

Meditations: Tuesday of the Seventeenth Week of Ordinary Time

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

- The weeds of the evil one
- The experience of temptation
- Sowing peace and joy

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WHEN the crowds listening to Jesus have left, the disciples ask Him to explain the meaning of the parable of the wheat and the weeds. In telling this story, our Lord was emphasizing the fact that good and evil will coexist on earth until the end of time. But now He explains it more fully, making clear that his words contain an allegorical meaning. The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed are the children of the Kingdom, while the weeds are the children of the Evil One. These weeds also had a sower, the devil, whom Christ calls “the enemy” (*Mt 13:39*).

The evil present in the world and in our own lives is not the work of God, but of the devil. His greatest cunning is to make us believe that he does not exist. Like the enemy in the parable, he sows when others are asleep, without attracting attention, “like the serpent that silently delivers

poison.”^[1] That is why we do well to watch over our heart and our actions, because the devil usually tries to distance us from God by tempting us in small daily things.

The devil is particularly intent on sowing discord in the fields of the world; that is, on destroying charity and communion in people so that distrust and division may sprout up. In this regard, some personal notes from St. Josemaría are preserved that reflect his struggle to prevent the evil one from sowing weeds in his own heart: “I will be very careful in everything that involves forming judgments about people, not allowing a bad thought of anyone, even if their words or works give reasonable grounds for making such a judgment.”^[2] And then he noted down a series of practical resolutions: “1) Before beginning a conversation or paying a visit to anyone, I will raise my heart to God.

2) I will not be obstinate, even if I have many reasons to be. I will only give my opinion if it is for the glory of God, but without insisting. 3) I will not make negative criticisms: when I cannot praise, I will keep quiet.”^[3] We too can think about how we strive to strengthen charity and communion with others in our inner world and around us, in order to render the sowing of evil fruitless.

WE ALL have experience of the insinuations the devil provokes in our hearts. Jesus himself also experienced temptations when He withdrew into the desert. At the same time, we know that the power and influence of the evil one is limited, because God came down to earth “so that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and

deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage” (*Heb 2:14-15*). Christ is the only Lord. Satan, in the end, is only a creature. It is true that he is allowed to work evil, for reasons we may not fully understand and that are ultimately linked to the mystery of our freedom. But it is also true that God grants us sufficient strength to overcome any temptation and that, even if we were to succumb, his mercy is greater than any sin.

Temptations, in themselves, are not bad: they are tests in which we can grow in love for God and in virtue. Therefore when we face them as what they are (opportunities to unite ourselves more closely with God), we will not let fear or surprise overcome us. The victory of the devil does not always consist in making us fall, but in taking away our peace, in making us think that it is not possible to live close to God with these inclinations.

Saint Josemaría said that he felt “capable of committing the greatest atrocities.”^[4] And he added that it is precisely in the recognition of our weakness that we find our strength. This leads us to be sincere and to ask our Lord and others for help, to be more understanding of the defects and struggles of other people, and to trust in God’s merciful love.

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CHRISTIAN LIFE is not limited to fighting evil. St. Josemaría liked to think of the first Christians as sowers of peace and joy: “Families who lived in union with Christ and who made him known to others. Small Christian communities which were centres for the spreading of the Gospel and its message. Families no different from other families of those times, but living with a new spirit, which spread to all those who were in

contact with them.”^[5] Indeed, they would have been aware of the action of the evil one in the world, and would even have experienced it in their own lives, but this reality did not lead them to become pessimistic or fearful. In the Acts of the Apostles we even see how the attacks they suffered from the authorities in one city led them to preach the Gospel in other places (cf. *Acts* 8:1-4).

The first Christians knew they weren't fighting in isolation. They were part of a community that spurred them to spread peace and joy. By sharing the Bread and the Word they found the strength that helped them to remain united. They knew that they could receive encouragement from one another and, at the same time, they felt the responsibility to take care of the small daily details that reinforce belonging to a family. “A community that cherishes the little details of

love, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father's plan. There are times when, by a gift of the Lord's love, we are granted, amid these little details, consoling experiences of God.”^[6] — Mary will help us to have a heart attentive to these small details, so that we can spread peace and joy in the souls of those around us.

^[1] Francis, Audience, 15 May 2019.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Intimate Notes*, no. 389, 14 November 1931. Cited in *The Way: Critical-Historical edition*, no. 442.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *Intimate Notes*, no. 399, 18 November 1931. Cited in *ibid.*, no. 443.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, no. 163.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 30.

^[6] Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, no. 145.

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