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Audio of Prelate: Burying the Dead

In this month's podcast, Bishop Javier Echevarria reflects on the last corporal work of mercy. "My sons and daughters, and friends: knowing how to die is just as important as knowing how to live, and in both cases we can be helped."

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

To listen to the 9-minute audio in Spanish click [here](#).

The last corporal work of mercy is to *bury the dead*. Let us turn our eyes once again to Christ, who speaks to us in the Gospels. In his Passion, the cruelty of men denies the slightest gesture of mercy towards our Lord, whom we see as captive, thirsty, sick, naked and rejected by his people.

However, soon after Christ dies on the Cross, we witness a gesture of mercy towards his Body, the mercy that God has sown in human hearts. Devout hands remove our Lord from the Cross, deliver Him to his mother, wrap Him in a clean shroud and bury Him in a new tomb.

I have often considered this passage, and I understand perfectly that the only arms worthy to receive the Body of Christ were those of his Mother, with her spotless life filled with generosity towards her Son and all

men and women. Meditating on this scene, a ray of hope is enkindled in our hearts, when we realize that mankind, while we failed to welcome the Savior at his birth and mistreated Him on his earthly journey, at least offered Him a decent burial.

This is how Saint Josemaria describes this episode: “Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who are hidden disciples of Christ, intercede for Him making use of the high positions they hold. In the hour of loneliness, of total abandonment and scorn, it is then that they stand up for Him *audacter*, boldly (Mk 15:43): heroic courage!”

The founder of Opus Dei continues his prayer with these words: “With them I too will go up to the foot of the Cross; I will press my arms tightly round the cold Body, the corpse of Christ, with the fire of my love. I will unnailed it, with my reparation and

mortifications. I will wrap it in the new winding-sheet of my clean life, and I will bury it in the living rock of my breast, where no one can tear it away from me. And there, Lord, take your rest! Were the whole world to abandon you and to scorn you... *serviam!* I will serve you, Lord.” As he himself advised us, Saint Josemaria *lived* the Gospel scenes, placing himself in them as one more character there.

Christ was born to die and thus save us. This scene should stir our hearts, for death is part of our lives and helps to give meaning to the time we spend on this earth. In the encyclical *Spes Salvi* we read that only Christ “shows us the way beyond death; only someone able to do this is a true teacher of life . . . The true shepherd is one who knows even the path that passes through the valley of death.”

My sons and daughters, and friends: knowing how to die is just as important as knowing how to live, and in both cases we can be helped. Christians must face this moment – for oneself or when it comes for others – with hope and serenity. On some occasions, we might be tempted not to talk about death to a person who is sick or very weak. But let us not fail to recognize that some words of help and comfort can be a real caress for the soul.

Offering the Anointing of the Sick does not have to be a cause for anguish or dismay: in those moments, the grace of God sustains the soul of a person who may be confronting, with understandable anxiety, the unknown. Let us allow God to act. Time and again, we priests are witnesses to how God's mercy alleviates the dying person's suffering when given this sacrament. On these occasions, we can all pray

with the patients, talking to them in a natural way about Heaven, sustaining them with our faith, and reminding them that they will not be alone, because God's infinite Love awaits them in eternal life.

One day in 1932, Saint Josemaria was accompanying a dying man in the General Hospital of Madrid. That person, facing his approaching death, remembered all the mistakes in his life; and his offenses against God disturbed his soul. The founder of Opus Dei recalled this scene years later, "He said to me loudly, before I could stop him: 'I can't kiss our Lord with this filthy mouth of mine!' 'But listen, very soon you are going to embrace him and give him a big kiss, in heaven!'" The man died in peace, sustained also by the faith of this holy priest, who was at his side at the moment of the final test.

Burying the dead is a work filled with possibilities to strengthen the faith of the living. Those who experience the death of someone close to them will appreciate being accompanied with our prayer and serenity; if we have to offer a few words of condolence, we can make sure to give them a supernatural tone, so that our faith can be a comfort to those in need. Perhaps many people today lack a friend who can remind them that God is a Father who also cares about those who have gone on to the next life.

It is also very Christian to care for the physical places where the dead are buried, by cleaning their graves and placing some flowers. This is not only for the sake of remembering them and praying for their souls; this care for the deceased also shows the respect we should give to the body. We firmly believe in the resurrection of the flesh, and the places where the

remains of those we have known rest remind us that they will come back to life.

Anyone who has prayed before a tomb knows that love does not die out, but stays alive. Faith gives us the certainty that God's mercy is able to overcome in a mysterious way the wall of death. How great is the power of his mercy by which, through Christ's resurrection, our love can reach beyond the confines of this life!

Naturally we turn to Mary, the Mother of the Crucified One. When unnailed from the Cross, He rested on her lap. Mary continued caring for Him, even while heartbroken. "No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary," says Pope Francis. "Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh. The Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has

entered the sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery of his love.” As the Holy Father invites us, let us imitate our Lady of Sorrows in our daily service to the living and the dead.

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