

The universal call to contemplation

Homily at the Mass in honour of St Josemaría Escrivá, Parish of Our Lady, Queen of Peace, Merrion Road, Dublin on 17th June 2023.

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A providential coincidence

As Providence has it, this year's Mass in honour of St Josemaría is being celebrated on the day in which the Church contemplates the Immaculate Heart of Mary. No doubt St Josemaría

is very happy with this, both because of his great love for Our Lady, but also because the heart of Mary is a *contemplative* heart, and thus a model for each and all of us.

In his Gospel, St Luke gives us an intimate portrait of Our Lady's Immaculate Heart. Twice he tells us that "Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19.51). Mary is a contemplative, the contemplative par excellence. She sees and ponders Christ and his mystery in the middle of her ordinary everyday life.

This, St Josemaría reminds us, is also your vocation and mine: "Contemplative souls in the middle of the world... wherever we greet the noise of the street and human activities – factory, university, farm, office, home – we find ourselves in a simple filial contemplation, a constant dialogue with God".^[1]

The universal call to contemplation

St Josemaría reminds us that we are all called to be contemplatives in and through the ordinary, everyday realities of work, family and social life. The Founder of Opus Dei often encouraged people to seek Christ, to find Christ, to deal with Christ, to fall in love with Christ, and then to bring him everywhere. What distinguishes the message of St Josemaría is that this contemplation of Christ takes precisely *in and through* the realities of everyday life.

This is why Pope St John Paul II referred to the founder of the Work as “the saint of ordinary life”.^[2]

In fact, “contemplation” is our calling, our destiny. We are all called to “contemplate” - to “see God” - ultimately in the beatific vision of heaven. Therefore to “see” God now, in and around us is, in the words of

St Thomas Aquinas, a certain beginning of beatitude (heaven), which begins here and will continue into the future”.^[3]

Our contemplation of the Lord happens of course in the silence of prayer, in time spent before the tabernacle and when we receive the sacraments. This intimate communion with Christ *also* takes place in and through every aspect of our lives. St Josemaría reminds us that we are invited to “see God in all earthly things: in people, in events, in big things and in what seems small to us, in what pleases us and in what we regard as painful”.^[4]

Three dimensions of contemplation

Let us briefly consider three dimensions of contemplation, drawing on the teaching and example of St Josemaría. Contemplation leads us *to rejoice in*

Creation, to love people deeply, and to have a good sense of humour.

Firstly, the contemplative comes to rejoice in Creation, or to use St Josemaría’s expression, to “passionately love the world”, as the manifestation of the beauty of the risen Christ. “God is calling you to serve him in and from the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life” St Josemaría tells us. “He waits for us every day, in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all the immense panorama of work. Understand this well: there is something holy, something the divine hidden in the most ordinary situations and it is up to each one of you to discover it”.^[5] What is this “something holy”, this “something divine” if not the presence, the company of the living Christ?

St Josemaría points out that “we recognise God not only in the wonders of nature, but also in the experience of our own work”.^[6] To try to work well and to be creative, to develop and flourish as best we can through our activities, to live out what is ordinary with love, is connatural to living through, with and in Christ.

To be a contemplative does not mean being in any way detached from reality, or alien to the day-to-day practicalities of work, family life, current affairs, hobbies, etc. On the contrary, someone who is immersed in Christ, the Word in whom all things were made (cf. Jn 1:3, Col 1:16), sees and enjoys reality with a more lucid and pristine vision. St Josemaría spoke from his own experience when he wrote: “my daily occupations [...] are no hindrance to me; quite the contrary, they are my path, my reason to love more and

more, and to be more and more united to my God".^[7]

For this reason too, the Christian is not at all afraid of reality, nor of the many difficulties it can bring with it, including challenges to our faith.

Living with Christ, he or she wholeheartedly engages with the world of work, family, culture, media, economics, and so on, with confidence, so as to sanctify it and raise the Lord up at the heart of his creation.

What makes all the difference is to be with Christ. As St Peter and the Apostles discover in today's Gospel, work without Jesus is fruitless; work with Jesus is more fruitful than we could ever imagine. With the Lord, difficulties are no longer obstacles but opportunities.

Secondly, contemplation leads to having a deep love for people. As we have seen, contemplation is loving

dialogue between God and the soul: “I look at him and he looks at me” as the humble parishioner of the Cure of Ars put it.^[8] This divine love also expands out to embrace all the people around us. We also come to see Christ in others. As St Josemaría put it: “A contemplative knows how to see Christ in those around him or her”.^[9] One is reminded of the lines from Hopkins’ poem, “As kingfishers catch fire”:

“for Christ plays in ten thousand places,

Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his

To the Father through the features of men’s faces.”

Contemplation is to see, enjoy and love Christ in others. In fact on one occasion St Josemaría remarked to a group of young people he was chatting with: “Do you know why I

love you so much? Because I see the blood of Christ coursing in your veins”.

It is from this contemplative view of other people that the zeal to evangelize arises, the desire to bring others true joy. As St Josemaría put it: “The contemplative soul is filled with apostolic spirit”.^[10] Contemplation is life with God which becomes evangelization. It is God’s love which spreads out through us.

Finally, contemplation and good humour go together. Because the contemplative sees all things in their ultimate and true perspective, namely the unconditional love of God for us, she or he doesn’t take life too seriously. We know that for those who seek to love him God does indeed turn everything to the good, as we heard in the second reading (cf. Rom 8:14-17).

On the golden jubilee of his priestly ordination in 1975, St Josemaría cast a glance back at his life and summed it all up in one big peal of laughter.^[11]

With a contemplative gaze he discerned the loving wisdom of God his Father in everything, including the many sufferings he experienced along the way.

A healthy smile and laughter are also signs of contemplative life.

Asking for the grace of contemplation

To see God in this way, with a contemplative gaze, is not simply something we decide to do. It is first and foremost a gift of God, which we can humbly and trustingly ask the Holy Spirit to grant us.

We ask you therefore Lord, through the mediation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the intercession of

St Josemaría, to grant us the gift of contemplation in our ordinary everyday life.

May we rejoice in creation, love others deeply and laugh wholeheartedly.

Amen.

^[1] St Josemaría, Letter, 11 March, 1940, no. 15.

^[2] St John Paul II, Address, 7 October 2002.

^[3] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 180, 4.

^[4] St Josemaría, Meditation, 25 December, 1973.

^[5] St Josemaría, Homily *Passionately loving the world*.

^[6] St Josemaría, *Christ is passing by* 48.

^[7] St Josemaría, *Friends of God* 306.

^[8] Quoted in Francis, General Audience, Catechesis on Prayer (32): Contemplative Prayer, 5 May 2021.

^[9] St Josemaría, Letter, 9 January 1932, no. 70.

^[10] St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By* 120.

^[11] Cf. A. Vazquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, Vol III: *The Divine Ways on Earth*, Scepter, New York, 2002, pp. 548-549.

Fr. Donncha Ó hAodha
