

MAKING CHRIST OUR CENTER

REV. PETER ARMENIO

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord, 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 savor that opening prayer, *my Lord and my God*, and as we focus on the Eucharist, which is the model and the greatest image and symbol of every topic in the Gospel. And it's not only a symbol, it's that true presence of Jesus. And St. Josemaria says that, for him, the Eucharist is Our Lord's greatest act of self-giving. And he says, even more than on the Cross itself, even though the Eucharist is synonymous with the Cross, to have Our Lord's presence here, we need to bring the sacrifice of Calvary to the present moment. But this hiding in the tabernacle, making himself so accessible, rigging up away, so that we could have him all to ourselves - no tickets, no lines, no waiting rooms, St. Josemaria says that this, for him, is his greatest act of self-giving, self-abasement.

Our topic of prayer is on detachment and penance. Well, detachment and temperance. But penance and temperance are expressions of the same idea. One way we could look at this is immediately go into all sorts of symptoms of attachment to worldly things and then go through a bit of an examination of conscience - a healthy guilt trip of all my attachments - to my health, my comfort, my routine, my opinion - that's one way to do it. The other way to do it is to look at the gold- look at the goal. To achieve a goal, there's always a certain kind of detachment. If I have the- if I'm going to run the marathon, well, I need to modify my schedule and curtail my comforts. I need to sacrifice some of my time to run many miles a week to train - that's- there's a certain detachment. If I'm inclined to be lavish in the amount of beer I drink, that definitely has to be seriously curtailed if I'm going to go into training. I will have to detach myself from certain foods that militate against this training, that add weight and limit my stamina, etc. Or, there's a certain kind of profession or certain kind of line of work, and I want to achieve that, I need to sacrifice myself and say no to other comforts, routines, discretionary time, etc.

So, when I look at the goal, spirit of sacrifice becomes more doable because the goal is so important to me that I am willing to make these sacrifices. Like so many people in the wee hours of the morning torturing their dogs, running with the dogs in cold, inclement weather. Why? Because they like cold weather? Or, they like to be out of breath, they like to huff and puff; they like to torture their dog? And the poor little dog has his own coat on and booties. Well, so you get into shape or you physically look good. Well, that goal is important enough to an individual that they would- they're willing to make that sacrifice, I'm not anti-exercise of making a point.

I want Christ. I want union with him. And with American business mentality, I'm going to pray in the Creed today, soon, *through him, all things were made*. Every good thing is an ever so slight reflection of the divinity of Jesus Christ. *Through him all things were made*. I want Christ and that- and when we achieve a good, if it's an inferior good, it's a pleasure - that peanut butter cheesecake we had last evening- yesterday evening, gave us pleasure. Some, not only pleasure, but at least some fleeting happiness. I asked the gentleman why he was in a good mood and he said because he had a great turkey sandwich. So, good things give us pleasure, very good things give us a certain happiness - an important achievement, friendship, family life, a moving book, music - gives you a certain kind of joy, but always fleeting, never complete.

And we see a uniform line of thought throughout the gospel. You figure that Jesus would go easy in his very first sermon, but he laid out his game plan, his roadmap. And the first words of his first sermon is what he will tell anybody who is interested in discipleship: "And seeing the crowds, he went up the mountain." Mountaintop is an image of divinity. It's also an image of sacrifice to reach divinity. "And when he was seated," which is the posture of teaching - that's why Popes sit when they preach and bishops sit when they preach. "And when he was seated, his disciples came to him and opening his mouth, he taught them saying, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.'" So, he sets a tone. The first words- he's going to say many things, he's going to touch on a lot of topics. But his first message is to obtain me, to buy me, you need to be poor in spirit. And that also is a work of lifetime. It's not a question of coming up with a few resolutions and we're off to the races. We need to wrestle with this for the rest of our lives. And a good start.

And I wish I knew he was gonna be beatified - well, I kind of did, implicitly, I would have perhaps, paid attention more. But Bl. Alvaro, as I mentioned I think yesterday or the day before, he had, it was kind of predictable - he was an engineer, and he was very proud of being an engineer, he loved engineering, civil engineering. And invariably, he'd always begin to get together with two of the same thoughts, every get together, two same thoughts. He would always invite us to join him in thanking Our Lord for all his graces and blessings he has showered on us and to thank Our Lord for all the blessings and graces were unaware of. And then he would say, *today's a good day to give of yourself again*. And let's tell Our Lord that we want to give of ourselves more. Now, this was not a routine for him. It was a routine but he didn't do this in a routine way. I mean, it came from the depths of his heart. It was his biography - that was his entire life, to be totally at the service of whatever Our Lord wanted.

And in this bigger biography of Bl. Alvaro, it's in Spanish, because there were many demands on him from the Church, especially during those intense years, those heady years of the Second Vatican Council. And then, regularly he would be asked for favors to be on committees to work on projects. And he confided to one of our brothers, well, it's always good to say yes because it's not that Our Lord wants our health to be compromised or fall into deep exhaustion, but he received special graces, but his health was never that good. And his- the grinding work schedule did not help his health. And if I didn't know this, because I was privileged to have seen him often, if I did not know the history, if I didn't know his intimate link with the

history of the Work and history of the life of St. Josemaria, I would say he's laid back. He- his favorite pastime is to enjoy people. And you could almost say that he had time on his hands because when it came to people he seemed to have all the time in the world. He wasn't looking at his watch or running to the next thing even though he was, you know, ground down by work. And I remember - there's only so many minutes to the get-together - but when I ran into him, since St. Josemaria never went on pastoral trip to the United States - in the 70s, Americans had a keen awareness that's, you know, our Father had died, and so, we didn't have him come to this country for get-togethers, meditations, and talks etc.

And so, when an American would ask Bl. Alvaro, would you come to the United States, it wasn't just a polite invitation, it was imposing a guilt trip on him because he would always elaborate - I really want to go. He was aware that we never had a pastoral trip. And I asked them, so when I asked him, he had the same kind of sensation. Yeah, I know he's not happy, because St. Josemaria didn't go on a whirlwind tour of all the centers of the Work in the United States. And he said, listen, my son, he told me, I am buried in work, I really want to go. But right now is not the right time. But you'd never know it if you talk to him. I could have been tempted. I wasn't- I could have said, well, you don't seem to be busy now. When we had that exchange over my lifestyle in Rome, if I had not known that he was having these meetings with the Holy Father, I would say well, I guess he has nothing to do so, he's so hard up for human interaction that he's willing to talk to me.

I would say two things with self-giving, just looking at holy people, that Heaven comes to us here on Earth imperfectly, not totally. And since we're all sensitive to time management and getting things accomplished, it's the nature of the culture. When we give it all, and I can't explain it, I really can't, we accomplish what God wants us to, we meet deadlines. And we do give the impression that people come first and we do have time for people, all the time they need. All these holy people gave their family, their friends, all the time they need. So Lord, we ask you in our prayer, help us to have this supernatural vested interest, this supernatural ulterior motive. Yeah, I like good things. I like my routine. I like my opinion. I like my health. I like my comfort. But, what you have to offer to me far surpasses all these partial goods.

We have a close range look at how Our Lord invited someone to be his follower, that classical encounter between Jesus and the rich young man. The rich and man was very impressed with Our Lord - He was moved. Our Lord sparked his generosity, sparked his ideals. Other young men were following Our Lord, it was only young men - one was super young, one could have been thirteen - that was St. John. Then one of the gospels says he ran up to him and knelt down. I'm not using that gospel because I'm not so sure if I could relate to that anymore, running up and then dropping to my knees. I would drop to my knees forever if I did that. And the gospel says, "Behold, a certain man came to him and said, Good Master, what good work shall I do to have eternal life?" It's a very American-esc question - give me the help menu in not too much writing; just- just give it to me straight. What do I gotta do? What's eternal life? It's a loaded phrase, it's Christ is eternal life. Without realizing, he says, how can I obtain Christ? How can I obtain true happiness? What must I do- what must I do to become a saint? They're all intimately related. What must I do to participate in your good news of great joy?

He said to him, why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good and he is God. And I think in St. Mark's Gospel, Jesus says, only God is good. And notice, he doesn't start saying, you know, you're attached to a number of things, rich young man - you're wearing nice clothes, you get your hair styled, you realize that living a temperate and virtuous life is to your advantage. I mean, you got a lot of things going for you. You're a nice kid, you're a gentlemen on a date. I mean, he says, but only God is good. No, this is a key phrase, it sounds like a throwaway one. Oh, there's only one who is good and that is God. He's- Our Lord is moving in for the kill here. He's going to ask this kid for everything because that's the only way to follow him - that's how the Sermon on the Mountain began and that's how the gospel ends- the gospel ends with the Cross. The Cross is the greatest sermon according to these all-star saints like St. Francis of Assisi, St. Thomas Aquinas. And we- we need to give it all. And he says, only God can give you the happiness you want, that's what it means. Only God is that good that works that that can satisfy the desires of the human heart. That's what converted Augustine. Augustine didn't convert because chastity was an end in itself - that was an obstacle for his conversion, to give up his lustful ways. He had a hard time making that decision. He needed to believe that Christ would surpass every joy, every pleasure, and he finally made that leap of faith.

It's not that I see anything wrong with these partial goods that come from God Himself. But I want the gold- I want him. And so, Our Lord goes through the commandments. He says, well, if you want to enter life, keep the commandments, so that's step number one, to live the Ten Commandments. Well, he does live those commandments but nevertheless, he's asking what must I do to have eternal life? Obviously he doesn't have it, that's why he's asking for it. And we translate him to, you know, a good American young man, he's pro-life, he's- the worst word he says is ah, shucks, likes sports, decent student, gives up ice cream and dessert for Lent, says the rosary on his way to work - all these are good things. He's better than the motley crew Jesus has, and the Apostles are even saying the same thing. I hope he wins him over because we're not exactly a bunch of spiritual all-stars here. And they're all staring at Matthew.

The young man said to him, all these I have kept what is yet wanting to me - he probably felt good about himself. Hey, I live all the commandments, how many guys you know that live the commandments, especially those more difficult commands. Jesus said, if you want to be perfect, if you want to really do it right, if you really want to have me, sell all that you have and give to the poor. Sell, but me. Why does he say sell? Why does he say give? Because by giving all that I have I obtain Jesus and that's why he says sell. Words of our Father, "I want you to be completely convinced, if we really want to follow Our Lord closely and be of real service to God, and the whole of mankind, then we must be thoroughly detached from ourselves - our intellectual talents, our health, our good name, our noble ambitions, our triumphs and successes. I would also include because your decision ought to go that far. The high ideals which lead us to seek only to give all the glory to God and to praise Him. We can ensure our detachment by tailoring our will to this clear and precise rule. Lord, I want this or that only if it pleases you. Because if not, I am not the slightest bit interested. By acting in this way, we are dealing a mortal blow to the selfishness and vanity that

lurk in every conscience. At the same time, we will find true peace of soul through this selfless conduct that leads to an ever more intimate and intense possession of God.”

And, we don't have time to go through all sorts of examples, but we know the examples - we need to be honest with ourselves and not make an excessive amount of resolutions. But we know where our attachments are, where we need to hack away. And it's not about stoicism, but it's about selling all that I have so I have him and I can give to the poor, those who don't have God, I got to prove to them that my merchandise is far superior to- than the merchandise people are attached to and erroneously think will give them joy.

Mary, again, you were our paradigm for every virtual- every aspect of following your Son. Throughout your life you kept saying yes and what that yes involved being detached and going so far in your self-giving that you offered your Son to the Father on our behalf.

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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