

## **PART SIX: THE MEANS TO UNION WITH CHRIST**

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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, 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 our walk with Jesus- we continue our personal walk to Emmaus. It's not just a pious, metaphorical way of speaking, everything Jesus does is for us personally and we are recipients of his words, of his presence, of his deeds. All the episodes of his life are meant to affect us personally. And especially this narrative of the life of the Resurrected Christ here on our planet, on this Earth, we accept his words personally, we accept his gestures personally. And just to segue into the topic of our meditation, which is the means to union with Christ, the means to sanctity, we see two means used - they don't recognize Jesus just like we don't see him with our eyes of flesh; we hope to see him face-to-face in Heaven.

And the medium of conversation with Jesus on this long walk to Emmaus and then back again to Jerusalem is Jesus' actual words, the prophetic words predicting his Passion that he explains, and then at the end of their journey, the breaking of the bread, the bread he will distribute to those two disciples, he breaks the bread. And so, they deal with him, if you will, using words of St. Josemaria, they deal with him through the bread and the Word though their minds don't recognize the Resurrected Jesus. Their eyes don't recognize the Resurrected Jesus. The voice of the mysterious companion is not identified as the voice of the Resurrected Jesus. They will detect him; they will recognize him at the very end and he will vanish. I will read this account.

And so we ask you, Lord, Resurrected Jesus, help us convert to the necessity of being nourished by your words and by your body and blood that we call the Eucharist. Though we've read this before, in order to segue properly into our next topic, I will read what we have read already: "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So they constrain Jesus to stay with them. "So he went in to stay with them" - so he was actually in their home, sitting at table, conversing some more - where- "When he was at table with them, he took the 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."

This just reminds me of an experience - an anecdote, if you will - it was occasioned by a visit I paid to a close priest friend who was dying of cancer. I went to his room and he was going in and out of sleep. And he noticed that I was completely mesmerized by a photograph he had on his desk. He was older than me, and it was a photograph of St. Josemaria lost in prayer during Mass. I don't know exactly what part of the Mass it was, but I do know it was before the "through him, and with him" and after the consecration just by his gestures and just by seeing the Sacred Host and the chalice that he was staring at. He was

metaphorically staring so intensely he was drilling a hole in those objects he was seeing, those objects are the Eucharist, the true presence of Jesus. That triggered another memory, as I was looking at that photograph, where he was making an act of faith in the true presence, telling Jesus, I believe you are here, I believe so ardently and so totally that I believe you were here more than if I would actually see you with my eyes of flesh - that's how much I believe that you are here.

I was saying to myself when I was staring at that photograph, he must be seeing something, that's the impression you get - his demeanor of intense contemplation, focus, almost as if you were in another world. And I would say that is the consequence of struggling, to accompany Jesus using his words, personally meditating on his words and his devotion to the Eucharist. Bl. Alvaro would say that he had such a strong faith you can cut it with a knife. He would proclaim to Jesus in those moments after the consecration or before the tabernacle, "I believe you are here more than if I'd actually see you with eyes of flesh."

Anyway, we ask the Lord for more faith, that he talks to us through the Word and through the bread. How does the bread and the Word affect us? Alright, we spend time in mental prayer or quiet time in meditation, contemplation, we insert ourselves into the scenes of the Gospel - advice from St. Josemaria - and become one more character and become recipients of those words he originally uttered on behalf of his followers, and we make that act of faith. We harken back to one of Jesus' first words - virtual first words - and ostensibly addressed to the Evil One, but in reality, to all of us. When the devil tempted him to turn the stones into bread, he reveals that his words are nourishment - "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." The Word of God indicates God the Son coming forth from the mouth of God. The Father is a metaphor for the generation of the Divine Son. Jesus will later on say in his Eucharistic discourse that his words are spirit and life. In his allegory or parable of the vine and the branches, he will say that we connect with the branch through his Word. We abide in his Word. So, there's something there with his Word. And obviously, Jesus talks about the Holy Eucharist as his true presence and as a- as a gift that actually gives life to the world.

We ask prayerfully, how does this work? I may draw a blank, I may feel dry, as spiritual authors say. I might find prayer, Eucharistic piety, tedious even though I don't want it to be tedious. What happens exactly? Well, maybe I could share another anecdote that I eventually drew some spiritual insight or lesson. I was having lunch with a professional athlete, football player, and we had a hamburger. He had his two or three hamburgers, I had my one. And I had my lemonade, and he had his milkshake. But, you know, being four times my size, that's understandable, and being a professional athlete. And then he proceeded to, in my estimation, ruin his milkshake. He was pouring this clear, viscous goo into the milkshake. And he told me that I didn't need him to share that with me. And I said, thank God. And I asked him what this goo is all about to prompt him to ruin a milkshake. He said it wasn't ruined because it had no taste. But it looked a little bit nasty.

Anyway, he said it was protein, a protein liquid substance. And he said that- that protein would eventually, if he worked out with weights and did wind sprints, that protein would develop into muscle

tone and actual muscles. He would bulk up and get stronger because the protein is the raw material for growth in muscular strength and actual growth of muscles. And what I drew from this is if we, when we nourish ourselves, there's all sorts of mechanisms inside the body – I think you could simplify it by saying there's a life force, you know, expressed in biochemical reactions and physiological reactions, secretions of hormones, and neurotransmitters - very complex, sophisticated activity in the blood with diversity of cells and antibodies and on and on and on. But, getting back to that development of muscle, there's something in the body that reacts to that protein goo that causes change in the body. This dealing with Our Lord, nourishing ourselves prayerfully in the bread or- with the bread and the Word also initiates reactions in our spiritual soul. There's a transformation going on that there's a life force that is being triggered, to put it in clumsy, human terminology, by dealing with Jesus in the bread and the Word like these two disciples heading towards Emmaus.

What word? I mean, he was- they were walking with him for hours talking to him, listening to him, though not recognizing him. It's an allegory of contemplation, of meditation, before the Blessed Sacrament. We don't see the Jesus we're dealing with but we believe he's there. And when we do this, something's happening. Just as in the physical body, when you nourish yourself with food and drink, something is happening. It's triggering- it's prompting reactions of the body that produce a greater stamina and a better muscle tone. So, that's what's going on there.

By speaking with Jesus and by contacting him in the Eucharist, both by adoring the Eucharist and receiving the Eucharist, we begin to, little by little, recognize his presence through the eyes of the heart and through the perceptions of the mind which is basically an increase of faith. And we need to examine ourselves: Am I willing to walk with Jesus through the medium of the bread and the Word? St. Josemaria says in *The Way*, "If you don't keep in touch with Christ in prayer and in the bread, how can you make him known to others?" Why? What's that connection? The connection is that there's a development of the heart of Christ in the one who prays, in the one who prays with the Eucharist, prays upon receiving the Eucharist. There is- change is going on. We maintain our own character and personality, but little by little we begin to love with the heart of Christ.

It reminds me of this very interesting blessed, if I'm not mistaken, Bl. Carlo Acutis. I think the Holy Father beatified him - perhaps another- another bishop - but, nevertheless, the Holy Father approved of his beatification. And this young blessed died at age fifteen of leukemia, knew he was going to die. And the nice thing about this blessed is that he was brimming with normalcy. Not that the saints don't brim with normalcy but, you know, you read about how Mother Teresa who was quite extraordinary- extraordinary calling, icon of holiness - we can't say enough good about her, but most of us are not going to go to the streets and gutters of Kolkata or any other city where you have the poorest of the poor and devote our entire life to that. It's a beautiful calling, but that's not your standard vocation. Not everybody is called to bear the stigmata of Jesus like Padre Pio or be set in everyone's- or be in the public eye like St. John Paul, or even our immediate patron saint, St. Josemaria. He was the founder of Opus Dei. Yes, there was a lot of ordinariness to his life, but in my estimation, being founder of Opus Dei also is an extraordinary calling.

But, this young man, saint or Bl. Acutis- Carlo Acutis, he was into video games, not that- that's needed for the sanctity by any stretch of the imagination, but he was- he loved computers. He was good at it. He helped his friends and he at times- anytime they had computer problems, if I'm not mistaken, I mean it's so recent his beatification, there's no substantial biography, at least I couldn't find one. He played soccer, like many bond fide Italians do. Parents seemed to be agnostic, pretty indifferent towards religion, uninterested. He was the only child, I think. He had a circle of friends and, given the situation of the Western world, it's implied that his friends were not practicing either. He was and he had an ardent desire to the Eucharist. I mean, it was- he wasn't trained that way. Ever since he was a little boy, single digits, and spent hours in front of the Blessed Sacrament. He played video games, he went to school, he played soccer, hung out with his friend. But he did- he put in a lot of time there and he was encouraging his friends to take a look at the Eucharist and develop Eucharistic piety themselves. He loved Our Lady, prayed the Rosary, and loved his friends, loved his mom and dad.

And his- just his persona, his demeanor, attracted people to Christ like a magnet. His parents start to become ardent Catholics. His friends began to practice. This Hindu maintenance man at his high school in northern Italy became a Catholic. And even though there was a huge discrepancy in age they became good friends, and the maintenance man was overwhelmed by the young boy's goodness, his charity, his affection. His friends loved him because of his uncanny ability to love them unconditionally, but in a very natural way, commensurate with being a fifteen-year-old high school boy. The secret is the bread and the Word. The bread and the Word transformed him.

And this is very significant, this part of the trek to Emmaus. Let me just read it again: "So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the 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." Now, to give you a sneak preview, many people are familiar with the whole episode, they will head back to Jerusalem and announce the Resurrection in a very enthusiastic way. They're ready to return to work. They're ready to evangelize. They're ready to take to heart Jesus' divine commission to be witnesses of the Gospel in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth (Acts 1:8).

But we see before they do that, before they head back to Jerusalem, there's a connection with this mysterious companion in first the Word - listening to him, dialoguing him, that signifies mental prayer, quiet time with Jesus - and then the breaking of the bread. The Gospel is being brutally honest. Obviously, it's intimately linked with the ultimate truth. These disciples, all the disciples, will be cut loose into a hostile, hedonistic, biased people towards Christianity. Christianity will fly in the face of the mindset of the people dispersed throughout the empire. But, nevertheless, they will attract people. But it begins always with the interior life. We ask Our Lord to engrave that truth in our minds and hearts that my interior life is a service to the apostolate to the work of evangelization.

Well, I cut corners. It's a little hit and miss with me. It's my problem, it's not my problem. It's my family's problem. It is my friend's problem. It is all the people I'm going to meet's problem because I'm not going to give them the heart of Christ. I could desire to run marathons, to expend energy, but if I'm not

nourished I can't do that. If I want to be a light of Christ for others I need to put in the time of meditating on his Word and adoring the Eucharist outside the tabernacle, and especially by receiving the Eucharist and participating in the Mass or celebrating the Mass.

In a sense, yes, there's seemingly insurmountable obstacles out there. We could name a number of issues - the transgender issue, the identity crisis concerning marriage - there is a real marriage between a man and woman, but it seems like that is not the definition of marriage our popular culture gives to marriage - sexual promiscuity, pandemic of pornography. And we may respond by saying, well, how do I preach the gospel or spread the gospel under these conditions, these insuperable obstacles? And I need to make an act of faith and not wallow in a guilt trip, that's for sure, or discouragement. But the obstacle, in a sense, is myself. Last time I checked, Jesus is the victory that that has overcome the world. He's more powerful than sin. He's more powerful than the obstacles. But in the mysteries of his Divine Providence, he relies on my faith expressed in dealing with him vis-à-vis - Sacred Scripture, his life, his words, and his true presence underneath the bread and wine.

I cannot evangelize unless I am constantly uniting myself to Jesus through these two means. And if Our Lord can overcome every obstacle, and if love is truly more powerful than sin and these motives of credibility of the lives of the saints who have under no uncertain terms evangelized no matter what kind of environment they were pitted against. And as the early Christians, little by little, transformed a pagan, violent, hedonistic world, if I don't embrace Jesus and put in time for prayer, I'm the problem because my light is a glimmering- a flickering candle instead of a bright light that radiates through the darkness.

I become- salt has lost its saltiness and is no longer able to transform the food and bring the best out of the food. I'm a leaven in the mass that has lost its pep to transform that that dough. I become a dangling branch off of the vine, rendering the vine incapable of producing fruit because I'm not completely attached to the vine. These are considerations we want to make that the situation is urgent, and these are great times precisely because I have no choice. If I'm going to really extend that Kingdom or at least be an instrument of extending the Kingdom, I need to take my interior life seriously.

And I'll read another point of *The Way*, compiled under very difficult circumstances, to be exact, the circumstances were consisted in a virulent persecution of the Church that surpassed the persecutions that occurred in those ancient times. And St. Josemaria writes here: "Following the words of another writer, I'll tell you that your Apostolic life is worth only as much as your prayer." And then he says here, kind of harsh, but he applies it to himself and those who benefit from his counsel, Point 109: "If you're not a man or a woman of prayer, I don't believe in the sincerity of your intentions when you say that you work for Christ."

And maybe one resolution as we finish up our prayer, just a personal recommendation that I'm trying to practice myself, is that spiritual law of "before's". We start our day before anything else, once we get ready, that we deal with Jesus before anything else as the day begins, which is a symbol of the Resurrection as the light comes out of the East, the sun comes out from the East, that the first activity is protracted time for

prayer. I could designate ten minutes, a half hour, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes - whatever it is, using the Scriptures, using spiritual books to help me talk to Jesus. If possible, that I connect it with Mass, that I do this before Mass, in order to immerse myself more profoundly in Mass, and that I do this before the Blessed Sacrament, that this quiet time also be Eucharistic adoration. The saints have done that - Bl. Carlo did that, St. Josemaria did that, St. John Paul did that, Mother Teresa did that. And, if possible, I want to do it too.

We put our sentiments in the hands of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph who gave themselves unstintingly in serving their son. Convert me, pray for me, so that I put that interior life - my prayer, and my Eucharistic devotion - very much in the first place. 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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