

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

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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, we ask You, Lord, to help us contemplate this mystery of faith that, perhaps, in an immediate sense, causes us to draw a blank. Our topic of prayer, on occasion of the month of November, it's a month that the Church utilizes so that we contemplate the last things, that's the traditional word, or the eternal truths, of death, judgment, Heaven, Hell, Purgatory.

And the doctrine behind the Communion of Saints is that the Church exists in this world, in this present world, and in the next. The most effective members of the Church are those who actually contemplate God directly, the Church in Heaven. Before, it was called the Church Triumphant. But also a part of the Church, and they're banking on our help, on our charity, is the Church Suffering, the Church in Purgatory.

And the Church on Earth, the pilgrim Church, the traditional word or phrase is the Church Militant, not in a violent sense or warfare sense, but in a struggle to conform one's life to the life of Jesus. And through deeds of love and charity, to win people over to Christ. St. Paul, in the earliest years of the Church's history, in one of the earliest documents of the New Testament, in his letter to the Corinthians, he teaches, "If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together."

There is a collective intuition we have. The Church is marked by different offices, different charisms, different roles, different functions. But who are the most valuable players in the Church? There's a lot less of a danger now, but just for simplicity sake, there could be a temptation, but lot less now, that those who are called to the clerical state, they need to dress the part because they are representing Jesus Christ, the High Priest, and the successors of the Apostles, obviously, the Holy Father, who enjoys a special role, being the official representative of Our Lord, the Vicar of Christ.

And we have profound respect of the different offices in the Church that come from Our Lord Himself. But who gets the most done? I was at a stop sign that on a day like this, not this year, and I was looking to my right, and there was a Church. I could make out a staircase, a granite staircase, going up. And it was, I was gonna say, a long stop sign, I was behind someone who was stopped at a stop sign. So, I was stopped for a little while.

And as I looked at my right, I noticed an elderly lady about a block away, going up the stairs but pulling on the banister. It was a sleet day; it was sleeting outside. And maybe she was the most valuable player in the Church because effectiveness is measured by sanctity, effectiveness is measured by love. The Church wants us to use His saints as role models to help us contemplate Our Lord's life. And why did these saints come to mind? Because they were talked about in recent weeks.

She would never have dreamt in a million years that she would be affecting the Church and the world more and more as time progressed. And I'm thinking about St. Bernadette because a couple of friends of mine have gone to Lourdes different times, and one even contemplated her incorrupt body, but my point was when she was here on Earth, she had a few apparitions, and the rest of her life was very humiliating, very difficult for her.

And she was holed up in a convent, and her superior was not very gentle with her, not kind to her, was overbearing, misjudged her. And probably, in a given moment, on a human level, you figure, what's this poor kid accomplishing? Comes from a very poor background, only knows destitution, a few apparitions, and for the next, whatever it is, half a century, it's kind of a struggle. It's, she's passing unnoticed, she's not publishing speeches, she's not on TV because TV wasn't invented, but even if it were, she wouldn't have been on it.

And what does she amount to? Well, she's a valuable player. And not that we have to be connected with something like a Lourdes, but it's just more of the point, what is the Communion of Saints? The holier you are, the more you help the Church, the more you help the world. It's that simple, that challenging as well! And so, what does St. Josemaria say, and he really lived this in a special way at the beginning, well throughout his life, but let me explain. "The Communion of Saints. How shall I explain it to you? You know what blood transfusions can do for the body? Well, that's what the Communion of Saints does for the soul."

I may have shared this before, but I was giving a retreat in Shellbourne, and I was distracted by the new books in Spanish in this section of Shellbourne called The Study. And that's usually where the priests stay, because there's little living room and rooms to chat with people and theology books and spiritual reading books and what caught my eye was a short biography of the first woman of Opus Dei. So, it caught my eye and read it. Instead of preparing meditations, I read the book.

And well, she was in a hospital in Madrid for incurable cases. She came from an educated family; she was well educated herself. And she was battling with tuberculosis and the tuberculosis, they would, her family sent her to different places in Europe where the weather was better, so she'd get cured, but she just kept getting worse. And St. Josemaria was assigned to that hospital, he worked in that hospital. And it was kind of a dreadful place.

It was packed with people and people were on the floor. And it was all people just waiting to die, and medicine was very insufficient, and there was not enough medicine to take care of all the patients, and St. Josemaria would make his rounds, and she had a diary, and her tuberculosis was not only in the lungs, but it was all over her body. Her body was covered with ulcers, and she was dying, and she knew that. And she was all alone. Didn't get too many visitors because this disease is very contagious.

And she writes in her diary that people are, their spirits are lifted when Fr. Josemaria comes, they look forward to seeing him. And she writes in her diary, "Well, my vocation is to offer this up. This is so painful, and I feel so exhausted. And I'm so lonely." This intention he's got must be very important for me to pay such a high price. But she was a cheerful woman. It wasn't, she wasn't morbid or pessimistic, but she was in a lot of pain, and she was human.

And many years later, many decades later, in the last few years of St. Josemaria's life, where Opus Dei had spread to a lot of countries by then he said, "The secret of all this are those suffering people in that hospital for incurables in Madrid." And specifically, this woman, I think, called Maria Ignacia. That's how it works.

The Communion of Saints, there's two results: Most of it's invisible, but it's, the results are real. And the results surface, not immediately. It's hard to generalize, but Jesus uses the parable of a seed. A seed's on the ground and it grows slowly, slowly, slowly and only after it matures completely does it give off fruit. But it's not immediate.

What do we believe here? This Communion of Saints, that I'm not an isolated member of the Church. Some of us, it's understandable. We are battling on a human level with odds totally against us. As always, the culture, the common opinion, the common lifestyle is a flagrant contradiction to the teachings of Jesus. It's not negative statements, it's just real. There's confusion, there's ignorance of the faith. This moral relativism has seeped into the heart of our own personal families.

What do I do? What do I say? What initiatives do I take? We have the tyranny of political correctness. We know the problems. Many say, "Well, how can I help the Church?" because there's confusion in the Church as well. Be holier. It's that simple. The ones who extend the kingdom are those who are most intimately united to Christ. How do I help the Church? Last time we checked the Church began with personal apostolate of friendship and confidence but bolstered by an intimate union with Our Lord.

Here, I've gotta live the virtue of order here, I got a stack of quotations here, you know, I preach to different groups and find a quotation and shove it in the Bible, and "this sounds good," and it goes underneath the cover here. That's why it's kind of beat-up. And somehow, I got a hold of one of the earliest writings of St. Josemaria, early 30s writings. In one of his instructions, he wrote a number of instructions on the, one is called "Supernatural Spirit of Opus Dei" and other ones on directors and other ones on dealing with kids, St. Raphael works, adults, St. Gabriel works, etc.

And he was just starting off. And he said, given the nature of our mission, what is our mission? Not just Opus Dei's, all the Baptized. Opus Dei gives a heightened awareness of that Baptismal mission, and that is to bring Our Lord to every human activity, to change the world, to Christianize it. And he doesn't talk about a phonathon. He doesn't talk about knocking on doors. He doesn't talk about a mass mailing. He doesn't talk about a pep rally.

He said that we need to vibrate with love for Christ. We need to be Eucharistic men and women, men and women of interior life vibrating with the heart of Christ. Because it's a Communion of Saints as, let's just, it merits reading again. "The Communion of Saints, how shall I explain it to you? You know what blood transfusions can do for the body? Well, that's what the Communion of Saints does for the soul."

But I recall giving a retreat to young people and miraculously, people were loitering the chapel there. You would finish the meditation and people would stay. Miracles can happen. And they actually kept the silence. That's a huge miracle, should be written up! And there was a good tone and lines for confession. You know, the typical Shellbourne experience that we don't want to ever take for granted, a certain fantasy island where people are adoring the Blessed Sacrament, praying the Rosary, going to confession, keeping the silence more or less.

And then it came to mind, because I ran, I had to make a sick call before my retreat to a dying lady. I anointed her and I said, "Listen, you, you still got a lot of work here." "What do you mean a lot of work? I can't get out of bed." I said, "Doesn't matter. That, that's irrelevant." I said, "I'm giving a retreat. And I need

you to offer this up for the retreat. Younger crowd. So, try to double the offering.” She said, “Okay, well, let me know how the retreat goes, though, because I want to see how I did!” Kind of a pressure tactic. I said to myself, “I guess I have to prepare the meditations now. Because she’s gonna want to know how I did.”

So anyway, towards the end, I waited for the end. I said, “Well, listen, you know, this was a good retreat, and you made a good retreat, and I could tell that, you know, there’s a good spirit of prayer here. There’s a lady dying for you. So, you know, kind of diminished the levity rather quickly. But anyway, I said, “This lady is dying for you and that’s why you made a good retreat.” And I was able to tell the lady, “The retreat was a smashing success because of you.” “What do you mean smashing success?” “Well, you know, kids actually stayed in the chapel to pray. To me that’s pretty successful. Instead of you know, running, running in a corner drinking Sprite, I hope it’s not no stronger than that. And they, or talking or fooling around or, you know.”

So, “I believe in the Communion of Saints.” I pray that in every Solemnity, every Sunday Mass. What does that mean in the practice? I believe that if I connect with Our Lord, I’m helping the whole Church. And I believe if I am unfaithful, I’m hurting the Church. That simple. “I believe in the Communion of Saints,” I believe. And I, we say this with humility. I’m just as important as anybody else in the Church because I’m equally called to be a saint like everybody else in the Church. I may not have the same office, that’s immaterial.

The, maybe Our Lord explains how we help the whole Church. He reveals in saint, through St. Matthew, that He’s present in everybody, especially the suffering: “Then the King will say to those at His right hand, ‘Come, O Blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me, and I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me, I was in prison, and you came to me.’”

“Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it for me.’” Lord, help us unpack this. That if we did it for the least, we’ve done it for You.

This is a specific way, and a specific revelation, of how the Communion of Saints works. If I am loving Our Lord in someone who is physically or spiritually hungry or thirsty or naked or sick, in Our Lord’s heart is everybody. In Our Lord’s heart is the whole Church. Even if I’m limited by sickness, or illness, or old age, and I can’t physically deal with somebody the way I could when, in my high school years or college years, when I had more access to people, if I did it for the least, I’ve done it for Him. And in Him, we have everybody. Every act of charity, what a truth! extends to everybody.

“You’ve done it for me. Everyone is in my heart.” And what a difference it makes! Our Lord says part of this Communion of Saints is what? This hunger. Well, I live, I live in a part of town where there’s not too many hungry people. In fact, people need to eat less where I live. There’s not too many thirsty people, especially on Friday nights and Saturday night. People need to, well, it’s winter, so it doesn’t apply anymore. Modesty is not at an all-time high! Is that what Our Lord means? No.

What He means is that the real, there’s physical hunger and thirst, poverty, and Our Lord means it, that’s a corporal works of mercy. But what Our Lord is especially focusing on is those who are hungry for the Truth, those who do not have the Bread of Life, who don’t have access to the Word of God because they

don't know! Those paralyzed, sick people who are confined to a life of lust, a life of ambition, a life of pride, because there's nobody there to help them get over that paralysis. And so, they can't walk with Christ because they're sick. They don't have the freedom to walk with Christ. We are called to do something about that.

And how do we do it? Well, by loving these people, by praying for these people. They can be as close to us as our own children, our own siblings, parents, friends. That's what Our Lord is asking us to do. We can't be remaining in our comfort zone. Those who are thirsting for the Truth, those who need to put on Jesus Christ, isn't that Paul uses that image, "Put on Jesus Christ." They're naked, they don't have Our Lord. And that's the Communion of Saints. What a difference it makes. And we all have that experience that when I get out of my comfort zone and I try to touch a life of another, not by lecturing them or preaching at them, but loving them and praying for them, it's a game changer! So that's my Communion of Saints.

St. Paul, Paul, when he got converted, when he was knocked off his horse, what does Our Lord say to Paul? He says, "Paul, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Paul says, "Who are you that I'm persecuting?" "I'm Jesus of Nazareth." And Paul makes reparation. He was persecuting the followers of Our Lord, and Our Lord says, "You're persecuting Me." And he reverses it, and unites himself to Christ, and repairs the damage he has inflicted on the Church. In fact, it's Paul who ushered in the age of martyrdom. He got it going and it didn't stop for 300 years. But it was Paul who built up the Body of Christ through his own union with Christ.

"I want to see people love the Eucharist more," then I've got to love the Eucharist. "I want to see people embrace Christianity," I gotta embrace Our Lord more. And, Lord, give me that faith, that the more I unite myself to You in mental prayer, and focusing on the Eucharist, on the Mass, saying the Rosary with devotion, really trying to love the people around me with concrete resolutions, I want to really believe that that Church is growing, that the world is being renewed. Our Lord does it, but He does it through His saints. That is how the Communion of Saints works. That if I am loving Our Lord, that is affecting the whole Church.

Well, we go to the Blessed Mother. Mary, we want to do our part in strengthening your Son's Church, your Church. Help us be more convinced that you're calling me to sanctity and it's sanctity that is going to extend the Kingdom of your Son much more effectively into the world.

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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