

Episode: With Mary, Praying as a Single Family

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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.

Easter is still very fresh in our minds. We go once more with our imagination to the Upper Room and place ourselves at the sight of Mary, the holy women, the Apostles. It will be a big help for our own interior life to try to envision how they spent those long hours, day after day, awaiting the promised coming of the Paraclete.

The Apostles and the holy women had just been on an emotional roller coaster ride from the sublime moments of the Last Supper to that crushing despair at the Lord's apparent defeat. Then, the other elation of Easter Sunday and those marvelous moments when Jesus appeared to them at various times during forty days, leading up to his Ascension. Those gathered in the Upper Room were in ecstasy. Each morning, their very first thought was, He lives! To use an unusual English usage, we could say that they had been "Eastered". That word that we will never again see comes from a poem written in 1918 by Gerard Manley Hopkins where he says in one line, "Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us." How interesting, how graphic to say, "let Jesus easter in us." As one writer puts it, "Easter, here, is a verb. It is not only an event but it is something that happens to us and in us. This poem and prayer asks that Jesus transform our lives, that he rise not just in a tomb but in us as well, that the piercing light of the Resurrection fall on the darkness in our cramped selves."

Christ is alive! The Holy Father recently wrote to the young people of the world. The document called *Christus Vivit*, but literally Christ is Alive. At one point, he says, "We need to keep reminding ourselves of this because we can risk- we can risk seeing Jesus Christ simply as a fine model from the distant past, as a memory, as someone who saved us two thousand years ago. But that would be of no use to us: it would leave us unchanged, it would not set us free. The one who fills us with his grace, the one who liberates us, transforms us, heals and consoles us is someone fully alive." Given these very stirring words of the Holy Father we can turn to Our Lord in our own prayer right now and say Jesus, I really, really want to find a way so that I never lose sight of this fact that you are really and truly here, that you really and truly see me and hear me, that you are in the process of liberating me, transforming me, healing me. I want you to continue to easter me, so to speak.

Thinking of those in the Upper Room, there was nothing static about their daily life during those days between Easter and the Ascension. After all, they had spent three long years being constantly nourished by the Master. And so, during that time in the Upper Room, each of them had to dig deep into their interior life in order to grapple with their new situation, in order- in order to seek strength. And so, we can ask the very obvious question, how did they do it? And we can suggest three elements that fortified them and prepare them for the next chapter in their vocation. And those three elements are contemplation, the Eucharist, and Mary.

In the first place, contemplation. By now that they had learned from Jesus and Mary the importance of silence and contemplation. Now more than ever, they sought those times of quiet prayer in order to put all the pieces together. Imagine St. Peter going over and over in his mind and in his heart, the Last Supper, the heart-wrenching moment of his denial of the Master, that look of forgiveness on the day of the Resurrection. Every other person in the Upper Room had his or her life changing moments that needed to be processed in prayer. And Our Lady, from the moment of the Annunciation so many years earlier, she had developed the talent of pondering each moment of grace in her heart. Well, let us learn from this.

One author underlines the crucial role of interior silence in our spiritual growth. He writes, "Silence fulfills an important function in mental generation- mental regeneration. It is only in the passivity of silence that the things that have deeply impressed us may resound and grow in our soul and strike root in our being." I'm sure each of us feels instinctively the need, at times, the desperate need for silence because there are so many things happening around us and to us. We need that quiet time in order to process all that is happening to us. It is only in the passivity of silence that the things that have deeply impressed us may resound and grow in our soul and strike root in our being. If we did not pause, contemplate, reflect, ponder different things, we would end up awash in a sea of ephemera, or as St. John Paul II put it, we would end up with a great sense of emptiness, full of ephemeral nothingness. Contemplation, time spent in meditation, reflection: this is our ballast, our anchor. You could say that the Upper Room was transformed into a retreat center where the inhabitants sank roots ever deeper. Let's face it, the fact that you're listening to this meditation shows your determination to anchor yourself. Revelation, all that God has said to us, that is the solid anchor, that rock solid foundation of our life.

St. Josemaria loved to ponder, to go over a list of bedrock truths that became part of his- his vision of his whole life. You may be aware of the fact that he often suggested that every Tuesday people recite and meditate on Psalm 2. Take, for example, those powerful words, "You are my child, ask and I will bequeath to you the nations, put the ends of the Earth in your possession." How wonderful to be able to fall back on those words- on those words of Revelation, but in a thousand years before Jesus, especially in moments of bewilderment, when that solid foundation will become a source of light and peace. It sometimes happens that life can be- become turbulent and we could end up being tempted to put aside our life of prayer, our life of contemplation- that would be a big mistake because at moments when things do become turbulent, that is exactly when we need that ballast to stay upright, just like a ship has a ballast at the lowest point in the ship to keep it upright.

These days, there is a clear and present danger to our life of contemplation. Simply put, distraction, or as someone called it, permanent partial attention. Just a month ago, I read a very interesting article precisely about anxiety and the roots of that anxiety. In that article, the author quoted someone who made a very interesting observation referring to how a person uses their smartphone. The suggestion was given to ask yourself the three W's: What for? Why now? And what else? And these are useful, starting with the first one, what for? When you pick up your phone, what was that for? Was there a purpose? The second

question, why now? Did you really have something to do or were you bored or anxious or fighting some craving? And then, what else? Opportunity cost... what else could you have done in that time you spent scrolling through Instagram or whatever...? You have to notice the opportunity cost. During those two hours, perhaps, you could have been studying, you could have been talking to your roommate, you could have read who knows how many chapters of War and Peace, you could have changed the oil- oil in your car, you could have done something useful. But now those two hours are gone and you have nothing to show for it. Well, let us learn from this very sage advice and learn how to take control over anything that is threatening to tempt- to distract us.

The second source of fortitude, of strength, for those in the Upper Room was undoubtedly the Blessed Eucharist. Imagine St. Peter and the other Apostles celebrating the Mass each day, tingling as that moment approached in each Mass, that moment of repeating those words they had heard the Master speak, "This is my body, this is my blood. Do this in memory of me." There can be no doubt that this- the central moment of each of those days of waiting was the Mass, the realization that Jesus was really and truly present there with them. Nothing can stop us also from imagining that- imagining that those times when Jesus actually appeared to the Apostles. Chances are high that he gave them a class on how to celebrate the Mass in a divine way.

Furthermore, imagine Mary receiving her first Holy Communion from the hands of St. Peter. This will cause us to perhaps not pass out, but be awestruck, just imagining the Mother of God listening, contemplating, then drawing nearer to the- to St. Peter who held up for her the body of Christ, the consecrated host and said, "This is the body of Christ." Imagine Mary- we can't imagine the emotion with which she looked at that consecrated piece of bread and said to herself, this body came from my body. This blood, the precious blood in this chalice, once coursed through my veins. This is my Son. We ask her- Our Lady right now to give us that very special unction, that special devotion realizing that it is in the Mass, in the Eucharist, where we too will- will receive that kind of strength.

Well, finally imagining the Apostles, the others, huddled around Mary in order to absorb from her so much strength. We're asking the question in our prayer how those in the Upper Room spent those days leading up to the Ascension and then Pentecost. Well just imagine, so many times when the Apostles and the others would turn to Our Lady and say to her, tell us more. Tell us about those days in Nazareth, those days in Bethlehem. But those- all those years in Nazareth when Jesus was ten and fifteen and eighteen and twenty- four and twenty-nine and a half. Tell us more about St. Joseph because those stories about Joseph's resilience, they will fill us with solidity and with a desire to provide the strain- the very same strength to our own family.

Going back to that beautiful document by Pope Francis called *Christus Vivit*, at one point he's talking about the importance of listening to our elders. He says, "What do I ask of the elders among whom I count myself? I call us to be memory keepers. We grandfathers and grandmothers need to form a choir. I envision elders as a permanent choir of a great spiritual sanctuary where prayers of supplication and songs of praise support the larger community that works and struggles in the field of life." There in the Upper Room, Mary was the oldest, passing on so many memories, giving so much strength.

A beautiful way for us to finish our time of prayer is to turn to one of the oldest witnesses to the devotion to Our Lady, which is that confident prayer, the Memorare:

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto

you, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

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