

Meditations: Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this Lenten season.

- Christ was persecuted
- Example of the martyrs
- Being close to those who suffer

IN A PASSAGE from the Book of Wisdom we find a description of the way of thinking and acting of those it calls “impious.” Possibly these were apostate Jews who, influenced by a materialistic and hedonistic

environment, had abandoned the faith of their fathers. The sacred author presents them as people who lament the meaninglessness of their existence and who, for that very reason, face it with cruelty. Guided by the law of the strongest, they mistreat the weak and defenseless and, carried away by their passions, cannot tolerate the uprightness of the just.

Let us lie in wait for the righteous one, because he is annoying to us; he opposes our actions . . . He professes to have knowledge of God and styles himself a child of the Lord. To us he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us. His life is not like that of others, and different are his ways (Wis 2:12-15). This description of the “righteous one” is a portrait of the prophets we encounter throughout salvation history: men chosen by God who are faithful to their mission and who

frequently suffer rejection and persecution by the powerful, sometimes even to the point of death. But this description, above all, is a portrait of Christ.

Our Lord was persecuted from the first words of his preaching, and with ever greater fury on seeing all the miracles He was working and that the people's admiration for Him was growing rapidly. They whispered calumnies against Him, stirred up doubt and tried to catch Him in verbal traps. But Jesus' reaction is surprising: "Not a single complaint, no word of protest. Not even when, without any consideration, they tear the garments from his skin. Here I see how foolish I have been to make excuses, and to utter so many empty words. A firm resolution: to work and to suffer for my Lord, in silence."^[1] —

RIGHT FROM its origins and down through the centuries, the history of the Church has been marked by persecution. Many people in the Church have shown great heroism, for the most part discreet and hidden. There are so many Christians who, following the words of Saint Paul, have overcome evil with good (cf. *Rom* 12:21). And the same is happening today, when so many brothers and sisters of ours, in not a few countries, continue to risk their professional future, their tranquil life, their freedom, and even their lives to be faithful to Christ. “It is painful to recall that, in this very moment, there are many Christians in various parts of the world who are suffering from persecution, and we must hope and pray that their trials will soon end. They are many: today’s martyrs outnumber the martyrs of the first centuries. Let us express our closeness to these brothers and sisters. We are a single body and

these Christians are the bleeding members of the body of Christ that is the Church.”^[2] —

We pray for all persecuted Christians. And, at the same time, how much we can learn from them! The example of their lives, strengthened by grace, teaches us so clearly what it means to set no limits to our love for God. Remembering them also helps us in our daily life, in the small or big things in which we want to express our love. Their inheritance is an inheritance of fidelity to Christ. They found strength in their weakness (cf. *Heb* 11:34). For they kept their gaze fixed on Christ crucified while “in the solitude of prison, in the final hours after a death sentence, in the long nights of waiting for an imminent murderous hand, in the cold of the concentration camp, in the pain and exhaustion of senseless marches.”^[3] —
Being co-heirs of so many saints fills

us with pride. And, at the same time, it can spur us to ask the Holy Spirit for humility, so that He will fill us too with his fortitude.

“JESUS will be in agony until the end of the world: we must not sleep during this time.”^[4] — Jesus, dead and risen for our salvation, remains in agony in every man and woman who suffers, who undergoes persecution, who is despised or unjustly misunderstood. A Christian cannot be indifferent to this suffering. Many of these people may be physically far from us. But others are close by. *As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me (Mt 25:40).* We can ask our Lord that these words of his remain alive in us: that He grant us a wise and sensitive heart, capable of perceiving the needs and suffering of our brothers

and sisters, so that we are eager to help them.

These days of Lent are very propitious for contemplating the Passion of Christ: Jesus despised, tortured by the soldiers, looked upon with indifference by Pilate, abandoned by his disciples, scourged, carrying the Cross and dying on it filled with meekness. “All his gestures and all his words are of love, of a love both serene and strong.”^[5] Seeing Jesus’ example will lead us to gradually purify our way of looking, so that we are quick to recognize the suffering of so many people, especially those around us, and have a creative compassion that comes to the assistance of others.

Mary stayed beside her Son at the foot of the Cross. She witnessed his meekness and patience, and very possibly heard Him utter those unforgettable words: “*Father, forgive*

them, for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). We can turn to our Lady’s intercession and ask her to help all Christians to overcome evil with good. Some will be called to do so in painful and difficult situations; others, in more ordinary ways. May all of us, contemplating Jesus on the Cross, learn to truly love our fellow men and women, and show them mercy and understanding.

^[1] Saint Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Tenth Station, no. 1.

^[2] Francis, Audience, 29 April 2020.

^[3] F. X. Nguyen van Thuan, *Witnesses to Hope*, p. 123.

^[4] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 553. Cited by Benedict XVI, Audience, 8 April 2009.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Eleventh Station.

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