

Meditations: Saturday of the Twelfth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twelfth week of Ordinary Time.

- A humility that moved Jesus' heart
- The centurion's faith
- Spiritual communions

SHORTLY AFTER entering Capernaum, a centurion approached Jesus and said: “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home in terrible distress” (*Mt 8:6*). This plea surely surprised the people witnessing the scene. It was unheard of for an important man in the Roman Empire to approach a Jew in this way: calling him “lord” and presenting himself as needy and weak, almost desperate. Perhaps he was aware that such a humiliation would threaten his authority among the inhabitants of Capernaum, but he wasn’t worried about his own prestige: his priority was to find a solution for his servant’s painful situation. Jesus was moved by this centurion’s humility, and even before he made a specific request, our Lord answered: “I will come and heal him” (*Mt 8:7*).

Jesus’ words as well would have surprised those present, since He said He would go to the centurion’s

house. When a Jew entered the home of a Gentile, he contracted legal impurity, which meant distancing oneself from God's presence according to the Law. In fact, the centurion was familiar with this warning, which is why he said: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Mt 8:8). "When we allow ourselves to be encountered by Him, He enters into us and renews us from within. This is what it means for Christ to come: to renew all things, to renew hearts, souls, lives, hope and life's journey."^[1]

Jesus wants to enter the heart of that simple and needy man to show him his love. We too may feel unworthy of being with our Lord, but God comes especially in search of the weakest, also those who feel half-broken, who have lost their self-esteem, who feel themselves

unworthy. God has come to heal us. But He is waiting for us, like the centurion, to draw close to Him and ask with humility.

SO GREAT is the centurion's trust in Jesus that he is convinced only our Lord's word is needed to heal his servant. He has experienced this himself. His human authority is enough for soldiers to immediately obey his orders: "I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes" (*Mt 8:9*). Therefore for Jesus, who has divine authority, a simple command would have been enough to heal his servant's body. This statement aroused the admiration both of our Lord and the crowd: "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (*Mt 8:10-11*).

Jesus praises the faith of a man who, in the eyes of his contemporaries, few would have thought could have faith. He didn’t seem the most appropriate person to receive such praise, since God had not revealed himself to the Roman people as he had to Israel. Thus Christ announces that the new People of God is not limited to just one nation, but offers salvation to all peoples. “And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,” Isaiah had prophesied, “these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer” (*Is 56:6-7*). Having a hopeful vision of the world, like Jesus, leads us to discover the good in all men and women, even those who, at first glance, may seem furthest from God. In the hearts of many of them, like

the centurion's, there beats the desire to encounter a "God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us individually and humanity as a whole."^[2]

BEFORE RECEIVING Communion at Mass, the liturgy invites us to repeat the centurion's act of faith: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed" (*Mt 8:8*). By these words, we express our need to be healed by Christ, who comes to our soul precisely to heal our wounds. "The Eucharist is not a reward for the good, but strength for the weak."^[3]

Throughout the day, we can nourish the desire for Jesus to come into our heart through spiritual communions. "Practice it frequently and you will

have more presence of God and greater union with him in your life,”^[4] Saint Josemaría advised. Perhaps we have all had the experience of waiting, for a time, for something we are especially excited about: a party, a vacation, the arrival of someone we love.... And perhaps the preceding days are filled with preparations, and in our imagination we begin to anticipate how that moment will unfold. And when that day finally arrives, our excitement is even greater the longer we have been waiting.

Through spiritual communions, we not only prepare to receive our Lord in the Eucharist, but we also renew our desire for Him to come and heal us. In her diary, Saint Faustina Kowalska said that Jesus himself told her that if we pray a spiritual communion several times a day, in just one month we will see our hearts completely changed. Therefore we

can ask our Lord for the faith we see in the saints, for their trust that this prayer will transform our heart.

Saint Joseph's life too was filled with "spiritual communions" for nine months. He dreamed of what the Child would be like and often spoke to Mary about his arrival. And when the Child was finally born, his expectations were exceeded: he considered himself the happiest man in the world to hold God himself in his arms.

^[1] Francis, Homily, 2 December 2013.

^[2] Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 31.

^[3] Francis, Homily, 4 June 2015.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 540.

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