

Episode: Learning to See with Hope

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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 topic for meditation in this time of prayer, and I understand theme of thoughtfulness and reflection for the whole month of the St. Josemaria Institute, month of January 2026, maybe you're not quite getting used to it being 2026 but here we are, 2026. So, the theme for this month is the reality of pessimism. I'm not sure what the different aspects of pessimism that are going to be covered and in the St. Josemaria Institute efforts this month, maybe trying to promote some of the books of the writings of St. Josemaria, I imagine, with regard to overcoming the problem of pessimism and- and looking at- also as pessimism, the reality of pessimism as the reality of our living in the middle of the world. If you don't- if you're not in the middle of the world, or if you're not very- somewhat engaged in the realities of the world, I guess you could say, for example, maybe an infant and whatever that might- might be for that person, the age of reason, or maybe a person with later in life senior who has a kind of dementia is not aware as much as the realities outside of one's self and immediate surroundings. Well, maybe those people are not very pessimistic. In fact, it's- it's very moving to see the optimism of little children many times, who, yes, they get sad, but it's usually momentary, right? And it's usually immediate. So the resolution to conflict, or the resolution to a problem is usually with- accompanied by immediate solution, usually a parent or a sibling comforting a younger sibling, in order to bring about return to happiness. That happened to me recently. Before Christmas I went to bless a house and we had a little snack and, nice family of four children, and mom and dad and all the children, I think, are, I don't know, five or six or younger, and then one of the little boys, we don't know why, he just started crying. Something wasn't quite right, and he just started crying. And we were all chuckling a little bit, because it's a little bit humorous when you're just talking and then somebody just- just starts crying, you know, full volume. So of course, Mom took the boy out. She said, we'll be back. It will be fine. So they did, and they came back, and it was just like transformation of this little boy who was as happy as could be. I have no idea what- what was the issue. I have no idea what was but- but mom took care of it in the moment, and within a few minutes, everything was okay again. Well, that's, you know, children don't have the- I think, at least I- just from my own point of view as a child, I guess you don't have those long term, I don't know, grudges or long term struggles or long term problems, I mean, it can happen, you know, but usually, infants and toddlers are able to overcome when they know

that they are loved and they are cared for and that they are they are included, you know, they're included in the life of the family, or whatever the thing might be.

I think it's the same near the end of our lives as we, sort of, our engagement with the world, in some ways, may be reduced that we, you know, the local sort of realities sort of take over. What am I going to eat, or am I comfortable sleeping? What are my medical needs? These kinds of things. Am I- Am I accompanied well? And so, yeah, now it's a little bit different, I suppose, when we're older and that we have experience, and maybe there's a lot of difficulties and struggles still persist in our minds and in our hearts. So it could be- you know, it could be a little bit less- less pessimistic, I would say, at the beginnings of life than maybe at the end of life, but I don't know, haven't got to the second part yet, that I know, as far as I know.

So anyway. But you know, most of us in what you could call it kind of a with a greater engagement with the world and a greater involvement participation, all of which is desired by God, which we happily do, hopefully, that's what we want to do. That's called responsibility and maturity and contributing to the common good and to the life of the faith, the life of the Church at this time. I mean, we are- we are fully engaged. And so as a result of that, you know, we can be affected by, you know, negativity of others, or negativity of- of the realities of our- of our lives and shortcomings of our own- of our own sort of abilities, efforts, things like that. But I came to this meditation with- with hope that we would be able to- and I'm sure we can with the grace of God and with prayer and with reflection, especially closeness to you Jesus, is that we will be able to recognize temptations and the realities, the possibilities of pessimism in my life, and be able to address it in a realistic, mature and engaged way. That's- That's quite a, that's quite an order, you know, that's quite a- it's quite an effort that we, you and I, perhaps have to make, both with the Lord Jesus in our life of faith, with a vocational sense of life. And that's what I would like to say is the key to all of this is to recognize our life as vocational. Our life- our mission as not only something we sort of go through or randomly participate in, or that we're brought into without our- our knowing or without our wanting, a kind of accidental, circumstantial life that- I'm unfortunate I think a lot of people sort of have that view. They don't know how they got to where they are, they don't know where they're going, perhaps they don't know what they can contribute to the life of the community and these kinds of things. And that makes, yeah, for a lot of frustration it- and that's how pessimism can- can enter into the question.

So first of all, ask Jesus in your time of prayer, and I do in my time of prayer here, let's ask Jesus, you know, for the- the help that we need. I mean, it's- it's- it's a lot of help that we need to be, as Our Lord said at the Last Supper, to be in the world, but not of the world. He prayed that God not take us out of the world. At least most of us, some people, have a particular mission to be sort of drawn out of the world in order to live a deeper life of prayer there. But even that, too, is a kind of engagement with the world, because you don't just- if you if you have a monastic vocation, that's a removal of ordinary human activities. That doesn't mean, well, okay, so I don't care about the world anymore. No, it's actually, it's- as far as I know, and I'm not a specialist in religious spirituality, but it's- it's an engagement with the world in a different way. It's an engagement with the world, maybe with a kind of separation, or a kind of- more of an observational viewpoint, instead of a direct participant kind of point of view, but it's an engagement of the world. In fact, I would say all Christians have a vocation to be engaged with the world in- in as much as they are able to recognize that the world is created by God and that we have a- an amount of time in order to serve Our Lord well. So we all have a really great opportunity no matter what our vocation is, we- to be engaged in the world, to evaluate the things of this world, to use all the talents that God has given you and me to take advantage in a supernatural way, as well as a natural way of the different relationships that we have, the friendships and the relationships by- by natural affinity and natural bonds that are there, our professional work, our- all of those things that Lord you have given all of us to- to seek an engagement

with the world, in order to sanctify the world, in order to show that you are the Way and the Truth and the Life.

The possibilities are immense, and we don't want to listen to the voices of those who say, oh, you know, nobody can be a saint today, it's just too hard. Or nobody is- has the- really has a mission. You know, they just have their- their natural talents, and they, some people are just more charismatic, naturally, than other people by their, you know, standing in culture, society and- and those kinds of things. And it's true that there are undeniable advantages that some people are more engaged and some people are more successful in terms of what they can accomplish in this world, and some people have been given such great talents. But with those great talents come- come great responsibilities. A while- a while ago I was asking a person I met who had lived in Washington, DC for a long time, but quite a while. And I asked that person if they remembered President John F. Kennedy, who, if you don't know much about him, he was president from 1960 until his assassination in 1963 and he was perhaps one of the most charismatic presidents that the United States has ever had, I suppose. And it was at the- a moment when the media was kind of growing as well and television coverage and photo ops, the press communication, people able to, you know, consume a lot of media, content, things like that. And so with that, you know, he became quite a charismatic and famous president, and even to the extent of glamorous kind of presidency, in some ways, I guess, I wasn't here yet, but that's what they tell me. Anyway, this person I was talking with said, yeah, what I saw him once, you know, in an event, he came in the room and first of all, his- his hair was lot redder than it looked. I suppose that's- that's to be expected, since television was still pretty much black and white at that time. But that kind of surprised the person, other people said, yeah, when- whenever he would walk in the room, even before he was President, you know, when he was up and coming Congress person, when- when John F. Kennedy would walk in the room? All the- all the heads would turn, you know, kind of conversation stop, kind of thing you know, and what- I don't know if that happens to you. I know it does not happen to me at events, and I'm glad that it doesn't happen. I- I'm happy people continue their conversations when I appear at some event or that kind of thing. I'm sure you're glad too. But anyway, maybe you've been given a special charism celebrity status. But these- these cases are relatively few. We know that, Lord, you have given extraordinary talents, attractiveness, abilities, communication skills, whatever, to a certain amount of people, but they have a greater mission. They have some- that's part of their vocation is to not hide those talents. Jesus said it really, really clearly, you know, that the person who has been given more, more will be expected. Or you do not take your talents and hide them under a bushel basket if you're given the opportunities to use those talents they should be used. But a negative sort of mindset may say, well, yeah, they're just a few of those people, but most people- and even those people, right, they often have these big falls and they have these, you know, they will never, you know, get through- their message won't get through, or there's some hidden agenda that they may have, or whatever it is.

St. Josemaria, of course, was among those saints who- he really went beyond the issue of pessimism or the issue of, can you accomplish what you are called to accomplish, or what- what are the results, what are the goals we're trying to reach in this world? In the success and even the good- all the good things that we can do? He was- he was beyond that, you know, he's- he's basically saying, look, nobody has an excuse to say, well, that's for other people, you know, holiness is for other people. Or that- well, in cases of people like me, there's not going to be- it's not- there's much, not much chance that I can be a saint, or that I will accomplish great ideals in this world. And St. Josemaria said that, you know- you got- we have to stop thinking like that. You know, everybody from the simplest talents that have been given a person to the most you know, genius capacities and strategists and intellectual capacities that people can have, artistic

and creative. Everybody has to be aware of what they have been given and say, this is for God. This is to be used with God's grace, for God's glory, above all, for the glory of God. And so who am I to say, I have success? Who am I to say, Oh, well, you know, I'm not really serving very well with the talents I've been given because, you know, I just- I never can get anything, right, you know, I- I'm like that character and the comic book.

I remember, a long time ago, had these comic books, and yeah, I was so- I was so poor growing up, I couldn't even afford my own comic books. People would lend me their comic books, I guess when they were all done with them, there wasn't much left. But I remember one comic book character who- he was called Sad Sack, and he was- he was always sad, but for some reason, he always become the hero in the comic because just kind of an accident, he would, you know, figure out something and become, you know, sort of the hero, kind of a- kind of an anti hero, in a way. But he always had, kind of, like this cloud over him, kind of thing and he, like, wherever he went, he was always, you know, sad and depressed and everything. But in the end, you know, he was successful. That was part of his- that was part of his, I guess- kind of charism, you know, that he would- he would be able to overcome the realistic outlook and- and things would be, would be improved because of him. So, like nobody, you know, even if you are pessimistic by nature, somebody like this cartoon character, God, can even use that, and does use it a lot. He- we- we want to have the best ideals. Aristotle said, we have this desire for nobility built into us, generosity, magnanimity, you know, kind of greatness of heart, greatness of soul and life, that we should be aiming our life toward- but even there that- that's kind of just pretty much a natural level and also dependent a lot on human opportunities and talents. He thought it was probably not universal that everybody could be happy. I think in the way that we consider it today, I know there are probably some Aristotelians out there who disagree with that, because it's always a big debate what is happiness in according to Aristotle, probably the best of the pagan philosophers, and you might even say, in a way, he wasn't pagan because he believed in an unmoved mover, or was kind of monotheistic in his outlook. However, you know, he was still- he was bound by the realities of the time, and there were still great class differences at his time, as there almost always are. And he didn't think there were, you know, some manual workers and slaves in particular who could really be called happy, because their- their life depended on, you know, the orders of other people. They didn't have the freedom needed to be happy to be able to pursue those the nobility of mind and heart. But be that it is that may you know we know that it's- no matter what we have been given, and in fact, no matter what even some of our difficulties are and can be, and unfortunately can sometimes kind of consume us, because the problems can be very real, you know, our we all have real problems. And I- I think if you're listening to this podcast, you've probably and praying along with it, you- you have your own problems that you could say, you know, you wouldn't have dreamed of as a kid, you know, person could have these kinds of problems, you know, and we don't have to go down the list, but everybody has- has their own. But even there, the Lord has given us grace to recognize that and to- to manage it, and it's- it's an amazing thing to witness.

I heard of this sort of game- It's kind of a game that sometimes we're used on kind of business retreats, not necessarily spiritual retreats, but you know, kind of business- extended business meetings when there are a lot of problems in the company, or when there are a lot of problems in the institution, and the people are experiencing a lot of personal problems too. The exercise goes something like this, I've never had to do it, but people are asked to take out a slip of paper, given a slip of paper, and write on it. It's probably done electronically now, I suppose some app probably does this for you, but to write down your worst problem at the moment, and then to- don't put your name on it, and then, you know, fold it up, put it in the box, and then pass the box around the room, a little bit like, I guess, like a white elephant, kind of a gift exchange, or something- kind of anti-gift exchange. And you pull a problem out of the box, and you look at it, and you have a choice of either putting it back and choosing a different one, or you can simply

just keep your own problem and just, you know, just keep with your own problem. And so you go around the room, and guess what happens is that there are a lot of problems left in the box, for the most part, because people would rather have their own problems than when compared with the problems that other people have, our problems, for whatever reasons it can seem manageable or even small like, oh my gosh, that problem, oh man, poor- poor person. Oh, I would never want that, you know. And they're thinking the same thing, perhaps, of our problem, you know, of our difficulty. I would never want that. Well, guess what? It's- Jesus didn't give you that problem, or allow that problem, you know that to- to be in your life, because it's not part of your vocation, it's not part of the mission that you have to sanctify your life and with that particular situation and- and it's amazing, right? I mean, it is amazing, Lord, how you have given us grace to manage some really incredible, difficult problems, and you see it in your own daily life, I'm sure, and I do too, like- people- the heroic efforts that they make, you know, they- to manage their problems. Now, humanly, there's a- there's a management familiarity there, but it's the work of grace ultimately. I think, for at least for those who are seeking a life of grace and- or want to manage their life according to the gospel and want to live their life according to the life of Jesus, and especially in participating in the cross, as Jesus said, to pick up your cross every day and follow me, that we did- that is beyond just human capacity.

I was reading the other day getting ready for this time of prayer, this meditation. I was getting- I was getting ready by just looking up the definition- common definition of pessimism. I mean, you have so many definitions now with online searches and everything, but the one that I- the one that came across seems very- was the first one that came up, and I hadn't thought it was, you know, that- that serious. But it basically said, you know, pessimism is to look at things with the worst possible outcome, you know, the worst scenario. I always thought- I thought pessimism kind of like, ah, you know, yeah, it's not- it's not too good. Hey, there they go again, or here I go again, you know, I probably fail or something like that. But this is- you know, a deep pessimism is like the worst possible outcome. You know, it's like- what would- I'm not sure what that's a like exactly, because I don't see it very much in my life where a person says, you know that- you know, the worst thing is going to come out of this. Maybe it's- I don't know maybe it's I was raised in a culture of a little bit of optimism or- you know, kind of, you know, things can get better, there are improvements, they may not be immediate, but usually that- or things will turn out okay in the end, we may have to go through some suffering, that kind of perseverance attitude. And the pessimism associated with that, which I think is probably kind of the pessimism we all have to a certain extent as Christians, it's like, yeah, I know this is part of the cross, yeah, you know, we'll never get over this, probably in this life, or something like that- or this is going to be, it always seems to kind of end up in this conflict in the situation. But, you know, that's, it's not like the worst possible outcome you know. That's quite a- that's quite a significant jump, I think so I think let's- let's thank God that, I think for most part, even if you consider yourself kind of a pessimistic person or- or susceptible to a pessimistic outlook, Lord help us to see that with your grace the day by day, sort of persevering grace, habitual grace, as theology says, you know, trying to be in the state of grace and the actual particular graces that we receive during the day, perhaps our pessimism is more short lived than we think. And we want it to continue that way Lord, we want the negative vibe that I might experience in a kind of daily life, I want to recognize it as it's not as deep as it- as it could be, it's not as deep as is a real pessimism may bring about the worst outcome or whatever. So I think we should recognize that and be grateful to God. But it's also a call as a part of our vocation to say, hey, wait a minute, maybe I'm not as pessimistic as I think I am Lord- or that I sort of, I don't know, sort of find it kind of- sort of a comfort in sometimes, oh, you know, because it's kind of an excuse for me to say, well, I don't have to do much more about this, it's been about all that's been done and said, etc. So I think I'm- I'm good, you know, with the way things- the things are, they're not the way I like them, but yeah, the way they are, and I'll just do my thing. Well, that's kind of an excuse to like- to short- kind of short change, not give enough credit to the workings of grace in our life and even in the little things you know that can

cause a kind of a temporary pessimism in our hearts. Those little things are the ones we have to recover from. The little things are the ones we have to change our outlook. Actually, today, as you're hearing this meditation, I was saving this to the end because, you know, it is January in your- in the world now, and I hope I make it to January, I really do, I'm trying to be optimistic there, but I'm recording this podcast on Christmas Eve. Who wants to be pessimistic on Christmas Eve, like nobody, right? So I thought, Oh, this would be a good day to meditate on pessimism. By the time you hear this, you may have surpassed the Christmas season, and you're into the new year with this- new challenges, but think of the joy and the hope of Christmas.

Christmas Eve is one of my favorites days of the year, because, well, tomorrow is one of the greatest days of the year, the birth of Jesus and the coming together of the human race under the guidance of salvation of Our Lord and the simplicity and the beauty of the Christmas story and all- all those things that are reviewed during the holidays- all the great holidays. But today, Christmas Eve is one of the reasons I like it a lot, is the gospel reading from the- the kind of the end of the pre-narration of the birth of Jesus, and that is the song of Zechariah, who, he starts out pessimistic, oh, who can- I can't have any children. And then the angel Gabriel says, hey, you're not going to be able to talk. You know, you're going to be mute until these things happen. Of course, John the Baptist is born, and afterwards, when he is circumcised, and when he is given a name, they don't- they're surprised because his name is John, but that's what the angel said his name would be, and that's what Zachariah says, his name is John. And at that moment, at the name of John, the confession of something you know, humanly not unlikely, then he is released from his kind of bonds of pessimism, and he sings this song of great joy, which I think it's, you know, it's wonderful that priests and laity, if they want to, we- we pray it every day, every day without fail, in the morning prayer, this the song of Zechariah. And I won't read the whole thing for you can look it up for yourself, but, you know, it's filled with optimism. "He has raised up for us a mighty savior born of the house of his servant. David, through his holy prophets, he promised of old that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us. He promised to show mercy to our fathers, to remember his holy covenant. You, my child shall be called the Prophet of the Most High for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins in the tender compassion of Our God, the Dawn from on High shall break upon us to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace." Oh, what a conversion, what a conversion from a pessimistic, even a religious viewpoint that just didn't see how these things could come to a time of reflection and prayer, leading Zechariah to proclaim the glory of God in this- in such a way, and to- to remind us through day- our daily lives, that God has called upon us and is guiding our feet into the way of peace as well. Let's ask the Holy Family and all the actors and protagonists and especially the Lord Jesus, the baby Jesus, to continue to guide us through this new year. Fill us with optimism, fill us with the hope, the faith and the love that has guided the saints through the ages.

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.