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Meditations: Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this Lenten season.

- Jesus wants to heal us
- Good desires and patience in our struggle
- Being understanding with others

HOW GREATLY our hope is strengthened on seeing Jesus' concern for those who need Him, which we see over and over again in

the Gospels! Today we contemplate the healing of a paralytic no one took an interest in, who languished beside the pool of Bethesda. Excavations have verified that this pool had five porticos, just as Saint John describes it: it consisted of two separate basins and, between them, a fifth portico had been built, which was added to the four at the sides. There lay *a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed* (Jn 5:3). The belief existed that an angel of the Lord descended every so often to stir the water, and whoever entered the pool first was cured.

Jesus draws close to the suffering multitude, and his eyes rest on this paralytic, who is probably the most helpless and abandoned among them. And on his own initiative He offers to heal him: “*Do you want to be healed?*” *The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and*

while I am going another steps down before me.” Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your pallet, and walk.” And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked (Jn 5:6 -9). “(Jn 5,6-9).

Saint Josemaria wrote: “You spoke about the scenes in Jesus’ life that you found most moving: when He met people suffering greatly, when He brought peace and health to those whose bodies and souls were racked with pain. You were inspired – you went on – seeing Him cure leprosy, restore sight to the blind, heal the paralytic at the pool: the poor beggar forgotten by everybody. You are able to contemplate Him as He was, so profoundly human, so close at hand! Well... Jesus continues being the same as then.”^[1] Christ, through the sacraments, comes even closer to us than in that encounter. And, like the paralytic in the Gospel, He continually offers to heal us.

THAT PARALYTIC had been sick for thirty-eight years. His life had been one long wait until at last Jesus passed close by. We can learn from his patience, since during all this time, “without giving up, he insisted, hoping to be freed from his sickness.”^[2] We too are called to be serene and persevering in our interior life. We need an optimistic patience in our Christian struggle, as well as in our effort to acquire virtues. In some points of our struggle, at least for a certain period of time, it may seem to us that we are not advancing; and other points will require a long period of joyful struggle, perhaps even for our whole life. That was the case with the paralytic, who reached old age with his infirmity, but who encountered Jesus in the end.

Sometimes excessive impatience, an internal tension, an effort to assess whether or not we are improving that takes on unhealthy overtones, could manifest a certain tendency to perfectionism. And this attitude is not in accord with the filial, trusting and humble struggle that our Lord is asking of us. Certainly, we need to go beyond simply good intentions and try to “place the last stones” in whatever we undertake. But it is also true that we will not always succeed, and we can’t allow ourselves to lose our peace because of this.

“Sometimes,” Saint Josemaría said, “our Lord is satisfied with our good desires, and other times even with our desire to have desires, if we accept joyfully the humiliation of knowing we are so little. This is what will lead us to the heights of heaven. Because if a person realizes that he is going ahead and doing well... what a danger of pride! There are many

wonderful people who consider themselves very low and of little value, incapable of doing what they know God our Lord wants. And they are excellent, extraordinary people. Don't worry too much whether you are advancing or not, whether you are improving or staying the same. The important thing is to want to be better, to want to love, and then to be sincere, opening wide your heart. Thus God will give you lights.”^[3] —

PATIENCE with ourselves, which comes from looking first at God and counting ever more fully on his help, will also spur us “to be understanding with others, convinced that souls, like good wine, improve with time.”^[4] — Sometimes we may find it hard to have this patient understanding for the people closest to us, as we easily tend to focus too

much on a few defects, instead of appreciating all the good qualities they have. And on other occasions, it can be difficult to excuse, welcome and truly love those who may seem to be far from God or who, due to their upbringing, view the world with concepts foreign to the faith.

In the Gospel we see that, after being healed by Jesus, the paralyzed man takes up his stretcher and starts to walk home. But then he meets some Jews, possibly people in authority, who reproach him for carrying an object on the Sabbath; they are scandalized that Jesus healed someone on that holy day. It is “a story that is repeated many times today. It often happens that a man or woman who feels sick and sad in their soul, because they have made many mistakes in their life, at a certain moment senses that the waters are being stirred – it is the Holy Spirit who moves everything –

or hears some words and thinks: I would like to go. And they pluck up their courage and go! But how often in Christian communities they find the doors closed . . . The Church always has its doors open! It is the house of Jesus, and our Lord is welcoming. He not only welcomes but goes out in search of people, as he went to look for the paralytic. And if people are wounded, what does Jesus do? Does he reproach them for being wounded? No: he seeks them out and puts them on his shoulders.”^[5]

Saint Josemaría encouraged his children to live “with hearts and arms wide open to welcome everyone.” For “we don’t have the mission to judge, but rather the duty to treat everyone fraternally. There is not a single soul that we exclude from our friendship,” he continued, “and no one should ever draw close to the Work of God and leave empty-

handed: everyone has to feel loved, understood, treated with affection.”^[6]
We can ask Mary, Mother of Mercy, to help us spread God’s love, understanding and mercy to those around us.

^[1] Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 233.

^[2] Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint John*, 36.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, 19 March 1972.

^[4] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 78.

^[5] Francis, Homily, 17 March 2015.

^[6] Saint Josemaría, *Letters* 4, no. 25.

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