

Meditations: Wednesday of the First Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during the First Week in Ordinary Time.

- Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law.
- In prayer we discover God's plans.
- We pray to prepare our soul for God's grace.

SIMON'S MOTHER-IN-LAW had a fever, and it seems that it was a serious one. St Mark, whose gospel contains St Peter's preaching, says that they hurried to tell Jesus about it and ask him to visit her. And the minute she was cured, the good woman herself was in just as much of a hurry to serve the Lord and his disciples. As soon as her fever disappeared, she devoted herself wholeheartedly to helping with Jesus's work.

In every Christian's mission, God's grace goes together with the individual's free response: all God's initiative and our little grain of sand. "Even for our spiritual life, observing the Commandments is essential. But here too, we cannot rely on our efforts alone: the grace of God that we receive in Christ is fundamental. That grace that comes from the justification given to us by Christ who already paid for us. From him,

we receive that gratuitous love that allows us, in our turn, to love in concrete ways.”^[1] Simon’s mother-in-law forgets about her own situation right away, and sets out joyfully to share what she has received. But she can only do this because Christ has healed her. That is what he came for, to make our desires and deepest yearnings come true.

This miracle is the first of a series of signs Jesus worked in the lakeside town of Capernaum. The whole town came crowding around the door of Simon’s house; Jesus restored joy and hope to a whole generation. Simon’s mother-in-law helped with her own work of service, and we can easily imagine how proud she was to be hosting the teacher from Nazareth. *He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons (Mk 1:34)*, the gospel tells us. Simon’s mother-in-law was delighted

to see so much joy being shared in her home, beneath her own roof.

TODAY'S GOSPEL shows us how Jesus began his day: *In the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed* (*Mk 1:35*). It also shows his priorities in life. There is a sharp contrast between the early morning, when he went out and prayed, and the evening, when he cured people. The power that went forth from him and healed them all (cf. *Lk 6:19*) came from his contact with his Father God in prayer. And in prayer we too learn to identify ourselves with God's wishes. We try not to let the day's events prevent us from praying, because we don't want to miss the chance of sharing in Jesus's mission.

Choosing the very beginning of the day for our prayer, as Christ did, is a way of exercising our freedom. We don't spend time with God just because we have to, but because among the thousand and one things in our day, we don't want to lose hold of what really matters. Jesus's determination to seek solitude to pray may surprise us—after all, isn't he in permanent contact with his Father? But in this way, the Son of God shows us that he needs to pray in order to carry out his mission. And before his Passion, when he is about to give up his life to ransom us, we again see him going apart to pray.

Simon went out to look for the teacher, and tried to persuade him to go back and meet more people there. *Everyone is searching for you (Mk 1:37)*. But Jesus told him that it was time for him to go to other towns. He wanted everyone to have a chance to meet God. He refused to stay where

he was, to rest content with what he had done; he was drawn by all the other souls awaiting him. So, still early in the morning, after dialoguing with his Father, Christ set out on his travels.

WHY DOES God want us to pray? Saint Augustine also posed this question: “Why should He tell us to pray, if He knows what we need before we ask? The Lord our God tells us to ask not so that our wishes may be made known to Him, for to Him they cannot be unknown, but so that by prayer we may be made ready to receive what He bestows. His gifts are very great, but our capacity for receiving is very small.”^[2] That is why we pray: to enlarge our heart’s capacity to receive all the gifts God has prepared for us.

The more we desire and pray for, the more we will receive, because God uses the space that prayer opens up in our hearts. When we recognize that we don't deserve anything, and go on to ask for impossibilities, we have made room in our soul for the graces that God wishes to pour out abundantly. “If we underrate Christ, we will hope to receive very little. If, on hearing His promises, we think that the gifts He speaks of are mediocre, then we sin; and we also sin if we refuse to recognize the place we were called from, who called us, and the purpose for which He called us.”^[3]

Saint Josemaría knew very well what God is able to give to those who pray. “Prayer—even my prayer!—is all-powerful.”^[4] When we pray persistently, we are asking for what God wants to give us. He has already prepared the gift we request, but he wants us to explain to him what we

need: he does not compromise our freedom. Saint Josemaría, always eager to renew his good dispositions in prayer, implored, “Mother, you are the Mother of God; tell me what I have to say and how I have to say it so that he will listen to me.”^[5]

^[1] Pope Francis, Audience, September 29, 2021.

^[2] St Augustine, Letter 130, no. 17.

^[3] Second-century author, Liturgy of the Hours, 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time).

^[4] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 188.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, Scepter, London and New York, 2018, p. 111.

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