

Episode: At the School of Prayer with St. Josemaria

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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 you for pardon of my sins, and the grace, to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Mother Immaculate, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

Perhaps we could begin this period of prayer by placing ourselves, with the aid of our imagination and with God's grace, by placing ourselves at the Last Supper. In the cenacle, that's a large upper room ready and furnished, which is so much part of your biography, Lord Jesus. And at the same time, so much part of our biography. In a certain sense, the Church, our family, is born there. That's why the upper room is where we feel quite at home. And during the Last Supper, in that upper room, the dialogue of Our Lord with the Apostles, and vice versa, is very intimate. And one might say that Jesus, in the Last Supper, opens His heart, to us, to His Apostles, to His followers of all ages, in an unprecedented way. And indeed, we could feel grateful to St. John, the Apostle, for the detailed account, he gives of Our Lord's words, at the Last Supper.

In a certain sense, we could say the Last Supper is testamentary, for Our Lord. He is leaving us His last will and testament. Although, of course, Lord, you're not dead, you live forever. But nonetheless, that's the last great discourse we have of you before your Passion, before the Cross and Resurrection. And therefore, we treasure it. All of the Last Supper, and all of Our Lord's words, they are worth meditating on. And all of them give us great lessons for life. And among them, are those words of yours, Lord, which can pierce to the very marrow of the bone of our soul, as it were, where you tell us: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Such a simple metaphor, something which is completely understandable to us, in whatever historical epoch, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If you abide in me, if you live in me, if you are a branch grafted unto me, if you are one with me, you will bear much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing."

Jesus, without further ado, in this moment of my prayer I ask you to deeply ingrain this truth on my soul. That without you nothing; with you everything! We could say that St. Paul formulates the same truth, a fruit, I'm sure, of his own experience; hard won experience, when he says those words, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." Indeed, the danger of activism, of volunteerism, of thinking that we have to do it all, and that the measure of our life is our measurable productivity, our achievements in inverted

commas, our meeting our goals. This is a real danger for us. Because in society, we tend to measure things by people's doings and achievements. But what ultimately gives value to any life is communion with Christ. What makes life transcendent? What fills ordinary life with the greatness of God? Ultimately, it's prayer. A person who prays leaves a deep and lasting, somehow an eternal imprint on history. Because the person who prays is truly a branch grafted on to the eternal and infinite vine of Christ.

So, Lord, I ask you through the intercession of Our Lady, also through the intercession of St. Josemaria, a great teacher of prayer, to help me to renew this awareness of the essential nature of prayer and how transformative it is. That it is what produces the fine wine, of Christian holiness, in me and around me. Without prayer, nothing! With prayer, everything!

Now of all the branches on the vine, and there are many branches, as many as there are people in the Holy Church of God, in the family of God, of all the branches on the vine, the most beautiful, and the strongest, and the most fruitful branch is Our Lady. Because there is nobody who surpasses her in the life of prayer. And in one of his homilies on Our Lady entitled, *The Blessed Virgin, Cause of our Joy*, St. Josemaria dedicates a number of paragraphs to the life of prayer. And he's drawing on the example of Mary, you might say, drawing on the experience of Our Lady's soul, as a person of prayer. And maybe here in these few moments of prayer together, we can meditate on this, we can pray with Our Lord about the life of prayer, having in mind the example and indeed the intercession, the support of the most faithful branch, the most fruitful branch, the most beautiful branch, Our Lady. Because it's in the context of Our Lady, Cause of our Joy, that St. Josemaria meditates on, on prayer, and on the life of prayer. So, let's let him, in a sense, give us this meditation.

He says among other things, "We ought to be seriously committed to dealing with God. We cannot take refuge in the anonymous crowd. If interior life doesn't involve personal encounter with God, it doesn't exist. It's as simple as that." It's quite a strong and incisive statement, isn't it? "If interior life doesn't involve a personal encounter with God, it doesn't exist. It's as simple as that." But of course, we know it's true. And it's helpful for the saints, to formulate things for us like this. St. Josemaria, who is a great pastor of souls, a loving father, a great teacher of prayer, he does well to remind us of this, "If interior life doesn't involve a personal encounter with God, it doesn't exist."

Lord, let my prayer to you be personal. Let it have something of me. Let it be genuine. Like Moses, in the Old Testament. One of the most beautiful things we hear about Moses is that the Lord spoke to him face to face as a man speaks with his friend. Jesus, that's how I would like to speak with you. I don't want anonymity. I don't want my prayer to be purely formal, or routine or superficial. I'd like my prayer to be a genuine conversation, an expression of love, real communion, real communication.

This doesn't mean that our prayer has to be all structured or it has to be, I don't know, super planned in advance or . . . no. The important thing is that we speak with Our Lord with simplicity, that we listen to Him with spontaneity, that we try and tune into Him. That we seek that face-to-face encounter with the Lord. We could remember in this regard, St. Josemaria's example and that of many other saints, including Saint John Paul II, how, at the end of his life, this is the case with St. Josemaria, but also, we see it in the later writings of St. John Paul, that hunger to see the face of Christ using the words of the Psalm, "It is your face oh Lord that I seek. Hide not your face from me."

See, when you and I, when we do our prayer, when we try and pray, and to be honest, to try to pray is already to pray. But when you and I, when we find ourselves before the Blessed Sacrament, or before the crucifix on a quiet walk, and we're trying to, to pray, let us seek the face of Jesus. Let us seek out His person,

let us listen to His voice, which is directed personally and in amiably to each one of us. "God seeks us out one by one," says St. Josemaria, "and we are to answer Him one by one. Here I am, Lord, because you have called me." This is a beautiful aspect, isn't it, of the Christian faith? That whereas perhaps in other religions, or in other aspects of the history of religions, religion is seen as, as people searching for God, desperately trying to find God, grappling with the idea of God and looking for Him. Whereas what distinguishes the Christian faith is that it is God who seeks man out. Our Lord who does everything. You might say he bends over backwards, to seek us out and to win our hearts. Yes, Lord Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd, who will seek out the lost sheep and carry me on your shoulders and nurse my wounds, and forgive my meanderings and my wanderings.

You are the father of the prodigal son who always welcomes me back, you seek me out. While the son is yet at a distance, the father sees him, because God is seeking us out even when we're a bit lost. You, Lord Jesus, are the searcher for fine pearls of refined jewels. And when you find one hidden in the field, you sell all that you own, to buy that field. And that pearl is you, is me. In God's eyes and God's heart, we are worth selling everything. Our Lord gives everything. He empties himself taking the form of a slave and humbles himself even to the Cross. Why? To raise us up. God seeks us out. The Lord seeks us out in Christ. You, Lord Jesus, are the Good Shepherd, who seeks us out, even though we're battered and bruised and half dead, through sin and through our fallen nature and our own distraction. And you pay for us. Not with a certain number of coins, a generous amount like the Good Shepherd. You pay for us with your very blood. Yes, Lord, you seek us out.

And that is a theme that is quite present in the preaching and in the words of St. Josemaria. And it's a beautiful theme to meditate on, that God seeks us out. You may remember in his book, *The Way*, in the chapter on the Holy Mass, he speaks of the Eucharist precisely in those terms. "The Eucharist is the mystery of God who comes looking for us. There He is, King of kings, and Lord of lords, hidden in the Bread. To this extreme, He has humbled Himself for love of you." God comes looking for us in the Incarnation. God comes looking for us in creation. God comes looking for us in the Eucharist. Or, that other point again about the Eucharist, where St. Josemaria says, "When you approach the tabernacle, remember that he has been waiting for you for twenty centuries." Lord Jesus, help me to realize that you, you call me, you call me by my name, or as St. Josemaria liked to say, "The Lord calls us by our special nickname, by that affectionate name that perhaps only our mother might know. That's how much he loves us. That's how tenderly he calls us." So, when we come to pray, the life of prayer is not primarily just effort on my part but it's a response to Our Lord's call.

Continuing with these words of St. Josemaria from *Christ is Passing By*, point 174, that's what we're meditating on here, he says, "We all know that prayer is to talk with God. But someone may ask, What should I talk about? What else could you talk about but his interests and the things that fill your day? About the birth of Jesus, his years among us, his hidden life? His preaching his miracles, his redemptive passion and death, his Resurrection. And, in the presence of the Triune God, we will speak of our everyday work, of our family, of our friendships, of our big plans, and little shortcomings. The theme of my prayer is the theme of my life."

So, in the first place, the Founder of the Work suggests that in our prayer, we would pray about Our Lord, himself. And it's true in every. . . this is true of any loving relationship of whatever kind, that we tend to focus on the other. How are you? How are you feeling? How are things with you? How is your life? What is your experience? We may not formulate our dialogue in exactly those words, but that is the departure point, isn't it? For any truly loving dialogue, we have eyes only for the other. And this applies, of course, also to our prayer life.

And that's why I suppose a privileged and very special or effective way of praying is to bring the Gospels to our prayer. The Gospel is where we see you, Lord, as you are, where we see the face of the Father in you, where we see all the love of the Trinity, in your words, and in your actions. That's why to meditate on the Gospel, to see the person of Our Lord, is always so powerful, so helpful for us and we know it. And this is something again St. Josemaria has taught us, along with many other saints, of course, this meditation on scripture, on the person of Christ.

There are many ways of doing this, you know. It could be meditating literally on the text of the Gospels or meditating on texts which in turn comment on the Gospels. It could be silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, before the Sacrament of Jesus in his Passion and in his Resurrection. When we pray before the Sacred Host, either reserved in the tabernacle, or exposed in the monstrance, or in the ciborium. Whenever we pray before the Eucharist, we're praying before the body broken for us and the blood poured out for us. We're praying before Christ, in his Humanity and in his Divinity. We're praying before the whole Christ, and inseparable from Him, the Father and the Holy Spirit. So, prayer before the Holy Eucharist is, is a wonderful way of praying. And perhaps we find ourselves praying before the crucifix, which is, you could say, a whole compendium of the Gospel, or praying before an image of Our Blessed Mother, which again, is a reflection of the Incarnate Word of Christ.

So many ways in which we can focus on the person of Our Lord, perhaps praying about the readings of the day from the Liturgy of the Word at Mass, or praying about the Divine Mercy, or about the Sacred Heart, or other devotions, the face of Jesus, the wounds of Christ. There are so many ways of dwelling on Our Lord's person, of one way or the other meditating on the Gospel. And we don't confine ourselves to that. But as the Founder of the Work says, here, "In the presence of the Triune, God, we will speak also of our everyday work, of our family, of our friendships, of our big plans, and little shortcomings." Surely, this is also what Our Lady did in her prayer. Twice in his Gospel, St. Luke has that beautiful, you might say, interior portrait of Mary, "his mother kept all these things, pondering them in her heart."

And you and I, who live our lives in the maelstrom of, of ordinary life, of coming and going, of business, of agriculture, of technology, of culture, of health, of sickness, of marriage, of celibacy, or whatever our vocation or life is in the middle of the world, whatever we're doing in all those different contexts. And we want to be like Mary, who kept all these things pondering them in her heart.

We conclude, I would like to conclude this meditation by making our own the words of St. Josemaria as he concluded his meditation. Let us ask the blessed Virgin to make us contemplatives to teach us to recognize the constant call from God at the door of our heart. Let us ask her now: "Our Mother, you brought to earth Jesus, who reveals the love of our Father, God, help us to recognize Him in the midst of the cares of each day." Stir up in our mind and will, excuse me, "stir up our mind and will, so that we may listen to the voice of God to the calls of grace."

I thank you, my God for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you have communicated to me in this time of prayer. I ask you for help to put them into effect. My Mother Immaculate, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.