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Meditations: Tuesday of the Seventh Week of Easter

Some reflections that can guide our prayer as we prepare for the great feast of Pentecost.

- Paul, witness of the Gospel
- God calls us to the fulness of life
- The apostles' magnanimity

PAUL WAS travelling to Jerusalem, where "chains and tribulations

awaited him" (*Acts 20:23*). Passing through Miletus, he decided to send a message to Ephesus summoning the priests of the church. The apostle knew that this would probably be the last time they would see him, and once they had gathered together, he gave an emotional speech about what gave his life meaning. Since Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus, he had unceasingly proclaimed "conversion to God and faith in our Lord Jesus" to all people (*Acts 20:21*). Although this brought him all kinds of difficulties, the only thing that mattered to him was being faithful to the mission God entrusted to him: "Yet I consider life of no importance to me, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness to the gospel of God's grace" (*Acts 20:24*).

Over the weeks of Easter, which are now drawing to a close, we have

meditated on Jesus's resurrection, which is the central truth of our faith. St. Paul recognises that we have not only received this treasure in order to guard it, but so that we may share it with others. God gives his gifts for the good of all, and this sometimes means setting aside our security or comfort to set out on the divine path of the apostle. "Following and accompanying Christ, staying with him, demands 'coming out of ourselves,' requires us to be outgoing; to come out of ourselves, out of a dreary way of living faith that has become a habit, out of the temptation to withdraw into our own plans which end by shutting out God's creative action."^[1] God shows us what it means to live this 'logic of openness.' He became one of us; he came to meet us in order to give us his mercy and salvation.

IT MIGHT seem like Paul, living only to fulfill the mission he had received from the Lord, could not have any personal hopes or projects. When Msgr. Javier Echevarría was elected as St. Josemaría's second successor, he was asked a related question: "Have you been able to be yourself?" In his reply, Msgr. Echevarría looked back on his life and, like St. Paul, recognised what God had done in it: "Yes, I have lived my own life. I would never of dreamed of having such aspirations. On my own, I would have had much narrower horizons and shorter flights. [...] I am a man of my time, a Christian, and a priest, and my aspirations have been fulfilled."^[2]

God relies on our gifts and personality to give shape to the proclamation of salvation. Jesus did not choose twelve identical apostles. Some were more enthusiastic or impulsive, others more introverted

or reflective. Each contributed to the spread of Christianity in different ways according to his character, experience, and audience. Moreover, it would be foolish to imagine that God, the Father who lovingly created us and called us to share his life, is less creative than we are. The apostles did not perceive their vocation as an external task, alien to their personal qualities and desires. They saw their talents activated and their aspirations fulfilled as they allowed themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit. This is why St. Paul, seeing his end drawing near, says that the only thing that matters to him is "to bear witness to the Gospel" (*Acts 20:24*). Over the years, he has experienced the unsurpassed attractiveness and excitement of fidelity to the vocation Jesus gave him.

SAINT PAUL sums up his life as an apostle like this: "I did not shrink from proclaiming to you the entire plan of God" (Acts 20:27). He never held anything back. Since meeting Christ, he was incapable of giving himself half-heartedly. "For someone who wants to live for Love with a capital letter, the middle course is not good enough; that would be meanness, a wretched compromise."^[3] His vocation led him to devote all his strength to the ideal that gave light to his whole existence. "What then is my recompense?" he asked in the First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:18). "That, when I preach, I offer the gospel free of charge so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel."

The Prelate of Opus Dei often reminds us that "we do not do apostolate: we are apostles!"^[4] The desire to bring souls closer to God is not limited to a particular time or a

concrete task: an apostle's heart beats at all times. If we think of the people who have made a positive mark on our lives — parents, teachers, or friends who brought out the best in us — we may notice a common characteristic: their magnanimity. They could not have changed us if they had limited themselves to fulfilling only the immediate task of providing material sustenance, giving a lesson, or spending time together.

Similarly, an apostle leaves a mark on souls when he goes beyond himself, struggling not to submit to human respect or calculation. That is why St. Josemaría said that magnanimity "gives us the energy to break out of ourselves and be prepared to undertake generous tasks which will be of benefit to all."^[5] Magnanimous people are not satisfied with giving a bit of time or effort; they give themselves entirely.

They follow our Lady's example. She gave her heart to God and he gave her the strength to welcome all of humanity.

[1] Pope Francis, Audience, 27-III-2013.

[2] Interview of P. Urbano with Msgr. Javier Echevarría, *Época*, 20-IV-1994.

[3] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 64.

[4] Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, Pastoral Letter, 14-II-2017, no. 9.

[5] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 80.

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