

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

The Ascension: Bringing Christ to the Periphery

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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 you 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 put ourselves in the presence of Our Lord. And we ask Him to help us meditate on His absolute last words. His words preceding His Ascension into Heaven. Issuing more than a command, a commission, a global apostolic assignment. And that apostolic assignment will remain till the end of time. But it's an assignment that for the most part, has been forgotten. It doesn't make sense that the last words of Our Savior would not be taken to heart by the majority of His followers.

Our calling to follow Jesus in an intimate way, brings to mind this calling. The Gospel of St. Mark, which tradition has, quotes St. Peter. It's a compilation of quotes from St. Peter. His Gospel is a combination of Peter's homilies. And so, there's a special precision in what he says or special accuracy. "Preach the Gospel to every creature." Our Lord, using Mideastern hyperbole, drives home His desire, "I want this message to reach everyone". And the rest of the Gospels say the same thing but without that hyperbole, "Make disciples of all nations."

And the former father, former prelate, Don Javier, now we have a new father. I recall in many different ways, reminding us in this workshop that even when you cross the street, never heard the apostolate put that way, he said, the people you see, at least pray for them and take advantage of every opportunity to attract that person to Christ.

And it bears repeating, that in one of his meditations, he said, your vocation, your calling is to do apostolate, to evangelize. It encompasses every dimension of your life. And even if we are confined to our homes or confined to a sick bed, in spiritual direction we need to speak about what we have done for the work of evangelization. Have I offered this up? Am I connecting my suffering, my infirmity with winning people to Christ, even if I don't know those people. Or do you have a list of people you're praying for so that they come to Christ?

We see a certain tone here, in *The Way*, we get used to it since it's used so much and so popular. But we have to kind of go back in history when the lay person was expected to show up for Mass and try to stay in the state of grace and confession was offered. Often, the lay person was encouraged to say prayers. And if you were going to do some apostolic heavy lifting, you would join a religious order or sign up for a monastery or maybe even become a priest. And our father is enlightened, on October 2, 1928, and he is given a charism, which is as old and as new as the Gospel; to bring Christ into the world in a way that He has never been there before. And my calling, my vocation, is to contribute in fulfilling that task of making Disciples of all nations.

So, St. Josemaria says out of 100 people, you're interested in the 100 people. And so, he has a new language that the ordinary man and woman never heard before. Even though it's as old as the Gospel. Through the world, still echoes the divine cry, "I have come to cast fire upon the Earth. And what will I, but that it be kindled?" And you see it has already died out? Don't you want to spread the blaze? We want to capture the spirit here, this apostolic spirit.

"Do you remember? Night was falling as you and I began our prayer. From close by came the murmur of water. And, through the stillness of the Castilian City, we also seemed to hear voices [of people] from many lands crying to us in anguish that they do not yet know Christ. Unashamedly, you kissed your Crucifix and you asked Him to make you an apostle of apostles." So, there's a spirit there, there's a zeal there that jumps off the pages. And we're more used to it because this what was novelty, then is now common doctrine. This is the spirit of Vatican II. The true spirit of Vatican II. And I ask you Lord, what must I do? Because now we're being encouraged, starting with the Holy Father, and rightfully so, to reach for the peripheries. And we reach for the peripheries, in other words, those people completely alienated from Christ.

I was driving near the Cathedral last Saturday, I had a meeting with a priest friend of mine, and I ran into three marches, women's marches. So, I really hit the jackpot, one major one and two minor ones. And it was a very powerful symbol and image. Not a very pleasant one for me. And since we all want God to give us slack, let's say well, misguided, at best misguided good intentions. But you sense, at least when I was driving, the language, the placards, the anger, the contorted faces, not that I looked that much. You see, you'd sense the presence of the evil one. And it's kind of symbolic of the culture we're living in. This complete alienation from God. This ignorance of the natural law.

I would, there's nothing wrong with a march that would endorse and acknowledge the exalted dignity of women. And how, quoting the recent teachings of the Church could be traced back to St. John Paul II, that life in the formation of every human person is entrusted to them. But to see this anti-life, symbol, this anger at the cause of life really struck me. And our response cannot be a holier than thou response and not that it is. But somehow, I would like to bring Christ to these poor people. Because that's a true destitution. That's a true tragedy that these people have not had an experience of Christ.

And how do I get to the periphery? Well, using St. Josemaria's wisdom, out of 100, I'm interested in the 100. I give special consideration to every person, but I need to give special consideration to somebody who would be open to Christ. And who could do more for Christ. I need to reach out to that person because that person could get to more people. So, there's, well, many ways of doing this. While this person could give more this person can understand this divine commission of bringing Christ to others. And there are others who are angry, have never been formed in the faith, have made choices in their lives that have alienated them from the Lord, there are some who are bitter over suffering, and we're interested in them.

How do I go about it? I ask that question in the presence of the Lord. How do I draw, for example, an angry atheist, to Our Lord? The Holy Father tells us that we need to get out of our comfort zone that we can't be self-referential. What does that mean in the practice? Well maybe part of our prayer is to speak to Our Lord and see who do I know? Begin with members of our own family. The periphery could be our own brother or sister. The periphery could be some good friends of ours, boyhood friends, friends we had in high school, college, colleagues. . . those can be periphery. Someone we meet on a plane. . . that I'm always trying to give people an experience of that heart of Christ.

See if I have the story right, but during the Spanish Civil War some people in contact with the work, members of the work were imprisoned. And they found themselves in prison with anarchists as well. Other young men who were to keep it simple, quite anti-Christian, quite anti-Catholic. And St. Josemaria encouraged them well mix it up a little bit play soccer, and don't be you against the anarchist. Mix it up and have. . . and enjoy yourselves and become friends. And they did that. Why, because we love everybody and we really love everybody when. . . I really want to win you over. God wins you over but through my example, through my joy, through my charity. I want you to take a second look at Christ.

And this presupposes, this point in *The Way of the Cross*, my first step, and maybe our pragmatic side says well, my first step is to make a list of people who are in the periphery. No, my first step is that I need to be more intimately united to Christ. That is the driving force. That's what St. Josemaria had, he says, "You know how constrained I am until I have a baptism to baptize with and how constrained I am until it is accomplished." He put that to music. "I have come to cast fire on the Earth and how distressed I am until it is accomplished." Words of Our Lord, he sang that.

And so, he says, in *The Way of the Cross*, Station 10, Meditation five, "When we strive to be really, ipse Christus, Christ Himself, then in our own lives." I got the wrong, I got the wrong quote. Sorry about that. Basically, the quote I had here was, let's see, let me try again. I'll just summarize it. Basically, it says that when we are united to Christ, to paraphrase it, um, I said, I'm sorry that there's not one soul we don't love. That our union with Christ increases the size of our heart. That the heart has an endless coefficient of expansion, He says. And when we are united to Our Lord, there's no person we're not interested in, that we're interested in everybody. So, my first sentiment must be this hunger to know the Master, Jesus says. Apostolic zeal. Step number one, hunger to know the master.

And so, I need to bring my plan of life to another level. I have to see the reading, the meditation, the Mass, Communion, the Rosary, these are ports of entry into that heart of Christ so that I really love everybody I meet. It's a question of union with Him. I mean, I think we'd be going about this, seeking the periphery, if we reduced it to just some techniques or even a little bit of a guilt trip. Yeah, um, it's a little bit, I'm writing them off, I shouldn't write them off, I have to be more charitable. No. More union with Our Lord.

I was reading memoirs of St. John Paul II one of his, I think, in one of his last books, *The Rise Let Us Go [Rise, Let Us Be on Our Way]*. And it was a grace, but it came from his union with Christ that any man or any person he met, he said he felt that Christ was visiting him. Christ was coming to encounter him. And so, if anybody who asked for his time, anybody who ran into him, he would see Christ there. And it's Jesus Himself, who says that He is present in people who seem to be the least of our brethren. "If you did it to the least of your brethren, you've done it for me." And who are. . . that's a very loaded phrase, the least of His brethren.

I think we could safely say, someone who can't stand the Catholic faith could seem like the least of his brother. Obvious. Or someone who is angry at the Church. Or someone who has absolutely no interest in the faith. Perhaps this could give all of us light. Because Lord, what you're telling me here is I've got to get out of my comfort zone. And, perhaps I have to email once in a while a nephew I have. And, I got to do it right so I don't spook him. You know, all of a sudden, you know, he hasn't heard from me for years and now I'm emailing him. What does he want? What? What's going on. But, I need to get out of that comfort zone.

And that person at work who has no interest at all, in fact, he doesn't like me because he's figured out that I'm a serious Catholic or I'm trying to be. I reach out to him and taking that risk that Our Lord took, and he really did a lot of reaching out and he didn't get reciprocity, especially when he died on the Cross. And, and he even said, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing. And, didn't seem like too many people's hearts were softened when he said it. I'm sure that happened, but it's not recorded the Gospel. So we have to be willing to be martyrs of the ordinary. Our kind overtures may be thrown back, back in our face, but it's never wasted.

This young man who was coming to me for direction, I told him that, you know, you need to try to draw your friends close to Christ. And, he said, Well, his, his close friend, has no interest at all in religion. I said, well, let him know what makes you tick and let's see what happens. So, he did. He came back. He said, Fr. Peter, that was very bad advice. I practically lost a friend. And he insulted me for being insecure. You know, that I'm hiding behind religion. And, that, that I shocked, that he shocked his friend for being so simplistic. And, so infantile, and with all due respect, even superstitious. This is within, I'll say, pseudo intellectual circle of people. And, he said, If you bring this up again, I don't want to deal with you anymore.

So, he told me that was bad advice, again, because he almost lost a friend. And, he was discouraged that his First Apostolic effort failed. So I gave him standard advice, advice, you would say, well, just pray for your friend and leave him alone. Don't lose the friendship, respect his freedom. That's part of it, too. We have to respect freedom because otherwise it's pointless.

Fast forward seven, eight months. That same friend who threatened to break off their relationship if he brought up religion was curious because this friend was friendly, and cheerful, loyal. [Saying to the young man,] You're kind of different. You seem to be stable. I guess that's, it's normal, but not usual anymore. And he said, do you get counseling? And he said, No, I don't. He said, Are you taking supplements? And he said, No. He said, Do you work out? Because you seem to have energy? He says no. He said, Well, there's something up. What's going on?

He said, Well, I don't want to tell you because I don't want to ruin the friendship. And he said, No, no, you... tell me because something's working. As well, I do have a relationship... I'm trying to deal with with God. I'm trying to follow Christ. I pray, I receive the sacraments. He said, You know, I, maybe I can look into it a little bit more, because it's working. There's something definitely there. He said, is there somebody I could talk to?

So, I don't know if he got further than that, but this desire to bring Christ to others has to come from the heart. It has to come from the gut. That's why our apostolate is in overflow. That as St. Josemaria teaches, when we're close to Christ there's not one soul we're not interested in. And we love so much that we run, we will take that risk of being rejected, and being judged, and being labeled. That's why that first catechism Jesus published, because we're in the same situation as our first brothers and sisters. And it bears repeating, because the New Testament is a history of the early Christians, and that's written by God Himself.

So, it's God's will that, that particular era be a standard of reference for us. And, even more so, since that was the age of the laity where they actually transformed a culture. We find ourselves in that very same situation. And so, Our Lord publishes a catechism. It's a two-line catechism. And He repeats that catechism at least three times, in the intimacy of the Last Supper, "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another. As I have loved you." And, Our Lord, last time we checked, loves every single human being. We must love as He has loved. There's nobody He does not love. And, the Gospel has infinite meaning. And, isn't that what Our Lord did? He went to the periphery.

Who are the great evangelizers but former sinners. One person who denies Him three times. Another, publican, who throws a wild party with loose women and other mafia types. An individual who terrorized Christianity; we celebrated his feast a few days ago, St. Paul, converted loose women, converted prostitutes. "Love one another as I have loved you." With His universal love, I'm interested in everybody and in His intense love, His affection, His joy.

Our Father says in, *The Way*, we finish up, apostolic zeal is the divine madness I want you to have. It has these symptoms, hunger to know the master, constant concern for souls, perseverance nothing can shake. And, we go to the blessed Virgin Mary. Perhaps, we could hearken to the apparition of Fatima where Mary makes it very clear, "I want people to come back to my Son." "I want you to be instruments of the conversion of sinners, people alienated from God." And, when we go to Mary, many, many conversions occur. We could look at any apparition we want. Guadalupe really drives home that fact.

Mary, we want to stay close to you so that we love more with the heart of your Son. And, we want to have His sentiments of wanting to touch as many people as possible with this true everlasting life. This true good news of great joy. I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections and inspirations You have 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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