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Audio of Prelate: Comforting the Sorrowful

In a new podcast on the works of mercy, Bishop Javier Echevarria reflects on the delicate task of consoling the sorrowful. "Consoling others isn't easy, since it requires a lot of tact; the soul of a person who is suffering is, so to speak, 'raw to the touch,' with a deep unease."

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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 10-minute audio in Spanish [click here](#).

The day after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene went with great sorrow and love to our Lord's tomb, to anoint the Crucified. When we read about this event in the Gospels we experience true joy, because we know that there, beside the tomb, she will find Jesus Himself now resurrected, with his glorious Body. Our Lord wanted to reveal Himself in that encounter, so he calls Mary Magdalene by her name: "Mary!" She recognizes Him right away and exclaims, "*Rabboni!*, Teacher!" Mary neither can nor wants to suppress that cry of joy at the certainty that our Lord is alive. At that moment, the darkness in this woman's soul disappears; sadness gives way to an irrepressible joy. Our Lord lets Himself be recognized by a woman of faith.

I wanted to recall this episode so we may realize that the very first action carried out by the Risen Christ was the work of mercy we are reflecting on today: *comforting the sorrowful*.

We children of God have been created to rejoice in the Good. But we can encounter on our path through life sorrow and pain, because we freely and sadly choose sin or because God's Providence allows suffering so that we may unite ourselves to his Cross, as the Gospel tells us. The daily coexistence with evil forms part of the human mystery. This reality shouldn't discourage us, but rather lead us to redouble our hope in God and our desire to turn to Him, confident that sorrow and suffering do not escape his loving designs, just as the invitation to repent and begin again when we have erred is part of his Providence.

It may happen that those who experience evil could tend to isolate themselves, thinking they are able to cope with this burden without anyone's help. By this ruse, the devil tries to separate us from God and our brothers and sisters, making us see around us only misunderstanding and hostility, and offering us in exchange false consolations that, in the end, leave behind a residue of bitterness. Eve was alone in Paradise when she dared to dialogue with the Tempter, as was Judas when he despaired on the night of the Passion. How rightly Saint Paul states in his letter to the Corinthians: *worldly grief produces death*.

Setbacks and suffering are part of life, but how much wrong we would do if we were to confront them solely on our own! Faced with this struggle, sadness could arise, and sadness brings with it pessimism, distancing us from God and from our brothers

and sisters. “Abyss calls to abyss,” says Scripture. At such times, we need someone’s help to keep us from falling further.

To those who go through this bad patch in their lives, Saint Josemaría advised them to first seek comfort in prayer and in the tabernacle, since from God comes all mercy. “You ask me to suggest a cure for your sadness,” he writes in *The Way*. “I’ll give you a prescription from an expert adviser, the Apostle Saint James: *Tristatur aliquis vestrum*, are you sad, my son? *Oret!* Pray! Try it and you will see.”

The founder of Opus Dei would appeal to Heaven when it was hard to accept a tough situation, such as the death of someone close, a relative or a friend. Although he suffered the natural sorrow of a father – of a son, a brother, a friend – he didn’t give in to sadness, but instead prayed: “May

the most just and lovable will of God be done, be fulfilled, be praised and eternally exalted above all things. Amen, Amen.” He repeated the word “*amen*” twice, to cling tightly to the Divine Will, even when it was hard for him or he didn’t understand it. I remember very vividly how Saint Josemaría found great comfort in that prayer in order to keep going.

At the same time, God’s help so often reaches us through other people: friends, colleagues, relatives or even strangers. They will console us or we will offer them comfort, thus opening a way for God, in his mercy, to mitigate the difficulties and sorrows we all face on our earthly journey.

Consoling others isn’t easy, since it requires a lot of tact; the soul of a person who is suffering is, so to speak, “raw to the touch,” with a deep unease. One word more or less can cure or can cause even more

damage. In that case, our presence will often be enough; at other times, it will be necessary to say something that conveys hope and helps that person to consider the situation from another perspective.

I advise you, when trying to console others correctly, to call on the guardian angels for help. God the Father sent an angel to comfort Jesus in the Garden of Olives, during that time of such intense suffering in our Savior's life. My daughters and sons, sisters and brothers, in this scene, which so often could nourish our prayer, we see clearly that to console someone is a divine action. This consoling presence amid Christ's agony reveals God's Love, the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the great Comforter.

You will recall that Saint Josemaría – following the Church's tradition – said that when we men and women

are in God's grace, we are *Temples of the Trinity*. Therefore when we carry out or receive an act of mercy, we are manifesting to the world the stream of love that stems from the Father, embraces the Son and reveals the Holy Spirit. And yet something so important can, out of God's goodness, be carried out with gestures as ordinary as a caress, some words of comfort, some minutes of patient listening, accompanying in silence or with our prayer a person who is suffering.

In that same scene in the garden of Gethsemane, we see one of the difficulties this work of mercy involves: that of not being able to discover our neighbor's suffering. Just a stone's throw from our Lord, the Apostles slept oblivious to the sorrow overwhelming their Master. Let us see ourselves reflected in their drowsiness. We fall asleep when we are absorbed in our own problems,

when rushing around prevents us from stopping to listen, when we don't give importance to the signs of sadness in a relative or a friend, when we offer advice without having listened beforehand, when we pour out reproaches on those who have done wrong, putting a limit on our patience...

I close with a beautiful prayer of praise that Saint Paul sends to his brothers and sisters in Corinth and that sums up the heart of the work of mercy that we are considering here: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." Amen.

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