

APOSTOLATE OF ATTRACTION

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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.

Lord, assist us in bringing to our conversation with you this key idea of the Holy Father, which is the topic of our prayer, the apostolate of attraction, or, the apostolate of witness, or the apostolate of good example. This apostolate is as old as the gospel and as new as the gospel, but the present culture call- especially calls for an apostolate of attraction where our witness, which is compatible with being a vessel of clay, proves that Jesus is real. And in fact, that gospel of attraction is indispensable to speak about doctrine because that attraction awakens that question articulated by St. Peter in his first epistle: “Be ready to give the reason for the hope that is within you.” So people need to see us as an oasis of joy and peace. Perfect, no, that’s Our Lord. But nevertheless, that presence of Our Lord.

We know how to go about it, but Lord, we want to talk to you about it. Today’s first reading gives a little bit of a picture of the formation of the very first followers of Our Lord taken from St. Paul’s Letter to the Thessalonians. At least, what I’ve read, this is the oldest body of writing in the New Testament. Some people dispute that - they say it is the Letter to the Corinthians, but this- these letters pre-date the four Gospels. And it’s in this letter that St. Paul says to the recipients of the formation he’s giving, that this is the will of God, that you be saints. So that- that’s what the first ones heard. And this repetition, virtually in every epistle, this repetition of the need to replicate that love of Christ, that heart of Christ. Jesus, push me to want to do this, to renew this desire to replicate your love. That’s why it’s a new commandment because we always have to renew that, we often begin again, to live this new commandment by its very nature requires a constant state of conversion.

So, it’s new for many reasons. And these very first Christians heard the following: “But concerning love of the brethren, you have no need to have anyone write you for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another. And indeed, you do love all the brethren throughout Macedonia. But we exhort you, brethren, to do so more and more, to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands as we charged you.”

And isn’t this the message that is traced back to Our Lord himself and the spirit of Opus Dei and the spirit of St. Josemaria, and the previous father, Don Javier? Emphasizing this, I heard someone comment on him, he said his life was characterized by great love - someone from Rome said that. And, we see that the system works. Yes, he had many people praying for him, but everybody fulfills this desire of Jesus when they

comment on Don Javier what- what love, what a big heart, what affection - and that affection kept growing. You will be known by the love you have for one another.

A little anecdote comes to mind, even though I'm sure it's been heard a few times, but it could serve for our own meditation. I remember in one of these workshops in Rome, where I brought into someone workshop for vicars and ran into someone, someone was- well, how are things in Chicago? And I mentioned at that time a couple of our brothers were terminally ill. He said, "I'm sure you mentioned that to the Father." I said, "I did not." He said, "Well, you better," he says, "because if you're here and you didn't tell him and he finds out from another source, he's not going to be happy about that. He wants to know these things." And so, I said, "When do I talk to him?" "Right before the get together, make sure you stop him and tell him." So, I did, and he was very appreciative, and talked about them and the get together and need to pray for these two people, and they both, that day, received a fax from him assuring them of his prayers and Our Lord's love for them and his love for them.

In fact when I got back, I got into a little trouble, quote-unquote. One of them said, "Why did you inconvenience the Father like that?" I said, "It wasn't my fault." He said, "I didn't- he didn't need to do that. And, you know, given his busy schedule, you shouldn't have done that." I said, "I didn't. I just told you." "No, no- you did- you did more than that. You wanted him to fax me." "Well, I did, but I didn't tell the Father that."

This- the hope here, and we're not starting from ground zero- people, when they come to Centers, they like it because of all the smiling faces and- and the affectionate treatment. But Our Lord does say, we could ask him that question, what must I do to attract? You need to approach my heart. And we could ask Our Lord, "Lord, well, how do I approach your heart? How do I duplicate that heart?" And we could take the liberty to say, don't just count on your own efforts. In fact, if it's- if it's- if that's your disposition that I'm going to make this effort, I want to remind you, without me, you can do nothing. And what's he referring to, specifically? Many things, any kind of spiritual growth, any kind of Apostolic progress, everything. But specifically, he's referring to his new commandment to replicate that love. And in fact, he begins his public life defining what a disciple is. He says that you are the light of the world. Sounds very idealistic. You are the light of the world. It's kind of a boost. But this is all about union with him, this replication of the heart of Our Lord is all about union with him.

Lord, we want the grace to hunger for you, to deal with you in the bread and in the Word, because it's you through me. And I need to keep coming to that decision and that disposition. Lord, push me to do that. St. Josemaria - I apologize for not identifying the exact quotation here, but it's this reference to piety when he says, just to paraphrase it, don't ever write yourself off. Whatever reasons or excuses, I didn't come from a lovey-dovey background, or we weren't very demonstrative in our affection, or I- or the- or the false humility, I'm basically too self-centered. Or I'm- I'm rather shy or I'm not shy, I'm- I'm an extrovert, but it's- it's superficial. I am a backslapper, but I- it's hard for me to go deeper. All those reasons that describe being a vessel of clay.

And our Father says, "It's always a matter of connecting with Our Lord. It's a matter of- it's always a matter of piety." Because what is piety? Piety is joining our heart with his heart, and it can't be a perfunctory piety, it has to be this seeking him out. He uses that word *seek*. Whenever sanctity is genuine it overflows from its vessel to fill other hearts of a soul with its super abundance. That is the apostolate of attraction. Our Lord begins by telling us that the first way, the first step, in extending that kingdom is to be a light of the world.

I know the first Apostolic words are *come and see*, but step number one - literally, step number one - that's what the Holy Father is emphasizing. It's a gospel of attraction. And he's saying, basically, you can't lead with doctrine, per se, but lead with attraction so people want to get the doctrine. It's hard to lead with doctrine now because it's not a Christian culture. And our doctrine, these truths of the Catholic faith, are one of the best kept secrets. But they'll be less secretive- they're not secret, per se, obviously, as we attract people to the gospel. And so, Our Lord says it's being that light, and that's what this point is all about because I don't need a light here, but if I had one of these meditation lamps, the light can only go on as good as the filament is, as good as the fixture is, as good as its capacity. I gotta plug it in. Why do I have to plug it in? Because somewhere there is a source of power, the- that fixture is a light, no question about it, but it's a participation in a power source. It draws energy, draws electricity from the power source so that it can lighten the room, so it can illuminate the room. I am not the light of the world in terms of the power source, I am a light insofar as I live in the light.

The Holy Spirit, in Psalm 36, "How precious is your steadfast love, oh God. The children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings, they feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights for with you is the fountain of life and in your light, do we see light." This is a prophecy. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid." And we almost take that as you cannot neglect your interior life. It cannot, because "nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel but on a stand and it gives light to all in the house."

What is that bushel? It's the bushel of lukewarmness, it's the bushel of lack of interest, it's the bushel of going through the motions. He says, it can- I don't want that light to be hid. Well Lord, how do I set that light on a mountaintop? Hunger for me, deal with me. This point - it's almost worth a retreat, "No matter how much you may love, you will never love enough. The human heart is endowed with an enormous coefficient of expansion. When it loves, it opens out in a crescendo of affection that overcomes all barriers. If you love Our Lord, there will not be a single creature that does not find a place in your heart." The- another example, this is from someone who's quite elderly now, and he lived in the same Center, same building as St. Josemaria in the late 50s, early 60s, and had a hard time talking about it without getting emotional. And I'm noticing that a little bit more, that people get emotional, those who are still around who knew St. Josemaria. And it was kind of a simple experience he shared. He said, "Well, in the late 50s and the early 60s, he already had a convincing reputation of holiness. People couldn't get enough face time with him." And he said, "But the last time he had seen him was on one of these unique trips and one of the first ones in 1972, or maybe a year later, I don't know. But that's what he said, it was around that time, and a big gathering,

bit get together. And St. Josemaria spotted him, said come on over here and gave him a huge hug and said a few words and, you know, the whole- he elaborated on the hub, and he had said that, you know, amid emotional obstacles that he had noticed his affection had significantly grown, it had grown, and he said he had it, whatever it was, fifteen years ago when he saw him last, or ten years ago- ten years ago. Why that affection? Well, because what he just said, that we need to deal with him. So, Our Lord saying that you are the light of the world, he's not giving us an impossible vision, humanly speaking. Yes, but he's talking about that overflow, that overflow of the interior life.

This apostolate of attraction, right before Jesus cuts his disciples loose, his Apostles loose, he, in a way, issues his first catechism and it's also tailor made for us pragmatic Americans, what works. And he's going to cut them loose into a world that is hostile to the gospel message and will radically disagree with it, to put it mildly. And the reaction for the next few centuries would be a reaction of violence and hatred - seems like the timing isn't all that great. And Our Lord says unconditionally, it's very interesting, the Last Supper account. He could have gone at this last evening in many- many different ways- he could have been a lot more specific in predicting the Apostles' future. He could have elaborated a lot more on the obstacles that they would encounter. He could have stressed even more how difficult this would be. But if you didn't know the history of Christianity and just read the Last Supper account, kind of read simply, you- you live the new commandment, and it's going to work. The obstacles are irrelevant because indeed, they are obstacles.

And these obstacles that they encountered are similar to the obstacles that we encounter. And so, we take to heart: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Even as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this, all men and women will know that you are my disciples." By this, they will know that you're my disciples, you've got to make me real. And if I strain my mind to figure out, well, how can I attract people more? My answer- the answer is I need to be you- more united to him. I need to participate more in the light. He's the light. And Our Lord is saying, under no uncertain terms, this works. They will know this by the love you have for one another.

Last little example... I was- I had a conversation with a gentleman who, we had some common friends, and they were connected with the Work, and he was kind of singing the praises- one was a young lady, another one was a young man, and just different children or- of people connected with the Work. So, he was just praising I think three or four people, and kind of saying well, that's- that's the fruit of the formation of- of Opus Dei. And as we were talking, I was saying, well, if we're going to be more precise, this is the fruit of the love they encountered in their family, that it's never a book that moves people to follow Christ. It's never, you know that- that solitary piece of advice, it's the witness of charity. And that was brought out that it's true. And this gentleman said, well, I hope when my kids are older, they could- we're saying about the parents of these three or four young people, they'll say about me - they will be attracted by the love you have.

As we finish our prayer, this piety, this union with the Light of Christ, this union with the power source, specifically, and I would say, you know, that's the Father's first intention that he shared with, and

everybody's grappled onto that, the life of Jesus, the humanity of Jesus, in union with the Eucharist, in union with him through the Word, getting personal with him, which is compatible with dryness, in union with that vine, because he's saying that it's- I have to love as he is loved. And usually the majority of the times it's- it's these little things, whether it gets- it's that smile upon seeing somebody, it's that listening ear, that genuine concern, that genuine, unconditional love, it's that piece we give people that I'm not the- he's the source. And if I find myself wanting there, you know, it's no discouragement. No, I just have to connect with the heart of Christ more, I've got to make my prayer life more of a high point. I need to engage him more. My work has to be more shared with him, whatever it may be.

We turn our attention to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and using an idea of St. John Paul, she recites her Magnificat and she's magnificent, chiefly on the order of love. She recites that Magnificat when she visits Elizabeth. John Paul says that we also should strive to be a Magnificat on the order of love. Mary, pray for us so that we have this desire to indeed to this.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you have 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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