

Meditations: Monday of the Fifteenth Week of Ordinary Time

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

- The combat that Jesus brings
 - Misunderstandings along the way
 - Invitation to take up the Cross
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JESUS' teachings are not always easy to understand. Sometimes his words are even provocative. Some people were scandalized by what He said, or they thought it too difficult to accept. Nevertheless, "Christ's whole earthly life – his words and deeds, his silences and sufferings, indeed his manner of being and speaking – is *Revelation of the Father.*"^[1] Jesus came to show us the face of his Father. All his gestures, even those that may seem hardest to understand, seek to make known to us some aspect of the mystery of God and his plan of redemption.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth," our Lord said on one occasion. "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household" (*Mt*

10:34-36). How can it be that the one who wants to bring peace to mankind – as the angels announced to the shepherds in Bethlehem – now presents himself like this? Is this the prince of peace foretold by Isaiah? “A son is given to us, and the government will be upon his shoulder; and his name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (*Is 9:8*). Jesus comes to establish peace between mankind and God. But sometimes this peace leads to rejection, especially when we are not prepared for his reign or when we prefer to avoid it.

Christ’s teachings cause division, first of all, within ourselves; that is, they reveal the lack of harmony within us. Indeed, because of the consequences of sin, we may find it hard to accept some aspect of his message. We would like to follow his words and imitate his life, but at the same time

we find a force within us that urges us to do what we don't want to do (cf. *Rom 7:23*). This is precisely the war that Jesus wants us to undertake, and which most often takes the form of small battles. The Holy Spirit reminds us internally of what we need to do to fight against that division. He sends "silent reminders," St. Josemaria said, "encouraging us to outdo ourselves in the supernatural sport of overcoming ourselves. May the light of God show us the way to understand his directions. May he help us to fight and be with us in victory. May he not leave us when we fall but always help us to get up and return to the struggle."^[2] —

THE PEACE Jesus brings is the result of our constant struggle against evil, spurred by his grace. He asks us to

fight against the enemy of God and man, against Satan. “Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division” (*Lk 12:51*). “What does this mean? It means that faith is not something decorative or ornamental; a living faith does not mean decorating life with a little religion. No, this is not faith. Faith means choosing God as the criterion and basis of our life. Following Jesus entails giving up evil and selfishness and choosing good, truth and justice, even when this demands sacrifice and the renunciation of our own interests. And this indeed divides.”^[3]

Since the beginning of the Church, the way the saints have acted has not always been understood or shared by their peers, often because the latter have not yet received the Christian message. But in many cases these differences have disappeared over time, not so much because of the

force of certain arguments, but because of the strength of Christian testimony. Christians are witnesses to the reality that mankind's true riches are those stored up in heaven; they show what it means to live as a child of God the Father; and hence they are not afraid of anything, nor do they have to pretend to be something they are not. Christians give witness to the reality that happiness is not found in a comfortable life, but in a loving heart.^[4] Therefore a life based on God, although it may cause some initial confusion, ends up attracting others because of the authentic joy it offers.

“See how they love one another. See how they are ready to die for one another,”^[5] people exclaimed about the first Christians. This love shown in deeds, which led the baptized to share everything they had, stirred up in those around them the desire to come to know our Lord.

THROUGHOUT our lives we experience many different problems and difficulties. Sometimes they are related to external situations (a problem at work, the illness of a loved one, a financial setback), and other times they are related to our inner world (doubts that refuse to go away, defects that make us lose our peace). Jesus is well aware of these problems, and doesn't ask us to live as though they didn't exist. Rather He invites us to take up our Cross, to embrace it wholeheartedly, and to follow in his footsteps. And our Lord assures us that whoever does so will find true life (cf. *Mt 10:39*).

Certainly, the life He speaks of is the life in heaven, but it begins here on earth, although it also involves suffering. It is a happiness that is not determined by external circumstances or by our state of

mind, but is anchored in what is truly important: Christ's love and the assurance that He is always with us. If we trust in Christ's words, the setbacks and sufferings that are always part of life will not be able to rob us of our joy. Rather with his grace we will find the strength needed to gradually integrate into our life – in the best possible way, with realism – each of these realities. Setbacks can help us to know ourselves and others better; they lead us to be more patient and to strive to open up new paths. They can also enlarge our heart and strengthen our relationships with others when we ask them for help. In any case, they always enable us to enter into the mystery of God's providence, and to learn more about God's plans and way of acting.

“Man was created for happiness. Your thirst for happiness is therefore legitimate. Christ has the answer to

your deepest desires. But He asks you to trust in Him.”^[6] The Virgin Mary trusted in God. The most perfect creature that came from his hands was not spared suffering. In a mysterious way, standing close to the Cross, her love became even stronger. Mary found happiness in the certainty that our Lord would never leave her.

^[1] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 516.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 77.

^[3] Francis, Angelus, 18 August 2013.

^[4] Cf. St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 795.

^[5] Tertullian, *Apologetics*, 39, 1-18.

^[6] Saint John Paul II, Speech, 25 July 2002.

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(11/20/2025)