

EVERYTHING FOR THE GOOD

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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.

We have just made, for the millionth time, that act of faith that is thrilling. We have said, “I firmly, absolutely, really and truly without a shadow of a doubt, believe that you are here.” What a wonderful way for us to live our life, and an especially wonderful way for us to get ready for this new season. This act of faith that, among other things, allows us to discover the meaning of our existence. My Lord, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me, that you are the Good Shepherd, the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep. The Lord has made it very clear to us how close he is to us.

As he himself has told us, the Good Shepherd calls his sheep by name. To strangers, a flock is a flock. All sheep are equal and alike. And we know this just walking around town. You walk by the students who are now arriving to start the new season, the new semester, and I'm sure each of us has the feeling that we are invisible to them, which is fine. We were like that too, when we were in the university, because as far as they're concerned, we're just the same as everybody else. But for the Shepherd, each one- each one of his sheep is different from the others. Each one has its own features and a name.

The Shepherd knows his sheep perfectly because he loves them and has a personal interest in each of them. And how much love he knows how to put into the name by which he calls them. This is what is going on every day in our life. The Lord- the Lord is looking upon us with unimaginable love and understanding, calling us by that name that perhaps no one else knows. Maybe- maybe our parents are the only ones who ever called us that name. But it's not just the name. Knowledge of the name is only a symbol. We know- we know a lot of people's names. We can't remember them all the time, but we know a lot of names. But what the Lord knows of us is our personality with our innermost feelings. He knows everything.

As we read in the gospel, we imagine those scenes of Jesus walking along the streets of Palestine. We see how he immediately reads in every single face he meets the whole story of a life, the intimate dispositions of a soul. Just think of Jesus entering Jericho. He saw so many faces to the left and right, and not just the faces, but he knew everything about them. He was looking- looking for someone who was not simply curious, but who was ready to respond to all the love that he had for that person. And he finally found him, looking up into the branches there, the sycamore tree which is still there. He saw Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus won- won over the Lord instantly because he really, really, really wanted something very special. He wanted that relationship. Just imagine what it was like for the Apostles, for all the disciples, to realize that the Lord knew them perfectly. Just imagine the Apostles: they're often in a desert place, eminently-eminently aware, as the weeks went by, of their limitations and their smallness, always beating each other up, trying to figure out which was the greatest. And yet they would look over and look into Jesus' eyes, and they'd realize, he understands. He doesn't mind that I'm such a dingbat. He is filled with mercy.

And so that intuition of hearts that they knew Jesus had gave the Apostles a peaceful security as they gave of themselves completely to the master. They had the comfort of knowing that they were in the hands of someone who knew them thoroughly. This is very important for us. It means that as we go through the day, we can relax because we can say to the Lord, as we say to him right now in our prayer: "My Jesus, looking ahead to today, you know I'm going to be forgetful, I'm going to get distracted," the list goes on and on, "but I hereby remind you that my desire to love you is practically infinite. I'm going to take you by storm no matter what."

And then we can relax because we have already set in motion that act of faith. We've already told the Lord exactly what we want. And even when those moments come, when we are drawn in opposite directions by whatever, we can say to him: "But wait a minute, what- what I really want is that which I declared this morning, during my morning prayer." We tell you that, Jesus, right now, during this time of prayer. This life of faith of ours not only gives us comfort and security, but it is the pathway for us to discover why we are here. The meaning of our existence. St. Josemaria taught us a little Christmas carol that is unbelievably charming. This is not the place for any of- any of us to sing it. But in Spanish, in the original, very simple: "*Tuyo soy, para ti nací, ¿qué quieres, Jesús, de mí?*"

It practically sings by itself. And what it means is, "I am yours. I was born for you. Jesus, what do you want of me?" That's a great thing for little kids to be singing but is of- of profound depth. I am yours. I belong to you. I am your possession. You are the reason I was born. "So, let's see, Jesus. What's the program? And what are your plans for me?" Because the fact is that God has plans for each one of us. God has fantastic plans for us. Everyone has a vocation. God is not indifferent about anyone.

As one writer puts it: "If there are so many Christians who today live aimlessly with little depth, hemmed in on all sides by narrow horizons, that is due, above all, to their lack of any clear idea of why they, personally, exist. What elevates the person and truly gives them a personality of their own is the consciousness of their vocation, the consciousness of their own specific task in the universe."

Years ago, there was a young mom, somewhere, I forget where. So, she was there at home and her little daughter was sitting on the couch, her legs sticking straight out because she was a little girl. And at one moment, the little girl said, "Mom, what should I be when I grow up?" And that mother, who had deep interior life, looked at her daughter very thoughtfully and she said, "Don't ask me. You have to ask God. He's the One who created you." Beautiful answer. Don't ask your counselor. Don't ask an app. Ask God.

What that leads to, of course, in our prayer every day is, “Okay, Lord. Today, what are you up to? I know you’re up to something.”

We’ve often joked together in our meditations about the fact that- that the typical- the typical comment of a mother who has several children, if they’re out in the backyard playing, and if the mother happens to be home at that time, typical thing would be for her to go to the back door and say to the kids, outside, “Whatever you’re up to, stop it.” But of course, we, with our life of faith and our life of prayer, we say to the Lord every day, “Whatever you’re up to, bring it on; let’s do it,” which leads to the very important question that we ask every day: “What are you up to?” It is very important that we ask this question often because it has everything to do with our happiness and it also has everything to do with the impact that God wants us to have on other people.

Each of you has undoubtedly discovered a very wonderful app called iPray the Gospel. If you haven’t discovered it yet, you just “Google” iPray the Gospel and you find the app. Well, in one of the readings, the author of this app begins by quoting St. John Henry Newman, who said, “God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me that he has not committed to another. I have my mission. He has not created me for nothing.”

And then this author says, “God has risked a lot. He’s risked a lot because he depends on our fulfilling that mission. God is like a good football coach who has chosen to train you. He helps you to develop your skills, he teaches you all you need, he spends a lot of time, invests his money and time and gifts in you. But you are free. You can turn your back on him, on the coach, and decide to do synchronized swimming. You might be good at it; you might be famous. But your coach would feel disappointed, and your team will have a gap.”

That was a very charming comparison that points to a real reality. God has a plan for each one of us, not just for ourselves, but for those around us. That effort of ours to reach out to those around us, to feel responsible for them, to be the Good Shepherd for them, is our way of being an instrument of God. Which means that he is taking a big risk. Because if we are all set to reach out and then we say well, “I think I’m getting a cold.” And we just- we don’t reach out. That could be it. But let us think a little bit, in this conversation with Jesus, about the different consequences of our life of faith. The fact that it is our- our way to access the meaning of our existence. Our life of faith leads us to have tremendous faith in Providence.

St. Josemaria loved to take that thought of St. Paul, where St. Paul says, “For those who love God, all things work towards the good.” And St. Josemaria shrunk it to *omnia in bonum*, “everything for the good.” It is a wonderful, positive outlook, an outlook of a soul of faith: All things work towards the good. It means that we are called to have a positive outlook regardless of the appearances. And that will give us tremendous emotional resilience in face of obstacles, apparent setbacks. This is so important for us to pass on to the next generation. There will be a lot of setback; there always- always have been, always will be obstacles. Things don’t go our way. The default setting of the human being is hysteria. And we throw up our arms, we

start wailing and gnashing our teeth. We get a mouthguard. We do all sorts of things that lead us to spend the day saying, "Woe is me."

That would bespeak a lack of faith. Far more interesting to have this attitude: "I don't care what the appearances are. I don't care how bad it seems to be. We are going to grow through these circumstances." Our life of faith will lead us to have patience. You know, God is a great choreographer. He knows how and when to set things in motion. And sometimes we can say to him, "Why? Why are you taking so long?" But then we have to say to him, "But yeah, but you're in charge. You're the boss."

There comes to mind that- that great line in *Fiddler on the Roof*, where they're talking about obstacles. I mean, they're- they're in that little town, that little village. The Chosen People are going through a really rough time because of their occupiers. And at one point, the central figure, whose name escapes me, he looks up and he turns to YHWH, to God, and he says, "I know we're the chosen people. But couldn't you choose somebody else for a while?" It's a great line. "All right, already. Stop!" But patience.

The patron saint of patience, of course, is St. Monica, who looked at that son of hers, Augustine, fourth century. She looked at him and realized he was destined for great things. But boy, did he take a long time. And why is she the patron saint of patience? (And this was just made up. It's not real. It's not official, but she really is). She kept pounding away for years, for decades. Thank God, speaking of St. Augustine, our life of faith leads us to the conviction that nothing is lost.

There was a virtual meditation some weeks ago that reached someone in Toronto. And that virtual meditation mentioned St. Augustine's *Confessions*, that great classic. And so, someone wrote back saying, "Many Christmases ago, these great friends of mine gave me a beautifully illustrated version of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine. But I never got around to reading it. Right after listening to the meditation, I went through my bookshelves to see if I could find it, and there it was. It is now with me, and I have started to read it."

Maybe this took 30 years for them- for her to get around to reading it. And who knows? Maybe- maybe God's Providence will lead some of you who are listening to this right now to say, "I haven't read it either. There's got to be a copy around here somewhere." How do we go about living this life of faith on a daily basis? The- right now we shouldn't be experiencing the thrill of the Olympics. We have to wait. But we know from experience that it's one thing to see the people, the athletes, competing in the Olympics, thinking, "Boy, this is- this is really glorious." What we don't see, of course, is all that they went through for years to get there. Well, that is the same situation with us.

We will be ready to live according to our life of faith, simply by doing on a daily basis what we should be doing and doing it really well. St. Josemaria wrote, "This has to be your ambition, to persevere in the exact fulfillment of your present obligations. Because that work, that is humble, monotonous, is prayer expressed in deeds, and it prepares us to receive the grace for that other work, great, broad, and deep, about which

we dream.” That is, to place Christ at the summit of all human activities. But let us activate this life of faith of ours today. And tomorrow. Very consciously, very lovingly going about the ordinary, humble, monotonous tasks, of getting the final preparations for the new season, for example. You know it could occur to us, “Yeah, but I’m just- it’s wonderful to hear Cardinal Newman say that God has this very special plan for me. But he’s talking about the intellectuals of the 19th century in Oxford. And I’m not an intellectual and etc., etc.

We can’t- we can’t allow ourselves to get away with that excuse. It’s too easy. Pope Francis wrote in, *Rejoice and Be Glad*, that document of his, how often we are tempted to keep close to the shore, otherwise known as the wading pool. Yet the Lord calls us to put out into the deep, let down our nets. Clinging to him, we are inspired to put all our charisms, our gifts, at the service of others. We all have gifts. It’s very important that we- that we recognize them, that we’re really good at certain things. We’re hopeless at other things, but that’s okay. Each one of us has gifts.

Going back to what St. John Henry Newman said. He has created- “God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me that he has not committed to another. I have my mission.” Well, he’s pointing here at the meaning of our existence. Those whom God has placed in our lives, they are our little lambs, so to speak.

We have to have this attitude: “I am the good shepherd. And if I do not reach out to them and lead them to green pastures, who’s going to? Those friends of mine, kids I went to grade school with, people I see in the parish every Sunday, and the list goes on and on. I’m the one present in their lives, I’m the one who is thinking about them, praying for them, concerned about them and determined to somehow serve them. And know, Jesus, I am not going to let you down. I am famous for not letting anyone down.” As the Pope says, going back to *Gaudete et Exultate*, that great document. Okay, it’s true. These are not his words- be- introduction. It’s true. We are small stuff, limited. But then again, the Apostles were limited editions, so we’re all limited.

So, the Pope says (these are his words), “Let us acknowledge our weakness, but allow Jesus to lay hold of it and send us too on mission. We are weak. Yet we hold the treasure that can enlarge us and make those who receive it better and happier. Much better, much happier. Boldness and apostolic courage are an essential part of mission. Everyone around us is looking for meaning to their life. By definition. Just the way it is. “Why am I here?” I’m not here just to go shopping; “shop until you drop,” the theme song of some people. There’s got to be a deeper, and there is a deeper, meaning. And that’s why we have to be so excited knowing that when our friends, our colleagues, and acquaintances see that we are so positive, so happy, so joyful; that we don’t gossip that we’re different.

Invariably and inevitably, they will say to us, “What is going on? Why are you different? Why are you not moaning and groaning? Why do you not gnash your teeth?” And we’ll say, “Well, are you just making conversation, or do you really want to know?” “I really want to know.” “Well, I have found a deeper meaning

to my existence.” And then they will be really intrigued. Let us finish this time of prayer, with infinite gratitude, if such a thing is possible. Gratitude because there's nothing like knowing why we are here. Mary, we ask you- we ask you to intercede for us; to do whatever it takes so that we never take our eyes off this meaning of our existence. And at the same time, you who are the Queen of the Apostles, guide us so that we fulfill your Son's deepest plans for all that he wants to do through each one of us.

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 in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



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