

Meditations: Monday of the Nineteenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist
our prayer during the 19th
week of Ordinary Time.

- The apostles fail to understand Jesus
- Sadness hides the joy in life from us
- Simplicity wins over our Lord

JESUS is sometimes hard to understand. In the Gospel we see that the apostles don't always grasp the meaning of his words or deeds. For example, shortly after the multiplication of the loaves, when speaking about the leaven of the Pharisees, our Lord asks them: "Why do you discuss among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive?" (*Mt 16:8-9*). On another occasion, St. Peter fails to understand the announcement of Jesus' passion. When Peter tries to dissuade Him, Jesus replies with a strong rebuke: "You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men" (*Mt 16:23*).

On our journey towards God, we shouldn't be surprised to encounter moments of darkness amid the bright light of faith; moments of doubt when we fail to grasp the meaning of what is happening to us. Our Lord doesn't spare us from this

lack of clarity. The apostles, and so many saints down through the centuries, have also gone through these trials. At the same time, like them, we can be certain that behind the clouds is the sun. Perhaps our first reaction might be like St. Peter's, and we try to escape from this problem at all costs. Jesus, in contrast, invites us to discover the good in what we find hard to understand. Just as from his death on the Cross we gain life, so something of immense value can be hidden in what is difficult for us to accept.

As St. Josemaría said, at times the greatest value we can draw from these situations is the need to anchor ourselves with greater trust in God: "This uncertainty is one of the bounties of God's Love, which leads me to hold tightly, like a child, to the arms of my Father, fighting every day a little so as not to separate myself from Him. Then I am sure

that God will not let me out of his hand.”^[1] In this time of prayer we can ask our Lord to help us discover the meaning of the daily events in our life, and not to lose our joy when we fail to understand them. For we know that He always sees us, accompanies us, blesses us and watches over us.

AFTER his disciples several times fail to understand his words, our Lord again tells them: “The Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day” (*Mt* 17:22-23). It might seem that by now his disciples would have acquired a certain familiarity with their Master’s surprising announcements. But the Gospel shows us that they are still far from possessing the supernatural vision needed to

understand his words. On hearing this announcement “they were greatly distressed” (*Mt 17:23*).

The apostles let their vision become clouded by sadness. This feeling prevents them from realizing that our Lord is actually giving them the key to the joy that their hearts are lacking: that the meaning of his passion is that He will rise again and free them from sin. Sadness prevents them from being able to rejoice in the good news of salvation. That is why some “desert Fathers described it as a worm of the heart, which erodes and hollows out its host.”^[2]

Sadness focuses our attention on everything that doesn't accord with our own expectations, and makes it difficult for us to enjoy all the good things we have around us.

In our daily life, our Lord continues to announce to us, as he did to the apostles, times of suffering and

resurrection. He does this through our daily jobs, and through the relationships in our lives. Every event, every person, is in a certain sense a message from God. If we receive them with the joy of the resurrection, we will be able to intuit the meaning of what we find painful. “As much as life may be filled with contradictions, defeated desires, unrealized dreams, lost friendships, thanks to Jesus’ resurrection we can believe that everything will be redeemed. Jesus rose again not only for himself, but also for us, to redeem all the happiness that has remained unfulfilled in our lives. Faith casts out fear, and the resurrection of Christ removes sadness like the stone from the tomb.”^[3] —

BEING witnesses to the apostles’ lives should fill us with consolation. They

had faults, doubts, sadness... But they were never lacking in simplicity. For example, they express their doubts clearly. When faced with their failure to expel the demon from the young boy, they ask: “Why could we not cast it out?” (*Mt* 17:19). At another time they want to know the meaning of our Lord’s way of teaching: “Why do you speak to them in parables?” (*Mt* 13:10). Nor do they hide their feelings: they express their joy when experiencing the glory of Tabor – “Lord, it is well that we are here” (*Mt* 17:4) – and their sadness at the second announcement of the passion (cf. *Mt* 17:23). St. Josemaría invited us to focus on this virtue of the disciples: “Look: the apostles, for all their evident and undeniable defects, were sincere, simple... transparent. You too have evident and undeniable defects. May you not lack simplicity.”^[4] —

This virtue helps us to abandon ourselves in God's hands, to anchor ourselves in his security and not in our own. Every day offers us many opportunities to embody this apostolic attitude: to turn to God as children, without the need for brilliant speeches; to love people as he made them, without wanting to change them to our liking; to live in the present, and not in fantasies; to express to Jesus with trust any doubts we may have... Simplicity drew God's eyes to the Virgin Mary. "In her littleness, Mary wins Heaven first. The secret of her success is precisely that she recognizes her lowliness, that she recognizes her need. With God, only those who recognize themselves as nothing can receive the all. Only those who empty themselves can be filled by him. And Mary is the one 'full of grace' (Lk 1:28) precisely because of her humility."^[5] —

[1] St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, XIV Station.

[2] Francis, Audience, 7 February 2024.

[3] Ibid.

[4] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 932.

[5] Francis, Angelus, 15 August 2021.

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