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Meditations: Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on this Advent weekday.

- A Christian's life is grounded on hope
- Letting God work in our lives
- God carries out marvels through our littleness

"COME, Lord, and do not delay."[1] Advent is a time of hope because our salvation is near. It is imminent:

“The Lord God is coming with all his might.”[2] A Christian’s life is grounded on the treasure of hope. The sacred author defines hope as *a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul* (*Heb* 6:19). The anchor allows the ship to cling to the bottom of the sea; it fixes its position so it doesn’t have to worry about the current and prevents the ship from drifting. Christian hope is based on God’s promises, on his unconditional love, and not on our own strength or possibilities. “It is a new and living hope that comes from God. It is not mere optimism; it is not a pat on the back or an empty word of encouragement, with a passing smile. No. It is a gift from heaven, which we could not have earned on our own.”[3]

When the Jewish people were living in exile in Babylon, the prophets stirred up the people’s hope by announcing a soon-to-come

liberation. In the first reading today we listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah, who invites the people to keep enkindled the flame of hope founded on God, since only He can save them: *I am the Lord, and there is no other . . . there is no other god besides me* (*Is* 45:5.21). Thanks to the Lord's power, *all the offspring of Israel shall triumph and glory* (v. 25).

The virtue of hope protects us from the ups and downs of discouragement and sustains us when a storm threatens to sweep everything away. When our heart lives on hope, there is no room for sterile lamentation and we become capable of achievements that seemed unattainable. With it we can endure the greatest trials. As Saint Josemaria wrote: "A good number of years ago, with a sense of conviction that was growing stronger in me each day, I wrote: 'Put all your hope in Jesus. You yourself have nothing, are worth

nothing, can do nothing. He will act, if only you abandon yourself in him.' Time has gone by, and that conviction of mine has grown even stronger and deeper. I have seen many souls with such hope in God that it has set them marvellously ablaze with love, with a fire that makes the heart beat strong and keeps it safe from discouragement and dejection, even though along the way they may suffer and at times suffer greatly."[4]

HOPE IS shown in the desire to let God act in our lives. Isaiah reminds the people in exile that it is God who is behind everything that happens: *I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe* (*Is* 45:7). The departure from Babylon was not the result of a revolt or an intelligent political or military strategy. God

opened up the path when the time was ripe.

The same thing happens in our own life. It is the Lord, with his merciful action, who brings salvation to our land: *the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and make his footsteps a way* (*Ps* 85:12-13). He is the main actor and the one who writes – counting on our freedom – the script of our own history. God wants us to wage on our part a determined struggle. But we should never forget that everything depends on Him: *apart from me you can do nothing* (*Jn* 15:5). “If ever it seems to you that the horizon is closing in and the earth is meeting the sky, look up at the sky,” Saint Josemaría advised. “For then you will do a lot of good on earth: looking up at the sky.”[5]

“The founder of the Work said: I haven't invented anything. There is Another who has done everything, and I have only tried to be ready to serve as an instrument.”[6] These words of Cardinal Ratzinger, written for the canonization of Saint Josemaría, summarize the secret of holiness: letting God work, abandoning our tasks and concerns in his hands, allowing Him to lead us along the paths He chooses. With this availability, “the doors of the world are opened so that God can become present, to work and transform everything.”[7]

When we wait for something or someone, it is because we have the hope that our desire will be fulfilled. But waiting requires patience and a lot of trust. God has his own times, which do not always coincide with ours. Hope goes hand in hand with patience, which far from showing apathy is a sign of strength. In the

words of Saint Augustine, patience is "like the mark of God residing in us,"[8] which makes us capable of "putting up with and bearing on our shoulders the unpleasant things in life."[9]

WHEN NEWS of Jesus' preaching reaches him in prison, John sends two disciples to ask our Lord: *Are you he who is to come or shall we look for another?* (*Lk* 7:19). Jesus answers by pointing to the fruit of God's action in souls: *The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news preached to them* (v. 22).

John is very clear about his own mission: to prepare the way for the Messiah. And he suspects that his own life is drawing to a close. He

doesn't seek a prominent role for himself. He wants to *decrease* so that Christ may *increase* (cf. *Jn* 3:30). As Benedict XVI said: "He had the deep humility to hold up Jesus as the One sent by God, drawing back so that He might take the lead, and be heard and followed . . . The Truth is Truth; there are no compromises. Christian life demands, so to speak, the 'martyrdom' of daily fidelity to the Gospel, the courage, that is, to let Christ grow within us and let him be the One who guides our thought and our actions."[10] Thus we will experience the healing and transforming effect of God's action in our soul, and we will become good instruments in his hands.

"Look at the example of Saint John the Baptist," Saint Josemaría said, "when he sends his disciples to ask our Lord who he is. Jesus answers by making them ponder on all the miracles he has worked. You will

recall the passage. For over forty years I have taught my children to meditate on it. Our Lord continues to work such miracles now through your hands: people who before couldn't see and now they do; people who couldn't speak, because they had a dumb devil, and they cast it out and speak; people unable to move, paralyzed at the thought of acting supernaturally, and they break out of their torpor and become virtuous and apostolic. Others who seem alive, yet are dead, like Lazarus: *Iam foetet, quatriduanus est enim,* "there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days."

"With divine grace, and the witness of your life and your doctrine, your words both prudent and imprudent, you bring them to God, and they come to life. You can't be amazed then: you are Christ, and Christ does these things through you."[11] "All the marvelous things that our Lord

wants to do through our wretchedness, are his work. The fruit isn't ours; the elm tree cannot produce pears. The fruit is from God the Father, who has been such a Father and so generous that He has placed it in our soul."[12]

Mary is our hope. We call her by that title because our Lady is the safe path for God to continue to work his wonders in our world. The humble woman of Nazareth continues her mission from heaven and constantly advises us to let God's grace act in our hearts: *Do whatever he tells you* (*Jn* 2:5).

[1] Entrance Antiphon, Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent.

[2] Alleluia, Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent.

[3] Francis, Homily at the Easter Vigil, 11 April 2020.

[4] Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 205.

[5] Saint Josemaría, Notes taken in a meditation, 15 January 1959.

[6] Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Letting God Work, L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 October 2002.

[7] *Ibid*.

[8] Saint Augustine, *De patientia*, 1.

[9] Francis, Audience, 12 February 2018.

[10] Benedict XVI, Audience, 29 August 2012.

[11] Saint Josemaría, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, "Now that the year is beginning," Scepter, pp. 126-127.

[12] *Ibid*.

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