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Meditations: Thursday of the Third Week of Lent

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

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- Acknowledging our own sins
- Sincerity in the examination of conscience
- Reconquering our freedom

Now he was casting out a demon that was dumb; when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke, and the

people marveled (Lk 11:14). This is how the evangelist introduces us, without much of a preamble, into this Gospel scene. The phrase “dumb devil” has been used in the Church’s spiritual tradition to describe a situation that can afflict any Christian: a lack of sincerity. It is a problem we may sometimes confront in our own lives: the difficulty to face a corner in our life that we have not yet illumined with Christ’s light, and to seek help for the conversion we need.

Since the devil is the father of lies, he employs all his cunning to prevent us from realizing our own mistakes.

“Here we have an aspect that can deceive us: when we say ‘we are all sinners,’ as one who says ‘good morning,’ something habitual, even something social, we have no true awareness of sin. No: I am a sinner for this reason and for this other, and another, and another. The truth is

always specific.”^[1] Sincerity begins with oneself. Since we are not exempt from any evil, we need to go to our Lord to be healed. Referring to the devil that prevents a person from speaking, Jesus makes it clear to his apostles that *this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer* (Mk 9:29). If we approach God with simplicity, invoking the Holy Spirit, we will receive the grace needed to know ourselves better in order to identify ourselves more fully with Christ.

SAINT JOSEMARÍA warned strongly against all the harm that this “dumb devil” can cause, this lack of sincerity with oneself and with those who can help us.^[2] It leads to the lack of clean air that gives birth to the truth, and distorts not only one’s ability to recognize what is true in our own

lives but also in the lives and words of others. We see this in those present at the scene after our Lord had just worked the miracle. Some in the crowd, instead of being surprised by this unheard-of event, began to say that Jesus was driving out demons by the power of Beelzebub. Others, going further, “asked him for a sign from heaven,” which is quite paradoxical since they had just witnessed a real miracle.

“If the dumb devil gets inside a soul, he ruins everything,”^[3] even the good things in one’s life, the wonders that God works right before one’s eyes. Such a person restricts his or her ability to contemplate clearly our Lord’s actions (both in oneself and in others), and even, as we see in this Gospel passage, distorts His intentions. Thus it is helpful to go daily to the examination of conscience, to those few minutes of prayer, with the desire that the Holy

Spirit may enlighten our conscience and spur us to strive to love God more each day. And then we will discover how deeply He loves us, since He embraces us like the father of the prodigal son when we simply acknowledge our problems and sins. Hence we pray with the Church each year: “Hear our pleas with mercy, O God, and illumine the darkness of our heart with the grace of your Son.”^[4] —

JESUS offers in his defense an explanation that anyone could understand: every kingdom divided against itself is destined for ruin. It would make no sense for Beelzebub to act against himself. Our Lord goes directly to the central point: the miracle is really a sign that the Kingdom of God has come. What these people have witnessed is what

Saint Luke himself had announced at the beginning of his Gospel: Jesus is the Anointed One of God who has come to bring freedom to captives.

But we can ask ourselves: to whom were they captive? To the one who was stronger than they were: to the devil. So our Lord continues his reply with this image: *When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder (Lk 11:21-22).* Ever since the first sin, the devil had been holding humanity in subjection. Jesus, the one who is stronger than the devil, had to come to defeat him and return to people their most precious treasure: their freedom.

Identifying and expelling the dumb devil from our life means protecting this great good that God has

entrusted to us. As Jesus himself says: *The truth will set you free* (Jn 8:32). Hence, sincerity with ourselves, with God and with others, is an integral part of the task that we all have: to strive each day to reconquer our freedom. Mary Most Holy, the free woman *par excellence*, full of grace, will help us to live at all times with the freedom of the children of God.

^[1] Francis, Homily, 29 April 2020.

^[2] Cf. Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 188.

^[3] *Ibid.*

^[4] Second Monday of Advent, Collect Prayer.

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