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Meditations: Saturday of the Twentieth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 20th week of Ordinary Time.

- Preaching and practicing
- Our only concern, God's glory
- Turning off the "autopilot"

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THE SCRIBES and Pharisees often gave our Lord the opportunity to

teach the crowd about the path to salvation. On one occasion, Jesus refers to them as teachers who occupy the chair of Moses, and consider themselves his successors. However, unlike the patriarch, “they preach, but do not practice” (*Mt* 23:3). Their lives are seen by the people as lacking in coherence. For “they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger” (*Mt* 23:4). In contrast, Jesus does what He teaches people to do. “He is the first to practice the commandment of love, which he teaches to everyone.”^[1] —

A true teacher stands out because his deeds support the truths he proclaims. And thus his life is an attractive example to those who cross his path. Christians who live with authenticity what they believe in become a sign of credibility. Their

life doesn't go unnoticed or seem insipid, but rather awakens in others the desire to draw closer to God.

“How I wish your bearing and conversation were such that, on seeing or hearing you, people would say: this man reads the life of Jesus Christ.”^[2] —

Certainly, the principal reason that motivates Christians to behave in accord with what they are trying to teach is not only the desire to set a good example. This attitude, when it stems from vanity, is also criticized by our Lord when He points to certain Pharisees who fast and pray, but only “to be seen by men” (*Mt* 23:5). “For example, when you think of a study you are undertaking, do you think only of promoting yourself, of your own interests, or also to serve the community? There, one can see the intention of each one of us.”^[3] —

If we ever notice that our main motive for doing good is what others

think, we can always rectify our intention and act out of love, seeking in all things to please God. “We do not live for earthly glory, nor for our own honor, but for the honor of God, for the glory of God, for the service of God. This alone moves us.”^[4] —

OUR LORD continues to criticize the lack of authenticity in some of the scribes and Pharisees: “They make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men” (*Mt 23:5-7*). Ultimately, these teachers were more concerned with the admiration and opinion of others than with giving glory to God.

Pride ruins the value of anything good that a person tries to

accomplish. St. Josemaría said that, in the Christian life, humility is “like salt which seasons all foods. For even though a particular act may seem virtuous, it cannot be if it is the consequence of pride, vanity or foolishness – if we do it thinking only about ourselves, putting ourselves before the service of God, the good of souls, and the glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When our attention is focused on ourselves, when we wonder whether we will be praised or criticized, we do ourselves a lot of harm. We should be concerned only about God.”^[5]

Humility is the foundation of the spiritual life. “If you ask me,” St. Augustine said, “what is the most essential element in the teaching and morality of Jesus Christ, I would answer you: the first is humility, the second is humility, and the third is humility.”^[6] In our prayer today, we can ask our Lord to help us focus on

Him and to be concerned only about his glory. Humility brings with it a healthy self-forgetfulness that uncomplicates and brightens our life. It enables us to recognize God's generosity and to joyfully contemplate the beauty of created goods, in which we discover a reflection of divine love.

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA tells us that she once heard God say to her: "You ask Me how to know and love Me, the supreme Truth. This is the path for anyone who wants to come to know Me and enjoy my Love: never cease to know yourself, and when you are lowered in the valley of humility, then in yourself you will come to know Me. It is in this knowledge that you will find all that you lack, all that is necessary for you. In the knowledge of yourself you will

become humble, since you will see that you, in yourself, are nothing, and that your being comes from Me since I loved you before you existed.”^[7] —

When we get to know ourselves well, we realize that we carry the treasure of grace in earthen vessels. And we recognize what can harm our soul and try to keep it at bay. At the same time, we realize that no one is a good judge in their own case, so we seek the help of someone who can guide us in our spiritual life and support us when we need it most. We also face sincerely what causes us exhaustion or stress, and try to embrace those moments with serenity and a sporting spirit, seeking a way to rest that will enable us to regain our strength. This attitude manifests a self-knowledge based on humility: we admit we are not superhuman nor do we have unlimited energy.

“Knowing oneself is not difficult, but it is laborious: it entails *patient soul-searching*. It requires the capacity to stop, to ‘deactivate the autopilot,’ to acquire awareness of our way of acting, of the feelings that dwell within us, of the recurrent thoughts that condition us, often unconsciously. It also requires that we distinguish between emotions and spiritual faculties. ‘I feel’ is not the same as ‘I am convinced’; ‘I feel like’ is not the same as ‘I want.’ Thus, we come to recognize that the view we have of ourselves and of reality is at times somewhat distorted. To realize this is a grace!”^[8] Mothers are often those who know their children best – sometimes even better than the children themselves. We ask our Lady to help us get to know ourselves better, so that we can follow our Lord with humility and simplicity.

^[1] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 30 October 2011.

[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 2.

[3] Francis, Audience, 5 October 2022.

[4] St. Josemaría, *Letter 1*, no. 21.

[5] St. Josemaría, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, no. 176.

[6] St. Augustine, *Letter 118*, 22.

[7] St. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, Part I, ch. 1.

[8] Francis, Audience, 5 October 2022.

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