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## **Another Way of Seeing: Giving Means of Formation**

When we give means of formation, we try to look with the gaze of a person for whom Christ is the center of everything. We also try to see through our listeners' eyes, in order to reach their hearts. And we do this with our own perspective and personality, which help us convey an authentic Christian message, true to its original meaning.

01/15/2025

Saint John had just returned from his exile on the island of Patmos. He was in the city of Ephesus, where he would spend his final years, when he began to hear comments that questioned the redemption accomplished by Jesus and denied that He was the Messiah. The Apostle therefore decided to write a series of letters addressed to the various churches in Asia Minor to strengthen the faith of his listeners and denounce these errors. He began by building on the foundation that animated all his preaching: *What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerning the Word of life (...), we proclaim to you so that you too may have fellowship with us. For our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son,*

*Jesus Christ. We are writing this so that our joy may be complete (1 Jn 1:1–4).*

## **Seeing through Jesus' eyes**

Speaking about Christ comes naturally when we have experienced deep friendship with Him. Indeed, the Apostle's words imply that such a relationship is necessary to fully experience the joy of being Christian. For this reason, his very discourse reflects the joy of being close to the Lord. "Manifest clearly the Christ that you are," Saint Josemaría said, "through your life, your love, your spirit of sacrifice, your work ethic, your understanding, your zeal for souls, your joy."<sup>[1]</sup>

The Prelate of Opus Dei once commented: "When we give formation, we strive to relate everything to the Lord. There comes a point in life when simple

aspirations for personal perfection no longer suffice; a struggle centered merely on becoming better is not enough. However, when in formation we show that love for Jesus Christ — and through Him, love for others — is at the center, then the struggle becomes meaningful. We seek to draw closer to Him, not just to do things better.”<sup>[2]</sup> —

This approach to providing means of formation in the apostolates of Saint Raphael, Saint Gabriel, and Saint Michael is the natural result of a life centered on Christ. For this reason, the objective of any formative class or session is not simply to inform people of obligations to be fulfilled and the negative consequences of leaving them unfinished, because “a struggle centered merely on becoming better is not enough.” The goal is rather to help each person discover the *meaning* of the subject being considered in order to place

Christ at the center of their lives. The beauty of loving Jesus and acting like Him motivates us much more than any kind of exhortation.

Naturally, commitments are a part of Christian life, but their meaning comes from the fact that they foster personal interaction and union with the Lord. The focus must be on the “why” of that commandment, highlighting the freedom gained when we embrace salvation and allow God to love us.

## **Seeing through the others’ eyes**

We need a lived experience of friendship with Christ to speak about Christian life, but we also need a personal connection with our audience. The speaker bears the responsibility of ensuring that their words are as human as possible, because this lays the foundation for

better communicating God's message and touching others' hearts. A genuine desire to serve and be useful to those listening means putting oneself in their shoes, asking: "What matters to these people? How can what I am about to say be helpful to them?" The listener poses similar questions: "What does this have to do with me? How is it relevant to my life?"

These are helpful considerations, whether we are preparing or receiving formation. They help the person giving the class or talk to present its value clearly and with conviction, showing its place in the struggle to deepen our friendship with Christ.

But the speaker's words and way of reasoning need to connect to the listeners' reality, environment, and needs. Starting from what is important to the audience helps

them have a receptive attitude, because they perceive they are about to hear something relevant to their lives. This is how Jesus taught, going out to meet people in the occupations that filled their hearts and minds:

“God is not a mathematical intelligence far from us. God takes in interest in us, He loves us, He has entered personally into the reality of our history, He has communicated Himself, even to the point of taking flesh. (...) He came down from his heaven to immerse Himself in the human world, in our world, and to teach us the ‘art of living,’ the road to happiness; to set us free from sin and make us children of God.”<sup>[3]</sup> —

Someone who communicates the faith seeks to open horizons of thought and freedom for their listeners. This happens when the ideas they share are rooted in their own life experience, showing the utility and beauty of what they are

explaining. Such authenticity naturally leads to placing Christ at the center of one's life.

## **Seeing through my own eyes**

The Gospels show us the apostles as people with very different personalities. Andrew, enthusiastic and approachable, wasted no time telling Simon about Jesus shortly after meeting Him. The sons of Zebedee, like any siblings, were very similar in some ways and very different in others: both were ambitious, but while James had a fiery temperament, John's youthful tenderness allowed him to enjoy a unique closeness with the Lord. Peter, impulsive and outgoing, was called to be the Rock and head of the Church. Each contributed to the spread of Christianity in unique ways, shaped by their character, experiences, and the people they met and spoke to.

God relies on our personalities and experiences to communicate the Christian life. This does not mean reinterpreting the original meaning of the message, but deepening our understanding to see it clearly and help our listeners do the same. Each of us carries out this task in our own unique way, faithful to the message, because he made the topic our own. More than repeating expressions or relying on a multitude of quotes — which, while offering a sense of security, may make the ideas seem more distant — our goal is to understand the message deeply and convey it with interest and a desire to inspire.

Our personal engagement with the message can be seen in the way we use images, provide examples, and communicate without unnecessary formalities. Speaking authentically, rooted in lived and comprehended experiences, is far more compelling.

But this approach is not easy: it demands that we allow Christ's life to question and challenge us first, so we may see the brilliance of what we hold in our hands with fresh eyes. If we want to achieve this, we need to contemplate the Gospel; to read it with our minds and hearts awake, allowing ourselves to be surprised by its beauty and rediscovering the good it contains.

If we give formation in this way, we will realize there are multiple approaches to the same topic, reflecting the depth and richness of the spirit of the Work. Each person can contribute from their own experience and knowledge. This diversity enriches the presentation of Christian life, not by attempting to exhaust a topic but by focusing on an aspect that is helpful to the audience at a specific moment. In this way, even if a subject comes up repeatedly in means of formation, its delivery

remains original and timely. “The beauty of the Gospel asks to be lived (...) and witnessed in the harmony among us, who are so diverse! And this unity, I dare say, is essential to Christians: it is not an attitude, a manner of speaking, no; it is essential, because it is the unity that arises from love, from the mercy of God, from the justification of Jesus Christ and from the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.”<sup>[4]</sup> —

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While Saint John was writing those letters, Saint Paul was doing the same hundreds of kilometers away. His life had changed completely after that encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, not only because he stopped persecuting Christians and joined them, but because his way of seeing God had been transformed. His life, once centered on strict rules to follow, became anchored in that

personal encounter with Christ. From then on his preaching, like the other apostles', was about conveying what he had received from the Lord. In doing so, Paul recognized and adapted to the needs of the communities and individuals he addressed, using his uniquely direct and lively style, which revealed his experience of God's love. His letters reflect varied relationships with their recipients: in some, he asserts his apostolic authority (cf. *2 Cor* 10:1-11); in others, he presents himself humbly as an old man and prisoner (cf. *Phil* 9). His aim, however, was always to share the beauty of a life lived with Jesus Christ.

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*Other articles on customs and norms of piety in Opus Dei*

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[1] St. Josemaría, Gathering, 13-VI-1974.

[2] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Class in the Roman College of the Holy Cross, 13-XI-2021.

[3] Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 28-XI-2012.

[4] Pope Francis, Angelus, 30-V-2021.

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