

The closeness of God and the saint of the ordinary

Homily for the Mass of St
Josemaria by Fr Donncha Ó
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It might be said that, liturgically speaking, June is a month all about the closeness of God, the nearness of the Lord, the warmth and love of God.

The great Solemnity of the *Blessed Trinity* brings us into the mystery of God who is, in himself, interpersonal love, and who invites each and every one of us to share in his divine life.

The Solemnity of *Corpus Christi* immerses us in the mystery of, as St Josemaria put it, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, hidden for love of us, in the Bread. The real, true and substantial presence of Jesus in the holy Eucharist, shows us how near God is to us, how accessible, how loving. Yesterday's Solemnity which celebrates the *Most Sacred Heart of Jesus*, which is, as the Liturgy puts it, full of "infinite treasures of love" also speaks of God's tender mercy and compassion. We receive God's forgiveness, healing and strengthening in a special way in the *Sacrament of Penance* and it is great that there are Confessions available here today.

The *Feast of St Josemaria* fits seamlessly within this dynamic of the accessibility, closeness and love of God. He is, as Pope St John Paul II told us at his canonization, “the saint of ordinary life”. “In fact”, St John Paul said, “he was convinced that for those who live with a perspective of faith, everything is an opportunity to meet God, everything can be an incentive for prayer. Seen in this light, daily life reveals an unexpected greatness. Holiness is truly within everyone's reach”.^[1]

Today we reflect on this nearness of God, and the holiness to which He invites each and every one of us.

We could consider three aspects: *contemplation, work* and *apostolate*, which are three essential dimensions of the Christian identity.

Contemplation

St Josemaria reminds us that we, all human beings, are created ultimately, to *see God*: to see God face to face. Heaven itself, which is the fulfilment of all our human and spiritual potential, is the beatific *vision*, to *see God*. St Irenaeus, recently declared a Doctor of the Church, put it succinctly: “*vita hominis, visio Dei*”. The life of the human person is to see God. What makes a person truly and fully alive is to *see God*.

All those things which we enjoy so much to see and experience in this life: family, friendship, work, rest, exercise, laughter, nature, art, technology ... Every form of authentic beauty is a foretaste and a preparation for seeing the ultimate Beauty, who is Christ himself. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins referred to holiness as “*immortal beauty*”.

We can be grateful to God for calling St Josemaria to remind us of the sheer beauty of the Christian life. St Josemaria preached that “there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary everyday circumstances and it is up to each one of us to discover it”.

What is this “something holy, something divine”, if not a *Someone*, with a capital “S”: *the living Christ himself, Beauty in person*, who is by our side, and on our side, in every aspect of our lives and whom we can see with the eyes of faith here and now, and whom one day we hope to see face to face in heaven.

The poem of Joseph Mary Plunkett comes to mind:

I see his blood upon the rose

And in the stars the glory of his eyes,

His body gleams amid eternal snows,

His tears fall from the skies.

I see his face in every flower;

The thunder and the singing of the birds

Are but his voice and carven by his power

Rocks are his written words.

God lovingly contemplates each one of us. In the Gospels we are told of the rich young man who approaches the Lord and of how Jesus lovingly looked upon him and loved him: *He looked upon him and loved him* (cf. Mk 10:21). So too, Jesus lovingly looks upon you and me, here and now. The Christian vocation, as St Josemaria reminds us, is to respond, *to meet Christ's gaze in the ordinary*, in the everyday, in the “humdrum”, which in fact is not humdrum, since being a contemplative, being a person who seeks out God's face in day-to-day

life, means “opening up the divine paths of the earth”.

Work

To be a contemplative is to live with Christ, wherever we are and whatever we are doing. As St Paul says to the Colossians: “Your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3).

We spend most of our lives at our daily work and tasks. Just as Christ looked on Mary and Joseph in the workshop of Nazareth, and just as they looked on Christ, we too are called *to meet God’s gaze in our daily work*. Work then becomes a language of love, not merely something that we have to get done, or merely something necessary or competitive or just repetitive. Rather, to work in and with Christ is, as St Josemaria put it, “to turn the prose of every day into epic verse”.

At times when he was about to begin some task or job, St Josemaria used to say to our Lord: “Lord, let’s do this between the two of us”. This is the attitude of the contemplative person. In this way, our ordinary work becomes a divine work of art which has an eternal value, in and with Christ. We see this in the Gospel of today’s Mass. When St Peter lets Christ into his work, when he works “with Christ”, **unexpected** results, wonderful results, divine results happen. The same is true of everyone who lets Christ into his or her “boat” in their daily life and work. *Ordinary work, extraordinary grace* as the title of Scott Hahn’s book about Opus Dei is entitled.

In this line, St John Paul II preached at Limerick in 1979: “No, there is no such thing as an ‘ordinary layperson’... The great forces which shape the world - politics, the mass media, science, technology, culture,

education, industry and work - are precisely the areas where lay people are especially competent to exercise their mission".^[2]

People who are contemplatives, who live with Christ and thus work well, bring "the joy of the Gospel" to the world, as the Holy Father often encourages us to do.

Apostolate

To meet Christ's gaze in daily life, to work in and through Christ, necessarily leads us to reach out to others. Contemplative life is apostolic life. St Thomas Aquinas has the famous phrase: *Contemplata aliis tradere*: to pass on to others what we have contemplated ourselves. That is a good description of evangelization. If we live with Christ, we spread Christ. When St Peter and the others in his boat experience the miraculous catch of fish (in today's Gospel), they immediately call out to

others to come and share in their task and in their joy.

That great contemplative, St Patrick, lived out the same dynamic. Because he is with Christ, he is with everyone. His prayer becomes proclamation, evangelization.

Christ with me,

Christ before me,

Christ behind me,

Christ in me,

Christ beneath me,

Christ above me,

Christ on my right,

Christ on my left,

Being with God, leads him to be with others:

Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,

Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,

Christ in every eye that sees me,

Christ in every ear that hears me.

In a word, as Pope Francis has put it: “Mission is a passion for Jesus and at the same time a *passion for his people*”.^[3] Let us ask for his apostolic passion today, through the intercession of St Josemaria.

We are united today in prayer in a special way with our prelate, Mgr. Fernando Ocariz, who is celebrating a Mass in honour of St Josemaria in Warsaw. The prelate, the Father as we call him in the family of the Work, often encourages us to be Christ-centred, so as to savour our daily lives and radiate Christ to others.

Conclusion: Above all else, thanksgiving

Above all else today we want to give thanks.

Thank you, Lord, for choosing St Josemaria as a most faithful instrument to found Opus Dei, and for reminding all of us that you are truly with us, and that we are therefore called to *contemplate* you here and now in the ordinary, to *sanctify* our work by doing it as competently and lovingly as we can, and to *share* you with others by our joyful example and words.

We finish with some words of the French writer Francois Mauriac:

“[Christ] is present first of all in the Church; He is present by his grace within us, as he is present in the Sacrament of the Altar; he is present wherever two or three are gathered together in his name as he is present

in each of our brothers and sisters. There is no encounter in which we do not encounter him; no solitude in which he does not join us; no silence where his voice is not heard deepening, rather than troubling, that silence. What a grace! But a grace we do not have a right to keep to ourselves".^[4]

St Josemaria, saint of ordinary life, pray for us.

Our Lady Queen of Peace, pray for us.

Amen.

^[1] St John Paul II, Audience, 7 October 2002.

^[2] St John Paul II, Homily, Limerick, 1 October 1979.

^[3] Francis, Message for World Mission Day, 2015.

^[4] Francois Mauriac, *The Son of Man* (1959), pp. 104-105.

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