

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

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-ninth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: souls are like good wine; being patient with our weaknesses; embracing suffering patiently.

- Souls are like good wine
- Being patient with our weaknesses
- Embracing suffering patiently

JESUS ONCE told the parable of a man who had a vineyard. He went *to look for fruit in it* (Lk 13:6) several times, but never found any. After three years of this, he judged that it was no longer worthwhile to cultivate the vineyard and asked the gardener to cut it down. What was the use of taking up space with a plant that produced nothing? The gardener, however, replied: *Sir, leave it for one more year, and I will dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down* (Lk 13:8-9). Sometimes, like the vineyard, certain people may not seem to bear fruit. We try to help them grow, encourage them to overcome faults, give up bad habits, develop virtues, and acquire good habits... But they are slow to respond, in spite of our efforts. Our first reaction may be like the man in the parable: we think it is pointless to keep trying.

Then we can remember that patience is one of the first characteristics of charity named by Saint Paul (cf. 1 *Cor* 13:4). When we don't see the fruits we hoped for, we have the opportunity to show the authenticity of our love. Our patience mirrors God's love for us, as well as the love other people – especially our parents and teachers – have shown us in the past. Recognizing that God and others look at us with patience encourages us "to be understanding with others, for we are convinced that souls, like good wine, improve with time."^[1] Growth doesn't happen overnight. It's a process that takes years and requires the patient love of the gardener. "Grace, like nature, normally acts gradually. We cannot, properly speaking, move ahead of grace. But in all that does depend on us we have to prepare the way and co-operate when God grants grace to us. [...] Grace normally takes its time, and is not inclined to act with

violence. Encourage your holy impatience, but don't lose your patience."^[2] —

THE VIRTUE of patience also applies to the way we view ourselves. There may be times when we grow impatient because our efforts seem fruitless. We struggle to grow in a particular virtue or root out some vice, and it seems to us that our efforts don't yield any visible results. It can be helpful to remember that God looks at us like the gardener in the parable. "Faced with our infidelity, God shows himself to be 'slow to anger' (cf. *Ex* 34:6; cf. *Nm* 14:18): instead of venting his distaste for man's evil and sin, he reveals himself to be greater, always ready to start afresh with infinite patience."^[3] —

When we recognize our weaknesses with humility and make a sincere effort to overcome them, they can be like the fertilizer that makes the plants grow. They may be unpleasant, and we may feel like our lives bear little fruit, but if we keep patiently working the soil, trusting that God's grace supports our efforts, green shoots will eventually emerge. This doesn't mean that all our weaknesses will disappear, but alongside the fertilizer in the vineyard, there will be trees full of fruit.

"To win the battles of the soul," Saint Josemaría remarked, "the best strategy often is to bide one's time and apply the suitable remedy with patience and perseverance. Make more acts of hope. Let me remind you that in your interior life you will suffer defeats and you will have ups and downs — may God make them imperceptible — because no one is

free of these misfortunes. But our all powerful and merciful Lord has granted us the precise means with which to conquer. As I have already mentioned, all we have to do is to use them, resolving to begin again and again at every moment, should it prove necessary."^[4] —

THE PACE of modern life is not always conducive to the virtue of patience. What once took large amounts of time — like communication, travel, and work — can now be accomplished almost instantly. We may be tempted to apply the same logic to things that frustrate us: we look for quick solutions to end that suffering. "We need [patience] as the 'essential vitamin' in order to get by, but it is instinctive for us to lose our patience and respond to evil with evil. It is

difficult to stay calm, to control our instincts, to refrain from bad responses, to defuse quarrels and conflicts in the family, at work, or in the Christian community."^[5] —

Impatience sometimes leads us to do what we don't truly want, such as treating someone poorly or giving in to a vice, thinking it is the best way to cut an issue short. Later, however, we regain perspective and realize that circumstances pushed us to act in that way.

Patience is a trait of a mature and free personality: it allows us to overcome frustrations and look to the future with hope. But above all, it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Gal* 5:22), which He grants us if we ask for it. It is also the response Jesus gave before his sufferings during the Passion. "He accepts being arrested, beaten and unjustly condemned, with meekness and mildness. He does not complain before Pilate. He

bears being insulted, spat upon and flogged by the soldiers. He carries the weight of the cross. He forgives those who nail him to the wood, and while on the cross, he does not respond to provocation, but rather offers mercy."^[6] — Jesus embraced suffering with a kind of patience that is "the fruit of a greater love."^[7] — Our Lady did not flee from the Cross either. We can ask her to help us patiently endure our daily struggles, knowing that this virtue is *better than the strength of a hero* (Prov 16:32).

^[1] — Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 78.

^[2] — Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 668.

^[3] — Pope Francis, Audience, 27-III-2024.

^[4] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 219.

^[5] Pope Francis, Audience, 27-III-2024.

^[6] *Ibid.*

^[7] *Ibid.*

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