

Meditations: Thursday of the Eighteenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist
our prayer during the 18th
week of Ordinary Time.

- Who is Christ for us?
- Love for Peter's successor
- Contrasts in Saint Peter's life

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JESUS is in Caesarea Philippi. There
he asks his disciples a direct

question: “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” The apostles echo the opinions they have heard about our Lord: “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Then Jesus asks them another question, this time more personal: “But who do you say that I am?” The Twelve are hard-pressed to answer this second question. Only Peter, thanks to divine prompting, gives the correct answer: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (*Mt* 16:13-15).

“If someone asks us the question, ‘Who is Jesus Christ?’, we should say what we have learned: He is the Saviour of the world, which we recite in the Creed. It is a little more difficult to answer the question of who Jesus Christ is ‘for me.’”^[1] To answer this question we need, like Peter, to look at our own life, to discover all the times that God has

come to meet us, to be ready to listen to what he wants to tell us. But, above all, we need to be ready to let our Lord be who He is, and not who we want Him to be. To answer Jesus' question we need to constantly purify our image of who the Son of God is, in an effort that will accompany us all our life.

If we think, for example, that the Son of God seeks above all that we never make mistakes, and pays more attention to our errors than to our successes, it will be difficult to develop a healthy understanding of Him or give a true image of Him in our apostolate. In contrast, those who have welcomed divine mercy, and know they are forgiven by Christ each day, will be able to offer a clearer image of who Jesus really is. St. Paul, because of his authentic relationship with Christ, knew that He was someone "who loved me and gave himself for me" (*Gal 2:20*).

PETER'S answer moved Jesus to exclaim: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (*Mt 16:17-18*). Strengthened by God's gift, Peter is called to be Christ's representative on earth. He will be at the head of the new people of God, the Church, which he will govern together with the other apostles.

St. Josemaría sensed that God had placed in his heart a deep love for the Roman Pontiff. When he first arrived in Rome, he spent the whole night praying for the Church and the Pope. As time went by, he recognized that this love became "more theological."^[2] — that is, more aware of its reasons, its importance and its supernatural character, and not guided only by human parameters. It was, therefore, an affection that was

not at the mercy of storms; it did not depend on a greater or lesser affinity, but on the words spoken by Christ.

On the morning of his death, the founder of Opus Dei asked someone close to Paul VI to convey the following message to him: “For years I have been offering the Holy Mass for the Church and for the Pope. You can assure him – because you have heard me say it many times – that I have offered my life to our Lord for the Pope, whoever he may be.”^[3] We can ask St. Josemaría for the same love for the Roman Pontiff – a divine gift for which he gave thanks each day, and which is expressed in constant prayer for him and in the desire to follow his teachings.

AFTER Peter’s confession, Jesus announced to the apostles that he had to go to Jerusalem, where he would “suffer many things . . . and be killed, and on the third day be

raised.” His words surely filled the disciples with astonishment. That is why Peter, who perceived the bewilderment of the others, expressed his disagreement with what he had just heard. Taking our Lord aside, he “began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’” Jesus flatly rejected his advice: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men” (*Mt 16:21-23*).

Jesus uses strong words for the one who, shortly before, had been named the rock on which to build his Church. It would not be the last time that Peter would witness such contrasts in his own life. During the Last Supper he assured our Lord that he was ready to die for Him. But a few hours later, he denied three times ever having known Him. Perhaps we too have had similar experiences, realizing the weakness

of our convictions and aims. Sometimes we too feel like a “rock,” capable of doing anything for God, and soon after we are defeated in a small or big battle.

We are consoled by the fact that, despite Peter’s mistakes, Jesus is faithful to his word, because He recognizes the apostle’s sincere repentance and desire to love. In the conversation on the lake shore after the resurrection, He will once again invite Peter to care for his people. Our Lord always calls us again. He knows our limitations better than anyone else and counts on them to make us humble and to learn to trust in the strength God gives us. “We are creatures and full of defects,” St. Josemaría said. “I would almost say that we will always need defects. They are the shadow which shows up the light of God’s grace and our resolve to respond to God’s kindness. And this interplay of shadows and

light will make us human, humble, understanding and generous.”^[4] We ask Mary to intercede for us so that we may know how to begin again like Peter, trusting in our Lord’s calls.

^[1] Francis, Homily, 25 October 2018.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Letter* 17, no. 19.

^[3] Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, *Immersed in God*, p. 232.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 76.

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