

THE RICHNESS OF ORDINARY LIFE

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My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here; that you see me that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, Saint Joseph, my father and Lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

"On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea, and such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down and the whole crowd stood along the shore listening to him."

All right now Jesus, I want to do the same. I want to listen to you, to sit down to pray.

"He spoke to them at length in parables saying, 'A sower went out to sow, and as he sowed some seed fell on the path and the birds came and ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground where they had little soil. It has sprung up at once because the soil was not deep but then the sun rose and it was scorched and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil and it produce fruit a hundred or sixty or thirty fold.'"

Later, the apostles asked Jesus about the meaning of this parable and he explained to them that our divine vocation, our calling from God, is a treasure that has all the potential in the world, but at the same time is very small, starts very weak, like a seed - like a mustard seed - he said in other parts of the Gospel - that has a potential to grow to be huge.

But at the same time as the counterpart of us taking care of it, because otherwise it is exposed to the birds that can eat it up – the birds of distraction, the birds of the superficiality. It can be also said that the seed has no room to grow because of the material things that choked the development of the little seed. And we experience the same anytime, Jesus, I am surrounded by noise, but things don't help me instead of, you know, helping me to get closer to you, they are being an obstacle, a hindrance, for our relationship, and today I want to examine the soil of my heart.

This meditation is about the richness of ordinary life. And my life is ordinary in the sense that it's a normal life, but has something extraordinary – this little seed. I remember when I was in California, I visited this place that had huge sequoias. One of them was so big that you were able to drive through the tree. It was like a tunnel, like a little tunnel.

And I was thinking this tree that is now gigantic, many many many years ago was a little seed. And I was astonished thinking this monumental tree was years ago in my hands – was like a little seed that could feed into my to the palm of my hand.

And I was thinking my Lord, this is what exactly happens with my vocation. I have been called by you, by your Father. I have received the grace, this little light in the darkness of history, the little light of your presence in Bethlehem changed everything. And not only for you or for the people around you that night, but forever. In every single human being there is a new birth, a new Nativity, a new Christmas and New Year at hand. And it looks small, it looks weak. Some people mock. I myself sometimes don't take it seriously, but has a divine potentiality that is called to develop, to grow and to put down roots, and it happens in my heart in my ordinary life. I don't need to go far to see that. I don't need to pay anything. It's free. It comes from you out of love.

Saint Josemaria says, "Our sanctity, the holiness we should be striving for is not a second class sanctity. There's not such a thing. The main thing we're asked to do is to love."

And I want to stop here for a second. Because many times Jesus, I want to be honest with you, I think about the circumstances around me or my talents, my capacities, and then I put myself in a second class holiness, in the second division. Thinking okay, there are some saints in history that were so gifted that they made it to the first division, and the rest of us will get into heaven through the backyard or through the back door of the house, not through the main entrance. And then my hope is that I can never make the cut and I avoid hell.

And this is not what you are talking about Jesus in the gospel. You are saying that every single human being, I myself, have an eternal destiny, eternal destination, and I have been looked upon by an eternal God that is loving me and giving me all the love in the world. And maybe my existence will not be, humanly speaking, as impactful as other saints. In a sense I will not make it to the front page of newspapers or magazines, or even I will not make it to the front page of the history of the Church in the sense of being recognized by thousands of people in this world. But you're telling me, I don't care about that. The only spectator that matters is the Blessed Trinity. And good news, the Blessed Trinity is looking upon you as if you were the only one in this world.

In this age of Netflix and TV shows and movies, I like to imagine the Blessed Trinity sitting down in a sofa and a chair looking at the movie of your life, of my life. And the three of them are enjoying every single episode. They don't fall asleep. They don't change the channel. They want to look at you as if you were the only person in this world. And they are giving you – they are giving me – you're giving me Jesus, my Lord, the chance to encounter you personally in my heart. And this is the interior life that develops and grows like a tree. And this is a treasure in the field. This is the kingdom of heaven.

And it's for me. And of course later, I will be very happy to share it with the rest of the world to bring this light to the whole planet, but the first encounter's in my heart, and I want to really clean my eyes today at the beginning of this year, to see the richness of my ordinary life.

This year, Pope Francis has given us another grace so to speak, or has proposed us to channel our desire of holiness through a saint that is very important, well the most important one in human history after our Lady, which is Saint Joseph. And when we look at St. Joseph's life, we realize that he didn't do anything spectacular. We don't have a single word of St. Joseph in the whole gospel. But who dares to say that St.

Joseph was not happy or was not instrumental in the most important task of redemption – taking care of Jesus Christ as a baby, as a teenager later as an adult. So let's look at Saint Joseph, at his ordinary life.

Pope Francis says that in every situation Joseph declared his own *fiat*, his own *let it be done* like Mary, and it makes complete sense. They were married. They were engaged and married. So they think alike. I mean they were very similar in their personalities, they connected, humanly speaking. So when Mary said *fiat, let it be done*, there were conversations with Joseph before that that maybe they used an expression for ordinary things in their house: there were news about something or opinions or different plans. Maybe it was an expression that was very common among them. Yeah, let it be done, or let's do it! Something like that that we would say now in English, but in Latin or in Hebrew was *fiat, let it be done*.

So St. Joseph was familiar with that expression. And he probably used it many times in his heart when he was talking to God, when he was presented to do something. Often in our lives, continues the pope, things happen whose meaning we do not understand. Like Saint Joseph, Mary's pregnant, we need to go to Bethlehem, we need to flee to Egypt, a job, a new language, a new country.

And then let's put ourselves in the shoes of St. Joseph says the pope. Our first reaction is frequently one of disappointment and rebellion. So many times, Jesus, when something small happens that I don't plan – if it could be traffic jam, it could be that the printer's running out of – you know – color or whatever; it could be something really small or something big... I got sick. We rebel.

Joseph set aside his own ideas in order to accept the course of events and, mysterious as they seemed, he embraced them. He took responsibility for them and made them part of his own history. This is really impressive.

St. Joseph was not passive in dealing with events. He thought *I am here*. There is a grace in this present moment. Maybe I don't like it or I don't understand it, but God is present in my history. And if he's presenting me with this, that I don't understand, I want to put into action my freedom to embrace this moment and to make it my own history. Not only to go through this, like I said, okay, I don't like it. Let's move forward, quickly. He says, I want to make this part of my history. I want to go to Egypt and grow. I want to go to Bethlehem and learn something. I want to look at Mary pregnant and pray about it. Even if I don't understand and I want – this is part of God's history, human history, redemption history if you want to, and is part of my own history.

And the pope continues, unless we reconcile with our own history, we will be unable to take a single step forward. For we will always remain hostage to our expectations and the disappointments that follow. In other words, if I am always thinking that I know that only my way is the right one. I will always be like a slave of my little world.

St. Joseph was open. Am I open, Jesus? Am I open like the seed to grow? Am I open to develop, to produce fruit – hundred, sixty, thirty fold? And not only with my little understanding of reality, but letting myself be guided by you and not in a world that is a fantasy world, that is far from reality. No, but in my ordinary life.

Wherever you are now – maybe you are driving, maybe you are in the living room surround by kids yelling and you're trying to pray, maybe you're in your room, in a quiet place, or in a train – in that situation God is present to you. God is asking you to see the world with his eyes.

I remember some time ago, I was celebrating mass in middle school. And they didn't have a chapel, so I needed to go through kindergarten before I got into the school, through the patio. And then I saw some kids playing, little kids in kindergarten. And one of them came to me... I was dressed as a priest before mass with a chasuble and the alb. So he came to me running. He grabbed my chasuble, looked up and said, who are you?

And I was a little surprised, didn't know what to say. And I said, "well, my name is Father Leo and I'm a priest." And the kid looked up to me as if I were Gandalf or wizard or whatever, and he was wearing a t-shirt with a ninja turtle, with swords or whatever. And then I asked him, "You must be a ninja turtle."

And then his jaw dropped. He was really surprised and excited. So he ran away... he went to the corner, talked to his friends and said "Hey, I am a ninja turtle. He told me." He was pointing at me. And he was convinced from then on that he was special warrior, right? And... I was thinking, this is the power of saying something to someone else.

You know where spiritual life God is telling you, you can be a saint... you are my son. And we should be aware of that. God is telling you I love you. I want you to be my friend. This is what it means to be a saint. And I'm not asking you to have a life that is just extraordinary in the sense of spectacular, noisy or... No, no... I want to grow inside you. I want to have a personal friendship with you.

Jesus, this is something very special. And I don't know how old are you, but the fact that we already know that God is calling us for an eternal joy, for a bliss that will never end, and the fact that we know it right now is a special gift.

If you have been baptized as a kid, you have grown very naturally aware of this calling, and maybe this is precisely the risk of our interior life that we think that is a normal circumstance, that is just a whatever, you know, is what everybody has. This is not the truth. The majority of the world today don't know anything about Jesus Christ. And they only approach our Lord through their consciences, through some truths, that more or less, you know, bring them closer to the idea of a God that is Creator or is good or helps guiding again their consciences or something like that. And if they live according to that little light, they will end up embracing, later, the eternal joy of heaven.

But you and I, right now, know everything that we need to know in order to be happy. And we can transform – we should transform. I want to transform, Jesus, my ordinary life into something special; into a special encounter with you. Like Saint Joseph, looking at reality and freely putting my brain, my creativity, into developing what you're giving me, making it better. Not because it's imperfect from your hands, but because it's unfinished, just as Saint Paul says, and I can again develop, join, embrace, and make my own thing with you. And this is personal.

This is what Saint Josemaria is saying here... we can be millionaires in ordinary life, millionaires of grace, millionaires of meaning - you have a meaningful life; you can if you want to. And the more you and I embrace the path of following Jesus Christ, the more meaningful our lives will be.

Pope Benedict says the same thing. God does not have a fixed plan that we must carry out. On the contrary, he has many different ways of finding men and even of turning his wrong ways into right ways. No fixed plan. Freedom is a huge part - is the most important part - of your relationship, our relationship of love, with Jesus Christ, with the Blessed Virgin Mary, God the Father, the Holy Spirit. Freedom in my ordinary life to say I want to, *fiat, let it be done*. Freedom to embrace what I have received and to transform it creativity.

When I was a kid, we went to visit this factory of candy. And it was a lot of fun to see the machinery working, producing thousands of chocolate bars and candy in a day. And at the end of the visit, the guy in charge at the factory told us now, guys, let's go to this place of the factory where you can see the candy and the bars that are defectious. And they are put aside because we cannot sell them, they have some defect. And they were in big bowls or kind of boxes. And then he said, now you just feel free to take as many as you want for free. And then we will look at each other... are you serious, for free? And then some of us had a backpack, some of them didn't, whatever. And so we took as many as we could of course, it was a blast, it was a dream, right? And if we didn't have a backpack, we took our sweatshirts and made a knot in one of the sleeves and then put the other where they were bags, more candy, or we were taking as many as possible as much as possible and we're happy. We went home and shared with our friends, families, ourselves.

And nobody thought that that was a lack of freedom. Like okay, if you take a lot it is going to be heavy and then your backpack is going to be filled with things and then you're going to be feeling the weight of the straps on your shoulders and maybe start sweating when you go to the train station. Nobody thought that taking more chocolate was against freedom. Everyone thought this is a gift, and the more the better, the merrier, right?

So the same happens with your ordinary life. God is telling you, how much do you want to take? Because I have a grace that, again, looks like a little seed but it could be a sequoia. If you want to... if you make room for that. If you put aside the thorns, the birds of distractions or superficiality, if you clean the soil of rocks that are stopping the roots from developing, if you love me, and it's at hand - I am giving you this - you can grow a sequoia in your heart. And this is not just for some people in history, this for every single human being - a personal encounter with the Trinity, a unique opportunity.

Jesus, thank you. Thank you for your parables, first of all, because they are awesome. And thank you for making me understand through these little examples the amount of grace and love that comes from you, Eternal God, that is making himself so available, so understandable to me, a little ant in this world, through these gifts, through these words, also that are the gospel parables. Thank you very much my Lord.

Now for that seed to develop, what I need is constancy in my life to begin again and again in ordinary life. And that constancy is the way I express my love for you Jesus.

I read this tale about this man that was going everyday to the well with two jars with water tied to his back. And one of them had in the back had a crack. And then every day he would go down to the well, fill them up, go back home. And then by the time he would get home one of the jars was empty. And in the tale, it's just a fairy tale, the jar after some years would say to the guy, why are you doing this? Why? I mean, I'm useless I have this crack. What's the point of going everyday down there and knowing that you know, I'm going to be spilling the water all the way back home. And then why are you taking me back again? And again?

And the following day, they went together again and the the owner - and again it's a tale - has a meaningful explanation, a very powerful one in my opinion. The owner went out with the jar, with both. And then he said, do you see this side of the road that is full of flowers? And the other side is dry. Those flowers are there because of you.

Your imperfection, if you want to, your incapacity of doing things can be an instrument to make this world better, greener, and more, you know, with an aroma of flowers if you let yourself be used by me. I have a bigger plan than yourself.

I was thinking that many times in our interior life, I don't understand why things happen. Or maybe I put resolutions in to be more orderly or more punctual and I fall again and again in the same exact sin. And what I don't realize is that I am growing in virtues that are way more important than order: could be patience, could be humility, which is the foundation of the spiritual life. And I need to be aware of this Jesus. You're using me. And many times, the saints that I admire in history are saints with a lot of defects. And of course now, I know the end of the story, happy end - they are in heaven. But during their process, they had dark nights - moments of, I don't know if it's despair, but moments of you know, very humiliating moments of saying enough, I cannot do it anymore. Always of saying I'm going to give up, but they didn't - they came back.

St. Augustine, Mary Magdalene, many of the saints in history that have scars in their heart, wounds that were healed many times and precisely because of that they are saints that we can admire and follow, otherwise would be so discouraging to have perfect saints, artificially perfect saints, without any kind of a human weakness.

I remember some time ago, I received a bunch of a paintings or drawings from a school that I'm working at as a chaplain from little kids, boys and girls - it was for my birthday I think. And every kid draws something on a paper and said "I love you, thank you, happy birthday..." things like that. And some of them, I thought they were a little cheesy or whatever, but I really liked one of them. It was kind of a painting of myself saying Mass. Humanly speaking, the painting was not very good in the sense my hands were gigantic, my head was out of proportion, my body... the perspective with the altar was not Michelangelo, right? But I was saying mass in the painting and then he... the kid put in letters a message for me. And he said thank you for being a priest.

And I kept it in my room - it's still there... is still there because when I forget things that are important, I look at that painting, at the drawing. Because, in my relationship with God, it's not about what I have or what I can do, what I can perform... it's I am a priest, I am a Son of God. And that's unbreakable, unshakeable. That's the foundation of my joy. And that is something that is present every single day of my life. I am called to be a saint. I am a saint in potential. And God is looking at that. God, you Jesus, you're focusing on that. I love you. I want you to be happy. I'm calling you at every second.

So open my eyes to listen to your voice, to pay attention, to discover you and to discover you interiorly first; to have this personal encounter with you – you looking at me, me looking at you. Miren. Miren. The other, you know, just opening up, allowing you to do the rest, and putting my freedom - my creativity - like St. Joseph, like Mary saying *fiat, let it be done*. Jesus, of course, enter. Please do whatever you want to in my life. Use me as an instrument. Through my cracks, I feel my mistakes, my lack of generosity, everything, all the above. But you are calling me and I want to say yes right now. I want to begin again. And the more times I say it, the more scars I have, the more attractive I will be to the rest of history, the rest of saints, because I will show that God can transform very ordinary things into something beautiful.

Let's ask the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, at the beginning of this year, to have the joy of encountering Jesus on a daily basis. Maybe you, I don't know if you do it, but I highly recommend that you start your day with a moment of prayer. It could be five minutes, could be ten, but the important thing is to try to do it daily. Could be in the kitchen, could be in the living room, with the gospel of the day, recollecting yourself. Because those minutes of mental prayer of dialogue with Jesus Christ early in the morning will have a huge impact in the rest of the day.

Jesus, I want to sit down with you every morning as Saint Peter Paul, Mary Magdalene did, probably before breakfast at dawn they would go out and pray. I want to sit down with you, start with you to talk to you about my life... could be a meeting that I have later, it could be an important call, It could be an important whatever... thing that I have in my hands that day, I want to talk to you about that before the day starts and to ask you to accompany me during this day. And if I do it every day, my days will be transformed by the presence of Jesus Christ, by your light, by your smile, by your company Jesus.

Thank you, Mary; thank you, Joseph, for being such a simple model of holiness. Thank you for your wonderful life. Thank you for sanctifying ordinary things like cooking, working, meeting friends, organizing a party - all the things that you did - with simplicity, with depth, with love.

I thank you my God for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations that you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help to put them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, Saint Joseph, my father and Lord, my guardian angel intercede for me. Amen.



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