

Meditations: Wednesday of the Twenty-Eighth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-eighth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: the reasons that move the heart; discovering the goodness of the commandments; seeking God in daily life.

- The reasons that move the heart
- Discovering the goodness of the commandments
- Seeking God in daily life

JESUS WAS often invited to dine in the homes of people from all walks of life. He visited the homes of his disciples and friends, participated in banquets held in his honor, such as the one given by the tax collector Zacchaeus, and even dined with the leaders of the people when invited. On one occasion, as St. Luke tells us, Jesus accepted the invitation of a well-known Pharisee. The host was uncomfortable when he saw that the Lord sat down to eat without following the custom of washing His hands. The other guests likely also noticed and were quietly critical of the Master's behavior.

The text does not explicitly state whether this gesture was meant to teach a lesson. What the evangelist tells us is that Jesus took advantage of the situation to convey a message to those present: in God's eyes, what

matters is not merely the external — *what is outside* — but also *what is inside*: the reasons that move the heart (Lk 11:40). *Woe to you, Pharisees! For you pay tithes on mint and rue and every herb, but you neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others!* (Lk 11:42). His tone was stern. Jesus accused them of hypocrisy, exposing their deceptive conduct, because some Pharisees were more concerned with outward appearances than with living according to the truth. They were so fixated on the letter of the law that they forgot the spirit behind it.

The Pharisees' attitude is still present today. We echo it when we carry out our daily commitments to God and others in a cold, automatic way. Perhaps we know that they are good, even necessary, things to do, but fail to grasp their true value. At that

point, the driving force behind our actions might be inertia, the desire to keep up appearances, or fear of what might happen if we fail to do them. But God doesn't just want us to check boxes; He wants us to act out of love. "Love and do what you will," taught St. Augustine. He went on to say, "If you are silent, be silent out of love; if you cry out, cry out out of love; if you correct, correct out of love; if you forgive, forgive out of love. Let love be rooted in you, for nothing but love can come from it."^[1]

SOME PHARISEES failed to recognize God's hand in Jesus' works. While Jesus acted with simplicity and naturalness, these Pharisees were preoccupied with following numerous minor precepts scrupulously, convinced that by doing so they pleased God, all the

while neglecting the integrity of their hearts and charity toward others. In contrast, Christ's teaching emphasizes that the secret of true righteousness lies not primarily in the material importance or perfection of the actions, but in the love that inspires us to do them in the best way possible. "Do everything for love," St. Josemaría often recommended,^[2] because "everything that is done out of Love acquires greatness and beauty."^[3] There are no insignificant tasks, because their value lies in the love with which they are done.

Speaking about the sanctification of work, the founder of Opus Dei once preached: "Do everything for Love's sake and do it freely. Never give way to fear or routine. Serve God our Father."^[4] If we follow this path, we will naturally and necessarily question the motivation behind our actions, especially in our

examinations of conscience. Is it love for God and others, or self-interest?

Merely following rules can easily become a burden. This is what happened to the elder brother of the prodigal son. Even though he seemed to be doing everything right (staying close to his father and working hard on the farm) he did not enjoy the life he was leading. The parable gives us the sense that he envied his younger brother's choices and the pleasures he enjoyed. It is important to sincerely seek the goodness of God's commandments and the acts that naturally flow from our relationship with Him and others. This is freeing: it allows us to savor what is truly valuable. What matters is not only what we do, but also the good we seek in doing it. Life is a journey on which we gradually purify our intentions and seek greater goods, adjusting our course when we notice we've gone off track. As we strive to

choose what's best for us, our desire to love God above all things will grow.

IN THEIR relationship with God, Christians need to safeguard moments and structure their lives so that the demands of the world do not suffocate what is essential and truly gives meaning to everything else. We plan and set priorities in any activity that matters to us, from caring for our families to growing professionally, maintaining friendships, resting and staying physically fit. Otherwise, the rush and pressures of daily life can pull us away from the values we want to nurture. St. Josemaría called this set of pious practices that shape a Christian's day a *plan of life*. These moments help us discover that "there is something holy, something divine,

hidden in the most ordinary situations,"^[5] even in our work and other activities. A plan of life is a response to the soul's need "to seek out God and speak to him without interruption, looking on him with love in the midst of the labours of their ordinary work."^[6]

St. Josemaría warned the members of Opus Dei that this plan of life should not turn into a rigid and inflexible schedule, pursued as an end in itself. Rather, he said, "They should be flexible, to help you on your journey; you who live in the middle of the world, with a life of hard professional work and social ties and obligations which you should not neglect, because in them your conversation with God still continues. Your plan of life ought to be like a rubber glove which fits the hand perfectly."^[7] Therefore, the fulfillment of this plan is not about simply going through the motions

and "getting by;"^[8] it is not something to check off a list to feel at peace. Rather, our plan of life helps open us to God and the needs of others. We can turn to our Lady's intercession, asking her to help us act out of love at all times, with the desire to identify with her Son.

^[1] St. Augustine, *Homilies on 1 John* (Seventh Homily), no. 8.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 813: "Do everything for Love. (...) Perseverance in little things for Love is heroism."

^[3] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 429.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God* (Working for God), no. 68.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 114.

[6] St. Josemaría, Letter 3, no. 13.

[7] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 149.

[8] Blessed Álvaro del Portillo, Letter 15-IX-1975, no. 8.

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