

## A DIALOGUE WITH JESUS

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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 you 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.

A few years ago at the 2013 Oscars, there was a mention during the ceremony of the fiction thriller film called *Gravity*. It's a story about the astronaut Ryan Stones, actually a woman, and she's played by Sandra Bullock. And in the movie, she's trying to save herself after the mission that she's on has been aborted, so she's in space and she's trying to save herself. There's lots of CGI, beautiful images of the Earth and lots of drama. And she's just frantically just trying to save herself in that Chinese space capsule, and she's realizing, well, most likely, she will die. And she wonders whether she'll even meet her little five year old daughter who had died tragically in a schoolyard accident. So, she knows she needs help beyond herself but she doesn't know how to ask for it. So, then she somehow ends up in a Russian spacecraft. And there- there's a picture of St. Christopher carrying the baby Jesus across a river. And then she sees this, there's like a- like a short kind of click in her mind. And she says that tremendous line, she says, "No one will mourn for me. No one will pray for my soul." In fact, she says, "I have never prayed. And nobody has taught me how."

The tremendous line or, I mean, how many people watching that movie would say the same thing? Nobody's taught me how to pray. And we read more and more people in the world are like that astronaut Ryan Stone, they call them the "nones", the N-O-N-E-S, the people who if asked what-what is your religion, with check the box "none of the above", right, that "nones", neither Catholic or Buddhist, nor anything. And this is a- too many people don't have a strategy, a plan, a pathway towards prayer. And they often say nobody's taught me how. But, of course, maybe many Catholics, Christians have never really tapped into a personal dialogue with you, Lord Jesus. And why not? Nobody's ever taught them. And we may have learned, you know, to play the guitar, or to do snowboarding as a kid. And we give thanks for those who taught us how to do those things. But what about prayer?

Well, I'll give you an example, in this book called *The Soul of the Apostolate*, by Jean-Baptiste Chataurd who was a Swiss university student in France, and he's- he was basically of agnostic background. And so he's at the university on a campus, I don't remember which university, but as he's walking across the campus, he sees a priest praying his breviary in the distance. He says this, he

says, "While walking across the campus one day, I happened upon a priest praying his breviary. This priest was unaware of the impression he was making on me." And he says, "His bearing full of respect of religion was a revelation to me and produced in me an urgent need to pray from that day on and to pray in the way that this priest was praying. The Church appeared concretize, so to speak, in this worthy minister in communion with his God."

So this incident led Jean-Baptiste to change his life completely and to become a man of prayer because what- just seeing that man has such an impact on, really, what his life was and he developed a deep interior life. And actually, he then got in touch with a local Catholic club on campus and he turned to a life of prayer. This was a real moment of conversion for him. And just on account of that one priest praying there in the distance, it was though he felt like an infusion of life giving oxygen or almost like a blood transfusion from somebody who had healthy blood while he was kind of feeling anemic and going through life with a kind of blurred vision. So he received this tremendous grace and, well, this really encouraged him to also pray as a good son of God. And he was only something like nineteen at the time, and eventually, he entered the priesthood and he became the abbot of Notre Dome sept-Fons, a beautiful Trappist monastery or Abbey in France. And it was founded in a 12th century or something. And he was there as Abbot for 30 years and he had a huge impact. And especially with his famous book, *The Soul of the Apostolate*.

So let's look today at the actual quality of our prayer and see to what degree it really, my prayer has an impact on my own life, and indeed, on the lives of others. Well, naturally we go to the Gospel as always. As Luke says, "It came to pass that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples.'" Imagine that, well, imagine his words after he was asked the teacher- to teach them to pray, imagine how he must have taught them. And what he taught them was not simply some deep theological treaties or some positions, you know, you have to sit like this in yoga form or something. He really gave them some words and he would have given them some examples. And they saw this, they imitated what they learned from him, and they really made it their own. But above all, it would have been the Holy Spirit really acting in them, right.

And so, well, we can ask, have I ever taught anyone to pray, like somebody preparing for First Communion, a child, for First Communion? Or prayer, have you taught your son or daughter to pray? And we- we could tell somebody, you know, you should pray, it's good to pray, it's really important, or just do it, just pray. But that doesn't mean that they'll know how to pray or what prayer is. In fact, many times people really need to see it. And we really need to lead them, I would say, by the hand, which means that we have to be enthusiastic enough about our own prayer to know what we're actually transmitting.

Now, if you permit me just a personal anecdote that I remember from my life, it was years ago, before I was Catholic, a friend of mine who was very honest with me, he told me, look, this is how you pray, I'll show you how. And he brought me into the Church. And well, together, we knelt down at the communion rail in front of a tabernacle and he literally took it- took me through it step by step. You know, first, we knelt. Then he took a copy of St. Josemaria's *The Way*, it was all tattered and used and- and he would just randomly select a passage and he'd read it, just one- one passage. And then we would stop in silence and reflect on what we just heard. And he, too, would reflect. And at times, I must say, I had no idea what the point meant and other times it was pretty clear and I understood something. But mysteriously, those words that I understood, I really took them as coming from God. And even those that did not understand, I felt that God was kind of like saying, okay, eventually, this will make sense. Even if you don't understand it right now, it'll make sense, so just like, be patient, be patient.

And other times he would take a passage from the Gospel, he'd find it in the missal in the pews, and he would just read that. And the same thing, it would be like read, stop, reflect. And there had to be something there. And we would stop after ten or fifteen minutes and then we would go out. And so- so we can ask ourselves now, you know, can I- have I ever- ever taught somebody to pray? Because ultimately, we have all learned that- that prayer is really the engine, the motor, of our interior life, of our personal dealings with our Our Lord, we've all heard that. And it certainly is true because without prayer, well we might end up thinking that we are the ones who advance along the pathway of holiness, that we are the ones who do things, that we are kind of like the architects of the fruits that we see around us because of our dedication, and the ones who kept- when we carry out some apostolic work, you know, that we may be help out in, that we are the architects, but this is not true.

But it is true that we don't always know how to pray well. In fact, often we don't even have a clue. And many people have maybe an overly mechanistic- mechanistic view of prayer. They understand it as like an engine, but an engine that we ourselves move. They think that prayer is just the fruit of personal effort, a kind of technique that works like this, like that. I read, I meditate, I listen, or see something that helps me, I internalize it, I examine how to live this, and I incorporate it into my life, right. And as a last step, I might make my own resolution to improve. So it's like a, like a kind of a three step movement- reading, examination, and then purpose or resolution or something like that. But, though that might be the beginning, like when I learned how to pray, that's just the beginning.

Prayer is really much more. It's not- it's not really a rational and cold technique. It's not a self-help method. It's not something tedious and flat. Really, prayer is also- it's a feeling, it's a contemplation, we get lights, we get inspiration, we get bold goals, we see exciting, new panoramas. And it's really something alive, it is not something that with time fades away. It is, as we say, the- the engine of

true love. And I'm sure you've seen pictures of monks in a chapel doing their office, or simply there praying in silence. You see- you see them there, and you see them, they're in quiet, but they- they don't seem to be lonely or alone. They really look like men in love. But you also see that in a parish church when you see and hear the sighs of an old lady at the back of the church, sighing out of love. She doesn't seem to be alone, even though physically yes, she is alone.

Perhaps you remember that anecdote that St. Josemaria told from- when he was- during the years when he was a chaplain in the church of St. Isabel in Madrid. He'd be in the confessional every morning and he recounts how he'd hear the doors of the church open and there was the strange sound of what sounded like milk- milk cans or buckets hitting the floor and making quite a quite a noise. And when- so, this happened several mornings, so finally one morning, he stood by the door, and when the man came in, you know, the door opened and the buckets and stuff, he came in, asked him, Hey, what are you doing? And the man said, Father, well, I am not very instructed, I come here every morning with my milk jars, my milk cans, and I put them down and I don't know what to say. So I just say Jesus, here I am, Johnny, the milkman, in Spanish *Juan, el lecherón*.

And St. Josemaria was quite touched by that. He said to himself, now that was a beautiful prayer, that was a beautiful way of praying. And this is wonderful, he thought to himself. In fact, he spent the rest of the day with that same aspiration, Jesus- Jesus, here I am, a poor sinner, unlike Juan, el lecherón, and he was quite touched by that he- and- and he was not following like, the ordinary protocols of this three step process, he was just struck by this because in some ways he was full of enthusiasm for love of God. And- and this is what in turn, fired up his prayer and escalated, you could say, to make him more enthusiastic in living prayer in his daily life. And well, this is what moves us to put- really put our heart into things, and it's not simply a technique, it's not simply a ways or techniques to improve. It is really, you could say, listening to the voice of God that speaks to us, and allowing ourselves really to be loved by him, allowing ourselves to be gazed upon by the loving eyes of God. That right there is prayer. Really, it means letting ourselves to be wowed and amazed in front for the greatness of the goodness of God as he acts in my soul, as we have seen in our own life, as we've seen, he acts in the lives of others, like Johnny, the milkman, or even Jean Chataurd, God clearly acted in his soul. And if you see certain people praying, you know, I mean, I think of somebody like St. Pope John Paul II, right, when he stopped in front of an altar, whenever in some public place, he just would kneel there in silence, and this was clearly a deep contemplation. But- and it's hard to sense it was silent, but it was filled with- with this wonder.

Now they say that the younger generations like the I-gen and the Gen Z, they don't- they find it difficult to stay silent. Silence simply- simply seems difficult because they're- they're so used to the stimulation of their phones and other stimulations that they get from their computers and so- so, you know, maybe they go there to do their prayer, they just- well, thinking of their last- the last

tweet or- or the last YouTube video or something and, you know, maybe Our Lord now is asking us to press beyond that and simply- simply to admire how much he loves us and just be silent in front of that and remain kind of speechless if you like. And if we lose that freshness in our personal dealings with the Lord, the interior life and our vocation, it could all become kind of stiff, like cardboard, and we could feel kind of boxed in almost, you know, through boredom. And this- we shouldn't let this happen, our goals and our purposes, then, otherwise, they become kind of sad and diminished objectives. Everything could become cold and cerebral, even predictable, kind of like those typical cat videos that are really, ultimately, just clickbait in order for us to give them another view. And it can happen that we're- we're not facing a love, you could say, that surprises us, that keeps us in suspense every day. And when we go to prayer, we can say, What will God want of me today, in this time? What am I going to- to be, you know, when I'm praying with him, what is he going to ask me, or to what paths- where will the Lord take me now? Those moments of prayer, you know, if they're lived without that freshness, they can become monotonous and just the same. And then our excitement can kind of turn off and- and our soul can kind of be almost like be- be chilled. And- and we could begin losing that intimacy with Our Lord, bit by bit. So we have to ultimately really let the Holy Spirit work on us. He, really, the Holy Spirit, he is the architect of our soul, he can show us where to go, you know.

You may know that in the 16th century, the Pope, Pope Paul III, he wrote a motu proprio, a document of his own- of his own initiative. He wrote this in 1551, in which he entrusted Michelangelo with finishing St. Peter's Basilica which had already been begun. There were already plans by Raphael, by de Sangallo, by Bramante, all these great architects, and they had worked already on the plans, some of them had died already, and then the Pope basically gave him full authority to finish it as he pleased. And this is said in the motu proprio, and Michelangelo indeed insisted that he do this- this- the finishing of St. Peter's without any monetary reward and solely for the love of God. I mean, bear in mind, he already had a huge reputation, he had already done the Sistine Chapel, painted it. But he really felt himself to be a sculptor and now this was a new challenge to be, you know, to be an architect. And it inspired him to simply finish the- St. Peter's in a way that was more simple than the previous, more complex plans that had spires and a lot of niches and things, and also to give greater prominence to the height of the dome. And we always see the St. Peter's dome, and that's what we see today. And if it had not been as tall, well, it'd be more difficult to see from the facade. And so, Michelangelo had the vision and the plans, but then, of course, it was for the workers to follow through. Michelangelo planned it, drew the plans, but he didn't actually physically build it himself.

And we have to imagine the Lord has an astounding masterpiece planned for our life. He is the architect. The Holy Spirit really is the architect. And we- we need not change those plans with our own ideas, that's really- that's what we do in prayer, look at the plans of God, be open to the plans of

God, really follow through. And all that we can discover in our prayer. I mean, imagine if one of the workers had said, you know, I don't like this bell, I'm gonna do it like this and they got together and did it differently, right, and didn't follow the plan. So it wouldn't- it wouldn't be the masterpiece that it is today. Lord, we ask you now in our prayer, lead me, so that I might dream the dreams that you have for me, but that I might dream them with you, Lord, not simply on my own, that I might really dream them with you. And those who carry out the task of accompanying souls must have enough sensitivity to be humble enough to let fly the soul that opens before them, you know, and enter into this intimacy with- with God without wanting to turn off those dreams that inspire- that inspire us and allow us to climb higher, because God really has dreams for us. Do you even know what those dreams are? Do you know what the plans of God are for you, like the plans of Michelangelo for St. Peter's?

Well, we have to dream about those. And a lot of the prayer is dreaming about God's plans for us. We may have seen our vocation but the plans are not over, I mean they have to still be put into practice. So, like St. Joseph, as Pope Francis said, he is the man of dreams but not a dreamer, he's not a dreamer. So maybe if I have a problem, an issue, I put it under the image, he said, of St. Joseph, so that he can fix it, you know, that famous statue of the sleeping Joseph, he takes his intentions and he puts them under St. Joseph and St. Joseph takes care of it. I think that, too, is an expression of the Pope's- the Pope's prayer.

So hopefully, we too, can be men and women who have big dreams. And not- let's not kind of encapsulate the action of God in kind of closed and dead practices, in a kind of tedious and monotonous structure, the interior life, which is- could be suffocated by routine and kind of habituation. And so that means we have to dialogue with Our Lord, speak to him, open our hearts, right, and remember that what we really have to avoid is anonymity, anonymity, just go there and sit there. No, we have to speak with our problems, with our worries, with our concerns, and avoid all anonymity. And it's difficult because we may tend towards that anonymity. They say that those who hold positions of importance in public life, politicians and senators and people like that, they often receive piles of letters that are purely anonymous that tell them things. And what could you do, you get an anonymous letter, and I- I don't know, it could happen to the Pope, too, that he gets these anonymous letters. But in the same way before God, many people may want to remain anonymous to avoid really any personal encounter in their prayer or in their examination of conscience. And the Master- well, he does not want you to stay anonymous, like a mere number, a number marked on your forehead or something. So all we ask you now, Holy Spirit, let us decide to build with you the masterpiece that that you have in store for us, that you have in mind for us, and together with St. Joseph, whom we can invoke, and our Blessed Mother, who will intercede for us, we can really follow those marvelous plans that will make of our life a true masterpiece.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you've communicated to me in this time of prayer. 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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