

Meditations: Monday of the Twenty-Fourth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-fourth week of Ordinary Time.

- Affection and respect amid differences
 - To save a soul, we would go to the very gates of Hell
 - Learning from others
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ONE OF the centurions had a servant who was critically ill, about to die. When he learned that Jesus had arrived in Capernaum, *he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his slave (Lk 7:3)*. They approached Jesus and *besought him earnestly, saying 'He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he built us our synagogue' (Lk 7:4-5)*. Jesus was probably pleasantly surprised by their words. It was not uncommon for Him to arrive in a city and sense tension and distrust between the Jewish people and the Roman soldiers. On this occasion, however, He found a very different atmosphere. Instead of imposing his authority through force, the centurion had expressed appreciation for the Jewish people and their traditions. The Jewish elders recognized his affection for them, and so they didn't hesitate to approach Jesus on his behalf, asking Him to heal to official's servant. The

differences between the Roman and Jewish peoples had not prevented them from learning to respect each other.

"Every man and every woman are like tesserae in an immense mosaic; they are already beautiful in their own right, but only together with other tesserae do they compose an image, in the *conviviality of differences*. Being convivial with someone also means imagining and building a happy future with the other. Indeed, conviviality echoes the desire for communion that resides in the heart of every human being, thanks to which all people can speak to each other, exchange projects and outline a future together."^[1] A desire for genuine friendship and eagerness to serve others are the characteristics that mark a Christian's relationships with others, including those who do not share their ways of thinking or living. As St. Josemaria wrote,

"through real, personal, loyal friendship, you create in others a hunger for God and you help them to discover new horizons — naturally, simply. With the example of your faith lived to the full, with a loving word which is full of the force of divine truth."^[2] —

SOME OF the people present would have been surprised by Jesus's response to the elders' plea: He decided to go to the centurion's home. The Jews were forbidden from entering Gentile houses, and if they did enter, they had to purify themselves afterward. But Jesus went to bring new life, and He gave witness to the importance of caring for every person and leading them to salvation.

St. Josemaria struggled to ensure that none of the people he served would die without receiving the sacraments, however difficult it was to administer them. On one occasion, he learned that a young man, living in a place where God was offended, had only a few days to live. He presented the issue to the diocesan Vicar General and obtained permission to go there and invite the young man to go to Confession and receive the Last Rites and Viaticum. St. Josemaria went with a friend to talk to the young man. After preparing him, he administered the last sacraments.

"Let us follow Christ's example," the founder of Opus Dei wrote, "and never reject anyone. To save one soul we should go as far as the very gates of hell; further, no, for beyond them one cannot love God."^[3] The Lord proclaimed the Gospel to the whole world, not only the Jewish people.

"The universality of the Church's mission means that no one is outside its apostolic horizon."^[4] We can ask Jesus to ignite in us the desire, concretized in deeds, for all people to come to embrace the salvation He offers. "There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him."^[5]

THE CENTURION did not want to inconvenience Jesus, perhaps because he knew that if Jesus entered his home, He would have to purify Himself. Therefore, as soon as he heard that Jesus was near his house, he sent some friends to tell Him, *'Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume*

to come to you. But say the word and let me servant be healed' (Lk 7:6-7).

The evangelist tells us that,, when Jesus heard those words, *he marveled at him, and turned and said to the multitude that followed him, 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith' (Lk 7:9).*

Jesus's statement is comforting. It shows us to what extent the Lord sees the goodness in our hearts. On this occasion, He praised the faith of a person who, in the eyes of the Jewish people, did not have faith. He thus taught those present that they can also learn from people who seem far from God. After all, He manifests Himself in all cultures; He shows Himself "in peoples who have traveled through history differently, who have walked another way. But He is the same God. And this God who is the Father of all leads us to dialogue."^[6] —

Christians know that everything we have received from God comes not as the result of our own efforts or ingenuity but rather "as the word of God which did not come to us because we were better or more prepared than others, but because He wanted to use us as his instruments."^[7] We do not own the truth; we collaborate with it (cf. 3 *Jn* 1:8). The Virgin Mary can help us see the world positively and open our hearts to all people.

^[1] Pope Francis, Address, 6-VI-2022.

^[2] St. Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 149.

^[3] St. Josemaria, Letter 4, no. 24.

^[4] Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, "La prelatura del Opus Dei: apostolado

ad fidem y ecumenismo," pg.3 (our translation).

[5] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 24-IV-2005.

[6] Pope Francis, Address, 5-V-2023.

[7] St. Josemaria, Letter 37, no. 25.

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