

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

THE VISITORS AT THE NATIVITY

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In the Name of the Father and 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.

During the last weeks, we've been trying to contemplate you, my Lord, as a child. And I don't know your experience, but I feel that every year for Christmas, I'm late. I am not ready. And even if I try to do my best, preparing externally, the decoration in my home, even if I try to bring the Gospel to my heart, there is always this contrast between the purity and the beauty of your coming and the inadequacy of my heart.

I'm not ready, and I will never be, for such a marvelous encounter. And I want to take advantage of this preparation for Christmas or this Christmas time to think about the first nativity, the first nativity scene. Every year, when we dust off the little figurines that we use for the creche, we need to be careful because some of them are delicate. And if they fall, they break easily. And maybe you, in your own home, have some old figurines that are broken and repaired.

And every year you wonder, "Should I buy a new one?" Or should I keep this that I inherited from my family, from a friend, maybe as a gift from a wedding, or a gift from a special Christmas? And those broken figures could be, maybe today, inspiration for our prayer. Because you know what? The first nativity scene in history had also some broken figures. But Our Lord used them wonderfully to deliver the most revolutionary message in human history, a message of hope, a message of joy, a message that will change forever our history.

Mary and Joseph were there. They were ready. But things turned out to be difficult and unexpected. So, they need to move to Bethlehem as we have been considering last weeks. And the time came for her to have her child. And Mary gave birth to Jesus in a stable, she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. And now that's when we can enter into this scene as a character that is participating now in the mystery of Redemption.

"There were some shepherds in that region, living in the fields and keeping the night watch over the flock. And the angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. And they were struck with great fear. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid.'" Let's stop for a second here.

Jesus, my Lord, when you came to the world, with your eternal plan of Redemption, you prepared something special, an invitation that was meant to be reaching out to all human beings, every single heart throughout history. And at the beginning of your life, it looked like you were improvising, but you are eternal. The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit never improvised. In history, they will never, they will never do that. What they do, they take advantage of every situation to show different paths, wonderful ones, mysterious ones. And they show us through their action in history, that nothing will stop them

from loving us, that nothing will stop them from accomplishing the most amazing work in history, the Redemption of every human heart.

A few weeks ago, I visited this factory where they manufacture, they produce, candy, all sorts of candy and it's a bit of a Willy Wonka place with a ton of sugar all over the place and chocolate pipes and even you can see everything—it's almost like a museum. It's very fun to go with kids or even as an adult because it brings you back to your childhood.

Anyway, there's this place, Albanese is the name of the trade, they are the brand. And they manufacture, they produce these little gummy bears. And they're delicious. And visiting this place, I saw that they were putting on the side, some of them, some of the ones that are produced, because they were defective, they were broken, they were shapeless. And they cannot sell them at the same price as the right ones, so, they put them on the side, and they're really cheap. You can buy a bag, pounds of them, for a few dollars. And the good news is that they are as delicious as the perfect-shaped ones. So, it doesn't really matter for your taste.

I guess they can keep them there because otherwise they would get in trouble, legally, or something like that. Anyway, but you can buy them, and they're delicious. But I wondered, when I was there, about you and me. With our imperfections, with our wounds, with our scars, we're gracious in the eyes of God. And as we see in the first Christmas in history, Our Lord wants to come whether we're ready or not, because he is taking the lead, he is anticipating what we need.

Your love for me, Jesus, is unconditional. And that's hard to believe! I live in a world where everything is a trade. And I usually pay for everything or do something, show some kind of skills or applications that allow me to enter into different places or relationships. But with you, it's completely different. Your love for me is preceding me eternally. And maybe I see myself as one of those shepherds, like a little ignorant, maybe smelly, right? But wonderfully called by you.

And actually, that makes Christmas very special, those shepherds in their inadequacy regarding maybe the knowledge of the law or maybe they were not even able to write or to read, they knew the name of the stars. They knew how to make a good fire, and to cook. And they were ready in their hearts to receive good news. And that's the key element of Christmas. Am I open to receive good news?

Dorothy Day knew quite a bit about hearts because she was taking care of very poor families throughout her life, and she was trying to bring them closer to Jesus Christ. And she had a huge conversion after having her first baby... said something very beautiful about Christmas. I'm going to read the quote right now. She said, "I am so glad that Jesus was born in a stable because my soul is so much like a stable. It is poor and in unsatisfactory condition because of guilt, falsehoods, inadequacies, and sin. Yet I believe that if Jesus can be born in a stable, he can also be born in me."

That's not just a consideration that fills our heart, like in a good feeling. This is a reality. My heart is a stable, but it could be warm if I put myself in the presence of Jesus Christ. If I look at you, my Lord, right now, wherever I am; maybe you are now driving in your car, maybe you're in the kitchen trying to put some order, maybe you are on a train, or at home.

Wherever you are, God is knocking, right now, at your heart. He's not interested in external things. And

that gives us a lot of peace, it gives me a lot of peace, Jesus, that even if I feel or I am a stable compared to you, you want to come, you're happy coming. It's not that you're accepting me or like, tolerating me, you're actually happy coming to me. That's the Epiphany.

Sometimes, we think that the epiphany is God, coming with his power as a king, as an emperor, dominating, ruling, and Our Lord isn't interested in all of that. St. Josemaria was very clear, if you read the homily, in *Christ is Passing By* about the Epiphany, he says, "Our Lord became man to teach us the Father's will." But then he says, "Where is the king? Where is Jesus? Could it be that Jesus wants to reign above all, in men's hearts, in your heart? That is why he has become a child, for who can help loving a little baby?"

In other words, you wanted to come to me defenseless in order to show me your kindness, your appreciation, your tenderness, and this is very, it's a need that I have to grow into that, again, because I live in a world that has different categories, in order to give value to things. The money or the power that you have, the skills that you're, you know, building up in your life, your ways of thinking that maybe are a little worldly in the sense that they are in reference to feedback. And then to enter into this relationship with you that is just free, that is homey, that is unconditional is so difficult.

I need to make a little bit of violence to purify myself. And maybe I want to ask you even that Jesus, you see, you need to do everything for me. I need the grace for my own conversion. And I need you to guide me into this. You need to do everything like St. Augustine would say, "I was trying sometimes to search you outside myself and you were inside me." That's so beautiful.

Some many years ago, I came across this poem that I translated with the help of a friend from Spanish to English. It's called *The Visitor*, and maybe historically speaking is not accurate. But I think it has some truth. I'm going to read it to you right now. And it is about a fictional visitor, but I think it's true, in a way. It's the first visitor to Jesus Christ and Mary and Joseph, the first visitor that they had that night.

"It was Bethlehem. It was Christmas Eve. The door hardly creaked as she entered. She was a dry, ragged, dark-haired woman with a wrinkled forehead and a hunched back. She came in muddy with dust from the road. She was moonlight without a shadow. Mary trembled at the sight of this woman. The mule nor the ox were afraid, ruminating through the straw and hay as if nothing were happening. She had long ash-colored hair, the color of long ago, the color of an ancient wind. From her eyes, the first glance appeared and each of her steps was slow as a sentry."

"Mary feared to see her approaching the cradle. Oh, God, with her clay hands, what does she carry? She bent over the child weeping endlessly and offered him what she had hidden. The virgin, astonished, saw her in the eyes at last. She was a beautiful woman, slender and luminous."

"The child looked at her, and so did the mule. The ox looked at her and ruminated as if nothing were happening. It was Bethlehem. It was Christmas Eve. The door creaked as she parted. As she approached the woman, Mary cried out, 'Mother!' Eve, looking back at the virgin called her 'Blessed.' What a clamor of joy! What exultation for the living stone and the star! Outside, the pure snow kept falling, heavy and cold. Inside, at long last God smiled while sleeping, holding between his infant fingers the bitten apple."

Isn't it beautiful? This first visitor, it makes sense to me, was Eve. And as the poet says, she came from a long

time with a lot of mud and dust in her heart, in her eyes. And she was destroyed by sin. She was destroyed by pride. But then she got a little light, enough light in her heart to come back. What a wonderful reality. I go to Jesus, I go to you, my Lord, and I am at home. Even if I'm dusty, muddy, even if I'm slow. And then what do I give to you? The bitten apple, my own sins. And that tells me that you are ready to receive anything I have in my heart.

And you smile at me, even with my sins, not that you like them in the sense that you don't care. But you like the process from which I come and then I deliver myself in humility to you and say, "I'm sorry." And that moment is precious and it's not that we need to sin in order to appreciate beauty. But if we do, we can always come back. And that's the trick that maybe we need to learn from Christmas, that Our Lord is always happy to welcome us. This is the Epiphany.

The Epiphany is not a God, again, that comes with power to step over us, to scare us; look at the angels! "Do not be afraid." The God that I'm talking about, the revelation of the Almighty Eternal God, is in a stable waiting for you with a big smile. And you can talk to him. I don't know what's your favorite Christmas Carol. But one of them that, at least I think is very inspiring, is the Drummer Boy. And it's the same idea as this one of Eve coming to Bethlehem to apologize, to cry, to be renewed.

It's this little boy that comes there, and "I have just, I have a drummer." "I have a drum," sorry. "And then I play in front of you, and Mary looks at me and smiles. And this is what I have. And this is what you want: my heart." And in order to do this, I need to be very strong. The life of childhood, spiritually speaking, is not easy, because it's about simplicity. And I need that purification in my heart to be simple, to accept you, to accept your love, to accept that I'm loved unconditionally, it's hard. It takes a lot because it means entering into a relationship that changes me forever. And not only me but changes the way I see people.

Once I enter into this relationship, I cannot look at the world or at anybody else as before. After the experience of sin and after being forgiven for that sin and being welcomed to Heaven, I looked around always with more hope, and also with more generosity. So, it's a transforming reality, it's a very demanding relationship. I was on a plane the other day and I watched one of those movies that you can only watch on planes, because, almost no dialogues, and then it's easy to watch and to be entertained, at least for a while; it was a long trip. Anyway, the name of the movie is *Kong*, this gigantic monkey or orangutan, in an island. And it's fun to watch.

I remember the movie because I think it is movies with monsters, there's always, there are always four basic characters. I don't know if you agree with this. But one character is the cocky guy that has a very sophisticated weapon. And you know that he will die pretty soon. There's the other guy that is a little bit more humble, is still strong. There, there's the girl, usually blonde and very attractive, and there's a fourth guy.

The fourth guy, we can call him the guy with the scar. The cocky guy will die with the monster because the weapon is unable to do anything. The other two guys will fall in love, right? The girl with the man that is a journalist or the explorer and then whatever, they will fall in love. You see it coming from minute one.

And then there's the guy with a scar, the scar could be on his arm, could be on his face, and you know that that guy is key for the plot because the scar is giving you information. That scar is telling you that he was

there before. He fought before another monster, and he survived. So, when the moment comes at the crucial moment in the movie, you know that he will do something, that he will remember something, that he will stop the monster. And he may, he may die in the movie, but he's a hero, the hidden hero, and he's essential for the survival of the rest of the team.

In our lives, sometimes we blame circumstances in the past or people or ourselves. And we hate or we, maybe hate is a very strong word, but maybe we loathe because of our scars. We're not happy with them. And those scars are actually medals. They're signs that we were there, and we survived. And if we're optimistic today it's not because we are proud but because we are redeemed, and that's very important. And then it's not that we're proud of our scars in a stupid way. But those scars can help us to be very understandable. And then we can help people.

So, everything that you have in your life is useful for God. Look at the shepherds. Look at the first nativity scene that God prepared to give us example, or to give us like a, like an icon, like a, like a reference. And we're not philosophers (I don't have anything against philosophers, they were not rich (I don't have anything against rich people), but they were *hearts*. There were some rich people, like the magi, the kings that came from, from the east.

So, there were all sorts of different people. But all of them have in common that they loved, they had a heart, they were there knowing the reality of their existence, and they were humble. And this is a triumph of Christ, of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ triumphs in humility. And this is very important for me, my Lord. I want to learn from you. And you teach me as a baby. And this is not just a random thing. This is a reality. This is a very important teaching from God.

Speaking about nativity scenes, some years ago, when I was in Rome, in the residence where I lived, there were a hundred people and different nativity scenes in each group. And one of them was my favorite one because it was very realistic, were very beautiful figurines, like little statues, Our Lady was very young. And so was St. Joseph, I like when St. Joseph is young. And that you know, he has hair on his head, and he's tough, and he's manly, I love it.

There was a dog, a little dog very close to the cradle, like accompanying Jesus and this is one of those dogs that you don't know what clear breed, it's a mix of everything, that was there, and then different shepherds and there was one that was my favorite one. It was very close to the cradle. And he was holding I think a chicken, or a goose in order to give it to Mary to cook it or whatever, right?

And he was struggling, holding that goose or that chicken like that little image. And then his face was very revealing because that boy was a Down syndrome. It was beautiful. To see in that. I don't know who created that nativity, but you it was a genius to me. Because it was very homey, very simple, but very deep. Mary, very young, at peace, smiling, St. Joseph, tough man, manly. And this Down Syndrome kid offering Mary, his little gift like the drummer boy.

You and I are the same. I don't know what's your favorite character in the Gospel, but try to get into one of them personally and even use the words that they used when they met Jesus Christ, could be like St. Peter, Jesus, "you know everything, you know that I love you." Or it could be Centurion, "Jesus, I'm not worthy that you enter into my heart, but only just say a word." Or it could be the silence of other people that met

Jesus and looked at him and never said anything to him but they were in love. They were learning and they were renewed by that Presence of Jesus.

Just to do it personally, that's the beauty of Christmas. That's what St. Josemaria saying in his homily, "Where is the king?" And he says, "As you kneel at the feet of the child Jesus, tell him, 'Lord, take away my pride, crush my self-love, my desire to affirm myself and impose myself to others. Make the foundation of my personality, my identification with you,'" the foundation of everything, my being like you.

Take away everything else. I don't want, I don't care about myself anymore. I just want to kneel in front of you, and to contemplate you. And then to clear my eyes to see reality as it really is. And it's very simple. And it's peaceful. And it's demanding! It's not easy. It's not easy. Not easy at all—it is very demanding because love never stops growing. So, it's not, it's not just a good feeling. It is an impulse to more generosity, to more, again, simplicity, to more joy, and that's always demanding, and beautiful at the same time.

Let's go to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to St. Joseph, asking them to [help us] be another drummer boy, another Down Syndrome kid, another little dog, that is just there accompanying Jesus. Or if we're really, really, really scared, we can be another Eve that comes there and then has the sins in your hands and you're just bent over the cradle, and then cry if you're scared and give to Jesus everything that is in you, all your trash. And Our Lord will make you smile. Our Lord will change you, will change me.

Our Lord will be sleeping in your arms, smiling, giving you peace, giving you the consolation that you need for anything that is going on in your life now, and will give you hope, the hope that you are loved, the hope that you are worthy of His love. Mary, Jesus, and Joseph may I always be with you.

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 to put them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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