

## Episode: Repent and Believe in The Gospel

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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.

Lord Jesus, truly present with us in the Blessed Sacrament, our theme of conversation with Our Lord is timely because we will be giving special concentration on the theme of Lent, which is conversion. Utilizing the special graces and the special means Jesus presents to us, prayer, penance, and deeds of charity, three contact points of Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is the incarnation of self-giving love, and only through self-giving love on our part can we make contact with him. Prayer is a form of self-giving love that we direct- directly to God through Jesus Christ. Penance, we impose the cross upon ourselves to have a deeper encounter with him and allow the Holy Spirit to more effectively purify us. And we encounter him in a direct way; he reveals it in our love for others. If you did it for the least, you've done it for me.

So, the theme of our time of prayer is conversion. There are countless messages in the Gospel, but there's one message that is omnipresent, because the trajectory to those very high bars the gospel message establishes, humbling ourselves, being a great servant, praying at all times, serving the least of our brothers and sisters, or at least, there's nobody who's least, but they may seem that way. And Our Lord wraps it up by saying: you must love as I have loved, perfect God and perfect man now commands you and me to do something humanly impossible, and the trajectory there is a series of conversions. How do I approach the humility of Jesus through a series of conversions, through a series of internal changes? How do I approach that heart of Christ, little- little spurts of purification and repentance and conversion? So what we're commanded to do, and even though Jesus doesn't explicitly use that phrase, whether I'm looking at my relationship with Christ through my work, which is what I do through most of the day, or my relationship with Jesus in my connection with people, or my relationship with Jesus in terms of bearing suffering, or my relationship with Jesus in terms of my spiritual life, he is calling me to be in a state of conversion, not just a solitary, isolated conversion, but a state of conversion.

And hence, St. Josemaria says, in *The Way*, "Conversion is a matter of a moment; sanctification is the work of a lifetime." I gently tend to correct people, not to humiliate anybody, but once in a while, I encounter some young men who talk about their conversion, and they share their story, and they're going off the

deep end and a lot of times they say, I'm an Augustine. And I gently say, I'll be the judge of that. I say that tongue in cheek, and then I say, with a little bit less tongue in cheek, wait until you're dead. And then we'll see if you were an Augustine, because Augustine wasn't only an Augustine, Augustine became St. Augustine, and that took hard work and a lot of grace of God. That's why he's called the doctor of grace, and that's why in his theology, his rich theology, there's three sources, the writings of St. Paul and of course, the four Gospels, his conversion, his poignant experience of weakness and sin, and the powerful grace of God changes St. Augustine from someone who wallowed in a moral gutter for over two decades to one of the greatest saints of the history of Christianity.

This state of conversion was captured by feel, like I'm going from the sublime to the ridiculous, but it's not ridiculous. The quarterback of the San Diego Chargers. I had read an article about him or interview with him, between him and the National Catholic Register, and he's still playing. He's about 39 years old, maybe 40, quite good. All you football fans know that. And he has Eucharistic pieties devoted to Mary. He has six or seven kids. He's a good Catholic. And I saw him being interviewed after a game, and he was in his T-shirt. And on his T-shirt there was a Latin phrase taken from St. Josemaria, and it was "Nunc coepi," which means, "now I begin", because St. Josemaria was very much into being in a state of conversion. He said, "We have to keep playing the role of the prodigal son. We know ourselves, we repent and we begin again. And he said holiness involves trying again." And many years ago, he was watching the Olympics in 1972 and he said the spiritual life, and drawing from St. Paul, he was going over the gestures and movements of a pole vaulter. And he was kind of narrating how this certain pole vaulter he was watching in the Olympics, tried once, tried again, tried another time, finally got it. He said, "That's what the spiritual life was all about. It's always beginning again."

And there's a combo involved with conversion. The conversion is anything but passivity. Number one, the grace of God. But number two, my struggle, the use of my freedom, my Barber, I think he was enlightened by the Holy Spirit. He's a self-educated, theologian and philosopher. He reads a lot. He's from the old country. He's from Sicily. And I said to him, it's a challenge to be a follower in Christ, a follower of Christ in this culture. He says it's a challenge, but it can be done. Well, he's a testimony that it can be done. He said, but what's- what's key here? He says, It never fails. I go, what is it? Says you have to want it. You have to look for Christ. And if you really look for Christ, it's going to work. Isn't that the word Jesus uses, seek and you shall find. Seek can't be a lackluster seek. How do I go about this conversion? Our Lord likes to talk about holiness as a journey. Jesus says, I'm the way. He's both the goal and he's the way you have to implement his teaching, and as you implement his teaching, because he is self-giving love, and his teaching is all about self-giving love under the guise of humility, under the guise of mercy, under the guise of suffering, under the guise of prayer, under the guise of service. And he's the goal as we follow that way he's mapped out. We become more and more united to him. That's what conversion is.

So my first consideration, as I think about being in the state of conversion, I am the way. So there's a there's a route. I need to make a mission statement, because before I start to make little resolutions, I got to know where I'm going. What is the goal? I look at it from two angles. Do I want to make you, Lord, the absolute center of my life, through the medium of work, through the medium of family life, spousal love, parental love, friendship love, suffering. Do I want that? And maybe I can't answer it right now. I want to, obviously, I want to say yes, but I want to mean it. I'm supposed to say yes. I shouldn't say no, maybe from another angle, because the whole entire Gospel is condensed in this very simple command. It's such a high bar that I can't reach it. I can approach it. All his bars are approachable. I can get closer to it, but perhaps I can't reach it in this life. To love as Christ loved, I am grateful because I preach so many meditations I need always new, concrete examples and illustrations that the gospel works this week. Don't get superstitious. I've been involved, in less than a week, three deaths, involved in search of going to the wake funerals, that

kind of thing, pastoral work. First case already wake and funeral and buried. I also hear this too often. One phrase, the guy was a saint. Another person he loved so much. He loved his family. He loved his friends. Another one, every single one, he really walked the walk of living the Gospel details. Even this poor guy was in his 80s. He finally had heart failure. He didn't have to do that, but he scored many, many extra points. Somehow he was arranged to send a big crate of exquisite French Bordeaux wine so people in my house would have that wine to help celebrate the most important feast of the year, which was Christmas. Yeah, I do like a good Bordeaux wine. I'm not a connoisseur, but what really impressed me was here, his person is pretty weakened, and he is declining matter of maybe weeks or months that he's going to die very cold out and he's in the car, and he makes sure that crate of wine is delivered. Last thing I wanted him to do, last thing I wanted to think about, he insisted, and then left the card on the bench so he knew where we would trace that crate. I mean, the litmus test is people know you by your love. Well, this guy really passed his litmus test. Not every day that people say you're a saint. In fact, Jesus says that in the Gospel, he says they should know you by your love. And the other two the same thing, what was this person's secret? Nothing's not going to make the headline. And without breaking confidences, I'm thinking of these three people, I'm very blessed that it didn't doesn't have to be this way. Many times it's not. These people married, the families wanted sanctity more than anything else. They slip and fall, that's part of the human condition, but they wanted that more than anything else, and with people, they want to always attract others to Our Lord. And it worked. I mean, the Gospel comes to life. You will be known by the love you have for one another.

So what do I do with this conversion? Well, I gotta know where I'm going. Well, I want to learn enough French to communicate in a French restaurant and inquire where the washroom is in French and impress my friends or my family. Okay, learn 20 root words, and you're good to go if that's the way you want. You want to get in shape. Well, I'm happy just to be able to walk around the block without panting. Okay, well, walk around the block. No, I want to master French. I want to read French and I want to converse with French. Okay, well, that's a different story. You're gonna have to put a lot of work into this. No, I want to run the marathon. Okay, well, now you're gonna have to put the work into it and that work. No, I don't want to just get- stay in the habit of doing my night prayers. Well, we say the Rosary at home. Wonderful, don't stop. But is that all you want to do? I'm for the right moral issues. That's good. I won't argue that. But is that all you want? I don't know. I haven't thought about it. Well, let's think about it. No, I really want Our Lord to be the center of my life. Okay, well, then we have to act according to that. And how do I get there? How do I make Our Lord the center of my life? How do I love with the heart of Christ? I got to undergo little, tiny conversions.

Next subtopic here, Jesus says that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. We're going to look at that a little bit just to illustrate this state of conversion. Perfect image of a mystery of the Kingdom of God. Pope Benedict would say that the Kingdom of Heaven is your union with Christ. I mean, that's the Kingdom of God. The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, the field in another that's drawing another parable. I mean the Holy Spirit's light, water, heat. My struggle is soil, the good soil, the mustard seed is put into the ground. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown, it is the greatest of shrubs. What's the greatest of shrub? Is a symbol, the saint. Today is- I don't want to digress, but we commemorate Josephine Bakhita. I remember her especially because she was beatified the same time as St. Josemaria. Marvelous Saint, cook, doorkeeper, former slave. It's the smallest of seeds. There's many meanings of the smallest of seeds. We could take the liberty to say, without contradicting the Gospel, that that seed was planted in Baptism, and it's the smallest of seeds. It's the life of Christ. It's the most basic form of life, which needs to be activated by light, warmth, water, and soil. It's meant to become the greatest of shrubs. And now there are allusions to evangelization, becomes a tree

so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. That is the heart of Christ, that full blown mature tree. They should know you by the love you have. They should know you by your heart of Christ.

One more piece to this. This is Matthew 13. We go to Luke 17, and Jesus refers to the mustard seed again, and we'll reflect on it very briefly. "The Apostle said to the Lord, increase our faith. And the Lord said, if you had faith as a grain of mustard seed. You could say to the sycamine tree, be rooted up and be planted in the sea, and it would obey you." Image of tremendous power associated with the tiniest of seed, power of Christ's love. And he says, faith of the mustard seed doesn't mean that my faith is supposed to be minute or small. He says my faith needs to keep growing in tiny spurts. We could call that a resolution. St. Josemaria was very much into little resolutions- resolutions to approach the demands of the Gospel, the goals of the Gospel. The ultimate is, I want to be identified with Christ. The goal is, I want to have it in my mind, what I want to do, mission statement. And guess what? Our world is saying, if you want it and you struggle, you're going to reach the goal, which is not always the case in being a tennis player, there's similarities. I gotta work at it. I gotta, Well, I really want to play, I want to compete, so I gotta get my stance down. I gotta hold the racket properly. I've gotta learn how to put my body into the swing. All that. But maybe I have such little tennis DNA that no matter how much I work at it, I'm going to be very limited in acquiring that skill. Or I really want to dominate French and read its literature and show and actually speak. Well, there may be limits to that, because I don't have the talent for it. Not true when it comes to holiness. And the nice thing, but I gotta work at it, is, even if I ostensibly fail, I win. Because basically what Our Lord is saying, Listen, I don't need your success. I don't need your raw willpower. I just need you to look for me and my grace will transform you. I just need you- want- I just need you to say, yes.

We go to our role model, the Blessed Mother. She is the paradigm of goal of being a disciple of Christ. And what does she say? She says, Yes, Lord, I give you everything. I put you first. Called her Fiat, and she's filled with Christ. She incarnates Christ, the Holy Spirit does, but only when she, if you will, is determined, struggles, because she knows what's in store to say yes, and only then is she transformed with a new presence of Jesus Christ. Lord, help us make some specific resolutions in terms of my prayer life, acts of penance, especially deeds of kindness, that will be an improvement as we approach Lent.

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.