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Meditations: Tuesday of the Twenty-Eighth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-eighth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: discovering the good in what we do; chastity is a joyful affirmation; redirecting our desires.

- Discovering the good in what we do
- Chastity is a joyful affirmation
- Redirecting our desires

JESUS IS visiting the home of a Pharisee. His host is surprised to see that Jesus sits down to eat without washing before the meal. The Master, knowing the Pharisee's thoughts, said to him, *Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of extortion and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also?* (*Lk* 11:39-40).

Jesus did not condemn the practice of washing. What he wanted to show was that the spirit with which good works are done matters more than how they look. "He told them that they were concerned only with external things. They despised what was interior because they were unaware that what was done with the body also had to be done with the soul."[1]

In this sense, holiness does not consist of adding more and more "good works" to our lives. Genuinely good actions must be accompanied by sincere interior adhesion to that goodness. We must cultivate an attitude that leads us to reflect on the reasons for our actions, ensuring that they have a healthy foundation and tend toward valuable goods, even if their results are not immediately apparent.

For example, striving to manage our anger in order to avoid problems and preserve peace may motivate us for a time and could be partially selfish. If, on the other hand, our motivation is the desire to be serene people who safeguard charity and unity within a group, we will be eager to fight every day, even when we feel a bit irritable, touchy, or resentful. Over time, with God's grace, our effort to be genuinely gentle will strengthen new ideals in our hearts, like the desire to

age amiably, radiating joy and understanding.

ST. JOSEMARÍA often talked about the virtue of chastity as a "joyful affirmation."[2] Such an approach contrasts with those who place excessive emphasis on the "no," as if virtue were just *not* doing, *not* thinking, or *not* looking. Once again, good actions require good soil in which to take root: they need good desires and noble intentions to drive them. Chastity is, therefore, a "yes" to love, because love is what gives it value and meaning. Naturally, one must say "no" to certain actions or attitudes that are contrary to it, which any sensible person perceives as negations of love. Despite the need for some "no's," chastity is an inherently positive reality.

In this struggle, as with any other virtue, it may sometimes be necessary to act against one's inclinations, and in such cases, the "no's" may be more prominent. However, Christian experience shows the importance of remembering that the "no" is not the ultimate goal; it is only a step that, if not followed by others, will only build the capacity for self-control and willpower. Aligning the inclination towards beauty and pleasure means integrating chastity into the good of the whole person: understanding our own desires, purifying them, and integrating them to bring unity to our lives so that our desires and feelings align with our identity and reinforce it more and more. An impure heart is a fragmented heart, without direction; a pure heart, on the other hand, is one that has learned to progressively unify and give harmonious direction to the different dimensions of life.

For this reason, the founder of Opus Dei liked to consider the fruits of a temperate life, one not tied to things that seem to shine but lack real value. "A manly person knows how to do without those things that may harm his soul and he also comes to realise that his sacrifice is more apparent than real; for living this way, with a spirit of sacrifice, means freeing oneself from many kinds of slavery and savouring instead, in the depths of one's heart, the fullness of God's love. Life then takes on again shades and tones which intemperance had tended to blur. We find ourselves able to care for the needs of others, to share what is ours with everyone, to devote our energies to great causes."[3]

SOMETIMES WE may find in ourselves affections contrary to our

identity. Recognizing this reality is the first step in redirecting our desires toward what truly makes us happy. Ignoring or disregarding the valuable information that our passions and feelings offer us can lead to the kind of division that the Lord spoke of: a cup that is perfectly clean on the outside but dirty on the inside; many good deeds but a heart that does not fully enjoy the life it leads. At times, the purification that Jesus asks of us will not so much involve correcting a specific external behavior as it will involve redirecting the latent desires in our hearts – desires that may be manifested as unrealistic aspirations inconsistent with our identity or as unfulfilled small aspirations that we have yet to entrust to the Lord and face with Him.

"For that is the way God made us: brimming with desire. With no exaggeration, we can say that we are

what we desire. For it is our desires that enlarge our gaze and drive our lives forward, beyond the barriers of habit, beyond banal consumerism, beyond a drab and dreary faith, beyond the fear of becoming involved and serving others and the common good."[4] Purifying our desires helps us to enjoy reality as it is because we find opportunities to live out the ideal that nourishes our entire existence in every moment of the day. We learn to savor the valuable happiness that each day offers without looking for escape routes or falling prey to tensions between external and internal actions. Our actions and the aspirations in our hearts will be be consistent with our vocation. We can ask the Virgin Mary to help us gain a greater understanding of our affections so that we can direct them toward the Love that sustains our lives.

[1] Hegemonius, *Acta disputationis Archelai episcopi Mesopotamiae et Manetis haeresiarchae* 21

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

[3] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 84.

[4] Pope Francis, Homily, 6-I-2022.

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