

Meditations: Saturday of the First Week of Lent

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

- Jesus commands us to love our enemies
- God makes it rain on both the good and the bad
- Taking the battle to our own life

LOVE your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Mt 5:44). These words of Christ are among the most striking in his entire preaching. Perhaps they often stand in contrast to our most immediate reactions. We

realize that we are not being asked for something superficial, as though we were simply to give in to those who do us harm. Rather we are being asked for much more: to love and pray for these people.

“Jesus’ words are clear. And this is not an option, it is a command. He is well aware that loving enemies exceeds our possibilities, but this is why he became man: not to leave us as we are, but to transform us into men and women capable of a greater love, that of his Father and ours . . . This command, to respond to insult and wrongdoing with love, has created a new culture in the world: ‘a culture of mercy.’ It is the revolution of love, whose protagonists are the martyrs of all times.”^[1]

To achieve this, we will put all our hope in grace. *I will obey your laws; never abandon me* (Ps 119:8), we pray with the psalmist. This help from

God not only acts in our will, but also in our intellect and heart. “I think I don’t have any enemies,” Saint Josemaría wrote, in a time of persecution. “I have met, in my life, persons who have done me harm, positive harm. But I don’t think they are enemies: I’m too little to have them. Nevertheless, from now on, they are included in the list of my benefactors, in order to commend them daily to our Lord.”^[2]

“WHAT REASON DO YOU HAVE for not loving?” Saint John Chrysostom asks. “That the other person responded to your kindness with insults? That he wanted to shed your blood in gratitude for your benefits? But, if you love for Christ, these are reasons that will move you to love even more. For what destroys the friendships of this world is what

strengthens the charity of Christ. How? First, because that ungrateful person is the cause of a greater prize for you. Second, because that person needs more help and more intense care.”^[3] How dull the world would be if we were all the same, and if we found everyone equally pleasant. But this is not the case, and Jesus asks us to love, pray for and serve everyone. We see the opposite reaction in the words of Cain, filled with envy and hatred: *Am I my brother's keeper?* (*Gen 4:9*).

If we turn our eyes to Christ, his love for all men and women resounds in our soul: *That you may be children of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust* (*Mt 5:45*). “It will do us good, today, to think of an enemy – I think we all have one – someone who has done us harm or who wants to do us harm or who tries to do so.

Let us pray for that person. Let us ask the Lord to give us the grace to love them.”^[4] But we don’t have to think of faraway places, battlefields, or powerful enemies. Perhaps in our own home we need to struggle to understand, forgive and not hold a grudge against a brother or sister, a son or daughter, or our spouse. How often we have seen that grace makes possible what we had not even imagined we were capable of before.

“MEN without remedy are those who stop looking at their own sins and focus on those of others,” Saint Augustine said. “They don’t look for what needs to be corrected in themselves, but what they can criticize in others. And, unable to excuse themselves, they are always ready to accuse others.”^[5] Truly striving to love our enemies entails

the effort, at the same time, to learn to focus on our own weaknesses, on our faults, on everything in our own lives that still has to be more closely identified with Christ. This attitude is filled with a realism that is much more practical, since, with God's help, what lies within our power to change is what we have in our heart. We abandon an imaginary battlefield – the lives of others – and strive to fill the world with good in a struggle much closer at hand. We leave it to God to change the course of history, while we strive to rectify what we have in our hands.

“We have to understand everyone; we must live peaceably with everyone; we must forgive everyone. We shall not call injustice justice; we shall not say that an offence against God is not an offence against God, or that evil is good. When confronted by evil we shall not reply with another evil, but rather with sound doctrine

and good actions: drowning evil in an abundance of good (cf. *Rom 12:21*)."^[6] It is not a question of failing to correct someone when circumstances warrant it. Neither is it a question of being naive, but just the opposite: it is about acquiring the wisdom of God. Mature, generous and discreet love is able to overlook grievances; it doesn't worry about the lack of appreciation others show us, and courageously strives to imitate Christ at the foot of the Cross: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* (*Lk 23:34*). We can ask our Lady, Queen of Peace, to teach us to love all her children, to pray for those who may have hurt us, and to help us bring the battlefield to our own soul.

^[1] Francis, Angelus, 24 February 2019.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *Intimate Notes*, 28 October 1931, quoted in *The Way. Critical-historical edition*, point 838.

^[3] Saint John Chrysostom, Homily on Saint Matthew, 60, 3.

^[4] Francis, Homily, 19 June 2018.

^[5] Saint Augustine, Sermon 19.

^[6] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 182.