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Meditations: Sunday of the Twelfth Week of Ordinary Time (Year B)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twelfth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: following Christ involves struggle; prayer helps us live without fear; reflecting on our fears.

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- Following Christ involves struggle

- Prayer helps us live without fear
 - Reflecting on our fears
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EVENING FALLS. The sky has begun to darken after an intense day during which Jesus taught the crowds through parables. They needed to continue preaching the Kingdom of God to other towns, and so Jesus said to his disciples, *Let us go across to the other side* (Mk 4:35). They then bade farewell to those present and boarded a boat, which for many of the apostles was like a second home.

We could say that Jesus invites us to cross to the other side too, to change certain aspects of our lives in order to resemble Him more closely. And this, logically, requires some effort. We might think that there will come a time when struggling will no longer

be necessary because everything will come easily: nothing will put us in a bad mood, we will naturally possess the virtue that costs us so much right now, and we will see every encounter with people as a blessing. Perhaps there will be seasons when we experience something like that. But let's not deceive ourselves: following Christ does not mean that we will not find things difficult.

“To be faithful to God requires a constant battle. Hand-to-hand combat, man to man — the old man against the man of God — in one small thing after another, without giving in.”^[1] —

The struggle will of course be more or less intense at different times, depending on our circumstances. But to aspire to a life with no battles, besides being unrealistic, would make it difficult to strengthen our love for God. Periods of greater

struggle allow us to revitalise our Christian vocation. In this sense, St. Josemaría commented, “Dear God, thank you, thank you for everything: for what goes against me, for what I don't understand, for the things that make me suffer. The blows are necessary to hack away what is superfluous from the huge block of marble. That is how God sculptures the image of his Son in souls. Be grateful to God for those caresses!”^[2]
We are never alone. When we feel the need to fight more intensely, we know that Christ is very close to us and accompanies us to cross to the other side with joy.

IN THE middle of the lake, although the apostles trusted their Master's words, a storm broke out. The wind was so strong that the waves threatened to sink the boat. And in

the stern of the rocking vessel, Jesus slept. It is not hard to imagine the many questions that would arise in the apostles' hearts: "Why did Jesus encourage us to sail to the other side when He knew a storm would assail us? Why, while we struggle to survive, does He seem to have no compassion? Did we not board the boat trusting that He had a better plan for us?" We have probably faced similar situations in our own lives. We had to make a complex decision that kept us up at night. Suddenly, wordlessly but with surprising clarity, we heard the Lord inviting us to head to the other side, to leave behind a security that may have kept us comfortable. But just as we embarked on that new venture, difficulties or misunderstandings arose. Then, perplexed and even disappointed, we asked ourselves where Christ had gone.

It is natural for us to feel insecure when we meet with opportunities to grow in interior life, in virtue, or in more perfect love, because we know we do not have the situation under control. We may get the impression that Jesus has abandoned us, that his heart is far from us. *Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?* (Mk 4:38), we ask Him. However, Christ's apparent silence is nothing more than a subtle invitation to grow in faith and trust, so that challenges and difficulties are seen as opportunities to follow the Lord's lifestyle. In dialogue with God, we learn to live through those storms with Jesus' serenity. "A day lived without prayer risks being transformed into a bothersome or tedious experience: everything that happens to us could turn into a badly endured and blind fate for us."^[3] — On the other hand, if we pray, even when God seems not to listen to us, we show Him that we have truly placed our hope in Him.

And the path of trust in God is the most important to be able to reach new shores in the interior life. “The daily journey, including hardships, acquires the perspective of a “vocation”. Prayer has the power to transform into good what in life would otherwise be a sentence; prayer has the power to open the mind to a great horizon and to broaden the heart.”^[4] —

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WHY ARE you afraid? Do you still have no faith? (Mk 4:40), Jesus asks the apostles who had awakened Him from his sleep. These questions hide a deep reproach. Christ certainly realised they were going through a difficult time. Many Gospel passages highlight his empathy towards others' problems. But, at the same time, He expected greater trust from his closest disciples. As St. John

writes in his first letter, *There is no fear in love* (1 Jn 4:18).

Often, in our prayer, we can let Jesus ask us the same question that He posed to his apostles: “Why are you afraid?” Then, perhaps, we will recall those moments when we tend to lose our peace or feel insecure. St. Josemaría made the following list of possible fears that can make us lose peace: “After the initial enthusiasm, there began the doubts, hesitations and fears. You are worried about your studies, your family, your financial situation, and, above all, the thought that you are not up to it, that perhaps you are of no use, that you lack experience in life.”^[5] Reflecting on the fears that overwhelm us when we head towards new shores in our Christian life helps us know ourselves better and ask Jesus for the concrete help we need.

They were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’ (Mk 4:41). This Gospel scene ends with a new kind of fear gripping the apostles. Experiencing Christ's real power, seeing that He is able to calm the waters with his words, the apostles are overcome by the fear of God: they are now certain that they are before the living God and that his power is real. Moving to a new shore in our life of faith involves taking this step: turning the fear that can initially paralyse us into deep reverence towards a God who is alive with us and can do what seemed impossible to our eyes. For this, we also have the help of our Mother, as St. Josemaría always taught us: “Before, by yourself, you couldn't. Now, you have turned to our Lady, and, with her, how easy it is!”^[6]

[1] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 126.

[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Sixth Station, no. 4.

[3] Pope Francis, Audience, November 4, 2020.

[4] Ibid.

[5] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 133.

[6] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 513.