

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

PURSUING HOLINESS

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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 celebrate this great feast day, the Feast of All Saints. It is a chance for us to admire those who have gone before us, those who have won a major victory. Today in the Divine Office, there is a very powerful reading from St. Bernard who wrote these words over 1000 years ago. He said, "The saints have no need of honor from us nor does our devotion add the slightest thing to what is theirs. If we venerate their memory, it serves us not them. When I think of them, I feel myself inflamed by a tremendous yearning." This is a very logical, very natural human reaction.

Some years ago, someone was standing- was visiting the Athletic Center at a major American University, well-known for its football team. And he was very charmed to see a busload of high school students enter that- that athletic center and pause before a very, very large trophy case that contained not only trophies but jerseys and all sorts of equipment of famous football teams from the past. And those students had their noses glued to the- to the glass of those cases, staring in awe at their heroes. Well, we did the very same thing on this great feast day. We come to a halt and stare with amazement at these winners. But we don't just stare at them, contemplating their example as innocent bystanders, we look to them for inspiration. As the Letter to the Hebrews says, "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses of the saints, let us also lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." It is a way of saying those great saints of today's feast day, they were winners in their moment and now it is our moment, and that has to thrill us.

When we talk about sanctity or holiness, we are talking about our own personal correspondence to the grace that God gives each one of us. We have to know- we have to learn how to respond day by day, situation by situation, in a holy way. Today, during this time of prayer, we can ask the saints for their- a little bit of coaching, coaching so that when we find ourselves in any given situation, just the ordinary scenes of everyday life, that we focus instead of being dispersed.

There was recently a- an article about a catcher for a major league baseball team, one of the contenders of the World Series, who had been having a very poor season in spite of significant skill.

And suddenly he got- he recovered his expertise because a coach helped him to focus. And this catcher was saying now, I had been having a rough season, because even as I was there catching, the middle of a game, my mind was far away thinking, worrying, but out of focus. Well, it's an important thing for us to focus, but then the question arises, well, what do we- what should we focus on? It's a nice thing to say that we are called to holiness, but now what do I do? What does that mean?

Well, fortunately Jesus, besides saying- besides inviting us to holiness, he gave us the roadmap which is known as the Beatitudes. Just a couple of years ago, the Holy Father wrote that document, *Gaudete et exsultate*, those Latin words that mean, *rejoice and be glad*. And in that, at a certain moment, the Holy Father breaks down the Beatitudes for us. But at the beginning he says, "The Beatitudes are like a Christian's identity card. So if anyone asks, what must one do to be a good Christian? Well, the answer is right there, the Beatitudes, where we find a portrait of the Master." At first glance we could think and even say to ourselves, well, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the peacemakers. Fine, I do those things. So, what else should I do? But not so fast. Not so fast, because the Holy Father in his- in his analysis of each of the Beatitudes helps us to discover content ways of living each one that may not have occurred to us and that can serve as a very wonderful examination of conscience. We can take a look not at all of them, because that would take us way past time, but just snippets that can also serve as an invitation to take a deeper look at- at this section of the document.

In the first place, *blessed are the meek for they will inherit the Earth*. Your first thought might be, you know, I don't even know where to begin to understand meekness. But then the Holy Father says, "This world of ours is a place that, from the beginning, has been a scene of conflict, disputes and enmity on all sides where we constantly pigeonhole others on the basis of their ideas, their customs, even their way of speaking or dressing." Well, that brings these things home. If we stop and think and look around at our typical situation, we find even within us- starting within us, this tendency to categorize people, perhaps to look down on them, and we don't even know them. This translation happens to be especially interesting. We constantly pigeonhole people, we put them in pigeon holes, - it's one from that- that kind of culture, etc. And that, of course, is not useful at all.

The Pope says, "Ultimately, this is all a sign of pride and vanity where each person thinks that he or she has the right to dominate others." We really have to be so grateful that we are in contact with people from every corner of the universe. It's a wonderful thing, it's a very enriching thing, and we have to have this attitude - I have a lot to learn from every single person around me, their way of speaking, their ideas, their culture. And right there is our very first resolution to imitate Jesus. The Lord says, "Learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls." To be gentle and humble of heart - well, then comes the examination of conscience. Pope Francis

says, "If we are constantly upset and impatient with others, we will end up drained and weary." Right now we can, in our own prayer, just ask ourselves, do I find myself often drained and weary? and if so, where does that come from? But if we regard the faults and limitations of others with tenderness and meekness, without an air of superiority, we can actually help them and stop wasting our energy on useless complaining.

Now, complaining... this is a question we can ask ourselves. Our first answer might be, I really don't complain very much. But then, if we stop and over the next few days just tried to recognize those moments when we find ourselves complaining, we might be surprised, we might be shocked. And that's the moment to ask ourselves, well, why do I do that? How can I turn that complaining into a very positive attitude that this situation, whatever it is, is actually a chance for me to grow?

You may know some stories about Fr. Joseph Muzquiz, one of the first three priests of Opus Dei and the one who brought Opus Dei to North America. At the end of the- towards the end of his life, Fr. Joseph was taking care of the staff at Arnold Hall outside of Boston. And he was given a- a clunker of a car, a genuine lemon, if we can use the slang, to get out there. Fr. Joseph was so apostolic that whenever the car would break down, which was rather frequent, his instinctive thought was well, that must mean I am meant to meet a parish priest somewhere within 200 yards of here. And given that part of Boston, in the South Shore, he was usually right. So, he'd pull out a map and pull out his directory and end up meeting somebody else. Here your first thought is, well, why didn't they give him a better car? That's a separate question.

Before we move on to another Beatitude, it is worthwhile sticking with this one and use- taking advantage of a consideration from another document by the Pope. In *Amoris Laetitia*, he says, "Whenever we think that relationships or people should be perfect, we encounter problems. When we put ourselves at the center and make- expect things to turn out our way - problems - because then everything makes us impatient, everything makes us react aggressively. Unless we cultivate patience, we will always find excuses for responding angrily. We will end up incapable of living together, antisocial, unable to control our impulses, and our families will become battlegrounds." Well, those considerations might be the most important thing we grab on to during this time of prayer together.

Another beatitude we can pray- consider in our prayer, *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted*. The Pope's comment is, "The world tells us exactly the opposite. Entertainment, pleasure, diversion and escape make for the good life. The worldly person ignores problems of sickness or sorrow in the family or all around him. He averts his gaze. The world has no desire to mourn. It would rather disregard painful situations. It would cover them up or hide them. But the Cross

cannot be absent ever." So, how do we go about mourning? What does- what do these mysterious words actually mean?

As the Holy Father says, "A person who sees things as they truly are and sympathizes with pain and sorrow is capable of touching life's depths and finding authentic happiness. Such persons are unafraid to share in the suffering of others. They do not flee from painful situations. They feel compassion for others in such a way that all distance vanishes." Perhaps the Holy Spirit at this moment in our own prayer will bring to our mind people, individuals we know, who are suffering, either from physical illness, suffering from loneliness, suffer- suffering in such a way the Holy Spirit will say to us, reach out to them right now. Contact them, ask them how they're doing, find ways of expressing compassion, suffering with them.

Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy. Mercy has two aspects. It involves giving, helping, and serving others. It also includes forgiveness and understanding. We need to think of ourselves as an army of the forgiven. All of us have been looked upon with divine compassion. How wonderful- how wonderful to see ourselves as an army of the forgiven that we find ourselves drenched in this sea of forgiveness because then, to the extent that we recognize that we had a lot of reason to be forgiven, we can then pass on that forgiveness. Seeing and acting with mercy, with forgiveness, that is holiness.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. This attracts us immensely, simply because of the promise *they will see God*, because there is nothing more that gets our heart beating that- than that goal. That's why we're here, and to realize this is an invitation as the Holy Father says, "to have hearts that are simple, pure and undefiled. A heart that is capable of love admits nothing that might harm, weaken, or endanger that love." The Bible uses the heart to describe our real intentions, the things we truly seek and desire. Apart from all appearances, none- none of us needs to be convinced of this fact, this very obvious fact, that nothing remains hidden. God reads our heart. He knows our heart infinitely better than we do. For this reason, we want- we need to guard our heart with all vigilance, as the book of Proverbs tells us.

We read in the Book of Wisdom, "He flees from deceit. The Lord flees from deceit and rises and departs from foolish thoughts." Well, knowing that nothing remains hidden, that leads us to this basic attitude, this- this determination - I want to be the real thing. I want my heart to be focused on that which really matters, on the one who really matters. And anything that could threaten to come into my heart, anything that could tarnish that love I have of God, forget it, I reject it absolutely, and I reject it with firmness.

As we were saying earlier, much more is contained in the Beatitudes than what first meets the eye. Take the beatitude, *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.* Things get really interesting when we come to realize that we can end up being the cause of conflict or at least the cause of misunderstanding. Take, for example, the world of- the world of gossip. That world that is inhabited by negative and destructive people, that world does not bring peace. As the Pope says, "Such people are really the enemies of peace. In no way are they blessed." *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.* We can assure the Lord in this prayer of ours that we will be that much more aware of what exits from our mouth, that we are called, wherever we are, to be children of God, to create that peace that is a sign of the peace that reigns in our heart.

As we said at the beginning, sanctity means happiness, blessedness, beatitude - those are all synonyms. It is a great thing to be pursuing happiness. And one of the- one of the direct byproducts, the direct byproduct is joy, the kind of contentment that has genuine content and is therefore permanent. There's a powerful story that can summarize, and does summarize, everything we have been considering. It is a story about a woman ninety-two years old who has just lost her husband after seventy years of marriage. She's there about to move into a nursing home. She's petite with her hair fashionably quaffed, her makeup perfectly applied, even though she is legally blind. After hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, finally, she is greeted by someone who is there to take her to her new room and she smiles sweetly when told that her room is ready.

So, this person says the following, "As Mrs. Jones maneuvered her walker to the elevator, I provided a visual description of her tiny room, including the eyelet sheets that had been hung on her window. She listened and then stated with enthusiasm, *I love it.* But I said, Mrs. Jones, you haven't even seen the room. *Just wait,* she replied, *that has nothing to do with it.* And then she explained, *Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not does not depend on how the furniture is arranged. It's how I arranged my mind. I have already decided to love it. It is a decision that I make every morning when I wake up. I have a choice: I can spend the day in bed, recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work or I can get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift and as long as my eyes open, I will focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away just for this time in my life.*" Well, this is someone who has won, and it's very easy to imagine that she is among those whom we are celebrating today.

Well, let us finish this time of prayer by turning to Mary, our Mother, Mary, the Mother of God. Mary, we ask you to help us to keep our hearts free, focused on the goal of Heaven. Help us to act with mercy. Help us to react with meekness and humility. In short, help us to become another Christ.

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