

Meditations: Friday of the First Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can
enrich our prayer during the
First Week in Ordinary Time.

- Bringing our friends to Jesus
- The forgiveness of sin
- We all need good friends.

THE CROWD'S desire to see Jesus is growing steadily throughout the region. The gospel tells us that *there was no longer room ... even about the door* (Mk 2:2). A few days ago we saw

how the whole town was crowding around the door of Simon's house, but now there is no longer any room even there. What Peter said was true: everyone is coming in search of the Teacher. Jesus has set their hearts on fire. He has brought new hope to an occupied and oppressed nation, but this is a different hope, one much greater than they could imagine. Christ's words and miracles have made it seem that the dreams of a people who have been awaiting the Messiah for centuries could actually come true. "Is this really the Messiah?" they wonder. "Are we lucky enough to have him here in this house in Capernaum?" For the simple people surrounding Christ, there can be no greater privilege than to have met the person who has dazzled them with the light of his teaching. They were the underdogs in the society of their time, but they are the ones who have found the great treasure. They, who have

always been the last, have been chosen to lead the people of the promise.

Among the crowd are four friends who have heard of or perhaps seen Jesus. They have a fifth friend who is paralyzed, and it occurs to them that if they manage to bring him to Jesus, there is every chance that he may be cured. But when they get to the house they find such a crush of people that they cannot get near it. In every group there is always one with more outlandish ideas, and it is this one who now suggests lowering their friend down from the roof of the house. They cannot think of any other way of bringing him before Jesus. And we in our prayer, centuries later, can do something similar for our friends. "One cannot communicate closeness to God without experiencing it, without experiencing it every day, without allowing ourselves to be infected by

his tenderness. Each day, without sparing time, we should be before Jesus, bringing him people, situations, as ever-open channels between him and our people.”^[1] —

DISCOVERING JESUS and telling others about him are two sides of the same coin. Every Christian is lucky enough to share Jesus’s own mission. “The light of faith allows us to recognize how infinite God’s mercy is, his grace that works for our good. But that same light also makes us see the responsibility that has been entrusted to us to cooperate with God in his work of salvation.”^[2] —

However, being apostles does not make us better than everyone else. Knowing that we have been chosen fills us with gratitude and stimulates our creativity, as happened to those

four friends. *They removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay (Mk 2:4).*

They want to bring their friend before Jesus; they think that that will be sufficient. *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'My son, your sins are forgiven' (Mk 2:5).* Up on the roof the four friends, astonished, congratulate one another, and perhaps Jesus sends them a humorous glance for having succeeded in their plan: they have managed to slip their friend into the Teacher's heart. They can see the delight in the eyes of their paralyzed friend, very different from his anguished expression as he was being lowered to the ground. They may be surprised that Jesus has forgiven him for his sins, but they can see from his face how liberated he feels.

We would like to feel that way every time Jesus cures us. “Don’t give up just because you’ve done one stupid thing, or even twelve in a row,” said Saint Josemaría. “Did you really think you were incapable of sinning? I’m sixty-eight ... and I’m going to give you some bad news: don’t imagine that when you’re old, everything will be plain sailing. You’ll have the same passions, and perhaps even more complicated than before. So our whole lives are a struggle—but it’s an easy one!”^[3]

AFTER JESUS has said these words of forgiveness, some of the people inside the house start arguing, annoyed that Jesus says he forgives the paralytic’s sins, because that is something only God can do. We are struck by these people’s physical position as recorded by the

Evangelist under the Holy Spirit's inspiration: *Some of the scribes were sitting there (Mk 2:6)*. We know that the people who really loved the paralytic were craning their necks to watch the scene from the roof. Those who complain about Jesus forgiving sins are comfortably seated. Like the four friends in the gospel, we as apostles cannot sit down and wait for things to happen. Our faith in God should lead us to trust the Holy Spirit, who is the true leader of our mission, and set out anew every day.

We see that the four friends neither ask Jesus to cure the paralyzed man, nor get upset because at first he “*only*” forgives the man's sins. They don't try and set the pace for God, but follow at the pace set by Jesus. The ensuing exchange keeps them hoping. Jesus asks the scribes, *Why do you question thus in your hearts?* Perhaps everyone feels the question is addressed to them. The scribes

know perfectly well what he means, but Jesus does not wait for them to answer. He turns to the paralytic and says, *Rise, take up your pallet, and go home.*

The friends watching through the hole in the roof explode with joy and gratitude. They see their friend pick up his stretcher and walk out on his own two feet. They must have hurried down to hug him. How grateful he must have been to his friends! How he must have hugged them, and especially the one who had had the bright idea of letting him down through the roof! We all need good friends to bring us before Jesus. And there is nobody who can do this like Jesus's own Mother. Her imaginative care will always smooth the way back into his company. "Mother of ours, thank you for interceding with Jesus on our behalf. Without you we couldn't have reached him. How true it is that we

always go to Jesus, and return to him,
through Mary!”^[4]—

^[1] Pope Francis, Address, September 12, 2019.

^[2] Pope Francis, Audience, September 29, 2019.

^[3] Notes taken in a family gathering, April 5, 1970.

^[4] Notes taken from a meditation given by Saint Josemaría, April 10, 1937.

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