

# CHRIST'S INSTRUMENTS FOR REVITALIZING SOCIETY

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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.

The topic that we want to pray about in this meditation is being an instrument for revitalizing every environment in society. Of course, we're talking about giving new life to all environments with the Holy Spirit within us— this is what it's all about. It's about bringing Christ to where he traditionally has not been brought, not because he- he doesn't want to be brought there, but because, traditionally, people, or at least in the past few centuries, people have thought that, well, Christ is to be relegated to the Church, or to ecclesiastical spheres, or to activities of that nature. But what we have to remember is that the "word became flesh and dwelt among us," that he himself revitalized us by coming into our world and then giving us new life so that we can, whatever we do, wherever we do it, that we can do it the way he would have done it had he become a- had he become incarnate in our own lives, in our own situation. Jesus became a carpenter, but I am sure he would love to have become, you know, a bus driver, but there were no buses then, so he couldn't have become that. But now that a Christian is a bus driver, then he- then Jesus could become a bus driver because, it is- if we take St. Paul literally, "it is no longer Christ but Christ who lives in me," than anybody who is in the state of grace and who does his job well is somehow Christ acting in the world, revitalizing it.

We turn to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, point 1888, and we read the following: "It is necessary then to appeal to the spiritual and moral capacities of the human person and to the permanent need for his *inner conversion*," and inner conversion is in italics, "so as to obtain social changes that will really serve Him. The acknowledged priority of the conversion of heart in no way eliminates, but on the contrary, imposes the obligation of bringing the appropriate remedies to institutions and living conditions when they are an inducement to sin so that they conform to the norms of justice and advance the good rather than hinder it." Well, these words may sound like- like two very long sentences, but basically it says if we want to change society, these institutions that some- sometimes are an inducement to sin but not- not just those, also the good ones. If we want to transform them and make them into something holy, then what's required is an inner conversion. It doesn't mean that all of a sudden candy wrappers have to have a crucifix on them or something like that, you know, if we- if we have a factory of candy wrappers, we have to print them out with gospel verses or something like that— that's not what it means. It means that the person making the candy wrappers has to convert on the inside and do them with love— that's what revitalizes society, it's this love, this inner conversion, as the Catechism says, you know, and- and a conversion of heart that- that really allows a window of opportunity for the Holy Spirit to come into the world once again.

St. Josemaria talked a lot about that. And- and why? Well, because that's the light that he received on October 2, 1928. He says in his book, in an interview, which is picked up in *Conversations with St. Josemaria Escriva*. He says, "Our Lord gave rise to *Opus Dei* in 1928 to remind Christians that, as we read in the book of Genesis, God created man to work. We have come to call attention, once again, to the example of Jesus who spent thirty years in Nazareth working as a carpenter. In his hands, a professional occupation similar to that carried out by millions of men in the world was turned into a divine task, it became part of our redemption, a way to salvation." Now, this is extraordinary. You know that job that you didn't like doing, that was so difficult- maybe it's your job, or your profession, your employment that you don't like, or it's just a particular job that you got to do during the day or something like that. Well, guess what? That can become part of our salvation, of our redemption. All of a sudden, this thing that was such a hindrance to me is now somehow united to the Cross of Our Lord and I could unite it with his Mass- at Mass, you know, whenever I go, and I could offer it as a sacrifice. And then all of a sudden, what was bad, what seemed bad, is now good and that was something not just good but divine, which is, you know, ultimate, extraordinary.

St. Josemaria continues in this interview, "To love and serve God, there is no need to do anything strange or extraordinary. Christ then," this is again, the stranger extraordinary means putting gospel passages in the candy wrappers you're making- you don't need to do that, it doesn't need to be that way. It just needs to be a good candy wrapper. In other words, you know, it shouldn't stick to the candy when you try to open it, it shouldn't, you know, I don't know, it should be cut well, it should be done out of love, the person doing it. It should be there to serve, you know, many children who like candy, or anybody who likes candy and so on, so that they exchange gifts, I don't know, the whole- the whole nine yards, okay. But again, nothing strange or extraordinary. "Christ bids all men without exception to be perfect as his heavenly Father is perfect. Sanctity for the vast majority of men and women implies sanctifying their work, sanctifying themselves in it, and sanctifying others through it. Thus, they can encounter God in the course of their daily lives."

And St. Josemaria had this- this kind of ability to even turn what seems extraordinary into ordinary. We need to begin again with this inner conversion because I need to revitalize this family that I'm living with right now. I need to revitalize, you know, the- the environment I'm in right now. Not tomorrow, not yesterday, because graces today, it's always today. But tomorrow, when it comes, that one, and yesterday, if I didn't do it, well, I can make an act of contrition and somehow, I would even say, act retroactively those moments when I was not that good, and I offer that act of contrition to Our Lord. We are- we're not like angels that can't repent. We are human beings which means we live in time and- and we make mistakes that we can repent of, and that's how somehow we revitalize those dark moments in our past. And hopefully, by also approaching the sacrament of penance when we are able to, as soon as we can, and thereby allow Christ to touch us there and renew and revitalize that aspect of our- our past so that we don't suffer post traumatic stress from all our sins, you know. But this is what it means to revitalize every environment.

We see it in the New Testament all over the place when Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance." His wish is for the entire world to be revitalized, to be given new life- new life. And

not just life but life in abundance, meaning, the best kind of life- the life that God lives, which, again, it- as I've said before in other meditations, this is not about the law of minimums, what is the least thing I can do to get by? That's the law of minimums because I'm always looking to do the least. It's about the law of maximums. The law of minimums is basically given to us by the commandments- thou shalt not do this or not do that. Why are they negative? Because they set a minimum, they set a minimum: you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not murder, you shall not, you know, bear false witness, etc.

But really, what we should be seeking to live is the Beatitudes, you know, blessed are the poor of heart, blessed are the meek, blessed are the- the pure, blessed are- are you when they persecute you, and so on and so forth. These are- this is the law of maximums. I'm seeking to actually be Christ to the full, and this is what gives life to the world when I give my life for others. It's not just about what's the least thing I could do to redeem this, these- these people hear that I've come to save. Jesus didn't ask that, he said, what's the most I can do? And so- to the point that I can't go further because I want to show them how much I love them. Well, it meant crucifixion. It meant giving up unto the last drop of blood and water that came from the side. It meant exaggerating out of love.

Revitalizing requires suffering and it requires commitment. Look at- just ask any father or mother, you know, there is a- there's something very special about unconditional self-giving of a father or mother or brother or sister or anybody who's in love when- when they do that, when they- when they show no conditions whatsoever for their love and- and they're- they're completely committed. It's really a- it's really a wonder to behold because nothing stops them. Nothing can stop a person's love like that. And then they engender people, they make people happy. They engender children of their spirit like St. Paul did. "I am in labor again until Christ is formed in you," he said to the Galatians, I believe. And, you know, he suffered a lot. St. Paul suffered and they betrayed him and they, you know, they- they went off to other preachers who were telling them about, I don't know, the old- that they had to fulfill the old law still and they were getting scrupulous and St. Paul suffered. And then they- they didn't accept him at some point, you know, at many points and he tells all that- all those adventures of his, in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, and he's telling them all that he has suffered for them because the other fake apostles that they're listening to now, they haven't suffered all that for them, you know. So, somehow revitalizing anything, whether it's a loved one, or an environment at work, or the attitude of people that- that I don't like, requires suffering. It requires commitment, requires believing in them, and it requires forgiving them time and time again. It is really ultimately the work of Christ on the Cross when he said, "It is accomplished, it is accomplished," and he gave up his spirit, you know. The Spirit is what revitalizes us, but you can only give up the spirit after you die. And so, the same thing with us. If we want to, you know, imbue the environment that we are in, at work or at home or in society, with new life to make it be on fire with the Spirit of Jesus, then we have to die to ourselves.

That's what this inner conversion is all about, that the Catechism is talking about. And this requires, obviously, courage, courage. It requires fortitude, strength, bold- boldness. The Holy Father talks about this word that comes up in the Acts of the Apostles several times in Greek. He calls it *parrhesia*, which is this

boldness to not be afraid to suffer or to preach the Word of God when it is necessary, you know. And if you read the Acts of the Apostles, the Apostles were, well, at first they were afraid but then after the Holy Spirit came, they're no longer afraid. It's a different Peter after Pentecost, you know. It says in chapter five of the Acts of the Apostles, after they were released, having been discouraged and charged not to speak in the name of Jesus by the Sanhedrin. It says, "So they departed from the presence of the Sanhedrin rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. And they did not for a single day cease teaching and preaching in the temple, and from house to house, the good news of Jesus as the Christ."

I mean, this is the boldness that they have, they're revitalizing or vitalizing it for the first time, revitalizing their environment for the first time with Jesus. This is the- the extraordinary power of the Holy Spirit. They're happy to suffer something for the name. They don't care because they're giving life, they're given- this is what our Lord says at the Last Supper. He says, you know, there's sadness in a woman who is about to give birth. But when she has given birth, she doesn't remember the pain because of the joy of that the fact- of the fact that a man has been born into the world. Wow. That's- that's amazing, that's amazing. The same thing will happen with us. When- if we want to revitalize our milieu, yes, it'll take suffering, but you know what? It's worth it. It's going to take dying to self.

Now, I- this is a spoiler alert. If you don't want me to spoil this short story by Tolstoy, please fast forward. I guess the only way I can think of is by spoiling it because it's such a good story. I have to tell the whole story in order to- in order to make this point, but the short story is called *Master and Man*. And in this story, well, we read about a guy, his name is Vasili Andreyevich, who is a businessman, and he- he wants to go out and do some business but there's a big snowstorm. And so he grabs one of his servants to accompany him, and he's kind of reluctant to accompany him. His name is Nikita. He's not the best guy in the world but he's, you know, he's a loyal guy. And so he goes. They go but they get caught in the storm and they stopped for a while in a town but they- he insists because he's- his love for money is too much and he wants to make the trade, make the deal. And- and so, you know, he says, let's push on, it's getting dark, I know, but let's push on, it doesn't matter. We'll- we'll find the path.

Anyway, what ends up happening is they get caught in the storm and Vasili Andreyevich, who is so intent on cutting this deal, he doesn't care about his servant anymore. And so he takes off and leaves him to actually almost die in the snow- in the snowstorm. And- and really, what ends up happening is he takes his horse and he gets lost himself. And he then ends up making a big, big loop around- apparently horses can come back to the same place because they have an instinct to come back. And he doesn't know that he has come back to the same place, but he finds his servant dying. What does he do? Well, he has an inner conversion at that moment because he- he had left him, he had left him because he- he was- he was tied up, as Tolstoy says, the more he tried to think of his accounts, his business, his reputation, his worth and his wealth, the more and more was he mastered by fear, you know, and so on.

So, what happened to him? Well, he had a conversion. And he basically put his coat on top of his servant who was still alive. And then he put himself on top of- of the servant who had the coat on now. And they

waited until the morning when they found them. And who did they find alive? They found the servant alive. And Vasili Andreyevich, he was found dead on top of the- the servant and- and he basically transferred the heat from his body on to the servant so that he could live. Well, you know, here you have a selfish guy and you have a guy that almost basically murdered or left his servant to die but then he converted and he transferred, he revitalized his servant who was dying because of his fault, you know, and- and- and the only reason why he was able to do it because of his inner conversion. He realized that he had done something really stupid. His love for money was- was a terrible thing and made him very selfish but he converted and he revitalized the person that he had hurt and he had left to die and he gave him new life.

Well, you know, something that is kind of the way we operate here. Yes, we're not perfect, you know, what- we need a conversion. And yes, we should be revitalizing a lot of our environments but we're kind of not. But when we do convert, boy, can we come back and actually, you know, live just- justice better. There where we are, you know, and we can give our life so that others can live. It's called martyrdom, you know, and I'm not talking, you know, I'm not talking about dying, okay. I'm talking about dying to self. Yeah, maybe every now and then you have to die, but let's look at what St. Josemaria says about martyrdom. He says, "From time to time I have wondered which kind of martyrdom is the greater: that of a person who received death for the faith at the hands of God's enemies or the martyrdom of someone who spends his years working with no other purpose than that of serving the Church and souls and who grows old smiling all the while passing unnoticed." That's a martyrdom. That's how you die to self. That's how you convert. That's how I can convert the- give life to others.

"For me, he says, "the unspectacular martyrdom is more heroic- that is your way, that's our way." Let's face it- how do we revitalize all this? Well, smile when you don't want to; listen to people that you don't like to listen to even though they're saying really dumb things. Listen, don't get upset yet, you know. Be there for people when they need you there, when they need you by their side. When they're, you know, consulted, lonely, instruct the ignorant, feed the poor, feed the hungry. But I mean, maybe feeding the hungry, you might say, well, I- okay, that's kind of, you know, I don't know, I have to go out of my way and dedicate my life to- to some charitable work like that and I don't have the opportunity- okay, fine. But do you remember your colleagues birthday? Or your wife's birthday? Or your husband's birthday? Or your child's important day? And t-ball? I don't know. Do you remember that? If you remember, you're dying to self because you're thinking about others, you know, doing little thoughtful things for other people, passing it- as simple as passing the salt before they even ask you, because you know they like salt or, you know they like milk or you know, whatever. Being ahead of the- of their needs. That's dying to self, that's revitalizing society. Let's face it.

Again, you know, am I going revitalize society by doing all these incredible things, feats, and fixing the whole government problem and the economic problem and the hunger problem in the world? Well, the more power to you if you could, okay, but chances are you just are going to go to work and do the same old thing. But you know what, you have the opportunity to revitalize it by smiling at the person next to you. That's it. And you might say, well, that's nothing. Well, actually, that is huge, because that's what Our Lord

did really with us. He was one guy, one carpenter, who revitalized the whole world, really through the Spirit, through the Spirit. And we can do the same because we have the fruits of the Spirit. What are the fruits of the Spirit? Well, this is what revitalizes things. Charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity, and many others, you know, but sometimes we live the opposite. We don't have peace. We have anxiety. We don't have patience. We want it now. We don't have kindness. We start yelling at people. We were not generous. We're selfish. We're not gentle. We're coarse. We're brutes. We're blunt, you know. We don't have charity, ultimately. And what we want is really to revitalize the world by bringing in the Spirit, the spirit of joy, peace, humility, modesty, and so on.

Well, let us turn to Mary and ask her to help us come back and reflect in this little time of prayer and recollection that we make once a month to help us reflect how we can bring the Spirit where we are now. And actually, it's not something that we have to plan too much because the Spirit has never planned anything. It's like the wind, Our Lord's says. You don't know where he comes from, you don't know where he's going, he just happens. Well, what we have to do is make ourselves capable of receiving the Spirit like Our Lady did in the Upper Room at Pentecost and then there's nothing stopping us, nothing. But what we need is humility and what we need is to turn to Our Lady just like the Apostles did.

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