

Episode: “Charity: Being Known By Your Love”

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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 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.

Lord Jesus, help us to continue our conversation on the greatest gift we have. St. Paul reveals that this gift is so great that the other talents we have not only pale next to it, but, inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Paul says that it counts for nothing. And that gift is that supernatural virtue called charity. And I would say, at baptism, as we approach the feast or the solemnity of the Baptism of Our Lord [this Sunday], baptism is a reminder that we have received a new DNA. I was preaching after a baptism and the father of these two little girls was a former professional athlete. And so I used the dad, I used the example of their dad, to explain the theological virtue of charity. Baptism gives us sanctifying grace, purifies us of all our sins, elevates our nature and makes us like Christ, and gives us the capacity to love as Christ loves, as long as we work on it. So what I said, I got something out of my own little homily, I said when I see professional athletes play on TV, whether it's baseball, football, basketball, I realize that they have something on their DNA—we could apply that to professional expertise, we could apply, apply that to art, singing, teaching, anything. But anyway, these athletes have something on their DNA that transcends just hard work. And that is an uncanny ability of speed, of strength, of eye to hand coordination, that makes them professional athletes, the best athletes in the world or the country. And we have also an extraordinary gift on our supernatural DNA. That DNA has been superimposed on us through baptism. And on that DNA, basically that supernatural genetic code, spells out saint. All of us have that most excellent of virtues, together with faith and hope, to love with that heart of Christ. And I want to segue into a point in *Forge*, I was wondering why I had *Forge* on my desk and it wasn't where I usually place it in my little book bookcase, and now I know why it was on my desk because on my notes, I have point 79 from *Forge*. And what does point 79 say? I have it almost memorized. St. Josemaria, today's his birthday, so we will give him a little special attention in order to converse with Our Lord more. He says piety, or he says, prayer, I think. Piety piety, piety which means prayer, prayer, prayer. Piety, piety piety! If you lack charity it's not a lack of character, it's a lack of piety. And why do I say that? Because this command that I was overhearing between confessions during the spiritual reading, I guess God really wants us to think about charity, always does, but all the readings of the Christmas, of this part of the Christmas season after the Epiphany are about charity, the first reading and also the gospel. And the topic, the designated topic, is charity. And I guess the designated reading is charity. So, okay, Lord, we get it. And why this piety? Because if we look at that very simple sounding commandment, “love, as I have loved you,” which surpasses significantly the old law, which is not easy either. The old law says, “love your neighbor as yourself.” It also says, “do unto others as you want done to you.” That's part of charity. But it's

not at the level of what Jesus calls the new commandment, “the new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you.” And he says that at least three times.

It's interesting to note the one who is, and I don't mean to be disrespectful, and then you're probably gonna say now, now, now that you say that you don't mean to be disrespectful, you are going to be disrespectful, but I don't mean to be. But John the Evangelist is the most lovey dovey of the gospel writers. Both in the Gospel he's the one who captures Jesus teaching on charity more than the other evangelists. In fact, what he records nobody else does, like the foot washing event, and Jesus saying, I've given you an example. And he's the only one who records or reports, “I give you a commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.” And he says it three times. What's interesting is Jesus changed his name and his brother James's name to *Boanerges*, which I guess in Aramaic means *Sons of Thunder*. He would call them Sons of Thunder. This was after he gave John and James a strong fraternal correction. The history behind that nickname is when they were going to pass through a town of Samaria, which is sort of enemy territory, Samaritans couldn't stand the Jews and the Jews couldn't stand the Samaritans because the Jews rejected the Samaritans for being part Jew, part Gentile, so they were known as impure. So they were kind of denigrated, scorned by the Jewish people and in retaliation that Samaritans couldn't stand them. And the Samaritans, you know, detected, you know, the Aramaic language or the Aramaic accent, and would not let Jesus and his boys pass through Samaria to get to Jerusalem. And so John, knowing how powerful Jesus was calming storms, creating fish out of nothing, multiplying loaves and fish, bringing people back from the dead, etc. They petitioned Jesus, both of them, destroy that village. That's not very Christian, is it? And so John said that and then Jesus says, “You don't know what spirit you have here.” Jesus reprimands both of them for losing their temper and asking him to use his divine power to destroy one of these Samaritan villages. And so we see on a natural level, John has undergone a conversion. Just the very fact that he remembers and he hones in on Jesus's teachings on charity.

And so my point is when Josemaria, St. Josemaria says, you know, don't write yourself off. One American said, you know, he witnessed two Mexican friends greeting each other: handshake, an embrace on the right and an embrace on the left, and another handshake. I mean, that's kind of an elaborate hello. And the American said, and he was partially right and partially wrong, mostly wrong. He says, well... And then the Mexican said, “you know, you you gringos have to learn some *cariño*, which means affection.” It's true, we need it. And the Americans said, “Well, does that mean I have to give that kind of embrace, two embraces and two handshakes?” No. And then the American said, “Well, you know, I'm, I come from an Anglo Saxon culture. We're not brought up that way.” Okay, we do it the American way. But we've got to do it Christ's way, whether it's the American way, or the Italian way, or the Spanish way, or the Mexican way, or the African way, the common denominator is that warmth of Our Lord, that love of Our Lord, because it has, it's on our DNA. And let's not write ourselves off. I have it, I got what it takes.

And first, Lord, I have to ask Our Lord this because without his grace, I factually know the charity is the most important gift I have. But I may prefer my intellectual gifts, or my personality gift, or my charm, or my singing ability. No, this is the most important gift that I've got. Or my drive to get things done. No, my charity, the other things are not incompatible, but they have to be inspired with my charity. And step number one, St. Paul says, we've got to begin with prayer or piety. He says, “Put on Jesus Christ.” Put him on. And I just, I notice, you know, I give spiritual direction downtown on Fridays, if I'm in town. And, don't get any bright ideas, but if there's a no show, I try to go to St. Peter's Church, which is right behind my building. And I like to go Friday afternoon because the Blessed Sacrament is exposed. And I notice there is one person that I think virtually every Friday, they go in there and they look a little tiny bit troubled, there's a little bit of anxiety there or sometimes a lot of anxiety there. Some people who are in tears. Some people are making a scene, prostrating, you got all sorts. But I notice as people are adoring the Blessed Sacrament and kneeling there and sitting there, little by little, the anxiety level goes down. And it seems like people become more and more at peace. And I would say when we do that, when we find that silence with the Lord, that's putting on Jesus Christ, his love takes over. And I have no original ideas. And I advise first, I start with myself, but I advise married couples. I got it from St. John Paul. And also,

Pope Francis strongly recommends this, the Rosary or at least part of the Rosary between husband and wife. John Paul specified that and he said that when you do that, the husband and wife come together more. They they're more united. They finally love each other more. Why? Because that's part of putting on Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Interesting, connected with St. John the Evangelist, St. Paul, in different verbiage is a little bit like St. John, much more severe in terms of his previous life, Paul was a hateful fanatic and was responsible for initiating the age of martyrdom among Christians—that age would go for another 300 years, unbeknownst to him. And he was so fanatical that he would, which was kind of countercultural, he would arrest women and children as well. And so he inflicted a lot of harm, before his conversion. Every epistle, he's exhorting the reader to have that heart of Christ. And what's, the what's the goal? And I need confidence in the Lord's strength, maybe not mine but his. If this is what the Holy Spirit is saying, that means it's not divinely impossible. I can rise to the occasion, in an imperfect way. Jesus says that, "you should be known by the love you have for one another. In this way, you'll be known to be my disciple, by the love you have for one another."

I'm going to give you an example of St. Josemaria, but this is what St. Paul says. And these are ordinary folk. Early Christianity was sort of like what we're doing here, you know, the Church in Colossae, or the Church in Ephesus, or the Church in Athens, you didn't have a parish center in a chapel like this. You had 40 families, they would meet at someone's house. They would have recollections, they would have religion classes, RCIA, that's when RCIA started at that time. And you would have elders directing, giving spiritual direction, and you'd have circuit priests who would make their rounds and say Mass, and bishops who would give Confirmation. And so these are ordinary, these early Christians heard the following, this is in Colossae. "Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, bearing one another, forbearing one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed, you were called, in the one body. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." And it's St. Paul who says, "the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." How does this work? I don't know, it came to mind, today's the birthday of St. Josemaria. And in one of the biographies I read, intermittently, his little deeds of charity keep springing up. And this is in, this takes place in 1937. He's already escaped the communist sector of Spain, where they took the lives of 7000 priests and religious, they polished off basically half the clergy, half the country's clergy. And it was a very bloody war. I think a million people in a small country at that time, 21 million people, maybe 25, 1 million died. And soldiers would go on leave. They'll be sent home after a battle or they'd have two or three days leave and then they would have to come back to their unit and then get back on the front. And the biographer says that it was not out of the ordinary that some of these young men would find their way and visit St. Josemaria. St. Josemaria wasn't their father, it wasn't their brother, who's just you know, he was a priest, who used to give them spiritual direction, hear their confessions. And they would spend half their vacations, half their leave time with him. And why did they do it? Because they had that awareness, "I may not come back again. And I need to be with this priest." Number two, when they were organizing the process of his beatification and canonization, they look at everything and, and there's copies of letters, letters of young, he he was a chaplain of a student residence that he started before the Civil War. And there was probably, let me just guess, maybe 50 young men, 50 university students in this residence in Madrid. And when they would write home to their parents, they would say, he's kind of different. Because I would, these guys would say, "I would kind of equate him like a mom. He would do us favors, he would listen to us. He was always available. He was concerned about our health, he would make us rest when we were sick, he would make sure we were taking medicine, he would do all these kinds of things. He was at our disposal." He says, "he's like a mom." I would say maybe that's what Our Lord means when he says, "You must be known by the love you have." What I want to say is, well, in the presence of Our Lord, in a sense, I don't want to be silly, but looking at this commandment of Our Lord, "love as I have loved." And then he says, "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." And then St. Luke refines that mandate, "be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate." In a certain sense, these mandates are unfair. How can I measure up to perfect God and perfect man? It's not false humility, but I've got all sorts of flaws. There's all sorts of omissions: there's pride, there's anger, there's resentment, all these kinds

of things that are consequences of my wounded nature. And let's listen to Our Lord, you know, that was echoed in that point I read, you know, we don't, it's not because we lack character, but we lack piety. Let's listen to Our Lord. And I think I could take the liberty to say this, "I am not going to give you a mandate that you can't live. With my grace, I expect you to approach it. I don't consign you to futility." Yeah, but I'm this way, I'm that way. "I don't care what you're like. I happen to be God. And there's nothing impossible with me. You've got to cooperate with me and you will love as I have loved. Perhaps not to a tee, but you will approach that and you will, you will be known by the love you have for one another. I don't care what ethnic, ethnicity you have."

When I'm with my family, my friends and my colleagues, how do they detect that I'm a disciple of the Lord? What are the earmarks of this charity? Well, we look at Jesus spent 30 years as a carpenter. So all these admonitions were lived with his family and his friends and his colleagues and his clients. This is well that's the normal place. And yes, we need to do corporal works of mercy and we have to do extraordinary things and almsgiving, but the the ordinary all counts for a lot and it's a lot of little things as a consequence of prayer, but I gotta work on it, I gotta examine myself, I gotta go to confession, I get better at it.

I've met three saints recognized by the Church. And I noticed that the little time I would spend, or maybe they would, you were the most important person in front of them. They're totally absorbed in you because they saw Christ there. A loving person is someone who knows how to lift spirits, not in a Pollyanna way or an irritating way. Please don't whistle and sing before I have my coffee in the morning, lift my spirits in another way. So we know how to lift spirits without being a clown or superficial, that we are fun to be with, fun to be with, it doesn't mean that we're clowning around or or playing practical jokes. People can be listened to, people they're encouraged, they're understood. I don't know how to do that. And Jesus will tell us, "Sure you do. You got the DNA. Use it. Work at it."

Last point, the Pope's talk about the New Evangelization. Francis just talked about re-evangelization. He addressed his Curia and it has to be understood properly. But he said to them, "Christendom is over." Well, Christendom, if you're going to be a purist, Christendom ended after the medieval era, right around, right before the Renaissance. But I think what he was saying is that the Christian culture in traditionally Christian countries is gone- we know that, you know that. And so he says, we've got to promote a re-evangelization. And the only way to do it is to witness that heart of Jesus. Because charity, no matter what the culture is like, is more powerful than resentment, of hatred, of coldness. Light always dissipates darkness, darkness does never overcomes the light. Life overcomes death. Grace overcomes sin. And so hence, St. Paul, and I'll finish with this, talking to the Church in Corinth, he says, "you yourselves are our letter of recommendation written on your hearts, to be known and read by all. You show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God. Not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." So Mary, we finish our prayer, help me be this letter from your son, not in terms of verbiage or the ability to transmit the right facts, but to reflect, albeit in an imperfect way, the very heart of your Son, Jesus Christ.

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.