

Meditations: Wednesday of the Twenty-Fifth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-fifth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: chosen in order to be sent; essentials and accessories; experiencing failure.

- Chosen in order to be sent
- Essentials and accessories
- Experiencing failure

JESUS CALLED the Twelve and sent them to preach the Kingdom of God and heal the sick, giving them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases (cf. *Lk 9:1-2*). The few words of advice He gave them about carrying out the mission reveal some of the characteristics of Christian apostolate.

The first is that one's personal vocation comes first. The apostles were chosen one by one for the mission that would be entrusted to them. Their selection is part of the divine mystery because it does not follow human criteria about qualifications or effectiveness. Most of them were uneducated; Matthew was an exception, but though he had better human means and more training, he was a tax collector and many people considered him a traitor to his people. The apostles were rarely noticed for their moral heroism; as the Gospels show us, they

were ambitious and competitive, they were always comparing themselves, they were attached to their human ways of seeing things, and they found it very difficult to reason in supernatural terms. The apostles' experience reminds us that "everything depends on a gratuitous call from God; God also chooses us for services that at times seem to exceed our capacities or do not correspond with our expectations; the call received as a gratuitous gift must be answered gratuitously."^[1]

The Twelve will go forth to preach the Kingdom of God not because they are wise or holy, but because they know themselves to be called by Christ and because they freely accept being sent by Him. This is the conviction that has driven the Church to spread the Gospel throughout the world from the early centuries to the present day. Christians see themselves as

continuing Christ's mission; we are called and sent to bring salvation to all people. Apostolate is rooted in our very identity as Christians. We received a mission in baptism. We do not do apostolate as one more task added to our Christian condition, but because the deepest truth of our identity is that "we are apostles."^[2] Like the first twelve, we have been chosen in order to be sent.

HAVING EXPLAINED their mission to the Twelve, Jesus gives them some advice on how to fulfill it: *Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics (Lk 9:3)*. Jesus asks those He sends on the apostolic mission to embrace a radical and meaningful poverty: they are to renounce things that may be good in themselves but are not appropriate

for them at that moment, because they could slow down or hinder the mission. This is the central characteristic of the virtue of poverty. It allows us to focus our minds and hearts on what is truly valuable and important without getting distracted by what is superficial, vain, or accessory.

In the case of apostolate, what is truly essential is God's centrality: the Lord sends us, and He works in people. We are instruments. Our role is important, certainly, but it is not the most important or decisive. Unlike material instruments, we are neither inert nor passive; we freely use all our talents and abilities and all the human means at our disposal, as our Lord wants us to. But what Jesus underlines in the Gospel is that all of this is secondary compared to our identity: we are called by Him and sent to souls.

This conviction fills every apostle's heart, as St. Josemaria reminded his children in Opus Dei's early years: "Do not forget, my children, that we are not souls who have joined with other souls in order to do a good thing. That is a lot... and yet it is little. We are apostles who fulfil an imperative command of Christ."^[3] The apostle is ready to fulfil the divine command generously, freely, and joyfully, because he has placed his trust in the God who chooses and sends him. That is the source of his hope and courage and the reason he is ready to make any sacrifice for the mission.

WHATEVER HOUSE you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake the dust from your feet as a testimony

against them (Lk 9:4-5). This is how Jesus concludes his advice on the apostolic mission. He makes it clear that his messengers' apostolic testimony will sometimes be received well and sometimes be received poorly. In case of the latter, He tells the Twelve to shake the dust from their feet, an evocative gesture in the Semitic culture showing that the person did not want to keep anything, even a little dust, from the place where they were rejected. For us, it is a reminder that we should not allow the failures or rejections we meet as apostles to weigh on our hearts or extinguish our supernatural enthusiasm.

“Are you misunderstood?” St. Josemaria wrote. “He was the Truth and the Light, but not even those close to him understood him. —As I have asked you so often before, remember Our Lord’s words: ‘The disciple is not greater than his

Master.”^[4] Jesus’s description of apostolic life is very realistic. He does not hide the fact that it requires sacrifices – so as not to forget to pursue what is truly valuable – and that it is not always crowned with success. His apostles will face difficulties, tribulations, and even persecution (cf. *Lk 28:12-19*); they will not go through life achieving victory after victory. Therefore, they should not base their joy on immediate results, but on the supernatural fruitfulness of their dedication. They will receive *a hundredfold and eternal life* (*Mt 19:29*) because God will draw an abundance of supernatural fruits from their Christian example and unreserved fidelity to the apostolic mission. In many cases, that abundance will be immeasurable by merely human standards.

We can ask the Virgin Mary to ignite in our hearts a sense of mission that

makes us be and behave like the first Twelve, feeling sent by the Lord and trusting that He will make our apostolic zeal bear fruit: “You and I are God’s children, dedicated for love of Him to serving our fellow men. So whenever we meet people we have to see them as souls, and think to ourselves: here comes a soul whom I have to help, whom I have to understand, with whom I have to get along, whom I have to help save.”^[5]

^[1] Pope Francis, Audience, 15-III-2023.

^[2] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral letter, 14-II-2017, no. 9.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, 19-III-1934, no. 27.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 239.

^[5] St. Josemaría, Meditation, 25-II-1963, in Crónica 1964, IX, pg. 69 (AGP, library, P01).

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