

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

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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 asked 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.

Early in Jesus' public life, he speaks in an air of mystery. And with the gospel, there's many, many layers of personal interpretation and many, many layers of theological interpretation. Jesus begins to define the Church. And he says, "You are the salt of the Earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?" So, on one hand, he equates the Church as salt.

What does salt do? but it converts. I hope I will never be put on a bland diet. Why? Because a bland diet by its very nature is a tasteless food. Or it's not as tasty as it would be if it were salted. A plate of pasta with tomato sauce and no salt is a lame plate of pasta. Or anything. And it's kind of a great analogy because Jesus also says that, that salt could lose its taste.

And we're not going to turn this into a theology class, but the Church is a Sacrament. A sign, an effective sign, it's not just a symbol, but it's a symbol that affects its symbolism. For example, water is a symbol or a sign of washing, and it actually does spiritually wash and does actually spiritually purify.

The Church is a sign of unity. It's a sign of life. It's a sign of conversion. It's a sign of salvation. And it actually does that. But why does Jesus say that it could lose its taste? There's another dimension to the Church and that is its human element. Its membership is sinful and needs purification, and it can fail to convey that saltiness, that power to convert.

Another definition Jesus gives of the Church is, "You are the light of the world." That's what the Church is. It's a light of truth. It's a light that leads to real joy and real fulfillment. By the way, this meditation's on love for the Church, just in case you didn't figure it out. Jesus also says that the same evangelist, St. Matthew, says that the Church is like "leaven in the mass."

And he says that it's a woman with this leaven in the mass. The Church is a Mother because the Church is the bride of Christ that generates new children. "The kingdom of Heaven is like leaven which a woman took, hid in three measures of meal till it was all leaven."

The Church has a lot of practical application, and I've heard, and you've heard: "I am not into organized religion. I am a non-denominational Christian." And that's goodwill, it's not bad will. And I think what people are trying to say, perhaps in a clumsy way is, "I am, I want to be a disciple

of Christ. I want to follow Christ and I don't want to get distracted or sidetracked with organization and rules and regulations and observances and liturgical ceremonies that don't mean much to me."

How is this compatible with St. Josemaria's words in *The Way*, underneath the heading of The Church? "What joy to be able to say with all the fervor of my soul, 'I love my mother, the holy Church!'" And let's ask you, Lord, with your permission: We have, what we have here is the Church's greatest treasure. We have the Founder of the Church right in the monstrance. We have the Person who touches lives right in the monstrance. The Church is an extension of Christ.

In fact, we can't love Christ without loving his Church. Now that he has died on the Cross, rose from the dead, and founded his Church, Christ exists only with his Church. It's a mystery. The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. You don't have a Christ, a separate Christ, from His Church. There's one Christ and an extension of Christ, which we can't understand.

It's a mystery, the Church is a mystery as well. The highest IQ cannot comprehend it, at least not in this life. But to be a follower of Christ, we have to love the Church. Even though there's many people who unwittingly love Christ, follow Christ, are connected with the Church, even though they don't realize it. But Christ only exists with his Church.

I'm afraid of flying. I always like to, unless I'm on an excursion or you know, out with friends, I usually wear my priestly garb because I'm always on duty. Even downtown I've been accosted, not violently yet. Well, once violently, but I got away. Someone was rabidly angry and was insulting me, but that's usually an exception, rather than a rule.

Usually, people will stop me and ask for Confession. Or ask to talk or ask for a blessing or ask for prayer. I was walking around in the West Loop, nobody was around, and this homeless man, three times my size, four times my weight, that's not too hard. And he ran across the street. And he grabbed me. He said, "Please don't be afraid." He said, "You look afraid."

I said, "I know, I'm trying not to be, but I can't help it." He says, "I'm not going to hurt you." I go, "I trust you. I'm still, you know, I'm a little startled. I'm not used to someone running across the street and grabbing me." And he said, "Well, can we talk?" So, I reach for my money. He says, "I don't want your money. Just, can you please talk to me?"

He wanted spiritual direction. He happened to be a Catholic. I think he wanted Confession. And he said, "I don't want your money. But if you have a Rosary, I would like a Rosary if you could spare your Rosary." He said, "You're a Catholic priest, I figure you have access to other Rosaries." "You're correct." I was very attached to this Rosary because I got it in Italy. Blessed by the Pope. Anyway, I gave him my Rosary.

He encountered Christ because of the Church. I'm an ordained minister of the Church. And in fact, the laity are the clients of the Church. The Church is meant, I mean, everybody's in the Church. But the hierarchy in the Church, if they do it right, they're there to serve the laity so that the laity change the world. That's what they're there for.

And the Church interacts with the laity in a very special way through the priest because it's the priest who brings Christ down from Heaven at Mass, not because he's holy, but because he's got power from the Church: Holy Orders. Now, the elephant in the room, again, I said, I'm afraid of flying because I keep getting into these conversations. And I know it's a bit self-inflicted.

One man was all worked up because of some dark periods in the history of the Church. I knew a little bit more than he did and he brought up a dark period, but it was certainly not the darkest period, and I was not going to encourage him to try to prove his point. And he was saying, "You know, the Church gets on its high horse. And in the Renaissance, there were very sinful popes. You know, having illegitimate children and those illegitimate children became bishops and cardinals."

Between you and me, he's seen nothing until he studies the tenth century. The Renaissance popes seem like a monastery of innocent altar boys in comparison to the tenth-century popes. And what we're going through now: clergy misdeeds, clergy abuse, has been very much prominent in the press the past almost 20 years and shows the underbelly, may show the underbelly of the Church.

How is that compatible with Jesus' words, "You're the light of the world, you are the salt of the Earth?" Well, he hints at it, that the salt could lose its saltiness, you could put the light under a bushel. But again, how is that compatible with St. Paul's words in his letter to the Ephesians chapter five, that the Church is like the most pure virgin "without stain or wrinkle?"

Hmm. Jesus, have you read the papers? Have you seen the news? Where have you been? How is that possible, that the Holy Spirit through St. Paul says that the Church is pure and immaculate, "without stain or wrinkle," like a most pure bride being brought to her groom, the groom being Christ?

Let's look at it so that we can indeed love the Church. What is perfect about the Church? It was founded by God Himself, God made man. That's perfect, He's perfect. The teachings of the founder who is Jesus Christ, that teaching is absolutely perfect. It brings the very best out of the human person. The more that human person embraces the teachings of Christ, the greater that person is. And the showpiece of the Church are these heroines and heroes that we call the saints.

It's a truth that purifies, it's a truth that consoles, it's a truth that transforms; that's perfect. When Jesus died on the Cross and rose from the dead, he won a gift called grace. We're not going to get into that too much because I don't want to turn this into a theology class, which means I have to quit in a minute. And I remember, this is generic, but I'm thinking about somebody specifically who's since passed away.

He told me he was totally alienated from his family, and he said, "rightfully so." He was very selfish, very mean-spirited. He was basically a detached atheist. And he wasn't a virulent atheist or an ideological atheist. He was an atheist because he had no use for religion. And his family members couldn't stand him; he told me. One thing led to another, and he converted to the Catholic faith. And like many converts, there's only one gear: it's fifth.

So, he's now in Eucharistic Adoration, he's studying the Catechism, he's reading, he's saying the Rosary, he's doing all those kinds of things. He's going to Mass during the week. And he brings many people into the Church. He's not cool. He's older. He doesn't dress well. But he underwent such a profound change that some of his family members, the younger ones, want to know which counselor he was talking to because they want to talk to the same counselor. He says, "the counselor I'm talking to happens to be Jesus Christ."

And they didn't believe him at first. But then they start to believe him, and they were just blown away by the profound change, transformation in this gentleman. That's perfect. The grace of God is perfect. The soul of the Church is the Holy Spirit, that's perfect. And the greatest men and women, and maybe I'm saying this, I say this, from a moral perspective, a spiritual perspective, are the saints.

Someone becomes a saint because of the Church. When I contemplate Maximilian Kolbe in Auschwitz, and he's exhausted, and he gives the little food he has away, and he has cinder blocks in a wheelbarrow, and the commandant or the guard is beating on him because he's fainting and he's out of energy. And he passes out and they throw him in a refuse dump.

His friends retrieve him, put him back in the barracks. I think he was in the priest's section, but he got one of his buddies upset because when he came to, he smiled. And the buddy said, basically, I'm sure the original Polish is much more eloquent, "You know, you know, Max, enough's enough. Why-are-you-smiling? Don't you despise these people? What are you smiling about?"

And Maximilian says, "I am sharing in the sufferings of Christ. What an honor!" Now, that is not natural, it's supernatural. To me, maybe someone will say, "Well, he was out of his mind," he wasn't. This is the greatness of the Church. And we don't judge the Church by those who reject its teachings. And I don't mean, "rejects its teachings," in terms of heresy: "Well, I don't believe in three persons in one God. I believe in the misbehavior of its members."

We don't judge by the misbehavior. We judge the Church by those who accept its teachings and make good use of the Eucharist, make good use of Reconciliation, embrace the Catechism, embrace the moral teaching, read the Gospel because the Gospel comes through the Church. The Church has said, "This is the inspired Word."

When our separated brothers... yeah, you don't want to be difficult with them. "Sola scriptura, only scripture." You know, you don't want to overdo it, but among us, the reason why you got your Scripture, non-Catholic Christian brother or sister, is because the Church approved it. That's why you have Scripture. So, that's what we love. We love those extensions of Christ, whether it's Scripture, especially the Eucharist, the Sacraments, the teaching.

And when the Holy Father comes out, I lived in Rome, I said, "I must be in the right outfit," because St. Peter's Square would be jammed with enthusiastic people from all over the world. And before this man was elected, whether it's Pope Francis or John Paul or Pope Benedict, well, they were kind of one more bishop in Rome. You become Pope, and all of a sudden, the crowds are transformed.

Well, we go to the Mother of the Church, the Blessed Mother: Mary, help me love the Church as an extension of your Son. And help me be the Church as light and salt. Help me see myself as an extension of the Church as well, I'm a member of this Mystical Body. In my family circle, in my workplace, in my social relations, help me be light, salt, and leaven. Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you've 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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