

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

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 22nd week of Ordinary Time.

- A faith that reaches the heart
- Pleasing God and neighbor
- Children, not slaves

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THE APOSTLES were hungry. They had probably gone several days

without more than a bite to eat. So as soon as they began walking through a wheat field, they picked some of the grains of wheat and start eating them. This in itself did not seem problematic, but it was the Sabbath. And the law makes it very clear that the harvest cannot be gathered on that day. Hence some Pharisees, on seeing the carelessness of these disciples, seek an explanation: “Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?” (*Lk 6:2*). It is not the apostles who respond, but Jesus himself: “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?” (*Lk 6:3-4*).

Our Lord often neglected practices that were customary among the Jewish people. Some scribes and

Pharisees reproached Him for the fact that his disciples failed to wash their hands before eating, not to mention the outcry He caused by working miracles on the Sabbath. Why did he do so? In order to put faith at the center of religious practice, “and to avoid a risk, which applies to those scribes as well as to us: to observe outward formalities, putting the heart and faith in the background. Many times we too ‘put makeup’ on our soul. Outward formality and not the heart of faith: this is a risk. It is the risk of *a religiosity of appearances*: looking good on the outside, while neglecting to *purify the heart*. There is always the temptation to reduce our relationship with God to some external devotion, but Jesus does not settle for this worship. Jesus does not want outward appearances; he wants a faith that reaches the heart.”^[1] —

This certainly doesn't mean that external works are of no importance. In fact, many of the traditions of any Jew of that time were present in our Lord's daily life. He recited the customary prayers, went to the synagogue frequently, celebrated the feasts... But He did so not to appear pious, or as a way of gaining the respect of God the Father or of the others, but rather as an expression of the love that filled his heart. Thus "he reminds us that Christian life is a path to follow, which does not consist so much in a law we need to observe, but in the very Person of Christ, who we have to find, welcome and follow."^[2] —

JESUS criticizes not so much the zeal of some scribes and Pharisees in obeying the law, but their lack of love. Many of them devoted

considerable time to prayer and fasting, but they neglected the most basic duties of charity towards their neighbor. Thus they didn't hesitate to criticize those who failed to follow their own standards, and were more concerned about fulfilling certain precepts than rejoicing in someone's healing. In reality, nothing is more mistaken than setting the observance of the divine law in opposition to the desire to seek the good of others. "I prefer virtue to austerity, Yahweh said, using different words, to the chosen people, who set too much store by certain external formalities. That is why we must cultivate penance and mortification as a proof of our true love for God and for our neighbor."^[3] —

St. Gregory the Great said that fasting is holy when it is accompanied by other acts of virtue, especially generosity.^[4] — In this sense, St. Josemaría encouraged us to practice

“mortifications that do not mortify others, that make us more refined, more understanding, more open to everyone.” And he added: “You are not mortified, if you are touchy; if your every thought is for yourself; if you humiliate others; if you don’t know how to give up what is unnecessary and, at times, what is necessary; if you become gloomy because things don’t turn out the way you had hoped. On the other hand, you can be sure you are mortified, if you know how to make yourself ‘all things to all men, in order to save all.’”^[5]

Every day offers us many opportunities to please God by seeking the good of those around us: smiling when we are tired, offering to take care of a more difficult task, forgiving small frictions that arise in living alongside others, sharing our time with those who need it most... Through these efforts we are

fulfilling the most important commandments of the law: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (*Lk 10:27*).

SOMETIMES fulfilling external formalities can give us a certain sense of security. In general, we all need specific indications in order to know whether we are doing something well. But if we apply this approach to our Christian life, our relationship with God can end up becoming like that of the Pharisees Jesus criticized, who had an abundance of external good works but a heart that lacked love. In contrast, when we put our will, affections and mind into fulfilling the commandment, we discover a deep,

serene joy, because we savor with our spiritual senses God's love in each of his precepts and in each of the circumstances in our own life. The Prelate of Opus Dei assured us: "It fills us with security to know that God's infinite Love is to be found not only at the origin of our existence but also at every moment in our lives. For God is closer to us than we are to ourselves."^[6] —

Grounding our Christian struggle on divine filiation fills us with optimism. We know that the expressions of affection a child receives from its parents can have a decisive importance for that person's future. If someone feels loved and affirmed from a young age, when that person grows up they will have a solid foundation on which to build the rest of their relationships. Well, something similar happens in our relationship with God. "Knowing that we have a Father who loves us

infinitely enables us to lead a joyful and fulfilling life; it illumines every corner of our life with love, trust, and simplicity, even amid difficulties or when we experience our defects more acutely.”^[7] Divine filiation also gives a new perspective to our fulfillment of the law: we are not subjects trying to please a king, but children trying to please their father – even though we sometimes fall short. We can ask our Lady to help us to always realize that we are dearly beloved children of God.

^[1] Francis, Angelus, 29 August 2021.

^[2] Benedict XVI, Audience, 9 March 2011.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 992.

^[4] Cf. Saint Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Rule*, 19, 10-11.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 9.

^[6] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz,
Pastoral Letter, 9 January 2018, no 4.

^[7] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz,
Homily, 26 June 2024.

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