

Meditations: Sunday of the Twenty-Third Week of Ordinary Time (Year C)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 23rd week of Ordinary Time.

- Detachment needed to follow Jesus
- Accompanying our Lord with our crosses
- Spirit of examination

MANY PEOPLE have now decided to follow Jesus. Moved by his teachings and miracles, they travel with Him wherever He goes. We don't know the personal motives in each one's heart. Some probably had experienced such great joy in his presence that they didn't want to ever leave his side. Others perhaps followed Him simply out of curiosity. And it is even possible that some tried to take advantage of Jesus' power for their own benefit, with less upright intentions. In any case, Jesus pauses along the way to explain what following Him entails: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (*Lk 14:26*). And He adds: "whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." (*Lk 14:33*).

Certainly, Christ doesn't want us to despise our family relationships or material goods, since God himself has given us all these things. In fact, Jesus spent most of his life in his family home. Having taken on a human nature, He needed and experienced the joy of using earthly goods. With this strong language, Christ is asking us to place Him at the center of our lives above anything else. Approaching earthly goods in the right way, so that they are not the reference point for our life, helps us to remember that our security and complete happiness are found only in Jesus. When we try to be his disciples, family relationships and earthly goods take on a new and supernatural light.

“Our Lord asks for generous hearts that are truly detached,” Saint Josemaría said. “We will achieve this if we resolutely cut the thick bonds or the subtle threads that tie us to

ourselves. I won't hide from you the fact that this entails a constant struggle, overriding our own intellect and will, a renunciation which, frankly, is more difficult than the giving up of the most prized material possessions.”^[1] Then we will be able to enjoy in a genuine way human ties and material goods.

“WHOEVER does not take up his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (*Lk 14:27*). Throughout his life, Jesus gradually revealed his identity, as well as the identity of anyone who wants to be his disciple. The liberation he was going to offer humanity did not consist, as many thought, in rebelling against the political authorities of the time. The path he followed was rather the opposite: giving himself up to death on the cross. The fact that Christ

associated the cross with being his disciple must have shocked his listeners, since it was the most atrocious sentence possible, reserved by the Roman Empire for outcasts. People probably viewed liberation and the cross as opposing realities. “How can victory and death be compatible?” they must have asked. But the truth is that “we cannot understand Christ the Redeemer without the cross. We might even come to think of him as a great prophet, that he does good things, that he is a saint. But we cannot understand Christ the Redeemer without the cross.”^[2]

Therefore, step by step, Jesus was preparing the hearts of the people so that his death on the cross would not be seen as a defeat, but a triumph; so that, over the years, even decades and centuries, the difficulties of life would not be seen as inevitable misfortunes, but as what can help us

to identify ourselves with God made man. Christ warns his disciples that they will suffer persecution and setbacks. “But with persevering hope in the victory of the cross, the human heart will always find firm ground, authentic peace, in the constant presence of the Lord, the true goal of all things, and whose help never abandons us.”^[3]

Through these setbacks, Jesus “prepares us to accompany him with our crosses on his journey towards redemption. He prepares us to be Cyrenians and to help him carry his cross. Our Christian life, without this, is not Christian.”^[4] As Saint Josemaría wrote: “The Cross on your breast?... Very good. But the Cross on your shoulders, the Cross in your flesh, the Cross in your mind. Only then will you live for Christ, with Christ and in Christ; only then will you be an apostle.”^[5] Just as the seed of the resurrection and new life was

already present on the Cross, so also is it present in the moments of our journey that are perhaps darker. We can ask our Lord for his light, which dispels the darkness and anticipates, like the dawn, the splendor of the bright day.

“FOR WHICH OF YOU, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it” (*Lk 14:28*). These words of Jesus are full of common sense. When embarking on a project, the logical thing to do is to first stop and analyze the situation: What means do I have to carry it out? What is making it difficult? Our Lord encourages his listeners, especially those who want to follow Him closely, to ask themselves these same questions. After having pointed to two characteristics of a disciple

(detachment and love for the Cross), Jesus wants us to personally consider whether we are willing to take up this path. Our Lord wants us, before making a decision, to be clear about what we can rely on, and where we should place our trust. This is what Saint John of the Cross saw as “the first step a soul must take to arrive at the knowledge of God.”^[6]

In the examination of conscience, we compare our life with our Lord’s, what we are with what we would like to be, how we view the world and how our Lord views it. Jesus’ way of looking is always one of infinite mercy, eager to grant us his love and assistance. His goal is not for us to be people without mistakes, but rather “to enkindle in our heart a greater love for God through specific deeds of self-giving.”^[7] God continually offers us his forgiveness and allows us to begin anew in building the “tower” that we

construct together with the Holy Spirit: our holiness. But unlike human edifices, this “tower” doesn’t depend solely on our own means. Moreover, we have many allies who, from heaven, are always ready to help us. “Before, by yourself, you couldn’t. Now, you have turned to our Lady, and, with her, how easy it is!”^[8]

^[1] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 115.

^[2] Francis, Homily, 26 September 2014.

^[3] Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 18 November 2012.

^[4] Francis, Homily, 26 September 2014.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 929.

^[6] Saint John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, 4, 1.

^[7] Blessed Alvaro del Portillo,
Pastoral Letter, 8 December-1976, no.
8.

^[8] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 513.

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