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Meditations: Friday of the Tenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the tenth week of Ordinary Time.

- The fullness of the beatitudes
- Striving for a pure heart
- Removing what gets in the way

THE SERMON on the mount is the first of the five great discourses in which Saint Matthew gathers Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of God. The preamble to this discourse is the

proclamation of the Beatitudes (*Mt* 5:1-11). "These 'new commandments' are much more than a set of rules. Indeed, Jesus does not impose anything but reveals the way of happiness."[1] By making them the essence of our lives, with Christ's help, his followers can become the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

With the Beatitudes as a backdrop, Jesus interprets the main precepts of the law. He wants to extract their full meaning through a series of contrasts between the old commandments and his new way of presenting them: *You have heard that it was said... but I say to you.* His way of speaking (*I say to you*) made a profound impression on people because it meant claiming the authority of God for Himself. Jesus adds something new to what Moses had said, bringing it to its fullness.

Jesus does not take the commandments of the law away, but rather brings them within, illuminating them in such a way that they can truly shape our hearts in conformity with God's. For His disciples, "the loving yet demanding words of Jesus,"[2] are a program of holiness: *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect* (*Mt* 5:48). "It is true: Jesus is a demanding friend who sets high goals,"[3] higher, undoubtedly, than Moses' goals, and reaching every part of our lives. For Jesus, each commandment takes on its full meaning as a demand of love, and they all converge in the greatest of all: to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves (cf. *Mt* 22:36-40). Love is demanding, and therein lies its beauty.

YOU HAVE heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart (*Mt* 5:27). Commenting on this verse, Saint Gregory the Great warned, "We must, therefore, guard ourselves so that what is not lawful to desire may not be seen."[4] God's precepts are not arbitrary; on the contrary, they respond to the desires of the human heart since, knowing us intimately, God's commands are the true path to happiness. Earlier, at the beginning of the discourse, the Master had assured that those who are truly *pure in heart* will be blessed (*Mt* 5:8).

With this beatitude, Jesus invites us to align our gaze with his, to cultivate an inner life that directs our affections and thoughts toward Him. Restricting purity of heart solely to combating temptations and

disordered impulses might lead us to perceive it as a burden. It causes us to lose sight of the fact that life with God fills us with a "Love that satisfies without ever satiating"[5] our deepest desires. When King David pleads, *Create in me a clean heart, O God* (*Ps* 51:10), he is asking for the capacity to savor and enjoy what is truly valuable, not just the ephemeral.

"It is not enough to stop 'on the surface' of human actions; it is necessary to go all the way to the interior."[6] In the struggle against sin, the Lord goes to the root, addressing the heart because it is where the goodness or wickedness of our actions is formed. "Sincerely examine the way you are following the Master," Saint Josemaria recommends. "Consider whether you might have given yourself in a dry, official way, with a faith that has no sparkle to it; if there is no humility or sacrifice, nor daily work; if you are

all façade and pay no attention to the details of each moment... In a word, if you lack Love."[7]

IF YOUR right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell (*Mt* 5:29). Jesus' striking imagery "urges us not to make a deal with evil (...). Jesus is radical in this, demanding, but for our own good, like a good doctor. Every cut, every pruning, is so we can grow better and bear fruit in love."[8]

"Don't show the cowardice of being 'brave'; take to your heels!" advises Saint Josemaría.[9] If we want to follow Him on the path, we will sometimes need to flee from situations that lead us away from

love and rid ourselves of what gets in the way. We have acquired a hidden treasure for which we are willing to sell everything else, even things we know are good. "Fidelity is shown especially when it involves effort and suffering,"[10] and it sometimes requires sacrifices. Saint Augustine said, "In what is loved, either the difficulty is not felt, or the difficulty itself is loved… The toil of lovers is never burdensome."[11]

Mary went through moments of joy and sorrow with the same love. We can ask her to intercede for us so that we too face all situations with the certainty that everything God asks of us is to bring us closer to Him.

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[1] Pope Francis, Audience, January 29, 2020.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 33.

[3] Pope John Paul II, Message, August 15, 1996, no. 3.

[4] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, 21, 2.

[5] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 208.

[6] Pope John Paul II, General Audience, April 16, 1980.

[7] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 930.

[8] Pope Francis, Angelus, September 26, 2021.

[9] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 132.

[10] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, March 19, 2022, no. 3.

[11]Saint Augustine, "On the Good of Widowhood," 21, 26.

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