

Meditations: Monday of the Second Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this season of Lent.

- Recognizing our neediness so as to open our heart to divine mercy
- Loving others with God's love
- A divine and maternal way of looking

WE BEGIN the second week of Lent by listening to the penitential prayer of the prophet Daniel: *We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside*

from thy commandments and ordinances (Dan 9:5). Despite the fact that the people of Israel refused to obey the voice of the Lord, God remained faithful to his promises. Hence the prophet continues his plea filled with hope: *O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him . . . To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness (Dan 9:4.9).*

The call to conversion, so pressing during Lent, flows from God's merciful heart. It is not the cry of a God who intends to settle accounts for mankind's sin, but rather the love of a Father who has compassion on our weakness, in order to heal it and restore us to life. "Another fall, and what a fall! Must you give up hope? No. Humble yourself and, through Mary, your Mother, have recourse to the merciful Love of Jesus. A

miserere, and lift up your heart! And now begin again.”^[1]

Turning to our Lord and admitting our own sins, as the prophet Daniel did, is the first step to renewing ourselves internally and opening ourselves to divine mercy. God is faithful and waits for our response. Trusting in his mercy, we will show Him our wounds and let Him care for us. With the simplicity and daring of children, we tell Him: “Lord, do not treat us as our sins deserve” (cf. *Ps 103:10*).

EXPERIENCING God’s love leads us to treat the people around us with that same mercy. “As the Father loves, so do his children.”^[2] Those who feel understood and loved find it is easier to understand and love others.

The words of our Lord in today's Gospel encourage us to have a big heart, with sentiments and reactions like his: *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you (Lk 6:36-38)*. The path Jesus invites us to undertake brings with it very practical instructions for our daily life: "Be merciful... do not judge... do not condemn... forgive... give." It is a program that has God himself as our model, in order to be "attuned to this Heart, 'rich in mercy,' which asks us to love everyone, even those who are distant and our enemies, imitating the Heavenly Father who respects the freedom of each one and draws everyone to himself with the invincible power of his faithfulness."^[3]

The vivid awareness of our own sins, and of how greatly we need God's patience, opens the door of our heart to compassion for our brothers and sisters. We must never forget that Jesus places our own forgiveness of others as the condition for our being forgiven: *For with the same measure you use it will be measured back to you (Lk 6:38).*

“GOD’S WORD teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the Incarnation for each of us . . . The way we treat others has a transcendent dimension.”^[4] When we attain this supernatural wisdom, we learn to see Christ in each person. This reality changes our own lives. We discover in others God’s presence; we see Him in each person we encounter or hear

about. And in some way He cares for us through those who are close to us.

Moreover, our way of looking, thinking, speaking and acting will be guided and embellished by charity. Saint Josemaría lived, and taught others to live, a charity that he once summed up in five verbs: “Pray, keep quiet, understand, forgive... and smile.”^[5] In fact, it is the same attitude that a mother has towards her son. Her maternal look leads her to always love him, to find an excuse when possible for his behavior and to support him with her help in the face of his sometimes unsteady steps.

“Brother,” a Father of the Church wrote, “I recommend this to you: that compassion always prevails in your heart, until you feel the compassion that God feels for the world.”^[6] We ask Mary, Mother of mercy, for the gift of always trusting in God’s love for us. Thus it will be easier for us to

forgive the mistakes of others, and to love and help them as they are.

^[1] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 711.

^[2] Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, no. 9

^[3] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 16 September 2007.

^[4] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 179.

^[5] Pilar Urbano, *The Man of Villa Tevere*, ch. 7.

^[6] Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetic Discourses*, 1st series, no. 34.