

Meditations: Monday of the Tenth Week of Ordinary Time

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

- Responding compassionately
- Happiness and eternal life
- The listeners' surprise

JESUS MET his apostles in an inconspicuous place, a hilly area overlooking the Sea of Galilee. They were tired and needed a break after the intensity of days of travel

through towns and villages proclaiming the Kingdom of God and healing the sick. But they realised that people were looking for Christ: crowds of people from all over Israel wanted to hear him. Jesus looked at the crowd with compassion and delivered a sermon that would leave a deep impression on all those present: He talked to them about the Beatitudes (cf. *Mt* 5:1-12; *Lk* 6:20-26).

We have probably felt like Jesus and his disciples in that situation. After a day of intense work, we come home ready to unwind and enjoy a well-deserved rest, but we open the door to find people looking for us: a spouse asking for help, children crying for attention, a parent needing care...

Christ postponed the rest He was looking for because he looked at the crowd seeking Him with compassion. He could not rest quietly when so

many people longed to hear Him speak. He knew his words could set their hearts on fire. He had come into the world to save them and share the good news. Similarly, "if we stay in touch with the Lord and do not anesthetise the deepest part of ourselves, the things to do will not have the power to cause us to get winded or devour us."^[1] The spouse, child, or parent looking for help might delay the rest we long for, but going to meet them will remind us of our true identity and give us a heart like Jesus', able to sympathise with others' needs.

THE BEATITUDES are part of a discourse about one of our most important questions: what is the path to happiness? "We all certainly desire to live happily;" St. Augustine wrote, "and there is no human being but

assents to this statement almost before it is made."^[2] They also touch on another key question: is there life after death? Jesus does not limit himself to offering a bit of advice about leading more or less happy lives, but invites us to look toward eternity. The Beatitudes are therefore a path that expresses the twofold desire that God has placed in our hearts: to seek genuine happiness on earth and attain eternal happiness.

These two desires do not contradict each other. "I am every day more convinced that happiness in Heaven is for those who know how to be happy on earth," St. Josemaria said.^[3] Jesus doesn't ask us to accumulate suffering on earth in order to rejoice later in paradise. The saints were people who knew how to be happy in this world. They experienced sorrow and disappointment, of course, like us, but these setbacks didn't rob them of the joy. Their happiness was

not founded on things they bought or found: they welcomed it as a free gift. "Beatitude, holiness, is not a life plan made up only of effort and renunciation, but is above all the joyful discovery of being God's beloved children. And this fills you with joy. It is not a human achievement, it is a gift we receive: we are holy because God, who is the Holy One, comes to dwell in our lives."^[4]

THE APOSTLES and the crowd heard Jesus' words with amazement. Up until then, they had thought that human prosperity was a sign of God's love. By that logic, if someone had many possessions and a good reputation, it meant that God wanted to reward his faithfulness to the Law. If someone was sick or poor, it meant that he or his parents were sinners.

They were surprised to hear Jesus say that the poor in spirit, sorrowful and suffering would be blessed.

They would have reacted in different ways. Some people might have dismissed Jesus' words altogether: they didn't believe it was possible to live a happy life in those circumstances. Some recognised the beauty of his ideas but thought they were idealistic and unrealistic because of our human weakness. Others, however, welcomed Jesus' message wholeheartedly. They were listening to someone who understood what they suffered and struggled with — poverty, injustice, discomfort... — and He told them that these things were not divine punishments or obstacles to eternal happiness. On the contrary, they could be part of the path that made them heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven.

God is not a distant being. He "takes an interest in us, He loves us, He has entered personally into the reality of our history, He has communicated himself, even to the point of taking flesh. [...] He came down from his heaven to immerse himself in the human world, in our world, and to teach 'the art of living,' the road to happiness."^[5] We can ask the Virgin Mary to teach us how to share the Gospel, taking on others' problems and showing the beauty of living the Beatitudes with her Son.

^[1]Pope Francis, Angelus, 18-VII-2021.

^[2]St. Augustine, *De moribus ecclesiae* 1, 3, 4.

^[3]St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 1005.

^[4]Pope Francis, Angelus, 1-XI-2021.

^[5] Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 28-XI-2012.

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