

A LIFE OF SERVICE

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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.

The topic of this second meditation in this recollection is very insightful because it says cheerfulness, life of service. And I was wondering, what comes first? Are you cheerful because you're serving, or you are serving because you're cheerful? I think they influence each other. It's a good way to understand that we want to be happy. If I want to be happy, my Lord, I want to put everything at the service of others. And once I do this, once I stop thinking about myself and serve others, then I'm happy.

In any way, let's go to the gospel, as usual, and keeping in mind that you were happy when you were here, and you are eternally happy right now, but in every moment in your life, I can be sure that you were 100% happy, there was joy in your life. Sometimes there was pleasures, sometimes there weren't moments of pleasure too, by the Cross, but in any case, you were joyful. You have the peace of heart that is a contagious, cheerful, a kind of aroma or fragrance in every one of your actions, in every one of your moments in your life. So, when we read in Matthew 4 that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil and that he fasted for forty days and forty nights, we imagine you happy, joyful in that reality of going, led by the Spirit. So, when the Spirit is asking me for something, when I feel the imprints of the Holy Spirit guiding me, it's towards happiness— not only as a destination, but in the process. So Jesus was not unhappy in this world waiting for Heaven to come, he was happy moving towards Heaven in his present moment.

And as we know, the tempter, the devil, approached him and said, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. If you're the Son of God," second temptation, "throw yourself down, do something spectacular." And the third temptation, "if you're the Son of God, adore me, I will give you all the kingdoms of the world, all the splendor of those kingdoms, if you adore me."

And it is three temptations, my Lord. We can sum up all the human temptations that we have in our lives. The first temptation is very simple, it's very superficial, it's that temptation of pleasure—bread, food, instant gratification—how present it is in my life, my Lord, that temptation, the temptation of

wasting my time sitting on the sofa, of not thinking, the temptation of instant gratification. The second one is a little bit more subtle but very present as well, it's the accept- the temptation of being accepted, doing something that has an echo, that has a feedback. It's the temptation of Instagram or Twitter or Snapchat or whatever the app you use of getting some relevance to our lives because of the echoes of our actions- very present in our world. But in as the foundation of my joy, the way I am perceived, and then being happy when- when I have some- someone telling me how amazing I am or some likes or whatever. And the third temptation is a condition of power, a very interesting one, the temptation of thinking everything through my heart, reducing reality to what I like; using people, using circumstances, using everything for my own kingdom- I am the king, I am the destiny of everything and everything should adapt to me and then we reduce the reality to us, and we can reduce even God- going to the gospel, as Bishop Baron says, to make our own gospel or to find our own God. And these are very, very subtle temptations, right, that we will have- that we'll go through. And- and it's good to be aware of that, Jesus, of the three temptations, all of them present in my life.

St. Josemaria, answering to those temptations says, "If you want to be happy, you don't need an easy life," or "The way to be happy is not to have an easy life, but a heart full of love." Thank you, my Lord, thank you, because during Lent, I can approach you. Other seasons of the liturgical year are wonderful as well, all of them are, because all of them bring me you or some aspects of your revelation. But I think Lent is special. Maybe because it's more quiet, less noisy, and the other ones are festivities, and of course you enjoy them very much like Christmas or Easter. But Lent has this flavor of a personal approach to Jesus. Maybe because you were alone in the desert it is easier for me to approach you and to walk with you or to visit you at night. Imagine a bonfire, maybe during these days, under the stars in the poverty, in the silence of the desert. And there without distractions we open our hearts to Jesus Christ, like Nicodemus at night, under the stars, quietly, personally, very much so, personally, Jesus, I want to talk about my things, to open my heart. Not because I want to put myself at the center but because I want to be sincere. I want to find happiness, cheerfulness, understand how your life of service will lead me to the bliss of Heaven even in the process, even right now.

So this is the Lent that we may want to kind of lead in our lives, the Lent of approaching Jesus alone and to look at you and to open my heart. And maybe we can use the message that Pope Francis has sent us for Lent this year where he says, "Let us not grow tired of doing good." Don't get tired of being a good person, maybe approaching Jesus, looking at Jesus at his smile, at his peace, his loyalty, your company, Jesus, your sacrifice without being tense, your sacrifice without being upset, right. Your sacrifice that creates around you an atmosphere of peace, that is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And then maybe you and I sometimes complain, I complain. And the Pope says, "let let us not grow tired of doing good. Showing goodness for the benefit of others frees us from a narrow self-interest,"

continues the Pope, “Infuses our actions with gratuitousness and makes us part of the magnificent horizon of God's benevolent plan.”

I'm going to read it again a little bit because it's so deep. He says that showing goodness or sowing goodness for the benefit of others, not for me, frees me from the narrow self-interest. It is so stifling in my life, Jesus, when I'm just thinking about myself. It's so annoying, it's so lifeless. On the contrary, when, with your grace, I can free my thoughts from my egotistical desires. All my actions have this kind of strength, this drive, that make me part- makes me part of the magnificent horizon of God's benevolent plan. So, in other words, when I am thinking about others, even if it is a small action at home or in my workplace or even the street, then suddenly the Pope says we connect with this gratuitousness of God's plan, that magnificence, that magnanimity of Redemption. And it brings me kind of a joy knowing that I'm cooperating with God in creating a better world- that's the purpose of all my actions. It should be at least. And I want you, my Lord, to help me.

Maybe this uniqueness of Lent has to do with discovering my heart and especially in discovering your heart, that's the gift of Lent, that we enter into the pierced heart of Jesus Christ- what a treasure, what a place to be. Entering there frees me from anything that I- I have in my heart and brings me to the core of the Trinity. There is no better place to be than in the heart of Jesus Christ. There we will be loved, we will discover that we are loved and we will see things with the eyes of Jesus Christ.

Speaking about the temptations of Christ, I want to share with you something that is kind of funny. But in the city where I was born in Barcelona, there is a mountain just behind the city- between the city- behind the city and the sea, right. So the city is in between the mountain and the sea, the Mediterranean Sea. Anyhow, the name of that mountain is Tibidabo. And the tradition says that Tibidabo means in Latin, *I will give you*. An iteration says that Satan, when he was tempting Jesus, showed him the most beautiful country and the most beautiful city in the world, which is Barcelona, and then he told him, I will give you Barcelona if you adore me- such a temptation, right, because it's a beautiful city. Anyway, so that's the name of the mountain, Tibidabo, it's is a legend. But on Tibidabo there is an amusement park, and I remember going with my siblings when I was younger to the Amusement Park. And there's also, by the way, there's another thing in the- in the top of the mountain is a church with perpetual adoration, thank God, that dominates the city, that protects the city- beautiful.

And in the amusement park, one of my favorites places to go when I was a kid was this room with mirrors. And there were mirrors that had some deformity that would make you funny in front of the mirror. One of them would create you like a huge head and a small, tiny body or you would, you

know, make you fat or thin or tall or short. It was so funny going with my siblings there, laughing in front of our images, distortion, deformed in the mirrors.

And I was thinking, when I was preparing this meditation that, in a way, during Lent, we have three mirrors in front of us. One mirror is reflecting the person that you are, the other mirror is reflecting the person that you think you are, and there's a third mirror which is the bad one for me, and that mirror reflects the person Jesus sees in you. You are as you are, right, and you think that you are better or worse or whatever. Sometimes you think you are better, sometimes you think you are worse. None of them are true. But there's a third mirror which is projecting you the person that you are going to be or the person that God sees in you. Jesus, help me to discover that mirror inside your heart and there I can see myself reflected. I can see myself seen by your Father and by the Holy Spirit. And it's not a vain thought to think about how we sin because it's- it's redemptive- it's a- it's a way of healing our wounds. Accepting ourselves is the first way to love others. If you don't have peace in yourself, it is impossible to have peace in others. If we don't love ourselves, we can not love anybody else. So, it is important that we know that we are redeemed and loved and accepted and healed because then we can bring the healing grace of our redemption to others, we will understand better and then we will be cheerful with a solid foundation that is not based on pleasure or acceptance or power, as we were saying in the beginning, but the foundation would be the life of service, that we are bringing to others because we have been loved and then we want to serve.

As the Pope says, let us not grow tired of doing good. Let's be joyful in our- in the reality of the present moment as an opportunity to continue the creation of the world, improving the world where we are. We're operating with God in making this world a better place. So, there's no creation, as we were saying. It starts with ourselves, allowing God to purify you, enter into his heart, to make your heart anew, to have hope, to have trust in God. There is future in your vocation, in your life, there is a future that is in the hands of God and this grace, there is a company of Jesus Christ called to the desert, maybe in under the stars, in the peaceful night of the desert, around the bonfire, or in a cave, in a personal conversation with Jesus, giving him your heart. Jesus, here is my heart, myself- I want to give myself to you. I want you to enter, I want you to purify, to put things in order.

I want you to possess me, to get to the point that St. Paul describes as a divine possession, right. There's satanic possession, which we avoid, obviously, and there's also divine possession. And then St. Paul says, "It is not I who live anymore, but it's Jesus Christ who lives in me." It's this joyful reality of saying, I don't know if this is my thought or his thought, but it is the same, and so connected, I'm so into the heart of Jesus that I- I don't care anymore, it's him guiding me- what a beautiful reality. And you and I are called to live in that same state of mind, state of grace, that St. Paul lived. So, let's go to the heart of Jesus, let's enter there without fear and we will see our reflection, like in a crystal in water.

I'm reading right now, this book, *The Tender Bar*, which is a story about a kid from a single mom who has a tough childhood, not too bad, but tough. And- and he's trying to find role models as men because there's no dad in the picture so he's trying to find someone that would be like his dad or guiding him as a man. Long story short, he ends up following his uncle and his uncle works in a bar. The name of the bar is *Dickens*- it's a special bar because it has a family atmosphere with books, with classics, some people get drunk sometimes, yes, but at the same time, there is something there, special dialogue, conversations, meeting people, very interesting people- it's in- in Manhattan in New York City on Long Island. It's a true story.

So- and he describes the bar as the place to go, he says that in Manhattan, in his little neighborhood, there are two places where people go- to church and the bar. Anyway, I'm not trying to say anything about bars, but I think he has a description of the bar that is beautiful, it can help us maybe for our prayer. He says, "We went there for everything we needed. We went there when thirsty, of course, and when hungry, and when dead tired. We went there when happy to celebrate and when sad to sulk. We went there after weddings and funerals for something to settle our nerves and always for a shot of Kors just before. We went there when we didn't know what we needed, hoping someone might tell us. We went there when looking for love or trouble or for someone who had gone missing, because sooner or later, everyone turned up there. Most of all, we went there when we needed to be found."

And this is a description of the bar, like a magnet that attracts people, all sorts of people, all sorts of situations, and changing what needs to be changed because it's not the same, but I think it can apply it to the heart of Jesus, right- with all my respects, obviously. But let's read it again thinking about the heart of Jesus: We went there for everything we needed. So true. When I need something, I need consolation, I need the hope, I need to share my joy, I go to your heart, Jesus. I go there when thirsty, of course, and when hungry. When I'm thirsting of good answers for difficult questions. When- when I'm hungry, when I had enough of superficial life and I want something substantial, I go there to your heart. I like the Eucharist, right, and especially when they're tired, when I cannot make another step, I go to your heart to rest. I go there when I'm happy to celebrate and when sad, not to sulk, but maybe to find consolation. I went there after weddings and funerals and at any time for something to settle my nerves- after a difficult day, at the beginning of the day, just before the day.

We went there when we didn't know what we needed. I love this one. When I don't know what I need, maybe I'm happy, maybe nothing big happens in my life, but I don't know what I need and then I go to you and I said, what do you want, my Lord? How can I serve you better? How can I be more useful for you? I don't know what I need. I go to confession every week. I try my best, but what do I need is- only you know. We went there when looking for love, for sure, that's the place to go, the heart of Jesus, because sooner or later everyone turned up there. That is true too. All creation

will be filtered, will be loved by the heart of Jesus. When you have a hard time in loving someone you will encounter that person that you despise in the heart of Jesus. The person that you don't like is loved by Jesus Christ as you are loved by the same heart. And that gives you a lot of strength in order to love someone that you don't like. Most of all, we went there when we needed to be found.

And I like this passive way of explaining the need to be found. It's not that I am seeking salvation, but I just need to be found, I don't even know where to go. And then the heart of Jesus, that you go there but kind of covers you, surrounds you, lovely- lovingly surrounds you and saves you from yourself or from other things. That's Lent. That's a cheerful life, that's what I learned from you. You went to the desert, led by the Spirit, with the happiness of a life of service in mind, thinking about how can I be a better instrument of God the Father, you thought that and you were having this preparation for your public life and for your Passion. Even if it was painful and you knew it, you had a deep joy inside your heart, the joy of knowing that every single human being will have a chance, every single human being will have a chance in their lives, a personal chance to seek your eyes, to discover your love and to answer to the calling of, do you want to be with me? Do you want to love me? Can I be your friend? All these questions that come from the heart of Jesus for every- every human being throughout history. And then when you are suffering, when you are fasting, you were thinking, that's- that's hurting me, but it's opening my heart, expanding it in order to allow every human being to enter. You were making room for people in your heart and your heart is so big, so wonderful, so inspiring, right. It's a new creation, it's like an atomic bomb. These days that we are praying for Ukraine, for Russia, I think of the atomic bomb, which is devastating, it's horrendous, imagine an atomic bomb of peace, like an expensive fragrance of love- that's the heart of Jesus.

Let's go to the Blessed Virgin Mary as well. During Lent, Mary was doing her own preparation. It was the first time that Jesus and Mary separated for forty days at least. Since then, Jesus was taking care of his mother, living together, and Mary knew that the time of the Cross was getting nearer when the Our Lord decided to make himself public. So it was after, you know, many years together sharing breakfast, nights, and- and Mary was enjoying each one of those days as a mom can do, right. And it was like when a kid goes to college that suddenly you know that it's going to be different from now on. And Mary experienced that too, and then those forty days were days that I imagined Mary going to the temple to pray every morning, right, accompanying Jesus from the distance, how beautiful that is to imagine Mary doing the same retreat, so to speak, preparing herself as well. So, let's enter into that heart, too, as the place to be, the heart of Mary, the heart of Jesus, we will find ourselves, we will find their reason of our joy, the encouragement for our life of service in those hearts of Mary and Jesus. I want to enter there. Please, allow me to enter and to learn and to have the peace that you convey.

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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