

Meditations: Sunday of the Sixth Week of Ordinary Time (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 6th week of Ordinary Time.

- The Law's newness
- Instrument of freedom
- Root of sin

AFTER PRONOUNCING the Beatitudes, Jesus continues the Sermon on the Mount by speaking

about the Law. Right from the start, our Lord doesn't present himself as someone who has come to abolish what Moses or the prophets had said, but rather to fulfill their words (cf. *Mt 5:17*). And this fulfillment, this deeper meaning, implies understanding the Law not as something external, foreign to the person, that requires doing violence to oneself in striving to fulfill it. Rather God's precepts are tailored to our hearts and are meant to transform us and prepare us for true happiness.

The Psalmist declares: blessed are those who keep the Lord's commandments "and seek him with all their heart" (*Ps 119:2*). The Book of Sirach also stresses that God "knows every human action" (*Sir 20*): He doesn't look only at the external deed, but also at the intention behind it. Jesus doesn't want us to act simply out of the desire to fulfil, since this

attitude can lead to “formalism”: striving externally to carry out what is established, but without perceiving the good it brings to our own lives. Our Lord wants us to be moved by a love like his, which often rose above even the Law.

“The newness of Jesus consists essentially in the fact that he himself ‘fulfils’ the commandments with the love of God, with the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within him. And we, through faith in Christ, can open ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit who makes us capable of sharing in divine love. So it is that every precept becomes true as a requirement of love, and all join in a single commandment: love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.”^[1]

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, some people have viewed the Law as an arbitrary imposition by God. This mentality leads to the belief that the only reason to obey it is because He has decreed it, so that one could even say: “God has established a commandment, but He could have also decreed its opposite.” This approach prevents us from perceiving the goodness of divine precepts and the profound rationality that underpins them. The commandments are not “whims,” but rather respond to the desire for happiness deep in the human heart.

Rather than arbitrary impositions, the commandments should be seen as “an instrument of freedom, helping me to be freer, to not be a slave to passion and sin. When one gives in to temptation and passion, one is not the master and agent of one’s own life, but rather one becomes incapable of managing it

with willingness and responsibility.”^[2] God, with his Law, shows us a path that satisfies the deep thirst for happiness that we all have; a path by which we become more masters of ourselves because our freedom grows ever greater. Therefore the gravity of sin lies not so much in the failure to comply with a rule, but in the harm we do to ourselves. We lose control of our lives and allow our passions to dominate us.

As Saint Josemaría said: “Freedom finds its true meaning when it is put to the service of the truth that redeems, when it is spent in seeking God’s infinite Love, which liberates us from all forms of slavery.”^[3] Our Lord’s commandments don’t curtail our freedom, but quite the contrary: “It is *lex perfecta libertatis* (cf. Jas 1:25), the perfect law of freedom, like the Gospel itself, since all of it is summed up in the law of love – not

only as an exterior rule that requires love, but also as the interior grace that gives us the strength to love.”^[4]

BESIDES pointing to the full meaning of the Law as a path that frees our heart to love, Jesus in his discourse encourages us to reflect on the origin of evil. Mosaic law prohibited murder and adultery, but Christ goes further: “Everyone who is angry with a brother shall be liable to judgment” (*Mt 5:22*); and “everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (*Mt 5:28*). Hence the fullness of the Law, the new Gospel brought by Christ, involves not only external actions, but also the inner acts of the person: affections, desires, emotions....

Jesus' teaching addresses the root of sin. Murder is preceded by the desire to harm another person. Adultery results from rejecting one's spouse and desiring to possess another person. These evils take shape, first and foremost, in the depths of one's own heart. And after taking root there, they manifest themselves through specific actions. That is why our Lord encourages us to turn our gaze inward and reflect on the motives that give rise to our actions. As He will say on another occasion: "What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery" (*Mt 15:18-19*).

Saint Josemaría insisted on the need to examine one's conscience in order to recognize the origin of our sins. Therefore we can ask ourselves: How do I examine my life in the light of Christ? "Take a good look at the way

you behave. You will see that you are full of faults that harm you and perhaps also those around you . . . You need to make a good examination of conscience every day. It will lead you to form definite resolutions to improve, because it will have made you really sorry for your shortcomings, omissions and sins.”^[5] God, with his grace, will help us to welcome into our souls the fullness of the Law that his Son revealed. We can address these words of the founder of Opus Dei to the Virgin Mary: “If there is anything in me that displeases you, tell me, so that we may uproot it.”^[6]

^[1] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 13 February 2011.

^[2] Francis, Angelus, 16 February 2020.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 27.

^[4] Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 9 January 2018.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 481.

^[6] *Ibid.*, no. 108.

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