

## Episode: “The Big Picture”: Fourth Sunday of Advent

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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.

We are almost at the end of this journey that is bringing us closer and closer to your birthday, my Lord, to the day of your nativity, to the day that changed history forever. And speaking about journeys, I remember once I was on a ski trip, and we got stuck, literally, into the snow, because it was a blizzard. A journey that should have taken 20 minutes from the ski resort to our house, it took us four hours. And we were rescued by the police. And I got home and I remember that day very well because it's scary when you're in the middle of a blizzard, everything is confusing. There is no sense of where the direction of my house is or my destination and, and it's cold, obviously. Advent and the whole journey of the Old Testament is similar. The confusion after the Original Sin, the mess in history took so long to repair, to be repaired. But the good news is that going through that it gives us a sense of atonement, a sense of gratitude, because we're getting finally to the gates of the encounter with you, of Heaven. And Heaven started in this world to be a reality when, as the Gospel of today says, the Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth after centuries, after thousands of years. And it is very beautiful, to see what happened, and to compare, or to connect that visitation to the moment of the Original Sin when a guardian of Adam put a sword to protect Heaven to split for years the relationship between God and men and then to see how God with his infinite patience, you, My Lord, with your Providence, you drive us to towards the destination that is the encounter with you.

So let's read the gospel with this connection between Adam and Eve, and then the new Eve that is Mary. “The Angel Gabriel was sent from God.” What a gift that you sent your angel to this little girl, a virgin, Mary. The Tradition of the Church says that she was 17 years old—junior in high school, right? And, and then she was betrothed to a man named Joseph of the house of David. And when the angel came to her, as we repeat every day when we pray the Rosary, or when we pray the Angelus, with refinement, with almost with a music that is subtle, it's soft but it's tender and affectionate. He greeted her, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you.” And the Gospel says that Mary was greatly troubled at what was said and I imagine her blushing a little bit, right. Little girl, there, praying in her room and pondering what sort of greeting this might be. In her humility, in her purity, Mary doesn't understand such an honor. And then the Angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. And he will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give him the throne of David, his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end.” What a panorama, for a Jewish girl, for a virgin that was offering herself, not to be the mother of the Messiah, not to be in the line of succession of King David. What a surprise. Mary in her prayer, years before, understood that God was asking her to be a virgin

forever. And all her classmates or her friends were actually praying for the country, for being in line of King David's dynasty, and then maybe be lucky enough to be part of that chain that connected with the Messiah. So huge sacrifice, huge humility and purity, when Our Lady, praying, gave up that possibility to God. And then what a surprise today, when she's in her prayer, receiving such a message, right? And then we learn from Mary, many things, but one of the things that I think is more attractive, is her readiness, to use all her talents, with freedom, to adapt herself to the plans that God has for her and to put things in the big picture. How important is this, is this for me, my Lord, to put things in the big picture. The history of salvation is a history of my contribution to salvation as well. And all the talents that I have, first of all, my faith, my existence, even most important one, my existence, my faith, my relationship with you, my family, my country, my life, at the service of a bigger plan. But difficult, sometimes it's for me, my Lord, to forget about myself, right? And then we see in comparison to ourselves, we see how Mary, our mother says—and again, remember, he said, she's a young girl? So mature, right? She says, "How can this be? How do you want me to do this? I'm ready. But how can I help?" And you see a creature, a human being, with soul and body, surrendering everything, joyfully. And saying, of course, tell me what and how, "Behold, I am the handmade of the Lord. I don't have anything for myself, I don't want anything that may interfere between God and other human beings." The responsibility of Mary, her connection towards history, and with all human beings, her eagerness to say, "I want to be an instrument." And what about that instrument, right? Like the best instrument, the best channel that God found in history is in the, in the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in your heart, my Mother. That's why St. Josemaria, in one of his homilies in the book, *Christ is Passing By*, comments on this idea of vocation so strongly and so attractive to me, "to every Christian, he says, "to a Catholic, whatever his state in life, priest or a layman, married or single, we can apply fully the words of the Apostle, 'chosen by God, holy and beloved.' Chosen by God, holy and beloved, this is what we all are, each one in his place and position in the world, despite our errors, and in the midst of the struggle to conquer them." Men and women, chosen by God, to witness to Christ and to bring all those who surround us the joy of knowing that we are God's children. The vocation that we have received from God, to be pure, to be chosen means to be really happy, and to be clean in my heart.

Maybe in this last Sunday, the last one of Advent, my Lord, I want you to help me to have a heart. It is so important to feel my heart, not only just to protect it against impurity, which is the first thing, it's like playing defense in sport, it's protecting, right? But that's just the very basic idea of purity. Purity is not, not having mortal sins, or not having dirtiness. Purity is a growth inside us—a discernment like the Blessed Virgin Mary and saying, "How can I live my vocation? In my situation, like St. Josemaria was saying, right where we are, right now. If you're married, "how can I be a holy husband or wife?" If you're single, trying to get married, "how can I foster in me the idea of being a father or a mother in the future?" My habits, my hobbies, my occupations, right now, are shaping my personality. If you are called to live celibacy, "how can I be a father spiritually speaking? How can I care? Instead of hiding myself in my little things, how can I give myself to others?" And and then applies to every one of us, the idea of a pure heart, engaged with the world, engaged with my friends, engaged in transforming human reality. And not doing anything weird, on the contrary, just giving fullness of meaning to every human activity.

I remember, some years ago, I was in Rome. At the headquarters of Opus Dei, there is the crypt where St. Josemaria was buried and now it's Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. And there are many little chapels around that. And I was giving a tour to a family that was coming to visit for the first time. And I was trying to do my best, showing different parts of the building and the chapels. And one of the persons there, I think it was the wife, she said to me, "Where is the image of Our Lady with the ring?" And I said, "I beg your pardon?" And then she told me, "someone, one of my friends, told me that there's an image here with the Blessed Virgin Mary with a ring. And, and I'm married, and I just I want to see it because I'm so proud of Mary with a ring like me, like, like a normal wife." And I didn't know. So I was a little shocked or unhappy to hear that story, but I said "let me think about it." And then we went again, through the whole thing. And then it was so beautiful, because we realized, and I missed it many years, that there is actually there one image of Our Lady, very beautiful, very simple. And the author, which I don't know who he is, but anyway, the author put a ring in one of her hands. And then the

mom saw it and then the husband too. And they said, "Oh that's great. Let's take a picture." They were so proud of their vocation. And it is so true, my Lord, looking at Mary inspire us, all of us. And if, especially in this world, where we live now, to bring the idea of a family, to the world. To bring the purity of heart that this joyful reality that fills our hearts. And maybe today I want to ask Jesus, I ask you and ask Mary and Joseph, fill my heart. I don't want to protect it. I want to fill it up with faces, with names, with people that I love. Right now, I want to think what's in my heart.

I don't know if I told you the story. But some years ago, one of the teachers at the school where I work, came to me, he was beaming with joy. He was so happy. It was Friday before school ended. And, "Can I talk to you, father?" "Sure." So we went to my office. And then again, he was beaming and I said, "What's going on?" And he told me, "Well, I'm proposing to my girlfriend, my girlfriend this Saturday." And then I said, "Oh wow, that's awesome." And he wanted to ask me some ideas. And so we're talking, he his plan, was really cool because he wanted to go to a lake in Wisconsin and he had the place in the lake, there was a tree and a deck. The guy had everything planned that he was excited sharing with me the whole thing. So teasing him I told him, "Hey listen. What if, what if you're going to be nervous and so maybe you you're shaking, and then maybe when you're trying to put the ring, maybe falls to the water, and what if you lose the ring. I was... "Shut up, father." And we were laughing. But at some point, I we were talking, I said what I would do is go to Walgreens or to Walmart and buy a fake ring that looks like gold and then you, you fake that you, just you're nervous, and you're putting the ring when you're proposing and then it falls and you throw it in the water. And then you jump to the water and in your pocket, you have the other one. And then you come out of the water with a real one, she will never know. And then just say, "got it for you" and whatever. And he told me, "No way, no way." And I said, "Hey, listen, it would be so romantic". But anyway, I don't think he did it. He didn't do it. But he proposed and now they are happily married, two kids. So anyway, but the idea that to me was very interesting, was the joy. When someone is in love, he cannot stop from talking about it. That's why when we, in this last Sunday of Advent, we look, we finally meet God at the gates of Christmas, it is an encounter of joy. Of course, we have gone, Jesus, through these weeks, with John the Baptist with his advice, with the Holy Spirit, through the desert, examining ourselves, looking inside us, things that need, needed to be changed or polished. But all of this is not because we want to be perfect in an artificial way, it's when, it's because we want to fill our hearts with you. We have a gift awaiting for us. And we, when you come to this world, as you did to encounter Mary, it's because you have good news for me, as you did had, have good news for Mary, right. And the temptation is to think that Mary or God are too pure for us; that we will never match their love, and this is true. So it could be a good starting point to begin with. But the good news is that Our Lord changes us.

When we read the gospel, and this is something that Pope Benedict said many years ago, it's not like reading Wikipedia, to have some data about something. It's not information, it's transformation. It is a book that has a power, not a magic book, in the sense of science fiction or no, it has the power that is a story that continues today. It is transforming me because God is alive. And Mary is alive, is not a legend. That inspires me, it transforms me. So maybe your imperfections, my imperfections, being a reality that we all touch with our own hands, should not stop us from trying, from opening to what God is bringing to you today. Where you are right now, God is coming. And maybe you and I are surprised, like Mary, "How can this be?" Or, or she was troubled, I would have said, "I am troubled. God caring about me? There are 7 billion people in the planet right now, more or less, God is actually coming to me personally? Seriously, to me, with my past? To me with my limitations?" And the good news, again, is that God is coming to change you, not to inform you about your limitations, but to tell you that you can be changed, I can be changed, that that's vocation—a calling to a better situation in life, to more happiness at the end, right? So let's be realistic, and at the same time, open to divinity, open to divine intervention in our history. We live in a world that is so secularized, that sometimes we forget about it, or we just think that this is a fairy tale. It is so beautiful that it cannot be true. It is true. God is more real than yourself. And God is bigger than all your sins together. And God wants to be part of our, our history today as he did, he did, 2000 years ago when he went to Nazareth.

I was having dinner with a family a few years ago. And I was, it was really beautiful because the family, I love their family a lot. And the first time I went to their house for dinner, I think it was in the living room or in the kitchen, they had this sign, big one made out of wood, that said something like, "You may call it chaos. We call it family." And that was it. You entered into the house and then you always, you will always see that sign. And you may think that it's chaotic. And maybe it is. But we call it family. And I thought this is really cool. This is really inspiring. Because they were trying, as we do, to be better. But at the same time there's an openness to this isn't the end. God isn't static. My vocation is not something that happened in my wedding, or in my ordination. It is continuous growing in my opening myself to God and allowing him to change me. So, don't, today let's ask Our Lady, "I don't want to shut the door to go to God and say 'why?' There's nothing you can do here." That would be so terrible. So, so sad. And also because Our Lord is very happy to be part of your family or to be part of you, of your life. St. Josemaria in this homily that I was mentioning in *Christ is Passing By* mentions how attractive, how inspiring, the families were during the persecutions of the early Christians in the Roman Empire. And he says "families, no different from other families of those times, but living with a new spirit, which spread to all those who were in contact with them." And this is what the first Christians were and this is what we have to be: normal people spreading good news, normal families with imperfections, but with love.

So the question today that Our Lord is maybe asking you is "Can you go beyond describing what you have? Can you go beyond analysis? Are you open to go beyond diagnosing or diagnosis? Are you open to healing?" We all know, you know, the description of the world where I live from the materialistic, realistic point of view—that's fine. "Do you understand that you can go beyond this? Are you accepting my visitation? Are you open to that?" And Jesus, with all my heart, I want to say yes, obviously. I am the son of the Handmaid of the Lord. And I will obey my mom, Mary, in everything, and she will obey you always. She will always give herself to you, not in an obedience that is blind and absurd, but in an obedience that is connecting both as hearts, both hearts connecting at the same time. That's the discernment that we learn from Mary. Her introspection was not just analysis, it was openness to help. And that's the beauty of Mary. Openness to more, to more happy, to more happiness, to more happier life, right? And, and that's what we can learn and imitate from Mary, my mother. I want to do that.

There is this German tradition, I think it's Austrian actually, that has a name and I'm trying to pronounce it well now, it says something like *Herbergssuche [Frauentragen]* or something like this. And apparently, the tradition that they do in Austria is in some parishes, they have images of Our Lady, and they have one that is particularly beautiful, I think, and then they just, during Christmas, in preparation for Christmas, they allow the parishioners to have it at home. And every day, there's a family that has the gift of having Mary there—that statue that is particularly beautiful. And they pray, and they allow Mary to enter into their house and they make a special room for her. And Mary stays there for a day and they probably pray the Rosary. Or maybe they talk to her just naturally and filially, like with normalcy, right? Like, you talk to a mom. I don't know where you would put that image. I don't know? Maybe in the living room? I think the kitchen sometimes is the center of the family life. Could be anything, right? It could be a room. But in any case, let's make room for Mary in our hearts. A real presence of Mary will change us. I mean, it is a day to say, "That's true, Mary should be part of my interior life. And I want her, I want you, my mother, to tell me things, to tell me good memories, to help me to discern what's the best thing to do here, to accompany in my struggles, to be part of my life."

Pope Francis was saying in one of the catechesis that he gave recently about vocation, he was talking about discernment, and he was saying, "You need to go back to your memories and learn from them." Oh yeah, I've been here before. I've been here in this situation before and I remember what's the best outcome of this because I learned it, even if it was a sin, I learned what not to do. Like in science and you sometimes you experiment something, this is what you don't do, okay, learn and then move forward with optimism. With optimism, always.

This mom shared with me a struggle that she had years ago, pregnant for the fifth time, and waking up in the middle of the night to feed the baby. And the baby crying and then apparently she went to the living room and she started crying, thinking, "this is too much, I can't do this anymore." And then started talking to Jesus, and to St. Josemaria, and then she shared with me that apparently, I don't know how, but she somehow, she saw St. Josemaria and Jesus, or imagined them at least, sitting down in the living room in front of her. And then they were laughing. At some point they were doing, they were serious, and then she was talking to them crying and saying, "this is too much, my vocation is very difficult, and I'm happy, but at the same time." And they were laughing. And at some point she told them, "What are you laughing at? That's not funny, right?" And they told her apparently "you are funny. We like you a lot. This is, this is our dream." Especially Jesus Christ was saying, "This is what I, what I was waiting for you to realize that your life is really awesome and I'm with you, and I'm enjoying being part of this. I'm really happy right now at 2am in the living room." Right? And St. Josemaria when he saw Opus Dei and the message of being a saint in the middle of the world, he saw basically this, he didn't see perfect, you know, untouchable people, super stiff, in silence praying in living rooms around the country, in an atmosphere of almost incense in their house. No, I don't think so. I think he saw the chaos of a dad being late and smiling. And he saw the chaos of a mom trying to pray in the living room, saying, "Hey kids, I'm going to pray for five minutes" and then being interrupted 20,000 times with a kid with, you know, his nose bleeding, and two other kids quarreling and breaking the glass and then interrupting her prayer and trying to fix it. And so, later on, "you should apologize to each other and now go to your room" and that's it. And then moving on and preparing dinner and a husband, preparing a weekend with a family mindset, or a boyfriend preparing a proposal excited, or a girlfriend dressing up well to go to that date, or a son, you know, waiting for his dad and hugging him when he comes back home from a trip, whatever. But the chaos of that family or any family will never stop the love of God. Not only that, it's just the exactly the place where he wants to be. This is exactly what St. Josemaria saw, trying to encounter Jesus Christ and that's the destination already. Mary was troubled when she heard that invitation. You and I may be troubled too; we don't get it, at least not fully, but we can react like Mary, "Tell me how can I help." And that will give us peace and direction.

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