

Meditations: Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during these final days of Lent.

- The deceit of temptations
- Bearers of a treasure
- Following Christ to Calvary

AFTER THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS, the high priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and said: *What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our*

nation (Jn 11:47-48). Then Caiaphas, who was the High Priest, spoke up: you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish (Jn 11:50).

From that moment on, the evangelist says, the Jewish authorities *had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him (Jn 11:57).*

The Jews had long considered doing away with Jesus, but until then they had not made a firm resolution to do so. The resurrection of Lazarus led them to make the final decision.

Therefore, Caiaphas concludes, the best solution is for Jesus to die. Those present are convinced that they have adopted a just solution, as this would prevent the fragile peace with the Roman authorities from unravelling, which could lead to harsh reprisals against the Jewish people. But this

was not the real reason why they persecuted Christ.

This way of acting reflects, in some way, the process of every temptation. “It normally begins with something small, with a desire or idea, but it grows and begins to infect others, and in the end it seems justified.”^[1] And the heart, misled by a strong emotion, often becomes convinced of its twisted justice. But a Christian’s daily life is also marked by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. God presents us with many opportunities to direct our impulses towards what He promises us for all eternity.^[2] We can ask the Paraclete to help us to be docile to his counsels, to welcome his inspirations, and to grant us the wisdom needed to refuse to be fooled by passing temptations.

NOT EVERYONE reacted in the same way upon witnessing the resurrection of Lazarus. *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him (Jn 11:45).* Those who were amazed at the miracle went to receive our Lord in his triumphal entry into Jerusalem: *the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb . . . bore witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign (Jn 12:17-18).*

Jesus had urged his disciples to announce the salvation He had come to offer: *Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation (Mk 16:15).* However, in this case there are no explicit words; what these people do is the natural consequence of having known our Lord. They know they are bearers of a treasure, and they want to share it with all their brethren. It is the same

reaction as that of Andrew when he encounters Peter: *We have found the Messiah* (Jn 1:41). “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.”^[3]

“Apostolate,” Saint Josemaría often said, “is an overflow of the interior life.”^[4] The apostles attracted others because they communicated their own experience of Jesus. They had seen, touched and heard Christ, so it was only natural to want to spread the joy of having met Him. It was not a task imposed from outside, but the spontaneous impulse of one whose heart is filled with the Gospel message.

MANY OF THOSE who, on witnessing that miracle, believed in Jesus, and who later received Him with loud acclaim in Jerusalem, may well have felt defrauded when He was condemned to death. The days of jubilation would now seem so far away. Some of them may have seen Him carrying the Cross to Calvary. But only his Mother, John and a few holy women accompanied Him at the hour of his death.

We don't know for sure why all these people abandoned Jesus. It is quite likely that many were afraid of being identified with Him, a man now condemned to death, and had decided He couldn't be the long-awaited Messiah. Christ had not become the overriding reason for their life. "Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once

again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace.”^[5]

Following Christ means leaving behind the comfort of the shore and launching out in the mission of being his witness. The Holy Spirit, with his gifts, helps us to travel this path, which includes both the acclaim of Jerusalem and the suffering of Calvary. Our Lady risked her whole life by responding “yes” to the Angel. And even though this brought her many sorrows and even seeing her Son die on the Cross, the certainty that God always triumphs gave her the greatest of consolations. “With a group of valiant women like these, closely united to our Lady of Sorrows, what work for souls could be done in the world!”^[6]

^[1] Pope Francis, Homily, 4 April 2020.

^[2] Cf. Prayer over the offerings, Fifth Saturday of Lent.

^[3] Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no.1.

^[4] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 239.

^[5] Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 3.

^[6] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 982.

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