

PART FOUR: BRIEF INDEED IS OUR TIME

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me and 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.

We continue walking with Jesus to the Village of Emmaus. All of us have our own version of an Emmaus where the Lord approaches us, we don't recognize him, and that's basically our life of prayer - we speak to Our Lord whom we do not see. But, Jesus is telling us that even though we think he is distant he's certainly close to us and our suffering and our uncertainties and anxieties are a magnet that draw him to our rescue, to our encounter. And so, finally, the long walk ends, so they drew near to the village in which they were going. He appears to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent."

So, the Lord wants us to use our freedom and wants us to make it pretty clear that we want to hold him close to us. And I want to comment or pray about that phrase, *stay with us*. Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent. And even more concretely, I want to bring to prayer the whole concept of evening and the day being far spent. It's rich in symbolic value. Day also is an image of Christ, himself, being the light of the world. And the absence of Christ could be symbolized also by night - darkness - maybe even evening. Also, the day being far spent or the day drawing to its conclusion symbolizes our lifespan. And I want to pray about that.

St. Josemaria insisted that somewhere along the retreat the reality of death, passing out of this world and judgment should be brought to our conversation with Jesus. And we could use that phrase as a little bit of a springboard to pray about the shortness of life. St. Josemaria says in his meditation, or his homily, *Time is a Treasure*, he says the following, he complains: "I want to talk to you about time that passes so swiftly. I'm not going to repeat to you the well-known phrase about one year more being one year less nor am I going to suggest that you ask around what others think of the passage of time. If you were to do so you would probably hear something like, 'Oh, divine treasure of youth that slips away never more to return.' Though I admit you may come across other views with a deeper and more supernatural content. Nor is it my purpose to dwell nostalgically on the brevity of human life. For us Christian, the fleetingness of our journey through life should instead be a spur to help us make better use of our time. It should never be a motive for fearing Our Lord and much less for looking upon death as a disastrous and final end. It had been said in countless ways, some more

poetical than others, that by the grace and mercy of God each year that ends is a step that is nearer to Heaven, our final home.”

And then he says, “How short indeed is the time of our passing through this world. For the true Christian, these words ring deep down in his or her heart as a reproach to his or her lack of generosity and as a constant invitation to be loyal. Brief is our time for loving, for giving, for making atonement. It would be very wrong, therefore, for us to waste it or to cast this treasure irresponsibly overboard.”

So, we want to see the shortness of time, the fact that the day of life will draw to a conclusion. And, as St. Josemaria states in his homily, *Time is a Treasure*, found in *Friends of God*, that the shortness of time, St. Paul says, time is short, is a spur, is a stimulus to fill what remains of our life, whether it's many years or even decades or months - only God knows for sure when that time is - but we want to fill it with deeds of love, and that's how we constrain Our Lord to stay with us. And time goes by and we don't want to let the Lord keep going. He accompanies us, gently respects our freedom. We need to insist that he stay with us as our life, little by little, ebbs away.

Well, how should we see this walk with Our Lord? And how should we see this work of constraining him, because it is evening and the day is now far spent. Though the Lord gives us many chances, every day that goes by without becoming anxious about it is one less day for me to give myself to the Lord. I recall visiting a very holy woman who was dying of cancer and she was offering her life for her family, her friends, for people to come back to God. And she- that was her work of apostolate, to win graces through her heavy cross. And she said, this sounds corny, she shared this with me - she said, “I eagerly await for heaven. I hope I don't need to detour.” I said, “Well, if you have to detour, we all will.” And said, “But, my only reservation” - something like that - “of Heaven,” I've never heard this before, “is that I won't have any more crosses to offer Our Lord for conversion of people. So, I need to take advantage of weeks, months, the days - whatever God has planned - to embrace my cross because I won't have anymore in the afterlife.”

And she wasn't saying, boy, do I look forward to a relief of my suffering. I'm sure there was some of that, but she was concerned that her only chance for doing this was the present moment or the days or weeks that remained for her. And in a very- in a healthy way, not in a morbid way, we also want to keep our eyes fixed on eternity and realize that we are surrounded by partial goods and they come from God and they are good, but we need to go after the treasure, the ultimate good which is God. And to arrive at God, we need to go through the humanity of Jesus who is perfect God and perfect man, but we go through his humanity.

How do I make good use of my time as my day starts to become far spent, as I approach evening, as the Lord feigns, that is, going beyond my Emmaus, my village. I need to constrain him. And in fact, if I'm not mistaken, some of the Fathers of the Church, specifically St. Ambrose, talks about constraining the Lord, not letting him get away from us. And he says: "We constrain him with cords of deeds of love." Holding that idea in our mind and heart, the same writer of the Emmaus trek recorded, or reported as well, this parable of the crops which can enlighten us a bit. And it's tailor-made for us Americans who are practical people, innovative, entrepreneurial and not opposed to running up a high salary - hopefully for altruistic reasons, for ascetical reasons.

And we read here: "He said to them, 'Take heed and beware of all covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.'" So, the Lord gives little overture of this parable or allegory that we should evaluate our quality of life, our standard of living by how close we are to the ultimate treasure which is Jesus Christ, perfect God, perfect man, that we have to be careful and honest with ourselves and to see if we are making poor use of our time which is compatible with getting a lot done, with having running up a high number of experiences, having a frenetic schedule, multitasking all those kinds of things that reflect a high level of time management. But in many cases, when there is frenetic activity, when there is anxiety over promotions and amassing more possessions, it's a sign that we're wasting time.

Let's see what the Holy Spirit tells us: "For a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. And he told them a parable saying, 'A land of a rich man brought forth plentifully'" - could be tailor-made to us Americans even though there's rich people all over the world. "And he thought to himself, 'what shall I do for I have nowhere to store my crops?'" Now, what's interesting here as we meditate on this walk, on this day being far spent, as evening arriving, that the first personal- person pronoun is almost redundant in this parable, that it's used excessively, that if the Holy Spirit had recourse to an American editor he or she would tell the Holy Spirit, get rid of most of your first person pronouns - they're just too much, that's redundant, it's repetitive. But the Holy Spirit, inspiring St. Luke, is making a point. I mean, these were said by Jesus, Jesus being the perfect teacher, there's a lot of *I* and *mine*, *I* and *my*, and that's a sign that this hypothetical individual is certainly wasting his time.

We do not constrain Jesus by being self-centered. We constrain Jesus by deeds of self-giving love. But let me read on, and I will emphasize the first person pronoun: "And the last- And he thought to himself, 'what shall I do for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this. I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods and I will say to my soul: soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Take your ease. Eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool, this night your soul is required of you and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is he who lays up treasure for himself is not rich toward God."

I recall going to a hospital because a young man overdosed. And, in fact, I went to the hospital because a recently ordained priest was on call and he was alerted that someone needed to be anointed as soon as possible because he was dying from an overdose and he- he'd pass away in a couple hours. Anyway, he wanted me to go with him since he didn't have much experience, this was his first anointing. I guess the first one could be traumatic, depends on the person in question. So I went with him and I had to help him. I mean, he wanted an integral confession, and the guy was in and out of a coma. So, I remember telling the young man, young priest, 'Hey, just get him to kiss that crucifix and get that absolution going and get the anointing going before it's too late.' Anyway, it got done and he wasn't able to speak to that gentleman, young man, unfortunately, and heard his confession and anointed him. And, it was a sorrowful moment, but his family, who were Catholic were elated that we got there in time, that he died with the sacraments, that he was aware of the sacraments, that he wanted the sacraments. And so, that was kind of a big boost for my friend - a happy, bittersweet moment for the family. They were panic-stricken over the prospect of their brother, their son, dying without the sacraments - he would not be- there was no danger of him being arrested for loitering a church.

And I had a mixed feeling about this, obviously a positive one because he died with the sacraments; kind of sad feeling as well because, in a way, a lot of his life was wasted and he would have enjoyed tremendously a relationship with Christ. And the purpose of our life is not to get to Heaven or purgatory by the skin of our teeth, but that we make good use of our time here on Earth in this life, realizing that time goes by quickly. In case we feel, well, I wasted so much time, so many years, in doing my own thing, being on the self-centered side, I also want to share another experience dealing with a very good man, terminally ill, knew he was, and lamented that now that he's ill he's really getting a lot out of his faith, his devotion to Our Lord, his love for the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, his love for the Blessed Mother, his desire to join Jesus on the Cross. I mean, he- he hit it right on all cylinders, he was a very exemplary person. I was almost tempted- I was giving him a little bit of direction, by saying, let's reverse that. But, anyways, lamenting about- they didn't do anything really wrong, but he was just- he was, as he quoted, your typical Sunday Catholic, your typical Catholic who checks the boxes, you know, he says his night prayers, prayers before- prays before meals, thanks the Lord for another day. Well, we're not going to sneeze at that. And he said, I just feel that I've wasted these years. I could have known Christ and I didn't. Now I don't have much left. And what hit me was, listen, God, using an idea of St. Augustine, how God makes good use of our wrongdoing and our mistakes, and now that the mistakes have happened, we're better off for them. God is that merciful and powerful.

And I said, well, somehow your past years of lukewarmness, as he stated, are kind of the springboard to having an ardent spiritual life that you have now, that God can make up for lost time. And I'm not saying he's gonna microwave our transformation, but in a way he does, and uses our perhaps

checkered past or mediocre past to help us really hold on to that treasure, Jesus Christ. We constrain him precisely because I'm running out of time. I think, you know, it's a healthy sentiment - I'm running out of time. And I need to make a fuss over each day imbuing it with as much love as I can because it may be- it may be my last day.

What are those crops? Well, what should I do with these- my crops? I will build larger barns and store more. This hypothetical character is enamored of his crops. I will pull down my barns and build larger ones and there I will store all my grain and my goods. So, his life, his interest, his passion, is accumulating as much of those grains, as much as those crops, as possible and he does not have a notion of reality. He thinks by eating the right foods, antioxidants, working out, will give him immortality or give him a life without end here on Earth. And Jesus says, you fool. And those crops could be, as I mentioned a few moments before, it could be money, it could be status, it could be professional promotion, it could be physical appearance, it could be a comfortable life. But you notice all these things revolve around ourselves, that's a rabbit hole. What we want to do is realize that the day is far spent, and I want to take full advantage of my time and run up a high number of deeds of love. That's how I hold on to our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we keep contemplating this theme, I've been blessed with both men and women who, in my estimation, led very saintly lives. I'm not saying that they led saintly lives throughout the duration of their life, but they led saintly lives. And some of these people knew that they were pretty sick and that their lives would end in short time, others were caught by surprise. But, these people I'm thinking about, each one had that sense of urgency to hone in on one of these people, said I know I don't have much time left, I may not have control of my mind because of this illness, so I want to really give myself to Our Lord. I want to use my fatal illness to talk to my family members, talk to my friends, not to preach at them, but to tell them as a friend, as a brother, that Our Lord is where it's at, and I'm going to utilize my peace, my joy - these people are all joyful - to explain why I'm joyful, why I'm serene, why I look forward - nervous because I've never died before, I've got the jitters - but I look forward to what's on the other side. And a lot of them look forward to being even more effective and touching hearts of others through their prayer of intercession.

And in one of these cases, someone opened his heart and said, you know, I fear the Lord. And, I kept interrupting him. And he said, please listen to me, Father. He- he's- I'm fearful. Not over God's harshness with me - I don't think he's gonna be harsh, the Lord's going to be very merciful. Jesus is going to be very merciful. So, I'm not afraid of that and I'm not afraid of the prospect of going to purgatory and I wouldn't be surprised if the Lord in his lavish mercy didn't allow me to detour. I'm afraid of when he says, when I was hungry, when I was thirsty, when I was naked, when I was sick, when I was in prison, you didn't feed me enough, you didn't clothe me enough, you didn't slake my

thirst enough, you didn't visit me enough - that's what I'm afraid of - I don't want to meet the Lord empty-handed.

And lastly, as we begin to finish up or start heading in that direction, what must I do? Well, in a certain sense, without getting morose, we're all terminal. It's not a question of if, but when. Am I terminal tomorrow? I don't know. Am I terminal next year? I don't know, unless, you know, I have an illness that indicates that I'm going to be terminal within a certain amount of time. I don't know, and even in that case, we don't know. I have to use my only chance of being holy to the full, but not in terms of effort or performance, but love again. I need to be using an idea of St. Alphonsus de Liguori saying, you know, if you knew if people knew that they only had one month, what would they do? And he said, you know, and people who are caught dying and there's no turning back now, they would give, you know, all their possessions for another two months of life or month of life or quality of life.

What would I do if the day, metaphorically speaking, was going to end in a week? Would I be so cavalier in skipping my acts of piety? Would I still be reluctant to often receive the Eucharist? Would I be happy with the impression I give to those around me, not that we're here to impress, but we are here to give everybody an experience of the kindness of Jesus. How much can I do for Jesus in a given day? We feed him, clothe him, visit him - on three levels - sounds are going to give another meditation, but I'll wind it down. My acts of- my deeds of piety. The amount of Masses and receptions of communion are numbered. The amount of kindness I show in word and deed with my family, my friends, acquaintances, are numbered. The amount of time I have to offer myself in union with the Cross through my work, through contradictions, through suffering, is numbered. And so I need to constrain him. And it doesn't make logical sense - if I don't do it now, why should I do it next week or next year? I may not have next week or next year. And, we bank on Our Lord's mercy - if I want to get close to you, Lord, if I want to constrain you, you'll let me constrain you like- just like you did with these- these disciples. They constrained you and you stayed with them for awhile. That's our next meditation, the experience they had.

And so, I finish my prayer, Lord, asking you to bless us with this sense of urgency, of making good use of our time. As the Holy Father mentioned in his encyclical on sanctity, he mentioned a Vietnamese Cardinal who is in prison after the fall of Saigon, which is now called Ho Chi Minh City. And he was in solitary confinement nine years, thirteen years total in captivity. And in his diary he states that what he really wanted to do, underwent a number of conversions. First it was kind of rough - it was rough all along - but, you know, he was pretty down given the fact that, you know, for being the primate Archbishop of the whole country to literally being reduced to a number with one indignity after another, experiencing that. He said, I'm going to fill every minute of the rest of my life with deeds of love. And I think his process is open, the Holy Father quotes him. And

Mary and Joseph, we pray to them for their prayer of intercession so that I pursue that great treasure which happens to be their son.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you've communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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