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Looking With Unclothed Eyes

To see the true beauty of the world God has created, we have to look at it with clean eyes, as this article on Christian life explains.

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Christian life is a constant search to find Jesus and follow him, knowing that whoever sees him, sees the Father.^[1] And it is also letting oneself be seen by him. Our Lord has remained in his Church, and he wants us to look at him. In the

Eucharistic liturgy the consecrated bread and wine are raised up so that the faithful can look at him. Each day we strive to find him in the Blessed Sacrament, really present, “with his Body and with his Blood, with his Soul and with his Divinity.”[2] And we look for him in the pages of the Gospel, which recount his life among us.

“What must the cheerful way that Jesus looked upon people have been like? It must have been the same which shone from the eyes of his Mother, who could not contain her joy—*Magnificat anima mea Dominum!*—and her soul glorified the Lord while she carried Him within her and by her side.

“Oh, Mother! May we, like you, rejoice to be with Him and to hold Him.”[3]

God's look

“If we would seek the beginning of this look, we must turn back to the *Book of Genesis*, to that instant when, after the creation of man 'male and female,' *God saw that 'it was very good.'* That very first look of the Creator is reflected in the look of Christ.”[4]

The Incarnate Word looks upon us with human eyes and a human face. In Christ's look we find the source of our joy, a love that is unconditional, the peace that comes from knowing we are loved. Moreover, in his eyes we see our authentic image; we learn our true identity. We are the product of God's love; we exist because God loves us, and we are destined to see him one day face to face, sharing in his very life. He wants to make us completely his, to the extent of making us one with the Son, as the Son is one with the Father.[5]

“May you experience a look like that!
May you experience the truth that
he, Christ, looks upon you with love!
. . . One can also say that this 'loving
look' of Christ contains, as it were, a
summary and synthesis of the entire
Good News.”[6]

Jesus looks at each person and at all
of humanity. He has compassion on
the crowds, but he does not see them
as an anonymous mass. He asks for
love from each one, in the singular.
He looks intently at the rich young
man, who is uneasy about
committing himself; and at Peter,
after his betrayal; and at the poor but
generous old woman who leaves her
gift in the temple, thinking that no
one sees her. Jesus' look rests on each
of us.

Christ's look is an invitation to self-
giving, because he gives himself fully
and he wants us close to him. He
teaches us to raise our eyes towards

noble goals, free of earthly attachments: *You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me,*[7] he tells the rich young man.

If we dare to look at the Redeemer, we will feel sorrow for our sins and the need for conversion, penance and apostolate. When Peter, after denying him, met our Lord's gaze, he realized what he had done: *and he went out and wept bitterly.*[8] His sorrow later turned into the daring of an apostle, into the firm decision never again to hide the Name of Jesus; and into joy, even when serious obstacles arose in the apostolate: *they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.*[9]

Christ's look restores our peace and confidence, even when we are

ashamed to approach him directly, like the sick woman who sought only to touch his cloak: *Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well."* And instantly the woman was made well.[10]

"My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me." This is how St. Josemaría began his daily periods of prayer. In our prayer, we need to look at him and know that he is looking at us. In heaven we will contemplate him eternally and without shadows. But we can also discover him here on earth, in ordinary life: in our work, at home, in the others, especially in those who are suffering. To strengthen this clarity, we repeat with faith, before the tabernacle: I firmly believe that you always see me. And when we feel blind, unable to see him at our

side, we ask him with humility: *ut videam!* Enable me to see, O Lord!

Our Lady's look

“The contemplation of Christ has an *incomparable model* in Mary... No one has ever devoted himself to the contemplation of the face of Christ as faithfully as Mary... Her gaze, ever filled with adoration and wonder, would never leave him. At times it would be *a questioning look*, as in the episode of the finding in the Temple: 'Son, why have you treated us so?' (*Lk 2:48*); it would always be *a penetrating gaze*, one capable of deeply understanding Jesus, even to the point of perceiving his hidden feelings and anticipating his decisions, as at Cana (cf. *Jn 2:5*). At other times it would be *a look of sorrow*, especially beneath the Cross, where her vision would still be that of a mother giving birth, for Mary not only shared the passion and

death of her Son, she also received the new son given to her in the beloved disciple (cf. *Jn 19:26-27*). On the morning of Easter hers would be *a gaze radiant with the joy of the Resurrection*, and finally, on the day of Pentecost, *a gaze afire* with the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. *Acts 1:14*)."[11]

Life is a succession of joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments. Our Lord expects us to seek him in every external or internal circumstance. We should learn from Mary to look at him with an ardent look, a questioning look, a sorrowful look, but always filled with confidence. We can also learn from her by turning to the images of our Lady that we find around us. The custom of searching out and looking at these images, and the love with which we do so, prepare us for our encounter with her Son, *the blessed fruit of her womb*. Guided by his

Mother, we can seek the face of Jesus: the child's face in Bethlehem, the lacerated face on Calvary, the glorious face after the Resurrection. This search is truly a search for God's face, which leads us to direct our whole lives toward our meeting with Jesus.

“In contemplating Christ's face we become open to receiving the mystery of Trinitarian life, experiencing ever anew the love of the Father and delighting in the joy of the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul's words can then be applied to us: 'Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being changed into his likeness, from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit' (2 *Cor* 3:18).”^[12] A Christian has the marvelous mission of reflecting Christ, in order to show others the look that God directs at each person, as the saints did. When adoring our Lord in the Blessed

Eucharist, for example during Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament, we look at the One whom we have pierced, covered with blood and wounds, and we discover the mystery of God's love, the true face of God.[13]

Looking at our neighbor

Looking is not just a physical act. It is a human act, which expresses the dispositions of our heart. St.

Josemaría urged us to contemplate others with pupils dilated by love, for knowing how to look is knowing how to love. Certainly there are looks of love and looks of indifference; looks which show openness and readiness to understand, to accept and to serve, and possessive looks, blinded by selfishness. "We, however, wish to look through unclouded eyes, encouraged as we are by our Lord's teaching: *Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.*"[14]

We strive to exercise the virtues, with the awareness that we have to struggle to sanctify every facet of our life, including our sight and the other senses. The eyes are not only a “window” through which we see the world and through which images come *in*; they are also a channel through which we express our dispositions, through which our desires go *out*. Charity, compassion, purity of heart, poverty of spirit, and availability to serve overflow through one's eyes.

Apostolic zeal begins by discovering the needs of others: their defenselessness, the attachments smothering their freedom, their confusion... We will put ourselves in the place of our neighbor if we are ready to become a neighbor for others:^[15] forgetting about other less noble interests, escaping from the whirlwind of personal concerns to stop, like the good Samaritan, to

spend time and take an interest in the problems and concerns of others. We have to open our eyes wide in order to see and remedy the spiritual neediness of those around us.

Apostolic zeal leads us to never turn our backs on others' problems and needs. An apostle's eyes affirm the value of every man and woman, considered in themselves and not to the extent that they serve our own interests. Moral truth, as the truth about the unrepeatable value of each person, made in the image of God, is imbued with the demand to respect personal freedom.[16]

In contrast, an impure desire, the craving to possess, or curiosity, which grow if we don't guide our way of looking correctly, end up blinding one's heart. We need to guard our sight for God and for the others. We reject images that separate us from him because they

feed the old man, nourishing a sad look and a selfish heart.

Learning how to look

Educating our sight is an important struggle, which influences the atmosphere and openness of our interior world. It's a question of trying to find God in everything, and of fleeing from what might separate us from him.

Learning to look is, then, an exercise in contemplation: if we make a habit of contemplating what is highest and most beautiful, our sight will feel repelled by what is low and dirty. One who assiduously contemplates our Lord in the Eucharist, and in the pages of the Gospel, learns to discover him also in other people, behind the beauty of nature and in works of art. We will find ourselves drawn to what is good and acquire the sensitivity to reject what is disordered.

At the same time, since our earthly life is a struggle, we are always exposed to the danger of “slipping back into the mud.” Learning how to look is also learning how to not look. “It is not good to look at what it is not licit to desire,” St. Gregory the Great advises us.[17]

Offenses against God present themselves before our eyes in different ways: sometimes we find them humanly repugnant, and we sincerely and naturally reject them, for example in the case of violent scenes. At other times the evil takes the form of a temptation, and beckons us with the attractiveness of the flesh, of selfishness, or of luxury.

In any case, we can always turn a defensive attitude into a constructive one, through the redemptive value of acts of reparation. Reparation requires that we see these realities as an offense against God, not just as

something unpleasant that bothers us, or as a temptation that we reject. Rather we see them above all as something that offends God.

When Jesus said that *everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart*,^[18] he made it clear that a disordered way of looking does not consist above all in the wrong use of an external sense, but that it is something deeper. It stems from a desire that shows a mistaken view of the person, who is no longer seen as someone worthy of respect, as a child of God. The look that I direct at others determines my own humanity.^[19]

If we look at others with clean eyes, with respect, we will discover in them our own dignity as children of God, and always feel like children of God the Father. But if we look with clouded vision, our own self-image

will also be deformed. “Thus just as I can accept the other person or reduce them to a thing to be used or destroyed, so should I be ready to accept the consequences of my own way of looking, consequences which have repercussions on myself.”[20] Our way of looking is decisive. The way one is looked upon depends on one's look, since one feels loved to the extent that one loves.

St. Josemaría taught us to turn our hearts—with an aspiration, a kiss, an inclination of the head, or a glance—to the crucifixes we see, and never to fail to greet, at least with a look, images of our Lady. These small gestures help us to live as contemplatives, with the hope of seeing God one day face to face.

“Vultum tuum, Domine, requiram (Ps 26:8). Lord, I long to see your face. I like to close my eyes and think that, when God wills, the moment will

come when I will be able to see him, *not as in a mirror dimly, but... face to face* (1 Cor 13:12). Yes, my heart yearns for God, the living God. When shall I go and behold the face of God? (Ps 41:3)."[21]

These words of St. Josemaría describe the deep yearning of those who still live among shadows, but who long with their whole heart for the clarity of God's light, the reason for our hope.

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Footnotes:

[1] Cf. *Jn* 14:7.

[2] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 684.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 95.

[4] John Paul II, *Apostolic letter to the youth of the world on the occasion of the International Youth Year*, 31 March 1985, no. 7.

[5] Cf. *Jn* 17:21.

[6] John Paul II, *Apostolic letter to the youth of the world on the occasion of the International Youth Year*, 31 March 1985, no. 7.

[7] *Mk* 10:21.

[8] *Lk* 22:62.

[9] *Acts* 5:41-42.

[10] *Mt* 9:22.

[11] John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 16 October 2002, no. 10.

[12] *Ibid.*, no. 9.

[13] Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, paper given at the congress *Il volto nascosto e trasfigurato di Cristo*, Rome, 20 October 2001.

[14] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 175; *Mt* 5:8.

[15] Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *L'Europa di Benedetto nella crisi delle culture*, p. 84; cf. *Lk* 10:29-37.

[16] Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

[17] St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, 21, 2, 4.

[18] *Mt* 5:28.

[19] Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *L'Europa di Benedetto nella crisi delle culture*, pp. 81-91.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

[21] St. Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*, Appendix, The Fourth Luminous Mystery.

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