ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

MARY, TEACHER OF FRIENDSHIP

REV. PETER ARMENIO

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.

Our topic of conversation with Our Lord and with his mother is concretely on the theme of his mother as "teacher of friendship." She could teach us every aspect of Our Lord's life. And what makes Mary special is that she incarnated perfectly the life and teachings of her son. Without being too pedantic with Greek terminology, the common teaching of the Church is that we venerate the saints with respect and devotion, and the official Greek word is *dulia*. Sound like a sickness.

And the veneration and honor we give to God, we give to Christ, is called *latria*. It's devotion and adoration and praise only reserved for God. The saints are not God, they're intercessors, men and women we venerate and love since they heroically incarnated the life of Christ, with imperfections since every human being suffers the effects of a wounded nature, barring the Blessed Mother.

And the veneration we give to Mary is called *hyperdulia*, an intense veneration, and only she receives that kind of devotion. Obviously, she is a human being so she would not receive adoration only designated to God. But at the same time, I shouldn't put it that way, but she's not one more saint. But she is in a class all unto herself.

Every topic that concerns Mary is very special to me, I'm sure special to any follower of Christ. But I was overwhelmed by so much Marian devotion and Marian piety, overwhelmed in a good sense, during my years of preparation for the priesthood while studying in Rome at the seminary for the Prelature of Opus Dei.

First of all, reading words, and homilies, points for meditation from St. Josemaria, it was abundantly clear that to arrive more effectively into the heart of Christ, we needed to take advantage of God's second greatest gift to us. Jesus' second greatest gift to us who is perfect God perfect man, He gives himself in the Eucharist, so, he can't do better than that, because that's his very self in both his humanity and divinity.

In his second greatest gift, he officially gave us his own mother as He hung on the Cross. She's a gift and she is there to be very much my mother, and a mother nurtures, consoles, takes good

care, is solicitous, etc. And a mother is an eminent teacher, someone who gives formation, and teaching requires instruction, but the best teacher is the one who teaches by example. And we want you, Mary, we ask with humility, that you teach us the value of friendship.

Well, we pray to her for humility, we pray to her for holy purity, we pray that she intercede when we have problems, we go to her for consolation, but perhaps friendship would not be our first topic. We want to imitate her in everything, and going back to my days in Rome again, I was blessed with a pope, for that matter, all the popes, all the recent popes have been great models for Marian piety, but it was when John Paul got elected, I'm dating myself, and his first words from the balcony upon being elected was his confidence in the Blessed Mother.

His coat of arms was not the typical one, it had a big "M" on it and a cross, it wasn't your traditional coat of arms with lilies or bears or lions or deers or crossed swords, etc. And Mary was at the forefront and at the background of his ministry, his papal ministry. Also is blessed with having as a prelate, the head of Opus Dei, the future, at that time, Blessed Alvaro. And he established three Marian years in succession.

And as I recollect how fortunate I've been to have been in the presence of a saint and a blessed, we can take the liberty of calling a blessed a saint as well. Near the mortal remains of St. Josemaria, who made an exception, he said, "You don't imitate me in anything. You imitate Jesus Christ. He's your model." And he says, "Okay, I'll make an exception. I can honestly say you can imitate me in my love for the Blessed Mother. That you could do."

And Blessed Alvaro would urge us, in fact, in an informal setting with maybe 200 people, he looked at me and said in Spanish that "Mary was a shortcut." And that was the only time he ever did it. He said, "Will someone please translate for him so he understands?" And so that Mary is a shortcut also is something engraved in my heart and my memory.

Okay, we are going to go to the Blessed Mother and as we pray in the Memorare, never was it known that anyone who has recourse to her is left unaided. And let's take the liberty to put words in her mind and heart. Son like Mother, Mother like Son. The Gospel in a sense is a series of very short narratives of Jesus' work of evangelization vis a vis friendship.

Though particular conversations are not recorded of his private life or hidden life, first thirty years, we can be morally certain because his public life reflects his hidden life, that he was a good friend, that he had many friends, through his professional work, through his family connections, through dealing with his neighbors.

Everybody would know everybody in those days, in those small villages, and that was very much his style, which meant that was very much St. Joseph's style because a human being doesn't act on instinct, needs to be educated, that's part of being human and formed. And Jesus had those two beautiful role models of friendship, his Mother and his adoptive father, St. Joseph.

And we see the tremendous importance Jesus placed on friendship, and virtual last words, many virtual last words, at the Last Supper, He explains what friendship is. He makes it abundantly clear to his disciples to his Apostles, "You are my friends." I'm a special friend because I'm the kind of friend who lays down his life for you. I love you with everything I have, I love you with my entire life, my sacrificed life, every individual.

We can be totally certain those were Mary's sentiments. She could very well address her friend Nancy, and say, "Nancy, you are my friend. And there's no greater friend than that friendship where one lays down her life for her friends." And that's what she did at the foot of the Cross as well, maybe more accurately to say, lay down her life for her daughters and sons. So, we see very much how friendship is so prominent in the Lord's life.

From a certain prism, you can view the gospel as little narratives, lessons, and dealing with individuals juxtaposed with the crowds of people, long line of people asking for a cure, asking for a word, and then the Holy Spirit magnifies some of these relationships. We can go back to John's gospel, chapter 11, and mull over a bit on Martha's way of referring to her brother Lazarus when he was sick. And he's identified when Jesus is contacted as "the one whom you love, the one whom you love is sick." It's a curious way of referring to someone. It's valid, but I don't recall that kind of phrase in all of the gospel even though we see loving relationships throughout the Bible. But Martha refers to her brother when contacting Christ, "the one whom you love."

And we could use other standards of reference to appreciate a little bit more Mary's friendships. I'm thinking about St. Therese of Lisieux, she lived under the same roof as this elderly nun that really got under her skin. Perhaps she was cantankerous, complained, would be an irritant in her conversations. And Therese, with the grace of God, drawing that strength from the heart of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, drawing it from Mary's intercession, really worked at seeing Our Lord in this nun that on a human level got under her skin. And with struggle, and with genuine, sincere love, Therese, on a natural level, supernatural as well, grew to really love this elderly nun that wouldn't win a popularity contest.

The nun finally said, "Wow, what a- this young woman really loves me. What a close friendship," and she was kind of surprised. Reminds me of an anecdote of St. Josemaria who at the beginning of the history of Opus Dei, he would recruit priests to hear confessions and give benedictions, say Mass for the different people coming into contact with Opus Dei that was very much in its embryonic stage. And one of the priests was irritating. And got on the nerves of the people in contact with St. Josemaria at that time. Again, someone who would not win a popularity contest. Probably today we'd call some of these quirks, personality disorders, whatever it was.

St. Josemaria would make that effort to, with little money, give him, invite him over for dinner, which would probably be midday in those countries, in those Mediterranean countries, and have someone pick him up, someone drive him home, spend quality time with him because he was a great friend, he loved them unconditionally.

And I've told this before: I have a friend from Spain whose great-uncle was a classmate of St. Josemaria in law school. And this friend of mine told me that his uncle, his great uncle, received a letter from Josemaria Escriva after he actually died. Sounds spooky, but he wrote the letter while he was alive. He didn't write it after he died. So, no need to panic.

And, well, he, I don't think this great uncle was in contact with Opus Dei, but they were friends since law school, and they kept up consistent correspondence over decades. All these good examples, obviously, starting with Our Lord, tell us about Mary's friendship, but her friendship as a mom's friendship, a perfect woman's friendship with these beautiful feminine virtues and qualities.

Her persona was exceedingly attractive. She was extremely lovable. And she was, she pulled out all stops for her friends. You could very well say about Mary, "the one whom you love is sick" or "the one whom you love is in need." Mary had, as you would put in modern parlance, "a knee-jerk reaction" when she was informed that she would usher in the Son of God into this world by conceiving him in her Immaculate womb by the work of the Holy Spirit.

She's also informed that her elderly cousin Elizabeth was with child. And Elizabeth wasn't her next-door neighbor. I went to the Holy Land and it's a week's walk to get to the Jerusalem area. And it's not a smooth walk. You walk on rocky ground; you climb up and down hills. There's, it's cold. There's inclement weather, et cetera.

And she was a woman and women usually didn't travel. No one traveled more than five miles away. But she did. Why? Because she pulled out all stops, she lays down her life. And it wasn't just a quick visit to inform her of the supernatural dimension of their respective pregnancies, but to serve her until she gave birth to her son.

We see Mary again appearing at a wedding reception. Now, there's many reasons: the importance of marriage, the importance of that vocation, Mary is portrayed as a great intercessor, many reasons. But I want to focus on her knack for friendship. She was invited to this reception. And perhaps we would say to ourselves well, so what?

Well, Mary is the most mystical person who ever lived. Makes a Trappist monk look like an activist, or a Carthusian look like an activist. No one had her profound prayer life and her constant presence of God. With our American pragmatic sentiment, we would say, "Well, a wild wedding reception is no place for this ethereal mystic.

She's so holy, maybe some of those toasts will be a little off-color. Or when people have a few too many, their behavior may leave a bit to be desired. All sorts of compelling reasons to not invite her since maybe she'd be very uncomfortable in that kind of boisterous setting. No, she's there. She's not only there, she's front and center there. And again, she's acting like a real friend. She's looking after her friend, the host, the hostess, the workers.

And what's her reaction? Just to summarize it in American lingo: "Let's keep that party going." Maybe she could have said, with a little bit of a puritanical edge, or, "Well, they're running out of wine and that's just grand because they could be just as happy with Sprite," or their version of it in those days. Or "they don't need to have wine for so many days." Those weddings lasted up to seven days.

No. "We got to keep the party going. It's up to each individual to live temperance." And she was looking out for her son's friends, the Apostles. They were kind of rough-and-tumble young men. And my take on them running out of wine was she was watching, as good mom, as good friend, watching those twelve boys empty their glasses often.

Perhaps she told her Son that, "Hey, be careful. They're overdoing it." That's not recorded. But she wants her Son to do something about it. She realizes they're running out. These are men. These are fishermen. These are strong men, young men. And it's a party. So, they're partying like the best of them.

And Mary is looking out for her friend and approaches her Son, basically says, "They have no wine. Son, do something." And we realize that wasn't part of Our Lord's plan. He said, "What do you want me to do, Woman? My hour has not yet come." And implied there, because the life of Christ, the four gospels, I would say it's, they're highlights there. Only what the Holy Spirit wanted to transmit. But it's there.

Obviously, she's friends with the workers. She has a relationship with them. Though the whole event is microwaved, as I said before, these festivities would last for days. And she introduces them to her Son. Now her Son has made new friends, they're friends. And these young men will never forget that whole event. They fetch water.

Mary persuades them, Mary gives them confidence, because on a human level, this is madness, to haul in between 80 to 120 gallons of water in an arid climate and expect something to happen requires heroic faith. But I would say on a natural level, Mary won them over and they trusted her, this loving woman who's really concerned and very confident that something could be worked out. Maybe our reaction is, "Well, this is not a friendship culture, and we need to react." No. The culture doesn't adapt to the Gospel. No, I take that back. The Gospel doesn't change on account of the culture, or dilute itself, because of the culture. The culture ideally should express itself through the Gospel message.

And yes, we followers of Christ, we Americans who work hard, who want results and culturally, we're not focused on people spending time with people, we're into in many instances, the wrong kind of time management. And friendship by its very nature requires time, and a show of affection, a show of service. And after when, going back to Jesus, when he works that, the greatest of all miracles, bringing Lazarus back to life, before that he wept. And the reaction not just of the sisters now, people who hardly know him, they come and see "how much he loved them."

And if we go back in time and interview the different people Mary knew in her small village in Nazareth, oh yes, you could talk about her humility, you could talk about her joy. But she's mostly known by her affectionate, motherly/friendly heart. We ask you, Mary, to pray for us so that we learn the friendship of your Son. And perhaps we can finish off quoting St. Josemaria, in his homily "Mother of God, and Our Mother" in *Friends of God*:

"Let us return once again to our everyday experience and see how we behave with our earthly mothers. What does a mother want most of all from her children, from those who are flesh of her flesh and blood of her blood? Her greatest desire is to have them close to her. When the children grow up and it is no longer possible to have them beside her, she waits impatiently for news from them, and everything that happens to them, from the slightest illness to the most important events, concerns her deeply. Look: in the eyes of our Mother Mary, we never cease to be little, because she opens to us the way to the Kingdom of Heaven, which will only be given to those who become little children."

And so, we go to Mary with the specific intent of loving that aspect of her life and her Son, friendship, and to learn how to live that new commandment of loving with the heart of Christ, specifically through our friendship.

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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