

Meditations: Saturday of the Second Week of Advent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this time of preparation for our Lord's imminent arrival at Christmas.

- Seeing ourselves as God sees us
- A spirit of penance
- Interior purification

WE HAVE REACHED the end of the second week of Advent. During these days the liturgy has led us to consider the example of Saint John

the Baptist in preparing for Jesus' arrival. In the Gospel of today's Mass we see Jesus surrounded by his disciples, who ask Him: *Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come? (Mt 17:10).*

According to a Jewish tradition dating back to the time of the prophet Malachi, the prophet Elijah would come again before the Messiah arrived, to announce his coming. So the Master answered them: *Elijah indeed shall come, and restore all things (Mt 17:11).* John the Baptist's mission consisted in inviting people to change, to interior renewal, to repentance for personal sins. After almost fifteen days of preparation for Christmas, we can ask our Lord to continue enlightening us with his grace, so that we see ourselves a bit more clearly as He sees us. Show us, Lord, all the good things you want to accomplish through us, all the happiness that depends on our

docility to your plans; and show us the points in which you want us to improve, where you want to draw closer to each one of us.

Just as John had the mission of preparing for the coming of Jesus as his precursor, proclaiming that his arrival was close and later pointing Him out among the crowd, God is also relying on us to bring the joy of the Gospel to those around us; a joy that “fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.^[1]” “My son, continue with your very personal prayer, which does not need the sound of words. Speak to God, face to face, you and He alone . . . In the solitude of your heart, which is never a lonely solitude, face your Father God and

tell Him: ‘I give myself to you!’ Be daring! Be courageous! Be bold!”^[2]—

TODAY’S GOSPEL continues with Jesus’ response to the disciples: *Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist* (Mt 17:12-13).

From the beginning of his public life, Jesus linked his own mission to that of the precursor. If we want to strengthen our own Christian life, we need to unite ourselves more closely to our Lord each day: “My son, this beginning of Advent is a good time to make an act of love: to say I believe, to say I hope, to say I love, to turn to the Mother of God – Mother,

Daughter, Spouse of God, our Mother – and ask her to obtain more graces for us from the Blessed Trinity: the grace of hope, of love, of contrition. So that when at times in our life there seems to be a strong, searing wind that could dry up the flowers of the soul, it will not wither ours.”^[3] —

The union of Christ’s ministry with that of John the Baptist was not limited to the initial phases of his public life, since later on He also associated John with his redemptive mission, by allowing him to suffer martyrdom. The season of Advent invites us to prepare our souls for Christmas with more diligent prayer and penance. The consideration of John’s sufferings until his martyrdom, as well as those of our Lord’s passion and death, invites us to meditate on the reality that, although we meet up with suffering and fatigue in our daily journey (which is often authentic penance),

the effort to make Jesus present in our own life is always preceded, sustained and accompanied by God's strength.

“LORD, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.”^[4] The Church’s liturgy today also continues to exhort us to ask God for the grace of conversion, to prepare the way for the Lord in our heart. This purification is not limited to external deeds, but also includes our interior world: putting our imagination and memory at the service of our mission, strengthening our ability to rise above ourselves and be concerned about the needs of others. “That joke, that witty remark held on the tip of your tongue; the cheerful smile for those who annoy you; that silence when you’re unjustly accused; your friendly

conversation with people whom you find boring and tactless; the daily effort to overlook one irritating detail or another in the persons who live with you... This, with perseverance, is indeed solid interior mortification.”^[5] —

Interior mortification, which purifies our soul, is not a negative effort, focused simply on not doing things. Rather it is an effort imbued with love, since we strive to love God at all times, seeking to ensure that our imagination, memory and emotions follow the right path and lead us towards contemplative life. Thus we can say: *I will meditate on all thy work, and muse on thy mighty deeds* (Ps 77:12); the great things God has done will come to our memory and enkindle our heart and affections with gratitude, making our love more ardent.

Let us turn to our Lady so that she may present to her Son our desires to prepare ourselves for Christmas with a spirit of penance and interior purification. Then what we ask for in the opening prayer of today's Mass will become a reality in our lives: "May the splendor of your glory dawn in our hearts, we pray, almighty God, so that all shadows of the night may be scattered and we may be shown to be children of light by the advent of your Only Begotten Son."^[6]

^[1] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 1.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, Scepter, p. 42.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, Scepter, p. 47.

^[4] Responsorial Psalm, Saturday of the Second Week of Advent.

[5] Saint Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 173.

[6] Opening Prayer, Saturday of the Second Week of Advent.

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