

THE QUEST FOR SANCTITY

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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 journeying with Jesus in this celebrated trip to Emmaus, and we continue to read: “But they constrained him saying, ‘Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.’” We meditated in the previous time of prayer that Jesus feigned to keep walking and not detaining himself with those two disciples. We could take an educated guess that all three were walking together for a significant amount of time, given the relatively large distance between Jerusalem and Emmaus, walking on foot in those geographical lands, there were no paved streets, it was hilly, rocky, windy, so forth. So it wasn't, you know, a smooth walk. So, we could speculate that a lot of time was spent. They observed immediately that he was going to go further beyond Emmaus as they headed toward their home and they constrained him. Lord, teach us how to constrain you. And because they really wanted him to stay, he did. But they constrained him saying, ‘Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.’

We looked at that verse from the perspective of the end times, our death, our judgment. Now, let's look at this phrase, this event, from the vantage point of our vocation. The book- our baptismal vocation, whether one is a priest or a lay person, whether one is a religious, like a friar, nun, Benedictine - no matter what, we all share a common vocation by virtue of being baptized. And, just to give you the punchline, and we'll develop it in our prayer, we're called to be united to Christ in a full way, we're called to be saints. What is a saint? To give the cliff note version, the saint can say along with St. Paul, “It is no longer I that live but Christ who lives in me.” And the quest for sanctity involves this constraining of Our Lord and inviting him to our home. Home, also, is a metaphorical image of our heart of our soul.

And, toward evening and the day is now far spent, also enjoys rich Cristo-imagery. Lord, when you're not with me, it is evening and the day is far spent. You are the day, the Light of the World, stay with us. And it's a beautiful prayer, but that prayer also needs to be manifested in our struggle to conform our behavior, our words, our mindset to the *kenosis* of Jesus, a Greek word that means *self-emptying*, used in Paul's rich, but at the same time, brief description of Jesus. His *kenosis* - words, Philippians 5:27: *He emptied himself*. And, we need to empty ourselves in order to constrain him, in

order to persuade him to stay with us. The verbiage we need to bring to his attention is a disposition of radical love. We could take any saint of our preference - let's use Francis of Assisi - Holy Father has a lot of devotion to him, rightfully so, one of these "hall of fame saints", and I bring him up because of the radical way he embraced discipleship. He was a prisoner of war, he was a knight in Assisi. And if I'm not mistaken, Assisi had a war - not exactly World War II - but a war with another city state, I think was Perugia - anyway, he was captured, and just for simplicity sake, he was in captivity for about a year. Previous to that he was the heartthrob of Assisi - young, good-looking, young man with plenty of wealth. He was a knight, probably equivalent to playing a major league sport or an NFL football team, and a great swordsman, knew how to ride a horse, on and on.

And he was in captivity thinking about his life and he saw that his life was sort of empty in spite of all the girlfriends and in spite of all the parties, in spite of all the adulation from being a crackerjack knight, and he felt the calling to follow Christ. He didn't say, I'm going to found the Franciscan order, he just want to follow Christ. And he- when he was released, went to his parish priest with his- all his money - big bag of- heavy bag of gold coins, and he wanted to give it to the pastor of his parish church. Pastor said, he didn't want to receive it, especially without the permission of his father and, in Italian emotional fashion, he flung all the coins into the sanctuary of the church and stormed out. Somehow his dad was alerted. But, nevertheless, I think he also told his dad he wanted to follow Christ in a radical way. He was locked in a closet. Somehow he got out of that closet, disrobed - he dressed as a nobleman - removed that, and stormed out of his house in a melodramatic way. That was his way of beginning his journey to Christ.

And, in his own personal prayer, the Lord transmits a message to him in his mind and heart, perhaps he appeared, but anyway, the message got to him: "Francis, build my church." At first he thought he was supposed to repair the local church in his town or one of them, but then the Lord clarified it, no, the whole Church. At the same time, the Holy Father had a dream of a vagabond street urchin in tatters holding I think St. Peter's or St. John Lateran, one of those major basilicas, holding it up, and the Pope realized that this mysterious, young, poor man was going to be instrumental in building up the Church. Finally, Francis made his way to the Holy Father to start to approve his order.

Anyway, the point here is that we need, across the board, whether we're called to the priesthood or to be just lay people in the middle of the world, which is very important for the Church, or to the religious life, if we're going to be disciples, we need that kind of disposition. We could give Jesus everything in installments, just like a marathon runner who decides to run the marathon realizes that he or she can't do the whole thing by the next day, so they start working themselves towards that marathon, increasing the distances of their workouts, little by little, so by the next year or

whatever that time is, they're ready to run whatever it is... 26.2 miles. And so, that's- that's the constraining. The Lord doesn't only want, but needs- he needs that.

It's hard to explain, but the human heart is not like a physical, spatial bucket that you can put all sorts of things inside - you know, rocks, pens, paperback books, statues, whatever... food - and the human heart, there's only one ultimate good they could fit. Just like someone engaged to be married, only one ultimate love could fit in the mutual hearts of the newlyweds or the imminent newlyweds because that's the nature of human love, there has to be an ultimate love or, as they say in modern parlance, what's your passion? Well, to follow Christ, our passion, our first passion has to be Christ. As we speak to him in our prayer, let's ask him to help us see this.

What's their experience? They- they hold onto him and Jesus responds so he went in to stay with them. So they constrained him sufficiently to keep him. "When he was at table with them, he took bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them and their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road while he opened to us the Scriptures?'" This burning of the heart, this expression of how they felt of their experience, is a wonderful testimony, that when there is this constraining disposition, this constraining action in terms of prayer, sacrifice, charity, our hearts burn within us, there's a new presence in our heart, there's a conversion and a transformation. A heart on fire is a symbol of a heart brimming with love, bringing- brimming with self-giving love, brimming with a presence of Jesus. Though he vanishes in a physical way, he leaves his presence in the mutual hearts of those two disciples. He will stay with us only when we are totally open to him. Not that it is no relationship with him if we only go so far as saying some cursory prayers and attend Mass on Sunday. Yes, there is a relationship with him, but there's no quest for sanctity, there's no effective transformation into another Christ unless I give the Holy Spirit that disposition of putting Jesus first.

To supplement this constraining action of the two disciples, let's hone in on a bit of a template of Jesus' conversations inviting individuals to follow him. And we read the account of the interaction between Jesus and the rich, young man: "And as he was setting out on his journey a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" Now the Gospel says he was young, now the Gospel says he was rich. "He ran up to him and knelt before him." So that's a sign of youth - I can't do that anymore. What must I do to be a saint? What must I do to have you? Because he is eternal life, Jesus is the incarnation of eternal life. What must I do? And Jesus gives us three steps: first step is consideration; second step is certain agility with the moral virtues, the certain acquisition of the moral virtues, we never acquire them perfectly in this life; and then a radical dedication to discipleship.

Consideration number one, “And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.’” Is that true? When I get good weather in the Chicago area, that’s certainly good. And I could speak for the whole population, I don’t know- a good meal - take your choice, a good hamburger, a plate of spaghetti, pizza, sushi - whatever you suits your taste, that’s good. So, our friends, our family, they’re good. They’re real good. The gifts God has given us, that’s good. We should recognize it. Matter of fact it might be wrong to forget or ignore all the good things God gives us. In fact, it’s God himself in the first words of Genesis who says everything. He created us good, and upon creating the human person, he said that’s very good. So, seems like there’s a contradiction here. Yeah, we know God is good. We know God is the ultimate good, but there’s other things that are good, too. How do we square the Word of God with reason? Because we must. Faith and reason reinforce each other, complement each other, and can never contradict each other.

Well, God is the only good that could fill the human heart. No person, no experience, no talent, no accomplishment cuts it. There’s only one way to be happy, it’s to embrace God. Jesus is a God-man, Our God-man, Our Lord and Savior. Only by being united to him can we be filled. We have good evidence from St. Augustine who was one of the most talented individuals in the history of Western Civilization leaves history in awe by the amount of work he did, the treatises he produced, and intermittently barely complaining that he had too much pastoral work to do as a bishop to elaborate on theological issues. But he produced, I don’t know, I’ve heard over 200 treatises, and thinking of *City of God* alone, 1,300 pages, that’s because he was an extraordinary man. He was rich back in the day, the 4th century, and he indulged himself in sensuality and hedonism, had a mistress, gave her up and had acquired another one, had a son out of wedlock. He was a prestigious teacher, had a very prestigious line of work in Milan, you know, he was in the Imperial Court as an advisor, and he’s the one who came up with that- many famous phrases, but this famous phrase, two of them: “Lord, how late have I loved you,” regretting that. And say- he’s also said in deep prayer, “Lord, our hearts are empty until they rest in you.”

So that’s what Jesus is saying to the rich, young man because he’s going to ask him for everything, that’s the only way to follow Christ. That’s one of the legacies of St. Josemaria Escriva in this illumination he received on October 2, 1928. What was transmitted to him is that this is the proper way to follow Christ, to embrace holiness, to put our whole heart into our faith. It’s about a person, it’s not about a lifestyle or only a series of beliefs. It’s that but a lot more. So, only God is good.

So, the second point is- he says: “If you want to enter life,” in this particular Gospel, that’s left out. But, in another Gospel, “If you want to have life, keep the Commandments.” And so, he goes over the Commandments with this young man. And why is that the second point in following Christ? Because we need a threshold of freedom to follow Christ. And another way of looking at the Ten Commandments is as a liberation of the human heart in order to give itself. In other words, the

Commandments forbid anger and greed and lust and injustice and mistreatment of others, falsehood, on and on. So, we need a certain liberation from those vices, those kinds of sins. If I'm angry, I can't give myself in charity. If I'm greedy, I can't put God first because my God is my possessions, my money. If I am a slave to my lusts, there's no way I could be spiritual. My mindset is carnal and carnal- being carnal and being spiritual are mutually exclusive.

And he's young and yeah, passions are a little bit more alive as opposed to when you're much older, and so Our Lord goes over those Commandments. You need to control your passions. You need to have self-mastery. You need to possess yourself. And now, I'm going to ask you to give yourself, but you have to possess yourself. And before I ask you to give yourself totally, I need you to be free to do that, free from sin. This is all part of that constraining, so Jesus stays at the home of our soul and so that our hearts burn within us.

What could be a little disconcerting is that this young man went through the trouble to kneel before Jesus to ask him how to acquire eternal life. To be brutally honest, even though it's normal to relive all the Commandments, it's certainly not common that people live the Commandments - that includes young people as well. Some do, many do not, and we can put ourselves in that category at times as well. But anyway, this particular person, I can just imagine him, yeah, well-behaved in school, a gentleman on a date, never uses profanity, on and on, gives up sweets during Lent, goes to Mass a little bit more often, very Orthodox, very pro-life, all good things.

“Teacher, all these I've observed from my youth. What do I lack?” And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack one thing.’” I'm always tempted to say, he does? I mean, this- this is a young man you want on your team. Look at the motley crew you have as Apostles. You're not putting your best foot forward with those Apostles. They all are obviously flawed. He looked at him and loved him. I want you on my team. You live the Commandments. You are a virtuous young man. Your idealistic. You want that eternal life. But he lacks one thing, lacks one thing for what? To have a full experience of Christ, to have a profound friendship with Christ, for Christ to fully dwell in the home of his heart, of his soul, to be an evangelizer. You can't evangelize unless you follow step number three.

“And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack one thing. Go, sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in Heaven. And come follow me.’ At that saying his countenance fell and he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.” And we can contrast that with those disciples who constrain Our Lord, they're on fire with joy - we'll see in a subsequent meditation the expression of the manifestation of that joy. Well, why? Well, we know the outcome - they will sell all that they have.

Now, Emmaus is a locus for total self-giving, the locus for the beginning of optimism and joy and deep faith and not the locus of discouragement and despair. “You lack one thing. Go, sell what you have.” Why sell? I’m buying the treasure hidden in the field. I have to sell all that I have. It’s the pearl of great price. It’s the widow who is mentioned in the Gospel of St. Luke, Chapter 21, who gave the few pennies she had, and Jesus noticed it and said, her legacy would live on because she gave all that she had. We see the- this pattern, this common thread, running through all of Jesus’ followers whoa are called to announce the gospel like these two disciples will do. They’ll go back to Jerusalem and announce the Resurrection. But this is all predicated upon this give- making Christ absolutely first and rediscovering ways to put him first in concrete ways.

In fact, who are the poor? Well, we got plenty of poor here on number of levels. We suffer by- when we see homeless people. There’s indigent people in our country, all over the world. But, to use an idea of St. Mother Teresa, who indicted, spiritually speaking, the United States, being one the poorest countries in the world because we destroy our unborn children. Any absence of God, we see it all around us, but we’re not pessimists. In fact, the virulent, moral relativism, the culture of falsehood, of sensuality, of death, doesn’t prompt us to wring our hands but to constrain the Lord with total dedication because those are the poor. And- and the money I have now never runs out because the money is now the Light of Christ that I radiate, and that’s never expended, that’s never used up. And hence, is very simple. Reflection of St. Josemaria, exhortation- prayerful exhortation in *The Way* underneath the heading of *Calling* is the following: “Why don’t you give yourself to God once and for all, really, now? Go preach the gospel. I will be with you. Jesus has said this and he has said it to you.”

Lord, we finish our prayer asking you to help us do the opposite of the rich, young man who goes away sad. We want to return to our Jerusalem fired up, fired up with love. But that’s predicated upon really sharing in Jesus’ self-emptying so I’ll be filled with Christ so they could give Christ to others, so I could be that light of the world. During this year of St. Joseph, we go to him who gave it all and therefore was able to bring Christ into the public life. And lastly, we go to the Blessed Mother who gave it all which occasioned the Holy Spirit to bring the Son of God into our world as well. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, pray for us so that we respond to your calling of total self-gift so we’re empowered to be lights of the world.

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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