



14. March 2025

## MEDITATIONS FOR LENT

### “Introduction to discretion”

A clarification for all those who listen to my daily meditations and have accompanied us on this journey through the Gospel of John up to the moment when Pilate, the Roman procurator, yielded to the pressure of Jesus' enemies and handed Him over to be crucified: as I mentioned in yesterday's meditation, since the subsequent passages would have led directly to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Lord, I have decided to postpone them until they coincide with the events we commemorate in the liturgical seasons that are approaching.

The series on the Gospel of John has been a very fruitful journey with the Lord, one that has brought great joy and gratitude for all that He has done to glorify His beloved Father and for our salvation. His holy words and instructions to the disciples and to all those who listened with open hearts left a deep impression.

We heard Jesus insist again and again that He came from the Father and did nothing but what He had seen in Him. In this way He glorified Him in an incomparable way. We met people who, without understanding everything Jesus said to them, trusted Him. We heard of His healings and great miracles, which credited Him as the One sent by the Father.

But we also suffered with Jesus when His words failed to touch the hearts of those who in reality had long been prepared for the coming of the Messiah. We experienced the tragedy that the greater the signs He performed and the clearer His words about His mission, the more darkness spread in some souls, to the point of wanting to eliminate Jesus.

We suffered with the Lord when we saw that one who had shared His bread, who had seen all His miracles and heard all His words, who had lived with Him, ended up handing Him over to His enemies under the influence of Satan. Then we witnessed the drama of Pilate who, although convinced of the Lord's innocence, did not decide to release Him and finally gave in to the Jews' insistence that He be crucified.

We have come to know better the Lord who, out of love for His Father and for us human beings, willingly accepted the hour when He had to suffer death on Calvary for our salvation, as we will meditate as we approach Good Friday.

When I began to reflect and ask the Lord how I could best serve God and people during Lent, I first recorded a short talk on the season which can be found on my YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kds5YZde7mc>

I gave some guidelines that could be helpful on the path of following Christ. What stuck in my heart was that we who follow the Lord must be good disciples of His, boldly proclaiming the truth and giving a witness of life that is consistent with what we say.

Then I turned to the books of the Desert Fathers, who were always determined to follow and imitate the Lord in the best possible way. These are spiritual fathers of the Eastern Christian tradition to whom the faithful often turn for spiritual advice. In a book I came across a story told by a certain Abbas Moses, which gave me the main thread for the following meditations:

In the region of Tebaida, where St Anthony Abbot lived, several fathers met with him. All night long they discussed the question of which virtue or practice could protect a monk from all the wiles of the devil and lead him safely to the summit of perfection.

The fathers' suggestions were many and varied: some advocated fasting and vigils in order to unite oneself more quickly to God with an agile spirit. Others insisted on the eremitical life as the way to be followed, since one who lives in the silence and solitude of the desert can pray to God in an almost familial intimacy and be more closely attached to Him. Others thought that priority should be given to works of charity, for which the Lord had promised the Kingdom of God.

When they had reflected for a long time on all these ways, St Anthony spoke up and said: "All the practices you have mentioned are necessary and useful for those who truly seek God." However, he pointed out that he had witnessed cases of spiritual decline and attributed them to a lack of discretion, understood as wise moderation in the spiritual life.

This is the subject of the next meditations.

In our ordinary language we usually associate the term "discretion" with reserve and prudence in speaking. In ecclesiastical usage, however, the term "discretio" is understood as the discernment of spirits.

Discretion (from the Latin *discernere*: to separate, to sift, to distinguish) is the virtue that is especially characteristic of the spiritual man (*pneumatikós*), by which he is able to discern wisely between good and evil, true and false, authentic and artificial.

This discretion is also applied concretely in the spiritual life, like that wise moderation referred to by St. Anthony Abbot in the above-mentioned story.

St Benedict, whose Rule Pope Gregory the Great called "the wisest and most prudent of the monastic rules", rightly speaks of discretion as "the mother of all virtues". With this term, we will set out to apply discernment of spirits, discretion, in relation to our goal of being true disciples of the Lord.