

Episode: Christ is Rich in Mercy

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In the name of the Father and of the Son 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 beg 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.

Our topic of prayer. Why? Well, because of today's memorial of this great Spanish mystic, St. Teresa of Avila, which the Catholic Catechism quotes relatively often, and she's part of the patrimony of the spirituality of Christianity, of the Catholic Church. And tomorrow, there is a memorial of another saint, a French saint, 17th century, St. Margaret of Alacoque, who, through inspiration of the Holy Spirit, prompted and inspired St. Margaret to promote devotion to the Merciful Heart of Jesus, his Sacred Heart. That's where the image of the Sacred Heart is traced back to, St. Margaret of Alacoque, who would have these private revelations and private inspirations. Seems like it's an inspiration that has been continuing throughout the past 500 years of the history of the Church. It gained significant momentum juxtaposed with World War II and the Holocaust, in the private revelations of St. Faustina. Sister Faustina then was canonized by St. John Paul, who promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart with another title, same concept, different title, the Divine Mercy, that is so popular today. We see that image in so many churches. And Pope Benedict and Francis- Pope Francis is always emphasizing that we focus on the mercy of God that is revealed in the humanity of Jesus.

So, let's talk to Our Lord and ask him, well, what do you want me to see? How do you want me to pray? We have to pray a certain way. On one hand, we have to be very free the way we pray. So no one's going to tell us how to talk to our mom and dad or friends. And you know, prayer is very personal. We pray according to the dictates of our personal piety. But at the same time, there's certain sentiments that Jesus wants us to have in prayer which does not detract from our prayer being very personal, and unique, and individual. And what is that? Well, if we look through the Psalms, the Psalms are prayers literally composed by the Holy Spirit and the Jewish people and every Christian, both Catholic and non-Catholic Christians use the Psalms as a way of speaking to God because the Psalms express every possible human sentiment and present to us a certain aspect of God- dwells on a certain aspect of God, and what is it his deep love for us. So all of us, we- we pray according to the way we want, the way we're moved by the Holy Spirit. But the common thread is that I- Jesus does want me to find strength in him, see him as our best divine friend. He's a divine human friend- He's a God man. And he's a God man because he is the visible revelation of what God is like. If God was translated in human form, it would be Jesus. What's the love of God like? I mean, without Jesus, we have no clue. St. Thomas Aquinas says that we can't know anything about God directly, nothing. Oh, no, that sounds heretical. It's not.

We can know God by his effects, sunset, a beautiful mountain peak, nature scene, a well-crafted baby. I don't know, for some reason that really moves me. I was in a sacristy and I was just mesmerized, I was always late for saying mass at St. Mary the Angels because this couple wanted their baby baptized. I said, Well, it's not that simple. You've got to go through a few classes and things like that, and I said, plus, I'm not the pastor, so we could- wait he's going to walk in. He never did. So, and I was just staring at the little baby, not making much conversation. I was just mesmerized with the little baby, and he was just, you know, oozing with proofs of the existence of God. And oozing with revelations of God's love. And then, you know, I kind of came to and I said, Well, I better get going here. It's kind of a- I can't use that as an excuse. I was staring at a baby for the past 10 minutes. So anyway, so the- the visible, revelation of God's love is Christ- is the heart of Christ. And these psalms, what do they emphasize here? Well, they emphasize God's mercy. All- there's 150 of them. Some are a little bit, you know, no nonsense, but the basic tone of the Psalm, of these sentiments, and this is before, it is 1000 years before Christ, is that God is rich in mercy. You know, there's a lot of titles for Christ, but I think the one, you know, we're not going to try to rival the titles Christ has given himself. They're all excellent and perfect on the safe side here. But I like especially St. Paul's, who says he is rich in mercy, that Christ is rich in mercy. And I mean, all the titles are valuable. He's Resurrection, He's Light, He's Life, He's Friend, He's all these things.

He's- but he's rich in mercy. And what are you telling me, Lord, in case I'd allow people to sleep, it happens you go into a pious coma, and the what was it going to say? God punished me for saying something silly. So, I need to have- I can't check the box. He doesn't want- that's the big no no. I've tried not to check the box. Got it done, my instructions were to do some mental prayer, or I feel I should do mental prayer. I got to get it in, you know, let's we? None of us wants to check the box, but we can check the box because, you know, we're scheduled, or sometimes overly scheduled, and all sorts of time constraints. And you know, we need an act of faith to think that we're making good use of our time by doing nothing. We're not doing nothing. We're praying. But you know, on a human level, it may feel that we're doing nothing. And Our Lord does not want us to check the box. He wants us to go to him in a certain way. And I- I now- I remember what I forgot, I was going to read a couple of excerpts from some instructions of St. Teresa of Avila. I had it, I made it a point to put it on my desk so wouldn't miss it. And I did miss it anyway.

So anyway, just to summarize, and I wish I could quote it verbatim, is that first she says in this instruction that I had to read from my Liturgy of the Hours that we are expected, she was a little bit no nonsense herself, tough Spanish lady, that we deal with Jesus as a friend. That's number one that she says that he is our best friend, and he says that everybody else, and it's not a slight on our friends, you know, our friends, just for the record, are not God, so they can't fulfill us, they can't always make us happy. They cannot, always- can't always help us the way we want to be helped. Well, only God could do that. And she says that this friend will never let us down. This friend loves us infinitely. It is divine as God is God and then perfectly as a man typified with his suffering on the cross. And she says that- that we are expected to always contemplate the life of Jesus. It doesn't have to be the exclusive prayer. Maybe I want to chill out. I don't want to contemplate anything. I just want- He's there and I'm here, I just need to see that he's here and I'm here. That's fine.

But she says that this humanity of Jesus is his mercy, basically his love for us expressed in these different episodes of the Gospel, should be our steady diet. See, that's why I should have read the thing, because that's my cliff note version. And that we are supposed to go to Jesus for strength when we are- feel helpless, when we are afraid, when we are anxious. These are- it's the human condition that we go to him for strength, and we will if we really seek him out, as she says, we will never be let down, because there's no one who loves us as this friend. And it's a great- so we could- as we contemplate he is rich in

mercy, we go to Jesus, that's the sacramental presence of Jesus' mercy, love doesn't get better than that. St. Josemaria says that, you know, there's so many beautiful manifestations of God's love, you know, the birth of Jesus is a beautiful manifestation, and his work as a carpenter, and then his public life of curing people, these are all manifestations of what he thinks of you and me. And he says, The ultimate may- you know he's, you know, that he dies on the cross, but he says, but even better than even, not better, but even more than, the death on the cross is being available for us. We can have all to ourselves in the tabernacle that he's in the Eucharist, you know, he's there for me so that I could go to him.

I wasn't- yesterday, but I was, you know, in Opus Dei you're always advised to try to be orderly, you know. And you know, keep your- keep things neat and all that. Some are better than- than doing that than others. I'm on the lower end of the totem pole here. But anyway, I was trying to, I was ordering some books, and that way I was trying to put them in order and they were in such disorder. There was books behind my row of books, and so I try to organize that a little bit, and a letter tumbled out, enclosed in an envelope not sealed. It was opened and my name was on it. And seemed like a birthday card, so I opened it and looked at it, and it was quite moving. It was an image- it was a card sent to me by a dying friend of mine who was terminally ill, and, you know, jogged the memories, you know, when you're my age, well, you know, it happens that you have friends who- who die. Everybody, just for the record, that's, you know, in spite of modern medicine, that's still everybody- everybody's terminal on some level, no matter how much bird seed you eat, or sunflower seed, or health, you know, or no matter how many deoxidants you are in taking, you know, but whatever, let's not change the subject here. And so it's Jesus, you know, it's Jesus hugging- hugging someone you know, really tight, you know. And the was a little letter to me. And basically, this man, why'd he send me this letter? I mean, he's in heaven, so he didn't tell me, you know, physically well, that's how- And I remember, then the memory started to come back, that that's how he found his strength. And that's how he found his joy, and he was looking at Our Lord with- as merciful, and the very fact that, you know, sure he that it wasn't, you know, just some generic card. I mean, that card was well selected. You know, if you ask me, I'm not that moved by my story, that I'm crying, it's just something in this pla- in this oratory that does something to my eyes. So the- that- I started to think about that, that card was selected, you know, he probably asked his wife to be indicated. What he- what kind of card he wanted to send me. Why did he send it to me? Because at that time I was also friend slash coach in his last, his last year and so. And, you know, he was pretty saintly, and he was pretty serene throughout this whole thing. But it wasn't I'm, you know, I'm serene, I'm scared, and so the fear, you know, of this illness that kept progressing and debilitating him, and his ability to walk, and his ability to think and the ability to remember, sometimes I think I have that part already was being diminished, and that would prompt him to go to Our Lord and finding strength and finding mercy and finding courage, and he would have to tell Our Lord, I'm scared, I'm afraid, I'm this, I'm that.

So he got very personal in his prayer, and just to give you an excerpt of the sentiments God wants us to have, and all the Psalms are basically, ultimately prayers directed to Christ, not originally, because Christ wouldn't be around for 1000 years, but everything St. Teresa says in this instruction that it is God the Father's will that we go to God as transcendent God, God, the Father, by the work of the Holy Spirit, we go through the humanity of Christ. So all these psalms in the mind of the Church is ultimately we go through the heart of Jesus. And so just to give you a psalm here, what does the Lord say when the righteous cry for help? Psalm 34, "the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles." So this is the ultimate truth. I mean, this is the Word of God. Well, I don't know if I noticed that. Well, it's not- it's a process. And I think- I could say, I could say it on faith, but I could say it on experience, personal experience and experience giving spiritual direction for decades now, that- and I don't want to ruin anybody's evening, that God will never- I can't speak for him, but, you know, I'm just, you know, if I just

take the statistics of my experience in giving guidance, he's not going to remove your defects, I'm sorry. You know, you're stuck with them, all right, but they're embarrassing, I know, but he doesn't remove them completely. They're willed away. We could cope with them. And Lord, well, I thought you're rich in mercy, and you're not gonna, you're not gonna take these deep I want them. God, I don't like my defects. I like her defects. You know, I have a friend who's this- this is a little bit of guy gossip, the- that he, you know, his big defect is generosity and compassion, all right, well, but how is that gossip? Well the gossip part of it, you know, it's still slight, just a tinge of gossip is all right, you let people get away with stuff, you know, or you don't set boundaries or but anyway.

Our Lord hears us, and he doesn't give in to compassion by just removing our defects, because it's precisely my weaknesses that are meant to lead me to his heart and experience his strength and experience his love. It's kind of- is it a ploy of God? That's one way to put it. Yeah it is a ploy, and I think we could take the liberty to put words in Jesus' mouth. Yeah, listen, I'm gonna, whatever your name was, Jody. I hope there's no Jody in here. Jody, Jody, of course, I love you, but I know I'm not gonna remove it, because I'm afraid you're not going to come back to me, you know, then you're gonna be smug. And you're not going to need me anymore. I mean, part of I- let me plan this thing out. Okay, your impression is painting. If you look, you know, at one little segment at one millimeter away, it looks like bunch of blotches, it's not though. Just, just hang in there. Your job- my job is to help you become a saint on my terms, not on yours, sorry. And your job is to try to get personal with me and rely on me. And kind of put into practice these kinds of- this kind of sentiment here, when the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles, the Lord is near to the broken hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit. We may not like this part, many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him or her out of them all. That's what the Psalm says, addressed to Christ.

So an important part of this prayer, you know, and maybe I, you may have heard this anecdote is kind of repeated often. It's- it's an anecdote of St. Josemaria. He was at a day of recollection- He was making a day of recollection, and a priest of Opus Dei, younger priest, a young priest of Opus Dei, was asked to give one, and he kind of was kicking and screaming that he didn't want to give it because he had a saint in the audience or a congregation, and he just- just felt very self-conscious and didn't want to do it. And then he got kind of, it was a rough day for him, because he was accused of being vain. You know, you're thinking about how you looked instead of leading everybody in prayer, so poor guy couldn't win. So he started to give us, you know, kind of standard easy softball, you know, meditation on humility. It was on, not on something erudite, and you know, St. Josemaria, he was known- he already had a reputation of sanctity, and sitting there and- and he says, well, humility is the basis of our spiritual life. And St. Josemaria was out in the back there. He says, No, my son, that's not true, right in his meditation. I don't have that kind of humility. Don't do that to me. So then he comes up to his table. He said, Why- sit down for a little while. So the poor guy sits down, and he starts saying, No, that's not- he was a little bit of a show, but it was a teaching moment. But he said, But he says, No, it's not- I mean, the spirituality is God loves you, that's the basis of your spiritual life. That you know these were men, so you're a son of God, and if you were women, you're a daughter of God. You're loved by God. That's- that's- that's the basis, was the guy right? Of course, he was right. Of course, he was right.

Humility is the base of his spiritual life. But that God loves me, and so I have to find- I go- I go to Christ to find solace and to find strength. And It's an important part of being holy, because being holy is not being a super woman or a superman. Being holy is relying more on Our Lord's strength. I mean, what is conversion? Being more and more during -throughout our life, more and more convinced that without me, you could do nothing. So you need to count on me, and you come to mental prayer to be refreshed. I mean that image in the Old Testament, and the image of in the tradition the Church, that you draw, you

know, you draw living water out of the heart of Christ, that's in the Gospel of St. John, that's in Isaiah, and in the tradition of the recent tradition, recent it's past 500 years that we draw out of the heart of Jesus. And probably what the letter to the Hebrews, which we'll read this Saturday- this Sunday here- is a very- they're all special, they're all inspired. But it's- it's a letter that gets into detail of Jesus, understanding of us. And it's a very unique body of literature because there's an interplay between Jesus, the divine and Jesus human, that interplay that both poles and how Jesus is the creator of the universe. That's how Paul- that's how Hebrews begins, at the same time he suffered temptation and wept and petitioned God and suffered. So both- both aspects of Christ are interplayed in- in this letter.

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession, for we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who is in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. Let us then, with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. So the early Christians heard this, and I need to ask myself, we need to ask for help. But how is this quiet time? And everybody has to feel free to do their own thing, but I think our common denominator must be finding that strength in Christ and- but going into my conversation with him because he wants to be exceedingly happy, and happiness and his will are almost identical, and it's happiness in his will, and his will means doing exactly what he did, following him. Do I go there to enhance my friendship with him, and do I go to my prayer to learn how to follow him in my life, to translate the Gospel, translate these episodes in the Gospel to my life as a worker, life as a student, life as an athlete, whatever I'm doing my life, interacting with my friends, et cetera.

St. Josemaria says here in *Forge*, "If you feel for whatever reason that you cannot manage, abandon yourself in God, telling him: Lord, I trust in you, I abandon myself in you, but do help me in my weakness." Then lastly, "Seek union with God and buoy yourself up with hope- that's sure virtue!- because Jesus will illuminate the way for you with the light of his mercy, even in the darkest night."

There is this gentleman, he made a visit in one of the churches, I think was Our Lady of Snow. It's not the safest area, but, and anyway, he went into the church. It's, you know, it's a shrine. It's a reputable- pretty reputable shrine, and he was mesmerized. You see a lot of statues and a lot of Sacred Heart statues, but for some reason, there was no glowing in the dark, there was no shedding of tears, there was no voices, just kind of sun going through the stained glass, and, you know, illuminating this statue of the Sacred Heart. I think he told me the Lord's hands were like this, you know, come to me, you know, they were like, that is the real statue. It wasn't, you know, he didn't- it didn't just happen. It didn't turn to life, if that's what you think I'm driving at. And he said, Well, you know, just seeing that, seeing that invitation, come on, come on, come on, come over here, he said, was, you know, a consolation. And so I may be, I'm going to experience anxiety, hope you- hope we don't, but we will. I'll experience fear, I'll experience inadequacy, I'll experience disillusionment, discouragement, even under the best circumstance, you know, I'm trying to spread the word of God. You know, I'm trying to witness it. No one listens to me. No one cares. You know, I'm exaggerating. Maybe I stick out, I'm not accepted because I'm embracing natural law, or I'm trying to live my discipleship as a Christian.

We have to share that with Our Lord and we'll come out really strong. We'll be strengthened, there's no question about it. Anyway, there's a lot more we could think about, we could pray about, but Jesus promises us. It's kind of almost very counter intuitive that, you know, if we do come to him for burden, and we come to him- I'm summarizing, you know, come to me, all who labored are heavy laden, and you'll find rest for your souls- if we really come to him, he promises that, you know, my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

So that's one form of prayer we want to exercise, and we turn to another consolation. And I would say the feminine, the perfect feminine human revelation of God's mercy is the Blessed Mother. And one may say, you know, just if you're a theological stickler here, no- no Vatican II, I know what it says, Christ is the apex of divine revelation. Well, Mary is the feminine image of her son, a Christ-like woman, perfectly, Christ-like, ergo, she is rich in mercy as a- as a human being, as a woman. And so we go to her as well and not- and seeing her as another act of God's mercy, giving us this Blessed Mother, you know, and we think about her in a special way during her month of the Rosary. So we pray to you, Mary, so we learn to contemplate your son's mercy and love for us the way you did.

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 your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.