

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

THE SCHOOL OF HAPPINESS

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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.

This meditation is based to a large extent, on an article that you can find on the Opus Dei website. The article is entitled, “I Will Follow You Wherever You Go,” and it is the tenth installment in the series, “Very Human, Very Divine.” Our Christian way of life is meant to lead us to happiness. Not just any type of happiness, but one with genuine, deep content. You could say that we need to learn what it means to be really and truly happy. And that involves seeing the ups and downs of everyday life in a supernatural way.

Consider a scene that took place in front of the home of Simon Peter in Capharnaum. One day, a scribe came up to the Master and said, “Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.” Jesus responded in a surprising way: “Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” The Lord is very blunt. Following Him involves hardships, tiredness, a lack of appreciation, misunderstandings.

The Apostles who were there watching this scene had already chosen to leave everything behind to follow the Master. They had discovered the secret to true happiness. For them, nothing could compare with the joy of a life with Jesus. You could say that our spiritual life is a school of happiness, where we learn how to be happy, no matter what. The fact is that difficulties arise every day. And so, the key is to get better at handling those difficulties in a truly holy way. And this is where the virtue of fortitude comes in.

Fortitude, resilience, toughness of spirit: this virtue that transforms obstacles into opportunities. Chesterton observed, “An inconvenience is an adventure wrongly considered.” Fortitude enables us to direct our deepest desires in the right direction: towards God, to be more affected by God than by circumstances which can always change. It’s easy to see the need for fortitude. Circumstances can all too easily influence us: the weather, a poor night’s sleep. We need to get through those difficult periods without becoming despondent or losing our serenity.

We can learn a lot from the Navy SEALs, the very elite force that is part of the United States Navy. They have an instant mindset shift whenever they come up against adversity. If they find themselves in a really tough situation, for example, having to march 50 miles in pouring rain, the kind of situation where anyone else would complain or give up, the Navy SEALs instead, they say to themselves, “Full benefit.” A very unusual phrase: “Full benefit.”

That phrase is shorthand for saying to themselves, “I am determined to get out of this very adverse situation all the benefit that I can.” Full benefit. Now the chances are that in the coming days and weeks, you might forget that phrase. So just think, “FB.” And remind yourself that does not stand for “Facebook.” It stands for “full benefit.” Right now, during this time of prayer, we can ask the Lord to help us to have such a deep

interior life that those words, that concept, that attitude comes to mind whenever we find ourselves in any kind of situation that strikes us as difficult.

Well, the question arises, how can we go about getting stronger? How can we protect that happiness that the Lord wants for us, no matter what is happening around us? Well, the fact is that much depends on acquiring an interior life. After all, it is our life of prayer that sharpens our vision of the things that really matter. The more clearly we set our sights on goals that move our heart, the better our chances of forging ahead without paying attention to the difficulties.

But just think of a phrase we come across relatively often in the Scriptures: “Jesus and the Apostles went up from Jericho to Jerusalem.” When you read those words, you could think “Well, that’s nothing special.” But one of these days, hopefully, you will have the chance to go to the Holy Land. You’ll have a chance to visit this ancient city of Jericho. And then once you’re finished looking at the sycamore tree, perhaps having lunch there, and you get back on the bus then you go up to Jerusalem, *and then* that phrase takes on a whole new meaning. Because the bus begins to climb, and climb, and climb, all the while you are surrounded by desert.

To imagine Jesus and the Apostles, somehow making their way up to Jerusalem, that is tough stuff. They had no highway back then. They just trudged through desert to get to Jerusalem. To be strong consists in strengthening our convictions and always renewing the love that moves us and making the most authentic goods shine forth more brightly in our life. To the extent that we do this, that we really and truly focus on what really matters, well, then we will be able to choose more easily, happily, that which deep down we really want.

Well, this brings up a very important key to those who are successful in whatever they do. And that is to look ahead to determine what they choose to do as opposed to leaving it up to how they feel at any given moment. For example, in our professional work, on any given day, we might not feel like making calls, like doing whatever our work involves. We might not feel on a given day of exercising, or we might not feel like studying.

However, if we have thought about these activities, prayed about them, designed our day according to how we want to fashion that day, well then when that moment comes, we can say to ourselves, “At this moment, the last thing I feel like doing is studying or exercising. However, I have chosen, I have decided, this is the moment when I want to do that activity, and that is what is going to happen.”

Someone who’s determined to compete in the Olympics chooses way ahead of time, years before, to get up each morning at 4 AM. Knowing that just days afterward, after making that choice, that athlete will not feel like getting up at four in the morning. But they will, which is how they get to the Olympics.

We can never let external circumstances make decisions for us. In the final analysis, it is a matter of being truly free rather than being bullied by ephemera. And by the way, just in case, “ephemera” means just passing things that really have no substance, no importance, just the here today, gone tomorrow. We cannot allow ourselves to be bullied by just things that appear out of nowhere and are about to disappear back into nothingness.

This is what St. Paul was getting at in his letter to the Philippians. He wrote, “I have learned in whatever situation I am, to be content. I know how to be brought low. I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance, and need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

For Paul, nothing is an obstacle on his way to what he really wants, that is, to love God with all his heart. This is the path to happiness and freedom: Ensuring that our joy and peace depend more on what we truly want, and less on the petty tyrannies of the moment. Being strong is the attitude of someone who perceives the true value of things. A Christian’s path is demanding because it requires an ever-deeper love. As St. Josemaria wrote, “To be happy, what you need is not an easy life but a heart in love.” Just think of the Lord’s invitation: “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” These are not calls to meaningless suffering, but to the development of a great freedom.

Thus, little by little, there grows in our heart the readiness to love to the end, as the Lord Himself did. Every sacrifice that is freely made, every hardship that is accepted without rebellion, every self-conquest done for love strengthens in us the conviction that our true happiness is found only in God. Fortitude is necessarily linked to the virtue of patience. Good things take time. Those all-important goals in our in our life develop gradually. We make progress to the extent that we make decisions based on what is truly good rather than settling for the immediate and ephemeral, and this produces endurance, patience. That is why the strong person does not lose serenity in the face of failure or when the fruit is slow to appear.

Patience is neither naïve optimism nor resignation. It is the attitude of the free person whose love is unfailing and whose sight is always set on the goal. We have told Jesus that we are ready to follow Him wherever He goes. We are in this for the long haul. We will never settle for anything less than the happiness of Heaven. And so, we can conclude this time of prayer by renewing our love for the battle. A strong heart always fixed on the goal can struggle for love with a capital “L” until the last instant. Mary, Queen of All Saints, help us to keep our eyes fixed on the goal to attain the happiness, the genuine happiness, that has no end.

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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