

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

## BECOMING A LIGHT OF 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. In our next period of prayer, our time of at least, preached prayer, is becoming that light because only the Lord makes us light of the world. And what does he mean? What does Jesus mean? “He or she who walks with me will have the light of life,” that we’ll have, we’ll radiate the actual life of Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis in his encyclical on holiness says that we’re called to make Christ present in the world by extending, radiating his actual love, by being united to him. Lord, how do I walk with you? The Gospel of St. Mark, kind of a nuts-and-bolts gospel, because those were homilies delivered to the Romans, were kind of American-esque, very pragmatic, into the bottom line. That’s why we have so many miracles packed into that gospel, because St. Peter was giving homilies and he had to prove that Jesus was God to the Romans and the Romans wanted the facts, so you got a lot of miracles.

And so, Mark skipped the Infancy Narratives of Our Lord, probably on a human level, Peter figured, the Romans were not interested in the baby Jesus being born in Bethlehem. What they wanted to know is how many miracles he worked, sort of like an American: how much money you make, well, how many miracles did he work? And the Gospel begins with, I’m gonna use the Greek word not to show off, but to make a point, it’s, the Greek word is metanoia, “and believe in the gospel.” And metanoia means it’s an overhaul repentance, it’s a profound repentance, with a desire to make an about-face in one’s life. And then Jesus says, “believe in the gospel.” Now, “believe” seems like, you know, a very common phrase. I won’t say throwaway phrase, but you know, a common phrase that we can gloss over very easily, but we shouldn’t. Because belief, ultimately, and I’m using ideas from Pope John Paul and Pope Benedict and Pope Francis as well, that belief ultimately means centering our lives around Christ completely.

I mean, if we believe fully, we will embrace everything he says. I mean, that’s what belief is, that’s the fullness of faith. It’s a lot more than accepting the Catechism. It involves walking with Christ with everything we have. I didn’t say it, he did. He said, you know, “the greatest commandment is to love God, whole heart, whole soul, whole mind, whole strength.” It’s the work of a lifetime. But that’s what he said. And it’s the only way to really live our faith. It gives joy, it gives fulfillment. Everlasting Life is always connected with following Jesus Christ. So, believe in the gospel. But don’t forget, Our Lord doesn’t say in His Sermon on the Mount, when he talks about discipleship, he doesn’t say, “I want you to practice a lot of devotions.” He does, but he doesn’t say it. And he doesn’t say, “A disciple of Mine will live the commandments.” He’ll say that, but he doesn’t say that in the Sermon on the Mount. He says, “You’re the light of the world.” And basically, you say, “Well, let’s try to figure out what that means.” And try to figure out how you become light of the world.

Maybe I could begin with an anecdote. It's common, but this exactly happened. I have a good friend who is close to his niece. And my friend, he sings, he doesn't sing for a living because he doesn't want to starve. But he sings, he has a very good voice. And his niece has even a better voice. So, her voice is so good she was a finalist on You Got Talent? Is that, do I get it right? Yeah? But she didn't win, she didn't come in first in the finals. And she had left the Church because her boyfriend, this girl's in high school now, wasn't Catholic. And he was a little bit of an evangelical. So, she went the evangelical route. And then she went to college. And during COVID, she was isolated. And boys will be boys and girls will be girls.

And she was, oh, I don't know, if the boys were on the floor above her in the dorm, or the housing or whatever it was. But the bottom line is, it sounds very medieval, they were exchanging messages with each other, tying it to a rope. So, she would lower a message just to interact with people. And these two boys would get her message, "How're you doing? I'm kind of isolated," you know, and they would send a message to her. And little by little since they were young, they said, "Well, let's cheat a little bit and get together," and so they're getting together and, and thank God, these boys were very, very devoted Catholics. You know, I mean, devoted daily Mass types and Rosary types. And they got to be good friends with these two boys and this girl. And she really appreciated their friendship. And she found them very joyful. How do I know all this? Because she gave a talk at the Catholic Newman Center in her school, I think it's Nebraska. And she told her story amid a lot of tears.

She talks about her conversion. And she said that she was, her heart was touched by the witness of these two boys and also their, not girlfriends, friends who were girls. There was, I don't know, four young people who were very serious Catholics, and what moved her was their joy and their kindness to her and her deep friendship with them. And she said, they started to talk to her, they said, she said they were not preachy to her. They said, "Listen, this has really helped us, and we'd like you to tap into this. We want you to try it out yourself." And she said, "Well, what's the difference? I follow, you know, I'm an evangelical now, I used to be a Catholic." They said, "Well, the game-changer is the Eucharist!" And so anyway, she started to tell the people, then she started to sob, how much she loved the Eucharist, very emotional. And my friend was trying not to cry, but he couldn't help it because it was his niece and I saw the video with him. I held in my tears, but anyway, wasn't my niece.

So, it was a very moving witness. And she was saying that she's totally centered on Christ as a Catholic, and how the Eucharist is so important to her. And the hallmark of these friends of hers, on some level anyway, was they weren't just Sunday Catholics. Their faith was important to them, so important to them. They were completely centered, and they had to include Christ in their friendship with this young lady. And now this young lady is super on fire, at least with that talk. So, what does, what does the Lord do with us? I mean, this is a generic way the Lord reels us in. And let's go to the Gospels. There's a number of accounts of this. I'll do St. Mark's since I brought him up at the beginning. "As he was going forth on his journey, a certain man running up fell upon his knees before Him and asked him, 'Good Master, what shall I do to gain eternal life?'" Another gospel says he was young. He was running and dropped to his knees.

I can't do that anymore. You could though. So, he's young, he runs, running after Jesus and drops to his knees. "Good master, what shall I do to get eternal life? What must I do to be super happy? That's what eternal life is, it begins here on Earth. Begins here, perfected in the afterlife. "What must I do to have your life," because Jesus is everlasting life? What must I do, to really share in everlasting life? And Matthew says the same thing, "what shall I do?" Very American-esque question: give me the help menu. "Lord, what do

I do? Give me three steps.” And Our Lord does. He knew Americans would read it. So, he made it very short. Three steps on how to get this everlasting life. We like that. We don’t want a treatise, we want, just make it short. Make it simple. All right, he does. But Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good, but only God.” That’s the first step. The first step is a consideration because the Lord is going to, well, anyway, let’s just stop here.

“No one is good, but God alone,” or “only God.” Hmm. I don’t know. Why does Jesus say that? It’s kind of wrong. It sounds like it’s wrong because there’s a lot of good stuff! I mean a matter of fact, you, one of the first truths you reveal is that after you created something you said it’s good! And then when you created man and woman, then you said they’re very good! So, this is very, something’s not adding up. Well, it does. I went, okay, I’m dating, I’m really dating myself. Okay. I, a few, couple, weeks ago, I went back to my old high school and said Mass for my classmates to celebrate our 50th reunion. 50 years. And it felt like those 50 years disappeared because all of a sudden, I’m going way back in time. The last time I saw a lot of these people was when I was 18. And I began my homily by saying, “Hey, guys, you haven’t changed a bit.” So, I lied in my homily. “You all look the same,” but it’s Jersey. So, you know, sarcasm is part of the culture, unfortunately.

And the whole, you know, the 50 years vanished and I was back in high school, we were telling stories and you know, my stories were tame, it was, we had a Mass, and they all look so cherubic and angelic, you know, these are old men. And then during the happy hour, they were less cherubic in the stories they told. And then a buddy of mine came up, and we were jealous. We didn’t gossip about him, but we were kind of jealous of him because, at least in teenage standards, at least when I was growing up, he excelled in every sport. He’s a good-looking guy, he got good grades, cheerleaders would vie to go out with him. Anything a teenage boy wanted, he had. He had a little bit of money. And this is really going, he had, he drove his own car when he was a senior. We didn’t have a car. And he also had an FM station. How’s that? He had an FM station. And he was, I don’t know, all-county basketball player, honorable mention, all-state quarterback for the team. And he was I think, all-county shortstop.

And what I remember is that, and we were a happy bunch more or less, and he wasn’t. I don’t know why. And we would gossip. I take it back. I said we didn’t gossip, we did. We were gossiping, kind of guy gossip. “Why isn’t,” his name was Joey, “why isn’t Joey happy?” I mean, he has a pretty girlfriend. He’s excelling in sports, we play the bench, we get cut, you know, and this guy is, has everything you’d want! Popularity, all those kinds of things. But I remember because we talked about it because he didn’t show up for the reunion. He was supposed to show up. But he didn’t show up. He was, decent friend. And some of us kind of were disappointed that he wasn’t there. And then I just, you know, I started to realize, well, he wasn’t the happiest guy in the class. He wasn’t that happy. I wouldn’t say he was morose and upset. But he wasn’t that happy. He wasn’t, I mean, his happiness did not stick out. And he had more than everybody else. And that’s what I think Our Lord is saying. He said that only God could fill us up. It’s not talent. It’s not promotions. I mean, these are good things. Everything is good. God has given it.

One guy told me, I said, “Hey, Tony. Hey, you’re in a good mood today.” “Well, I had a great turkey sandwich.” But if I call him up now, and I ask him, “Hey, Tony, are you still in a good mood? Because four months ago, you told me you had a great turkey sandwich.” No. So, anyway, only God is good. And so, what the Lord is gonna say, “Listen, young man, rich young man, I’m gonna ask a lot of you, but I want to first tell you that only God could fill you. So, it’s not a raw deal.” It’s not, you know, that you’re going to suffer because you’re giving your life to me. Matter of fact, it’s a bargain because only I could fill you up. Now you got to believe,

you know, we don't deal, we don't see Jesus. I need to believe, and we all have that vocation to make him the center of our life. And only he, no matter what kind of lifestyle we have, whether it's pleasant, whether we, you know, we're bereft of personal problems and things just line up for us that, one success after another, the Lord says, "That's not good enough for you. Only God is good. Only God is that Good that could fill you." That's what he means.

And Augustine says that. He says to the Lord, "How late have I loved you!" So, he's kind of disappointed that he didn't start earlier and that he partied too much. And he says, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you." So, Lord goes on, and that's why we did repentance, all right, only God is good, "Do you know the commandments? You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not defraud, honor your father and your mother." So, you need, in order to put nice furniture in your room, or in a room, and a nice rug, you have to make sure it's clean. Wash the walls, wash the floor, repair things, just so that that furniture matches the pristine cleanliness of the room. And he does! He lives all the commandments. We're not gonna sneeze at that. Even though it's normal to live all the commandments, it's not common. And it wasn't, certainly wasn't common 2000 plus years ago. And it's not, wasn't common, that chastity was lived, wasn't common.

And so, he enumerates, Jesus enumerates, okay, step number one, you know, God is good, only God can fill you. We got that done. Okay. Now you got to live the commandments. And Jesus says if you want to have life, but if you want to enter life, keep the commandments. So that's step number one. Why, why the commandments? Why does he mention the commandments? Because the commandments basically give us freedom to own ourselves. I mean, if I'm, enslaved to greed or if, if possessing things and owning things and looking for things has a grip on me, well, I can't give myself, so I'm not free. If I'm not truthful with myself, I'm not free. If I have issues with people and I've, I'm harboring resentments, I'm not free. If I'm self-absorbed, I'm not free. So, that's what the commandments do. It frees you up to possess yourself, you own yourself, none of us owns ourselves perfectly, but you need a threshold of self-ownership for the next step.

If lust is a little bit out of control, well, I gotta control that to give myself because I'm owned by lust. Greed, envy, resentment, you know, laziness, all the capital sins. But this guy is pretty good. I can just imagine him: a polo shirt, you know, not a buzz, not a shaved head, but you know, short hair, intellectual glasses, and tennis racket in his hand or a golf club in his, the back of his car or in his trunk. No bad language. Gentleman on a date. Goes to Mass. During Lent, gives up ice cream and beer and all those nice things. Good kid. President of the pro-life club. Very good, and when he gets married, he wants to have all the kids God sends him. I mean, he's checking the right boxes. I mean, he's living the commandments. Very few do! You know that, I know that. And Jesus says, "The young man said to him, all these I've kept, what is yet wanting to me?" Maybe he said, I don't know how he said it. "Hey, Lord, how many guys you know, live all the commandments? Even the multiples of three, I live." And Jesus said, "Well, you lack one thing. I want you on my team, Seth." We'll call him Seth.

Seth, I want you on my team. But you're still not ready to be a light of the world. "I'm not?" Eh, not yet. Step number three is a killer. "All these I've kept what is still wanting in me," what else do I have to do? "Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor. And you shall have treasure in Heaven. And then come, follow me.'" Oh. "But his face fell at the saying, and he went away sad, for he had great possessions." So, already, he's no longer, he's not a light, can't be a light, because joy is the light. That's one of the components. A very important component of it and true joy comes from self-gift

to Christ. We notice throughout the gospel, you got super sinners in there. I have a soft spot, maybe you do too, for saint, poor St. Matthew, he was a chief tax collector, which meant he extorted money. I mean, I don't admire him for that. He was a traitor, he didn't trade stock, he was, he turned his own people in. He worked for the Romans, the enemy.

Oh, he hung around with a lot of loose women. He didn't go to the synagogue. And He lived lavishly. He was a chief tax collector, pretty brilliant guy, wrote a gospel. So, you know, he was a very talented man. And Jesus befriended him as he walked through the main center of Capharnaum, and they became friends. And Matthew saw something in Christ Himself, And Jesus said, "Would you like to follow me?" We don't, you know, there's a lot more that is recorded. And Jesus, Matthew probably, did say yes, obviously. "Yeah, I'd like to follow you." "You have to leave all things and follow me," that's what the Gospel says, "and he left all things and followed him." The hitch is that we have to make him number one. And the faith is no, I sound very superficial, it's no fun unless we make him number one. I mean, it's dullsville. And it's dullsville if we're not trying to spread the gospel to others. Because that's what being a Catholic is all about.

And Jesus never says its individual. He never says, "circle the wagons." He says, "interact with the world." Leaven in the mass. The mass is the world. Salt of the Earth. Change the world. Light of the world. Preach to all nations, peach to every creature. That's Mark, Mark quotes St. Peter: "Preach to every creature." That's what the Lord says. But to do that, what the Lord is telling me, he's saying give to the poor, "Well, I don't know, I'm a professional, I don't," yes, we want to do what we can for the homeless and the indigent. Obviously, that's part of being a Christian. But I think the Lord goes beyond the indigent. He includes them, obviously. But the poor is someone who doesn't have Christ in their life. And the only way they'll be interested in ceasing to be poor, if they see that you're rich! And I'm rich, that's what Jesus says, that you will have treasure in Heaven. So, they have to see that you're rich. And the Lord can only dwell as a bright light if I begin with that disposition. "Lord, I'm going to put you first, little by little, like a mustard seed." I'm going to grow little by little, but I need to make that disposition.

Look at any saint. And they all began that way. Francis of Assisi, the heartthrob of Assisi, another party, I don't know why I'm into party animals. But anyway, he was a party animal too, you know, he's kind of like my, my friend. He was a knight, so, good athlete, good horseman. He was a jousting; he was a swordsman. He, he put on tournaments on big feast days. He was rich. He got into a war against Perugia. No, was it Perugia? Or Pisa? Wasn't exactly World War II, but you know, Assisi, and he was a prisoner of war. And he was, he was captured. And he spent a year in prison. And he realized that he was unhappy, that something was missing in his life. I mean, he had everything. He was rich. And he has talents, he had gifts, he had popularity. And, I mean, this is very Italian-esque. He finally decides and he goes to his pastor, and he says, "Listen, I want to give my whole life to God." He didn't say, "I'm gonna become a Franciscan." His name was Francis, but he didn't say, "I'm gonna become a Franciscan." And he said, listen, here's all my money. He had a big, big bag of gold coins. And the pastor said, "Well, you consult with your parents, your father, first before you give anything so, you know, leave."

Francis, this is very Italian-esque and Francis got really angry, got ticked off, and took his wealth of coins and threw them in the sanctuary and bolted out of the Church. And then he told his father that he wanted to give his life to God, so, he started to take off his, he didn't take off everything but he started to take off his aristocratic regalia. He says, "I'm no longer," he says, "I'm going to, I'm going to leave all things and give it to Christ." Very melodramatic. And his father hid him in a closet and locked him in. And then finally

he escaped, and you know, the rest is history. I mean, we don't have to be so melodramatic. St. Ignatius, St. Josemaria, Bl. Guadalupe, she's in Opus Dei, Bl. Carlo, all of them have to make that decision: "I want to be totally centered on Christ." And if we don't make that decision, it's not going to work. What can I say? I just work here. That's what he says. And if we go away sad because we haven't given ourselves to everlasting life, well, that doesn't work either. I mean, part of selling people on the gospel is that I'm genuinely joyful.

So, anyway, we finish up. And Lord, you're not gonna say no to me, especially if I ask for the intervention of your mother. In The Way, point number two, "May your behavior and your conversation be such that everyone who sees or hears you can say, 'this woman or man reads the life of Jesus Christ.'" Lord, I hope that happens. We'll work towards it. Help us have that disposition to be totally centered on you and help us make those little baby steps to get closer to that goal.

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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