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Meditations: 4 January

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during these days of Christmastide.

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- We are truly children of God
- Experience of the encounter with Jesus
- Prayer of thanksgiving and petition.

IN THE LITURGY OF THE WORD
during these first days of the new

year, we are reading the first letter of the Apostle John, written in Ephesus on his return from exile on Patmos. The central theme of the letter, to which Saint John returns again and again, is the Christian's communion with God, which comes about through faith in Christ and fraternal charity.

“God is love,” the Apostle says several times throughout the letter. He also points out that God is the source of all that exists and that a Christian is made a child of God through love. We are truly his children, and not in a figurative or poetic sense (cf. *1 Jn* 3:1). And as a result of this sonship, we can be rightly said to be *born of God*. This is what we read today in the first reading: *No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God* (*1 Jn* 3:9-10).

“We realize we are God’s children, dearly loved children of God,” Saint Josemaría said on Christmas Eve in 1967. “And this night the Lord, through his Mother, will send us many new graces, so that we may grow in love and in divine filiation ... See, my children, how grateful we should be to this Brother of ours, who made us children of the Father. Have you seen your own little brothers and sisters, those tiny tots, children of your relatives, who need everything from everyone? The Child Jesus is like that. It is good to think of him like that: defenceless. Being almighty, being God, he has made himself a Child, helpless, abandoned, in need of our love. But in that cold, lonely place, with his Mother and Saint Joseph, what Jesus wants, what will give him warmth, is our heart. So, uproot from your heart everything in it that is a hindrance! You and I, my child, let us have a look to see what in our heart is getting in

the way... Get rid of it! Really and truly. Saint John says it in his first chapter, *quotquot autem receperunt eum dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri (Jn 1:12)*. He has given us the power to become children of God. God wants us to be his children.”^[1] —

TWO FISHERMEN FROM CAPERNAUM, John and Andrew, were following John the Baptist, whom they considered to be a great prophet. One day Jesus passed by them and the Baptist said: *Behold, the Lamb of God! (Jn 1:36)*. His disciples *heard him say this, and they followed Jesus (Jn 1:37)*. After that encounter, nothing would ever be the same again. “Out of curiosity they decided to follow Him at a distance. They were shy almost and embarrassed until, turning round, He asked them: *What do you seek?* So began the dialogue that would give rise to the adventure.”^[2] — John and Andrew followed Jesus; they asked him

questions, *saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him (Jn 1:39).* That day they became apostles for ever.

“It is Jesus who takes the initiative. When He is with us, the question is always turned upside down: from questioners, we become questioned; ‘searchers,’ we discover that we are ‘sought’; He, indeed, has always loved us first (cf. *1 Jn 4:10*). This is the fundamental dimension of the encounter: we are not dealing with something, but with Someone, with the ‘Living One.’ Christians are not the disciples of a system of philosophy; they are men and women who, in faith, have experienced the encounter with Christ (cf. *1 Jn 1:1-4*).”^[3] —

The two friends, John and Andrew, did not know clearly who Jesus really was. They would need time – years of living together with Him and

listening to his words – to understand the mystery of the Son of God. Without fear, we too cross the threshold of his house to speak with the Master face to face, to listen to and meditate on his Word, to open our hearts as one does with a friend. In the silence of prayer we learn how to get to know our Lord. With the same insistent and bold question of the disciples, “Teacher, where are you staying?” Learn to listen again, in the silence of prayer, to Jesus’ answer: ‘Come and see’.”^[4]

“SO, LET OUR PRAYER BE A PRAYER of sons and daughters and a continuous prayer,” Saint Josemaría encouraged us one Christmas Eve. “*Oro coram te hodie, nocte et die* (Neh 1:6): I pray before you night and day. Have you not heard me so often say: that we are contemplatives, at night and during the day, even when sleeping; that sleep forms part of prayer? Our Lord has said so: *Oportet*

semper orare et non deficere (Lk 18:1). We must pray always, always. We must feel the need to go to God, after every success and after every failure in our interior life. Especially in these cases, let us humbly go back and say to the Lord: ‘In spite of everything, I am your son!’ Let us play the role of the prodigal son. As it says in another part of Scripture: praying always, not with long vocal prayers (cf. *Mt* 6:7) but with mental prayer without the noise of words, without external gestures. Where do we pray? *In angulis platearum...* (*Mt* 6:5). When we walk through the streets and squares, we should be praying constantly.”^[5] —

On that day, Saint Josemaría suggested raising our hearts in thanksgiving for Christmas and encouraged his listeners to dream in prayer, to think big, to ask that God’s will be done in so many souls. “And how are we going to pray? Pray with

thanksgiving. Let us thank God the Father, let us thank Jesus, who made himself a child because of our sins; who abandoned himself, suffering in Bethlehem and on the Cross with arms open wide, with the gesture of an Eternal Priest ... And petition too. What should we ask for? What does a child ask of his father? Daddy..., the moon!: absurd things. *Ask, and it will be given you, knock, and it will be opened to you (Mt 7:7)*. What can we not ask of God? We have asked our parents for everything. Ask for the moon and he will give it to you; ask him without fear for whatever you want. He will always give it to you, in one way or another. Ask confidently.”^[6] —

In the house where Jesus lives we also find the gentle presence of Mary. We ask our Lady to teach us to live as children *born of God* and to come close to Jesus to live in his house.

[1] Saint Josemaría, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, 74-75, in meditation “Pray without Ceasing.”

[2] Saint John Paul II, Message for the XII World Youth Day (Paris, 1997), 15 August 1996.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Saint Josemaría, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, 76, in meditation “Pray without Ceasing.”

[6] *Ibid.*, 78.