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Meditations: Thursday of the Second Week of Advent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this season of Advent.

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- Need for inner purification
- Purity of heart
- Our love is enkindled in prayer

Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist (Mt 11:11). These words of Jesus that we read in the Gospel of today's Mass have been faithfully guarded by the Church, which from the beginning has venerated the Precursor in a special way. We can see this, for example, in the liturgy, which solemnly celebrates his birth, so intimately related to the mystery of Christ's incarnation.

The four Gospels highlight the figure of Saint John the Baptist. He is the last of the prophets, the one who concludes the Old Testament and points to the New, announcing Jesus, the Messiah, the Lamb of God. His father, Zechariah, when he recovered from losing his ability to speak due to his initial lack of faith, praised God with a prayer known as the *Benedictus*, which is especially significant in this liturgical season:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people . . . And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins (Lk 1:68-77).

Thus he made known John's mission: to prepare for Jesus' arrival, now imminent, calling people to penance and conversion of heart.

To find Christ, we need to be purified. "Ask the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and your Mother, to make you know yourself and weep for all those foul things that have passed through you, and that, alas, have left such dregs behind. And at the same time, without wishing to stop considering all this, say to him: Jesus, give me a Love that will act like a purifying fire in which my poor flesh, my poor heart, my poor soul, my poor body may be

consumed and cleansed of all earthly wretchedness. And when I have been completely emptied of myself, fill me with yourself. May I never become attached to anything here below. May Love always sustain me.”^[1] —

FOR I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Fear not, I will help you.” (Is 41:13). These words of the prophet Isaiah, in the first reading of the Mass, remind us that, in the effort to prepare ourselves better to receive Jesus, the most important thing is our trust in the help divine grace will provide. It is God who will transform us if we are docile to his inspirations. Then a new life will rise up in our hearts; what perhaps until then remained sterile in us will be regenerated. We will be able to savor, made a reality in our soul, the Lord’s loving

promise: *I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water (Is 41:18).*

God will grant us his grace like those rivers destined to give life to the fields. In the mysterious interaction between our will and His, our role is to desire and welcome his grace, removing the obstacles that could wither the fruit: “Jesus, may my poor heart be an enclosed garden; may my poor heart be a paradise where you live; may my Guardian Angel watch over it with a sword of fire and use it to purify every affection before it comes into me. Jesus, with the divine seal of your Cross, seal my poor heart.”^[2] —

We want to love our Lord with our whole heart, and so we ask Him to help us see what still distances us from having his same sentiments: a

lack of charity and mercy towards others, selfishness, indifference... Let us ask Him for the help of his grace to cleanse our heart. “This gift was given to those who asked for it, to those who wanted it, to those who strove to receive it.”^[3] The call to purify our heart that the Church addresses to us in Advent is not simply to root out contamination. It is about something radically different and much more attractive: we want to purify our heart – humbly asking our Lord for his help – in order to identify our heart every more fully with the Heart of Christ.

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“WE CHRISTIANS are in love with Love: our Lord does not want us to be dry and rigid, like inert matter. He wants us to be saturated with his love!”^[4] For our hearts to be filled with divine love, we need to beseech

God for this gift, as we do in the opening prayer of today's Mass: "Stir up our heart, O Lord, to make ready the paths of your Only Begotten Son, so that through his coming we may be found worthy to serve you with minds made pure." On our part, we should strive "to work and live and die as people in love,"^[5] making our own that prayer of Saint Josemaría: "Lord, make me so much yours that not even the holiest affections may enter my heart except through your wounded Heart."^[6]

The liturgy of Advent frequently repeats the pressing announcement: the Lord is coming and we must prepare an ever wider path for Him, an ever cleaner dwelling, an ever more willing heart. For a person in love, simply waiting for Him is not enough; our love leads us to go out in search of Him. So we form now the resolution to go out to meet Him in our prayer, with small signs of

affection, like our Lady and Saint Joseph. We want to find Jesus in our practices of piety throughout the day, to tell Him that we love Him, that our infidelities hurt us, that we are impatient to receive Him.

God will reward our effort to draw closer to Him. As we recite in today's psalm, *The Lord is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in mercy* (Ps 145:8). He will give us a freer heart, a heart more deeply in love that spreads peace and joy to those around us. To attain this gift, we turn to our Lady, Mother of Fair Love, following Saint Josemaría's advice: "You should tell our Lady, right now, speaking without the sound of words, from the accompanied solitude of your heart: 'O, my Mother, sometimes this poor heart of mine rebels... But if you help me...' Mary will help you to keep it clean and to follow the path God has called you to."^[7]

[1] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 41.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 412.

[3] Saint Jerome, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 3, 19, 11.

[4] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 183.

[5] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 988.

[6] *Ibid.*, no. 98.

[7] *Ibid.*, no. 315.

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