

PASSIONATELY LOVING THE WORLD

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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.

With your permission, Lord Jesus Christ, truly present with us in the Blessed Sacrament, our conversation with Jesus is a topic that was very dear to the heart of St. Josemaria. And he gave a celebrated homily in Spain in the late '60s, and it was titled, *Passionately Loving the World*. Already with the title, we perceive that we are called to imitate Jesus in his love for humanity that began with the specific humanity of his immediate family in Nazareth, his colleagues when he worked as a carpenter, his friends. His contact with humanity exponentially increased when he went public and gave his sermons and addressed those large crowds and worked his miracles.

We ask the question as we speak to Jesus, what do I do with this grandiose topic or title *Passionately Loving the World*? What am I invited to do? How do I live out this challenge to love the world? The world would be an empty shell without people. So, this love for the world involves what our Holy Father says that we cannot be self-referential. We need to be Catholic. Catholic is a Greek word which means *universal*. And this is the original version of Christianity, and it's the proper version, that we Christians are not called to be satisfied with observances or fulfillment of devotions. Even though this contact with Jesus is indispensable, it cannot stop with this individualistic Christianity— that's not what Catholic means. It means that we need to reach out to people, love people, contact people, evangelize people within our own personal sphere of influence.

And I'd like to reconstruct a scene of the Gospel which is the multiplication of the loaves and the fish. I want to take the liberty in imitation of the ancient writers of the Church to see the actions of Jesus, his miracles, his words, his allegories as well. The traditional interpretation of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish point to the Holy Eucharist. We have one Eucharist that can serve an infinite number of people. We have the same Jesus— the same Resurrected Jesus who transcends space and time, and the multiplication of the loaves and the fish point to the Eucharist. But, as St. Paul says, the richness of Jesus Christ and his teachings have no limit. There's always a deeper meaning, there's always a personal meaning— there's no limit. And I'd like to take the liberty to have the crowd of people in that deserted place represent our society. And I'd like to also take the liberty to have those circle of friends of Jesus as individuals call to change the world, to affect the entire world. Jesus says that his will is that we make disciples of all nations. And if we want to be especially precise, we could use Mark's quotation of Jesus' Last Words which is called

the Divine Commission, “preach the Gospel to every creature.” So, he really wants this message preached, and we’re not Catholic in the full sense of the word unless we’re on that wavelength. And I know it’s more comfortable not to look at that dimension of our Christianity. It’s more comfortable for me, that’s for sure.

And so, Our Lord is surrounded by throngs of people. Matthew gives a number, 5,000 men, not counting women and children. So, he’s basically saying that this high number, this high count of people, is quite vast, and not even counting women and children. “Now, when Jesus heard this he withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.” Jesus was going off to pray. It seems to me, and modern medicine would take almost 2,000 years to be effective, and so many people wanted to get this cure. It was- he was proving hands down that he could cure you by just a wish, by a touch. He gave hope. No one spoke as he spoke. People didn’t have hectic schedules the way we have today. So, he amassed quite a high number of people.

“But when the crowds heard it they followed him on foot from the towns. As he went ashore, he saw a great throng and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” Every word of Jesus is meant for our own spiritual nourishment, and step number one in *Passionately Loving the World* is I need to have his compassion for those around me. We make that act of faith, that the greatest tragedy, I think I’m old enough to say that, I say that by experience, it’s not a terminal illness, that’s for sure, or financial difficulty or what the world calls failure, but an absence of hope, absence of meaning, absence of access to joy and absence of Christ.

I was very fortunate, it was my first time I was involved with overseeing a program for seminarians in Rome, and the conclusion of the program was a four-day pilgrimage called *In the footsteps of St. Josemaria*, going to shrines that were significant to his own spiritual life, to his own sanctity, into the history of Opus Dei. And one of the sites was Lourdes which was near a shrine where he was miraculously cured, called Torreciudad, where I happen to be ordained as well. So, that had special significance for me. And Torreciudad is a three-hour ride from Lourdes. So, I went to Lourdes and it was- well it was worse today, at least it’s not raining, it was a cold, drizzly day, probably low 50s, high 40s. And I was underneath someone’s umbrella in front of the Grotto, maybe two hundred feet in front of the ground, and there was an endless line of sick people- never saw anything like it. I mean, I knew sick people went there, but I never saw this endless procession of crippled people in wheelchairs, physically ill with brain damage, some totally paralyzed, some partially paralyzed, all heading with all sorts of volunteers who would lower them into this pool of water where many miracles occur.

And I couldn’t help thinking that these people who represent Christ in a very special way, Christ is present in the sick, that these people are symbolic of our society, of what Pope Francis may call the periphery. The periphery, in many occasions, or many instances, is in our own house, in our own home, in our neighborhood, among our friends. Perhaps we were- most likely we were part of that periphery. And Jesus is saying, don’t be indifferent. St. Josemaria talks about this humbled superiority complex. If I have Christ, I’m a vessel of clay. I’m sinful, I’m weak. But I’ve got Christ- that possession of Christ, that belief in Christ, that hope in Christ should arouse compassion.

I had that same sensation many years ago in Denver at World Youth Day, where I- I'll spare you the details, I had to oversee a World Youth Day church. And there was endless lines of kids going to confession. The center of attraction was the World Youth Day, John Paul, now, St. John Paul. And many of the kids virtually had no exposure to the sacrament of reconciliation. Maybe they went once in their lives- high school kids, college kids, and just endless, endless lines of kids. I was doing it for about four days, five days, got very little sleep, probably lost a lot of weight, too; there wasn't much time to eat. And you realize that, in a very poignant way, there's a very special occasion, the hunger, to know Our Lord. Perhaps they won't realize it explicitly and say, I hunger to know Jesus Christ, I hunger for the consolation of Christ, the healing of Christ, the peace of Christ. And- and that was an occasion- that occasion was very explicit. So, that's my first step in loving the world, that I care for the people around me and I have compassion that they don't know Christ.

It's Matthew who seemed to have the most checkered past of the apostles, judging by his conversion party and that he was a tax collector and his house was thronged with mafia types and loose women, scandalized the Pharisees- those were Matthew's friends. It's Matthew who's the- the businessman. He's the only evangelist who records two of Jesus' parables that nobody else records: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up and then, in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." So, Christ is associated with treasure. Again, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls who, on finding one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

So, step number one is this big concern that other people become recipients of this treasure called Jesus Christ. St. Josemaria says in *The Way*, "Don't you long to shout to those youths who are bustling around you: Fools, leave those worldly things that shackle the heart and very often degrade it..., leave all that and come with us in search of love." This is a new language even though it's as old as the gospel. In early '30s Spain, this kind of lingo was not used. Again, I repeat, it's as old as the gospel and as new as the gospel as well.

"Do you remember? Night was falling as you and I began our prayer. From close by came the murmur of water. And, through the stillness of the Castilian city, we also seemed to hear voices of people from many lands crying to us in anguish that they do not yet know Christ. Unashamedly you kissed your crucifix and you asked him to make you an apostle of apostles." And we ask Our Lord in- in the intimacy of our meditation, Lord, what do I do? Well, let's read what Jesus says. I know I read it, but just to give it context: "As he went ashore, he saw a great throng and he had compassion on them and heals their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a lonely place and the day is now over."

Now, these are all symbols of an absence of Christ, a lonely place, a desert. Day is a name for Christ, a traditional name for Christ. Day- the day is out, the day is over, send the crowds away into the villages to buy food for themselves. That's what the Apostles say. I don't want to have anything to do with these people, there's nothing we could do. And we Christians may feel that this is a lonely place. We are very much a mustard seed. And we gaze at the crowd, which is our society, even our- maybe even our own family, our

country or world— whatever. We turn on the news, we look at the newspaper, we- that this is a vast leper colony, a colony of lust— and no need to get into more detail— a colony of despair, a colony of emptiness, a colony of cynicism, a colony of fear, a colony of anxiety; this is a lonely place. “And the day is over, send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” And Jesus says this to you and me. Jesus said, “They need not go away.” Your family members, your friends, your society, mine as well, don't send them away. They need not go away. You give them something to eat, you give them something to eat. And we tell Jesus, you're being unrealistic. How can I effectively, passionately love the world when I am a nobody? I'm- what am I among so many, which is another passage about the loaves and the fish. And another gospel says the Apostles, or the disciples say to Jesus, what are we amongst so many? That's another push back Jesus got. And we give him push back too. We have only five loaves here and two fish. What is this among so many?

And what Jesus is saying here, which is quite extraordinary, that's why we have to compassionately love the world, give me your five loaves and two fish, give them to me. That's all I have. I want all you have. And if we give him those five loaves and two fish because the price tag for Our Lord is to give of ourselves totally, what- well all I have is five loaves and two fish. As the popes say, our society is renewed by those who give the five loaves and two fish, which is basically committing yourself to holiness. And, it's interesting to note that bread par excellence, in terms of the Word of God, in terms of the Holy Eucharist, signify Christ. And if you say the word *fish* in Greek and spell it backwards, it spells out, I think, *sótér*, which means *Savior*, or *Redeemer*. That's why fish is also a symbol of Christ. But Our Lord doesn't say, Alright, leave those five loaves and two fish there. Give those five loaves and two fish. Now start giving them away. It's the Apostles who give Christ. Fish and loaves are a symbol of his. But only after that young man gives up his five loaves and two fish.

The price tag of possessing Christ is to sell all that you have. If we're not totally committed to Christ, we can distribute bread and fish. And Our Lord is saying, No, you don't have to send them away. No, you don't have to get discouraged about the world. I just need your holiness. Well, I'm so puny, I mean nothing. But let's look at all the saints. The world, in terms of evangelization, has been significantly dented because of them.

So we, as always, return to the Mother of Jesus, and the distribution of the loaves and the fish were begun with that teenage girl who, when she was invited to become a disciple of Christ in the form of being a Mother of Christ, it was the Holy Spirit who brought God into the world but in consort with the teenage Mary of Nazareth, saying, Yes, I give of myself totally. Her response was, “Be it done to me according to your word.” I've got to say the same. I could chip away at that, but at least I want to have that vision. Jesus, give me that vision of giving you the five loaves and two fish so that I could give you to others. And Mary, intercede for me.

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