

Meditations: Sunday of the Twenty-Seventh Week of Ordinary Time (Year C)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 27th week of Ordinary Time.

- Asking with daring and serenity
- People who are “mustard seeds”
- Concerned about God and others

TEACH US to pray. Explain the parable to us. Show us the Father. These are three requests the apostles address to Jesus in the Gospels. The familiarity with which they address Him contrasts with the anguish the prophet Habakkuk expresses in this Sunday's first reading. The prophet laments: "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save?" (*Hab 1:2*). His distress contrasts with the apostles' daring in their petitions: teach us, explain to us, show us.

We too can approach our Lord with trust, and calmly await his response, without letting ourselves be carried away by hasty worries that, rather than springing from the sure hope of one who knows that God has heard their prayer, stem from a certain despair, as though He wasn't listening to us. God's response is often quite different from what we

were expecting. “Prayer is centred and rooted in the inmost depths of the person; it is therefore not easily decipherable and, for the same reason, can be subject to misunderstanding and mystification. In this sense too we can understand the expression: prayer is difficult. In fact, prayer is the place par excellence of free giving, of striving for the Invisible, the Unexpected and the Ineffable. Therefore, the experience of prayer is a challenge to everyone, a ‘grace’ to be invoked, a gift from the One to whom we turn.”^[1]

Today’s Gospel includes another request by the disciples: “Increase our faith.” And we hear our Lord’s surprising response: “If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.” (*Lk 17:6*). Once again, divine wisdom is not limited to

a textbook response, but unfolds in the novelty of a transforming offer. Every time we pray, every time we petition our Lord, He listens to us and, if our request is sincere, He answers us. Not with the kind of response we might expect, but with the one He wants to transform us with. “Faith by its very nature demands renouncing the immediate possession which sight would appear to offer; it is an invitation to turn to the source of the light, while respecting the mystery of a Face which will unveil itself personally in its own good time.”^[2]

A MUSTARD SEED is small and fragile, but it contains a silent strength that will make it grow and become a large tree. Perhaps in our lives we meet many people who are like mustard seeds: simple, humble

people, who don't draw attention to themselves, but whose firm and persevering faith enables them to endure difficult trials without losing their hope or love. They don't boast about their merits or abilities, because they know they have received everything from God. Rather, they respond with Jesus' words in the parable in today's Gospel: "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty." "Such is the kingdom of God: a humanly small reality, made up of the poor of heart, of those who don't trust only in their own strength but in that of God's love; it is made up of those of no importance in the eyes of the world; and yet, precisely through them, Christ's power breaks forth and transforms what is apparently insignificant."^[3]

A man or woman of faith doesn't seek to impose their own plans on God or force Him to act according to

their human expectations. They know that their vision is limited, that their desires may be marred by sin, and so they don't cling to them as though these were absolute. Their attitude is like that of the faithful servant who remains attentive to the voice of his Lord, ready to obey, to hope, and to act when necessary. They realize that their greatness, everything that gives meaning to their existence, lies in knowing that they are loved and upheld by God.

“Faith comparable to a grain of mustard seed is a faith that is neither proud nor self-assured. It is a faith that, in its humility, feels a great need for God and, in its smallness, abandons itself with complete trust in him. It is faith that gives us the capacity to look with hope at the ups and downs of life, that helps us to accept even defeats and sufferings, knowing that evil never has, and never will have, the last word.”^[4]

“FAITH is first of all a personal adherence of man to God.”^[5]

However, as limited human beings, our adherence to Him does not always have the constancy and fullness that we would like. Our search for God is sometimes interrupted by distractions, weaknesses, or tiredness. Saint Josemaría confides to us in one of his letters: “The conclusion I come to every day in my examination of conscience always is *pauper servus et humilis!* That is, when I don’t have to say instead, ‘Lord, Josemaría is not very happy with Josemaría.’ But since humility is truth, it also happens that very often I think, as no doubt you also do: ‘Lord, today I have not thought about myself at all! I have been thinking only about you, and for your sake I have been concerned only about working for others!’ Then our contemplative soul

exclaims with the Apostle: *vivo autem iam non ego: vivit vero in me Christus* (*Gal 2:20*), it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”^[6] —

Something similar often happens to us too. Our day goes by with its multiple tasks (caring for our family, professional work, the unexpected demands of each day), and when night falls, we feel as though we haven’t been very generous. Perhaps we think we could have prayed better, loved more, served more selflessly. And perhaps that’s true. But it can also be true, as Saint Josemaría said, that without realizing it, we have spent that day seeking to serve God and others, striving to identify ourselves with Christ, who “came not to be served, but to serve” (*Mt 20:28*). In the end, that is the joy the humble servant experienced: to have spent his day, with its lights and shadows, giving

himself to his Lord, as our Mother did. “Let us turn our eyes towards Mary. No creature ever surrendered herself to the plans of God more humbly than she. The humility of the *ancilla Domini*, the handmaid of the Lord, is the reason we invoke her as *causa nostrae laetitiae*, cause of our joy. After Eve had sinned through her foolish desire to be equal to God, she hid herself from the Lord and was ashamed: she was sad. Mary, in confessing herself the handmaid of the Lord, becomes the Mother of the divine Word, and is filled with joy. May the rejoicing that is hers, the joy of our good Mother, spread to all of us; and close beside our Holy Mother Mary, we will become more like Christ, her Son.”^[7]

^[1] Benedict XVI, Audience, 11 May 2011.

^[2] Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, no. 13.

^[3] Benedict XVI, Audience, 17 June 2012.

^[4] Francis, Angelus, 6 October 2019.

^[5] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 150.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *Letter 3*, no. 90.

^[7] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 109.

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