

Meditations: Saturday of the Thirty-Fourth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-fourth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: a vigilant attitude; virtues free us; virtues unite us with others.

- A vigilant attitude
 - Virtues free us
 - Virtues unite us with others
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AS WE stand at the threshold of Advent, a time that always fills us with hope, we hear one last message of vigilance. *Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life (Lk 21:34)*, the Gospel for this Saturday admonishes us. These are brief and straightforward pieces of advice that we hear directly from Jesus's lips. The attitude of vigilance can be understood in two ways. On one hand, we could be vigilant like guards responsible for ensuring that everything proceeds in order and for sounding an alarm when that calm is disrupted. On the other hand, we could be vigilant like people watching and joyfully waiting for an event they have anticipated for a long time. The second case has to do with our proximity to an important event. Anticipation might even cause us to lose sleep: what is about to come is so important to us that we do

not want to lose focus, and we want to avoid anything that might cause us to lose sight of what we truly desire.

Jesus provides three clear examples. What usually entangles us is related to excess and the things that overwhelm us in a disorderly manner. Our intelligence becomes clouded when we give up on our struggle to build good habits, when we try to escape from the challenges of daily life, or when we obsess over the things that worry us. Therefore, if we want to cultivate an attitude of watchful anticipation of the Lord's arrival — whether his second coming at the end of times or the remembrance of his first coming at Christmas — we will try to avoid these potential stumbling blocks. How can we do that? Jesus gives us the answer in the Gospel: *Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before*

the Son of Man (Lk 21:36). We could also say, as St. Josemaria does, that “we need prudence to protect our Love. We must keep a careful watch and not be overcome by fear.”^[1]

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WE ARDENTLY desire to remain awake in order to receive the Lord. His impending arrival renews our strength; knowing that we are strengthened by the One who awaits us at the finish line gives us hope. “Our personal happiness does not depend on the successes we achieve, but rather on the love we receive and the love we give,”^[2] and our joy lies in the relationship we cultivate while awaiting a God who invites us to share it with others.

If we do not want to get entangled in what does not lead to God, it is crucial to strive for a life of vigilance

through the virtues. Through them, we learn to receive God's love and give it to those around us. Virtues are a path to freedom because they liberate us from various forms of slavery. What is more important in life than the freedom to allow Christ to come to us? In this journey where we learn to seek what leads us to Jesus, virtues help us enjoy a certain “connaturality” with true goodness. They make us increasingly inclined to choose the good things that draw us closer to God and help us sustain that choice.

Human virtues enable us to *stand before the Son of Man (Lk 21:36)* and help us overcome our daily burdens with particular grace. They are part of the “care” that the Lord asks of us. At times, they may seem like a burden, but when enlivened by charity, they lead us to reflect a clearer image of Jesus.^[3] “Every other burden weighs you down and

crushes you,” St. Augustine says, “but Christ's burden lightens your load. Every other burden is a weight on you, but the burden of Christ is wings to lift you up. Take away the wings, and you are crushed to the earth. Restore the wings, and you are borne on high.”^[4] —

VIRTUES ARE a path to loving and savoring what is good. “*Pondus meum amor meus*’: my love is my weight, St. Augustine said, referring not simply to the obvious fact that at times it is hard for us to love, but to the fact that the love we have in our heart is what leads us on, what carries us to wherever we go.”^[5] —

Virtues never isolate us; rather, they necessarily connect us with others. “We must bear in mind that decision making and responsibility derive

from the personal freedom of each individual,” St. Josemaria said.

“Virtues are therefore also radically personal, they pertain to the person. Nevertheless, in this great battle of love no one fights alone. None of us, I like to say, is a floating line of verse. In some way we are always either helping or hindering each other. We are all links in the same chain. Join with me now in asking Our Lord to grant that this chain may anchor us to his Heart until that day comes when we shall contemplate him face to face forever in Heaven.”^[6] As we strive to become better, we help others. Beginning and beginning again, joyfully, helps us contemplate God, even in the people around us.

Human virtues help us give the best of ourselves but they also, more importantly, prepare us to receive the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and charity that come from God. They ready us to open ourselves

to God's love. At the end of the liturgical year, we cultivate in our hearts that intimate aspiration: the desire for our entire existence to be for God, from our most ordinary gestures to our most important decisions. Mary helps us in this journey, with the same gentle touch with which she nurtured Jesus, and we will contemplate her often in the upcoming season of Advent.

[1] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 180.

[2] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 1-XI-2019, no. 17.

[3] Cf. St. John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, no. 64

[4] St. Augustine, Sermon 126.

^[5] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 9-I-2018, no. 7.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 76.

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