

Meditations: Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent

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

- God comes in search of us
- Always beginning and beginning again
- Trusting more in God and less in ourselves

“BEHOLD, the Lord will come, and all his holy ones with him; and on that day there will be a great light.”^[1]

Christ comes into the world to forgive us, to save us, as we read in the Gospel of today's Mass: *What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?* (Mt 18:12). The Good Shepherd goes out to look for those who, for one reason or another, have distanced themselves. He returns again now to fill us with his life, to strengthen us in our call to holiness.

We want to hear again the voice of the one described in the first reading today: *He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young* (Is 40:11). Our Lord is determined that we experience the joy holiness brings and insists on searching for us: "He hastens to look for the hundredth sheep that was

lost. How marvelous is God's gracious kindness, who seeks out man in this way; how great is the dignity of man, sought out in this way by God!"^[2]

We too hasten to go out to meet Him, ready to renew our love. "A day of salvation, of eternity, has come for us. Once again the call of the Divine Shepherd can be heard, those affectionate words: *Vocavi te nomine tuo* — I have called you by your name. Just like our mother, he calls us by our name, even by the name we were affectionately called at home. There, in the depths of our soul, he calls us and we just have to answer: *Ecce ego quia vocasti me* — here I am, for you have called me, and this time I'm determined not to let time flow by like water over rounded stones, leaving no trace behind."^[3] We want this Advent to leave a deep mark on our souls; hearing the Good Shepherd call us by

our name, we want his grace to renew us.

IN THE WILDERNESS prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley will be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain (Is 40:3-4).

The words of the prophet Isaiah in the first reading at Mass today invite us to prepare ourselves as well as possible to receive the grace that our Lord wants to grant us with his coming.

We realize that we should improve in so many things: in our desire for a true contemplative life, in our spirit of sacrifice, in the way we work, in our concern for souls, in our apostolate... And not in a general

way but in specific points: for example, in the advice we receive in spiritual direction and confession, or in that specific virtue that we know does us so much good. We can aspire, with God's grace, to always be improving little by little, although sometimes this happens more slowly than we would like: "I have never liked biographies of saints which naively – but also with a lack of sound doctrine – present their deeds as if they had been confirmed in grace from birth. No. The true life stories of Christian heroes resemble our own experience: they fought and won; they fought and lost. And then, repentant, they returned to the fray."^[4]

We need to keep enkindled the interior impulse that spurs us to go out to seek Jesus, that constantly impels us towards the holiness He wants for us. "I am still advancing," says Saint Augustine. "I am still going

forward, I am still on the way, I am still struggling, I have not yet arrived. Therefore, if you too are going forward, if you are struggling, if you are thinking about what has to come about, then forget about the past, don't look back on it, so as not to anchor yourself in what you are looking back on. If you say 'it is enough!', you are lost." ^[5]

AFTER RECOUNTING the parable of the shepherd who goes out in search of one of his sheep, Jesus concludes: *It is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish (Mt 18:14).* Our Lord never abandons us. There lies our hope. Our life will always contain stumbles and falls, but that very weakness, when we recognize it as such, attracts God's strength. He who is the Lord of hosts guides the battle:

“a commander on the battlefield esteems more the soldier who, after having fled, returns and forcefully attacks the enemy, than the one who never turned his back, but neither did he ever carry out a courageous action.”^[6] The person who never falls is not on the path to sanctity, for such a soul does not exist, but rather the one who gets up quickly and returns to the struggle.

The Christian life is a life of spiritual combat. It is a battle filled with peace, sporting spirit, joy, because it is grounded above all on trust in God. “Jesus understands our weakness and draws us to himself on an inclined plane. He wants us to make an effort to climb a little each day. He seeks us out, just as he did the disciples of Emmaus, whom he went out to meet. He sought Thomas, showed himself to him and made him touch with his fingers the open wounds in his hands and side. Christ

is always waiting for us to return to him, for he knows our weakness.”^[7]

Hence we need to be humble before God, like a small child who tries to behave well and, although he may often go astray, always senses his parents’ unconditional love. Our Lord is pleased when we turn to Him for help and, when necessary, for his forgiveness. There lies in large measure the secret of holiness. We also rely on the help of our Blessed Mother. Mary always helps us to start over, to let ourselves be found again by the Good Shepherd: “Through Mary, your Mother, have recourse to the Merciful Love of Jesus. A “*miserere*,” and lift up your heart! And now begin again.”^[8]

^[1] Tuesday of the 2nd week of Advent, Entrance Antiphon.

^[2] Saint Bernard, Sermon on the Lord’s Advent, I, 7.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 7.

^[4] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 76.

^[5] Saint Augustine, Sermon 169, 18.

^[6] Saint Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospels*, 34, 4.

^[7] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 75.

^[8] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 711.

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