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Meditations: Monday of the Second Week of Easter

Some reflections that can nourish our prayer during these days of the Easter season.

- The prayer of the first Christians
- With Baptism we have been reborn in Christ
- Baptism and life in the Spirit

DURING EASTER TIME, the first reading of the Mass continues the narration of the Acts of the Apostles, the book that tells us about the

Church's first steps. This is the best source to get to know how the first Christians lived, and where Saint Josemaría found light for Christians of today. We see in these first communities an atmosphere of joy, deep gratitude and supernatural enthusiasm that galvanised them to share their faith with everyone. There is no attempt to hide the difficulties they encountered, both from outside and, at times, from within the Church. But neither the former nor the latter were given too much importance, since these difficulties paled before the grandeur of the life of grace and the action of the Holy Spirit.

Peter and John returned after having been arrested and kept overnight by order of the authorities. A great uproar had been raised when many people, after listening to the two apostles and being present at a miracle, had come to believe in Jesus.

The authorities, after interrogating Peter and John, threatening them and exhorting them not to continue preaching, had to let Peter and John go free because of their fear of what the people might do, *for all men praised God for what had happened (Acts 4:21)*. When the two apostles returned, that first community of Christians, perhaps worried about the persecutions that were looming, decided to pray together part of Psalm II. And on finishing this prayer, Scripture tells us that *the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31)*.

In reading the Acts of the Apostles we discover that what drives forward all apostolate is prayer. A person who prays “actually experiences Jesus’ presence and is touched by the Spirit. The members of that first Christian

community sensed that the narrative of the encounter with Jesus did not stop at the moment of the Ascension, but continued in their own life. In recounting what the Lord said and did, and praying to enter into communion with him, everything came alive. Prayer infuses light and warmth: the gift of the Holy Spirit endowed them with fervor.”^[1] —

TODAY’S GOSPEL PASSAGE, in turn, invites us to take a step back in time. We read about Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, that dialogue where our Lord invites him to “be born again.” In contrast to the first Christians, who had already received the grace of Baptism and experienced the help of the Holy Spirit, Nicodemus finds it hard to understand Jesus’ words. Nicodemus is an influential Jew who admires Christ. He thinks that anyone who can do such wonders has to be a man of God. Although he goes by night so

as not to be seen in the company of such a controversial teacher, he addresses him respectfully and in all sincerity. Jesus' words quickly raise the conversation to a higher plane: *Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5).*

Like the first Christians, we too are new women and men, born again through Baptism – born from “on high.” As Saint Josemaría said: “In Baptism, our Father God has taken possession of our lives. He has made us sharers in the life of Christ and given us the Holy Spirit.”^[2] This Sacrament confers on us the immense dignity of being children of God and called to holiness, which is simply the “fullness of divine filiation.”^[3] Sanctity, then, is not merely a question of external behaviour. It does not mean aspiring only to moral perfection. Rather, it means wanting that the life of grace

God has infused in us to truly become the fount of our entire existence – sharing ever more fully in the sentiments of the Son, with a heart ever more like His.

With Baptism, a marvelous adventure begins, an adventure of love, a life that is not only new but that our Lord wants to continually renew under the ever-surprising breath of the Holy Spirit. “By virtue of the Holy Spirit, Baptism *immerses us in the death and Resurrection of the Lord*, drowning in the baptismal font the ‘old’ man dominated by sin, which separates us from God, and giving birth to the new man, recreated in Jesus. I am certain, quite sure, that we all remember our date of birth. But if we celebrate birthdays, why not celebrate – or at least remember – the day of rebirth. It is another birthday: the date of our rebirth.”^[4]

“MANY OF US have inherited the Catholic faith from our parents, and, by the grace of God, supernatural life began in our souls from the moment we were baptised as newborn infants. But we must renew throughout our lives, and every day of our lives, our determination to love God above all things.”^[5] — Saint Josemaría stresses here an intrinsic characteristic of our Christian vocation: the readiness to always welcome God’s grace with renewed faith, to follow the inspirations of the Holy Spirit with a docility that expands our interior freedom.

Our baptismal vocation introduces us into the “dynamism” of living under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Our faithfulness to God isn’t characterised by inertia and monotony, but by the continual newness of a free and loving response. Saint Josemaría said: “When people give themselves freely,

at every moment of their self-surrender freedom renews their love; to be renewed in that way is to be always young, generous, capable of high ideals and great sacrifices.”^[6]

And Benedict XVI stressed: “How great is the gift of Baptism! If we were to take this fully into account our lives would become a continual ‘thank you.’ What a joy it is for Christian parents, who have seen a new life come into being through their love, to bring their son or daughter to the baptismal font and see that child reborn in the womb of the Church, for a life without end!”^[7]

Although many of us are unable to recall the day when, as Jesus said to Nicodemus, we were “born again,” we can always remember it in our imagination and prayer. And we can give thanks to God and the people whose faith God used to incorporate us into Christ’s life. The life of Mary, from the moment of her *fiat* – “let it

be done to me!” – at the Annunciation right up to her silent *fiat* at the foot of the Cross, is an example for us of a faithful response to her vocation in every situation, with an ever-renewed docility to God’s grace.

[1] Francis, General Audience, 25 November 2020.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 128.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *Letter 2 February 1945*, no. 8.

[4] Francis, General Audience, 11 April 2018.

[5] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 27.

[6] *Ibid.*, no. 31.

[7] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 11 January 2009.

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