

Meditations: Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer as we approach Holy Week and the Easter Triduum.

- God is faithful
- God's promise overcomes every obstacle
- The thread of hope

Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations (Gen 17:3-9), God says to Abraham when establishing his Covenant. The Lord promises him a numerous people and a land in

which to share the joy of being with Him. God commits himself to being faithful to his people of the promise: *And I will be God to you and to your descendants after you (Gen 17:7).*

These promises, however, went through moments of apparent darkness. At times, it even seems that they will be forgotten, such as when the Lord asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. From a purely human point of view, this request is impossible to understand. But the patriarch knows that God is faithful, and reasons from the viewpoint of faith. He knows that God's plans cannot always be fully understood, right here and now. Therefore he trusts in Yahweh, who knows better, and hopes "against all hope" (cf. *Rom 4:18*). At the last moment, a lamb will take Isaac's place for the sacrifice so that Abraham's son remains alive and, in him, the promise of

numerous descendants can be fulfilled.

This memory of the patriarch helps us prepare for the celebration of the Paschal Triduum. Soon we will remember how this mysterious episode took on its full meaning on the Cross. Just as Isaac was replaced by a lamb at the last moment, the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, will free everyone who believes in Him from death. He will open the gates of our definitive homeland together with an immense multitude of people.

JESUS REVEALS in the Gospel that the scope of the promises made to Abraham actually points to a life beyond death. *Truly, truly, I say to you, if any one keeps my word, he will never see death (Jn 8:51)*. Some Jews found it difficult to accept this transcendent meaning of the

promises, and accused Jesus: *Now we know that you have a demon.*

Abraham died, as did the prophets . . .

Who do you claim to be? (Jn 8:52-53).

But their rage against Jesus, which will lead Him to the Cross like a sacrificed lamb, will actually bring about the unexpected fulfillment of what had been promised. This has often happened throughout the history of salvation: when the horizon seems closed to God's plans, the thread of the promises traverses each stage of history without breaking.

Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad (Jn 8:56), Jesus replies. The sureness of God's promises is the strongest reason for peace and joy for one who hopes. Nothing can rob us of this security, based on God's fidelity. No matter what happens, He has promised us that He will always be our God.

Hope is “the virtue that flows beneath the waters of life, but that supports us so that we do not drown in the midst of so many difficulties, in order not to lose our desire to find God, to find that marvelous face that we all one day will see.”^[1] Beginning with Christ, the thread of the promises made to Abraham continues in the Church, traversing history as a thread of hope. Even in the darkest moments, when it seems that this thread will break, men and women of faith appear who, like Abraham, know that God is faithful. They too, hoping against all hope, know they are bearers of God’s promises. “I have seen many souls,” Saint Josemaría said, “with such hope in God that it has set them marvelously ablaze with love, with a fire that makes the heartbeat strong and keeps it safe from discouragement and dejection, even though along the way they may suffer and at times suffer greatly.”^[2]

THIS THREAD OF HOPE is the topic of a meditation preached by Saint Josemaría on July 26, 1937.^[3] He was confined at that time in the Honduran Legation in Madrid. Opus Dei was just a few years old and its activity had been cut short by the Spanish Civil War. The lives of the first faithful of the Work were in danger; perhaps they could be tempted by pessimism, so Saint Josemaría wanted to raise the sights of that group of young men, by reminding them that God is always faithful, and inspires holy men and women in every age who renew people's hope.

In that meditation, he begins by reminding them of the early Christians. Nothing distinguished them from their equals, except “the bright light that burns in their hearts.” Through them, “Christ’s voice resounds ever more strongly.” And when, with the passing of the

centuries, that fervor of the first Christians seemed to have cooled down, God raised up Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, and a new spiritual vitality appeared that enlivened the world. In the 16th century, Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Francis Xavier appeared, whose work of evangelization would reach the ends of the earth. And also a woman, Teresa of Avila, who will raise up in the Church authentic “generators of intense spiritual life” with the foundation of her convents.

Saint Josemaría set before those young people in the early 20th century some historical milestones to help them realize that God continues to be faithful to his promises. “*Non est abbreviata manus Domini*; God’s power has not been lessened. He continues to grant new wonders for the benefit of mankind.” We too are invited to be bearers of that thread of hope that brings life to each era in

history. Our Lady, our hope, will help us bring Christ's joy to all men and women.

[1] Pope Francis, Homily, 17 March 2016.

[2] Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 205.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *Growing on the Inside*, “*Non est abbreviata manus domini*,” 26 July 1937.

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