

Meditations: Sunday of the Sixteenth Week of Ordinary Time (Year C)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 16th week in Ordinary Time.

- A happy tiredness
- Sanctifying oneself peeling potatoes
- Comparing ourselves with others

MARTHA AND MARY have welcomed Jesus and the apostles into their home. We don't know if their visit is a surprise; perhaps they had sent news a few days before arriving. In any case, being the good hostess that she is, Martha feels responsible for ensuring that her guests' stay is as pleasant as possible. She would do her best to make sure that everything is in order, that there is plenty of food and drink to replenish their strength, that they can rest.... But little by little she begins to notice that she can't keep up, that what she needs to do is much greater than the time available. And her sister seems to have forgotten her own duties; instead of lending a hand, Mary is sitting at our Lord's feet listening to his words. When she can no longer bear it, Martha approaches Jesus and says with indignance: "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me?" And Christ responds: "Martha,

Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her" (Lk 10:40-42).

Martha's experience can often seem similar to our own. Many things in our daily lives seem to demand our attention: caring for our family, work projects, social commitments, unexpected events. Perhaps we have the impression that we don't manage to get to everything we need to do, and that's why we may experience a certain feeling of emptiness at the end of the day. The problem, however, "is not always an excess of activity, but rather activity undertaken badly, without adequate motivation, without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable. As a result, work becomes more tiring than necessary, even leading at times to illness. Far from a peaceful and happy tiredness,

this is a tense, burdensome, dissatisfying and, in the end, unbearable fatigue.”^[1]

Jesus’ advice to Martha is not to set aside her duties, but rather to carry them out without forgetting what is essential: finding our Lord. She shouldn’t see her guests simply as people with physical needs; she should strive to unite herself to Jesus in everything she does. Then tiredness doesn’t rob us of our peace or happiness, because we experience that we have what is essential, and that we have it in abundance: being close to Christ. “The Master passes very close to us, again and again. He looks at us... And if you look at Him, if you listen to Him, if you don’t reject Him, He will teach you how to give a supernatural meaning to everything you do... Then you too, wherever you may be, will sow consolation and peace and joy.”^[2]

WE CAN FULFILL our obligations in many different ways. We can finish a task – sending an email, writing a report, preparing dinner – with the desire to get it done as quickly as possible, or with the desire to seek the good of those who will benefit from it. A small act of service can be performed with a grudging face, because there's no other option, so that others will think well of us, or to give glory to God and love the other person, created in God's image. Like Martha, in these small daily struggles we are called to encounter our Lord. And like Mary, we can pay attention to what He wants to tell us in the midst of our activities.

From the time he founded Opus, Saint Josemaría stressed the need to find a divine meaning in our daily, material tasks: “You are writing to me in the kitchen, by the stove. It is

early afternoon. It is cold. By your side, your younger sister (the last one to discover the divine folly of living her Christian vocation to the full) is peeling potatoes. To all appearances, you think, her work is the same as before. And yet, what a difference there is! It is true: before she 'only' peeled potatoes; now, she is sanctifying herself peeling potatoes.”^[3] —

When we strive to seek God in what we do and sincerely give ourselves to others, we experience in our souls a humility filled with joy. For the Christian life does not consist in doing many demanding things that one day, in heaven, will result in our being rewarded. Rather already here on earth we begin to receive a hundredfold. And this hundredfold is, ultimately, sharing in Jesus' life. “God wants us to share in his own divine and eternal joy, and he helps us to see that the deepest meaning

and value of our lives lie in being accepted, welcomed and loved by him. I am personally loved by God. If God accepts me and loves me and I am sure of this, then I know clearly and with certainty that it is a good thing that I am alive. God's infinite love for each of us is fully seen in Jesus Christ. The joy we are searching for is to be found in him.”^[4]

MARTHA didn't lose her peace only because of the amount of things she had to do. The problem was comparing herself with her sister; she couldn't accept that she had to take care of everything, while her sister was so calm while doing nothing. This is a reaction that can also happen to us: we tend to compare our workload with that of the people around us. And if we

notice an imbalance, often, like Martha, we can become indignant. And then we try to find a way to distribute the tasks more equitably or to get the other person to help us. In many cases, this is an opportunity to reconsider how we view and carry out the work we have in our hands. If I view this task as a burden or a punishment, it's understandable that I get angry when the other person doesn't help out. But if I see it as a way of giving glory to God and helping others, and regardless of whether a redistribution of tasks may take place, I will value more highly the great mission of service that our lives entail.

Comparisons can occur in various areas: physical appearance, virtues and defects, social position, family or financial situation... Like Martha, such thoughts often lead to envy, sadness, or anger, if we think we are being treated unfairly; or they can

lead to a superficial joy if we think we are better off than others. In any case, these comparisons can easily produce insecurity, because instead of being grateful for what God has given us (a job to do, talents to develop, people to help...) we give more importance to the value other people assign to us, which is always something fickle. In contrast, when we look at our life with divine eyes ("God loves us as we are, not as we would like to be"^[5]), we experience the surest love possible, which no comparison can destroy. Our Lady, as a good mother, loves us unconditionally, seeing each of us as her beloved son or daughter. "There is no heart more human than that of a person overflowing with supernatural sense. Think of Holy Mary, who is full of grace, Daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, Spouse of God the Holy Spirit. Her Heart has room for all humanity and makes no distinction or

discrimination. Every person is her son or her daughter.”^[6]

^[1] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 82.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 8th Station, no. 4.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 498.

^[4] Benedict XVI, Message, 15 March 2012.

^[5] Francis, Speech, 3 August 2023.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 801.