

Episode: The Plan of Life: Daily Habits for Holiness

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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 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.

We have a very precise goal for this time of prayer together, and that goal can be summarized by the dedication that St. Josemaria wrote in a book on the life of Christ many years ago, back in the mid 30s. He wanted to give this book to a young student, and so he wrote in the at the very beginning of the book, "May you seek Christ, may you find Christ, may you fall in love with Christ." The whole point of this time of prayer, this conversation with Our Lord here, truly present- present in the Blessed Sacrament, is to fix our eyes, our heart, on that goal of seeking Christ, not just in general, but day to day, hour by hour. We want to find ways of becoming so aware of his presence, of this constant compassion- companionship of his that he will transform our life and ultimately we will become genuine contemplatives.

There's a very beautiful book, a very short book by Robert Hugh Benson that was written about 100 years ago. The name of the book is *The Friendship with Christ*. And the author says right at the beginning that the consciousness of this friendship of Jesus Christ is the very secret of the saints. It is the maddening joy of the conscious companionship of Jesus Christ that has produced the lovers and therefore the giants of history. We want that consciousness, not just of his presence, but of how he looks at our relationship, the fact that the Lord, right now, during this time of prayer, is gobbling us up, so to speak, with his love. That he would do anything for us to be seeking him with passion, and this is what we ask him.

But that raises the question, the very obvious question, how do we get there? Some of you might be old enough to remember the little tune in the ads for Brill Cream. This is not the place for me to remind you of the tune, but you certainly will remember the slogan, a little dab will do you. Now that strange combination of words, if you pronounce it properly, it's saying a little dab of Brill Cream is enough, a little dab will do you. Try saying that five times. That's fine for hair grease or, let's just say, gel, a little dab will do you. It doesn't work- it does not work with the spiritual life. It is not enough for us to hang a rosary over the rear-view mirror, to talk to people at cocktail parties about the fact that when we were 10 years old, we were an altar server. Certainly not enough for us to say an occasional Hail Mary, even if we are the quarterback. Just- that kind of approach to the spiritual life would produce a thin veneer that would wear off at the first washing.

The fact that we're here today shows that we want way more than that. We want something serious, something for adults. And above all, something- an approach that will help us to achieve our goal of seeking Christ and of finding him, and little by little, of falling in love with him. Well, the secret, as taught to us by St. Josemaria is what he referred to as a plan of life. It is a plan of attack. It is very concrete, amazingly concrete, which is why it is so helpful. The plan of life comes down to a series of rendezvous spread throughout the day, or if you want, you can think of it as a giant power grid stretching out over the expanse of any given day of ours. If you think of the power grids that cross and crisscross our country, you think of these giant towers spread out at definite intervals, and you think of this constant delivery of power. Well, that's what the plan of life is. It's this grid that we superimpose on our daily choreography, a grid that enables us, in a very explicit way, very conscious way, of touching base with Our Father God, with Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, getting that boost of energy and diving back into whatever it is that we were doing. This power grid, this plan of life, really and truly, keeps us at- you could call it a cruising altitude. It keeps us up there where we want to be, even as we go about our daily tasks. And furthermore, having this plan, a very concrete plan, saves us from the dispersion, the danger of dispersion, of just wandering around aimlessly, at times, wasting time. And also, it saves us from the danger of activism, of just being on the go all the time, kind of a frenetic pace of life, whereby we end up confusing our- confusing ourselves, and fooling ourselves, thinking, I don't have time. I'm so busy, I have so many things to do, I don't have time to stop and pray. Well right now we can ask the Lord and say to him, my Jesus, save me from those two contrasting dangers. Do not let me slip into dispersion, because I want to be focused on the most important things in life. And do not- do whatever it takes to keep me from falling into activism, because that activism will not do me any good, and it certainly will not do those around me any good, because I will be frenetic, I will lose that self-composure that helps those around me, it helps me.

Well, what exactly is the plan of life? What are the ingredients of this famous plan we have been talking about for a few minutes now? Well, the most important element, as you can imagine, is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, as often as possible, daily, if possible. And why is that? Because the Holy Mass involves the author, the source of life, himself. Every time we receive Our Lord and Holy Communion, he is feeding us with his own life. He is increasing his presence, the presence of the three persons of the Trinity in our soul. And as the days go by, as the years go by, we get to the point where we cannot imagine a day without the Eucharist. Some of you have undoubtedly begun reading these daily meditations in this- using this app or this website called iPray with the Gospel. Quite a number of those anecdotes have to do with people who have gone to wild extremes, great sacrifice, at the risk of their life to receive Our Lord every day. People in prisons, people banished to the far ends of the earth, people who put their lives at stake in order to be able to receive Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. You know, we could spend the rest of this meditation talking about the mass, but we would miss a lot of other things, but suffice to say, to repeat those wonderful words of St. Augustine, placing in the mouth of Jesus these words, I am the food- "I am the food of the strong." And Jesus, according to St. Augustine's placing these words in the mouth of Jesus, he goes on to say, "When you eat normal food, you convert that food into yourself. When you receive Communion, when you eat my flesh, drink my Blood, I convert you into me." We become that much more part of Jesus Christ.

So the first ingredient, the Holy Mass. Then comes a time set aside each day for meditation, for this kind of conversation that we're having right now, if possible, in the presence of Our Lord in the tabernacle. But whatever and whenever and wherever, whatever it takes for us to stop, talk things over with the Lord, knowing that he loves us unimaginably, that he has been waiting for this conversation more than we can begin to imagine. He wants to hear everything we have to say, because he loves us so much.

Then there is spiritual reading. Reading of some- some spiritual book could be one of the classics. St. Theresa of Avila, St. Augustine himself, St. John Paul II, each one of us has certain authors that help us,

especially. Undoubtedly, you've come across the writings of St. Josemaria, starting with the very first book that he wrote, called *The Way*, That "spiritual reading," to quote St. Theresa of Avila, "has made many saints." And why is that? When we open the pages of a book, when we read, for example, the biography of a great saint, we are learning- we are observing what it means to be, ultimately in love with God, and what the consequences of that- the ramifications of loving God are, what it looks like. Someone was saying recently that he was visiting a large, well-known midwestern US campus with an excellent football team, and he was there on a day when a high school bus pulled up and all these students came out, went into the field house, where there is a great big museum, great big showcase of all the great players from the past and the boys in that group, they had their noses, the noses pressed against that show glass- that showcase. They were looking at the jerseys, the shoes of certain players, the real football photographs. And this person observing this said you could, you could almost hear these young people growing just from looking at their heroes. That's what we do in the spiritual reading, not to mention the fact that if we read a book about the certain teachings of the Church, certain realities of the spiritual life, we develop an understanding of vocabulary, we acquire principles of the spiritual life.

Then there is the Holy Rosary. How wonderful to think that when we pray the rosary, we are fulfilling an express desire of Our Lady. She is the one who gave us the rosary, she is the one who asked us to pray the rosary every day. This is Mary, the Mother of God, and our mother who asked us to do this. And it makes all the sense in the world, because day after day, we are contemplating the different scenes of the life of Jesus. We become that much more aware. For example, on Tuesdays and Fridays, the Sorrowful Mysteries, as we contemplate those mysteries and pray those decades, we are remembering the main moments of Our Lord's Passion and Death. The agony in the garden, the scourging at the pillar, the crowning with thorns, the carrying of the cross, the crucifixion and death of Jesus. By the time we finish that part of the Rosary, we are once again reminded he did that for me, something we can never forget.

Then at the end of the day, we finish the day with our examination of conscience. It's our chance to look back over the day to check our progress. If golfers at the end of a round of golf can look over the scorecard, add up the number of putts, especially three putts, we can certainly look over the day and check our patience, our spirit of service, etc. That's the way we grow. That's why we get better. Because then we can ask the Lord, we can say, I'm sorry, because today, I- I kept losing my patience. Tomorrow, tomorrow's another day. Tomorrow, I begin again. I'm going to struggle again. We become aware.

Well, these are the basic ingredients. Then comes the- that one drop, that one special ingredient that makes everything worthwhile and it makes it work. That special ingredient is constancy; day after day, month after month, for the rest of our lives. And why? Because the goal is so great, the goal is so important, it's worth struggling till the end of our days on this earth to seek Christ, to find him, to fall in love with him, one day at a time. We can't imagine what an impact that has over a lifetime. If you have had the chance to go to Jerusalem, you will discover, among many marvels, very beautiful gardens. It does not rain a lot in Jerusalem, so the question arises, what- How do they do it? What they do, they have laid down a series of tiny little pipes like arteries with an opening at the base of each plant. And they have, the engineers who have done this, they have determined how many drops of water each plant needs every day. And that system administers that many drops of water. They have to go by drops because there's not that much water there. But the cumulative, the accumulative effect of that is magnificent. Well, that's- that's what we're talking about with the plan of life. We're not talking about enormous expenditures of time and energy. I mean 15 minutes a day, for example, spiritual reading, including two or three minutes of the New Testament. It's nothing. And yet, at the end of a- at the end of a year, we look back and we realize I have read so many books. I have gone all the way through the New Testament. I'm- I've already started going through it again. It is fantastic.

How do we make the plan of life- life work as it should? Internal order is key. That phrase might sound a little bit funny, but what it comes down to is ordering our day around our priorities. When we lock onto a priority, we are capable of leaping over tall buildings in a single bound, it's amazing, we get things done. Well, when we say, as we're assuring Our Lord right now, in this time of prayer, I'm coming to get you, I'm going to seek you, I'm going to pursue you. Well, then our day falls into place, all these different elements fall into place. Then we begin arranging our day according to this- this set of priorities. We say, Okay, what time is mass? I'll get there. When is the best time for me to do the reading? I'll do that. Best time for the Rosary and so forth.

You may recall the story we prayed together about recently. A young man at one of our student residences was saying that somebody had said to him, Well, we have mass here in the residence every day, would you like to come? And his first thought was, I don't have time, I have so many- so many assignments. But then, as he thought about it, over the next few days, he said to himself, but wait a minute, I have time for ping pong, I have time for YouTube, I have time for the video games. Maybe, if I rearrange things, maybe I can do it. And that was a big moment in his life. He hasn't- He has not missed ever since he made that little bit of reasoning.

The delay of gratification. We've prayed about this one together too, it comes in here perfectly. As you know, because we- we've read this from a book recently, a very thoughtful person said, the delay of gratification is of profound significance. Consider people who are successful and those who are not, the successful among us delay gratification. What that means, with regard to the plan of life, if we set a special time for- for the spiritual reading, for example. Well, the chances are that when that time comes along, we will suddenly think of something that would gratify us. It could be doing a crossword puzzle, it could be- could be anything. But we have- we have- we have set for ourselves a rendezvous with Jesus Christ. And so when that time comes for the appointment with him, what a wonderful thing it is to get into the habit of saying to ourselves, I'm not doing anything until I finish this spiritual reading, the crossword puzzle, or whatever it is, can wait. Well, that is delaying gratification, and that is the stuff of winners, of successful people. It's very important for us to foster toughness and generosity in order to make the plan of life work, especially at that magic moment the beginning of the day when the alarm clock goes off, toughness that will show itself in getting out of bed. You can help us a lot at that moment to realize someone is waiting for me. The Son of God, he who has redeemed me, is waiting for me to spend some time with him in prayer. And furthermore, he's waiting for me to make this act of generosity as a tiny little bit of thanking him for his dying on the cross for me. If we can get that done at the beginning of the day, our day is- is well on its way to being a great day.

By the way, think of the impact of following this plan of life on your children, on your grandchildren. How wonderful it is- it will be for them to know that at certain times of the day you come into a screeching halt. You have your book, you have your Mass. How wonderful it is to say to the gang at home, would anyone care to pray a decade of the Rosary with me? Or 10 Hail Marys, or one Our father, 10 Hail Marys, one Glory Be. And the chances are, as the- as the as time goes by, some of the gang will want to pray the entire rosary with you. It's very important that they know- that they learn that you are a soul of prayer. They will never forget that.

A very beautiful way for us to finish is a consideration, going back to this great app, iPray with the Gospel. It's so very simple, referring to Mary, the mother of Jesus, the Mother of God. How lovely to find Mary following Jesus, to imagine her listening to him, paying attention to every word, to every story. Hanging on his every gesture, his smile, as a thirsty soul drinking- drinking in every word that came from his lips. How

wonderful to imagine Mary smiling to herself on hearing that voice that she knew so well. She had her eyes on him every time she had the chance, even when some- Jesus was talking to someone else in the distance, she could not help looking at her son and recalling so many conversations with him. That's very moving. It's a great way for us to finish our time of prayer, because we can turn to Our Lady, she who is that- that woman of prayer who craved being in the presence of her son. We say, Mary, give me that same craving, that same desire. Give me that interior life that I- that I need. Give me a greater- and greater love for you.

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.