

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

Some reflections that can assist
our prayer during the 21st
week of Ordinary Time.

- Preparing for Holy Mass
- Keeping our lamp lit
- Adoring our Lord at Mass

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IN MANY human activities,
preparing well is very important. For

example, in sports, how one performs in a match depends largely on one's training and the hours spent mastering the right techniques. The success of certain social gatherings, such as inviting friends to dinner at our home, also depends largely on how well we prepare it. In general, the time and, above all, the interest we put into organizing certain events shows the value we give to that activity. The more important the event, the more preparation we put into it, even if only with our thoughts and attention. At the same time, we have the experience that preparing well brings good results. When we are playing the match or enjoying time spent with a friend we haven't seen for a long time, if we have prepared well, we will enjoy it all the more.

No activity or encounter is more important than the Holy Mass, since there we truly experience Christ's

death and resurrection and receive his Body as nourishment. Hence no preparation is as worthwhile as preparing ourselves to participate worthily in the Sacrifice of the Altar. Everything we can do to prepare ourselves to celebrate the work of our redemption in the best possible way falls short of the great mystery of God's love for us. It is a wedding banquet in which we are invited to take part, like the maidens in the parable: "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom" (*Mt 25:1*).

St. Josemaría, who saw the Holy Mass as the center and root of his life, invited us to prepare ourselves as well as possible for this sublime moment: "The Eucharist was instituted during that night, preparing in advance for the morning of the Resurrection. We too have to prepare for this new dawn.

Everything harmful, worn out or useless has to be thrown away: discouragement, suspicion, sadness, cowardice. The holy Eucharist gives the children of God a divine newness and we must respond ‘in the newness of your mind,’ renewing all our feelings and actions. We have been given a new principle of energy, strong new roots grafted onto our Lord. We must not return to the old leaven, for now we have the Bread which lasts forever.”^[1]

THE PARABLE narrates how five of the maidens “were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come

out to meet him” (Mt 25:2-6).

Although this parable refers especially to God’s definitive embrace that we will receive after death, we can also apply it to our encounter with Christ in the Eucharist. At times we may feel distracted or lethargic during Holy Mass. Although we know we are in a sacred place where we can enter into a loving dialogue with the Holy Trinity, our imagination may run wild. Perhaps at such moments we think that we are like those maidens who, while waiting for the bridegroom to arrive, fell asleep.

Taking part in the Holy Mass is not an intellectual exercise that involves simply concentrating on each gesture and word of the priest. Rather, attention to the richness of the prayers and liturgical gestures is like a door that should lead us to the divine mystery hidden behind them. Therefore the key to being able to

“live the Holy Mass,”^[2] as St.

Josemaría used to say, is whether we carry with us the oil that, even in moments of greater tiredness or distraction, gives our heart the light needed to recognize the face of Christ, who in the Holy Mass is giving his life to save me. Moreover, the founder of Opus Dei advised us to abandon what is causing any distractions – concerns about people, worries about work, etc. – into God’s hands.^[3]

“The condition for being prepared for the encounter with the Lord is not only faith, but a Christian life abundant with love and charity for our neighbor. If we allow ourselves to be guided by what seems more comfortable, by seeking our own interests, then our life becomes barren, incapable of giving life to others, and we accumulate no reserve of oil for the lamp of our faith; and this – faith – will be

extinguished at the moment of the Lord's coming, or even before.”^[4] The best interior preparation for truly understanding the Holy Mass is a life of charity, because that is what we celebrate in the Eucharist: the infinite love of Jesus, who willingly gave his life for each one of us.

AT MIDNIGHT the maidens heard a voice that woke them from their deep sleep: “Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!” (*Mt 25:6*). They all began to hurriedly prepare their lamps. But since the foolish ones had not brought enough oil, and there was not enough for all of them, they had to go out to buy some. While they were away, “the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut” (*Mt 25:10*). When after some

time the agitated maidens arrived, they were met with a resounding no from the bridegroom: “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you” (*Mt 25:12*).

To be aware of the greatness of the mystery we are celebrating in the Holy Mass, we first need to know our Lord very well. May Jesus never have to tell us what the bridegroom said to the foolish maidens: “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you” (*Mt 25:12*). Knowledge between two people who love each other is not reduced to the mere accumulation of biographical data, nor to more or less sporadic encounters. It is an attitude of the heart, which leads us little by little to enter into the feelings and thoughts of the other person. That is why Eucharistic adoration is so important, by which we prepare our hearts to recognize our Lord in every Mass. “Adoration before the Eucharistic Lord in the tabernacle

help us and prepares us to live the Eucharistic celebration very well.”^[5] —

Benedict XVI wrote that “in the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church’s supreme act of adoration.”^[6] — Eucharistic worship outside of Mass therefore teaches us to adore our Lord in the Mass, to desire to unite ourselves to Him through Communion, to increase our hunger for Him. “Receiving the Eucharist means adoring Him whom we receive.”^[7] — We can ask Mary, Virgin Most Prudent and Woman of the Eucharist, to help us prepare for each Holy Mass as she prepared to receive her Son. And if ever the oil in our lamp seems to be running out and the flickering flame threatens to expire, Mary will give us some of her own, which never runs out and

which she gives us with motherly generosity.

[1] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 155.

[2] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 88.

[3] Cf. St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, 21 February 1971.

[4] Francis, Angelus, 12 November 2017.

[5] Francis, Message to the National Eucharistic Congress in Germany, 30 May 2013.

[6] Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 66.

[7] *Ibid.*

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