

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

YOU ARE A GRAIN OF WHEAT

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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.

What better setting than a dreary, raw, cold, windy, misty morning, than to meditate on the Cross of Jesus? However, if it were a beautiful sunny day, that would also be an appropriate setting because Our Lord will reveal that His burden is easy and light. But as we keep on dissecting Jesus' invitation, "Come and follow Me," we try to penetrate the meaning of those words.

In a certain sense, the entire Gospel is a breakdown of the meaning of "follow me." We read in the Gospel the Apostles heard that very clearly. He said to all, "If anyone would come after me," wants to come after me, "let him or her deny himself or herself and take up his or her Cross daily and follow Me." So, the "follow me" is explicitly connected with this saying "no" to self and embracing this Cross.

Peter will receive the most severe reprimand possible from Jesus as he attempted to dissuade the Lord from entering into Jerusalem that would cost him his life in a very painful way. And Peter attempted to dissuade him. And then Jesus responded and reproached him saying, "Get behind me, Satan." Again, it's to Peter that Jesus will say that "Satan will sift you like wheat."

So, the Lord invites us to the Cross and there's so many ways of seeing this. But first, let's contemplate what the Lord says. It's the most difficult teaching. It's so counterintuitive because the raw material of the Cross is suffering. Whether it's emotional, mental, psychological, moral, spiritual, physical, that's the raw material. And the Lord says we have to embrace that Cross. And we have experience reading the lives of the saints and those lives of the saints can cause intimidation because they claim that they love the Cross. And these great mystics say that you have to pray so that you accept and even pray for the Cross.

St. Josemaria says that holiness consists in loving God in the ordinary. And he leads the way in living this light that he saw on October 2, 1928. And as a buddy of mine said that he read the three-volume biography of the founder of Opus Dei, and he liked it and didn't like it. And I said, "Well, let's start with the negative. Why didn't you like it?" He said, "because it was one long Way of the Cross. The Lord never let up. From day one to his checkout date, it was definitely a life of suffering." And he said, "that's a very high price to pay to pursue holiness."

And Our Lord makes it abundantly clear. We have now within the circle of Opus Dei two Venerables, lay people, thank God. And one of those lay people is a teenage girl who died when she was 17. And she lived in the late 50s. And it's an interesting biography, even though it's a distance of 50-plus years.

You can relate to the girl's lifestyle, her joys, to her modes of recreation, her reactions, very much an experience of today, in spite of so many technological changes. And to make a long story short, she decides to be a saint herself. And she says "yes" to Our Lord and gives her life to Our Lord. And Our Lord permits this very painful cancer. And on one hand, we are very edified because she's a real happy kid. Normal as well.

She was served chicken on a big feast day. I like chicken. And she lost her temper and yelled at the person who gave her chicken, "You know, I don't like chicken!" She started to cry. So, she's very much very human. It's kind of nice to see the defects of the saints. There's hope.

So, we're edified by the joy and good spirit and the willingness to connect with Christ through this suffering, but at the same time, it could frighten us. She says in this biography, that, just to paraphrase, that the least illness would scare her. And she confided to her mother that you know, the common cold would shake her up, and now she has something much more serious.

First question: Lord, why do we have to do this? Why do I need to follow you? And Jesus will answer, "Well, I am the Way. You got to walk with me. And my journey ends on this walk to Calvary. And to follow me, you need to walk with me."

This also answers the question: "Now among those who went up to worship at the feast, were some Greeks." I think another translation may say "Gentiles" which alludes to the fact that there's a disbelief in the one true God. And they were visitors in Jerusalem. Maybe they were tourists. And the best show in town was Jesus of Nazareth.

He'd bring people to life, he would restore sight to the blind, he would turn water into exquisite wine. There was no stopping what he could do. So, "These came to Philip," Philip is a Greek name, it's not a Hebrew name, who was born, "who was from Bethsaida in Galilee and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'" Very profound. It is the cry of modern society.

I don't want moralizing. I don't want academic facts as profound as they may be. I want to see the face of Christ superimposed on your face. And nothing less. I want to see that New Commandment, even though they can't articulate it that way. I want to see that heart of Christ. That's the only experience that is going to get my attention. That's what the world is saying. That's what the culture is saying. "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

"Phillip went and told Andrew," Andrew is another Greek name. "Andrew went with Philip, and they told Jesus, 'there's some Greeks outside waiting, should I let them in?'" And Jesus

responds, basically, “You need to be that Jesus.” “And Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.’” And when he says “amen, amen,” he says you got to really listen or “truly, truly.”

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat,” now he uses, why does he specify a grain of wheat? Another parable he’ll use the grain of mustard seed. Why didn’t he say, “unless you become a grain of mustard seed and bury yourself in the ground?” Why does he say, “a grain of wheat?” Why didn’t he say, “an olive seed or an olive pit?” Why did he say, “grain of wheat?” Does he have something against lettuce or radish? Why grain of wheat? Well, it’s the only grain that can hold Christ.

It’s that one grain that you can find the true presence of Jesus Christ because the grain of wheat is ground down and transformed. It goes through transformations, the grain of wheat. It buries itself in the ground and it’s ground down and turned into flour -- an allusion to the Holy Spirit. Water is poured on it, and it’s converted into dough, another allusion to the Holy Spirit. The dough is put into an oven and heated and it’s now it’s transformed into bread, another allusion to the Holy Spirit.

And in Mass, the priest calls down the Holy Spirit, and the bread is transformed into Jesus Christ. That’s why we call it Transubstantiation. And Our Lord is saying that I become intimately part of the Holy Mass, the Eucharistic sacrifice, if I die with him, that he says that if I connect with his Cross, I become Christ. That’s why he doesn’t answer directly that question. The Apostles say, “Master, there’s Greeks here waiting for you, should I tell them to come in?”

He doesn’t say, “Yeah, get them in.” I’m sure he saw them. But he says, “You need to become that grain of wheat.” And he continues because all his teaching is aimed at evangelizing others. It never stops at the individual. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the Earth and dies, it remains alone. And if it dies, it bears much fruit.” I recall, again, going back many years again, going on a hospital visit. The individual whom I was visiting was asleep. So, I just sat and started to wait for him to wake up. And this big, strong nurse walks into the room.

She was a good Catholic, with a bit of an Irish brogue. And she bluntly asked me why was I sitting in that room doing nothing. And I said, “Well, I’m waiting for him to wake up.” And she said, “You must have a lot of time on your hands.” I said, “I don’t know what else to do.” She says, “Well, why don’t you just wake him up?” I said, “I think he needs the rest.” She said, “Well, well let me put you to work.”

So, she escorts me out and says this guy will be a challenge for you. He was terminally ill. But he was in his twenties and he was a rough customer, and someone was thrown out of his room because they detected that there was a bulge in his jacket, the bulge was a gun. I guess he was in a gang, the guy I visited. I mean at first, he didn’t want to talk to me because he found me very wimpy-looking.

I said, “Well, why don’t you just give me a, give me a chance? His first reaction was I don’t want to give you a chance. Then we start to talk. Long story short. He finally opened up, said his happiest years was when he was an altar boy. We start to get together, he started to read, there was no catechism then of the, or the most recent catechism, so I gave him Faith Explained and he started to study his faith and became fascinated by it.

All within one year, devoted to the Eucharist. You could see this, he started to understand the science of the Cross. He saw it as reparation. He saw it as part of his spiritual life. And in my naivete, then I, he died, and I did his funeral, but at the wake, had a long line of people wanted to go to Confession. So, being a little bit new at this kind of stuff, I thought, “Well that’s part of the drill. You take care of someone, you go to the wake, and you have a long line of people going to Confession.”

Well, virtually that has never happened again. Maybe someone said, “Hey, you available for a quick confession? I go, “I can be, I’m available for a long confession, too.” But it never, that never happened. Not that it can’t happen again. But never happened. Why? Because this young man became a grain of wheat.

What we ask of Our Lord is that we overcome ascetical Alzheimer or spiritual Alzheimer. I keep forgetting that to follow him, I need to bear my Cross, I keep forgetting. And so, I’m surprised at the traffic jam or surprised that I have a headache or surprised that I was misunderstood or surprised that I’m experiencing weakness, or I’m surprised that I’m still struggling with the same temptations.

And I have the Alzheimer. It doesn’t occur to me that, “Hey, guess what? I need, I’m invited to be the grain of wheat.” “Well, yeah, I’m willing to bear the Cross except the ones the Lord gives me. If only I had the right kind of crosses, I would be pretty good at it.” And these are serious crosses, a lot of beautiful Christian families.

A loved one is not practicing, doesn’t want to have anything to do with the Lord, and with our American pragmatic mentality, the Cross gets accentuated because, “Okay, well, I prayed a novena for a week and I still don’t see a change. In fact, he is worse or she is worse,” or Yeah, I’m going to live charity, and really turn on the charity. But I’ve done it for a week and there’s no change. So, I guess it’s not going to work. And I’ll, I’ll stop.”

So, we’re very pragmatic. The Cross is not pragmatic. And St. Paul says that I need, which is a mystery, not total darkness, but a mystery. Paul teaches the early Christians, “You are called to make up for what is lacking in the Passion of Christ.” What does that mean, exactly? Wasn’t what he went through good enough? Isn’t that the Redemption? And I don’t know if I’m making this up here, okay, just for the record, because you know, maybe some of you will check and see if I’m correct. I don’t remember. But I think I saw a caption in the Baltimore Catechism, you could tell there’s good long-term memory, that’s a bad sign, isn’t it?

And I think it was on the Sacraments. And you have Jesus on the Cross. And you have, let's say, a reservoir at the base of the Cross. And you have a plumbing system leading from that body of water to individuals. There are seven pipes from that reservoir leading to houses and individuals. And that is the Sacraments.

By the same token, Our Lord needs this plumbing system to transmit his grace to others through the Cross. We don't, we're not sources of the Redemption, we apply the fruits of the Redemption because what is Redemption? It means "buy back." And Our Lord needs some individuals connected with him to buy grace for others. And as we buy that grace, as we connect with his Cross, we become that grain of wheat. We hold Christ. This was supposed to be my second half of the meditation but anyway, we won't go over time.

Jesus, give me the help menu. How do I handle this? What did Jesus tell His apostles? Did he just say suck it up? Or take it or leave it? I mean who enjoys suffering? And that's not what the Cross is. "Well, I'm afraid of the saints because they love suffering." They don't love suffering; they love the Cross. It's different. "Well maybe if I'm holy enough I'll just welcome migraines. I'll sing a song of thanksgiving when I'm stuck in traffic, or if the door is shut on my finger instead of using an expletive I'll say, 'Wonderful. Thank you, Lord.'"

I don't know if that's possible. It can be kind of weird too. But what he does say is "do mental prayer." Use any term you want. Only in the context of the Cross, He says, "Come," again he says, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy-laden." That's what he says, that's the help menu. He's gonna give us directions here.

When it was show time for the Passion, he uses similar words, "watch and pray." Poor Peter didn't watch and pray, he fell asleep, and the Gospel says he followed him at a distance. So, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy-laden." Vent. Complain. Even get angry. But come and open up your heart and speak to me about what's troubling you, what's burdening you.

Sometimes I ask that question, I don't mean to be silly about it, "But have you asked Our Lord to help you?" A lot of times I get "No." I go, "Well, give it a shot." "Come to me all who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest."

He doesn't say, "I *may* give you rest" or "you *may* find rest." "I *will* give you rest. Come to me." Crosses are a reality check to my spiritual life. Am I coming to him? Then he says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." So, it's not my yoke, it's his yoke. So, there's a certain, I knew there was a hitch to this. Okay? There's a transference. There's only one Cross and it's his. He carries the Cross. I'm like Simon of Cyrene. I tag along. I have to follow the help menu, though.

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart. And you will find rest for your souls." You're called to share my Cross. "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Why? "Because I'm going to carry it. You tag along, but it's my Cross."

In the practice, Lord, what does that mean? “Well, my feelings have been hurt. I’ve been snubbed.” Or “someone was rude to me.” No one likes that. “Well, I am sensitive.” We’re all sensitive. What’s his yoke? Well, they spit in his face and slapped him around and laughed at him and crowned him with thorns. Okay, are we gonna play ball with him or not? We’re supposed to connect our humiliation with his and there’s big disproportion as we know.

“Well, I’m so tired!” Well, guess who was tired? “I’m embarrassed by my weaknesses.” Who felt profound shame as he was stripped of his garment and nailed to the Cross in front of those crowds? “I sometimes feel abandoned.” What was Jesus’ words on the Cross?

So, we have to look at him and St. Josemaria says, “Enter into,” this is words of a saint, “Enter into the wounds of Christ crucified. There you will learn to guard your senses, you will have interior life, and you will continually offer to the Father the sufferings of Our Lord and those of Mary in payment of your debts and the debts of all men and women.”

Mary, we turn our attention to you. We ask you to teach us the science of the Cross. Give us confidence. But convert us to at least the first step; to come to your Son, to disclose our inner feelings, our inner struggles, our troubles. And help us watch and pray, connecting our struggles, our sufferings, with the sufferings of your Son.

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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