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

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

- Serving with our talents
- A fear that paralyzes
- Value of ordinary life

JESUS once told the story of a man who “going on a journey called his

servants and entrusted to them his property; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away” (*Mt 25:14-15*). The man wanted his servants to trade with what they had received in order to obtain a return while he was gone. Christ told this parable to show us the need to correspond to the natural and supernatural gifts that God has given us.

Like the servants in the parable, God has given us unique talents, abilities that we can put at his disposal to bear fruit and make our world a better place. “God calls every person and offers talents to all, at the same time entrusting each one with a mission to carry out. It would be foolish to presume that these gifts are an entitlement, just as failing to use them would mean failing to achieve our purpose in life.”^[1] — The first step to taking advantage of these

talents is recognizing them; that is, identifying what my specific contribution to others can be. Sometimes this can be tied to our temperament. An expansive person may have an easier time making others happy or laugh, while an introvert may be more inclined to listen closely and focus on the needs of those around them. At other times these talents will be linked to our professional skills, with which we contribute to improving the society in which we live and which can also mark our relationships with others.

In any case, the decisive factor is not so much how great the impact is that we can leave, but rather the effort to ensure that our talent renders a return, assisted by divine grace. In the parable, our Lord praises equally both the one who produced five talents and the one who produced only two, because both tried to yield fruit. Hence Jesus wants us to value

what we have received and to be grateful for the gifts that others have. In contrast to the envy that can lead us to fail to appreciate what we have and to be saddened by the talents of others, Christ's proposal is much more encouraging. He invites us to put our good qualities into play, no matter how many or few they are, and to enjoy the good that comes from serving and letting ourselves be served by the gifts others have received. "Your buried talent, dig it up again! Make it yield, and you will taste the joy of knowing that in this supernatural business it does not matter if in this world the results are not wonders that men can admire. What really matters is to hand over all that we are and all that we have, striving to make our talent yield, and constantly exerting ourselves in order to produce good fruit."^[2] —

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ONE OF THE SERVANTS in the parable was given only a single talent. But instead of negotiating with it to try to obtain a return, he “dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money” (*Mt 25:18*). And when the master returned, he explained to him why he had done this: “I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground” (*Mt 25:24-25*).

Like the servant in the parable, when faced with the mission God has entrusted to us, it is only natural that we experience a certain fear. We are afraid of not being up to the task, of failing, of looking bad, of losing the talent we received. But this fear is not the problem. In fact, if we felt quite sure of our abilities when faced with what God is asking of us, then we would be trusting more in what

we can do ourselves than in divine grace. This initial fear is good when it leads us to abandon ourselves in God's hands, because thus it is transformed into trust. "This servant did not have a trusting relationship with his master, but was afraid of him, and this hindered him. Fear always immobilizes and often leads to making bad choices. Fear discourages us from taking the initiative; it leads us to take refuge in secure and guaranteed solutions, and thus end up not accomplishing anything good. To go forward and grow on the journey of life, we must not have fear; we must have trust."^[3]

Chronic fear can be due to a distorted image of God. Sometimes, like that servant, we can think of God as a harsh master who only seeks to punish us. "If we have this mistaken image of God, our life cannot be fruitful, because we will live in fear and this will not lead us to anything

constructive.”^[4] Sacred Scripture, in contrast, shows us a God who is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,” (*Ex* 34:6). He is not a king who mercilessly punishes the mistakes of his subjects, but rather a Father who covers with kisses the son returning home and prepares for him the best that he has (cf. *Lk* 15:11-32). St. Josemaría said that God is not like a hunter who waits for the slightest carelessness of the prey to shoot. Rather He is like a gardener “who takes care of the flowers, waters them, protects them, and only cuts them when their beauty is at its height.”^[5]

THE MASTER addresses the two servants in the parable who have produced fruit with the same words: “Well done, good and faithful

servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master” (*Mt* 25:21). Contrary to what the third servant thinks, the master is quite magnanimous, since he rewards the efforts of his workers disproportionately. Although the servants had not done much, they will receive something much greater than what they could have humanly expected: sharing in their master’s life.

Christ thus shows us that in order to attain eternal life we don’t need to do extraordinary things. Of course, the biography of some saints is marked by such events, but for the majority of people God leads us along an ordinary path of holiness. And this path is marked by the love with which we carry out the tasks our Lord has entrusted to us: caring for our family, doing our job well, being faithful in practices of piety. All these

ordinary daily realities, like the talents in the parable, can result in unimaginable riches: by being good parents, spouses and workers, we can come to enjoy the glory of heaven.

“Ordinary life is not without its value. If doing the same thing day after day seems flat, monotonous and unappealing, it is because love is missing. When there is love, every new day has a different hue, a different tone; each day strikes a different chord. May you do everything for Love. Let us never grow weary of loving our God. We need to use every second of our poor life to serve all souls, for love of our Lord, because the period of mortal life is always little for loving. It is short like the breeze that passes by.”^[6] — The greater part of our Lady’s life was spent in a normal way, like any other woman of that time. We can entrust to her the talents God has

given us, so that we may know how to make them yield fruit in our daily life.

[1] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 13 November 2011.

[2] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 47.

[3] Francis, Angelus, 19 November 2017.

[4] Ibid.

[5] St. Josemaría, quoted in Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 3, Rialp, Madrid, p. 430.

[6] St. Josemaría, *Letter 1*, no. 19.

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