

STUDY AND PRAYER

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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 read in the Gospel of St. Mark these words, “And when he had landed, Jesus saw a large crowd and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” Now, normally, when Our Lord sees some crowd or someone who, you know, needs something, he takes care of their immediate needs, and, for instance, feeds them. We saw in the gospel many times, how Our Lord multiplies the loaves and the fish, or when they don’t have wine, he gives them wine at the Wedding at Cana, and so many other instances where he sees the needs of the person in their illness or what not and he cures them or resurrects them even. But here, he actually does something else. He- he sees their immediate needs, you know, and the immediate need in this case is that they were ignorant. They were ignorant of truth, and that’s why it says, “immediately afterwards, they were sheep left without a shepherd and he began to teach them many things.”

“He began to teach them man things.” That means that the most urgent thing at that moment was they needed truth. They needed truth and he- he had mercy on them because they didn’t know where to go - not because they didn’t have food, not because they didn’t have a map, not because they had an illness, but maybe because they didn’t have spiritual food, which is the truth, maybe because they didn’t have a spiritual map or an intellectual map of really where to go in their lives, and that is also a deep reason for living and how to guide others. They didn’t have that and they didn’t have, you know, real spiritual health which comes from actually living out the truth of God’s law and- and of understanding who we are and knowing ourselves.

And so, that’s called ignorance and he sees this and he begins to teach them many things to get rid of that ignorance, that illness of the mind. Now, St. Josemaria has a point of *The Way* which is very evocative for us, especially as we begin a new school year, right now, in the month of August and in early fall. We are going to need a lot of time to study and a lot of strength to study if you’re a student and even if you’re not a student, St. Josemaria said something that’s evocative for all of us. He said, “For the modern apostle, one hour of study is one hour of prayer.” Now, think about that: “For the modern apostle, one hour of study is and hour of prayer.”

Here St. Josemaria actually raises study to the level of prayer, and he raises both study and prayer to a way of life. And not just for students, it's a way of life for the modern apostle. For the modern apostle, one hour of study is one hour of prayer. And that means that we need to pray all the time because- and we need to study all the time. In fact, St. Josemaria, I think, is one of the first, if not the first, to coin a term about the plan of life which is unique to him. And maybe, the actual practice is not unique to him. But what is unique to him is the name that he coined for this practice and he called it- he had a- he had a set of norms that are norms of *always*, or *always norms*. And among these *always norms* he had presence of God and study.

And in fact, study is something that really with this *always norm* is- is not just for students. It's for everybody and it is a life-changing habit; it's a way of life. It's a way of looking at the world. It's a way of approaching the world. Now in this point of *The Way* that I just read, "For the modern apostle, one hour of study is one hour of prayer," St. Josemaria puts together study and prayer but also, apostolate. Apostolate is really the radiating of hope to the world, giving them reasons to hope. And so, really, what he's doing is well, these, he's putting three sides of the same coin together. Now, you might say, well, a coin has two sides. Well, yes, a coin actually has two sides. Study and prayer, we could say, are two sides of the same coin. But, you know what? If you allow me, I will in this very meditation, I want to coin a new phrase and the - no pun intended - the phrase is, "There are three sides to one coin." And actually, I want to think of the rim of the coin as the third side, that's the third side, and it's the side that puts the other two together. And I think that's what St. Josemaria is doing here. He's putting study and prayer, which are two sides of the coin, together with the third side, which is charity, or apostolate, which really means giving hope, radiating hope to the world because they need deep reasons in order to live, in order to survive.

St. Peter, in his letter, he actually has something very similar. He says, "Be ready, always" - he's talking to believers - "Be ready, always, with an answer to everyone who asks for a reason, a logos, for the hope that is in you." Be ready. So, in other words, you who believe, you have faith, you need to provide a logos, a reason for the hope that you have because you're so happy. It brings joy. Incidentally, one of the *always norms* that St. Josemaria had besides study and- and presence of God was order, cheerfulness, consideration of one's divine filiation. These are the reasons, the deep reasons that bring joy. Cheerfulness is- is a consequence of our divine affiliation, consequence of really being aware that we are children of God. But how could you be aware if the world is telling you that you came out of, you know, hap-hazard evolution, that there is no God. It's an atheistic kind of evolution that they proclaim.

And no- well, we have to study, we have to study those deep reasons and then proclaim them to the world because we believe St. Anselm's famous phrase, "faith seeking understanding." We need- we believe, yes, but then we need reason to go deep into those beliefs so that we can solidify our hope. You see, those are the three elements that we have in this point of *The Way*. We have study, we have prayer. Think of study like reason, deepening in your reason. Think of prayer as deepening in your faith, and think of apostolate as deepening in your ability to radiate hope which is really an act of charity to the whole world. So faith and reason yields hope. Study and prayer is true apostolate and we need to feed the people with this hope

that only Jesus Christ can give. This is what St. Ambrose says, “Whoever gathers water from the mountains and leads it to himself or draws it from springs is himself a source of dew like the clouds. fill your soul then with this water so that your land may not be dry but watered by your own springs.” And then he adds, “He who reads much and understands much receives his fill. He who is full refreshes others.”

So, Scripture says if the clouds are full, they will pour rain upon the Earth. Well, think about that. If you study, if you fill your cloud, meaning your intellect, your reason, your heart with- with good reasons to believe with, you know, deepening into the mysteries of faith, then you will be able to provide hope for others. You'll be able to provide this water for others. You'll come as a cloud that rains on dry land so that people can then believe as well. And people can also not only believe but, you know, return with- with this great joy of knowing that they are loved. This is what people need. This is- this is why the crowds are like sheep without a shepherd, they don't know where to go because they don't know that they are loved by God profoundly. And it's not just about knowing that as we proclaim your love by God; no, it's not about that. It's just, when you go into people's lives, they have reasons that actually are counter-reasons for them not to believe. The world is providing those things. And so, they have to give an answer. They have to answer those paradoxes that they have and they're not easy, you know. They're not easy, especially when- when all of society is it- is kind of being taken by this and imbibing this whole ideology of saying that, well, we really are not, you know, God does not exist and we can do whatever we want. Therefore, you know, there is no good or evil.

Well, at first sight, it may seem all that- that that makes me feel less guilty or something like that, you know. But- but it's not true. Ultimately, it's a destruction of man himself and woman herself because they don't respect one another. Just look at the- just look at the New Testament. All over the New Testament we see this dynamic of the need for study, the need for prayer, and the need for giving hope to others. Think of the disciples going back to Emmaus, what's going on with them? They- they see the crucifixion, they are witnesses of the death of Christ, and they- they've read Scriptures, you know, they've read all sorts of things they've been around with Jesus, they've seen the miracles and yet they don't get it. There's something wrong with them, they are sad. They even say they had hoped that Jesus would have been the Savior or the Redeemer of Israel. They had hoped because now, after everything has happened, they have lost hope. There is no more hope in that this man who is now dead, crucified, buried is going to save us. And so, they leave running back to Emmaus. And even the women who saw the empty tomb, they listen to those women, but they think those women are crazy. And then they say, okay, we've had enough, we're leaving - we're going back to Emmaus. Emmaus, which for them represents kind of a nostalgia of the good old days, you know, of, you know, where we grew up, where everything was fine, where we understood everything, where we were happy. But it was ultimately a place that had to be left because they grew up, you know, and now they want to go back to that. Well, they can't. It's impossible for them to go back to those good old days where they understood everything and they had hope, you know.

Why? Because everything has changed now. Everything is changed, and they're trying to desperately go back to a childhood that- that is long gone and they can't really- they can't really pretend that all the

events in Jerusalem did not happen. And they- now they fear for their lives. So, Emmaus, take it for what you want, represents this safety place, this place of safety for them which is really not real, you know. They're not going to be safe there, you know, and they're not going to be happy there either. So what does Jesus do? Well, he does the same thing that he does with the crowd that approached him in St. Mark's Gospel. He has pity with them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He goes behind them, walks behind them and asks them, why are you sad and what are you talking about, you know. Tell me your side of the story. Tell me, why don't you believe? Tell me why- why you are running away and they tell him. And they tell him the reason for their sadness. And Jesus reprimands them. He says, "Oh foolish ones and slow of heart to believe! Didn't the Christ have to suffer in order for him to enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and the prophets, basically all Scripture, he shows them where in Scripture it says that the Christ had to suffer. The Messiah had to suffer before coming into his glory.

And they are probably amazed at this knowledge of Jesus, you know, because he has really studied the Scriptures and he shows them a new way of looking at them. It's that just memorizing Scriptures. It's really having an interpretation of the Scriptures that will then give them a new hope. And so what happened? Well, we know what happens, they take him, they invite him into the inn, they have dinner, of course, in the breaking of the bread they recognize him and he disappears. And then it says they go back to Jerusalem that very hour. And they say, "Were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke to us along the way?"

Now, let's- let's pray about that passage for a second. These people had lost hope. And what brings them back is not something new that they- that- some new event. No, they knew all the events. They knew all the events - the empty tomb, the crucifix - everything; nothing changed externally. What changed was internally - their knowledge of Scripture changed because they studied. Now they have greater faith and now they can give hope to others because they're on fire, their hearts are on fire now. That's what happened. They did not have the right interpretation of Scripture, which Jesus gave them.

Now, this happens all over Scripture. Think of Nicodemus going to Jesus by night, looking for what? For hope, for reasons. And he encourages him to look, then study, you know. He says, you're a teacher of Israel and you don't know these things, you know, I can't explain bigger things if you don't even know the human things. You need to study more. For what? For your faith, your hope, for your charity, so you can enlighten others. Think of the Magi- the Magi are a great example of this virtue of study. They study the stars. they do their calculations. They're mathematicians, they're astronomers, you know. As one Father of the Church said, that's the moment where astrology ended and astronomy began. Why? Because, you know, it was no longer about magic and about weird, you know, signs in the heavens. It was about true study, you know, and putting faith and reason together with probably some revelation of Scripture that they have, they put together. And then they set off because they have hope of seeing the King of the Jews, as they call him, you know. They didn't call him the Messiah because they were not Jews, but they call him the King of the Jews. And then they trust- they trust even Herod who, you know, is the King of the Jews, and he

guides them. They let themselves be guided by, you know, this person who is in office at that time. He guides them towards Jesus.

So they're men of reason, they're men of faith. They're men of trust and they're men of hope. And they- then, you know, go back another way after they see Jesus - literally, another way because they wanted to avoid Herod as they were told in a dream. But also another way, figuratively speaking, because they had now been transformed by their encounter with Christ. They had seen the logos made flesh. They had seen the King of the Jews. They had seen the one who was to come, the light in their life, the star in their life is now here. Well, faith, reason, you know, prayer, study, and then that yields apostolate, hope, radiation of hope to the world. They enlighten many people. Same thing with the- with the Ethiopian eunuch who is there visiting by Gaza. And Philip the Apostle is told, you know, approach this man who is reading the prophet Isaiah. Of course, he doesn't know what he's reading because he's not a Jew and he doesn't understand the prophet and, you know, but then Philip is there to explain it to him. And he explains everything about Jesus to him. And why does Phillip know this? Because he has, well, he has studied Scriptures and he's been with Jesus. And- and then the Ethiopian asks to be baptized. He believes because somebody explained it to him. Of course, there's grace there, too, but those reasons were the- the straw that broke the camel's back, so to speak, or the last drop that, you know, that he needed in order to believe and Philip was there with the right answers.

And that's so important for people to have somebody that can preach the gospel to them because they know it, because they study it, because they live it out. Therefore, for the modern apostle, an hour study is an hour of prayer, you know. And then that Ethiopian, he goes back and he- he, you know, he proclaims the gospel until the day he dies because he has been baptized and he has met Christ and he has found him in his study and in Scripture- in the Scriptures. It's very important for us to realize.

And, what do we study? That's a good question. Well, we have to study the two books that God wrote, you know. Did you know that God wrote two books? Well, some people describe it that way. He wrote the book of creation. And why is creation a book that he wrote? Well, because, as St. Justin says, there is seeds of the logos in creation. Everything that came out of God is good and everything that came out of God is- is a likeness to God, especially mankind, especially man and woman. We image God in his image and likeness, you know. But the world, too, nature is somehow a likeness to God. There's something that reflects God in nature - the order of nature, the goodness of nature, the just- the vastness of nature can lead us back to God. And we know that, through St. Thomas Aquinas, the five ways that he has are beautiful descriptions of, you know, of looking at the world and actually then reasoning towards the cause of that order or of that, you know, goodness that we see here below and then back to the cause, which is God, ultimately. The, you know, of course, those proofs are- are very beautiful but they're not going to, you know, convince an atheist, perhaps, a militant atheist, of anything, which is fine. But again, we're not here simply to debate. We're here to give hope to those who are well-disposed, who are looking for something.

And if you're looking, then you can find God in the book of nature, in the book of the world, in the book of human nature, you know, when we know ourselves, when he- when we know humanity, then we realize that- that God has to be a person, you know, who can- who can communicate, who can speak with us, who reveals himself through- through so many beautiful things that he has created. But I would say especially more human things like friendship, you know, love, more anthropological ways that lead back to God. And for this I think we need to read literature, we need to read history, we need to be conversant with art because everything that is true, good and beautiful can lead us back to the Creator. And anything that is good, true, and beautiful really has been redeemed by Christ who has incarnated himself in- as a human being, the logos who created the world through whom all things were made, he became flesh. So somehow, all these beautiful things have been canonized by Our Lord, you know, and so there's something good in the world.

As St. Josemaria called that, there's a *quid divinum* there's a divine something that is up to us to discover. Well, that requires mining- mining, you know, that *quid divinum*, that divine something, which means study. Study, like mining. We have to find the divine DNA, you know, divine DNA inside creation. And that divine DNA, is that order, that logos, that deep, noble friendship, that is really a reflection of the friendship that God has with us and so on. There's an imagining of God in everything that is good, true, and beautiful. Well, that's the first book. That's what we got to study - science, math. There's no conflict between science and religion, as many people will say. There's no conflict between faith and reason, there's no conflict because God created the world.

But the second book that he wrote, as we know, is the Bible, Scripture. He revealed himself in human language with- by inspiring real human authors while at the same time he being the- the one, divine author of all of Scripture. And here we have prophecies, here we have the history of salvation, here we have miracles, here we have events, that- teachings, you know, that like St. Paul's teachings or The Sermon on the Mount or the Ten Commandments, or whatever it is - we have a richness of treasure in Scripture that we need to take into account so that we can deepen our faith. And that means we need to analyze this revealed truth. We need to study it - scrutinize the Scriptures, Jesus says, right, scrutinize the Scriptures. Well, do we scrutinize the Scriptures? Do we study it? Do we live it? Do we devour it? And also the development of Scripture which, you know, all the dogmas of faith that were developed throughout time, mostly because of heretics. When they started saying something that was- that didn't sound right, then we had to provide a reason- the Church had to provide a reason of why those things were wrong. And then, in so doing, the Church developed a kind of theology, you know, and brought in words from philosophy like substance and, you know, the Trinity and- and- and person. The concept of person was developed in order to explain the Holy Trinity and- and not just explain it away, but to explain how it's reasonable, right, to have three persons in one God and so on. We- that required a lot of studying.

The lives of the saints, another thing to study, because they are somehow the continuity of the gospel, because the gospel is- is alive and it keeps being incarnated in every person's lives- life. So, the saints actually give us another take on how to live the gospel, you know, the writings of the Fathers of the

Church, and so many other works that the treasury of the Church has in possession. The good news is they're all free on the internet. You don't need to buy anything. They're all free. All these ancient works are free. They're hard to read sometimes, but that's where we need to sit down and actually study because there's a treasure there.

Now, what are some obstacles to this study? You know, well, St. Thomas says, one of the first obstacles is lust. Yes, sexual disorder. Yes, all that stuff, but not only. Lust, also in the broader sense of the word, like intemperance, you know, because it makes the mind sluggish, just to, you know, not live temperance, you know. If you're thinking about food and drink all day, and about pleasure, disordered pleasure, you know, even if it's good, even if it's okay, you know, that too much of that doesn't allow us to actually think because we're- we become too worldly, we become too lazy, we become too inconstant. We don't like- it takes effort to study, but- and we'd rather be listening to music all day long, but silence is something that makes us nervous, especially now, you know, when we have so much available noise or music or whatever pleasurable sounds in our smart phone all day long. Well, do we love silence? Do we- do we, you know, actually make time - 15, 20, 30 minutes - of breathing every day? That takes effort. And it's not just about reading, it's about actually going deep into it and concentrating, intensity, in the actual thing that I have at hand, you know. So lust or intemperance, and- which makes me inconstant and makes me kind of distracted.

Another obstacle is curiosity, which is a kind of intemperance because, you know, it's really an excess of study, curiosity. I want to know everything. And basically, this kind of intemperance, really, is something that leads me to want to know every absolute thing there is. It's like, I want to memorize Wikipedia or something. Well, that doesn't help either because- because I have no order. It doesn't give me a path. It doesn't give me the right interpretation. I have a lot of knowledge, but no wisdom, which is kind of a mystery how, you know, the- the people who knew where Jesus was born, they knew where Jesus was born when the Magi arrived, you know, and these are the- the Scribes and the Pharisees, they knew where he was born. They had all this knowledge, but no wisdom. And they thought it was like a curiosity where the Messiah was going to be born, but not something that- that effected them existentially. So, curiosity kills this existential aspect of, you know, I know everything but I don't really know what truths to live by or to die for, you know, which ultimately are the ones that give me hope. They're living truths that give me hope.

Well, one last obstacle I think is, you know, besides lust and curiosity, which are forms of intemperance, is literally falsehood. Falsehood, you know, like delving into theories that are not real, that are not in conformity with reality, that are not in conformity with the human nature that was created by God. Ideology, or literally bad things that we can- that we can read that just do not conform to human nature or the faith, and, you know, here you have all sorts of authors that- that twist things, you know. I don't know, we can- we can think of so many people, but we should look for truth. And I'm not saying that, you know, we have a prohibited list of books or something that you shouldn't read. Well, the Church had that at some point. And St. Josemaria even thought that some books were, you know, should not be read,

obviously, because they did so much harm, like communist things or things like works of Nietzsche and things that- that people had- had- had used to justify a lot of errors and relativism. And well, perhaps you have to read it because everybody else is reading it and you have to give them an answer as to why they are wrong and maybe you do have to read them. But, all these things are to be, whether you read them or not, they have to be analyzed with- with criteria. They have to be judged, not used to judge. Okay, that's- that's the point that if you assume them into the structural, you know, criterion for with which you judge things, then that's where, you know, you'll start seeing the world in another- in another way that God did not intend. But if you read them, then you judge them with the light of faith. You judge them with the light of reason, you know, which- which, you know, basically should be based on your experience of reality, not on some ideology.

And that's something that you- we all have to be careful on, right? Because little by little, we start thinking along different lines. And- and then, you know, we start coming up with theories that are not in accord with reality. And so for this, I think the best thing is to have a mentor, to get advice. It's a prudential act, you know, what I read and what I don't read. I need to actually, you know, think, well, maybe I could have somebody mentor me, give me a list of books to read, give me a list of books that are- that are proven to be classics and good, you know, and in accord with the faith. Those are the books that I need to actually use to structure my mind. And then I use that mental structure, those intellectual resources to then decide and judge whether a certain theory that has come up new is good or not or need- or is good but needs to be purified further, you know, and maybe some good could be drawn out of it. John Paul II was great at doing this, you know. He'd draw the good out of all these authors that, you know, had some good and some things that were not so good, but he drew the good out of them. Well, which is interesting but you have to be very discerning and very prudent at that, you know, very- very skilled at that, but that requires hours and hours of study.

So today, I think in order for us to be apostles, to be- to unite faith and reason together, we need this third side of the coin which is hope. It really is an act of charity. That's why, ultimately, we should study, and that's ultimately the- the reason why we want to turn it into prayer. Otherwise, we will be erudite, yeah, but so what? We will be proud, which is another obstacle to study is pride, the things that I come up with are the things that are true just because I came up with them. Well, that doesn't work, you know, and that's not charity, that's not really charity, that's driven by vanity. I want to know, because I want to know, and I want to be thought of as- as really, really smart. But you know what, for what? If it's not for charity, why bother, you know. So prayer and study, and then apostolate.

Let us turn to Our Lady whose the woman of- of the logos incarnate. She said, "Let it be done to me according to thy word." She incarnated the Word, she brought in to us. And the reason why she was able to do that is because of her humility. Study requires humility, this- this relationship with the logos requires humility so that we can be imbued by it and incarnated and then bring him to others just as she did to her cousin Elizabeth and to the whole world, to you and me.

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



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