

Meditations: Monday of the Third Week of Advent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer as we begin the 3rd week in Advent.

- Meditating on Sacred Scripture: light for our path
- God is present in hearts that seek Him sincerely
- Love for the truth is a characteristic of Christ's disciples

THE PROPHETS announced the coming of the Messiah, and therefore

the people of Israel eagerly awaited his arrival: “Behold, our Saviour will come; you need no longer fear.”^[1]

Often, however, we see that the people ignored the prophetic messages, which sometimes led to their own ruin. We can consider here the story of Balaam, a pagan seer who is told by an enemy king of Israel to curse God’s people. Filled with the Spirit of the Lord, Balaam ignores the royal pressure and blesses the chosen people three times: *How fair are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel!* (Num 24:5). Balaam’s end is tragic, for he will die at the hands of the Israelites themselves.

In his prophecy, Balaam symbolizes the coming of the Messiah as a star that will come from Israel: *A star shall come forth out of Jacob* (Num 24:17). The Savior’s coming will be like “a great light over the earth.”^[2] Centuries later, it will be the light of

a star that guides the steps of the Magi. who discover in it a message of salvation. The star leads them to “a little flame enkindled in the night: a needy newborn infant wailing in the silence of the world.”^[3] Although everyone saw the star, not everyone understood its significance. In today’s opening prayer we boldly pray: Lord, “casting light on the darkness of our hearts, visit us with the grace of your Son.”^[4] Give us the light we need to discover the importance of all the events in the personal life of each one of us.

The book of Numbers tells us that Balaam was a *man whose eye is opened because he hears the words of God and knows the plans of the Most High (Num 24:15-17)*. In our quiet meditation of the revealed Word we find light for our daily journey. *Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Ps 119:105)*. In Scripture we also learn the meaning of our

own life. “In that Holy Writing,” Saint Josemaría assured us, “you find the Life of Jesus, but you should also find your own life . . . Take up the Gospel every day, then, and read it and live it.”^[5] —

WHILE JESUS, on one of his frequent visits to the Temple, is teaching the people who have come to listen to Him, the authorities – the chief priests and the elders – arrive with the intention of testing Him. They are upset, among other reasons, because He enjoys an authority with the people that has not been granted by the established powers. *By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?* (Mt 21:23). Their questions don't come from an honest curiosity; they simply dislike the Master's preaching and

rebel because the crowd follows Him so enthusiastically.

As on other occasions, Jesus knows the intention in their hearts. They behave duplicitously, with pretense, and are not candid. They ask him an ambiguous question, when in reality what they want is that Jesus once and for all makes clear whether He is the Messiah. In any case, they are not willing to acknowledge this and act with a calculated cunning. We are not surprised when the Master refuses to answer them. “Jesus has no time for calculations, for astuteness, for the cruelty of cold hearts, for attractive but empty beauty. What he likes is the cheerfulness of a young heart, a simple step, a natural voice, clean eyes, attention to his affectionate word of advice. That is how he reigns in the soul.”^[6] —

God makes himself present in the hearts of those who sincerely seek Him. *To him who orders his way aright I will show the salvation of God!* (Ps 50:23). Jesus is moved by the child who draws close with simplicity, the leper who shows his wounds, the blind man who cries out with no fear of what others will say, the publican who climbs a tree to see Him better. That is, the hearts of those who do not hide behind falsehood. “The Christian must prove himself to be genuine, truthful and sincere in all that he undertakes. His conduct should reflect a spirit: the spirit of Christ. If anyone in this world has a duty to be consistent with his beliefs it is the Christian, for he has been entrusted with a gift he must make fruitful: the truth that liberates and saves.”^[7] —

WHO GAVE you this authority? The Master answers with another question: *I also will ask you a question; and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or from men? (Mt 21:24-25).* Jesus places the authorities before the truth, while also praising John. Although the people had flocked to the Jordan to be baptized by John, the authorities did not listen to his message of conversion and penance. The leaders of the people do not know how to respond to Jesus because their heart is not open to the truth. In reality, they are only seeking the approval of the people. They carefully consider the difficulties that could result from giving one answer or the other: it was from heaven... it was from men... But they fail to find a safe answer: *We do not know (Mt 21:27).*

The encounter with the truth requires an attitude of openness and acceptance. The Christian truth is found only if one loves gratuitously. With his courage and humility, the Baptist was a bold witness to the truth. Fidelity to the truth is not always an easy path. However, the truth has an enormous power of attraction. To show the “splendour of the truth,”^[8] we first need to strive to search for it sincerely, in order to know and contemplate it. If we sincerely love the truth, if it enters our heart and changes us, we find it easier to express it with the gift of tongues and make it visible to others. We Christians are called to show the attractiveness of the truth.

Christ said of himself: “I am the truth” (cf. *Jn* 14:6). Therefore the passion to search for and transmit it is a joyful task for us. “Many years ago now, I saw with crystal clarity a truth that will always be valid: a new

way of living and spreading the eternal truths of the Gospel is needed. Children of God at the very heart of society, of the world, have to let their virtues shine out like lamps in the darkness – *quasi lucernae lucentes in caliginoso loco.*^[9] In the company of our Lady and Saint Joseph, we are journeying towards Bethlehem. At their side we can learn the rectitude of heart with which they both eagerly sought God in the small and great truths of their daily lives.

^[1] Entrance Antiphon, Monday of the Third Week of Advent (*Jer 31:10*).

^[2] Cf. Alleluia, December 25, Mass of the day.

^[3] Benedict XVI, Homily, 6 January 2008.

^[4] Opening Prayer, Monday of the Third Week of Advent.

[5] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 754.

[6] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 181.

[7] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 141.

[8] Saint John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 1

[9] Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 318.

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