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Meditations: Sunday of the Fifth Week of Lent (Year B)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this season of Lent. The topics are: discovering who Jesus is; the Cross makes our lives complete; love and sacrifice for others.

- Discovering who Jesus is
- The Cross makes our lives complete
- Love and sacrifice for others

THERE ARE only a few days left until Jesus' death on the Cross. The Church invites us to immerse ourselves in the last week of Lent by sharing his feelings. When some Greeks say, *We want to see Jesus* (*Jn* 12:21), something seemingly unrelated overflows from his heart: the awareness that the time for redemption was approaching. *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified* (*Jn* 12:23).

Jesus knows that his Father's project of love – to save humanity – is nearing its culmination. He is about to fulfill his mission on Calvary. This has been his primary desire, which he now decisively fulfills: *Now my soul is troubled; and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour! Father, glorify your name!* (*Jn* 12:27-28). Truly knowing Christ means discovering that his identity is inseparable from the Cross.

Understanding the Lord without his Passion would distort his true message.

Therefore, in response to the request of some Greeks who want to see Him, Christ speaks of the hour of salvation, using the image of the grain of wheat. These are two components that depict who He is. If we want to know Jesus with full fidelity, we cannot reduce him to a mere teacher or a stern prophet: He is God, and He has come at the opportune moment to give his life for us. *Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit* (*Jn* 12:24). "Jesus reveals that for every man and woman who wants to find him, He is the hidden seed ready to die in order to bear much fruit. As if to say: if you wish to know me, if you wish to understand me, look at the grain of

wheat that dies in soil, that is, look at the Cross."[1]

"IN THE Passion, the Cross ceased to be a symbol of punishment and became instead a sign of victory. The Cross is the emblem of the Redeemer: *in quo est salus, vita et resurrectio nostra*: there lies our salvation, our life, and our resurrection."[2] The Cross is so essential in our lives that the first Christian prayer we were taught in childhood was the sign of the cross. And the many crucifixes on the walls of our homes or discreetly carried in our pockets remind us of Jesus' true identity.

The Cross makes our lives complete because evil is defeated through it. Just as a Cross was the culmination of Christ's work of love, so God wants to glorify our existence. In response

to his Son's obedience, the Father does not hesitate to reveal himself: *Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again'* (*Jn* 12:28). We too go through times we could call "moments of Passion," and we overcome them with our loving response. Thus all Christians, who are other Christs, are included in this "I will glorify it again," and Jesus adds: *This voice was for your benefit, not mine.*

However, embracing Christ's Cross does not mean accumulating suffering, making sacrifices until we feel we deserve glory or a reward for our actions. Jesus talks about losing one's life in the context of discreet service. "And what does losing life mean? That is, what does it mean to be the grain of wheat? It means to think less about oneself, about personal interests and to know how to 'see' and to meet the needs of our neighbours, especially the least of

them. To joyfully carry out works of charity towards those who suffer in body and spirit is the most authentic way of living the Gospel. It is the necessary foundation upon which our communities can grow in reciprocal fraternity and welcome."[3]

THUS, BY the will of God (who desires our happiness), ordinary life becomes a way to accompany Jesus on his earthly journey, passing through Calvary to the Resurrection. Although Jesus may sometimes ask us for larger sacrifices, He generally calls us to discover "the Cross of each day, the hidden Cross, without splendour or consolation…"[4] This is how we make Christ triumph, through small, hidden mortifications that only He sees that that, like his Passion, are born of love for others. In a point in *The Way*, St. Josemaría

suggests some discreet mortifications that can help us care for our relationships, imitating Jesus' way of life: "That joke, that witty remark held on the tip of your tongue; the cheerful smile for those who annoy you; that silence when you're unjustly accused; your friendly conversation with people whom you find boring and tactless; the daily effort to overlook one irritating detail or another in the persons who live with you... this, with perseverance, is indeed solid interior mortification."[5]

Our life is a time of encounter, and so it makes sense that many of the sacrifices of our daily lives are meant to make life more pleasant for the people around us. As the Prelate of Opus Dei reminds us, "Growing in cordiality, joyfulness, patience, optimism, refinement and in all the virtues that make living with others agreeable is important for helping

people to feel welcomed and to be happy [...] In contrast, certain ways of expressing oneself can disturb or hinder the creation of an environment of friendship. For example, being overly emphatic in expressing one's own opinion, or giving the impression that we think our own viewpoints are the definitive ones, or not taking an active interest in what the others say, are ways of acting that enclose a person in himself."[6] Love and the Cross are inseparably united. The Virgin Mary, "teacher of the sacrifice that is hidden and silent,"[7] can help us to love our brothers as her Son did: by giving our lives for everyone.

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[1] Pope Francis, Angelus, 21-III-2021.

[2] St. Josemaría, Way of the Cross, Second Station, no. 5.

[3] Pope Francis, Angelus, 18-III-2018.

[4] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 178.

[5] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 173.

[6] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 1-XI-2019, no. 9.

[7] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 509.

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