

# ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN THE EUCHARIST

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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, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

Some days ago I was asked by some kids at the school where I work, 'Father, what's your favorite miracle in the gospel?' And there are many that I really like, but I think there's one that stands out, which is Jesus walking over the waters, for many reasons, especially because I think it's very unique. Also, because the Apostles were lost. It was dark, there was a storm, and Jesus brought peace to them. But, later on, I was thinking that in any case, more than miracles, what we like about the gospel are the encounters between Jesus and people - normal people like you, like me. And today, on this anniversary of the First Communion of St. Josemaria, it is good to meditate of our encounter with Jesus Christ. Every communion is a meeting with you, my Lord. And again, in the gospel, I can learn how to treat you through human approach, through human reverence, with delicacy, with with a closer and maybe more friendlier approach than usual. You can see Our Lord dealing with sinners like you, like me.

Our Lord was walking through Jerusalem and he saw Levi sitting at the tax collectors' table, which was very unpopular for the Jewish people because it was someone working for the enemy. And, Jesus called him - probably there was an encounter before that, maybe at the temple, maybe at some of the parties that Our Lord went to participate, maybe it was at Cana during the wedding feast. We don't know, but Levi knew Jesus and Jesus knew him. And immediately, says in the gospel, he rose and followed him.

How beautiful it is, my Lord, to follow you, to leave everything behind. But then, the temptation comes of living a life that may be because it's closer to you, looks like distant from the world. And this is not true or this is not the way to follow Jesus. Look at what happened in the gospel, Levi made him a great feast in his house. And there- there was a large company of tax collectors and others sitting at table with them, very human, very approachable. Levi cannot contain the joy that he has for himself, and then he bring Jesus into his life.

When we go to communion, we are connecting two worlds, two universes, and through the humanity of Jesus Christ, we can actually live in both universes. We can live our lives in a very

human way and at the same time raise the horizon of our ambitions or our dreams to a higher level, and this is what the Eucharist does. Your presence, my Lord, in this world tells me that you are faithful to me, that you are faithful to your creation, that you do not abandon us. And especially during Easter after your Resurrection in this time of the year where we celebrate with joy that you are alive, it is so good for me to remember your words, like whispering, 'I will be with you always and wherever you go, I will be with you until the end of the world.' That is so beautiful. That's such a gift to think about your fidelity. Sometimes, Jesus, you know that I am inconsistent, that I'm not able to be, you know, generous all the time, that I forget that I have envy, that I am imperfect. And sometimes that weighs upon my shoulders or drags me down and it makes me feel unworthy of you. And in a way, this is true. But you didn't come here to this world to judge me. You came to make me happy, to give me peace.

I don't know if you have seen this movie, *The Mission*? It's a very old movie, I guess. It is especially well-known because of its music. But, anyhow, there's this- one of the protagonists that commits a mortal sin, and- and then he has a penance, in the movie, at least, that is very inhuman because he needs to carry like a net with a bunch of objects that are really heavy tied to his- to his wrist or to his neck - I don't remember - and he needs to drag that net with a weight for some months. And the penance is heavy, is really- is painful, and I don't know what the intention of the director in the movie, but I don't think that's the way Our Lord loves us. Of course, Jesus, you sometimes, you move me to penance, but my penance makes me free. My penance is a- is a means to get closer to you. And in the Eucharist, I can understand this better. You desire to come to me with my imperfections, your desire, your eagerness to raise me up with my friends, also imperfect; your willingness to put everything aside in order to enter into my house, your joy on entering in my life.

That's what you wanted when you created the Eucharist, you wanted to make the world a better place not only in a nice way, but as only God can do it, and I'm grateful for that. And today, seeing this approachability of you going into a house that is not a temple, that is not super holy family, makes me think about your generosity and your fidelity. And your fidelity, my Lord, tells me something about your personality, the way you do things is more important than the results because the fruitful way is smooth, it looks quiet, it's efficacious. And I want to apply this to my life, I want to be like you. In any person, there is a line that separates before and after Christ, not only in human history, but in your history there was a moment, I'm sure, that you discovered Jesus, so to speak, for real. And then you can draw a line there and you can say yes, after receiving him in the Eucharist, every time I receive him, I can see the world with his eyes, I can be transformed into God.

I remember some weeks ago I had to travel through the U.S. and I stopped in three different airports. And usually, when I go to airports, I think about heaven. You know why? Because I see thousands of people walking around. And I don't know them but we're very close in airports, in

hospitals. We are so close to each other, a bunch of strangers getting to some destinations, sharing for some minutes maybe the same seat or the same plane, and that makes us closer. And usually, I pray rosaries walking through the airport, looking at people not in their face but, in general, different races, different ages, backgrounds, and I always wonder, what's the personal encounter of each one of them with God? When did it happen? When will it happen? Each one of them, people that I don't know and I will never see again, are masterpieces, creations by God. And they are not just more trees or more birds. Each one of them has an eternal soul and I would love to know their personal story. And I pray for them. And I think that looking at them in that way helps me to think about Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

When you, my Lord, decided to stay here in this world available for everybody, you were sewing something that takes a lot of times centuries - your hidden presence is so powerful. It tells me a lot of things about how to love. I need to learn how to love, Jesus. Not only to have to love you, but how to love others or even how to love myself, and the mirror that I have is you in the Eucharist. I want to contemplate you there in silence. You are in silence, you know everything, and you want to be quiet. But it's not a quietness that is kind of empty. It is a quietness of love. You're listening to me, waiting for me. You're so refined, Jesus. And when I look at you in the Eucharist, when I sit down in front of you, even if sometimes I don't know words, I don't know how to deliver any message or I have to say anything interesting, the fact that we are together makes me a better person and I am so thankful that you decided to stay here. I cannot imagine a world without the Eucharist and I want to protect you in my heart.

Today, I want to increase my desires to receive you better, to make a party like Levi, to put music in my soul when you come, to tell you a million times that I love you, that I adore you, that I wish to be better, that I wish to be more generous, like you, that I am sorry for my sins, and I need you, my Lord. Thank you very much for coming and teaching me how to love you. I need to ask you in- for that and I'm so ashamed of not being able to make that little step of just loving you without your grace. But you are happy with this. You are prepared. You have been waiting for centuries. And again, I want to protect you in my heart and I want to deal with you with all my life as I am, to encounter you- you are not rejecting me. You'll never do that. But help me to believe more in the reality of your love.

Right before Easter, when I was at the school, a dad, tough guy, came to me saying, 'Hey, Father Leo, I want to invite you to celebrate Easter with my family.' And I said, 'What's the plan?' He said 'We're going to go with my son and his friends to the theater to watch Godzilla against King Kong, a new movie that is now in the theater.' I said, 'Yes, Godzilla against King Kong- what a plan, what a blast!' So, I checked my calendar, and unfortunately, I was out of town the days that they were going. But I thought it was so funny that this guy with his friendship, naturalness, wanted to share with me

Godzilla against Kong, right? And this is what friendship is about. There aren't filters, we expose ourselves, we risk. When we love, we risk because we are ourselves and we show our intimacy, our dreams, ourselves. And I think the Eucharist is the best remedy for everything because it shows us Jesus as he is and ourselves as we are.

Jesus comes to you, inside you, and he's happy. And you can talk to Jesus as he is as well. You can discover him in the Eucharist without fear. You, my Lord, chose to have his presence through bread precisely to allow me to get closer to you with confidence. And this is what St. Josemaria, from the very beginning of his life, learned - the friendship with Jesus Christ makes you simple, in a good way, less complicated. And then we grow in many other virtues through this foundational simplicity. The Eucharist clears my eyes and my heart because God is not complicated. God has all the wisdom in the world. God has the power. But in essence, God is simple. There's no complication - straightforward, accessible, lovable. And St. Josemaria said in *The Way*: "Are you unhappy? Think: there must be something, an obstacle between God and you. You will seldom be wrong if you take this approach." So, even our sins, like Levi today in the gospel that we read, our sins are not the last part of the story. And if it makes you sad to have sins, maybe it's because you are complicated. What we need to be is repentant, but not complicated. What we need to do is atonement for our sins, but with the joy of the encounter, with a party like Levi.

It helped me a lot when I was a kid and I went to my first confession. One of the priests told me there's a party in Heaven today because you came. And I never thought about it, but then later I read the gospel, and here's what Jesus says, when the last sheep gets recovered or is brought back, there is a party. And if that happens with confession, imagine with the Eucharist - it's even better. Help me, my Lord, to understand this well. Help me to accept redemption through the Eucharist. You are alive after the Cross with your wounds, with your scars, to save me, and you are so happy that you went through your Cross, Jesus, to save me, to make me happy, to make me free.

This past week, I got in contact with a family - you can pray for them - they are out of risk now, but the mom, pregnant, had an infection and they went to the hospital, they rushed there and then the dad was texting me back and forth asking for prayers and keeping me up with the latest news about her and the baby. And then, there was something that shocked me when I read it at the beginning and I kept it in my phone, took a picture of that message, and I brought it to my prayer because he told me that she wasn't in pain- with a lot of pain. And then he said morphine is not working. So, it was real pain. And then he added, but she will not take any medicine that may harm the baby. She's in a lot of pain, morphine is not working, but she never take anything that can harm the baby. And you think, where is this generosity coming from? How is it possible that the human being is transformed into such a beautiful, you know, instrument of mercy, piety, respect?

It's the Eucharist - all of us - you, yourself, myself, when we do something good, says St. Paul, it's because the Holy Spirit of Jesus is inspiring us. And through prayer we can discover that intention of Jesus or way of thinking, changing our minds, and that's prayer. And it's beautiful, but the Eucharist is even more than that, it's God taking possession of you. And then, as you can talk, unfortunately about satanic possession, you can talk as well as about divine possession. It is not either I live, but God lives in me, says St. Paul. And I can see it in this mom, it's God living inside her. It's God living inside you, wanting to live there and acting through you. That's what the Eucharist transforms your heart and your body. The Eucharist, Jesus in the Eucharist, makes you a better person, changes you. Thank you, my Lord. Thank you for coming inside me. Thank you for taking the risk.

Pope Francis speaks about the Eucharist, says that Our Lord came down to earth to heal, to heal our misery, which has many different forms. And he says, besides the material poverty that affect so many people, there are other forms of still greater misery, the consequence of distancing ourselves from God, spiritual destitution, real slavery to alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography. We experienced this type of destitution when we turn away from God and reject his love. And Jesus, you my Lord, as a good doctor came to this world to makes us free, to heal precisely all of those things. You are not upset, you are not disappointed. You are a divine doctor. You are happy to accompany us through our misery. And what I learned in the Eucharist is to love the process of the transformation.

Sometimes, my Lord, I think that I'll be happy, completely happy when I get to Heaven, and this is true. But maybe there's a temptations of despising the present moment, thinking that someday we will reach some level of holiness that will be more comfortable or more steady or whatever and then we will stop struggling because we will have reached some kind of a elite of holiness in this world or afterwards and meanwhile, it's just a miserable life. That is not true. What makes me beautiful, what makes you beautiful, wherever you are now listening to this meditation, is the transformation- is actually to believe through the process, to embrace the process. It's what makes you beautiful in front of God because Our Lord from on high and on- and inside you, sees that you are trying hard, that you don't give up.

St. Catherine of Siena, one night, it was a night of partying in her city in Italy during the summer. And then she heard people dancing and people getting drunk and doing other things. And then she went to her room - she was young - and she prayed because she was very tempted to join in the party and going crazy. And for the whole night, she was very, very, very close to sin. She wrote later, wrote in her memories, and early in the morning she went- she rushed to the chapel nearby her house, the church, and then complained to Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and told him - and I like when the saints get upset, it's really awesome because you learn - and then she told him, last night you abandoned me and I was very close to sin, to offend you gravely. I'm really upset with you. Why did

you do that? And apparently she heard the voice- the voice of Jesus saying, I didn't abandon you. I was inside you enjoy- enjoying you on seeing you fighting against temptations. I was so proud of you from inside, like in a little castle. And I am so proud because now I know how you fought for me, for keeping me inside you. I am so proud of you, but I will never abandon you, don't worry. And then she recovered her peace.

But I thought it was such a beautiful experience. Our Lord wants you to win. And you will win because Jesus is inside us. And when we read in the Old Testament the Original Sin, this poisonous virus that is Original Sin, a real virus that destroys creation, that leaves creation wounded, and human beings, our souls, our spirits, our bodies, wounded by Original Sin, at the same time, we appreciate, we can see, the promise that comes from God. I will instill my law in their hearts. I will come to rescue them says the psalmist. And for years, thousands of years, the faithful people of Israel praying for the Messiah, dreaming about the Messiah, but not even thinking about naming him and not even close to the Eucharist as we have it now. Sometimes I think that when we went to Heaven- when we go to Heaven, sorry, we will be- we will be not mocked because in Heaven there is respect and charity, but the people from the Old Testament will tell us, you are such a bunch of losers, with all due respect, because we were for centuries, thousands of years, and generations after generations, praying to, you know, to have that maybe the chance to see one someone related with the Messiah. And you had him in your house, he's in your temples, in your hearts physically - bunch of losers. I don't think they will say that because it's Heaven. And again, they will respect, but I think they will say, come on, you should have done way more.

Jokes apart, Jesus, I want to do more, but not in an anxiety kind of a mode. I want to love better. Maybe that's what the Eucharist teaches me - not to do more things, but to get deeper. Maybe that's your your way of teaching me how to love - with patience, with fidelity, with tenderness, with refinement. The Eucharist definitely makes me better. Help me to believe; help me to wait.

Speaking about First Communion, I remember some years ago I was talking to some parents about the First Communion of their sons and daughters, preparing them to- to receive Our Lord for the first time. And then one of the moms interrupted me and told me, excuse me Father, but I don't think he's going to do- my son is not going to do the First Communion, he already did it. And then everyone was in silence like, what do you do? And she said, let me explain to you guys - when I was pregnant, I kept going to Mass every Sunday and even during the week, which means that I received Jesus sacramentally inside my body where my baby was and we shared everything there. So, I put them together in my womb, Jesus and my baby. And actually, I think she had a point. It was beautiful. Everyone was kind of a very surprised and happy to listen to this faithful mom that had a lot of theology in her answer.

And it is so true that I was from the very beginning touched by you, my Lord. And also, it is true that I have a mom in Heaven that actually did the First Communion in history, the Blessed Virgin Mary. And maybe, in this day that we are celebrating the anniversary of the First Communion of St. Josemaria, we can also go to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The First Communion, the Annunciation, the Incarnation inside the heart of Mary, inside the body of Mary, is our model, is the way we should do things. And Mary said, let it be done - *fiat*. I want to receive God in my life. I want to be changed and I want to change history. So she said *yes*. Can we say *yes*? Can I say *yes*? I think I can.

Thank you, my Lord for coming. Thank you for loving me so much and I want to receive you not only in my First Communion, but throughout my life - many communions - many times that we get together inside me, we talk and I followed you closer.

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, St. Joseph, my father on lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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