

Meditations: Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this Lenten season.

- Jesus is the fullness of the Law
- A fidelity that enlivens and enlarges the heart
- Understanding what we love

Beyond the Jordan, in the wilderness . . . Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him in commandment to them (Deut 1:1.3). The people are on the verge of entering the promised land. But the

one who has been their guide and shepherd since fleeing from Egypt forty years ago, will not cross that last border with them. Before giving up his soul to God, Moses fulfills his mission to the end. *Behold*, he tells them, *I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples (Deut 4:5-6).*

The identity of Israel will be forged through their fidelity to this Law. From Joshua and Phinehas to Saul of Tarsus, passing through Elijah, Judith and Mattathias, many Israelites will feel their souls enkindled with a burning love for God's Law. Therefore when Jesus begins his public life, the people are stirred up. He speaks with authority, and seems to permit, both for Himself and his

disciples, some exceptions to the traditions of their fathers. The pious Israelites are confused, so our Lord tells them clearly: *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them* (Mt 5:17).

Jesus places Himself within that tradition of ardent love for God's Law, the glory of his people. But He adds something important. Certainly He has not come to eliminate it, but neither is He seeking a mere formal fulfillment. Christ has come to bring the Law to the fullness of its meaning. "He goes to the Law's roots, focusing first and foremost on the intention, and therefore on the human heart, from which our good and bad actions originate . . . Through faith in Christ, we can open ourselves to the action of the Spirit, which enables us to experience divine love."^[1] —

TO SOME of Jesus' listeners, his answer may have seemed inadequate. They might have asked themselves: "If he has not come to abolish the Law, then what is the meaning of his ambiguous conduct?" But Jesus' conduct seemed ambiguous only to those with a distorted vision of the Law. And what Jesus wants to abolish is precisely that deformed outlook. But this effort proves to be arduous, since He finds it so deeply rooted, especially among some of the Pharisees. Theirs is a superficial fulfillment of the Law, a formal observance, compatible with a heart that fails to grow bigger (cf. *Is* 29:13; *Mt* 15:6).

But this is not the fidelity that our Lord wants. Moses had said: *So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live (Deut*

4:1). The purpose of the Law is to help us to live, to grow. In the same way, Jesus' words are spirit and life (cf. *Jn* 6:63). Far from being immobile, the word of the Lord, the psalmist tells us, "runs swiftly" (cf. *Ps* 147:15). Far from diminishing us, fidelity to the Law has the capacity to make us great, because it sets us on the path that expands our heart:
Guide my steps by your word, so I will not be overcome by evil (Ps 119:133).

"Sanctity has the flexibility of agile muscles," Saint Josemaría said.

"Sanctity is not rigid like cardboard; it is life, supernatural life."^[2] How can we distinguish the "pharisaic fulfillment" that diminishes us and makes us rigid, from the fullness that enlivens us and makes us great? We could list many things here, but the ultimate key lies in a love that has two specific signs: joy, the fruit of doing things freely;^[3] and the tenderness with which we do things,

^[4] because we put our heart and great care into them. So we can understand why “great souls pay much attention to little things.”^[5]

IN ORDER TO FULFILL God’s Law with love, it is good to know why we do these things. It is true that we can love something even if we do not fully understand it because, in that case, we trust the person who tells us: our Lord, our parents, someone we have confidence in... But authentic love always seeks to understand better, and love grows to the extent that we go deeper into its reasons.^[6] If we do things without understanding why, it is easy to end up limiting ourselves to external fulfillment, without internalizing the reasons for doing it, and without identifying ourselves with it. Thus we can easily end up forgetting that

we are doing it for God, and it can become something burdensome or meaningless. Sacred Scripture exhorts us: *take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children (Deut 4:9).*

Sometimes we come to understand things precisely through our obedience, when that obedience is born from the desire to identify ourselves with what God wants from us. This miracle occurs above all in prayer, where God helps us to conform our will to his, thanks to the lights, affections and inspirations that He pours into our souls. And along with prayer, an indispensable means is study, especially of Sacred Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. These are inexhaustible treasures into which

we can delve ever deeper, and where we will find each time new lights to fill everything we do with meaning, and to give reasons for our faith to those who ask us for it.

Our Lady also had to strive to understand God's action in her life. That is why she frequently meditated on events in her heart (cf. *Lk* 1:29; 2:19.51); she asked for an explanation for what she did not understand (cf. *Lk* 1:34; 2:48) and sought guidance from someone who could help her (cf. *Lk* 1:39). Hence Mary can teach us to be truly free.

^[1] Francis, Angelus, 16 February 2014.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 156.

^[3] Cf. Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 9 January 2018, no. 6.

^[4] Cf. Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, no. 127.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 818.

^[6] Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas,
Commentary on Nicomachean Ethics,
Bk. 8, 12, no. 6.

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