

Meditations: Friday of the Thirty-First Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-first week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: personally engaging in the things of God; the cleverness of the good thief; approaching God with childlike ambition.

- Personally engaging in the things of God
- The cleverness of the good thief
- Approaching God with childlike ambition

IN THE parable Jesus tells in today's Gospel, the dishonest manager seized the opportunity of his impending dismissal to renegotiate the debts and secure his future. *Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty* (*Lk 16:6*), he told his debtors. The shrewd person foresees and prevents things. In this parable, Jesus praises the proactive servant, encouraging us to be at least as shrewd in the way we deal with his Father's affairs as the people who only look out for their own interests. The dishonest manager was clever; he calculated what would benefit him carefully. He anticipated what he might need in the future. “We are called to respond to this worldly astuteness with Christian astuteness, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit.”^[1] We'd like to ask the Holy Spirit to infuse our intelligence with the creativity and

determination to make what God wants a reality.

St. Augustine, commenting on this passage, asks, “What kind of life was the steward anticipating when he took those precautions? And if he was concerned about a life that has an end, will you not be concerned about your eternal life?”^[2] Naturally, Jesus does not expect disloyalty from his disciples; He wants our involvement and commitment to his divine mission to be intelligent. He wants us to put all our gifts and talents to use. He does not want his kingdom within us to be something imposed from the outside but something we genuinely desire, something we discover to be our happiness. We would like everything that belongs to God to be at the same time ours. We want to be like his Son, more than the steward the parable describes. “To love,” St. Josemaria writes, “is to cherish but one thought,

to live for the person loved, not to belong to oneself, to be happily and freely, with one's heart and soul, subjected to another's will... and at the same time to one's own.”^[3]

THERE IS a poor thief at Calvary, who has seen how the sack where he kept all his loot has fallen apart. He resigns himself to his fate and points it out to his companion, who keeps complaining: *We are here justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds* (Lk 23:41). But his profession has also made him cunning, and he makes one last attempt: He looks at Jesus and makes an astonishing request, *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom* (Lk 23:42). He does not feel strong enough to demand anything; being remembered is enough for him. Perhaps he intuits

that if he achieves this, he will not be alone wherever death takes him.

Jesus replies, *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise (Lk 23:43).*

In a way, this good thief does the opposite of the dishonest manager. He has strayed many times, but he is not willing to fail again; he has only one opportunity left. Jesus knows the deepest desires of his heart and fulfills them abundantly. With Jesus, it is better to be straightforward and direct. “One aspect of the light which guides us on the journey of faith is holy ‘cunning.’ [...] It consists of a spiritual shrewdness which enables us to recognize danger and avoid it. The Magi used this light of “cunning” when, on the way back, they decided not to pass by the gloomy palace of Herod, but to take another route.”^[4]

We do not want to be naive and assume that we are impervious to

danger. We know the allure of palaces like Herod's. We sense that the thief must have experienced a painful inner conversion. However, shrewdness helps us seek refuge in the place where nothing can separate us from our love. It drives us not to remain silent before Jesus, but to openly express what we have deep within our souls.

IN OUR relationship with God, we cannot forget St. Paul's advice: *Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life (Gal 6:7-8).* With God, complete sincerity and total simplicity are always worthwhile because He knows the most intimate

parts of ourselves. These virtues are not easy because at times they require us to acknowledge our vulnerability or mistakes.

However, the fruits of this healthy realism, of that openness with God, are immediate: “Just now, Jesus, when I was considering my wretchedness, I said to you: Allow yourself to be taken in by this son of yours, just like those good fathers, full of kindness, who put into the hands of their little children the presents they want to receive from them... knowing perfectly well that little children have nothing of their own. And what merriment of father and son, even though they are both in on the secret!”^[5] People who come to God in this way do not ask for what they deserve: they have abandoned that logic, and they don’t have any reservations about making their requests with holy ambition. St. Josemaría encouraged us to learn

how to treat God this way by following children's example: "When I worked with children, I learned from them what I have called the life of childhood... I learned from them, from their simplicity, their innocence, their candor, from seeing them ask for the moon and having to give it to them. I had to ask God for the moon: My God, the moon!"^[6]

"Jesus has no time for calculations, for astuteness, for the cruelty of cold hearts, for attractive but empty beauty. What he likes is the cheerfulness of a young heart, a simple step, a natural voice, clean eyes, attention to his affectionate word of advice."^[7] We want to have a healthy childlike shrewdness to desire to receive everything from God, to rely more on his strength and less on our own. In this endeavor, Mary accompanies us, showing us the right path to walk with shrewdness.

^[1] Pope Francis, Angelus, 18-IX-2016.

^[2] St. Augustine, *Sermon 359A*, 10.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 797.

^[4] Pope Francis, Homily, 6-I-2014.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 195.

^[6] St. Josemaría, Notes from a Gathering with Priests, 26-VII-1974.

^[7] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 181.
