

Meditations: Tuesday of the Sixteenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can guide our prayer during the sixteenth week of Ordinary Time.

- Mary embraces the divine will
 - Freedom and self-giving are not contradictory
 - God speaks to us through other people
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JESUS was surrounded by a large crowd when suddenly someone came up and said that his mother and brothers were standing outside and asking to speak with Him. Our Lord answered, “Who is my mother and who are my brothers?” Then “stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother’” (*Mt 12:46-50*).

At first, Christ’s reaction could seem cold to us. He seems to pay scant attention to his mother. But then Jesus gives her the greatest praise possible because Mary, more than anyone else, has carried out God’s will. Saint Augustine says that she first conceived Jesus by faith, and that she is blessed first of all because she kept the truth in her mind rather than in her womb.^[1] Hence Mary is more the mother of Christ by faith

than by nature. Our Lady fulfilled the will of God when she accepted the angel's offer to be the mother of the Messiah. And afterwards, many other occasions arose for her to accept again the divine plans.

“Our Lady did not merely pronounce her *fiat*,” Saint Josemaría remarked. “In every moment she fulfilled that firm and irrevocable decision. So should we. When we sense God's love and we come to know what he desires, we ought to commit ourselves to be faithful, loyal – and then be so in fact.”^[2] Throughout our lives we will have many opportunities to embrace God's will in both great and small things. Mary's attitude shows us that there is nothing that makes us happier than to follow with love and freedom the plans God has in mind for us. “Accept God's Will fearlessly. Resolve unhesitatingly to work all your life, with the materials which the

teachings and the demands of our Faith provide. If you do, you can be sure that along with suffering, and even along with slander, you will be happy, with a happiness that will move you to love others and help them share in your supernatural joy”^[3] —

MARY, by her obedience to the divine will, untied the “knots” that Eve’s disobedience had caused.^[4] — The first woman’s desire to be like God deeply wounded human nature. Mary, by stating that she was the Lord’s handmaid, let God become man in order to free us from the slavery of sin. Hence our Lady’s yes enables us to receive a new freedom.

Sometimes we may think that obedience and freedom are two opposing realities. We think that

choosing one will always be to the detriment of the other. This approach would be true in a relationship marked by sin. In that case, obeying the dictates of evil effectively contributes to reducing one's own freedom. Little by little, one loses the autonomy to choose the good and feels incapable of acting out of love. One acts not so much out of an ideal that inspires one's life and fills one with joy, but out of the irresistible force with which sin manifests itself.

Mary, in contrast, teaches us that by obeying God we are truly free. "Freedom and self-giving are not contradictory. They sustain one another. Freedom can only be given up for love; I cannot conceive any other reason for surrendering it. And I am not just playing with words or phrases. When people give themselves freely, at every moment of their self-giving, freedom renews

their love; to be renewed in that way is to be always young, generous, capable of high ideals and great sacrifices.”^[5] Therefore, as the Prelate of Opus Dei reminded us, obedience to God, when one acts out of love, “is not only a free act, but also a liberating act.”^[6]: it frees us from the bonds of sin and enables us to discover the good that fulfilling the divine will brings about in our own lives. This is the happiness that the psalmist sings about: “The commandments of the Lord are right, they gladden the heart. The commandments of the Lord are pure, they give light to the eyes” (*Ps 19:9*).

THROUGHOUT the history of salvation, the Lord communicated his will through very specific people. Some prophets, for example, exhorted their Jewish

contemporaries to abandon foreign cults in order to worship only the God of Israel. David was chosen to be king of Israel through Samuel, who received the Lord's instruction to anoint him. Also today, God "can make his will known to us through the people around us, invested with greater or lesser authority, depending on the specific context. Because we know that God can speak to us through other people or through ordinary events, the conviction that we can hear his voice in them generates in us a docile attitude towards his designs, which can also be hidden in the words of those who accompany us on our path."^[7] —

Of course, this doesn't mean that all the advice we receive is infallible. "God doesn't impose blind obedience on us, but rather intelligent obedience."^[8] — And this means comparing what is said to us with

our own view, in an open dialogue with the other person, to whom we humbly and trustingly express our point of view. The Prelate of Opus Dei reminded us that “those in authority need to have extreme refinement in order not to impose their own criteria unnecessarily and to prevent their indications or advice from being interpreted as though they were a crystal-clear expression of God’s will.”^[9]

At times someone can make God’s will known to us by reminding us of a precept of the Catholic faith when, for example, we face the choice between a sinful act and one that is not sinful. But most of the time it will be more difficult to discern, since several of the options may be good and we aren’t sure which is preferable in a specific case: accepting or rejecting a job, buying or doing without something, carrying out a certain plan or not doing so.

The advice of a person who loves us, and who has God's grace to help us, can give us some light, since we realize our own inadequacy and the role our feelings can play in making our judgment less objective. But this advice should be an aid that helps each of us to make a prudent decision with total freedom. Our Lady will help us to carry out and love the divine will at all times, knowing that God is the first one who is interested in our own happiness and the one who makes our own freedom ever broader and more worthwhile.

[1] Cf. Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 72 A, 3. 7-8.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 173.

[3] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 814.

[4] Cf. Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus hæreses*, III, 22, 4 (PG 7-I, 959-960).

^[5] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 31.

^[6] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 9 January 2018, no. 7.

^[7] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 10 February 2024, no. 6.

^[8] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 17.

^[9] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 10 February 2024, no. 7.