

Episode: To The Heights: The Path to Sainthood

Contributor: Rev. Leo Austin

Podcast Page: <https://stjosemaria.org/podcasts/to-the-heights-path-to-sainthood/>

We are pleased to offer a transcript of this podcast to serve the needs of all our subscribers. Please note, however, that this transcript is generated by AI and may not be perfectly accurate. This content may not be published or reprinted without permission from the St. Josemaria Institute.

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.

Every time I read the Gospel, something special happens, and it is because the Gospel is not just a book that contains some thoughts or some wonderful anecdotes, inspiring ones. That is because the Gospel is the life of someone that is still alive, Jesus Christ, you my Lord. And that's why, even 2000 years later, when I read it today, you're speaking to me. Pope Benedict says that the life of Jesus is not just a piece of information, but it's a performance- It's a transformation in each one of us. So when I read today this part of the gospel that I want to bring to this time of prayer, my Lord, I want to listen to you. I want to listen to your words apply to me in today- of my journey right now. An answer to those questions or challenges or reactions with my own personal encounter with you.

The Gospel of St. Mark, at the beginning of the gospel says that, when Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home, and so many gathered around that house that there was no longer- no room for anybody, not even in front of the door. He was speaking the word to them, he was preaching, wonderful, and people in silence, listening, maybe taking notes, bringing them to your heart- to their hearts. And there were some guys- four guys that were in town, and they were bringing to him a paralyzed friend. Four of them, says the gospel, were trying to bring him in front of Jesus, and they couldn't, because the house was packed. So in a very daring move, they went up to the roof, made a hole, and lower the paralyzed friend in front of Jesus. Many times in the Gospel, miracles are performed when someone is asking for help. Could be a leper, sinful woman or sinful man, a blind person, and Our Lord does the miracle- performs- you my Lord perform the miracle at request, we would say. In this case, it's different. There is something very special in this miracle, because it's kind of a silence. There are no words, but there is something very specific that Mark noticed, and he wrote it, and we can read it today, and it says that, "Jesus, moved by their faith, asked the paralyzed person, do you want your sins to be forgiven?" And the Pharisees were scandalized and- and they were questioning that authority of Jesus, and Our Lord said, well, in order that- for you to know that I have this power, he said to a paralyzed person, "rise, take up your mat and go home."

But I want to stop for a second. And the miracle happened. And he was probably crying, and I guess he hugged you, my Lord, he spent some time with you, and then he went outside the house, and then the other four friends were waiting for him, and they threw a party most likely to celebrate, right? Very gratefully. But there is this little instance in which the gospel and everybody in the room saw that Jesus was moved and he was moved by their faith. Not even the person with sins or paralyzed was asking for anything. There's a silence that are- very, very loud silence, so to speak, very wonderful, very respectful. In an interview that Curtis Martin was giving recently, speaking about, you know miracles, he was encouraging us to enter into this SEEK encounter, SEEK, this FOCUS missionary encounter with the attitude of Pier Giorgio Frassati, Saint Pier Giorgio Frassati, and I want to think more about this, my Lord. What's the attitude that I have in front of the gospel? In front of you? Curtis Martin was saying that a way- maybe a way to do it is like a three steps towards Jesus Christ. The first one is holiness- personal holiness. The second one is joy, and the third one is a mission- sense of a mission. And I think this gospel is talking about these three steps. The first thing that both the friends and the paralyzed person experienced was the encounter with Jesus Christ. I listened to the Word of God, I listened to your voice, my Lord, and you're alive. You are alive. I believe that you are here. I said it at the beginning of my time of prayer. I believe that you are here, and then all the words, all your- you know, sentences and teachings are still, you know, echoing in this world and in my heart. And that's the most important thing, essentially the foundation of everything I encounter, the real Jesus in my interior life. Step number one, where are you now, Jesus? Maybe I'm paralyzed, maybe I don't know how to move, maybe I'm scared, maybe I'm lost or lazy or indifferent, whatever your situation is. And then you encounter, I encounter Jesus, and I hear his voice. What do you want? What a question, right? When Jesus Christ asking you, what do you want, in the silence of your prayer, when Jesus Christ is looking at you eye to eye and says, What do you want? How can I help you? That's huge. If you and I can make that silence, then we will see- we will feel that encounter, and then those words for real, right? So what do you want? I want to encounter you. St. Thomas Aquinas was dying in his room after years of a prayer, sacrifice, writing, studying, and then God in a crucifix that was in his room, Jesus Christ was apparently talking to him- he was having a mystical experience. And Jesus Christ you, my Lord, you asked him, "What do you want?" And then he answered, "I want you. I want nothing- I want nothing, but you." What a wonderful answer. So what do you want? I want you, my Lord.

The second thing is, according to Chris Martin, Curtis Martin, sorry, is the joy of that realization Jesus is in front of me, I talk to you, and then there's such a joy that naturally, I jump to the third step, actually, which is the mission. So you see, encounter the joy of the love of God in me, and then I jump into a mission, I need to share what I have discovered, very much so as in my life, as in the- in the life of this paralyzed and their friends- paralyzed person and their friends. I encountered, and the joy my sins are forgiven, I can walk, I can move spiritually and physically speaking, and then I am on a mission, I cannot keep this for myself. I think it's very simple but very deep. And maybe this is a map that can help you in your in your vocation right now, I don't know where you are, right, but in any case, we all have the opportunity, especially in these days, looking at the catalog of the saints the Church is encouraging us to look at them and say, Okay, why don't you inspire yourself with the saints? And then you look at Pier Giorgio Frassati, for instance, right? And then you see, okay, what did he do? A little bit about his life? And you realize that he didn't do anything extraordinary from the external point of view. At least, he was the son of a couple that was wonderful from Italy. The mom loved painting, an artist, creating things, you know, colors, perspective, composition, different things, an artist. I like the idea that he grew up with a mom that was engaged with artistic desires, with creation, with- right? Wonderful. And then the dad was running a *La Stampa*, which is a newspaper in Italy, and he was advocating for the rights of the people, for the truth. So that combination was kind of the sauce right that created in Pier Giorgio Frassati, in infancy, and childhood and a culture in his house that- I love it because he was very engaged with the world. Sometimes I think we have this fear of the world because it's evil, because it's- or we think is evil or is tainted by the

original sin, but the world is wonderful, it's your creation, my Lord. I need to maybe get over this paralysis that is a fear that is not coming from you. And then Pier Giorgio loved, for instance, museums, art, music, going to a theater, going to the opera performances he knew by heart, quotes from Dante from the Divine Comedy, engaging the world, living his life in the middle of the world, like St. Josemaria would like to say, climbing mountains, going on hikes, playing sports, having a ton of good friendships. You know, that's the life of the saints.

Now where is all coming from? What is optimism? Is it because he was born that way? Maybe had some natural incarnations to do those things, but it's also something that you cultivate. And maybe this is the step that Our Lord, in your vocation, is asking you during these days, looking at the saints is- is also an opportunity to say, okay, how do I cultivate myself culturally? How do you rest? How do I rest? How do I develop my personality? How do I choose things? Am I scared of choosing things? Pier Giorgio Frassati chose, for instance, to be receiving daily communion, to have daily communion. It was an exception back then in the days, but in those days, daily communion, you needed permission, it was not like now, but he needed that daily communion. That permeated his personality, and then he was taking care of the poor. He wanted to be an engineer- he was an engineer. He wanted to help people play sports, have friends, but he was a foundation, always the foundation of the encounter with Jesus Christ. You see, it is not that difficult. It's something that you and I can do- all of us can do. You may say, but I don't have that personality, and I reply, you have a heart. It doesn't matter if you're Albert Einstein or you are homeless, or you are a Nobel Prize, or you're a street cleaner, or a cook, or a mom, or a dad, or young, or old, or rich, or poor, or healthy, or sick, in any of those situations with Our Lord and you yourself, you look at- is your heart, and that's very important. And maybe my Lord, I need to think more about this. Where do I put my heart?

One of the biggest temptations in our times, at least in my experience, personally and talking to other people, is the fear to make mistakes. Pier Giorgio Frassati and in the gospel of today, these four friends took risks, both Pier Giorgio and these friends, they took risks, and they took risks without knowing the outcome. What I mean with this is that sometimes in our- in our experience, maybe we get frozen because we are scared of making mistakes, and then we don't do anything. Or, which is even worse, we do a lot of things, but our heart is abandoned. And, for instance, we have this path that I don't think is good for us, for anybody, which is to keep myself busy in order to avoid temptations. That's very dangerous because it seems virtuous, and maybe it works for avoiding temptations, but that's a means for an end. Being busy is not necessarily a way towards holiness. You can be very busy and completely empty in your heart. So sometimes the fear of thinking, the fear of examining if you are happy, freezes you, freezes me from making steps forward. Pier Giorgio Frassati has this famous quote, "Verso l'alto," towards the heights, towards the, you know, the elevated places, both physically and intellectually, emotionally and spiritually speaking. And he technically- I mean, he did it- or applied, maybe, to hike- hikes or climbing mountains, and then there's this iconic picture that he's looking up to a rock that he's climbing, verso l'alto, look up- look up and risk, and put your heart. Don't be scared of making mistakes, because there's no perfect reality. If we are thinking that the perfect conditions should be met in order to do any step in life we would do a few of them. I always think that- or tell guys that come to- to my residence for spiritual direction at UCLA, and they're maybe dating, thinking about the vocation towards marriage and his wonderful vocation, and maybe, is she the one? Is she the one that I want? And I say to them, I don't know, but you need to make her the one. And they say, What do you mean? I say, well, if you think that she's Catholic and she wants to have a family, and she's your age, and she lives around you, the conditions are there. You don't need anything else. And jokingly, sometimes I tell them, is she taller than you? And then, oh, come on. Well, whatever, I wouldn't marry someone taller than me, whatever, but yes, that's just a joke. But if the conditions are there, what else do you need? Then, I don't know if it's- if I marry her, maybe she's not the one that God was, you know, preparing for me. And I said, there's no such a thing. You with prudence,

with prayer, with some advice, checking the boxes, and also maybe checking someone in your family or someone that knows you. You make her the one when you choose her. And that's a free act of, you know, choice that transforms reality and makes reality more beautiful. And you don't choose because she is perfect, but you choose her because you want to make her beauty- beautiful or more beautiful, right? So it does apply to marriage, or applies to friendship or to jobs, for instance, business, I think- I think as a perfect job, we cannot be waiting forever. We just say, Okay, I am have this opportunity is in my- my country- I mean, I cannot go to all the job applications around the entire planet to know if that's my job, it would be exhausting, it would be pointless, right? I don't want a job that's in Indonesia or in Japan or in Europe, because, I'm in LA and maybe I can move to another city, maybe, but, what I mean is, this is reality, and I tackle reality, and I choose, and I transform reality with my choice, and that's an act of freedom that is also an act of mercy towards reality, so to speak, and transforms everything we touch with the grace of God.

Remember, you have the encounter of Jesus Christ, you have the joy of Jesus Christ, you have a sense of a mission- a vocational sense of a mission in your life. And then whatever comes across your life, my life can be redeemed, touched, transformed by me, by my loving, this opportunity in front of me that's wonderful, that's so liberating. And there are no maps in the sense of- perfect maps and thank God, I would say, thank God is not perfect, because then where is the opportunity? Where is the challenge? If everything is perfect, life will be so boring, precisely because we have a mission, we need to fix things. We're not surprised- I'm not surprised, my Lord, like you are not- people in the Gospel are bringing you difficulties, and you're very happy to give them peace, and you're not surprised. You're not expecting a perfect people in Israel, you're expecting people that make choices and love, and seek answers, and then you give them those answers, and they struggle, and then you come back and you give them more and- and this is growth interacting with an imperfect reality. And that's the beauty of my life and yours.

Speaking about mountains, St. Josemaria has this point in *The Way* that describes a little bit this interaction with reality. He says, "You're right, the peak dominates the country for miles around and yet there is not a single plain to be seen," like a jungle, right? "Just one mountain after another." And then he- he's describing reality, you know, problems, challenges, imperfections, insecurities, defects, whatever, personally, other people around me, whatever. And then he says, "So it is, so it must be with the horizon of your apostolate: the world has to be crossed. But there are no ways made for you. You yourself will make them through the mountains with the impact of your feet." You will open new ways to encounter Jesus Christ because you have him inside you. Like Pier Giorgio Frassati, you bring him verso l'alto, to the heights, to the stars, to the horizon of your holiness through the joy that you have and you bring to others in your missionary apostolate life, both professionally, spiritually, personally speaking. And that's the beauty, precisely, that the saints discovered in their vocation. This is the beauty of this friendship of these four guys with a paralytic friend, the friendship that Jesus Christ brings to everybody else, and the saints, you know, understood that, and they said, okay, this is my opportunity in the now of my history to do the same thing.

Pier Giorgio Frassati, a normal person. He was an engineer, college friend, a younger guy, and then with- with friends, with sports, with art, with heart- study, with visiting the homeless. Apparently, it was really generous. He grew up in Italy, and when he was a teenager, he was a little older, but during his years in college, all the people that were coming from the First World War were in the streets, some of them abandoned orphan people, and he would go to visit them. Sometimes he would not pay or he would keep the money from the tram or from the bus in order to give it to the homeless, or his money for lunch and give it to the homeless or to the people- orphans, or people he needs in the streets. To the point of time, he was so generous, that he got sick, he was infected and poliomyelitis, and he died at the age of 24, he actually died on July the fourth, or the Fourth of July in 1925. So every time now we celebrate

Independence Day in the US, we can remember Pier Giorgio Frassati and the day he entered into heaven. And because he was sick, and he contracted that sickness, taking care of the poor, taking care of people that were, you know, sick, what a wonderful life. And again, so normal at the same time, so friendly, so approachable, my Lord, I want that, I want that for myself. I wish I had the faith in my own vocation that St. Giorgio Frassati had in his own vocation. Jesus give me faith in my own vocation and in order to be a gift for others, Jesus again, help me to cultivate myself in my personality, it's not an optional, it's not something superficial, it's not something worldly, not at all, to read good books, to watch good movies, to listen to good music, to be able to appreciate art or nature. These are not optionals. If we're real Catholics, we need to be contemplatives, and we need to show the world that creation is- is a gift from God, otherwise, if we're just busy, it was just stoically working hard with no time, with no energy to develop ourselves, we cannot be a gift for others. So it is- it is crucial that I have a schedule, for instance, for my weekends or for my time after working a schedule or a plan, maybe I don't follow it perfectly, but I have things that help me to develop as a person.

Pier Giorgio Frassati, in a society that was broken after the first World War, imagine right, in a world that was imperfect like any other part of the world, Italy is not any better than any so there are sinners, people trying to do their best, and there's scarcity of food, and there are nights that are cold and- but in that context of friendship, you know, and- and even in a broken world after second- first World War, Pier Giorgio Frassati, like an obstacle, he sees a mountain of problems, and he climbs, verso l'alto, Jesus Christ is with me. I have a joy that is for me first, and once I get it- once I get it, personally, I want to give it to everybody else. Verso l'alto towards great things, towards transforming the world. All the saints, especially, I would say, in the last century with, you know, Pier Giorgio Frassati, Maria Goretti, St. Josemaria, Maximilian Kolbe, St. John Paul II. We have such a catalog of saints, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, all of them living in different moments of reality and history, but all of them saying, I have Jesus, I'm so happy, I want to bring it to you. That's it, that's a recipe. That's what this encounter at SEEK Conference organized by FOCUS missionaries wants to promote right, and that's why we want to be holy people. That is- are very happy and with a missionary feeling or missionary in your understanding of life. Let us ask all the saints, the catalog of the saints, to give us faith in our own vocation, starting with the Blessed Virgin Mary, with you, my mother, with Pier Giorgio Frassati, St. Josemaria, St. John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Padre Pio, all of them, that we follow your son, Mary, that you follow, I follow Jesus Christ with the same joy, with the same generous heart, as all the saints did.

Apparently, years ago, St. John Paul II was interviewed, I think it was in Australia, and the interviewer who was going through- through his schedule, asking him, what's a normal day in the life of the Pope? And St. John Paul II was explaining, I wake up at 5:30, I pray the Liturgy of the Hours, I have some time of mental prayer. Then I celebrate the mass, and I have this meeting, and I have lunch and more meetings, and then this thing, another thing. And halfway through the interview, the journalist, it was a woman, asked him, "What is your free time? You're so busy." And then St. John Paul II, smiled at her, he was on TV. And then he said, "All my time is free. Everything I do, I do it freely. What do you mean my free time?" And it made me think that if I cultivate myself, I work, but I intentionally and willingly give myself, and then there is no sense of a freedom versus duty. It's not that my duties are overtaking my freedom. No, is this. They combine, they are there together. They're actually the same thing. I'm the same person and- and, of course, I- I sometimes I have a hard time doing something, but I put my- my intellect, my will, as something beautiful, as something that is I want this because I'm squeezing my intellect. I'm squeezing my- even my body in the gym or whatever, to be a gift for others, to help others to be healthy or to- to enjoy the experience of an effort to do something, even if it's in sports or scratches or- or drafts, in drawing or learning how to contemplate things or to play an instrument or to learn another language. All those things

are experiences of beauty in themselves. Not only the result is- is a whole process that refines you as a person, and it helps you to appreciate beauty better, because you know how hard it is, but in a joyful way, not in a resentful one. And then my Lord, like in the Gospel, you know, I try things, and then sometimes I- I'm paralyzed, but then I go to you, and then you talk to me, and you give me hope, and then you see my faith, or the faith of my friends. And then there's an influence, and we help each other, and then we move forward. And you know, the chiaroscuro, the charity and the darkness of the life of the saints. And there are moments of more light and there are moments of more darkness. But the combination make- makes you know the painting of my life so wonderful in your eyes and in my eyes too, because I experience all those things, and I am human. But my Lord, the lesson maybe is, or here is to avoid the fear of not doing anything- or to avoid the shelter of keeping myself busy but my heart empty, just doing things, just being scared of being valued from what I'm really are, and in hiding with noise, with business, with quote, unquote, a virtuous life that has no development has no, you know, commitment of Love.

My Lord, this is not good for us. The saints risked- the saints gave themselves, and in doing that, they transformed people, they transformed society, they transformed the world. Even for a human point of view, giving myself, being a gift for others is so wonderful. Help me, my Lord. St. Josemaria has this point in *Furrow* that has to do with this. He says, "I read a proverb which is very popular in some countries." And this is the proverb, "God owns the world, but he rents it out to the brave." End of the quote, as St. Josemaria says, "And it made me think, what are you waiting for?" God owns history, the world, but he's not lording or doing everything. He rents it out to the brave. And again, the brave don't think, Oh, well, I am more introvert. I cannot be brave. No, no braveness of heart, the braveness of your heart, the giving entirely, even if you're- if sometimes I am, you know, very I don't know, overwhelmed by things is in my heart, the little step of saying, I want to love this person. I want to cultivate myself to be a gift for others. I want to develop this capacity, this capability, that is what the saints 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, Pier Giorgio Frassati, intercede for me.