

Meditations: Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this season of Lent.

- A consistent life that reflects Christ
- Rectitude of intention to give glory to God
- Humility opens us to the greatness of God

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice (Mt 23:2-3). The synagogues

had a special chair where the rabbis would sit while explaining Scripture. In a figurative sense, “the seat of Moses” designated the teaching of the rabbis, who taught and interpreted the Law. But, as our Lord makes clear in the Gospel, the scribes and Pharisees acted with such inconsistency that they failed to observe the rules they themselves established.

The simple people, in contrast, sought Jesus precisely because everything they saw in Him was true. They followed our Lord with enthusiasm because He practiced what He preached. While the Master went ahead and opened the way, the Pharisees and scribes placed on the shoulders of others *heavy burdens, hard to bear, but they themselves will not move them with their finger* (Mt 23:4). Jesus asks his followers to embrace their daily cross (cf. Lk 9:23), because He goes in front

bearing the heaviest cross. The authorities, on the contrary, were demanding on others and permissive towards themselves; they speak well, but we don't see good fruit in them.

Although the Christian life is not about doing things so that others will see us, a consistent life is much more helpful than just words. The spirit with which we carry out our daily activities in our family, at work, with our friends, if it reflects Christ's attractive peace and joy, will be an authentic transmission of the Gospel. “It is the consistency of our own life that will enable our brothers and sisters to recognize Christ, the only Savior and the hope of the world.”^[1]

JESUS reproached the authorities for being more concerned about appearances than the truth. *They do*

all their deeds to be seen by men (Mt 23:5). They are eager for human praise, seek the first places in public and long to receive homage.

Everything they do is aimed at gaining a good reputation. They live their life trying to impress others, as on a stage, content to observe external rules that don't flow from love: they "follow the letter" but "don't know its spirit."^[2]

It is only natural that we care about what people think of us, since we live among others. We feel the need to be accepted and valued by the people around us, especially those who love us. But a right intention leads us to put the greatest emphasis on the joy we give to God and the good we do for others. We are concerned about pleasing only to the extent that we want to make the people we love happy.

Saint Josemaría said that “a right intention consists in seeking ‘only and in everything’ the glory of God.”^[3] This is the decisive criterion that should guide our actions. “It is the indication that guides us when we are not sure what is the right thing to do; it helps us to recognize the voice of God within us. The glory of God is the needle of the compass of our conscience.”^[4] Although we see in our heart a great gamut of intentions and desires, examining the motives for which we act will free us, little by little, from acting facing men, and give us the peace that comes from acting facing God.

FACED WITH the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees, our Lord insists: *He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever*

humbles himself will be exalted (Mt 23:11-12). Humility is an indispensable virtue for God to fill us with his gifts. “It is with steps of humility that one ascends to the heights of heaven,”^[5] Saint Augustine said. The patriarch Jacob saw in a dream a ladder that reached from earth to heaven and by which angels were ascending and descending,.(cf. *Gen 28:12*), Another Father of the Church wrote in this regard: “Through haughtiness one descends and through humility one ascends . . . When our heart is lowered, God raises it up to heaven.”^[6]

Humility enables us to discover both our misery and our greatness. “Humility means looking at ourselves as we really are, honestly and without excuses. And when we realize that we are worth hardly anything, we can then open ourselves to God's greatness.”^[7] This

humble and generous attitude makes room for God to act. The book of Proverbs tells us that humility is accompanied by wisdom: *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom* (Prov 11:2).

“God only wants us to be humble and to empty ourselves, so that he can fill us. He wants us not to put obstacles in his way so that – humanly speaking – there will be more room for his grace in our poor hearts.”^[8]

Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, will help us as a good mother to root out of our hearts anything that could block God’s action. And then He will be able to enrich us ever more fully with his gifts.

^[1] Francis, Homily, 3 August 2018.

^[2] Origen, *Catena aurea*, Homily 23 in *Matthaeum*.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 921.

^[4] Francis, Homily, 3 August 2018.

^[5] Saint Augustine, Sermon on Humility and the Fear of God.

^[6] Saint Benedict of Nursia, *Monastic Rule*, chapter 7.

^[7] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 96.

^[8] *Ibid.*, no. 98.