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Meditations: Thursday of the Fourteenth Week of Ordinary Time

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

- A free gift
 - Mark of true friendship
 - Thirst to reach the whole world
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THE APOSTLES had often witnessed Jesus' generous concern for each person, without demanding anything in return. "You received without pay, give without pay" (*Mt 10:8*), he told them. They felt fortunate to have spent so much time with Jesus and to have received the call to spread his Gospel throughout the world. It was not something they had deserved, or had earned through their own effort; it was quite simply a free gift from God.

The life of the first Christians was also marked by this gratuitous generosity. They were "of one heart and soul" (*Acts 4:32*), which led them to care for one another. They didn't hesitate to put their own possessions at the disposal of the needs of the Church and of the poorest. They wanted to help those in need, because now they were all apostles: with their own dedicated life, with their hospitality, with material

assistance, or by placing themselves at the service of those who helped organize the first evangelization, like St Paul's travelling companions.

This same picture is also seen in the Church today. Lay people, priests and religious who with their witness remind us that God lives among us. The sick and the elderly who, in everyone's name, unite their illnesses and limitations to our Lord's suffering. Men and women who, through their generosity, contribute to caring for those most in need. Fathers and mothers of families who make their home a school of love, like that of the Holy Family, to help elevate the whole of society. Each one, from his or her own place, tries to embody the mission for which God has called them, seeking to freely communicate the gift they have received without deserving it.

THE MARK of Christ's gratuitous generosity is also found in any true friendship. A person who keeps track of everything he or she has done for someone, in order to demand something in return, could hardly be considered a friend. Forging a good friendship involves "a lot of time talking, being together, getting to know one another,"^[1] without worrying too much about how much one gives or receives. That is why it is the opposite of selfishness, since it means always seeking first the good of the other person, being sensitive to his or her needs. "Let us make a firm resolution about our friendships," St. Josemaría wrote. "In my thoughts, words and deeds towards my neighbors, whoever they may be, may I not behave as I have up to now. That is to say, may I never cease to practise charity, or allow indifference to enter my soul."^[2]

It is part of friendship to give to others the best that we have; that is what any good friend longs to do. Someone who has experienced authentic contact with Christ knows that the most precious gift he or she has is precisely that of having known Jesus. Hence apostolate is not something forced, but quite natural, a manifestation of our affection for the other person, being aware of their specific situation. “Friendship is itself apostolate; friendship is itself a dialogue in which we give and receive light. In friendship plans are forged as we mutually open up new horizons. In friendship we rejoice in what is good and support one another in what is difficult; we have a good time with one another, since God wants us to be happy.”^[3] We can ask ourselves: how do I care for my friends? Are my friendships true opportunities to give and receive Christ’s love through others? Is my experience of God the most valuable

thing I can share with the people I love most?

THE APOSTLES were not content with announcing the Gospel to those closest to them. They had received from Jesus the command to spread his message throughout the world, but we can assume that they already felt this need before this. A message so crucial to each person's life, an event that changed the meaning of one's existence, could not be limited to the lands close to Israel.

During his travels, Saint Paul felt his heart enkindled on seeing the thirst for God in those around him. St. Luke tells us that in Athens, while waiting for his companions, Paul "was distressed to see that the city was full of idols." (*Acts 17:16*). As usual, he went first to the synagogue. But as

soon as he could, he also went to the Areopagus, where the Athenians themselves asked him to explain “this new teaching of which you are speaking” (Acts 17:19).

We too find many people around us who thirst for the God they do not know. All men and women, in a more or less veiled way, are seeking God; all have within a longing for our Father in heaven. With the witness of our life filled with the joy of the Gospel, we can show Christ to others in carrying out our daily work.^[4] St. Josemaría described the apostolate of his daughters and sons as “an intravenous injection in the bloodstream of society.”^[5] In our workplace, in our own homes, in small and large cities, we can show others our Lord’s face through our sincere friendship. Our Lady will help us to share the apostles’ desire to bring the Gospel to all the people around us.

[1] Francis, Interview, 13 September 2015.

[2] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 748.

[3] Monsignor Fernando Ocariz, Pastoral Letter, 9 January 2018, no. 14.

[4] Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogm. Const. *Lumen gentium*, no. 31.

[5] St. Josemaría, *Instruction, 19 March 1934*, no. 42.

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