

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

MARY, MOTHER OF FAIREST LOVE

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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.

Today on February 14, we celebrate a double anniversary in the history of Opus Dei. The first one took place in 1930, February 14, when St. Josemaria saw during Mass that Our Lord wanted him to begin his work with women, and so, he did. And the second anniversary is February 14, 1943, when St. Josemaria founded the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, to be able to incardinate priests in the work of Opus Dei.

And since then, we have had the collaboration and the complementarity of men and women, priests and laity, under one governance of Opus Dei, and a single mission to proclaim the universal call to holiness and to proclaim this message that we can all be saints in the middle of the world by living out our duties, carrying out everything that we ought to do in our profession, in our family life, in our relationships, in society, in the responsibilities that we have incurred because of our state in life, that all those things could be offered up as a sacrifice to Our Lord.

Well, today, I wanted to pray about, not these historical moments for which we are very grateful, but rather with the Mass that has been chosen to show our gratitude to Our Lord for these great moments, which is the Mass of Mary the Mother of Fairest Love. So, on February 14, everyone in Opus Dei celebrates this special feast with this Mass, with this invocation to Our Lady, called the Mother of Fairest Love.

You may be wondering what “fairest love” means. Well, “fair,” in this case does not mean something that has to do with justice or injustice. Like, you know, that was “fair game” or something like that. But it has to do with “fair” in the meaning of beauty. Mary, the Mother of the Beautiful Love, or, as some translations have it, “Fairest Love,” meaning, the “Most Beautiful Love.”

And this invocation of Our Lady comes from some words of the Old Testament that have been applied to her from the book of Ecclesiasticus. And of course, originally, they did not refer to her, but the tradition of the Church, throughout time, with saints and doctors of the Church, have applied these words to her.

And here are the words, “I am the mother of fair love, of fear, of knowledge, and of holy hope; in me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue.” These words are really beautiful and mysterious at the same time. “I am the mother of fair love,” or Fairest Love, “of fear, of knowledge, and of holy hope.” And then it says, “in me, is all grace.”

Think of Mary as the Mediatrix of all graces; perhaps here's a Scriptural confirmation of that tradition. But also, it says, "in me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue." Think of when Jesus says in St. John's gospel, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Here, those three words are found. You know, the Way, the Truth, and the Life in Mary, or in the Mother of Fair Love, of Fairest Love.

Obviously, if these words are mysterious in the sense of, in the Old Testament not knowing, you know, what they apply to, well, originally they apply to wisdom, but if they apply to Mary, they make a lot of sense because Mary carried the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and all virtue and all hope and all grace in her womb. And that is Jesus Christ.

And so, these words of Scripture certainly can be applied to Mary, and we do so in the way that St. Josemaria actually applied them to Mary, and that is as a way of praying for holy purity, for the sanctity of marriage, for the sanctity of the family, and for vocations to celibacy and all topics related to these areas.

And this is not something that is unique to St. Josemaria; St. Bernard of Clairvaux, in the 13th century, or St. Bonaventure in the 13th century, who was inspired by the works of St. Bernard of Clairvaux earlier than that, wrote these words, "Save me, O Mother of Fair Love, fount of clemency and sweetness, of piety! Beautiful art thy ways and thy paths are peaceful. In thee shine forth the beauty of chastity, the light of justice, and the splendor of truth. Thou art clothed with the sunrays, as with a vesture resplendent with a shining 12-starred crown."

Obviously, these words refer to Mary as that guardian of the beauty of chastity. And that's what we want to pray about today. You know, St. Josemaria had two statues commissioned of Our Lady of Fairest love. One of them is at the University of Navarre. And it is very fitting that it should be in a university setting because that's when young people find their love of their lives, and they dedicate themselves to a mission, to big ideals, and it is there that they will most likely find their vocation to matrimony. And based on that Sacrament they will build a family, or they may also find their vocation to celibacy.

But all in all, it is because they live holy purity that they can find these states of life as a vocation and as a gift from God, whatever God may be calling them to. And we pray for all young people today, so that they may find their vocation to love, you know, and to love God above all things in the first place. And then after that, they can specify their vocation however they see in their prayer, whether it is to marriage or to celibacy or the priesthood or the religious life.

The other statue that St. Josemaria had built was in the Church of Our Lady of Peace, which is actually where he is buried today. And right outside, in the vestibule, there's a lamp that is always lit in order to pray for holy purity. He even wanted a shrine to be built in the United States dedicated to Our Lady, Mother of Fairest Love, and that shrine has yet to be built. But we pray that one day that great shrine could be a place where people come and ask Mary for many favors for their marriage, for their families, for their vocation, and also for holy purity.

You know, I imagine that shrine in the future, you know, just like in Lourdes, they have many crutches of people that have been cured, you know, of their ailments and they start to walk when they couldn't walk before and they hang up their crutches; well, maybe in that shrine in the United States, when it is built, people can come and nail their bills of divorce, you know, because they don't need them anymore because they're going to go back, you know, to their marriage or they're going to pray for their children who need to come back to the faith, or they're going to pray for a special strength to live the virtue of holy purity, wherever they may be, you know, so that they can reflect the love of God and they can image, really, the Holy Trinity through their body and soul and love and their joy and their, you know, the look in their eyes.

This is what, hopefully, that shrine will be a special place for many people to be able to find Our Lord and Our Lady in this virtue. Well, of course, the virtue of holy purity, as St. Josemaria said many times, is not the most important virtue. But at the same time, it is a *sine qua non* for charity, you know, it is a virtue without which charity cannot exist. And that's why it is so important for us to pray for it.

Some people think that they can live holy purity, like St. Augustine, at some point in his life, just on their own strength. And like St. Augustine, people will find out that they may be able to do so for a time, but it is very difficult to do so if it is just about controlling, you know, bodily hormones and functions. It is not about that, primarily it is about love. And this is a gift from God. And that's why St. Josemaria always talks about holy purity, not just purity. It's about a virtue that comes from God. And it is a gift. And we have to pray for it.

And it is not just about controlling our passions, our disordered passions due to Original Sin. It's not about that. Only or primarily, it actually is a lot more. Holy purity is about safeguarding this imaging of God that we have in our soul. It is about safeguarding this interior world our interiority, where we are able to love God, where we're able to make a covenant with God like the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, of our heart. It says that the heart, I'll read the quotation from point 2563 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

“The heart is the dwelling place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place ‘to which I withdraw.’ The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant.”

There's a lot to unpack in this quotation from the Catechism. The heart is the place of truth. It is the place of encounter, it is the place of imaging, it is the place of relation, the place of covenant. So many things happen in the heart. And this interior world has to be protected. And that's what the virtue of holy purity actually does, along with other virtues that assist it.

So, for instance, the Catechism continues in a section on modesty, that it says, [2521] “Purity requires modesty, an integral part of temperance. Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden. It is ordered to chastity to whose sensitivity it bears witness. It guides how one looks at others and behaves toward them in conformity with the dignity of persons and their solidarity.”

[2522] “Modesty protects the mystery of persons and their love. It encourages patience and moderation in loving relationships; it requires that the conditions for the definitive giving and commitment of men and women to one another be fulfilled. Modesty is decency. It inspires one’s choice of clothing. It keeps silence or reserve where there is evident risk of unhealthy curiosity. It is discreet.”

And so here we have this little virtue, as St. Josemaria called it, the virtue of modesty, which protects so much. It’s like that wall outside of the fortified city that keeps the enemy from coming in. And there’s so much inside, right? There’s this heart, this great human heart, which has the possibilities of becoming divine, which it is actually protecting, and it is for this that we pray to Mary, the Mother of Fairest Love, that we really protect the highest kind of love.

And that we fall in love with the greatest, most lovable person that can ever be, which is her Son. You know, the heart is made to love. And we can give the heart many things to love, right? We can give the heart things to love, material things to love, and then it’ll become material. Right? It’ll become, it’ll be lowered by it, by those things, by that love.

St. Thomas Aquinas says the following, “When our mind is intent on temporal goods, to rest in them, it remains at their level; but when it seeks them in relation to eternal happiness, it is not lowered by them, but rather raises them up.” So, in other words, we need to give the heart something bigger to love, so that then it actually judges where all those material things in our lives actually fit. And then it brings them up and raises them up. It gives them a new dignity because they become instruments to love God and love others. And that’s why things are always a means to an end. They’re never an end in themselves. But our society, our materialistic society, so often loves material things as if they were ends in themselves.

And so, the heart is made to love, the heart is made to be in relation, the heart is made to make a covenant with others, especially with God. It is there to love God and neighbor. Right, and it also seeks to give itself completely in this mutual trust that exists between one person and another. That’s called faith, whether it’s human faith, or human trust, or supernatural faith, which is our relationship with God.

That’s why the heart seeks truth: because it cannot give itself, we cannot give ourselves, if we know we are going to be used. We cannot give ourselves if, you know, if we’re not sincere about our gift. Either our gift is not going to be received well, or we’re not going to give the full gift. There’s

something about the heart that it only gives itself completely. And it only gives itself completely in a relationship of trust. And so that's the truth.

That's the truth that Mary carries within, right. It's the truth about the human person, about the human heart. The heart seeks that sincere gift of self as the Vatican Council constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, says: only in that sincere gift of self can men find themselves, can men and women find themselves.

And therefore, the one thing that we need in order to live holy purity is, we could say, holy sincerity, and have a holy love for the truth, to have truth in the heart. And so, for this, look at King David. When he sinned, he committed adultery with Bathsheba, then he murdered her husband. But those two sins of adultery and murder, as bad as they are, were not as bad as the third sin which he committed, which was to lie to himself as if nothing had happened. That was the worst thing of all because that shut the doors off to grace.

Unlike other sinners, you know, like the Samaritan woman who had had many husbands or the other adulterous woman in the gospel, or whomever it is, Zacchaeus, Dismas the Good Thief, you know, all those people, yeah, they committed crimes, but they were repentant. They knew truth. They had truth in their heart. And that's why they were able to come back very quickly. But David, it took a prophet, the prophet Nathan to tell him a parable that would actually allow him to see his sin.

And that parable, where, you know, the prophet says, well, there was a rich man who had many lambs, and there was a poor man who only had one ewe lamb. And the rich man, when he had a guest, he took the ewe lamb from the poor person and slaughtered it for his guest. And David when he heard that said, "That man should pay! that man, that's unfair." Well, the prophet said, "That man is you."

And it was only because of that parable that David was able to have truth in the heart again. And he realized, and he repented from his sins, and he was able to come back. And he was able, what was he able to do? he was able to make room in his heart for God, for true love, for the fairest love, for the most beautiful love, right, and not, you know, downgrade love to only a kind of appearance of what it truly is.

So, we know that we have our heart that is wounded by sin. We, you know, we constantly experience in ourselves what Scripture says, that "The just man falls seven times a day," and that's for the just man, you know? Certainly, we fall many, many times. And that's due to Original Sin. And we have this kind of tendency to not tell the truth in our hearts, to not be able to love without self-interest, there's always a kind of struggle there that we need to engage in, in order to have purity of heart, because of this wound. But how do we do that? Well, we have all the means in the world. That's why this invocation of Our Lady, where it says, "I am the mother of fair love, of fear, of knowledge, and of holy hope," it gives us hope.

She is the one that contains all hope. And we are able to come back from our falls because we can admit to ourselves in our examination of conscience, the truth about what we have done, and we have the sacrament of penance for that, obviously, which recreates the innocence in our hearts and takes away that stain of sin that we incur when we transgress the law of God.

And so, Mary brings us hope, Mary brings us hope. And thanks be to God for that. And we are able to then praise God in sincerity as it says in a psalm, “My heart overflows with a godly theme.” We’re always thinking about God, or we’re always ready to listen to God as it says in another psalm, “My heart is ready, oh, Lord.” And we keep vigilance, as it says in Song of Songs, “I slept, but my heart was awake.” And we’re able to shun all fear, the fear that makes us doubt about the love of God for us.

And that’s why Our Lord tells us, “Let not your hearts be troubled, but believe in me.” Do not be afraid, do not be afraid. The only fear that we should have, as St. Josemaria says, is the fear of offending God, but that fear is a filial fear. And we know that when we are sincere, when we look for the truth, when we go and make a sincere examination of conscience and then we go to Confession if we need to, that we have so much peace after that because Our Lord has forgiven us.

Well, this is the Feast of Mary, the Mother of Fairest Love. Perhaps this is what we can do today in order to truly have devotion to her, is to make a clear examination of conscience and ask Our Lady to help us uproot anything that comes as an obstacle to that love, to the highest of loves, to the fairest of loves, to the most beautiful of loves, which is Christ Himself.

Let us turn to her as we end our prayer today and ask her for the strength to be able to love God above all things, and then to love our neighbor and respect our neighbor with this virtue of holy purity, respect ourselves, and truly be able to serve humanity with the love that She incarnated in her womb, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

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