

Meditations: Wednesday of the Twenty-Ninth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-ninth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: a taste for the city of God; turning our desires toward God; love for Confession.

- A taste for the city of God
- Turning our desires toward God
- Love for Confession

IN HIS letter to the Romans, St. Paul warned Christians about the reality of sin and encouraged them to put themselves entirely at God's service: *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:12-13).*

St. Paul, like many saints, is well aware of how much sin promises and how little it delivers, how much it takes and how little it offers, the anticipation it creates and the bitterness it leaves. The sovereignty sin seems to give us is only an illusion, and it makes us distrust God's sovereignty until his presence fades into the background of our existence. "Two loves have built two cities," Saint Augustine wrote: "love

of God carried to the contempt of self makes the city of God; love of self to the contempt of God, the earthly city. The first glories in the Lord, the second in itself.”^[1] Sometimes, temptation shows us the apparent immediate benefits of sin, which can be appealing. But temptation always conceals what sin will take from us, the good we will miss out on, the city we will abandon, the relationships we will damage.

We make choices throughout our lives, in social and professional life, and we become what we choose: we identify with the object of our struggle, and we develop an inclination toward the goods, whether real or apparent, that we pursue. If we choose sin, we turn ourselves, little by little, toward the city of men. If we opt for the good, even when it is challenging, our hearts will acquire a natural affinity for what is good, a love for the city of

God. We will develop a “new, spiritual way of seeing earthly realities [and] the freedom to love God and our brothers and sisters with a pure heart and to live a life of joyful hope for the coming of Christ’s Kingdom.”^[2]

WHEN HE preaches, Jesus reminds the people that choosing well, forming hearts inclined toward God’s commandments, is both possible and necessary. To illustrate the point He wants to convey to his listeners, He tells a parable about a steward whose master left him in charge of his estate. The servant behaved selfishly and cruelly, knowing that his master was away and would not come back until later. But the master returned, found the servant in this state, and punished him severely. Perhaps the servant believed that he

could afford to live at his master's expense. He may have convinced himself that he was in control, that he could calculate when his master would return, and that he would be able to cover up his misdeeds, presenting himself as a respectable person. But the parable shows that his sense of security was misplaced.

Turning our hearts toward the good is not something achieved overnight. God, like the master in the parable, grants us a period of time to desire to turn our efforts and hopes to Him, with his grace and freedom, because that is what will make us truly happy. This has concrete consequences in our daily lives, and when they are lived authentically, they help us discover the happiness that comes from living with God. "If, for example, a young person wishes to become a doctor, he or she will have to embark on a course of study and work that will occupy several

years of his or her life, and consequently will have to set limits, say “no” first of all to other courses of study, but also to possible diversions and distractions, especially during the most intense periods of study. However, the desire to give his or her life a direction and to reach that goal — to become a doctor was the example — enables him or her to overcome these difficulties. Desire makes you strong, it makes you courageous, it makes you keep going forward.”^[3] This is why St. Josemaría often used the image of a battle to talk about holiness, a path on which we encounter trials but also peace.

“When love exists there is a kind of wholeness — a capacity for self-giving, sacrifice and renunciation. In the midst of that self-denial, along with painful difficulties, we find joy and happiness, a joy which nothing and no one can take away from us.”^[4]

ONE OF the means that God has given us to help turn our hearts toward Him is the sacrament of Confession. When we approach this sacrament, it is Jesus who encourages and supports us: *Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth (Ps 123:7-8)*. The priest forgives our sins in Jesus's name. For people who return to Confession after a long time, that moment is very moving. But people who confess frequently may think that their confessions are somewhat routine. For this reason, St. Josemaria reminded us that “our Lord instituted the sacrament of Penance not only to forgive sins but also to give us strength and to provide us with spiritual guidance and assistance.”^[5] In other words, even if our confession seems routine to us, God is giving us his grace to face the struggles of the day and to

free us from sin: “I want you to be rebels, free and unfettered, because I want you — it is Christ who wants us! — to be children of God. Slavery or divine sonship, this is the dilemma we face.”^[6]

In every Confession, we meet the father in the parable, waiting for us and fervently desiring our return home. “All too often, we think that Confession is about going to God with dejected looks. Yet it is not so much that we go to the Lord, but that he comes to us, to fill us with his grace, to fill us with his joy. Our confession gives the Father the joy of raising us up once more. It is not so much about our sins as about his forgiveness. Our sins are present but the forgiveness of God is always at the heart of our confession.”^[7] That's why Saint Josemaría encouraged his children to love this sacrament: “I am always delighted to receive this means of grace, for I know that our

Lord forgives me and fills me with courage. I am convinced that by going to the sacrament of Penance devoutly, we learn to be more sorry, and hence to love more too.”^[8] We can ask our Mother Mary to help us experience the joy of receiving her Son in our home every time we go to the sacrament of Confession.

^[1] St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, Book 14, Chapter 28.

^[2] Pope Francis, Homily, 15-VIII-2014.

^[3] Pope Francis, Audience, 12-X-2022.

^[4] St. Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 75.

^[5] St. Josemaría, Notes from his preaching, 8-X-1972, quoted in *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza*

de San Josemaría (III), E. Burkhart – J. López, pg. 498.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 38.

^[7] Pope Francis, Homily, 25-III-2022.

^[8] St. Josemaría, *Alone with God*, no. 259.

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