

## Episode: The Great Project of Our Life

Contributor: Rev. Msgr. Fred Dolan

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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.

This is a very special time for us to pray together. A great time for reflection. Anytime we pray is a moment of reflection. But at this time of year, there's something special in the air. You undoubtedly remember the first time you read this very poignant point from *The Way* by St. Josemaria where he writes, "Have you seen the dead leaves fall in the sad autumn twilight? Thus souls fall each day into eternity. One day, the falling leaf will be you." From the very first moments of this time of prayer together, we ask Jesus to give us this perspective to help us to stand back to take a look at this life of ours on this earth, to realize that our time here is very short.

You may have come across that inscription on a tombstone, who knows where the, the original is, but the tombstone represents that which those the deceased there in that cemetery are saying to us. They're saying *that which you are, we were, that which we are, you will be*. We need that. Is it not true that some people are terrified to think about death? Some people, they just never take the time to step back and reflect, reflect on deeper things. Their attention is focused on the next vacation, on the coming weekend. But that's no way to go through life, it is equivalent to flying blind. One very thoughtful writer, put it this way, "Some people banish death from their thoughts. But this leads them to make choices in life that actually curtail their happiness. When we focus on death, well that increases the stakes at play in the present, and clarifies what we should do with our time." And he concludes, "if you insist on ignoring your own demise, you're likely to make decisions that cause you to sleepwalk through life. You may not be dead yet. But you're not fully alive either."

Well, the fact that we're making this day of recollection together, making this time of prayer together, is a sign that we really, truly passionately want to be fully alive—really, truly mindful of every moment through the day, every day of our life. We don't want to be walking, sleepwalking through life. This is what St. Josemaria was getting at in a very important point in *The Forge* when he says, "Ask Jesus for perspective, at least once a day, cast your mind ahead to the moment of death so that you can consider the events of each day in his light. I can assure you that you will have a good experience of the peace that consideration brings." You're probably thinking if I were to say to any of my friends, that my peace comes precisely from thinking at least once a day about death, they would shake their head in amazement. They wouldn't

believe me. And yet we know it makes all the sense in the world. It gives us perspective. At any given moment, we might be all flustered, anxious, stressed. And yet if we step back, especially in a time of meditation and prayer like this one, we take this little thing that has us so upset and then we compare it to eternity, we probably ended up giggling or at least saying, Why, why? Why should I let this thing get me upset? It is not important. This is why we need so badly to think about death. In the old days, there were, there was a brand new vitamin, I have no idea if it still exists, called One A Day vitamin. This is, this is our one a day spiritual vitamin that will allow us to be at great peace, serenity, taking each event, each difficulty in stride. Now a really interesting question, what if I were told that I have one month, one week to live? For whatever reason. Well that would certainly help us to focus. We would suddenly, instantly zero in on the things that really, really matter. And at the same time, we would ask ourselves, why do I give so much importance to things that just do not matter in the bigger scope of things?

Years ago, you probably came across that book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*. So you recall that really interesting grid with two axis, one axis, one axis was important and unimportant, and the other axis was urgent and non-urgent (or not urgent). The point of the author was, as so many people spend most of their time in the quadrant urgent but unimportant. If they were to step aside and reflect, they would be able to ask themselves, why? Why am I so urgent, so pressed, and therefore stressed by this thing that is unimportant? To exaggerate things a little bit, have you ever gotten yourself in a tizzy thinking, I just have to go driving half an hour to get to such and such a place, to buy a birthday card for my so-and-so who's turning one today? And so you get yourself in a tizzy, probably get a parking ticket. All because you have convinced yourself it is absolutely urgent. But it's not urgent. What we want to do is we ask you, Jesus, right now, you who are truly present here in the tabernacle, to help us to see all the different aspects of our life, all the different things on our to do list, from your perspective. Because what we want to do is to focus on things that are important. And furthermore, we want, we are determined to live the virtue of order, which means that we will be looking way ahead, so that we will rarely, if ever, be in the situation of thinking something is urgent. We give ourselves, we give our souls space, in order to take time, do things calmly, in the right order.

This is a great exercise for us. It's also a great attitude. This attitude that time is short, I don't have time to focus on trivial matters. You just don't have time. This will undoubtedly also bring to mind the great challenge that confronts everyone, globally these days, which is the screen. If we are really honest with ourselves, we'll say, why? Why did I just dedicate one hour or even two hours scrolling through Instagram, Tick Tock, YouTube? And walking away from those two hours with absolutely nothing to show for it. Those two hours are gone forever. Right now, we can make a resolution to limit ourselves, to box ourselves in, so to speak, so that we not get trapped into wasting time, valuable time, on things that are totally insipid, not just unimportant, but insipid.

All of this, all of these considerations, within a very important context, the great project of our life is gradual transformation into another Christ. Why do we pray? Because we want to take on upon ourselves the attitudes of Jesus, his ways of acting, his ways of responding to people, his vision of that which is important. The best attitude we can have, the best approach is this genuine eagerness to change on an ongoing basis. We long to change, to be transformed ultimately. One very important writer put it, he says, "Those who have no spiritual life really have no interior life." Well, as the weeks and months and years go by, that readiness to change diminishes to the point where they become petrified, like stone like, they're not going to change. On the other hand, that which interests us a great deal, to the extent that we have genuine interior life, spiritual life, we will be eager, passionately eager, to change. And when that happens, well, then accidental concerns, they recede into the background, our life becomes very simple. And then we're able to focus on the decisive aspects of our life. It's really interesting. It is possible to go through life,

with our head filled with accidental concerns, with complications. We don't have time to pay attention to accidental concerns and complications. We want our life to become very simple. And if you think about it, there are just very few things that are really, really, really urgently important. Important from God's point of view, that we become holy ultimately. And so we want this, to reach this moment, this point where the decisive aspects of life become genuinely accentuated. Just one example, the more we pray about love, about charity, the more we come to realize, well, sanctity holiness is the fullness of charity, and that means to quote St. Thomas Aquinas, "to love is to will the good of the other." Well, that takes reflection. Because our default setting is to focus on ourselves and what we're getting, what we're getting out of it, what our needs are. Whereas if we're really and truly loving, in our morning prayer, we can think then, okay, starting with those in my own household, I have to very proactively want the good of each one of them. And what does that mean? How can I ensure that my spouse, the kids, whoever's at home, is growing is thriving, is happy, is getting closer and closer to the fullness of life? And then great things happen.

We're going back to this topic of perspective, which actually we haven't even left. I was recently visiting my dentist, a Jewish dentist here in Toronto. He told me a very charming story that he had heard from a rabbi during a funeral. It seems that in a kingdom long, long ago, there was a woman who had three friends. One of them she adored. They were in touch every single day. The second friend, well, more or less, they would get together once a month for a cup of coffee. The third friend, well, they rarely ever were in touch. One day this woman was summoned to the castle by the King. When she got that summons, she was petrified. And so she called her first friend, the one that she adored and said, "can you please go with me to the castle? I'm really afraid." That friend said, "No way. Forget it, I will not go with you." So crushed, she turned to the second friend, filled with hope. The second friend said, "I will go with you as far as the doors of the castle, but I will not go with you beyond that." So then, practically despairing, she turned to her third friend not expecting anything. Well, amazingly, the third friend said, "I would be delighted to go with you. Not only will I accompany you, I will go ahead of you to prepare the way to get make sure that everything is ready for you to see the King." Well, as you can imagine, there is a moral to the story. What about that first friend, the one who was adored? Well, that is all our money. When we die, our money no longer does us any good. It will not even go with us to the castle. You probably remember that observation that you will never ever see a hearse pulling behind it a U-Haul trailer. You can't take anything. What about the second friend, the one who would go all the way to the gates of the castle? Well, that's our family. Our family will be there at our side, nonstop 24/7 when we're on our deathbed, but they can't go any farther than that, that's it. So who is this mysterious third friend, the one who will go ahead of us? Well, here you're about to learn a little bit of Hebrew, that third friend is our mitzvot, which is plural of mitzvah. In other words, our good deeds. Our good days will go ahead of us to prepare the way for us to meet the King of kings. That's a wonderful story that helps us realize that what really matters in this life is day by day leaving behind us a trail of mitzvot. Factor in these coming days, if any of your friends ask you what's new, you can say, "Well, I'm really focusing these days on mitzvot." Which, of course, as you know, is Hebrew for good deeds. And your friends will think you're very sophisticated, which you are.

Perspective, perspective, perspective. As we read in Scripture, "here, we have no lasting city." And St. Josemaria commenting on that fact that we had, this is not our lasting city. We're just passing through. And so he says, "Now is the time to untie all the bonds that bind us. Let us prepare ourselves at all times for that step that will bring us into the eternal presence of the Most Holy Trinity." So where do we go from here? Well, this is a great time for us, as we talk things over with you, Jesus, truly present here in the Blessed Sacrament. Strategy. I want to take this, I want to take this perspective and turn it into rules of engagement, so to speak. Well, the first one comes to us from, again from St. Josemaria, who has wonderful chapters on the Last Things, getting ready for death and what comes afterwards. And in *Furrow*, he says, "How happy when they die must be those who have lived heroically every minute of their life. I

can assure you it is so, because I've seen the joy of the those who have prepared themselves for many years with common patience for this encounter." The key here obviously is living heroically, every minute of their life. Ultimately, it comes down to the magical mindfulness, being really and truly mindful of the value of each minute. We ask you for that, Jesus. The opposite of mindfulness, of course, is mindlessness. And who wants to go through life in a mindless way? Another bit of strategy that is very important, we cannot allow ourselves to waste time trying to undo the past. It is inevitable that at any given moment, we might think back to something really dumb we did in eighth grade. That's the kind of thing we can very briefly, in an instant, learn from, take a lesson from that, but then move on. We can't get stuck in those recollections. St. Josemaria again comes to the fore, he says, "Do you feel sorrow for not having loved? Fine, but do not wallow in a wretchedness that God has already forgotten. He awaits your new response with a new love." We don't use the word wallow all that often, because we don't wallow all that, all that often. We can't get stuck in that recollection by eighth grade, or about three years ago, it doesn't matter. The marvelous thing about, one of the many marvelous aspects of Our Father, God, is that he loves forgiving us. He loves forgetting the dumb things that we do, which is why we have every right to not only move on, but to forge ahead, determined to respond with a new, grateful love.

Another surprising strategy, that hopefully will help, is the importance of helping our loved ones to prepare for death. We were mentioning at the very beginning how some people are terrified to think about death. But we have, we have to think about death. Otherwise, there's no way of getting prepared. There are certain cultures that have this vision of death that produces terror, which means that if someone from that culture, that country, is in the hospital and, if a priest enters the room, to give them consolation, maybe hear the confession, give the last rites, the person will be on the verge of having a heart attack just from seeing the priest, which that's a shame. We can't let that happen. But how do we go about helping people prepare for death? By focusing, helping them to focus, on things that really matter. It's what St. Josemaria is getting at when he says, "Death comes and cannot be avoided. What empty vanity it is then to center our existence on this life." Some years ago, a woman with a deep interior life went to see her friend who was on her deathbed. When she got there at the family home, she found her friend surrounded by family members. And they were saying to her things like, "You were just so beautiful." This woman with interior life was thinking to herself, who cares? That has nothing to do with anything. Why are you saying these stupid, insipid things? So she got down and close to the ear of her friend, she started talking to her about what comes next, about taking Heaven by storm, about making acts of contrition. This woman was mocked by the family members saying, "why are you talking like that? That's old fashioned." That's a pretty dumb thing to say, I'm sure you would agree. She was helping her friend to face facts. The fact is, we will be meeting the King of kings and we have to be ready. And that's what matters. We have to cast away all resentment. Not just as we're in the final weeks or months of our life, because we haven't, we have no idea when, when the Lord will call us back home. But in general, even right now, during this time of prayer, if we discover any kind of grudge, resentment, we have to get rid of it. It's too bad we can't buy grudge-o-meter somewhere. But I think we would know. We ask Jesus to help us, help us to know ourselves. I don't want to go around with this burden, with this weight. I don't want to be bonded to the grudge-e if I'm the grudge-or, it's just not worth it. So we jettison those grudges.

One thought that is important to bring to this time of prayer, because otherwise you will never ever come across it, but in *Amoris Laetitia*, the *Joy of Love* of Pope Francis, number 255, he touches a very sore point. It's logical that people mourn the death of a loved one. But we can't go overboard. There are people who will mourn for a month, maybe two months, but then they keep going. And a year later, they're still dressed in black. Not because black is a cool color, but because they're still in mourning. So the Pope says some words that really are tough love, so to speak: "At particular times, we have to help the grieving person to realize that after the loss of a loved one, we still have a mission to carry out, that it does us no good to

prolong the suffering, as if it were a form of tribute. Our loved ones have no need of our suffering. Nor does it flatter them that we should ruin our lives." Well, the final thought has to do with the everlasting, the eternal value of our actions. The fact is that a life well lived, which is what we're looking for, will have reverberations down through the centuries. It's no exaggeration to say that. Those bonds of love, the care that a parent gives and raising his or her children, will have lasting impact.

There was a wonderful story, and with this we conclude, about an elderly retired priest roughly 95 years old. One day he was asked as he looked back over those more than 70 years of priesthood whether that life of his of self-giving had been what he expected. And here's what he said, "Somewhere 1000 years ago, there was a priest, no one knows his name, no one remembers that he even existed. But because of his fidelity to his calling, centuries later, I came to know Jesus Christ. Somewhere 1000 years from now, a young couple will bring their child to the baptismal font to receive the new life of Christ. It will be because of me." Now, there's no way that we can wrap our head around 1000 years from now. But we can certainly think about two generations from now. Two generations from now, people will talk about the impact that our life of prayer, our interior life, our apostolic drive, our involvement in their lives, changed them completely. They will speak of us with great gratitude, with great devotion. And it is, it's very, it's a very holy thought, which will lead us to redouble our efforts to be mindful in each day.

Well, Mary, we finish this time of prayer, with much, much gratitude as always. How can we not be grateful to you? But we ask you, my dear Mother, to bring to our mind often to administer to us each day that one a day vitamin so that we put everything else in the perspective that this life is for keeps, that we are determined to take Heaven by storm.

I thank you, my God for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations that 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.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.