

Meditations: Saturday of the Twenty-Fifth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-fifth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: admiration for Christ and contemplation; the Cross is always nearby; living in dialogue with God.

- Admiration for Christ and contemplation
- The Cross is always nearby
- Living in dialogue with God

THE EVANGELIST St. Luke tells us that the crowds *were all marvelling at everything [Jesus] did* (Lk 9:43). It is not hard to imagine why they reacted this way. For one thing, He spoke with authority and his charisma drew crowds. His teachings were not mere words, however; they were accompanied by deeds. Jesus's miracles confirmed his divine origin, and his way of life reflected God's mercy. No one who saw Jesus could fail to react to the richness of his personality and the treasure of his words.

Jesus has left as deep an impression on us as He did on his first followers. That feeling, by the grace of God, comes back to us on occasion, but we wish it were always present in our lives. Admiration means looking at what we love with fresh eyes, because all love has something of novelty. A person in love never tires of contemplating the beloved, not out

of curiosity but because we want to continue appreciating all their richness. This is precisely what contemplative life entails: we know that Jesus is near and we never grow tired of entering into his mystery.

Like any relationship, the life of prayer is a journey that advances little by little. "First one brief aspiration, then another, and another... till our fervour seems insufficient, because words are too poor..."^[1] Our goal is to abandon ourselves in his hands, letting him conquer our hearts, "looking at God without needing rest or feeling tired. We begin to live as captives, as prisoners. And while we carry out as perfectly as we can (with all our mistakes and limitations) the tasks allotted to us by our situation and duties, our soul longs to escape. It is drawn towards God like iron drawn by a magnet."^[2]

WE MAY be surprised by Jesus's reaction to the people's admiration. Instead of enjoying their astonishment, He begins speaking to them about the Cross, as if to show that true contemplation cannot be separated from inner purification: *Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men (Lk 9:44).*

Again and again, Christ insists that “faith cannot be reduced to a sweetener to make life more palatable.”^[3] Perhaps some of the people following Jesus did so in the hope that He would guarantee them a more comfortable existence or simply to feel part of the group led by a famous prophet. But this was not Christ's message: authentic love is inseparable from truth, from reality, and it cannot ignore suffering. “But do not forget that being with Jesus

means we shall most certainly come upon his Cross,” St. Josemaria warns us. “When we abandon ourselves into God's hands, he frequently permits us to taste sorrow, loneliness, opposition, slander, defamation, ridicule, coming both from within and from outside. This is because he wants to mould us into his own image and likeness.”^[4]

Contemplating Christ's face and delving into the mystery of his love means discovering the message in his wounds and opening ourselves to the pain in his heart, which holds all the people suffering around us. That is why contemplative prayer, which is “the breath of the soul and of life,”^[5] requires interior mortification; a serene and determined struggle to keep our senses free in order to place them in Jesus and experience everything as He does. If our prayer unites us to Christ, it will also unite

us to the world's problems, seeing them from God's perspective.

BUT THEY did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, that they should not perceive it (Lk 9:45). The crowd surrounding Jesus was bewildered when they heard Him speak about the Cross. They could not understand why someone who had demonstrated such great power, even the ability to raise the dead, would speak about his own painful end. They were confused to hear Him talk about defeat in the midst of triumph. His words seemed out of place in an atmosphere of joy and hope.

However, instead of bringing their bewilderment to Jesus, the people *were afraid to ask Him about this saying* (Lk 9:45). The admiration they

felt for Jesus often turned out to be a mixture of superficial knowledge and reverential fear. Nevertheless, Jesus invites them to ensure that their contemplation is not just the impression of a passing moment, a temporary emotion, but something that can generate profound change in their lives. He offers them the understanding that their entire existence can be a dialogue with God.

The union of our heart with Christ's allows us to contemplate the world with new eyes. We discover, even in the shadows of history and our own life story, a glimpse of divine light.

“Jesus was a master of this gaze. His life never lacked the time, space, silence, the loving communion that allows one’s existence not to be devastated by the inevitable trials, but to maintain beauty intact.”^[6]

Mary, teacher of prayer, can obtain for us the grace of a contemplative heart like hers.

^[1] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 296.

^[2] *Ibid.*

^[3] Pope Francis, Homily, 15-IX-2021.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 301.

^[5] Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 25-IV-2012.

^[6] Pope Francis, Audience, 5-V-2021.

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