

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

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 24th week of Ordinary Time.

- A woman's daring
- Two ways of looking at the same gesture
- Christ knows the affection we have for Him

JESUS is in the home of a Pharisee. From what St. Luke tells us, it seems that the host is very interested in eating with this person who works great miracles. He can finally receive Him under his roof. But just as they are sitting around the table, a woman bursts onto the scene. And she is no ordinary person: she is a public sinner. The Pharisee would probably have been scandalized. He would not have allowed someone like that to enter his house, especially at such a special moment as that meal. With great boldness, this woman began to weep at Jesus' feet and to bathe them with her tears, and "wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment" she had brought in an alabaster jar (*Lk 7:38*).

That woman was not willing to let her sins define her life. She knew she had made many mistakes. That is

why she wanted to show her repentance with a gesture of humble yet bold love. If her faults had led her to distance herself from God and her fellow villagers, now the recognition of her guilt spurs her to draw close to the Son of God, despite the presence of the Pharisee. And Christ, who knows the desire in her heart to change her life, grants her what she is so desperately seeking: peace of spirit and the forgiveness of her sins (cf. *Lk 7:50*). “Ask Jesus,” Saint Josemaría said, “to grant you a Love like a purifying bonfire, where your poor flesh – your poor heart – may be consumed and cleansed of all earthly miseries. Pray that it may be emptied of self and filled Him. Ask Him to grant you a deep aversion to all that is worldly, so that you may be sustained only by Love.”^[1]

THE GOSPEL account offers us at least two ways of viewing that woman's gesture. On the one hand, that of the Pharisee. The host said to himself: "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner" (*Lk 7:39*). Besides doubting Jesus' power and despising the woman, the Pharisee makes another great mistake: ignoring his own sinfulness. By labeling that person as a sinner, in a certain way he sees himself as righteous, and therefore thinks he has no need for divine forgiveness.

On the other hand, the Gospel presents us with Jesus' vision, which is marked by mercy. Our Lord appreciates the daring of that woman, who is not afraid to enter a stranger's house. He appreciates her humility in throwing herself at his feet. He is moved to see her weep. He does not see her only as a sinner, but

as a woman who is trying to win God's heart with her love. "What depths of mercy there are in God's justice! For, in the judgments of men, the one who confesses his fault is punished: but in the Judgment of God, he is pardoned."^[2]

This scene highlights the reality that "those who trust in themselves and in their own merits are, as it were, blinded by their ego and their heart is hardened in sin. Those, on the other hand, who recognize that they are weak and sinful entrust themselves to God and obtain from Him grace and forgiveness."^[3]

Therefore we can ask our Lord that, like the woman in this passage, we may know how to turn to Him with humility when we notice the presence of sin in our lives. "Yes, you are right: how deep is your wretchedness! By your own efforts, where would you be now, where would you have got to? You admitted:

‘Only a Love full of mercy could keep on loving me.’ Take heart. He will not deny you his Love or his Mercy, if you seek him.”^[4] —

THE PHARISEE is troubled. Jesus has seen the scorn in his heart for that woman’s gesture. And our Lord makes him see that, in reality, she has been a much better host than he. In a certain sense, that woman’s heart is a home better prepared to welcome Him. “I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment” (*Lk 7:44-46*).

Christ is grateful for the small gestures of affection that we show Him: our external piety in church, the hidden sacrifices we make for Him in our daily lives, our brief, silent prayer in our workplace... Like that woman, with each of these gestures we show our Lord that we love Him. “A person in love doesn’t miss the tiniest detail,” St. Josemaría wrote. “I have seen it in so many souls. Those little things become something very great: Love!”^[5] —

Jesus doesn’t want to reprimand us if we neglect or omit any of these practices, just as He didn’t initially do so with the Pharisee. But if we judge others harshly and are condescending towards ourselves, our Lord will be quick to point out our inconsistency. “For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get” (Mt 7:2). Therefore we can ask our Lady for a

mother's way of looking at our brothers and sisters, a look that knows how to put their mistakes into perspective and appreciate their good qualities.

^[1] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 814.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 309.

^[3] Benedict XVI, Speech, 7 March 2008.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 897.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 443.