

Meditations: Thursday of the Fourth Week of Easter

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this season of Easter.

- Remembering God's mercies
- Having recourse to the springs that purify
- Mercy shown in service

AFTER PREACHING the Gospel in Cyprus during their first apostolic journey, Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas sailed to Asia Minor to

continue announcing the word of God. When they arrived at Antioch in Pisidia, on the Sabbath they went to the synagogue. Those in charge invited them to lead the commentary on the Law and the Prophets. So Paul stood up and began his preaching with a brief summary of the history of the Chosen People (cf. *Acts* 13:16-22). He told them about how the Lord had brought the Israelites out of slavery “with a strong arm,” how they had journeyed through the desert until reaching the Promised Land, and how once established there they had received judges and kings to guide and protect them.

Saint Paul wanted to remind them that the history of Israel is a history of divine mercy. “The disciples preach about historical events, and this is key because it enables us to remember the important moments, the signs of God’s presence in the life of mankind. To look back to see how

God has saved us, to travel again – with our heart and mind – along that path with our memory.”^[1] We who are a continuation of this Chosen People will pray with the psalm of today’s Mass: *I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations (Ps 89:1)*. Despite the difficulties that the people at times experienced in striving to believe and be faithful to the Covenant, God continued watching over them.

By mentioning the figure of King David, Saint Paul reminded his listeners that the Covenant looked especially to the future. *Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised (Acts 13:23)*. The canticle of mercy reaches its fullness in Jesus Christ. He is the Anointed of the Father, with the strength of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus all humanity can find the fulfilment of its deepest desires. Our own

history too converges on the Risen Christ. He draws us to his Person to show us his Father's mercy, in our past, present and future.

AT MASS today we will hear part of the account of the Last Supper. After washing his disciples' feet, our Lord reminds the apostles that He will also be present in those He sends out (cf. *Jn 13:16.20*). It is the wonderful mystery of the close union between Christ and his disciples. God continues to act in the world in this way as well. It might seem too sublime to us, surpassing our capabilities, but it becomes possible through the action of grace. This is why the gesture of washing his disciples' feet is so eloquent. It is our Lord who washes us, who makes us capable of continuing to announce

the Gospel with renewed confidence, inspired by his tenderness and love.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me (Jn 13:20). We are Christ bearers for others! God's mercy continues to reach many people through the words and deeds of Christians. It is true that all of us have defects that cloud the glass through which the light of God's mercy passes. But in our eagerness to begin again, to once again seek God's forgiveness, the goodness of the heavenly Father is announced anew, because "the Church is a people of sinners who experience God's mercy and forgiveness."^[2] —

An angel purified the lips of the prophet Isaiah with a burning coal before he was sent to the people of Israel (cf. *Is* 6:1-9). And we too should remember that, in order to announce

the Gospel message effectively, we need to go to the springs that purify us, especially to the sacrament of Reconciliation. Thus we will be able to preach God's mercy, which we ourselves have already personally experienced. "This drama was lived by Jesus with the Doctors of the Law, who did not understand why He did not let the adulterous woman be stoned; they did not understand why He was going to dine with tax collectors and sinners: they did not understand... They did not understand mercy. Let us ask our Lord to help us understand what his heart is like, what mercy means, what He means when He says: it is mercy that I desire, and not sacrifice!"^[3]

IF YOU KNOW these things, blessed are you if you do them (Jn 13:17).

Jesus gave his apostles an example of self-giving and loving service. Upheld by God's grace, they too poured out their lives for their fellow men and women, tirelessly announcing the message that Jesus is alive. Through our gratuitous service we can enable God's mercy to reach many people, treating them in accord with their greatness as children of God. Saint Paul exhorts the Philippians: *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:3-4).* And he reminds them how Jesus, *though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant (Phil 2:6-7).*

It is love that makes us “inclined” to serve others gladly. Thus, when composing the *Preces* of the Work, Saint Josemaría wanted the first expression to be *Serviam!* (I will serve!), making clear this desire for self-giving imbued with supernatural enthusiasm. “If we let Christ reign in our soul, we will not become authoritarian. Rather we will serve everyone. How I like that word: service! To serve my King and, through him, all those who have been redeemed by his Blood. I really wish we Christians knew how to serve, for only by serving can we know and love Christ and make him known and loved.”^[4] —

In the life of our Lady we see how the action of God’s mercy is transformed into service. Right after the Annunciation, Mary hurries to help her cousin Saint Elizabeth. And her self-giving breaks forth in a song of joy, testifying to God’s action, for

his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation (Lk 1:50).

[¹] Francis, Homily, 21 April 2016.

[²] Francis, General Audience, 9 August 2017.

[³] Francis, Homily, 6 October 2015.

[⁴] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 182.

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(12/10/2025)