

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

ST. JOSEPH: MODEL OF FIDELITY

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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.

We have just invoked St. Joseph as our father and lord. Those words have to give us a special excitement here as we get ready for the great feast day of St. Joseph. They have to mean a lot to us in a very special way because St. Joseph, who is a hero for us, gives us such a marvelous example of strength, of resilience, of faith; ultimately, of fidelity. Each one of us is called to be a source of solidity for our family, for our neighborhood, our church, our society. And so, during this time of prayer we can turn to St. Joseph and ask him to give us a double portion of his fidelity. In one sense, could strike us as a little bit odd, that St. Joseph occupies such a lofty space simply because we know so little. He appears so little in the New Testament and yet we know that he was a source of solidity for the Holy Family.

In our prayer, we can fill in the gaps with our imagination. We can think, for example, of the difficulties that St. Joseph had to face, and we have to make a special effort to use our imagination because the problem is that we know how those situations turned out. We can only begin to imagine what St. Joseph experienced when he was told that his fiancée was expecting a child in those days of uncertainty, of agony, really, until the angel told him that the child whom Mary was expecting was of God.

The unimaginable dread after the birth of Jesus, when Joseph was told to arise immediately and flee into Egypt with Mary and Jesus. We can't imagine the dread of the horror of thinking that the ruler of the land was hunting down that infant nor can we imagine what it must have been like to arrive there, that poor, young family, to arrive in a distant foreign land, having to begin again. We know how everything worked out, but it helps us to stop and think, "What did Joseph experience during those tough times when he was confronted with enormous difficulties?" He confronted those difficulties with faith and with confidence, which is why we can consider him the master of fidelity.

One of the ancient Greek philosophers wrote, "It is difficulties that show what men are." We can certainly apply that to St. Joseph. On other occasions, we have made brief reference to a great biography of Abraham Lincoln. At one moment in the biography, the following statement is made which has a lot to do with what we're praying about now: "Abraham Lincoln, roughly the year 1860, expressed his concern that his generation had been left a meager yield after the field of glory was harvested by the Founding Fathers. Those Founding Fathers were a forest of giant oak trees who faced the task to possess themselves and through themselves, us, of this goodly land."

It's difficult prose, we don't talk like that anymore. But let's face it, the image is quite haunting. Lincoln was concerned that all the greatness had been used up by the Founding Fathers one hundred years earlier. Of course, his actions turned into something really great. It's so interesting for us because we find ourselves in the same situation, especially if we read great biographies. The stories of old, of people who turned out to be great heroes, let's face it, those stories make us, at times, beyond the point of swooning, of passing out, as we read about the difficulties those people faced.

If you read, not to go on and on about Abraham Lincoln, but his ancestors, his father, his grandfather; back then, an adult was lucky to live beyond the age of forty-five. Many, many women died during childbirth, and the list goes on and on, but we don't want to dwell on that too much. What is of interest to us is to think, "Well, now it's my turn to be bedrock for my family, for my church, for my society."

Where did St. Joseph get this great fidelity? Ultimately, it comes from God, from confidence in God himself, from the rock-solid conviction that God is faithful. St. Josemaria in *The Forge* writes: "You have seen very clearly that you are a child of God, even if you were never again to see it, but that won't happen. You should continue along your way forever out of a sense of faithfulness without ever looking back."

So, how do we go about forging this life, this life of fidelity of faithfulness, of solidity? St. Josemaria offers us a very, very brief, simple formula in this book of the collection of homilies called *Christ is Passing By*. He says, "What are the principal means to ensure that our vocation takes root? Today, let me point out two of them which are like living supports of Christian conduct: interior life and doctrinal formation, that is to say, the deep knowledge of our faith. In the first place, interior life."

Fidelity on the big scale, just having a faithful life over a period of who knows how many decades, it's built up by fidelity on a daily basis. In the first place, in our relationship to God, to God our Father. That is why, inevitably, when we spend these times of prayer together, we inevitably end up talking in one way or another about the value and the importance of having a plan of life, a plan of attack, for our relationship with God on a daily basis. A desire of ours, for example, to spend time talking with him as we're doing right now, time in prayer. The holy Mass as often as we can, turning to Our Lady with great fidelity, praying the holy Rosary, building up this solid source of strength which is our spiritual reading, regular Confession, examinations of conscience every day, at the end of the day.

All these things, all these practices are the stuff of champions. If we were to examine the life of any one of the great saints, take those of recent memory such as St. John Paul II, Mother Teresa, St. Josemaria, we would see the same pattern in the life of each one of them, an unswerving loyalty, fidelity, to that relationship. In the case of St. John Paul II, especially towards the end of his life, his final years, it was very well known that even when he could hardly move, he would be up at the same time every day, incredibly, unswervingly faithful to his plan for morning

prayer and then Mass. It's a great question for ourselves as we speak to Our Lord here in the tabernacle. Undoubtedly, we see the value of having this plan. And undoubtedly, we see from a lot of experience, each day as we take a look at how we're going to use our time during the day, when we make that decision, I have a plan, I have a commitment with Jesus Christ himself.

Well, over the period of years, we become incredibly solid. Thinking of your children, of your grandchildren eventually, what a wonderful thing it will be when they develop this instinctive, it's not even a thought, it's just an awareness that at a certain time their father is either praying the Rosary or doing his spiritual reading, and they'll know that because you tell them. "Well, you know, it's 7:30, time for your dad to do his spiritual reading, and if you want you can sit there and watch me."

As we were saying earlier, St. Josemaria mentions these two means to ensure that our vocation takes root, that our vocation develops the solidity that it is called to develop. The first is interior life. The second element is our doctrinal formation, that is, the deep knowledge of our faith. What does that have to do with fidelity? Well, he explains it in another place when he says, "Loyalty, fidelity, demands a real hunger for formation because you are moved by a sincere love and you do not wish to run the risk of spreading or of defending, through ignorance, principles or attitudes that are very far from being in accordance with the truth."

In other words, we have to develop a Christian *head*. It's not enough to have a wonderful sentiment of loyalty. We have to know the content of our faith. We have to know the truth and that truth, of course, will underline, will be there beneath our feet. There is a very powerful moment in a book written by Joseph Ratzinger fifty years ago where he talks about the word *amen*.

We say *amen* in the blink of an eye, but he says much is contained in that tiny word: "Trust, to entrust, fidelity, firmness, firm ground, truth." This means that the thing on which man can finally take his stand, and which can give him meaning can only be truth itself. The more we learn about the content of our faith, for example, by studying the Catholic Catechism, the firmer that ground is beneath our feet. I mean, just think right now, during this time of prayer, we know without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ is here present in the Eucharist listening to us, filling us with these great desires of imitating St. Joseph. We know it because he has revealed it to us.

A very wonderful, attractive consequence of faithfulness is joy. Again, if we use our imagination and picture Joseph there in the workshop in Nazareth, we picture someone who is rock solid, who has a reputation for being incredibly reliable and dependable, faithful. And we picture someone who was joyful. A faithful man or woman usually overflows with happiness and sows peace and joy wherever they go.

It would be very inviting to write a master's thesis about the connection between joy and fidelity. But ultimately, someone who is faithful is not only reconciled with God but is in love with God,

dealing with God all the time or at least trying to do so. And that, of course, leads to great joy, great serenity, and happiness. We have a great commitment to those around us; a great responsibility, and that responsibility, of course, fills us with the desire to be even more faithful.

We think of St. John Paul II, all the lives that he has impacted. Who knows how many lives he has impacted? The same goes for all the great saints. We think well, “Exactly the same thing applies to my life. Other people depend on me.” Or, as St. Josemaria puts it in *The Forge*, “There are many people around you and you have no right to be an obstacle to their spiritual good, to their eternal happiness. You are under an obligation to be a saint. You must not let God down for having chosen you. Neither must you let those around you down. They expect so much from your Christian life.”

What a wonderful thing to know that our lives have such transcendence. Furthermore, what a wonderful thing it is to realize that this fidelity, fidelity of St. Joseph, is something that is built up day by day, brick by brick if we want to imagine our life as a building construction project and that there are no shortcuts, that fidelity is build up by being faithful in the little things of each day. Our Lord himself said, “Because you have been faithful in the little things, enter into the joy of your Lord.” What little things?

Our way of, in the first place, of fostering and maintaining, and making grow this spiritual life of ours. Faithful in your concern, your dealings with your spouse on a daily basis. It was so moving to hear, on a number of occasions, married men or married women speaking with Don Javier, the former Prelate of Opus Dei, and hearing Don Javier say to them, “Okay, you’re on a business trip? Call home every day.” Send a postcard,” back in the good old days of postcards, every day. Make that relationship flourish on a daily basis through those small things.

And what is marvelous is to realize that when we do everything for love, in that way there will be no little things, everything will become big. It could be something as small as your interactions with your children, of being a man of your word. If you’re saying, “This coming Wednesday we’re going to do a certain thing,” and your children come to realize you are a man of your word, well, over the years that builds up, and they think of their dad as “rocky.” Rocky, because you are so solid, so dependable.

What is the danger? The danger would be to think, well these small things really don’t matter because they’re so small. The small things, of course, build up; that drop by drop, falling on a rock, of course, destroys the rock. As one writer puts it, “The strongest danger for the Christian is to despise the fight in those skirmishes that gradually sink into the soul until the soul becomes soft or brittle and indifferent. But, above all, insensitive to the voice of God.” As little infidelities that could seem so unimportant, they can do a lot of damage over time.

All this time, we’ve been thinking and talking with St. Joseph. We can finish this time of prayer by referring to Our Lady. Talk about solidity, about dependability, about fidelity. As St. Josemaria

writes in *Furrow*, “When the apostles had scattered and the enraged mob made themselves hoarse shouting angrily at Jesus, the holy Virgin Mary followed close behind her Son along the streets of Jerusalem. She did not draw back when the crowd cried out nor did she leave our Redeemer alone. When each person, anonymous in that procession, was in his cowardice emboldened to ill-treat Christ. Call on her with all your strength, Virgo Fidelis, Virgin Most Faithful, and ask her that those of us who call ourselves God’s friends may truly be so at all times.”

As we finish this time of prayer, let us ask Our Lady to give us this confidence in God’s fidelity and this realization that the Lord is giving us grace day after day to become that source of solidity for our families, for our society.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations that you have communicated to me in this time of prayer. 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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