

Friday 8th in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (Mk 11,11-25): After He had been acclaimed by the crowds, Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple. And after He had looked all around, as it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

The next day, when they were leaving Bethany, He felt hungry. In the distance He noticed a fig tree covered with leaves, so He went to see if He could find anything on it. When He reached it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. Then Jesus said to the fig tree, «May no one ever eat your fruit!». And his disciples heard these words.

When they reached Jerusalem, Jesus went to the Temple and began to drive away all the people He saw buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the stools of those who sold pigeons. And he would not let anyone carry anything through the Temple area. Jesus then taught the people, «Does not God say in the Scriptures: ‘My house will be called a House of Prayer for all the nations’? But you have turned it into a den of thieves». The chief priests and the teachers of the Law heard of this, and they tried to find a way to destroy him. They were afraid of him because all the people were captivated in his teaching. When evening came, Jesus left the city.

Early next morning, as they walked along the road, the disciples saw the fig tree withered to its roots. Peter then said to him, «Master, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered». And Jesus replied, «Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, if you say to this mountain: ‘Get up and throw yourself into the sea’, and have no doubt in your heart but believe that what you say will happen, it

will be done for you. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it shall be done for you. And when you stand to pray, forgive whatever you may hold against anyone, so that your heavenly Father may also forgive your sins».

«Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it»

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Today, fruit and prayer are the key words to this Gospel. The Lord notices a fig tree and finds nothing but leaves: and He reacts by cursing it. According to St. Isidore of Seville, “fig” and “fruit” have the same root. Early next morning the Apostles, surprised, tell him: «Master, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered» (Mk 11:21). In reply, Jesus Christ speaks to them of faith and prayer: «Have faith in God» (Mk 11:22).

There are people that almost never pray and, when they do it, it is with the hope God will solve problems they do not know how to handle themselves. And they justify it with the words from Jesus we have just heard: «Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it shall be done for you» (Mk 11:24). They are right, and it is quite human, understandable and legitimate that, in front of a problem too difficult for us, we trust in God, in a much higher force.

But we must also add that prayers are “useless” («for your Father knows what you need before you ask him»: Mt 6:8), as long as they do not have a practical and direct utility, as —for instance— switch on a light. We do not receive anything for our prayer, because what we receive from God is grace upon grace.

Should we, therefore, not pray...? Of course, we should: now that we know that by prayer we obtain the grace, our prayer has become more worthy and valuable: because it is “useless” and it is “costless”. Furthermore, there are three benefits we do receive from the petition prayer: interior peace (to find our friend Jesus and to trust God is relaxing); to mull over a problem, rationalize it, and knowing how to raise it, is to solve half of it; and, in the third place, praying helps us to discern between what is good and what, maybe out of some personal whim, are the actual intentions of our prayers. Then, later on, we shall understand with the eyes of the

faith what Jesus says: «Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son» (Jn 14:13).