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## **“Jesus, I know that this enchanted you”**

Saint Josemaria always saw in the care for little things a way to respond to God's infinite love for us. A new article on Christian life.

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On 29 December 1933, Saint Josemaria was finishing the installation of the DYA Academy. Four young men were helping him: Manolo, Isidoro, Pepe and Ricardo. One of their jobs was to put up a large blackboard in a classroom. The

next day he wrote down in his notes this brief account: “When they had put a blackboard in a classroom, the first thing those four artists wrote was: *Deo omnis gloria!* — all the glory to God. Jesus, I know that this enchanted you.”[1]

We see expressed here certainly his joy on witnessing this moving scene. But we also see the founder of Opus Dei’s clear awareness that we can please God through small and almost miniscule gestures. It isn’t easy to understand how such an insignificant action of a creature could affect our Creator like this.

God has told us that his delight is to be with the children of men (cf. *Prov* 8:31), that He is “enchanted” by us. If we find Saint Josemaria’s expression here a bit daring, he is even more daring when he states: “With Faith and Love, we can drive God crazy, who once again goes mad—He was

mad on the Cross, and is mad each day in the Host—spoiling us like a Father does his first-born son.”[2] His preaching often contained similar expressions: “I spoke to them about Jesus being crazy, mad with love for us.”[3] Has it ever occurred to us that God might react in this way?

## **God’s happiness**

At the end of his first pastoral letter, the Prelate of Opus Dei addressed God with this prayer: “Grant, O Lord, that from faith in your Love, we may live each day with a love that is always new, in joyful hope.”[4] Saint Thomas Aquinas says that happiness “belongs to God in the highest degree” (*S. Th.* I-I, q. 26). No one is as happy as He is, and He wants to share his joy with us. So we live with the hope of eternal happiness and, at the same time, we are already joyful now because God grants us a participation in his own bliss.

To go deeper into the mystery of divine happiness, it can be helpful to consider how Jesus reacts in a scene narrated by Saint Mark: *He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny (Mk 12:41-42).* That small gesture deeply moved our Lord.

The small copper coins tinkled as they fell into the treasury, which looked like a trumpet with its mouth facing upwards in the temple's atrium. It was there that offerings, alms and rents were deposited. The usual clanging of the heavy metal coins was quite different from the gentle tinkling of the two almost worthless coins that this poor woman offered.

Nevertheless, that woman won over Christ's heart. In reality, He has no need of our offerings, and He begs us for something much greater: our heart. "Didn't you see the light in Jesus' eyes as the poor widow left her little alms in the temple? Give him what you can: the merit is not in whether it is big or small, but in the intention with which you give it."<sup>[5]</sup> Jesus doesn't interpret human gestures the way we do. The widow's offering is tiny, but it is much more pleasing to Jesus because it is done with a free and humble spirit: *Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living (Mk 12:43-44).* Christ challenges us to give a new, paradoxical value to things—and above all to our own life.

## **A freely bestowed love**

It is useless to try to measure our Lord's love for us. "God comes down freely. His love is non-negotiable: we did nothing to deserve it and we will never be able to repay it." [6] Jesus wants to be our friend, as He confided to his apostles in the Cenacle (cf. *Jn* 15:15). "And in them he has said this to all of us. God loves us not merely as creatures but as children to whom, in Christ, He offers true friendship." [7] However, when we sense more clearly our own fragility we tend to think that God will react as we would. When something doesn't turn out well or when it seems to us that we aren't up to the level of his Love, we imagine Him being disappointed or saddened. We find it hard to grasp that our life, marred by miseries and mistakes, could please or enchant God, and much less drive Him crazy with love.

The Fathers of the Church have tried to warn us against this quite common mistake: “Why then, oh man, do you see yourself as so worthless when in God’s eyes you are so precious?”[8] Saint Bonaventure shows us the sure way to avoid this mistake: “But if you seek to understand how these things work, ask it of grace and not human wisdom; ask it of desire and not the intellect; ask it of the longing expressed in prayer.”[9]

How is it possible that God is so won over by our tiny gestures of affection and even by our limitations? How can the infinite gap between God’s Love and our own poor response be canceled out? Certainly we don’t have enough “money” to “buy” his Love. He loves us because He wants to, which is the most divine reason. Hence He doesn’t oblige us to respond in a set way. He is won over when we pay Him back with his own

“coin,” with a love that is bestowed freely, letting ourselves be loved and allowing God to love us madly. This comes about when we realize that divine affection is not for sale, and that our only hope lies the lottery of his unconditional goodness. Then the soul responds with the little that it possesses, but with this great difference: it does so because it truly wants to, just as God does. And it enjoys it just as He does.

### **“Homely details about the hero”**

By opening our eyes to the immensity of God’s Love, realizing that He loves us madly, we can better understand the value in God’s eyes of what is little, precisely because it is ours. We know we will never be able to “pay back our debt,” but we dream of being able to contribute at least something to “covering the family expenses.” It is his Love that transforms our tiny trinkets into

precious jewels. All our small efforts then help “make God happy.” As the Gospel tells us, two small copper coins worth a penny are enough to satisfy his infinite capacity to love and to be loved. These small things help to set the soul free because they help it to let itself be loved in exchange for nothing. When done with this intention, they don’t “restrict” us. In fact, it is impossible to put care into them perseveringly if they stem from a desire to control, to “cancel our debt.” These small things done with love are simple and spontaneous gestures of a soul that knows it is looked upon lovingly by an all-powerful and eternal God, but also a down-to earth, “homely” God.

Many of us will never attain the heights of the great saints or martyrs, but we have the good fortune that God finds our small daily efforts to please Him enchanting. We never think we have done anything to

merit his affection, but this is precisely what opens our heart completely to his grace. He delights in our free, joyful struggle to please Him. Since we aren't aware of the heights we are on, we lose any "vertigo" and act with a naturalness and a faith that is enchanting for Him. "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master" (*Mt* 25:23).

Approaching little things with this perspective enables us to avoid two caricatures that are unworthy of the joy and love with which God looks upon us. Although apparently quite distant, both deviations share something in common: putting the focus on ourselves, on what *we* do. On the one hand, we could discover that, after years of struggle, the care for little things somehow makes us feel secure, with the risk of seeking

there the tranquility of those who simply “comply.” Perhaps without realizing it, these small things may have become “small rigidities” that serve to tranquilize our insecurity. We fulfil them but we don’t enjoy doing so. On the other hand, they could also become for us an unbearable weight, a heavy burden that distorts Christ’s lovable face and makes the struggle oppressive for us.

In neither case is the solution found in not paying attention to them. Rather we need to try to grasp, to the extent that we can, how God looks upon our loving struggle, without worrying about the results we ourselves achieve. We need once again to place the focus on Him. This is part of “the eternal dialogue between the innocent child and the father crazy about his son: ‘Tell me, how much do you love me?’... And the little lad pipes out: ‘A mil-lion mil-lion times!’”[10]

In this regard, Saint Josemaria writes in a letter: “What silly things I’m telling you! It’s true. But everything in which we poor human beings have a part—even sanctity—is a fabric of small trifles which, depending on the rightness of our intention, can form a tapestry of splendid heroism or of meanness, of virtues or of sins. The epics—those of our El Cid, for example—always tell of gigantic adventures, but mingled with homely details about the hero. May you always attach great importance—a right intention!—to little things. And I too; and I too...”[11]

### **“Driving God crazy”**

We can “drive God crazy” when our life is inserted in Christ’s. Then our small efforts, our tiny coins, united to Christ, become a holy and unblemished sacrifice (cf. Eucharistic Prayer I); they become a pleasing gift

to God the Father, as the priest prays in a low voice after the offerings are presented at Mass. The Latin expression here is very expressive: “*Ut placeat tibi,*” that it may be pleasing to you. Our sacrifice can please God, as Benedict XVI says, because the Eucharist “draws us into Jesus’ act of self-oblation.”[12]

The saints found a shortcut for reaching these heights. They discovered that even our mistakes help us to love God more, if we are repentant and place them in his hands: “I tell Him again and again that I love Him. Then I get so embarrassed, for how can I tell Him that I love Him if I have offended Him so often? I don’t react to that by thinking that I am lying, because it wouldn’t be true. I continue my prayer: Lord, I want to make amends to you for all the times I have offended you and for all the offences you have suffered from all souls. I

will make amends with the one thing I can offer you: the infinite merits of your Birth, your Life, your Passion, your Death and your glorious Resurrection. I offer you the merits of your Mother, those of Saint Joseph, the virtues of the saints, my own failings and those of my children, which sparkle like jewels in a heavenly light when, with all the fervor of our soul, we abhor both mortal sin and deliberate venial sin.”[13]

The soul that lets itself be loved makes the merits of Christ its own and feels capable of climbing peaks that, with its own strength, would be unattainable. So much daring—spurred by God’s grace—could seem paradoxical and even somewhat amusing to us. But this good humor brings forth our best response to the love that is given to us. In this regard Benedict XVI shared a very personal insight about how he sees God:

“Personally, I think that He has a great sense of humor. Sometimes He gives you a nudge and says, ‘Don’t take yourself so seriously!’ Truly, humor is an essential element in the mirth of creation. We can see how, in many matters in our lives, God wants to prod us into taking things a bit more lightly, to see the funny side of it, to get down off our pedestal and not forget our sense of fun.”[14]

God wants us to enter into his joy (cf. *Mt 25:23*), to share in his intimate, infinite joy, which nothing can ever destroy. That is what He has created us for.[15]

That good woman in the Gospel wasn’t worried about her offering being so small in comparison with the others at the treasury. She knew that the amount didn’t matter in God’s eyes. She only knew that, despite her poverty, she needed to give everything to God. The saints

have always known this: “I would be very happy to go to heaven soon. But when I remember those words of our Lord, ‘Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to every man according to his works,’ I tell myself that in my case God is going to find Himself in a fix. I don’t have any works! So He won’t be able to pay me ‘according to my works.’ Fine, then He will pay me according to His...”[16]

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The prophet Zephaniah tells us how greatly God loves his children: “The Lord your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival” (*Zeph* 3:1-18). The Pope says he has always been moved by these words: “I find it thrilling to reread this text.”[17] The

Church applies these words also to the Mother of God. Our Lady can help us to share in her conviction of the truth of the Archangel Gabriel's words: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (*Lk* 1:30): your Creator is crazy about you.

*Diego Zalbidea*

[1] Saint Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 611.

[2] Saint Josemaria, *Instruction on the Supernatural Spirit of the Work*, no. 39.

[3] Saint Josemaria, *Intimate Notes*, 23 November 1931. Cited in Pedro Rodriguez, *The Way, Critical-Historical Edition*, commentary on point 916.

[4] Fernando Ocáriz, *Pastoral Letter*, 14 February 2017, no. 33.

[5] Saint Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 829.

[6] Francis, *Homily at Midnight Mass*, 24 December 2019.

[7] Fernando Ocáriz, *Pastoral Letter*, 1 November 2019, no. 2.

[8] Saint Peter Chrysologus, Sermon 148.

[9] Saint Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ch. 7, no. 6.

[10] Saint Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 897.

[11] Letter of Josemaria Escriva to Juan Jimenez Vargas, Burgos, 27 March 1938. Cited in Pedro Rodriguez, *The Way, Critical-Historical Edition*, commentary on point 826.

[12] Benedict XVI, Enc. *Deus caritas est*, no. 13.

[13] Saint Josemaria, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, “The Joy of Serving God,” meditation given on 25 December 1973, Scepter, 2018.

[14] Benedict XVI, *God and the World*, Ignatius Press, 2003.

[15] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1.

[16] Saint Therese of Liseaux, *Letter* 226.

[17] Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 4.