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Audio of Prelate: “Instructing the ignorant” and “offering good advice”

In this month's podcast, Bishop Javier Echevarria offers reflections on two of the spiritual works of mercy.

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Previous podcasts in the series:

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Translation of the Prelate's audio recording is found below.

To listen to the 11-minute audio in Spanish click [here](#).

Among the spiritual works of mercy, I want to consider today the first two: *instructing the ignorant* and *offering good advice to the one who needs it*. Teaching others is one of the most beautiful works all of us can carry out. For example, the work of mothers in educating their children.

What great patience, joy and generosity they show in their attention to their children, to help them reach human and supernatural maturity! As Pope Francis said: “A mother, above all, teaches the right path in life and guides her children. She doesn’t learn this from books but from her own heart.”

I would like to add here that the father too has to learn each day, with an upright heart, to be a good husband, a good father, doing all he can every day – just as his wife does – to maintain and enkindle the loving atmosphere in his home. The heart: this is the secret of the works of mercy, which involve the will and are born of charity, of God’s love that can reach out to others through you and me.

In the Gospel, we hear the words that Christ addresses to those who come to arrest him in the Garden of Olives:

“Every day I sat teaching in the Temple.” Indeed, his public life consisted primarily in teaching us the path of the children of God, bringing light to our intellect, and opening up the way to reach God the Father, with the help of the Paraclete.

In the same vein, the forceful words in his Sermon on the Mount, in his parables describing the Kingdom of Heaven and in his dialogues with various people still inspire wonder in us: scenes in which the Master transmits to everyone – also to us today – different ways to follow the paths of salvation. Therefore, as the Pope also points out, “to be capable of mercy, we must first of all be ready to listen to the Word of God. This means rediscovering the value of silence in order to meditate on the Word that comes to us.”

The only one who can carry out the role of a good teacher, and advise

others rightly, is a person who is always willing to learn. We should all open ourselves with docility to the Master's teachings if we really want to help others sincerely. Therefore, reading the Gospel carefully and with recollection (a custom that I invite you to practice every day, reading calmly, quietly, pondering what God is telling us) makes us more sensitive to experience the mercy of our heavenly Father and thus capture the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Then, when we have to orient someone or give advice, we will immediately ask ourselves: what would Christ do here? And we will act accordingly.

On many occasions (on all of them!), our good example will also be the best way to help others. Saint Josemaria reminds us in his book *Furrow*: "Jesus began to do and then to teach. You and I have to bear witness with our example, because

we cannot live a double life. We cannot preach what we do not practice. In other words, we have to teach what we are at least struggling to put into practice.” Indeed, our struggle, our own desire for conversion, will become a spur for others to notice the effort we make to live with Christian faithfulness. If we want to help them, we must be personally demanding on ourselves first.

On the other hand, giving opportune and helpful advice entails an act of generosity, because it calls for setting aside our own ego and placing ourselves in the situation of others, trying to understand them more deeply, always taking into account their personal circumstances, in order to give the best advice. This advice will always flow from friendship and often have a supernatural tone, since that is how we can help others to see things with

a wider perspective that includes God.

These works of mercy should impel us to be generous in showing others the path that leads to Christ. Saint Josemaria said that “for a Christian, apostolate is like breathing. A child of God cannot live without this supernatural life-force. Our concern for souls is a response to a command of love given to us by our Lord that sends us out as his witnesses throughout the whole world.”

Many people, perhaps without knowing it, are waiting for someone to introduce them to Christ. True happiness cannot be found without Him! Hopefully the graces from this Year of Mercy can help us overcome the obstacles that sometimes stop us from being apostolic: human respect, laziness, or simply the thought that the task is impossible. Nevertheless, let us invite those we encounter in

our daily life to look at our Lord's face; let us make known his teachings (I insist) in our own life; let us explain the doctrine of the Church when necessary and, of course, let us always conduct ourselves in a manner consistent with our faith. Thus we will show others that living in accord with the Gospel is attractive.

I once again want to quote Saint Josemaría: “We have to act in such a way that others will be able to say, when they meet us: this man is a Christian, because he does not hate, because he is willing to understand, because he is not a fanatic, because he is willing to make sacrifices, because he shows that he is a man of peace, because he knows how to love.”

This is how the founder of Opus Dei always acted. His life primarily involved transmitting to others the

spirit he had received from God. I am a witness to his zeal for showing us clearly, even in the smallest details, how to follow Christ by sanctifying ordinary life. He did so with a maternal and paternal heart, making use of small daily events, inspiring us with his example, reminding us patiently and sometimes forcefully, as often as necessary.

I suggest that, in this Year of Mercy, you read one of the biographies about Saint Josemaría's life, even if you have already read them. His teachings come directly from the Gospel and contain, as our Lord said, "things both old and new," and can always give a new impetus to our own spiritual life. In reading these biographies or his writings, our Lord will help us discover wonderful and attractive aspects of the Christian spirit for our personal conduct, which we can pass on to others.

Saint Josemaria defined Opus Dei as “the history of God’s mercies,” since he always experienced God’s incomparable closeness while striving to make the divine will a reality. Thanks to God that history has not stopped, but continues today in the work of many men and women who are striving to assimilate this way of life and to follow Christ, putting themselves in the lowest position, as servants.

Truly, the possibility of being able to find God in the occupations of each day – isn’t this a great manifestation of divine mercy? Isn’t it a manifestation of God’s special tenderness that we can cooperate with Him in the great adventure of bringing the fruits of Redemption to all the crossroads of the world with our daily life?

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