

THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCTRINAL FORMATION

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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.

At the very end of the life of Jesus, his last words were for a small group of people, directed to a small group of people like us. I always imagine talking to you, my Lord, in a reduced number of people because I- it helps me to think that my conversation is personal, even if I am part of a family that has billions of people, like the Catholic Church. In somehow, some way, I just- I just think that you feel more comfortable with small groups, and you can do that because you are God. So the eleven, and maybe some women, after the Resurrection went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some of them doubted. They were still excited with the Resurrection, it was hard to believe. Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of time."

And this is the last part of St. Matthew's Gospel. The very last words of Jesus on this Earth - strong commandment, power, authority- I have all authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me. And I'm telling you go- go, and make people happy. Making disciples doesn't mean to get people to my team or whatever. It is just making people happy. People of all nations- not just Jewish people, but just everybody, baptizing them, opening for them the gates of Heaven, of the sacraments, of the peaceful relationship with God through the sacraments that is the water of grace outpouring from Heaven. It should be shared for every single human being. And they need to know that there's a family in Heaven waiting for them with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and they are adopted, and they are clean, and they're saved, and called to be happy. And then, an important remark, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, not because I am bossy or I want to make money or I want to have an influence in the world - I want to have followers like in Twitter or Instagram - it's not about that. It's to obey the law of freedom to enter the Kingdom of God.

The second meditation in this recollection is catechesis on the family, doctrinal formation, initiative, getting involved with schools and youth activities, personal example. A lot of things going on- I was, I was thinking, catechism of the family... this- this maybe, and doctrinal formation... and- and how would you do that? That's a very good question. How can we change the world with doctrine? But just doctrine? And I think at the very end, when Jesus says, "Remember, I am with you always," it's more than just delivering a

bunch of rules. It's a life that we are showing to people, it's a path, it's more than just knowledge. It's not repetition of anything. He's not remembering things, it's living in a way, right?

A few days ago, I had a gift. As a priest, sometimes you were always- being a priest is a gift, as is any vocation. But anyway, so this is special, like I say, I was called to this house, to give the Anointing of the Sick to a woman that was literally dying. She died a few hours later. When I got to the home of this family, they were all around her bed. She was in the living room, actually, unable to speak, breathing heavily, suffering a ton with cancer, struggling with battling cancer to the last moment, and unable to speak, very thin. They did something beautiful... they put an image of Our Lady and Jesus on the ceiling because she was unable to move, and then it was so hard for her to- and then they put an image on the ceiling. And then she was always looking at them and then we were talking. And then, when you, as a priest or as a human being you- when you see someone dying, you re-frame everything, your whole life, because you realize that at the end, what you need to be happy, or to be human, is a very essential thing, it's just to be accepted as human and then recognizing your dignity. And then when you see something like this in action, or actually happening, meaning a family carrying around someone that, humanly speaking, it's not attractive, and is not doing anything interesting, so there is a beautiful treasure there in the heart of the house and everyone goes around carrying, kissing, we were praying the Rosary, someone's singing songs, the dad was saying- telling memories that they had together, funny memories, and every- it was a get-together around her, just to make her happy in the- in her last moments. And it was very moving... very simple.

Then, on my way back, driving, I need to leave, so I did something that I never do with women. I told her in front of everybody, I want to give you a kiss before I leave, and I want you to give this kiss to Jesus to Mary and to Joseph when you get to Heaven from me and to tell them that I- that I want to see them and that I am envious that you are seeing them before I do, right. And then I left. And when you realize that that event, that encounter, is going to happen in a few minutes or hours, it's an eerie feeling. It's beautiful, but it is scary as you touch eternity. So anyway, I was driving back home, and I thought about formation. How do you do all those things? What's the- the end goal of all we learn about the sacraments, the history of the Church, moral theology, you know, whatever, just liturgy, at the end the commandments, respect to each other, all the information that we have as a human being- philosophically, doctrinally, technical formation, as well literature, at the end is to provide for dignities, is to realize that we are here in this world as a part of a family that is divine, that Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit created us. And then as Jesus says in the Gospel, they gave us the world to go out and to say, now evangelize but not in the sense of delivering doctrine, but giving life to the world.

And that's the beauty of our vocation, Jesus, my Lord. I am so blessed. And I want to receive formation and to give formation. Without formation we had- my- my life will be empty. I cannot depend on feelings. It's a very big temptation in our time to think that feelings should be the driving force of our decisions. There's an expression in Spanish that I don't know if you can relate it to English, but I want to try, which is, it's very graphic because you say you're more dangerous than a monkey with two pistols. And imagine a monkey with two guns, it would be so dangerous. You will run away from a monkey with two guns, right, because

he's unpredictable. So, our feelings are unpredictable, and they can be good. Sometimes they accompany us and we feel good doing something beautiful and fine. It's like the weather, sometimes it accompanies us but it's not the most important driving force.

There's this Cardinal that had a meeting with young people recently, and then he was talking about the importance of having formation— knowing your faith, knowing why you should do the things that you're doing and not just obeying or blindly following your instincts, but understanding, for taking the time to form yourself. And he said, “If you do that you will discover true love. It is the greatest challenge in a world where the feel-good factor— feel good, I feel good, I do it, they feel good factor outweighs any other value.” This isn't good. “We live in a in a world of mere emotions in which life is not a project but rather a series of moments.” It's just okay— I feel it, I do it. And then when my feelings fade away, I will stop because I don't want to harm myself. And no, you're not harming yourself, you're just going against the grain which is perfectly fine sometimes, at least, and then you understand why and you build a strong why. And it's not a voluntary reaction either, like, okay, I gotta go always against the grain, no feelings, like a robot? No, no, but it's understanding why, forming myself, is this good for me? Is this making me a better person, whether I feel it or not? What's the reason of this choice I make? It is important to have a reflection and examination of conscience at night or, or at least during the day. What is driving me to do these things? What's my intention here?

“Then a stable commitment,” says this Cardinal, “a stable commitment appears challenging, difficult, but it's necessary for humanity render fragile by individualism.” Individualism is- is risky and is- is harming us. And maybe with- with a mask of a feeling good, doing this, I feel good, I am the center, it looks more a kind of a like a toy horse, like gets into our hearts, things that should not be there. It is precisely here faced with these signs of the times that the gospel offers itself as a remedy, a true medicine. And what kind of gospel? The gospel of the family.

So, this is what I want to- I want to bring to my prayer today, to ask you for help. You told me, go out of yourself, guys, go out. We need to change the world. We have the doctrine. You have the doctrine. I've been with you for three years, to the apostles- you know my life, you know the parables, you know the doctrine behind that, you know how and how you need to share it with the rest of the world— be more generous, committing yourselves. I'll be with you, don't worry. So, you're going to transmit my life, not your life— it's fine. And I will be with you to the other world so you- you're not alone. And it's not that you need to do anything extraordinary, but you need to understand the beauty of your mission. So, my Lord, maybe help me to look around and to be more generous, not to kind of close myself to my feelings, to things I like, and- and to unmask excuses sometimes that prevent me from- from being an apostle. What kind of friends do I have? Are they all the same kind of friends? Do I have an openness to learn from people that I don't agree with in many things, but they have other virtues that I can learn? Am I open to- to share things with others? Am I scared of people? In this polarized world, we Catholics were to build bridges. Life is not black or white. There are gray areas and things that are opinions and- and in any case, there are people that are

confusing the best of the case and then just need to go and meet them without giving lessons, learning and supporting them, and finding the common ground.

I remember, some years ago, I met this person from the UK- they are working in this initiative, it's beautiful, it's doing a lot of good, it's called Catholic Voices, maybe you know it. They're doing a lot of good in the UK. And one of the persons there running the show in this company or initiative, told us- and it was at the beginning, I was like, wow, this is hard to- to accept, but later on I thought, well, you have a point. He said you need to find a common ground when you go on TV shows or these TVs- kind of a debate or whatever- common- ground because people are not stupid. People want the good and they're confused. And, he said, imagine that you go to a debate and there is someone that was same sex attraction or lesbian, whatever, and then she wants to have kids through artificial insemination or whatever and- and then you just, you have to deal with that in the program. And then he asks the audience, we were like, in a get together with people, students from college- students, and then he would say, how would you start that debate? And then people were saying their opinion- I would say that this is really intrinsically bad. This is against the Church. This is against moral law- different opinions.

And then he listened, this guy. And at the end, he said, you know what? Everything that you said is true. I would never start my introduction by presenting myself in that way because then you're creating a wall. And everyone was like, yeah, but how do you start otherwise, because you don't want to compromise the truth, either, right? And he said well, you can start saying, wow, you want to be a mother. That's a wonderful thing. I have two sisters, both of them are mothers, and when they- they became mothers they were so happy. So, you really- you really had a dream, this beautiful dream, to be a mother is one of the most beautiful things. I- I respect you a lot for this desire of being a mother, to a lesbian, right? And I was thinking, wow, this is kind of thinking out of the box, right, because you're not compromising the doctrine, you're trying to find a common ground. And later on you say, okay, I understand your feelings. I understand your desires. Now, let me explain what for me is the best way to become a mother- I think, with a husband has more stability, because- and then you explain the whole thing. And this is not being hypocritical or it's not just a tactical thing, it's just understanding the person. And saying, okay, I want to get to- to your- to your intellect and to your heart, and I want to let you know that I love you as a human being and I respect you, and I want to find a common ground that we can share and maybe build something from there. And you need a lot of doctrine for that and you need a lot of formation and you need to choose your formation and then digest it, and then, how can I present it to the world that doesn't know anything? But they're not necessarily bad or just twisted or evil. Sometimes they are confused.

So, this is what Our Lord- Jesus, this is why I learn from you in the Gospel. Your gentle approach to a woman with five husbands, five divorces. Remember the Samaritan Woman? Call your husband. No, I don't have a husband. You said the truth- you have no husband because the one you have now is the fifth, is number fifth. This is not your husband. In that you have said the truth. You say, Jesus, gentle, okay, yeah, you see, you know, you're happy because you recognize that this is not making you a real wife, it's just another relationship, a superficial one, and it's not true, whatever. And then Our Lord converts that woman.

Or, with Zacchaeus it probably was very superficial, rich, wealthy, bunch of friends who were sinners. And Jesus goes for dinner and Zacchaeus says, wow, Jesus loves me. And this is a first. They didn't go to the temple to pray, they didn't go to make some sacrifices. No, no, they went for dinner. And Zacchaeus said to himself, wow, he loves me. Maybe I'm interested in his doctrine= after all, maybe it's not that difficult because it's a human relationship. And then he discovered afterwards the doctrine of Jesus and he said, My Lord, half of my possession is right now to the poor, and if I have extorted anyone in anything, I will give-pay over four times, four times over.

So, Jesus, that's it. I mean, once I realize that there's an encounter with you and- and there's a meaning or a reason why I should do the things, or I respect people through you, through the encounter with you, then following the doctrine is easy. I mean, have my possessions and if I have extorted just four times over I mean, I don't care. I just discovered the treasure is you, not the possessions- I got it, I got it. I'm free. And I happily- Zacchaeus is giving up everything. But because of that, there was charity, an encounter.

So, you, wherever you are now, you have neighbors, you have friends- I have neighbors, I have friends. And they're wonderful people ,and we need to believe that they are sons and daughters of God, and there's something good there, the image of the Trinity. And I want to form myself well, not to be perfect or to be just a museum, kind of a guy perfectly, you know, not protected and then far from reality, far from people in need. No, I want to be, like you said in the Gospel, an apostle that goes to all nations, all sorts of situations. The light of the gospel being shared there, precisely where it is dark. Preciesly where there is no light, I'll bring the light. And the darker the places, the more shining the light would be or appear. So, even in the most atheist country in the world, you have the grace to change that country, or a neighborhood or office or friend because you are not talking about you, you are talking about Jesus Christ. I am with you always. If I were talking about me, game over, Jesus, right now, there's nothing- I mean, I'm not that inspiring. I'm not interesting enough to change the world. I mean, that's it. I mean, it's over, we lost. But it's not me, it is you that I'm talking about, and that gives me a lot of peace. And, you know what? Jesus loves you. And, you know what? He's calling you to be happier and free. He wants you to be eternally in a place called Heaven with him- loved, understood, forgiven, saved, healed.

“Turn,” says St. Josemaria, “turn your gaze constantly to Jesus, who without ceasing to be God humbled himself and to the nature of his life in order to serve us. Only by following in his direction we will find ideals that are worthwhile.” Ideals- formation, truth. “Love seeks union, identification, with a beloved. Christ brings us face to face with the ultimate choice. What’s the choice? Either we spend our life in selfish isolation- myself, my problem, my Catholic friends- or we devote ourselves and all our energies to the service of others- difficult people, pagan environments, darkness, unknown, the jungle- and I will go there with the gospel. This is the ultimate choice. And of course, we need to be prudent, right? We cannot sin in order to bring people to God or we cannot, you know, put our souls at risk to do that. But the words, I will be with you always to the end of the world, in any situation, you will have my life- it’s is a guarantee that with prudence, with friendship, with generosity, we can change the world. The Blessed Virgin Mary did it too, right? The queen of the apostles, she accompanied them- the early community efore they left Jerusalem,

they were praying with Mary, and then Our Lady send them out to, you know, the four cardinal points I get, go, and they did it, with the encounter of Mary, with a prayer, together with Mary they were able to face the world, to face reality, with hope. Let's ask Our Lady to have this desire of formation, forming ourselves, in order to be apostles and Our Lady will be the queen of our lives.

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 to put them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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