

Episode: “Dinner with Jesus”

Contributor: Fr. Leo Agustina

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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.

In the Gospel of today's Mass, we read something about Jesus and his interaction with a human being. And maybe because of the distance of centuries, we put the Gospel in a box, maybe the box of urban legends are nice stories that have nothing to do with us. But this is not true. The beauty of the Gospel is precisely that it applies to you today, to me. Right now, Jesus is passing by and talking to us. And that's why the Gospel is alive. So, let's read it not as a legend, or as a fantasy, but as a reality. Jesus is alive. Jesus, we believe that you are alive. That's why I said, I believe that you are here with me, in my heart, in the tabernacle if you're in the church, in your soul, in my soul, when we're in state of grace.

So, let's listen to what Jesus has to say today, to you, to me, putting ourselves inside the scene of the Gospel. And it says that, “Jesus went out again, beside the sea; all the crowd gathered about him” (Mk 2:13). People like you, you are not just a doctor, you are not just an inspiring guy, you are giving answers, to thirsty people, of truth, of beauty. And today, Jesus, the same happens to me, I'm thirsty. “And then he taught them” (Mk 2:13) with patience, with great examples, with your life, with your smile. And as he passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax office. Jesus passing by many people at their work, at their jobs. Where people were working, Jesus made himself present, which has a huge message, which means that God is aware, and not only aware, he really cares. He comes to you right now. I don't know if you're in college, or you're a young professional or not so young, it doesn't really matter. Jesus is coming to your office, to your desk, to your car, to your kitchen, whatever it is, to your life. In the Gospel, we see how Jesus comes to the boat of Peter, to his own boat, to his own life, right. And the same happens to you if you want, if you open the door.

And I have a complaint. I gotta say that the Gospel sometimes is a little bit too brief. But it has enough. Because the Gospel says that Jesus went to this tax office, there was a person working there, Levi. And this is when it comes to a very brief kind of statement, Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” And then he rose and followed him, leaving everything behind. And what about you? What about me? Do you listen to Jesus? Do I listen to him? Of course, I bet you that Levi and Jesus met before that encounter. Probably at the synagogue or maybe Levi went for dinner with him or met him at some place before that and there was an ongoing conversation about the meaning of life about the purpose of his existence. And Jesus probably

opened to him horizons of deep meaning, direction or drive, and then Levi was listening to Jesus. And that morning, after maybe some conversations, Our Lord told him, "Why don't you follow me?"

In every vocation I like to say that there is a cocktail, like a cocktail that we do for drinks. There is a cocktail between two ingredients, two basic ingredients: one of them is a calling and the other side, or the other component of the cocktail, is your freedom. A vocation is not an Amazon package that falls from the sky and then like a surprise that you open and then you're gonna adapt to it completely, like something strange, or something that has nothing to do with you. Like a plan that has been eternally designed for you and you just need to open up and adapt and just figured it out; like something strange or random.

Vocation is a combination between your freedom and the grace of God. My freedom, and your invitation. And that's the beauty of every vocation. Because Jesus says, "Follow me" if you want to. And then he listens, and then he arose, and followed Him. The Gospel is really a piece of beautiful art, a real story because you can see how then Levi, with initiative, follows Jesus. Not like a zombie, or like a robot because he invited him over for dinner, right. That makes sense. You'd be following me; we spend our lives together forever. I want you, Jesus, to come to my life. My vocation is not only following you, but bringing you to my life, it is both sides, right. So, Levi, invited Jesus over for dinner. Can you imagine such a thing? Jesus Christ going for dinner. That'd be so great.

I watched the other day, another episode of this TV show, I really like it. If you don't like it is okay. It's not the Gospel, but it's based on the Gospel, *The Chosen*. And there's one episode where Mary Magdalene is just freed from her demons and started to live a life of dignity and beauty. And it is still in the very early stages of her vocation. And then she gathers with some friends to celebrate the Passover, like any other Jewish woman. And there are a few of them, she's not very popular, because she has this reputation of being a big sinner, seven demons, right. So, she has a very small party, like you we see in our lives that sometimes we're not popular. And then she has like three or four friends coming over for dinner, for the Passover, and they're preparing it very nicely, very humbly and, and it's beautiful. And then the door, someone knocks at the door. "Knock, knock." And she goes there, because they're surprised, who's the last person coming here? And then she opens the door, and it's, Jesus! I'm not saying that this is a historical fact, but I like to think that probably something like that happened to many other people. Like Jesus knocking at their doors literally, and saying, "Can I have Passover with you?" And then Mary Magdalene in that scene is kind of shocked, and very happy and surprised, and overwhelmed having Jesus for the Passover. And she doesn't even know that he is the Messiah, that the lamb is his future sacrifice on the Cross and the Eucharist. But it is so beautiful to see Jesus coming to her.

And the same thing here, like Levi saying, "If I want to spend the rest of my life with you, why don't you come to my life, Jesus?" And then look at what happened because it's very interesting. Many tax collectors, obviously, and sinners who were sitting with Jesus and his disciples, Matthew (Levi, Matthew is the same name) coworkers, and they were friends, and then he wanted to bring Jesus to them. And then they were together. Some of them are atheists, some would say nowadays, maybe liberals or whatever, right. And then Scribes and the Pharisees, when they saw that he was sitting with them, with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Mt 9:11). And then Jesus heard that and he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick," do need a physician, "I came precisely not to call the righteous but sinners" (Mt 9:12-13).

And I don't know what was the conversation that night at the house of Levi, but I'm sure that they were not talking all the time about the temple or the Torah. Maybe they were talking about horses, or parties, or the wine that was so good. Maybe they were a little frivolous or superficial because they were at the

very early stages of meeting Jesus Christ. And Our Lord was fine with this. So, what I'm trying to say, my Lord, is that in every vocation, there's a story to be told and to be unfolded. And you are fine with that. And you are actually creating that story together with the protagonist. Again, not like a package that falls from the sky, and then God is telling you what to do, and then he's against your will, and against your, your loves or against your dreams, that will be so cruel. It's God saying: Can I put music to your life? Can I give you color to the movie of your life? Can I give you rhythm to your poems? Can I accompany you?

I was reading recently, Bishop Barron, there is this book that he wrote about the centrality of Jesus Christ. And he has a term, it is the first time I read it, the term, or heard about it, it is co-inherence, co-inherence. And kind of a difficult word. But basically, what he's saying is that, in changing the world, in redeeming the world, in coming to our time, and in his humanity, Jesus Christ, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, did something really spectacular, and really beautiful, which is co-inherence. Which means that they permeated human realities without destroying them. Meaning, they intervened, they touched history, to redeem it, to bring it to another level, but at the same time respecting the normal course of humanity, like the normal pace, the normal rhythms of humanity. Otherwise, it would be unnatural.

What about your vocation? Do you understand that God wants to make you better? He is calling you, respecting you, respecting me. And I really appreciate your refinement, Jesus, in coming to my life, to change it. But at the same time, enjoying the fact that I am the owner of my life, and you are just accompanying me with respect. The fact that you respect me is so beautiful. Of course, sometimes I would say, do not respect me Jesus, just take over. You have better ideas than I do and, you know, way more. But you would tell me, "No, you're free. I enjoy the process, more than the end or the outcome." And this is something difficult for me to accept.

St. Josemaria in, *The Way*, has a chapter on calling, on vocation. And in the point 913, he says, "Don't doubt it. Don't doubt it. Your vocation is the greatest grace Our Lord could have given you. Thank him for it." St. Josemaria is telling you, whispering, your vocation is the greatest grace that Our Lord could have given you. Your vocation is a treasure. In other parts of the Gospel Jesus says that it is like a pearl, a hidden treasure that the man or woman discovers and then follows that treasure, takes a treasure to an inner place, protects it, sells everything. In other words, it's like a compass that directs every action, every love—that's so human and divine at the same time.

If you go to Rome, I hope you do. I think every Catholic should go to Rome and to the Holy Land at least once in, in your life, right. I've been in Rome several times. I've lived there for five years; I have never been in the Holy Land. And it was one of my dreams, obviously, as a priest, to go there. To celebrate Mass in the holy sites, it's just a, is a dream, really. And I hope Our Lord gives me that chance before I die, right. But if you go to Rome, you will go to the Vatican. And every time I go to the Vatican with someone, I think the experience is the same that people say, in one way or another, "Man, I feel at home. This is my home." This is the first time here, but just seeing the Vatican, the tomb of Peter, you feel, you almost touch history, right. And you feel at home. This is my family. Now this is really beautiful.

And in the Vatican, you have different options, obviously. But I think one of the biggest, or the greatest places that you can visit is the Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo. And there are many different scenes of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Creation, which is iconic. If you remember, if you have seen pictures, probably, of God the Father creating the world. And then there's this scene where you see God the Father as kind of an old man surrounded by angels, and he's with his power he's touching, about to touch, to give life to Adam. And then you see both fingers almost touching each other, right. This is very iconic. Many pictures and paintings are with those two fingers. And Michelangelo apparently wanted to give a

message in, in this scene because the finger, and it's a very kind of small detail, but it makes a lot of sense, apparently, the finger of God the Father is completely stretched out, cannot go farther. He is making an effort with his power, his creative power, with his freedom, as God the Father and the Holy Trinity, like he's reaching out, stretching to, to get closer to us. And then Adam is there too. And his finger is a little bent. It's not completely stretched out. And then Michelangelo wanted to represent this combination, this kind of tension, which is good, between God's invitation and human freedom, right. And then God cannot do more in order to love. Cannot. He reaches a limit, even if he's God, he reached a limit, which is not because he's incapable of loving more, but it's because he cannot oblige us to love. That's the limit, right. Our freedom and God accepted that and created that, actually, because he saw something beautiful in it. And then God is saying, "I cannot do more, literally." Begging you, "Can we be together? Can we walk together? Follow me, please. I'm begging your friendship, our friendship." And then it is up to Adam to say, "Okay, do I want to stretch? I'm so close. I am completely dependent on God. I am ontologically linked to him, or whatever, but in the end, it is my option, my choice. Do I want to stretch a little bit more and touch God in my life? Allow him to enter?" So, that's a question for today.

Jesus, my Lord, God, the Father, Holy Spirit, I want you to know that I don't have any restriction for you. I want you to know, I want to give you my entire heart, my mind, my past life, my present life, my future. Everything is yours. I want to give you the keys of my soul. I want to give you complete access to my heart, entirely for you. I don't want to be separate from you, even a millimeter. I don't want anything to block or to blur my connection with you. I like to listen to everything you have to say. And, in my freedom, I want to tell you that I want just to give my entire life to you, to follow you as close as I can. I want to replicate your effort. And with complete freedom I want to give myself to you like Matthew, that morning, or St. Peter, or the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Josemaria. All the saints were invited and all the saints, through the journey of their vocation, in one way or another, at some point surrendered. And they say for sure, "I'm yours."

Recently I was on a plane. And sometimes on the planes I watch movies because they entertain you and they make the trip a little shorter. So, what's this movie by name, *Yesterday*, which is a comedy but it has some depth. Yeah, it's deep, kind of has some depth. It is called, *Yesterday*, and it is about a guy that is a musician. And he's not that mediocre, but he's good. He likes music. He likes the Beatles. And then he plays guitar and pops in little concerts. And he's not successful. He's trying to make his life out of music, but has other jobs and struggling financially. He likes music. And, anyway, and at some point, there's this science fiction thing. There's this kind of a weird phenomenon on the earth, like a blackout, electricity, whatever, some cosmic problem, and then suddenly the whole world is in darkness for 12 seconds, I think. And then the whole world comes back to normal after 12 seconds. And then some memories are lost for some people among them. Suddenly, after these 12 seconds, and again it's a science fiction movie, nobody knows anything about the Beatles. They didn't exist, period. But this protagonist, this mediocre musician, is the only one in the world that knows all their songs. And he knows them. He knows them. And he knows how to play them. But nobody else, there's nothing; no trace from the Beatles in history. So, he goes to Google and there's nothing. He asks friends, other musicians. Beatles? What's that? And then, the whole movie is hilarious because he becomes very famous. He starts playing the normal songs of the Beatles, and the people are saying why this is crazy, there's a new order of music, this is really awesome. And he becomes very famous, he goes to Hollywood, he signs for a big company. Anyway, there is a tension with his girlfriend, I don't want to spoil the whole movie for you.

But there's a moment in the movie, that he sees two guys in a concert that want to talk to him. And they look at him in that kind of a way that he thinks maybe they know, too, that I'm, I'm lying here. I'm not lying, but I'm taking advantage of something that I didn't create, right. So, he's a little scared about that. And

then at the other concert, these two guys come to him, they want to talk to him. Ok, let's talk. And then they say in the movie, "Hey, you're using the music of the Beatles, right? Like, the group that nobody else..." Yeah! And then he says, "Are you going to denounce me? Are you gonna...?" And they say, "No. No, no, no, we are here to tell you that we're so happy that you are playing them, because we are the three people in the whole world that remembers them or knows about them. And we're so happy that you brought those songs back. So, we were actually trying to thank you for bringing the Beatles back." Right. And the movie continues.

But for a while, I was thinking that our vocation, in a way, makes us aware of something very, very special. That is, the existence of God. And that goes to a personal level. And then the discovery of that may be because we have been raised Catholic, or we have been always surrounded by other Catholic people. Maybe we're used to it. But it's something really special. So, when you read the Gospel, when I read the Gospel, we're opening up a book that is eternal. And the joy of remembering that, like these guys saying, "Hey, you brought us back the songs that you know, were very important in history of music." Imagine with the Gospel, we're bringing back the life of Jesus!

And you, my Lord, you are alive. This is not a joke. This is a reality. And you're respecting me and you're enjoying my life. And I, I want to be aware of this and to open up my heart to you today. Because you are the same Jesus that existed in the Gospel, and walked through the Holy Land, and performed all those miracles, and said all those parables, and died on the cross. You are life. You're life for me—for the world in general, for human beings, yet for me, personally. And if I were the only guy in the world that remembered that, I would be thrilled and moved to explain to the whole human history, there was this Savior that came and he's God that entered into history, and look at what he did. And if I were the only one remembering the Gospel, I would write it down and bring it to the rest of the world and then restart the Church, right. Like this guy with the Beatles. Like, I have something really important to tell to the world. So, what about if we start with ourselves, in our prayer, in my prayer to reflect on that I have something really beautiful? What St. Josemaria says is the greatest treasure. And maybe, my Lord, sometimes I get confused. Again, because I think that my vocation is a tension between my freedom and your, your dreams, and then they're not the same. They're not on the same page. You go against me. You're kind of limiting my possibilities. And this is so absurd. Can you imagine calling God the Dreamer, the killer of dreams, or the dreams killer? That's absurd. It is someone that dreams big. It is someone that has creative power. It is someone that has the possibility and the capacity of doing beautiful things that the first Creator of Beauty is God. And that applies not only to, you know, the landscapes that you see in Google, with the pristine water and the mountains or the weird animals with different colors. Oh, that's beautiful! That's it. No. The principle, the most important beauty, is your relationship with him—that's the treasure that we should rediscover every single day.

I discovered recently this prayer by Bishop Oscar Romero. I suppose in a way it's about vocations. It is a little long. So, you will forgive me if I read it, because it's kind of long. But I, I think he says, so many things that help us today to understand ourselves and our role in history. He says:

"It helps now and then, to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom of God is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete. Which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that we could say. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings you wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything. This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they will hold future promises. We lay

foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capacities. We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it very well. It might be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and to do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future, not our own."

How beautiful this is to think that my vocation goes beyond me. That of course there's my freedom, my cooperation, but at the same time, it goes beyond. It is more beautiful than myself, thank God, right. And we're putting the seed of eternal trees. You, today, when you interact with a friend, you will not finish his salvation, I will not finish, not the Church, right. So, in history, everything is going to be tainted by sin, incomplete, open to further development, and we should not panic about that. We will do our best in combination with the grace of God that does the rest. And that's the beauty, that we are humble enough to say, okay, my vocation is me inviting Jesus to meet me first or to talk to him, to follow him, and then my friends, sinners, tax collectors. And that's my role hoping that God will, with his grace, will do the rest. And, but not that just me or not just him, it's both. This the beauty, this is the treasure, that you are co-author of the history of Redemption, even if you and I are nothing. God wants you to have a say and he enjoys that, working with you. Why? I don't know. But he wants to work with you in your own soul and in the history of salvation. Something that I don't deserve Jesus that you take me so seriously and at the same time respecting me.

Let us ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to not only to accept but to enjoy to dive in this cocktail of God, begging your love. And you and I opening to him as she did, with the same smile, with the same generosity.

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