

Meditations: Thursday of the Thirteenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can guide our prayer in the thirteenth week of Ordinary Time.

- The paralytic's friends
- True friendship is a good in itself
- Preparing the ground for friendship

“THE current situation of evangelization makes it more necessary than ever to give priority to personal contact. This relational aspect is at the heart of the mode of doing apostolate that St. Josemaría found in the Gospel narrative,” the Prelate of Opus Dei wrote.^[1] St. Matthew offers us in today’s Gospel a story of authentic friendship. A group of the friends of a paralytic, spurred by their affection for him and their great faith, insist on taking him to Jesus to be cured. The Master is moved by this gesture. Hence Jesus will not only cure his body, but “when he saw their faith he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.’” (*Mt 9:2*).

St. Mark also tells us that there were so many people surrounding Jesus that at first they couldn’t get close to him. But this didn’t deter the paralytic’s friends. With determination and daring, they

decided to climb onto the roof of the house and lower the paralytic's stretcher through a hole they opened in the tiles, right in front of Jesus. We can imagine the crowd's surprise. They would have watched in amazement as the tiles were removed and the stretcher was slowly lowered. Perhaps not everyone would have looked kindly on these efforts, especially the owner of the house and those who had waited a long time to get close to our Lord. But friendship proved stronger than the obstacles. The friends acted with the freedom of a love that stemmed from a true concern for the good of their friend, although not in the way people expected.

The paralytic also shows a great capacity for friendship by allowing himself to be helped and putting himself in the hands of his friends. He must have had great trust in them to allow himself to be handled in this

way. Jesus is impressed by the strength of their friendship and by the daring of their faith. Therefore, unlike other times when Jesus asks for faith from the person seeking to be healed, here he puts the emphasis on the faith of the sick person's friends. This healing shows us how true friendship is a source of divine blessings: "Friendship is one of the noblest and most elevated human sentiments, which divine grace purifies and transfigures."^[2] —

GRACE can greatly enhance friendship by opening the relationship between friends to the riches of faith, hope and charity. We see all three of these virtues in the scene we are considering today. "Christ's action is a direct response to the faith of those people, to the hope they put in Him, to the love they

show for each other.”^[3] But Christ “does not simply heal the paralysis. Jesus heals everything, He forgives sins, He renews the life of the paralyzed man and his friends. He brings about a new birth . . . We can easily imagine how this friendship, and the faith of all those present in that house, would have grown stronger thanks to that healing encounter with Jesus!”^[4]

“For this world of ours to set its course in a Christian direction (which is the only one worthwhile), we have to exercise a loyal friendship with all men, based on a prior loyal friendship with God,”^[5] St. Josemaría insisted. A deep friendship with Christ will manifest itself naturally, without our realizing it, through our joy and our eagerness to serve others expressed in a thousand small gestures. “This way of transmitting the Gospel is particularly effective, also because it

reflects an important anthropological reality: interpersonal dialogue, in which we seek to pass on to others the good we have received. This apostolic dialogue arises naturally when sincere friendship is present. It is not a question of exploiting friendship, but rather of helping our friends to share in the great good of our faith and friendship with Christ.”^[6] —

But the opposite can also happen, and when something as valuable as friendship with a son or daughter of God is reduced to a means to achieve a personal goal, however lofty this may be, it always leaves a bitter aftertaste. Jesus admired true friendship because He himself experienced it and continues to experience it. Therefore an important characteristic of authentic friendship is gratuitousness. We are a true friend of someone not because we can attain something we want

from them, but simply because we love them. Each friend is happy with the existence of the other person and wants only their good.

FRIENDSHIP is always a gift. It is not something that can be programmed or calculated, but it can be fostered. “If one nobly expresses one’s feelings and is loyal, if one knows how to sacrifice oneself for others, in the end what St. John of the Cross wrote happens: where there is no love, put love and you will draw out love. We could also say: where there is no friendship, put the noble feelings of friendship and you will draw out friendship.”^[7] We can also grow in our effort to be more kind and reliable people; thus we can “prepare the ground” to create an authentic relationship with our friends. “Growing in cordiality, joyfulness,

patience, optimism, refinement and in all the virtues that make living with others agreeable is important for helping people to feel welcomed and to be happy: *A pleasant voice multiplies friends, and a gracious tongue multiplies courtesies (Sir 6:5)*. The struggle to improve our own character is a necessary condition for facilitating relationships of friendship.”^[8] —

The philosopher Aristotle said that one cannot be happy without friends, and St. Thomas remarked that without friends we can never attain complete happiness. A friend is one of the greatest treasures we can have, but it is a treasure that requires great care. We can consider how those accompanying the paralytic in the Gospel story must have cared for their friendship. It may not have always been easy and comfortable, but in the end it was worthwhile because it brought them

close to Christ. For authentic friendship, it is not enough just to share some moments in common with the other person. We need to enter into our friend's world and share in their concerns and joys. What worries our friend or makes them happy is important to us, because it is also ours. We can ask our Lady to help us have a heart that, like hers, becomes one with the hearts of our friends.

^[1] — Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 14 February 2017, no. 9.

^[2] — Benedict XVI, Audience, 15 September 2010.

^[3] — Francis, Audience, 5 August 2020.

^[4] — Ibid.

^[5] — St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 943

^[6] _____ Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, *Love In Action: Loving God and Neighbor, A Twofold Commandment*, “Love for Others and the Apostolate.”

^[7] _____ Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, *Get-together*, 11 September 1979.

^[8] _____ Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 1 November 2019, no. 9.

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