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Meditations: Thursday after the Epiphany

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during these days of the Christmas season.

- Led by the Holy Spirit
- Sent to proclaim the Good News
- Love for God and neighbour.

WE ARE CONTEMPLATING during these days the beginning of our Lord's public ministry. After overcoming the temptations in the desert, Jesus went back to the place where He had grown up. *Jesus*

returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country (Lk 4:14). The Gospel emphasises that He was led by the Holy Spirit, for the Paraclete plays an irreplaceable role in the work of our redemption and sanctification. This is also what Saint Cyril teaches us in today's *Liturgy of the Hours*: "In a plan of surpassing beauty the Creator of the universe decreed the renewal of all things in Christ. In his design for restoring human nature to its original condition, he gave a promise that he would pour out on it the Holy Spirit along with his other gifts ... He therefore appointed a time for the Holy Spirit to come upon us: this was the time of Christ's coming. He gave this promise when he said: *In those days, that is, the days of the Savior, I will pour out a share of my Spirit on all mankind.*"^[1] —

We are struck by the fact that Scripture explicitly says that Jesus went into the desert led by the Holy Spirit (cf. *Lk 4:1*), and that He also *returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee (Lk 4:14)*. If we follow his example, our fidelity to God will be freer the more we are aware of the Paraclete's role in our life. "A disciple is a person who allows himself or herself to be guided by the Spirit, and is therefore a person who is rooted in tradition but can embrace the new, a free person. Free. Never subject to ideologies open to opinion ... He or she remains in the Lord, and is inspired by the Spirit."^[2]

The fruit of being filled with the Holy Spirit is a deep freedom, which enables us to live on this earth as Jesus did. That is why we experience the "need to put Christ at the centre of our lives. To discover the deepest meaning of freedom, we have to contemplate Him. We are amazed to

see the freedom of a God who, out of pure love, decides to abase himself by taking on flesh like ours. We see this freedom unfold throughout his steps on earth towards the sacrifice of the Cross ... Our divine filiation enables our freedom to expand with all the strength that God has bestowed on it. It is not by emancipating ourselves from the Father's house that we become free, but rather by embracing the reality that we are sons or daughters.”^[3] —

SAINT LUKE TELLS US THAT JESUS *taught in their synagogues (Lk 4:15)*. Our Lord presented his teachings in accord with what the Old Testament had revealed. He is, at the same time, “both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation,”^[4] — as the Second Vatican Council declared. Hence his teachings filled those who listened to Him with hope and He was *glorified by all (Lk 4:15)*.

Against this background, Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read (Lk 4:16). Jesus was thus fulfilling the Sabbath precept and was preparing to do the reading according to the weekly liturgical custom, which included the reading of a text from the Torah or the Prophets, followed by a commentary. *The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'* (Lk 4:17-19).

Origen says that "it is not by chance that he opened the scroll and found

the chapter of the reading that prophesies about him, as this too was the work of God's providence."^[5]

Jesus begins his public preaching by making his own the will of the Father expressed in the Old Testament, undertaking the mission of evangelising, of announcing the good news of the Kingdom. In the same way, we too want to be faithful to the inspirations God gives us in prayer, in reading the Gospel, and at so many moments throughout our day.

AND HE CLOSED THE BOOK and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' And all spoke well of him and marvelled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth (Lk 4:20-22). "Jesus himself is 'the today' of salvation in history, because he brings to completion the work of

redemption ... this Gospel passage also challenges us 'today.' In our diversified and distracted time, this Gospel passage invites us to ask ourselves whether we are able to listen. Before we can speak of God and with God, we must listen to him."^[6] —

During our dialogue with our Lord, we want to follow his example of being attentive to the divine Word revealed in Sacred Scripture. We can, for example, turn our attention to the advice of the Apostle John found in today's liturgy: *We love, because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God must also love his brother (1 Jn 4:19-21).*

Our love for our neighbour needs to be shown in specific ways, as Jesus himself tells us at the Last Supper. “Washing one another’s feet leads to so many specific gestures, since the cleansing referred to here is born of affection; and love discovers a thousand ways of serving and giving oneself to those we love. For a Christian, washing each other’s feet means, without doubt, praying for one another, lending a hand with elegance and discretion, facilitating the work of others, anticipating their needs, helping one another to behave better, correcting one another with affection, being patient and affectionate with one another.”^[7] We ask our Lady to help us to welcome divine inspirations as calls from a Father who seeks only our happiness; and also to obtain for us from God the grace to love our brothers and sisters as Jesus, moved by the Holy Spirit, loved us.

[1] Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *On John's Gospel*, 5, 2.

[2] Pope Francis, Homily, 1 April 2020.

[3] Monsignor Fernando Ocariz, Pastoral Letter, 9 January 2018, 3-4.

[4] Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, 2.

[5] Origen, *Homilies on Saint Luke's Gospel*, 32, 3.

[6] Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, 27 January 2013.

[7] Bishop Javier Echevarría, *Eucaristía y vida cristiana*, Rialp, Madrid 2005, p. 67.

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