of the sacrament of marriage, we cannot be blind to the difficulties that arise in married life. At times, problems lead to the breakdown of that communion. "Inevitably, situations will arise involving human

weakness and these can prove emotionally overwhelming. One spouse may not feel fully appreciated, or may be attracted to another person. Jealousy and tensions may emerge, or new interests that consume the other's time and attention. Physical changes naturally occur in everyone. These, and so many other things, rather than threatening love, are so many occasions for reviving and renewing it."^[8]

Certainly, there will be crises, big or small, in the story of any marriage or, indeed, human community. It is important to know that God is not absent in those moments, nor has He forgotten us. On the contrary, these are opportunities to discover his closeness with greater maturity, opportunities to strengthen our faith and our love for others. "In such situations, some have the maturity needed to reaffirm their choice of the

other as their partner on life's journey, despite the limitations of the relationship. (...) When crises come, they are unafraid to get to the root of it, to renegotiate basic terms, to achieve a new equilibrium and to move forward together. With this kind of constant openness they are able to face any number of difficult situations."^[9] However, there are no one-size-fits-all solutions for all marriages: God calls each person, each marriage, to holiness, and the paths that lead us there are unique.

We can ask Mary, Queen of the Family, to help us open ourselves to receive from God a growing charity, matured in the inevitable difficulties; to help us, following St. Josemaria's advice, to "learn to smile and forget about [our]selves in order to pay attention to others," and to "listen to [one] other and to the children, showing them that they are really loved and understood."^[10]

^[1] Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 123.

^[2] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1116.

^[3] *Ibid*, no. 1131.

^[4] St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 13.

^[5] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1623.

^[6] Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 121.

^[7] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 23.

^[8] Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 237.

^[9] *Ibid.*, no. 238.

^[10] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 23.

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