Meditations: Saturday of the Twenty-Fourth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-fourth week of Ordinary Time.

- Jesus teaches through parables
- Embracing the word of God
- The role external circumstances play

JESUS TRAVELS through the territory of Galilee with his disciples,

proclaiming the Kingdom of God to those who come to listen to Him. He uses parables in his preaching: short stories that reveal deep truths about spiritual life in simple ways. He takes everyday examples from the world of work, such as sowing, fishing, and household chores. At other times, he draws from social and family life, such as a wedding feast, a father's relationship with his children, or a contractor hiring laborers. He also talks about unusual things, like finding a treasure or an incident on the road. The images He uses are easy to understand and much greater than mere theoretical teaching. "An attractive image makes the message seem familiar, close to home, practical and related to everyday life. A successful image can make people savour the message, awaken a desire and move the will towards the Gospel."[1]

Jesus enjoys using these parables because he understands human nature well. He knows the power of examples drawn from everyday life. His attitude is simple and approachable; He is ready to put Himself in others' shoes. What Christ wants to tell us is not disconnected from the world in which we live. On the contrary, it is closely linked to everyday realities. St. Josemaria wrote, "ask God to grant us, his children, the 'gift of tongues,' the gift of making ourselves understood by all. You can find the reason why I want this 'gift of tongues' in the pages of the Gospel, which abound in parables, in examples which materialise the doctrine and illustrate spiritual truths, without debasing or degrading the word of God. All of us, both the learned and the less learned, find it easier to reflect on and understand God's message through these human images."[2] We do so not just to

"decorate" the things we want to say, but in order to love other people like Christ did.

IN THE parable of the sower, Jesus explains that the seeds that did not fall on good ground were eaten by birds; or when they sprouted, they quickly withered due to lack of moisture or were choked by thorns. However, those that fell on good soil produced abundant fruit, even a hundredfold (cf. *Lk* 8:5-8). The sower scatters the seed across the field without paying much attention to how it will be received, sowing it generously and hoping that it will take root. The seed, in its deepest sense, is Christ Himself, who God has given to us: "Those who hear the Word with faith and become part of the little flock of Christ, have received the Kingdom itself. Then, by

its own power the seed sprouts and grows until harvest time."[3]

"This Parable of the Sower is somewhat the 'mother' of all parables, because it speaks about listening to the Word. It reminds us that the Word of God is a seed which in itself is fruitful and effective; and God scatters it everywhere, paying no mind to waste. Such is the heart of God! Each one of us is ground on which the seed of the Word falls; no one is excluded!"[4] We receive God Himself. Thus the way for this seed to take root in us is not primarily conformity to a moral code or acceptance of an intellectual doctrine, but a loving response to the God who comes out to meet us.

To some extent, whether the seed will sprout and bear fruit depends on us. God holds out happiness to everyone, but He does not force us to take it: each person has to freely

choose to embrace the gift. God made us free, as this parable shows. "An ardent desire for freedom, the demand for it on the part of persons and peoples, is a positive sign of our times. Acknowledging the freedom of each woman and man means acknowledging that they are persons: masters of their own acts and responsible for them, able to direct their own lives. Although freedom does not always lead everyone to develop into their best selves, we can never exaggerate its importance, since if we were not free we would not be able to love."[5]

THOUGH THE language Jesus uses is simple, his disciples ask Him to explain the parable. The Master then enumerates the reasons why the seed does not sprout in the soil and God's word does not take root in people's

lives: the devil's influence, superficiality in front of difficulties, worldly wealth or concerns... He tells them that the good soil refers to *those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience* (*Lk* 8:15).

At times we blame external circumstances when things don't go as planned, as when unforeseen events complicate work projects, family activities, or social gatherings. However, St. Josemaria invites us to face these complications, even when they seem to affect the seed, in a holy way. In other words, he urges us not to fall into what he called "mystical wishful thinking": "if only I hadn't married, if only I hadn't this profession, if only I were healthier, if only I were young, if only I were old..."[6] God comes to meet us in the present, here and now, even when we least expect it.

The parable teaches us that external circumstances do not have the final say; our free decisions are definitive in our reception of the divine gift. With the action of grace and our personal effort, we can gradually remove everything that chokes the seed. Our Lady, a fertile field in whom God Himself became incarnate, will help us prepare the ground for Jesus to come to life in our hearts.

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[1] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 157.

[2] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 895.

[3] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 5.

[4] Pope Francis, Angelus, 12-VII-2020.

[5] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 9-I-2018, no. 1.

[6] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 116.