

Meditations: Friday of the Nineteenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist
our prayer during the 19th
week of Ordinary Time.

- Marriage, image of divine love
- Celibacy, a call to transmit
supernatural life
- Loving without the desire to
possess

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SOME Pharisees, seeking to test Jesus, came to Him and asked, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” (*Mt 19:3*). Christ responded by reminding them that God himself is the author of marriage and explained its indissolubility: “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one’? So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (*Mt 19:4-6*).

Marriage is not simply a social event or a formality. The mutual love between a man and a woman is an image of the absolute love with which God loves us. “And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation.”^[1] Hence marriage is a good

“of extraordinary value for all: for the spouses themselves, for their children, for all the families with whom they enter into relations, for the entire Church, for all humanity. It is a good that is diffusive, that attracts young people to joyfully respond to the vocation of marriage, that continually comforts and revives spouses, that bears many and various fruits in ecclesial communion and civil society.”^[2] — One of these fruits is the forming of the *domestic Church*: the home is the first school of Christian life, where “one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous – even repeated – forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life.”^[3] —

In marriage, through divine grace, men and women find everything they need to be holy, to identify themselves with Christ and to bring God closer to those around them.

Therefore, it is a path that, if followed faithfully, enables us to anticipate the glory of heaven and to find the happiness that God grants on this earth. It brings a joy that is compatible with times of sacrifice that can strengthen the love between spouses -- a joy that normally is savored in the small events of daily life. As Saint Josemaría said, “the secret of married happiness lies in everyday things, not in daydreams. It lies in finding the hidden joy of coming home in the evening, in affectionate relations with their children, in the everyday work in which the whole family cooperates; in good humor in the face of difficulties that should be met with a sporting spirit.”^[4] In this time of prayer we can ask for the fidelity of all marriages and thank God for the gifts He has given us through the love of our own parents.

AFTER stressing the greatness of marriage, Jesus expresses the value of celibacy. The attractive example of our Lord's own life shows us that it is not a question of a sceptical or even comfortable attitude, as perhaps some of those who listened to Him suggested (cf. *Mt* 19:10), but of a divine gift (cf. *Mt* 19:11). Celibacy is a call to receive and transmit to others supernatural life without the mediation of an earthly love. Those who receive this vocation are like Christ, who quite clearly did not renounce love. The celibate person receives a specific grace that gradually transforms one's affections, in order to put everything that a life of love entails (affections, desires, dreams, creativity, passion) at the service of God and the people around them. Accepting this gift "cannot mean being deprived of love, but must mean letting oneself be consumed by a passionate love for God and subsequently, thanks to a

more intimate way of being with him, to serve men and women too. Celibacy must be a witness to faith: faith in God materializes in that form of life which only has meaning if it is based on God. Basing one's life on him, renouncing marriage and the family, means that I accept and experience God as a reality and that I can therefore bring him to men and women.”^[5] —

One of the characteristics of the vocation to celibacy is the availability of one's heart to live entirely for God and, through Him, for others. The celibate person thus experiences the “expansion of heart” that St.

Josemaría spoke about: “No matter how much you may love, you will never love enough. The human heart is endowed with an enormous coefficient of expansion. When it loves, it opens out in a crescendo of affection that overcomes all barriers. If you love our Lord, there will not be

a single creature that does not find a place in your heart.”^[6] Thus the one who is celibate can love someone even when the other person doesn't respond: it is enough to see the other person grow spiritually to be inspired to continue helping others. And thus one imitates Jesus' way of loving. During his time on earth, Christ didn't put any barriers to his affection, but rather offered his closeness to everyone, especially those rejected by society. Therefore a person who receives the gift of celibacy is also called to love and serve all men and women, especially those most in need. Of course, this doesn't mean that one doesn't find it difficult at times to give up forming a family or receiving affection in return. But this experience of emptiness, accepted with serenity and realism, can be an opportunity and a call to continue to nourish the Love that gives meaning to one's self-giving. For in this solitude one can

also learn to perceive how close God is.

ALL men and women are called to live the virtue of chastity. This virtue is expressed in different ways according to the vocation each one has received. In any case, whether a person is married, single, celibate or widowed, chastity is not “a ‘no’ to the pleasures and joys of life, but a great ‘yes’ to love as a deep communication between persons, a communication that requires time and respect as they journey together towards fullness and as a love that becomes capable of generating life and of generously welcoming the new life that is born.”^[7] — For those with a vocation to marriage, this new life is the children who are the fruit of the spouses’ love. For the celibate person, it is the people one helps to

grow in their relationship with God and with whom a spiritual fatherhood or motherhood is exercised.

Chastity enables us to love without the desire to dominate others. In fact, it is sometimes said that the opposite of love is not so much hate, as the desire to possess: to try to use another person to satisfy a need and fill one's own emptiness. This is what lust seeks, a vice that "judges every courtship to be boring; it fails to seek the synthesis between reason, drive and feeling that would help us to live our life wisely. The lustful seek only shortcuts: they don't understand that the road to love must be traveled slowly, and this patience, far from being synonymous with boredom, allows us to find happiness in our loving relationships."^[8] —

God's love for us is free. He even gives us the possibility of making

mistakes and rejecting Him, since He doesn't want slaves, but children who welcome his love because they feel like it. Chastity enables us to truly know others, to respect them and seek their happiness; in a word, it generates a relationship of communion in which one enjoys seeking the good of the other person. And although loving in this way can sometimes be demanding, those who strive to live this virtue "realize that their sacrifice is more apparent than real; for living this way, with a spirit of sacrifice, means freeing oneself from many kinds of slavery and savoring instead, in the depths of one's heart, the fullness of God's love."^[9] — As the founder of Opus Dei recommended, we can turn to our Lady when we feel the weight of temptation: "Mother! Call her again and again. She is listening, she sees you in danger perhaps, and with her Son's grace she, your holy Mother Mary, offers you the refuge of her

arms, the tenderness of her embrace. Call her, and you will find yourself with added strength for the new struggle.”^[10] —

^[1] — *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1604.

^[2] — Francis, Speech, 27 January 2023.

^[3] — *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1657.

^[4] — St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 91.

^[5] — Benedict XVI, Speech, 22 December 2006.

^[6] — St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Eighth Station, no. 5.

^[7] — Benedict XVI, Speech, 13 May 2011.

^[8] — Francis, Audience, 17 January 2024.

^[9] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 84

^[10] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 516.

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