

THE SPIRIT OF DETACHMENT

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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.

We read in the Gospel of St. Luke, “But looking up, he saw the rich who were putting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. And he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all, for all these out of their abundance have put in as gifts to God. But she, out of her want, has put in all that she had to live on.’”

Our Lord does a double take here because he is amazed at the generosity of this poor widow and he points it out to the Apostles because, well, perhaps the Apostles were looking at how- how much everybody else was putting in. And, you know, they were probably commenting on how much, you know, the rich and the famous were- were bringing in and they were awed by that, they were stupefied by how much, you know, money all these people had—perhaps that's something we could think about. But Our Lord is really impressed at not the amount but the way it is done at the- he looks at the heart, he looks at the inside and he looks at the circumstances of each person. So, only he really knows how much is really generous for each person. And he points to this widow because she didn't have anything else to live on except these two copper coins that really amounted to nothing but she gave them to God. And because of that, it is implied here she goes home justified, you know, because, you know, God is very pleased with this gift and we know that God cannot be outdone in generosity.

Well, Our Lord is constantly talking about poverty and being poor in spirit. He says it in the Sermon of the Mount, “Blessed that are the poor in spirit.” You know, what does it mean, to be poor in spirit? Well, it- it means that we freely choose to be poor interiorly. Interiorly, it has to be free, it has to be interior. And it's almost irrelevant how much money we actually have because if we choose to be poor interiorly, then all our possessions, however many they are, big or small, you know, many or few, it doesn't really matter because they're not going to get to our heart. Our poverty is not going to get to our heart if we don't have anything. In other words, we're not going to play the victim and complain that we don't have anything and I, you know, we're not going to give into envy of the rich because they have and we don't. It's not going to get to us. We're going to accept it, we're going to be happy, we're going to actually give from our want, our need, like this widow. And at the

same time, if we have many things, we won't allow those things to kind of get to our head and make us vain and- and think that we're something, you know, something else or somebody important when we're not. We're just like everybody else. We have the same dignity as the poorest of the poor. And- and we're not going to let the great possessions that we have really take over our lives so as to create anxiety. We're simply going to use them and put them at the service of humanity if we have that much money or that much wealth so that we can do the good with them. And we're going to live soberly, you know, we will take what we need but we won't take more.

This is the the way that a child of God ought to see the world. We have to be in the world, but not be worldly. That's what Our Lord prayed for at the Last Supper for the Apostles. And yes, some people will leave the world- called by God to leave the world like St. Benedict so that they can give a witness to the world, that this world here, planet Earth is not the end all and be all of all existence, that there is a future world, the life that will come after this life, that is where the definitive happiness, you know, will take place and we can receive Our Lord's- Our Lord's reward, which is Heaven.

Here- here on Earth, what we're called to do is actually use the world but not abuse it, be in the world, to bear witness to the world, without being worldly. And some are called to even leave the world so that they can give a special kind of witness for the rest. But that's obviously not for everyone. If everyone were to leave the world and to leave the the administration of temporal affairs to somebody else, to the pagans, right, to people who are not Christian, then the world may not be saved because, you know, we need Christians in the world. And that's the teaching of St. Josemaria, that he- he realized sanctity or holiness is for everyone, not just for people who leave the world- religious or people who take care of administering the sacraments and preaching the Word of God like priests.

So priests and religious, yes, they give up temporal affairs, meaning, you know, ordering- the ordering of the world in- in its structures, like, you know, Wall Street and politics and Hollywood and all sorts of other professions, engineering and technology, and all these things that are good. Priests and religious give that up so that they can dedicate themselves while the priests to administering the sacraments and preaching the Word of God and serving. And the religious, in a different way, by giving witness of- of the fact that this world is not- is not the end. It's not the end all and be all of- of all our existence and- and it is only a passing world.

Well, the laity- actually, it belongs to the laity to order the world and- and the proper place of the laity is within society and within these temporal affairs. And they have to order them according to their prudence and use the goods of the Earth so that they can serve mankind and create good structures that lead to- to a- an environment in which virtue can be developed and lived out and the

faith also can be lived out. Obviously, they can create the- the optimal circumstances for that. However, just because the laity is in the world and it is their task to order all these temporal affairs, it doesn't mean that the laity are called to abuse the world, you know. One thing is not using the world at all, like religious. Another thing is to abuse it, right. But what we have to do is use it properly because it's good. It has come good out of the hands of God. It was- the whole world is good. The world is not evil. The world is made good by God and we have made it evil with the misuse or the abuse of- of it. But what we have to do is purify it and elevate it to Our Lord. And for that we need the virtue, if we can call it a virtue, or the outlook of poverty or detachment, really, it's been about being detached from the world but still being in the world and using it.

St. Gregory talks about this exact point in- in one of his homilies where he says, "My brothers, we do not take it upon us to say to you that you should give up everything." In other words, he's saying, I'm not going to command you to leave the world and give up everything that you have now. "But yet, even while holding to all things you can, if you wish, leave them if you so handle temporal matters as to strive with the whole mind to eternal aims." He says basically, you can- you can actually be holy, right, if while handling temporal things, temporal matters, you- you struggle to keep your mind and your heart, your soul, on the goal of Heaven, on God, on eternal things, eternal aims- that's pretty good, that takes effort, that's even harder, I think, it's harder, perhaps, to live poverty when you're surrounded by wealth and surrounded by things than when you just give up all things. And- and so, that's why we, well, it requires a virtue of temperance, of sobriety, of the gift of science, what- what is known as the gift of science of the Holy Spirit, right, the gift that allows us to actually understand where everything that is created fits within our path to holiness.

St. Gregory continues, "That man uses the world as if he were not using it, who brings to the surface of his life from outside all things necessary and yet does not allow them to lord it over his mind so that they are subject to him and serve him from outside and never break the concentration of his mind as it aims at higher things. Whoever, therefore, are like this have all earthly things for their use and not as objects of their desires. Therefore, let there be nothing to hold back the desire of your mind. Let not the love of anything in this world entangle you."

I have a quotation here from a biography of Charles V. When he retired, he went to a monastery in Spain- Yuste is the name of the monastery where he died. He died the following year. And this was February of 1557 when he retires. And here's what the biographer says. He says, "Over 100 of his Flemish servants had to go back to their country." Of course, he was retiring so he doesn't need these 100 servants, "They were no longer needed," he says. "Their parting from the king was very emotional, just as sentimental was the parting of 99 members of his personal escort. The king retained only the essential servants needed for his person- one noble, one secretary, a scribe, a personal physician, four barbers, a pharmacist, and his assistant. Five chamber maids, two

watchmakers with one assistant, a tailor, and a jeweler, two chefs, three bakers, a wine keeper, a beer maker, a barrel maker, a sauce maker, a poultry man, a farmer, a fruit expert—all of them with at least one assistant—a wax maker, two laundry maids, three travel aides, a personal confessor, and three bodyguards.” That’s it, that’s all he needed.

Can you imagine, you know, retiring and all you keep is all these people, right, to serve you? Well, obviously, these were different times and this is a- an emperor. And I don’t know if this was the- the least he needed, and this was living poverty for him. But sometimes I think we can, you know, we can actually look like Charles V, you know, when we’re moving or something like that and we just are attached to everything. And, you know, we have our, I don’t know, the thing- the paper we wrote in freshman year that we need to keep—absolutely—and we have this letter from somebody else, and we have our fifth grade class picture. And of course, all these good things are- are great to have and- but sometimes we get attached to them. And we have a full attic full of things that just collect dust or a closet that is bursting at the seams with clothes that we haven’t really worn for years or all sorts of other, you know, stuff that we just don’t want to clean up, don’t want to get rid of because we’re attached to all that. Or we’re attached to services, you know, perhaps we don’t care about material things anymore but we care about the services, and if we don’t have the latest service or the latest phone, the latest technology, we- we get all upset. We get all upset because the Wi-Fi is too slow or something like that.

We have to see what St. Josemaria said about the spirit of poverty that God wants us to have in the world. He says, “These are signs of true poverty: not to have anything as our own, not to have things we don’t need, not to complain when we lack something we need,” you know, “and when we have a choice, to choose the worst for ourselves.” This is- if we live by this rule, well, we abide by these three rules and then call it rules of thumb because they’re not really rules, they’re just kind of rules of thumb, we will actually live the spirit of detachment that Our Lord wants us to live, you know. So think, you know, do I have- do I consider things my own? Do I own the car? Yes, I own the car. Yes, it’s in my name. Yes, everything is mine. But do I consider that this is, you know, not mine. It’s on loan, really, from God, because you know, it’s gonna go away and I’m gonna go away. I’m gonna go back to the Earth when I die. So, it’s really on loan. It’s not mine to hoard like- like- like- in *The Lord of the Rings*, you have the *my precious*, I kind of want to hoard the ring, I feel the tug. And I, well, no, you know what- I can give it up. If I need to, I can lend it to someone. I can, you know, if I crash it, I’m not- it’s not- it’s not a big tragedy. Well, of course, it’s a tragedy and everything else and all that stuff. Hopefully nobody dies and nobody’s there. But if nobody’s hurt, nobody dies. There’s just money and just the material thing. Well, we’ll get another one. We’ll, you know, we’ll figure it out. But it’s- it’s not the end of the world. I can- we have to be like St. Paul.

He says, "I have learned," right, he says, "to live in poverty and to live in abundance. I," let's get the passage, the exact passage in the Letter to the Philippians: "I know how to live in abundance. I have been schooled to every place and every condition to be filled and to be hungry, to have abundance and to suffer want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me." I can do all things so in him whose strength has been the Lord. I don't need anything, really to be happy. In fact, the happiest people in the world had been poor—Our Lady, St. Joseph, Jesus, St. John the Baptist, and so many more, so many others.

Not having- not to have things that we don't need. Well, look at your closet, is there something some coat that I haven't used in a long time—can I give it to the poor, you know. St. Bernard talks about if I have a coat in my closet that I don't use, it belongs to the poor, I'm taking it from the poor, I'm stealing from the poor. And he's not talking about generously giving it in charity to the poor, he's talking about giving an injustice to the poor because it's theirs. It's- it's really not mine if I don't use it. He puts it at the level of justice to give it away and not charity. That's very- he really ups the ante and puts the bar really high, on this point that St. Josemaria talks about, not to have things we don't need, not to complain when we lack something we need, you know.

St. Josemaria was in the- in the Civil War in Spain where they didn't have anything—no soap, no toothpaste, no Listerine, no, I don't know, basic needs, you know—that- that we- we take for granted today. We could just order them on Amazon and get them the next day, you know. We're- we haven't lived what most of humanity has lived which is the ability to go without the things that we would like to have or even the things we need, you know. Well, we don't have- a good mortification is not to complain. That's hard, it's hard. We know it- we know it's hard but that could be really pleasing to God. It's like the widow's mite, you know, that great sacrifice.

Also, you know, when- even if we can do many things, even if we- if things are not bad, we can enjoy a good day and- and spend the day, you know, maybe leisure and doing all sorts of things vacationing. But do I vacation with a- with a mind of Christ even if everything is listen to me, St. Paul says, "all things are lawful for me," he says to the Corinthians, "but not all things are expedient." In other words, I can do all things. It's okay, I can buy this and I can buy that and it's all good. There's nothing wrong with it. But should I- should I give something up just to give something up to Our Lord, you know. Well, these- these are things to think about.

When we live the spirit of- of freedom from material desires, what really happens is we are in the presence of God more easily. We think of eternal things, like St. Gregory says. We are aiming towards eternal things. And- and we are concerned more about the others than about ourselves. And really, time becomes kind of eternal, you know. I have time for people. I, because I'm not in a hurry anymore, because when I'm in a hurry it's about, well, because I'm working- working- working

to make more money- money- money, to, you know, buy more things. When- when actually, when I live the spirit of detachment, I'm connected with people, it brings me to others. I live in harmonious relationships with myself because I'm not anxious about not having things. I'm not anxious about missing out, you know. I'm not giving in to FOMO, "fear of missing out", as they call it. I am- I am okay with God because I know that he will provide for me, as you know, St. Matthew says, as Our Lord says, in- through the words of St. Matthew, a very simple rule, you know, that he says, "Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, What shall I eat? What should I drink? What shall we put on? For after all these things the Gentiles seek. But your father knows that- that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his justice and all these things shall be given you besides. Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have anxieties of its own. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Well, sufficient for the day is its own trouble, you know. When I'm good with- with myself, when I'm good with God, when I'm good with others, I live magnanimity, I live generously. I can give myself- it's not just about giving things, it's about giving myself which is something that the rich young man could not do. He was not able to do it. He- he was so weak and tied down by his possessions that even though he was called to be with Jesus and follow him closely as one of his disciples, he couldn't bring himself to say yes. And he went away sad. These are the thorns in the thistles that Our Lord talks about in the parable of the sower that choke the seed. That's good seed, good soil, good watering, good sunlight, good conditions, good nutrition, good everything-it's coming up. But then you have thistles, thorns, the cares and the riches of the world that don't allow this good seed to grow in this good soil. And then it's wasted-that's the rich young man.

Well, when I live a spirit of detachment and a spirit of temperance, I have inner peace somehow. I can rejoice in simple things. I can pray better, I have a prayer of quiet because I'm not desirous of anything else. I can listen to others, I can listen to God. I can really, simply just look at the world at how- and look at how beautiful it is and, at the same time, look at how passing it is. I could be in awe. I'm capable of being in awe at the stars and the trees and the beauty of the world but at the same time, look at all that beauty and say, but this is not God. This is not the definitive world, you know, and actually lift my soul up to the creator of all these good things that- that really speaks of a purity of soul, a purity of heart, whereby I can distinguish between good and evil. I can distinguish between what is good and better and best. And that, you know, that- that- that requires a refinement of soul, a quiet of soul, a quietness of soul that can only come from the living a, you know, a detachment from the world. And the detachment sounds negative but it's really so that I can live attachment to God. I can be attached to God, right, attached to eternal things and not be bogged down by earthly cares.

Well, let us end our prayer on this great virtue of temperance with regard to material things, otherwise known as poverty—poverty of spirit or detachment, and think of the Holy Family. We can think of Jesus who has nothing, who has nowhere to lay his head. He was born in a stable, detached from everything, and as a result of that, he was able to love much and be totally free—totally free to go and be attached on the Cross for all of us. Our Lady and Jesus and Joseph will help us too, to reflect their spirit of poverty in our own lives if we turn to them with confidence.

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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