

Meditations: Friday of the Third Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this season of Lent.

- The scribe's testimony
- A guide for our life
- Being in the Kingdom of God

JESUS was asked many questions during his time on earth. On several occasions people did so with the purpose of twisting his words. Their questions didn't reflect a sincere desire to know the truth; they were acting out of envy, eager to accuse Him in public. But in the Gospel we

also see people who approach our Lord with simplicity. This is the case of a scribe who, on seeing how clearly Jesus responded to the concerns of the Pharisees and Sadducees, asked: *Which commandment is the first of all?* (Mk 12:28). Unlike the previous questions, this scribe did not come with bad intentions. He wanted to obtain from this wise man an answer to a crucial question, which was also the topic of ongoing debate among the rabbis. A pious Jew had to comply with more than six hundred rules. Therefore it was only natural to ask which was the most important precept.

The sincere attitude of this scribe can inspire us today in our own mission. He witnessed the wonders Jesus did, and his job was to recount the facts exactly as they had happened. His testimony, free from prejudice, must have helped many of his contemporaries to break down the

barriers separating them from our Lord. He shows us that in order to draw closer to Jesus, we cannot cling to our own preconceptions, or ask Him to confirm a previously held point of view. “The sin of the Pharisees,” Saint Josemaría said, “did not consist in not seeing God in Christ, but in voluntarily shutting themselves up within themselves, in not letting Jesus, who is the light, open their eyes.”^[1] In order to listen to Christ, we need to be ready to gradually transform our own judgments in the light of his saving word.

THE DIRECT WAY in which the scribe asked his question shows us that it was something he had been reflecting on for quite a while. This man was inquiring about what he saw as truly important in his own

life. And this is something every person wants to know. We need points of reference, guides that show us the best way to live our life. “We may have asked ourselves, at one time or another, how we can correspond to the greatness of God’s love. We may have wanted to see a program for Christian living clearly explained to us.”^[2] —

Sometimes we may be looking for answers to questions that have already been answered. Jesus answered the scribe with words that this man probably knew by heart, since it was the essential part of the Law that God gave to the people through Moses: *The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength’* (Mk 12:29-30 and cf. Deut 6:4-5). At the same time, Jesus linked this precept

closely with another one also well-known to the Jews: *The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’* (Mk 12:31 and Lev 19:18). Thus He shows us that both commandments are so deeply linked that they end up being one.

“Love for God is the first thing that is commanded,” Saint Augustine said, “and love for neighbor is the first thing that must be practiced . . . You, who still do not see God, by loving your neighbor will deserve to see Him. Love for our neighbor cleanses our eyes in order to see God, as John says clearly: ‘whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen’ (1 Jn 4:20).”^[3] Loving the people around us is the path to loving God with all our heart. This was the guideline that Jesus set out for the scribe and that later He himself will give us the measure for: *Love one another as I have loved you* (Jn 13:34).

AFTER JESUS answered the Scribe's question, we see once again the noble intention with which this man had approached our Lord. For he reacts with enthusiasm and joy: *You are right, Teacher (Mk 12:32)*. His joy at Jesus' words leads our Lord himself to exclaim: *You are not far from the Kingdom of God (Mk 12:34)*.

It is not a small compliment. We too would be greatly consoled to hear Jesus say that we are not far from the only thing that is truly worthwhile: being with Him in his Kingdom. This is what we ask for when we pray the Our Father: "Thy Kingdom come." These words help us to realize that it is not we who decide to approach Him: rather it is his Kingdom that comes to us, it is God who takes the initiative. "The Lord always gets there before us, he gets there first, he is waiting for us! When we seek him,

we discover that he is waiting to welcome us, to offer us his love.”^[4] —

But Christ didn't open up the gates of his Kingdom so that we would be vassals there. Our Lord wants us to reign with Him: *The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne (Rev 3:21)*. The authors of the book of Psalms already foresaw that the children of Adam were destined to be crowned with glory and honor (cf. *Ps 8:5-6*). With Jesus' teachings, we understand even better that this will be the destiny of those who love their neighbor with deeds, because that was our Lord's way of living: to reign by serving. Our Lady knew that God casts down the powerful from their thrones and exalts the humble (cf. *Lk 1:52*), who are those who know how to serve. And therefore Mary ended up being crowned Queen of the universe.

^[1] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 71.

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

^[3] Saint Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium*, 17,8.

^[4] Francis, Address, 18 May 2013.

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