

Meditations: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (Day 6)

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18-25 January).

- Christ wanted to found the Church on the apostles
- All Christians are called to be apostles
- Apostolate "ad fidem" and "ad gentes"

THE BOOK of the Acts of the Apostles, after narrating the coming of the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire upon the disciples who were gathered in Jerusalem, records a characteristic shared by the first Christians: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching* (Acts 2:42). Today, in our prayer, we consider the last of the four notes of the Church: her apostolicity.

St Josemaría points out that “the preaching of the Gospel does not arise in Palestine through the personal initiative of a few fervent individuals. What could the Apostles do? They counted for nothing in their time. From a human point of view they were neither rich nor learned, nor heroes. Jesus places on the shoulders of a handful of disciples an immense, divine task. *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should*

abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you (Jn 15:16).

“Through two thousand years of history, the apostolic succession has been preserved in the Church. ‘The bishops’ – declares the Council of Trent – ‘have taken the place of the Apostles and are placed, as the Apostle (Paul) himself says, by the Holy Spirit to govern the Church of God’ (*Acts 20:28*).”^[1] In the same way St Paul, writing to those living in Ephesus, a city which worshipped gods made with human hands, reminds them that having been baptised in the name of Christ they became *fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles* (*Eph 2:19*).

We rest on the same foundation as the first Christians. Through the apostolic succession, the Church

maintains over time the certainty of continuing to work for God, in obedience to the mission given by Christ himself: *Go and make disciples of all nations* (*Mt 28:19*). Moreover, this is the way to preserve and transmit with certainty the words heard from the apostles themselves: *Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me* (*2 Tim 1:13*). Today we can thank our Lord for the apostolicity of the Church and pray that all Christians may be brought together – in virtue of their divine origin – in the one people of God.

“WHENEVER WE read the Acts of the Apostles,” said St Josemaría, “we are moved by the audacity, the confidence in their mission and the sacrificing joy of Christ’s disciples. They do not ask for multitudes. Even

though the multitudes come, they address themselves to each particular soul, to each person, one by one: Philip, to the Ethiopian (see Acts 8:26-40); Peter, to the centurion Cornelius (see *Acts 10:1-48*); Paul, to Sergius Paulus (see *Acts 13:6-12*).”^[2] To understand the apostolicity of the Church, we have to share in the fervour of the first disciples, who worked with the awareness of having discovered in Christ the most important thing in their lives. St Paul goes so far as to say it in words that set fire to the world: *For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ (Phil 3:8).*

Pope Francis stresses that “being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey. In this preaching,

which is always respectful and gentle, the first step is personal dialogue, when the other person speaks and shares his or her joys, hopes and concerns for loved ones, or so many other heartfelt needs.”[3] Every Christian, wherever he or she is, is the presence of the Church itself, which wants to spread its joy and light in the world. Participating in the transmission of the Gospel unites us to that task of the early times; it makes us experience the apostolicity of the Church, which is based on the words and life of Jesus Christ.

St Josemaría reminds us that the apostles always maintained this missionary zeal because “they have learned from the Master. Remember the parable of the labourers who awaited work, in the middle of the marketplace of the village. When the owner of the vineyard went out, already late in the day, he found that

there were still labourers standing idle: *Why do you stand here idle all day? Because no one has hired us (Mt 20:6-7)*, they answered. This should not happen in the life of a Christian. No one should be found around us who can assert that they have not heard of Christ, because no one has bothered to tell them.”^[4] The apostolate for a Christian is not a task limited to a specific time, nor an activity reserved only for certain situations: a Christian is always an apostle.^[5]

THIS SENSE OF MISSION, which is born of baptism, was also a characteristic of the work with souls that St Josemaría encouraged from the beginning. That is why he affirmed, with a truth that has been demonstrated for many years, that “the Work has a special love for the

apostolate *ad fidem ... and directs its efforts ad gentes*,”^[6] that is, to all those who have not yet received the consolation of Christ. “*You know well*,” he also wrote, “*the breadth of vision, the charity we have always shown to those who do not share our faith, to those who are not within the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church. From the beginning we have had these souls as friends, and so often as cooperators in our apostolic work*.”^[7]

The model for opening ourselves to all people has always been the life of the early Christians. Starting from Jerusalem, they spread out to all known cultures, nations and languages, following the command that Jesus had given to his disciples: *Go therefore and make disciples* (Mt 28:19). In this way, with the passing of the centuries, “many souls have come to the fullness of faith through this gentle road of charity,” St

Josemaría wrote. “Thank God for this, and ask him for fortitude and humility so that you may never stifle the action of grace and may always be good instruments of his. I repeat: never judge rashly, be good friends of everybody, respect the freedom of others and the freedom of grace; and, at the same time, profess your faith with deeds and with words.”[8]

With our sincere friendship open to all men and women, “there are no shared moments that are not apostolic: everything is friendship and everything is apostolate, without being able to distinguish them.”[9] Trusting in the intercession of the apostles, we wish, like the first Christians, to persevere in their teaching and in their desire to bring the friendship of Christ to those around us, just like the first Christians. We ask Mary, Queen of the Apostles, to help us to have gratitude and appreciation, always in

a new way, for the apostolicity of the Church. And, at the same time, to kindle our hearts with the fire of Christ: *Fac ut ardeat cor meum in amando Christum Deum*, make my heart burn with love for Christ, my God.[10]

[1] St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 12.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 127-128.

[4] St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 15

[5] Cf. Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Letter, 14 February 2017, 9.

[6] St Josemaría, *Instruction*, May 1935-14 September 1950, 146.

[7] St Josemaría, *Letter 24 October 1965*, 56

[8] St Josemaría, *Letter 24 October 1965*, 62.

[9] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Letter, 1 November 2019, 19.

[10] Hymn, *Stabat Mater*.

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