

## Episode: Formation and Freedom

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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.

The life of Jesus Christ, your life, my Lord, is a constant revelation. God coming to this world, assuming our human nature, reveals himself. And you and I, like the apostles and the people that were following Jesus, learn little by little more about this life that Jesus is bringing to us, this light, this truth, and it's a gradual understanding. And sometimes in our times of prayer- when I dialogue with you, my lord, I see things very clearly, very specific teachings. Many times, it's not that clear and that's okay. I pray. I meet you. I accompany you in front of the tabernacle or even in my car or in my room. And there's- nothing specific about my life or any specific question, but being with you somehow transforms me and that's what the apostles experienced many times. I think it's very similar to what happens in families or in friendships. We get to know more and more about our parents, our siblings, friends, and we appreciate it better, especially if they cared about us when we were younger. We really thank them, right? And today, maybe, is a good day to think about parents, teachers, mentors, coaches, that had a tremendous impact in our lives, in our vocation. They are, or they were, at some point, part of our journey. And we appreciate that. All of them somehow participate in these teachings of Jesus Christ in the mentorship that somehow comes from God. And maybe they are secondary causes, and really good ones, helping God to teach us something, to reveal more about the truth, the goodness, the beauty of the divine life that dwells inside the Blessed Trinity. So, I really want to thank them right now, my Lord: my parents, my siblings, my friends, again, coaches, teachers, professors, mentors. They have been revealing to me wonderful things about myself or the world. And all of them are participating in your heart, somehow, in your knowledge, in your wisdom.

In the Gospel of St. Mark, we see how our Lord, at the beginning of the gospel, chooses some of his apostles, the first followers. And after that the gospel continues and says that Jesus came to Capernaum with his followers, few of them, and on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. What a wonderful reality, Jesus teaching. You, my Lord, at ease in a synagogue, or in a temple, or in the streets, in a corner, in a house, in a basement, teaching. I want to be like you. I want to- to be a good mentor for others. It could be that I am a teacher, a professor, or maybe, most commonly, a father, or a mother, or a priest. And all of us have this role of mentorship, caring about people. So, we want to learn from you, my Lord. I want to look at you, how you teach. Because there are- so many things to learn here. "People were

astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes." This is the first clue. Our Lord has his authority. What is his authority? St. Josemaria, the founder of Opus Dei, I think was a great teacher. When you read his books, *The Way*, his homilies, you see the humanity of Jesus Christ applied to our world. And that's why he's the saint of the ordinary things, the patron of the ordinary things, St. Josemaria, because he looked at Jesus Christ in his humanity. And then he was a big follower of Jesus, of course, and also he was speaking to freedom. And I think another foundation for all the ways he educated or taught people is formation. So, I think there are two pillars- two basic pillars, in order to understand Jesus Christ and all the saints. And these two pillars are very strong. They are foundational. One is formation, knowing the truth. And the other one, as important as the first one, is freedom.

So, let's see how Jesus applies these two big concepts to his teaching. He taught them having authority. And then look at the example. In their synagogue, there was a man with an unclean spirit. So, there's someone with a problem that he cannot listen to God. He cannot see him clearly because he has this unclean spirit that is blocking his view, his eyes. And then he cried out, "What have you to do with us? Jesus of Nazareth, have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.", This possessed person, or the devil through this possessed person, knows who Jesus is, very interesting. Knowledge is not enough. You can know many, many things, but then is your heart moved to love them, right? When I'm talking about teaching someone, mentoring someone, it's not just passing information; it's also helping people to be attracted to the beauty of that information, to the beauty of the truth.

Jesus, help me to be a good mentor, a good father or mother, towards my kids or students or people that I have in spiritual direction. I deliver the truth as best as I can; but at the same time, I deliver it with the authority of showing them how beautiful this is. This is what Jesus does- he appeals to- to our conscience. He says, "This is beautiful. Look at this inside you." And then the gospel says that Jesus rebuked him and said, "Quiet! Come out of him!" Quiet that, I think, in the context of this teaching moment, has to do with slow down. I'm adapting to you. I'm walking with you. Let's slow down for a second. Let's contemplate this truth together. Of course, he's not talking to the devil because the devil cannot be redeemed, unfortunately. He's talking to the person, maybe being possessed, who is still struggling. He wants maybe to be closer to Our Lord but is still hesitant about making the last step towards truth. And then Jesus Christ is saying, slow down. Let's contemplate this together. Don't rush. And maybe this applies to my role when I need to guide someone or to guide myself, sometimes slowing down, putting things into perspective, knowing the story. Why are you acting that way? What's the root of this problem, not just the symptoms? What caused you to react in this way? And this is a wonderful art that we need to develop for ourselves or especially for others. Say, "Why are you doing this? Let's slow down for a second." And then the gospel continues and says that the unclean spirit convulsed him with a loud cry and came out of him and all were amazed and asked one another, "What is this?" A new teaching with authority. He commands even unclean spirits and they obey him. And they repeat this idea. A new teaching with authority. What is this authority, my Lord? I think it has to do with formation. I know who you are. I know the truth. And also freedom, allowing people to sit.

I was checking the meaning of education, it comes from Latin. There are two words at the root of education. One is *educare*, which means to train to mold, and the other one is *educere*, which means to lead out, to- to bring out of himself. And I think both combined are very wonderful because it's: I lead you out of yourself, to mold you in a new image, in a new personality that is going to make you happier. And the interest is not in me with my agenda, trying to convince you or to win you over for myself. It's showing you what you're missing. Hopefully, being a good instrument to do that and then encouraging you to follow that. That's a wonderful idea. When I'm mentoring, when I'm being a parent, I'm not just winning over. I'm leading towards beauty, towards something that is not even mine: the beauty of God, the beauty of

the world, right? And this is what parents and teachers do so well. And I really want to, one more time, thank them for everything they have done for me, personally speaking. And I think for all of us, we should be very grateful for that art that they have been delivering to us, to each one of us, showing us the truth, the happier life outside of ourselves.

Sometimes parents ask me how to raise good kids, how to raise a family, and advice from me or from other people, right? And sometimes the risk, I think, is to create like a greenhouse, artificial growth. A greenhouse where plants have no interaction with the weather- rain or cold or heat or dryness. And then in an artificial, very controlled environment, they think, or it is a temptation at least for all of us to think that in that environment, kids will be safe. And I get the point. We should be prudent in the sense that we cannot expose a child to things that are very- very toxic or damaging, but we cannot keep those things forever protected in an artificial way, I think, right? St. Josemaria, or Our Lord in the gospel, many times shows how he trusts people. If you see apostles, for instance, they had missions during the life of Jesus in which Our Lord was not there. He was not controlling everything, every action, every teaching. He sent them two by two, with prudence, with another person checking or pondering together, right? But, they were sent away from Jesus and Our Lord was not there. And he trusted them to deliver the message of God that he knew better than anybody else. Later on, when he, when you my Lord, ascended to heaven, you just said to them: Go to the entire world and preach what I taught you. You are ready. You have assimilated what I told you, and I don't need to protect you anymore. And of course, you will have temptations, obstacles, both internally and externally, but you will grow because you know the truth. You have a moral compass inside you. And that's what I want to encourage people to have, my Lord, a moral compass. And a moral compass doesn't mean that everything should be perfect after that. Moral compass means that when I get lost, I will come back. I know where the truth is and that's enough. Especially for, I think, schools or families to create that moral compass, to accompany the person inside forever, wherever they go. And it's not about the place where they are, but the person that they are. And they choose to be, and they continue being and growing. And of course, it's risky and many times painful to see people that we love making wrong choices, damaging either themselves or others or creating problems in society. It is painful. It is very painful sometimes, but it is a way to grow. And obviously, we pray that those learning lessons are not causing big scars or injuries. But, we need to trust the Holy Spirit and trust people. Trust that you, my Lord, will guide them and protect them. Many times we ask that the Blessed Virgin Mary, for instance, is a wonderful idea, that the motherly affection of our Blessed Virgin Mary will never abandon her children, right? And so- we know that she will keep an eye on them and accompany them where we cannot be physically. She will be there somehow, and the Holy Spirit, and God the Father,- Jesus Christ, dwelling in their souls. But, we need to trust. I want to trust and to give them the chance to grow, to thrive, not because I'm controlling them, my Lord, but because they understand truth.

There's this book by Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation*, in which he describes something that is happening now in our world, in many families and schools. In which the paradigm is to protect younger people from risky activities such as going to the park, running, climbing trees, throwing snowballs, if you are in a state where there's snow or things like that, protecting them with all sorts of helmets and restrictions and belts and stuff like that. And on the contrary, allowing them to have phones, for instance, smartphones in which you have access to all the violence and toxicity of pornography or influence from-weird people, honestly, right? And then he, in the book, the thesis is basically to switch that paradigm into saying: no, no, you allow kids to explore nature, they will get bruises or injuries- but they will experience the limits of their, you know, games or they will make decisions in an unstructured environment, in unsupervised environment, and they will learn. On the contrary, you restrict those things that are really, really damaging and toxic, such as the internet, many times, at least when they are young- later on, they may have the judgment and the strength to cope with that reality. But, I think it's very interesting, this

idea, my Lord, in a spiritual life as well, in everything, actually. To show people- this is the beautiful thing of your vocation. You can make choices. You are free. And then you need to form your conscience. And I can show you how this will not restrict your freedom, but on the contrary give you access to more beauty. And it's an art, and it takes time and effort, a lot of effort, many times. But, we are called to do this. I want to be a mentor like Jesus, like you, my Lord, that draws people out of themselves. And I don't want to talk about myself. I want to talk about you.

There's this book, *The Boys in the Boat*, that is a classic, I think, now in the US. It's a true story about a team that competed for the Olympic Games in Berlin, 1936, when Hitler was there. The Olympic team of rowers from Washington State, mainly, that went there and competed in the finals. I don't want to spoil the book. It's a great adventure. It's both a personal story and also a team story in the book. And he described how difficult competing in sports at that level is, obviously, and then the bonding experience among the players or the team, the rowers, and also the role of each one of them on the boat. It's- really awesome and inspiring. And one of them, one of the members of every boat, every shell, is the coxswain, right? And he's the guy that doesn't row but has a ton of responsibility because he's guiding the rest of the team. He's the only one that is looking ahead or looking backwards or to the sides, seeing how the race is going. And he can give, actually, very good advice to the rest of them that are immersed in the physical effort of rowing together, synchronized, because otherwise they can get in trouble- And then he's directing them. And the description applies, in my opinion, to what Jesus Christ does with us, or to what a mom or a dad does with his children or her children, right? And it's very awesome. It's very inspiring. From the moment the shell is launched, the boat, the coxswain is the captain of the boat. And let's see the description of this mentorship, right? He must exert control, both physical and psychological, over everything that goes on in the shell. That control is not a stifling control, physical control or psychological, it's more knowing what's going on. Oh, this rower is exhausted, or he's discouraged, or he's distracted, or he's very excited, but I need to tame him because the race is long. Whatever it is; psychologically, physically, where are they? Very important. Our Lord in the synagogue looks around, there's someone with unclean spirit, and then he approaches him. Where are you? You cannot say anything, but I can save you and do what you want. In many miracles, Our Lord asks the question, "How can I help you? What do you need?" He allows people to say, "I need this." And- sometimes what they say that they need is a physical change and Our Lord is thinking about their souls, but he waits. Then he heals him or her, and later on there's a conversion of the heart. So, Our Lord adapts to what they are going through. Wonderful, very inspiring for me as a priest or for you as a mom, as a dad, as a friend, adapting to what people need a little bit at the beginning and then bring them closer to Jesus Christ afterwards. So, everything in the boat, right? He controls that psychological, physical situation of every one of the of the members. A good coxswain knows the horsemen inside and out, their individual strengths and vulnerabilities, and they know how to get the most out of each man at any given moment. They know them. They know them very well. You know your sons. You know your friends. I know people in spiritual direction. I make an effort to remember things, to get to know them better, to- learn from them as well: their virtues, their beautiful talents. I see that, and then I try to channel that energy towards something beautiful. And then they have a force of character to inspire exhausted rowers to dig deeper and try harder, even when all seems lost. They have this strength, the authority of Jesus Christ, appealing to, spiritually speaking, appealing to your conscience that you can do this better, go deeper, try harder. But not in a volunteeristic way, try harder because you will be happier. Try harder to see the truth. And then we inspire them because we are appealing to their consciences, not to ourselves or to our agenda. So, we're putting them in front of themselves or in front of God, and they see that respect and that we are not owning their souls. We are just helping them as best as I can. In short, a good coxswain is a quarterback, a cheerleader and a coach all in one. Whatever you need: your cheerleader, your coach, your quarterback. What do you need? And then I transform myself into an instrument for Jesus Christ, wonderful. The availability of a mentor. The

flexibility of a mentor, of a mom, of a dad, of a priest, of anybody, of a mentor, in general, a coach- I adapt to what you need, right? Again, he's a deep thinker. Can he as a coxswain be inspirational and, in many cases, the toughest person in the boat? And I would say is the toughest person because he suffers, or she suffers, with other people's sufferings.

Years ago, I remember I was talking to a priest. And he gave us a talk, to several priests, and then he said that sometimes when we suffer, it could be a priest, it could be a mother, a father or a friend, when we suffer for other people's mistakes, sometimes we rebel, or we think that losing sleep is a curse. And then he said, "It's a gift." I was surprised and I asked him later, personally, what do you mean by a gift? And then he said, "Well, you are participating in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. You are seeing that person through the heart of Jesus. That's why you suffer. And suffering in that context is a gift, because you are redeeming him with a participation in the heart of Jesus. And that you are redeeming him, but you are actually being asked by Jesus to suffer with him." I thought it was wonderful. So, that's why a coxswain, a mom, a dad, a priest, a coach, is the toughest person in the boat because he should be, or is trying to be, the toughest because he's struggling with that person, and that makes you suffer and grow as well. So, even in the process of mentorship, we all grow in understanding, in strength, in wisdom, in purification, and at the same time it's a wonderful experience. It is so rewarding. We don't do it for that. I don't do it because of the rewarding part, my Lord. But, it is so rewarding when someone, because of you or somehow you are a little bit instrumental, sees the beauty of your friendship and- you can be part of that process. It is unbelievable. It is a miracle- It's a constant miracle that people open up, and maybe because you have a little bit of a contribution, they discover the truth of life: Jesus Christ. And they are free, and they can do many, many things- and you unlock somehow or help God or the Holy Spirit to unlock their inner abilities, to develop their innate potential and to throw them, like to the world, to conquer it, to- live their lives. And you're a part of that process. It's such a gift. It's such an amazing gift.

There's this movie that somehow shows that. It's called *The Greatest Showman*. I think the actors are Hugh Jackman and Zac Efron. And there's a moment in the movie that Jackman is trying to convince a young Zac Efron to join this company that he's starting about spectacles and a circus and- Zac Efron is a rich, young man. And I think it's pretty similar to the gospel in a way. And there's a song called "The Other Side", or something like that, in which Hugh Jackman is trying to convince him that he's totally worth it. You are rich. You have all the potential in the world, not only financially, but also you are creative; you are excited about doing new things. Let me show you what you can do. Let me help you to reach to your potential. And then there's a conversation that is a little bit like the gospel scene in which Jesus is encouraging the young fellow to follow him and to change the world. And in that conversation, Hugh Jackman says, "right here, right now, I put the offer out. I don't want to chase you down, but I know you see it." It's not my agenda. It's not that I want to chase you down. It's not I'm not interested in you. It's I know you see it. "You run with me and I can cut you free," he says, very much like the gospel, Jesus saying, come with me and I can cut you free. And then he continues, now, "is this really how you want to live, to spend your days: whiskey and misery and parties and plays? Let me take you to the other side of yourself, to the other side of the world, to outside of what this cage in which you live and you are content or happy, but there's no truth. There is a stifling atmosphere of selfishness, and there's no freedom." But, "if you come with me," he says in the song, "you will finally live a little, finally laugh a little. Just let me give you the freedom to dream." I thought it was a really awesome song, and the movie's pretty good too. And this idea of I'll take you to the other side, if you run with me, Jesus Christ telling us, I will cut you free from your slavery, from your chains. And then you will finally live better, a little better, or laugh-, I will show you how to dream. Wonderful idea: being a mentor is being an instrument. And of course, we cannot walk their path by them, or taking their place. In every mentorship, there is a moment of trust. It's a moment of saying, this is what I got. Now, you need to pray about it, and you need to make your own decisions. And I'll be here, and God

will be there inside you all the time. But, it is your life. It is your choice. You are the agent of your own vocation. I can encourage you. I can show you the beauty of it. But at the end, at the very end, it is up to you. And that is when the plant, instead of being in a greenhouse, artificially protected with no risks, is exposed a little bit. And the plant that is our personalities, or the personality of people that are under our protection or care, they experience some pain because of the wind, because of the snow, because of the dryness of the terrain. But, then they grow- they get stronger. And they have answers, and they internalize those answers, and they convince other plants, or people, to grow as well. And the influence, the impact of that formation with freedom, exponentially grows beyond people that we know and the people that they know, and it continues to grow.

The apostles experience that from Jesus Christ, that mentorship that was inviting. It was not imposing. It was not bossy. I was encouraging them go to the whole world. I don't have to monitor you. I am not a helicopter, Jesus. I just, I trust you. You can do it with me, and I'll be present in a different way, more spiritually speaking, in the Eucharist. But, I will inspire you- I will accompany you, but I trust you. Help me, my Lord, to be a good mentor with my people in spiritual direction. Or, if you're a mom or a dad, with your kids, with your students, encouraging them towards the truth, towards the beauty, towards the goodness. And let's ask the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph to help us too. They were the mentors of Jesus Christ. What about that? They raised Jesus. They taught him then to read, to walk, to eat, to play, to greet people, to kiss, whatever. They taught him everything, to study. So, they are great mentors because they help the second person of the Blessed Trinity to grow in freedom and in wisdom. Let's ask Mary and Joseph to be good mentors of people that we have around and to care about them and to trust them; as later on, Jesus trusted his apostles.

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.