

## A Renewed Faithfulness

The feast of Saint Joseph highlights for us the beauty of a faithful life. "Saint Joseph was a faithful and just man because of the love that filled his soul and made him love the paths that God's Providence had marked out for him."

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Saint Joseph, *vir fidelis et iustus*, was a faithful and just man because of the love that filled his soul and made him love the paths that God's

Providence had marked out for him. “Joseph entrusted himself unreservedly to the care of God, but he always reflected on events and so was able to reach that level of understanding of the works of God which is true wisdom. In this way he learned little by little that supernatural plans have a logic which at times upsets human plans.”<sup>[1]</sup> — Saint Joseph had to renew his faithfulness repeatedly throughout the human life of the divine Word: after the surprise of the Annunciation, during the census in Bethlehem, when undertaking the flight into Egypt, and again when the child was lost in Jerusalem and then found in the temple. With an intelligent, quick and joyful obedience, he did what God asked of him.

Faithfulness is a virtue that has to be renewed throughout one's life. Married people renew their love

every day—especially on anniversaries—and thus they purify it and make it grow constantly. In following Christ's call to our path in life, we want to renew our decision to give ourselves for love. When we said “yes” to the call for the first time, we didn't know everything that God was going to ask of us, but we already wanted to give ourselves totally and forever.

## **A force that conquers time**

*You have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.*<sup>[2]</sup> The end of the parable of the talents ties the joy of the Lord to faithfulness, after underlining the importance of little things. Faithfulness leads from what is smallest up to what is greatest, from the care of what is entrusted to us on earth right up to eternal glory. Faithfulness consists in fulfilling our promise. Therefore, it is connected

with truthfulness and trustworthiness; in the faithful person, word and deed match each other. But the faithfulness that opens the gates of Heaven goes further: it includes a person's whole life. It is a virtue that is proven over time, in the straightforwardness and transparency of a person's own identity and one's relations with God and other people.

Thus faithfulness has a dynamic aspect. Human life is subject to change, and faithfulness is, as it were, a force that conquers time, not through rigidity or inertia, but in a creative way. It integrates each day's new circumstances into our original commitment, and thus gives continuity, security and fruitfulness to our lives, in order to enter into the happiness of Heaven. Truly "faithfulness is the perfection of love,"<sup>[3]</sup> and redeems time (see *Ephes* 5:16).

Scripture shows the unconditional aspect of faithfulness and how every person is called to respond to God's faithfulness. The Covenant with God, Christ's faithfulness, are the foundations and models of human fidelity. All genuine faithfulness is tied to the prior faithfulness of God, and there is a close link between my faithfulness to God and my faithfulness to other people.

God has a plan for every person, even if the one concerned does not know it. God will reward each person's faithfulness to their vocation and mission by making them into a new creature, recreated by grace. *To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.*<sup>[4]</sup> A white stone was given to victors in the games; a white stone was used in legal courts to exonerate

the accused; a marked stone was used as an entrance-ticket to private banquets. My faithfulness will make me a victor and, purified by grace, admit me to the banquet of Heaven: *Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*<sup>[5]</sup> The purpose of my faithfulness is to share in God's own life, in the fullness of love that is his Kingdom.

## **God is faithful**

The Old Testament stresses God's faithfulness by calling him *emet* and *hesed*, true and merciful. His mercy is as great as the heavens and his faithfulness reaches from the earth to the skies.<sup>[6]</sup> Faithfulness is linked to the revelation of God. By revealing his name, God at the same time reveals his faithfulness, which is from everlasting to everlasting. This is true for the past, because he is the God of our forefathers, and for the future, because he will always be

with us.<sup>[7]</sup> “God, who reveals his name as ‘I Am’, reveals himself as the God who is always there, present to his people to save them.”<sup>[8]</sup>

God is always present and always keeps his promises.<sup>[9]</sup> Hence the importance of being aware of his presence—one of the first things we learn in the interior life. Brief aspirations and glances at pictures of our Lady are specific ways of remembering the presence of the One who created us, who maintains us in existence, who looks at us with a Father’s love and has chosen us with a special call. God’s faithfulness is a consequence of his love, i.e. of his very being: “God, ‘He who is’, revealed himself to Israel as the one ‘abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’ (*Ex 34:6*). These two terms express summarily the riches of the divine name.”<sup>[10]</sup> When we are faithful, we become more like our God who is love, and who is always

faithful. “God adds unsuspected dimensions to the holy lives of those who do his will. He adds the one important dimension which gives meaning to everything, the divine dimension. To the humble and holy life of Joseph he added—if I may put it this way—the lives of the Virgin Mary and of Jesus, our Lord. God does not allow himself to be outdone in generosity.”<sup>[11]</sup>

## **Our faithfulness is grounded on God’s faithfulness**

As Christians, we hold fast to the confession of our hope, because he who promised is faithful<sup>[12]</sup> and has called us. *He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*<sup>[13]</sup> Saint Paul does not hesitate to apply that divine faithfulness to Jesus Christ: *the Lord is faithful: he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.*<sup>[14]</sup> We proclaim that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever: *Jesus*

*Christus heri et hodie idem, et in saecula.*<sup>[15]</sup>

Our life is not always easy, it is not a path of roses. God takes suffering into account as part of all faithfulness. Saint Peter teaches us this: *Let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator.*<sup>[16]</sup> We are marked by the consequences of original sin. Our faithfulness is built especially on the basis of accepting our own culpability and asking for forgiveness. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*<sup>[17]</sup> To be faithful we have to acknowledge our personal faults, because our hearts need to be purified. If our approach to our Lord didn't begin with a *mea culpa*, as it does in the Holy Mass, we would get nowhere.

Our faithfulness is the response to a call from God, who is faithful and wants to divinize us by giving us the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul expresses very well how the vocational meaning of our life develops out of God's faithfulness: *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*<sup>[18]</sup>

Disappointment will never come to us from God. He alone deserves absolute love, because his love transcends death.

## **God is good**

To be genuinely faithful, including in difficult circumstances, we have to grasp truly that God is infinitely good. This marvelous reality is discovered in prayer, in the sacraments, and from other people. There is an absolute primacy of grace, the gift of the God of mercy, in all genuine fidelity: *nos diligimus, quoniam ipse prior dilexit nos*—we

love because he first loved us.<sup>[19]</sup> God, the most loving Father, loves us, and he sent us his Son Jesus. *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*<sup>[20]</sup>

Faithfulness is grounded on God's love and is the perfection of love. "The love which, with God's grace, we have given him wholeheartedly in youth, is not something we can take back with the passage of time. Fidelity is the perfection of love: in the life of a soul dedicated to God one always finds, lurking behind any form of disenchantment, a source of corruption and impurity. Fidelity, when it is whole and entire, is always joyful and unconditional."<sup>[21]</sup>

Our Lord says that the Holy Spirit will convince the world *of sin, because they do not believe in me.*<sup>[22]</sup> We can understand this as referring not only to the fact of not believing

that Jesus is true God and true Man, but also to the “sin” of not trusting fully in his love for us. Perhaps we haven’t yet managed to incorporate fully into our lives Saint Paul’s somewhat mysterious words: *quod autem nunc vivo in carne, in fide vivo Filii Dei, qui dilexit me et tradidit seipsum pro me.*<sup>[23]</sup> It is good for us to ask ourselves “the life I now live in the flesh, do I live it by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me?”

## **Believing in God’s love**

We have faith, by God’s gift, and therefore know that God is love. This love has been shown to the maximum in the love of Jesus, who died for us, for each of us individually, who gives himself to us in the Eucharist, and who accompanies us always as our friend and brother. For this reason we can truly say with Saint Josemaria those

three words from Saint Paul: *omnia in bonum!* We want to love God, and for those who love him all things work together for the good, although we don't always see how. Believing in God's love is so fundamental that Saint John sums up the Apostles' experience of Christ as follows: *we have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us.*<sup>[24]</sup>

“Christian faith is thus faith in a perfect Love, in its decisive power, in its ability to transform the world and to unfold its history.”<sup>[25]</sup> The face of this Love is revealed to us in Jesus, in his self-giving for us, for our salvation. Pope Francis, speaking about Saint Peter, remarked that perhaps the devil's greatest temptation was insinuating to him “the idea that he wasn't worthy of Jesus' friendship, because he had betrayed him.” But our Lord is faithful. And the Pope adds, “friendship has this power: a friend

who is more faithful can, by his fidelity, make the other person faithful, who perhaps isn't truly such. And in the case of Jesus, He has, more than anyone else, the power to make his friends faithful.”[26]

Saint Josemaría joined that certainty of God's love to the deep sense of our divine filiation: “What confidence, what repose and what optimism it will give you, amidst all the difficulties, to realize that you are children of a Father who knows everything and can do everything.”<sup>[27]</sup> However, even though we know this, we often get upset, worry about difficulties or about our failures and limitations, about setbacks and misunderstandings. This is natural, humanly speaking, but it shows that we don't yet fully believe that at every moment God is there with us, with his infinite love, and that he

knows everything and can do everything. He is *interior intimo meo*,<sup>[28]</sup> more present within me than I am within myself.

*“The just man lives by faith.* These words, which later became a frequent subject of Saint Paul’s meditation, really did apply in the case of Saint Joseph. He didn’t fulfil the will of God in a routine or perfunctory way; he did it spontaneously and wholeheartedly. For him the law which every practising Jew lived by was not a code or a cold list of precepts, but an expression of the will of the living God. So he knew how to recognize the Lord’s voice when it came to him so unexpectedly and so surprisingly.”<sup>[29]</sup>

If we find ourselves getting overly upset, it means that we are still, to a certain degree, situating the security and peace that we all desire in our

own selves: in things going well for us, in having good health, in having a job that suits us, in being valued by others... even in our apostolic efforts. And where does Christ fit in here? We still have that “sin” of which only the Holy Spirit can first “convince” us and then cure us, through the perfection of charity: that is how we will fully believe in God’s love.

Saint Augustine comments on our Lord’s words in Saint John’s gospel by saying that God will place in us the love that we need: “Jesus said: ‘He [the Holy Spirit] will convince the world,’ as if to say, ‘He will pour out charity into your hearts’.”<sup>[30]</sup> The fullness of charity is holiness, which we will only attain in Heaven. With the grace of the Holy Spirit and our generous response, here and now, in this life, we can grow more and more in the faith that works through charity. For that growth to happen,

we must anchor all our security in God's love.

## **With the strength of charity**

Faith in the Christ's love leads us to a loving repose in the Blessed Trinity. There is nothing that moves us to love so much as being loved by this God who wants to introduce us into the Trinitarian current of his own Love. With the measure of our love for God, with faith in his love for each and every one of us, we love other people, seeing in them persons loved by God. Charity is what gives life and strength to deeds; without charity, deeds for the benefit of other people are mere altruism, or even hidden selfishness. *If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or*

*resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*<sup>[31]</sup>

How can we attain this charity? “It is not possible to love all mankind except from the Cross. We love all souls; we reject nobody.”[32] It is only from the Cross that we can love all men and women. The Cross leads us to forget about ourselves, which we can only achieve out of love for God, and knowing that we are loved by Him. *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*[33]

When human reasons for joy and confidence fade, faith in God’s love becomes decisive, a love that is only perceived with eyes of faith: “the realization of the greatness of man’s

dignity—and of the overwhelming fact that, by grace, we are made children of God—forms a single attitude. It is not our own forces that save us and give us life; it is the grace of God. This is a truth which can never be forgotten. If it were, the *divinization* of our life would be perverted and would become presumption, pride. And this would lead, sooner or later, to a breakdown of spiritual life, when the soul came face to face with its own weakness and wretchedness.”[34]

## **Happiness**

Our love rests on our faith in God’s love. Our freedom is integrated into our faithfulness, because there is no genuine perseverance without love. Love alone can produce faithfulness: “Fall in love, and you will not leave him.”[35] And with fidelity comes joy, happiness, including moments when we are undergoing physical or

spiritual suffering. With faith in God's love, "a child of God, a Christian who lives by faith, may suffer and weep, may have reasons for grief, but never for being sad."<sup>[36]</sup> —

The first "canonization" was that of the good thief. A few words from our Lord on the Cross, from where he was loving the whole world, giving his life for the salvation of all those who would accept grace, teach us that faithfulness and happiness are closely linked. Faithfulness means always being with Jesus and never leaving him. In Heaven, we will experience the great mystery of our divinization, we will be more fully sons and daughters "in the Son." Our Lord told the good thief, *hodie mecum eris in paradiso*.<sup>[37]</sup> — That very day, he would be with Jesus in paradise. The word "paradise," of Persian origin, means garden or park, and is charged with a sense of happiness. This is why Genesis talks

about the “garden” of Eden.<sup>[38]</sup> When Jesus tells the good thief he will be in paradise, it is a way of saying that what awaits him is happiness.

“With Saint Joseph, the Christian learns what it means to belong to God and fully to assume one’s place among men, sanctifying the world. Get to know Joseph and you will find Jesus. Talk to Joseph and you will find Mary, who always sheds peace about her in that attractive workshop in Nazareth.”<sup>[39]</sup>

*Guillaume Derville*

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[1] Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 42.

[2] *Mt* 25:21.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *Letter*, 24 March 1931, no. 45.

[4] *Rev* 2:17.

[5] *Rev* 19:9.

[6] Cf. *Ps* 54(53); *Deut* 7:9; 32:4; *Is* 49:7; *Ps* 145(144):13.

[7] Cf. *Exod* 3:6, 12.

[8] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 207.

[9] Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 212.

[10] *Ibid.*, no. 214.

[11] Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 40.

[12] Cf. *Hebr* 10:23; 11:11.

[13] *I Thess* 5:24.

[14] *II Thess* 3:3.

[15] *Hebr* 13:8.

[16] *I Pet* 4:19.

[17] *I Jn* 1:9.

[18] *I Cor* 1:9; 10:13.

[19] *I Jn* 4:19.

[20] *Jn* 3:16.

[21] Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 24 March 1931, no. 45.

[22] *Jn* 16:9.

[23] *Gal* 2:20.

[24] *1 Jn* 4:16.

[25] Francis, *Lumen fidei*, no. 15.

[26] Francis, Address, 2 March 2017.

[27] Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 9 January 1959, no. 60.

[28] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 6.

[29] *Christ is Passing By*, no. 41.

[30] Saint Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 95, 1.

[31] *I Cor* 13:3-7.

[32] Saint Josemaria, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, p. 139.

[33] *Jn* 13:34-35.

[34] *Christ is Passing By*, no. 133.

[35] *The Way*, no. 999.

[36] Saint Josemaria, 'The Riches of Faith,' article published in *ABC*, 2 November 1969.

[37] *Lk* 23:43

[38] Cf. *Gen* 2:8.

[39] *Christ is Passing By*, no. 56.

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