

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

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-seventh week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: charity opens our eyes, Jesus and the Samaritans, loving through deeds.

- Charity opens our eyes
- Jesus and the Samaritans
- Loving through deeds

A DOCTOR of the law asked Jesus about the relationship between eternal life and love for God and neighbor. He knew well that the law of Moses commanded the latter, but there was a debate about who deserved to be considered a "neighbor," and whether that distinction coincided with belonging to the Chosen People. Jesus seizes this dialogue to speak about a love that knows no distinctions, and He does so through the parable of the good Samaritan.

The story begins with a man who falls into the hands of robbers who leave him half-dead as he travels from Jerusalem to Jericho. When a priest and a Levite encounter him on the road, they pass by without stopping, perhaps to avoid contamination with his blood. They prioritized this rule, linked to worship, over God's great

commandment; He desires mercy and not sacrifice (cf. *Mt* 9:13).

It seems like the rule and common-sense care for an injured man were conflicting realities in the priest and the Levite's hearts. They may have thought they had to choose between worshiping God and caring for that man. In reality, when we allow love for God and others to shape our lives, these dilemmas disappear: “Charity rids us of our selfishness; it breaks down the walls of our isolation; it opens our eyes to our neighbor, to those more distant from us and to the whole of humanity.”^[1] We realize that caring for another person is a way of worshiping God: “If I do not draw close to that man, that woman, that child, that elderly man or woman who are suffering, I do not draw close to God.”^[2]

JESUS INVITES the doctor of the law to break free from his preconceptions, presenting a Samaritan man as the hero of the parable. The Samaritans were a group outside of official religion, far from the purity associated with the Chosen People, especially those who worshiped in the temple. The actions with which the Samaritan enters the scene are the same as those of the other two travelers: he passes by and sees the injured man. But his reaction is entirely different: *He had compassion* (*Lk 10:33*) and was “struck in his soul by the lightning flash of mercy.”^[3]

Jesus’s listeners may have been surprised to hear that it was a Samaritan who showed compassion; they may have thought they could predict how one of them would act in this situation. But Jesus wants to show that we should not reduce reality to our own models or

categorize people. In fact, the Gospel presents at least two interactions of Christ with Samaritans: a leper who is a model of gratitude to God (cf. *Lk* 17:11-19), and a woman who encounters the *living water* of Jesus, becomes an apostle (cf. *Jn* 4:7-30).

When we look at others without prejudice, we learn to love them as they are, and we also enrich ourselves with their gifts. In doing so, we imitate the love of Christ, who always looks at all the good we are capable of. As St. Josemaría said, “Faith in the great gift of God’s love has made all differences and barriers dwindle away. *There is no longer any distinction between Jew and Greek, between slave and free man, between man and woman, because you are all one thing in Christ Jesus* (*Gal 3:28*). Knowing that we are all brothers and sisters, and loving each other as such, over and above all differences in race, social background, education

and ideology, is essential to Christianity.”^[4]

THE SAMARITAN’S reaction went beyond merely feeling compassionate. He took action: *He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back' (Lk 10:34-35).*

The Samaritan shows us that love is manifested in concrete actions, both big and small. Through them, we express our willingness to assist others in their needs and to make their lives more pleasant. St.

Josemaría encouraged us to make our love concrete so that our words become tangible through deeds:

“There is a story of a soul who, on saying to our Lord in prayer, 'Jesus, I love you', heard this reply from heaven: 'Love means deeds, not sweet words.' Think if you also could deserve this gentle reproach.”^[5]

At the end of the parable, Jesus asks a question: *‘Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed mercy on him’ (Lk 10:36-37).* We can ask Mary to make our hearts more sensitive and to grant us the readiness to take action so we can be true neighbors to others.

^[1] St. John Paul II, Message for Lent, 1986.

^[2] Pope Francis, Audience, 27-IV-2016.

^[3] Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, volume I, pg. 197.

^[4] St. Josemaría, "The Riches of Faith," 2-XI-1969.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 933.

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