

Episode: The Inestimable Value of Ordinary Life

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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, we ask you to help us have a conversation with you about the inestimable value of ordinary life. 30 of your 33 years was a lifestyle, like millions of others. You had a line of work. You were a skilled manual laborer, a carpenter. You lived in a village, like everybody else, you lived in a home. You had your ever-expanding circle of friends. You had conversations with friends. You visited sick people whom you knew. You were very much a people person.

Lord, help us learn. Obviously, the Holy Spirit did not use American consultants. Because if he did, I'm morally certain that the American consultants, with all the good will in the world, would have advised the Evangelical writers to illustrate interesting and catchy episodes of your pre-teen years, your teen years, your life in your early 20s and late 20s, pithy sayings, wise insights, anecdotes, your adventures as a child, as a teen, anecdotes of the different characters you met along the way of your professional life.

But virtually, there's nothing. Barring, in a certain sense, the minimum, what we now call the Joyful Mysteries, narrated by Luke. And this silence, to use an idea of St. Josemaria, speaks volumes though no volumes have been written about that hidden life. Undoubtedly, tradition has it that St. Luke, who may not have been an immediate disciple of Our Lord, seems like he was a disciple of a disciple, definitely disciple of St. Paul, interviewed the Blessed Mother. He's the one who most extensively describes the life of Mary. Included in his Gospel is her celebrated canticle called the *Magnificat*, that bittersweet event of losing her 12-year-old boy and finding him in the temple, and he got lost on purpose, that's there, his birth, the Annunciation. But other than that, I guess it's quite extraordinary having- having your unborn baby cause another unborn baby to leap inside the womb at the Visitation. But nothing more than that.

In fact, the Gospel, or the Gospels, tell us that the only commentary of those many years preceding Jesus' public life were described as excessively ordinary, so ordinary that they insulted him, and I say this respectfully, that that rudeness, that disrespect, those insults, serve us much material for prayer and reflection.

The commentary about Jesus' hidden life was to grossly underestimate the value of that life spent in that insignificant village. Tradition tells us how insignificant it was, the city of Nazareth, or the village of Nazareth. Apparently, it's one of the few villages of Palestine that are not named in the Old Testament, there's no reference to that village. New Testament, yes, but Old Testament, no.

Let's enter into that comment. We could take the commentary recorded by St. Mark, who recorded what St. Peter said in a sermon, probably in Rome, and the other Gospels have similar commentaries as that of Mark. Now Jesus is going public, and his debut as a public Messiah now was to give a sermon in the synagogue, making it abundantly clear that this 800 year old prophecy of Isaiah is now fulfilled in him, in that person preaching on the- those verses of Isaiah. "He went away from there and came to his own country, and his disciples followed him. And on the Sabbath, He began to teach in the synagogue."

Now another Gospel tells us that the verses he was reading was that this Messiah would give meaning to human life, that he would be the hope of the chosen people. He would help the poor, he would visit- he would free the prisoner, he would bring joy to the sad person. He would lift up the oppressed, on and on and on. And so that was the content of this sermon he gave.

"And many who heard him were astonished." They were on edge, saying, "Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands." All right, so they're kind of blown away by the content of this sermon and the insights. Now they are admitting that they are hearing and seeing another side to Jesus of Nazareth that they're astonished that it's actually him giving this impassioned homily and this ostensibly insignificant person in the greater scheme of things, ostensibly, obviously, is basically saying that the this ancient prophecy is now fulfilled.

And why do they have a hard time accepting this? What's the commentary? I'll continue reading. Mark 6:1-6, "Is not this the carpenter. The son of Mary and brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon," Apparently, they'll become apostles. "Are not His sisters here with us, and they took offense at Him." What's the- the commentary? He's just the carpenter. He's been a carpenter until now, and we know his mom. He's just the son of Mary. Little do they know that she would become Queen of Heaven and Earth, but we'll wait for that.

Another Gospel passage says that he's the son of the carpenter. He's the son of Joseph. Now, Lord, help us penetrate this, this comment, this reaction that was denigrating, but for us, it opens up all sorts of doors, sheds light upon our own ordinary existence. What's going on here? What's- what's being said? But first, let's look at as St. Josemaria says, this "Trinity on earth", Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Jesus is God made man, and God made man is a carpenter living in Nazareth. Mary is immaculately conceived and, well, I was gonna say she wasn't producing any podcasts, though, that would have to wait for a couple of millennia. She didn't write treatises. Who knows if she knew how to write. She didn't give speeches at rallies. There's no recorded miracles. She was eminently ordinary. She emerges only one time in Jesus' public life, and it's at a party, it's a wedding party.

And it's a very organic, ordinary, down to earth miracle that she provokes in her son. "Get more wine, keep the party going." And very down to earth. Motherly conversation they have. "They need more wine. They have no wine. Do something." You know, it's a very ordinary every day, well, situation, a party. A wedding banquet, and she needs more wine. Well, she brings that need to the attention of her son.

And Joseph, ostensibly, probably the greatest saint after Mary, by the very fact that he had to educate, form, be a role model for Jesus, because he's a man, he's human. So, part of being human is to learn, to

be formed, to be educated. That's what being human is. We don't grow by instinct. We grow by education and formation. And so, God had to put his best foot forward with Joseph. But there's no recorded word of Joseph. There's not much information about Joseph. He's revealed as a righteous and just man, a holy man. The highlights, the cursory highlights of his life indicate his heroic generosity, heroic faith, his heroic spirit of service. And we have to say he did quite a good job for being the son of man. In his public life, it's as good as it gets.

But again, very ordinary. He's, he's not known as a guru, or, you know, a philosopher on the side. He's known as the carpenter. And in fact, Mary and Joseph also serve as an occasion to, if you will, insult Our Lord, because that's all he is. Son of Mary, son of Joseph.

We ask in prayer, Jesus, if you would have consulted again an American PR person, perhaps he or she would have told you, why do you make a splash when you're seven years old? Let's get the show on the road. Let's not- you know, 30 years old is getting up there in those days. Why are you stalling with carpentry and hanging out in this little nowhere village. You know, at least, go to Jerusalem, go into the public square and create a few rabbits, or, you know, elevate in the air, or glow engulfed in a bright light, but make it abundantly clear that you are the Son of God, that you are the Savior of the world. Why are you putting this public life off for 30 years?

And we ask Our Lord, Lord, answer this question, yes. "I don't want you to underestimate the ordinary life. I want you to reflect that the characteristic of everyday life of myself, of my mother, of my father, the Holy Family, was the ordinary. You are not a second-class citizen because you're not called to do what the world would call an ordinary- an extraordinary endeavor." If we're called, we're called. "But you're called to blend your part of the world. You blend into the world, but through your ordinary life, I want you to evangelize that little, tiny piece of the world, and light diffuses."

Jesus is saying that evangelization, transformation of the world, being salt of the earth, being light of the world, begins in the ordinary, begins in that little piece of the world called family, that little piece of the world called the workplace, and that little piece of the world involving social interaction. That is where the rubber meets the road. And Jesus will tell us, "Ever since I was conceived, I've had a holy anxiety," he used that word, "to preach to all nations to save every human being, and this is the way to go about it, through the ordinary with extraordinary love. That's- and you- and my light radiates from family life. Out of family life, it radiates from the workplace, it radiates in social interaction."

I, on many occasions, meet people who want to talk about the Lord in the context of some spiritual guidance, and what prompts them to come is that their friend, man or woman, works hard, takes their work seriously, is diligent in their work and a charitable person in that workplace, and a true friend in that professional context. And they want a bit of what their friend has, his or her joy, work ethic, capacity for friendship.

God tells us in the Old Testament, and Jesus reiterates that, that we're called to live the greatest sacrifice that goes beyond all the sacrifices, which is to love God with whole heart, whole mind, whole soul, whole strength. Well, have we ever dwelled on that? What does that exactly involve? How did Jesus as a man live that? We're morally certain he didn't hang out the synagogue because it was on record that he's a carpenter, and that wasn't customary either to be in the synagogue every day, all day. Is he telling me to spend hours in front of the Blessed Sacrament? Well, maybe if I'm on retreat or I receive a special enlightenment, but usually that is not his will. Some time, yes, but exclusive time, no. Family- and so how does he want to be loved? He wants- he wants us to be loved through our work. He wants us to be loved-

he wants to be loved the way we interact with family. He wants us to be loved- he wants- e wants to be loved, excuse me, by the way we treat people, in the context of the ordinary.

And just to give it a little bit of a theological perspective, God is self-giving love. That's what he is. He doesn't just love, he is love. This- the Greek word is *agape*, which basically means a giving-love. And how do I love in my work? By making- whatever it is, whether I am vacuuming a floor or writing a paper for a scientific publication, or whether I'm teaching geography or whether I am a prosecutor or a defender in a court of law, that I give God the best I have, that my work has much self-giving love.

If I'm not mistaken, in St. Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower, whose claim to fame that made her a Doctor of the Church, she heroically loved Jesus through the ordinary. And I think she came up with that line, "If you cannot find him amid the pots and pans, you won't find him." And she felt that she was not called to extraordinary feats. But- so she said, "Well, I will live the Lord- I will love the Lord in the details and the little things, in the pots and pans. The way I wash the pots and pans- is going to be the best washing of pots and pans that I could ever perform. And when I polish that doorknob, it's going to be done very well out of love, and that sister who, on a natural level, gets under my skin because of her temperament, her personality, well, I'm gonna imagine that she's St. Joseph for Our Lord himself. And is not a put on. I'm doing this out of love. And when I fail, I am not going to, you know, get frustrated with self as if I didn't perform, but I'm going to make an act of contrition and begin again, and even laugh at myself."

St. Josemaria had a huge vision, even when people thought he was insane, others thought he was a heretic, when he wanted to instill in the ordinary faithful that they're called to be totally centered on Jesus, and their work has to be converted into prayer. And their call to holiness is the same as the call to holiness of a great mystic, a great saint like St. Teresa of Avila or St. John of the Cross. And they're call to change the world. Through sanctity, through witness, starting from their families, from their workplace, from their neighborhood, from their parish.

Can they become saints by giving themselves to Jesus, the way Mary did, the way St. Joseph did, the way Our Lord did in Nazareth? And let me just read these few points of *The Way*, and we'll wrap it up. He says here, in *The Way*, heavily influenced by St. Therese of Lisieux, now a Doctor of the Church, "Do everything for love. In that way, there will be no little things. Everything will be big. Perseverance in the little things for love is heroism." Next point, "A little act done for love is worth so much." "Do you really want to be a saint? Carry out the little duty of each moment, do what you ought and put yourself into what you're doing." "You have mistaken the way if you scorn little things. Lastly, great holiness consists in carrying out the little duties of each moment."

Well, as we start to wind down our meditation, we tell Our Lord, no, I am not going to consider myself a second-class citizen, because my calling is to be a family man, a family woman. I'm not going to underestimate my calling because I sit behind a desk or my work is a job I appreciate, but packing bags or performing the same operation on infected appendix doesn't seem to be an earth shattering endeavor, but the love I put into it is. And so I don't want to underestimate that, and I am called to be a great saint, because sanctity does not depend on exactly what I'm doing, as long as it's honest, but how much love I invest in what I'm doing. And it would be another meditation, but what's important in order to have this kind of presence of God and work for God amid the ordinary working for God with extraordinary love is to find protracted time in prayer. I- we could be totally convinced what Jesus did publicly, he did privately, or he did in those first 30 years. And one of the features of his life was to go off all night in a lonely place, to spend time in deep prayer. And that was the driving force of his ability to sanctify his work, his friendship, his interactions with others, the contradictions he ran into as a man. That his prayer life was the

foundation, the springboard, the driving force. Anyway, we finish up our prayer going to the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, first asking for that sentiment, that desire of wanting to be holy, be centered on Christ, be a saint, be a light, amid my ordinary existence, my ordinary life, my schedule, the people I live with, the work entrusted to me, my illnesses, special calling there that some are called to sanctify their illness. I ask for that sentiment to really want to center myself around you through those different components of my day. And at the same time, I ask you for the help to make a concrete resolution to move forward in that regard.

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.