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Combat, Closeness, Mission (22): Fill the World With Light

We will show others the beauty of the world and of life, the way God sees them, if we discover that beauty for ourselves.

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“How wretched it is to be far from God!” Saint John Paul II is said to have commented to someone who had gone years without confession.^[1] Those who have not grown up with faith, or who distanced themselves

from it in their youth only to rediscover it later, know well what this distance feels like. When they first notice that God wishes to draw near to them, perhaps at first they do not recognise Him, or they keep Him at arm's length out of pride or reluctance to change their lives; but as soon as they lay down their arms, they experience what the psalmist writes: "*Dominus illuminatio mea*; the Lord is my light" (Ps 27:1). The world does not change at that moment. Everything remains the same, and yet everything is different. Everything becomes visible in the radiance of God's light.

Wanting to see

Jesus and his disciples walk through the bustling streets of Jerusalem and the sun-drenched paths of Galilee. They meet people who feel the heat of the sun on their skin, though they cannot see its golden rays, and who

hear only the hubbub of the crowd, without knowing where it comes from or what causes it. They are blind. They cannot set out on a journey, because they cannot direct their steps. They provoke the laughter of mockers, the scorn of the proud and the compassion of their brothers. Their lives literally lack perspective.

Suddenly, something happens that no one saw coming. Fed by Isaiah's prophecies, a small flame of faith and hope burns deep in a heart: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened" (Is 35:5). The time of fulfilment has come. Bartimaeus cries out with a loud voice: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus responds: "What do you want me to do for you?" And he replies: "*Ut videam*, that I might see." With Jesus's powerful and simple words — "Go, your faith has saved you" —

Bartimaeus begins to see (cf. Mk 10:46-52).

Let's fast-forward twenty centuries: Saint Josemaría walked the streets of Logroño observing façades and architectural details, seeking inspiration for his future profession. The young man overflowed with vital enthusiasm: he grew with his heart and eyes wide open. One winter's day, when the beauty of the buildings contrasted against the white of fresh snowfall, his eyes fell upon some Carmelites walking barefoot in the snow. Their footprints revealed a simple and courageous piety. Other pedestrians would erase those footprints with their own over the course of the day, but they would remain indelibly imprinted on that child's heart.

What did this experience awaken in the boy? The same words as the blind man of Jericho: *Domine, ut videam!*

Like Bartimaeus, he would cry out and pray, and like Bartimaeus he would be heard. After ten long years of prayer, supplication, crying out and searching, he would finally see the task that God entrusted to him. But that day, 2 October 1928, would not be the last time he prayed with these words. They would remain on his lips, repeated again and again until the very end of his life. His constant prayer not to lose the light, not to lose God's closeness, would enable him to bring it to many souls.

In contrast to the fervent prayer of Bartimaeus and Josemaría, who want to see, some people assent to voluntary blindness: "Keep your eyes closed," they seem to tell themselves, "because in reality there is nothing to see. Don't think, because whatever you do you won't find the truth, and it probably doesn't even exist. Why pray? In any case, there's no one listening..." Scepticism, the belief

that, at most, we can depend on the darkness of reason without faith, breeds despair. And despair is the state of the soul in which every desire to reach a goal is extinguished, because the person is convinced that there is nothing to find; or, if there were, it is not within their reach.

Before healing a blind person or someone who is ill, we often hear Jesus ask: *what do you want me to do for you?* This reminds us of something we already know well. Jesus only heals us if we accept our illness and want to be healed. Those who believe they can already see perfectly cannot emerge from their blindness (cf. Jn 9:39-41). Those who prefer to keep their eyes closed or their heads buried in the sand have nothing to fear from Jesus: the Lord can do little for them. On the other hand, those who know they are blind will eventually come to see, even if the miracle unfolds slowly, as it did

for that other blind man who initially saw figures like walking trees instead of people (cf. Mk 8:24).

In darkness

The first page of the Divine Comedy, which is a thrilling journey through hell, purgatory and heaven, begins with a brief self-portrait of Dante. A mature man, *nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*, the author is crossing through a dark wood.^[2] His eyes are wide open. He is not blind, and yet he sees little more than poor Bartimaeus. Wherever he looks, his eyes always meet the darkness of the forest. He stumbles and falls. He seems condemned to die there. How did he get to that place? He confesses that he doesn't understand it himself, but the Gospel gives us a clue.

Jesus tells us of ten young women, all of them facing a path in the darkness. Each has a lamp to light the way. Five are wise and have

provided themselves with oil to keep their lamps burning until the end. Five are foolish, scatterbrained. Busy with many things, they forget about the oil. Night falls, and the first five can advance, whilst the other five are left behind, in the darkness (cf. Mt 25:1-13).

Dante's dark wood describes the experience of wandering through life without knowing exactly where to go. It is a darkness in which sometimes we can voluntarily remain: "Keep the light off; who knows what you'll see when it comes on..." Our own imperfection, our sins, the perception of evil in the world... at times, everything seems to tempt us to remain in darkness. It was night, Saint John notes, when Judas left the room of the Last Supper to betray Jesus (Jn 13:30). In darkness, the devil has better access to souls. He is less clearly recognised as the father of lies. We might then

more easily allow our souls to be stained, because we can barely see how it has become dirty. And if someone comes and offers to light a candle, we might refuse and prefer to leave everything in darkness, because "everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed" (Jn 3:20). The devil, on the other hand, seems not to accuse; it seems as though, if you go with him, your sins need not be forgiven: they will dissolve in the darkness. But, although we sometimes choose darkness as a hiding place, in reality we are made for the light.

Playing games with the light

From Dante's dark wood, we move to Times Square in New York City. The experience is overwhelming. You find yourself surrounded by brilliant lights competing for your attention, for your gaze. Restaurants, cinemas

and shops with a variety of offerings that seem to know no limits, seductive palaces of moral decadence. Your eyes are open. You are not blind, nor do you lack light. And yet you are not much better off than Bartimaeus by the roadside, nor than Dante in his dark wood. You see too much; your gaze wanders from one place to another and, if it settles on something, it is not what you would really want to see, but merely the most recent thing to capture your attention. You are surrounded by lights, but you wander in twilight.

The luminous advertisements of Times Square are no longer found only in one place on the map: they flicker in anyone's pocket. And the enemy knows this all too well. Since mere darkness does not allow him to attract souls to himself, he illuminates his paths with bright but ephemeral lights, and in turn tries to darken God's paths. The spiritual

battle between good and evil,
between Saint Michael and Lucifer,
between the children of light and the
children of darkness, is therefore
ultimately a battle for the
illumination of paths.

Let us go back to the story of our first
parents, which is also our story. God
adorns the whole of paradise with
beautiful light, and gives Adam and
Eve the freedom to eat from all the
trees except one. Then the serpent
arrives, and begins by extinguishing
the lights of the garden: “are you not
allowed to eat from any tree?” “On
the contrary,” Eve tells him, “we can
eat from all the trees except that
one.” And so, quite simply, the
serpent draws her attention to the
forbidden tree, which stands
illuminated in the middle of the
garden, as if there were no other. Its
fruits now seem irresistible. And
Eve's gaze and desires change. She
no longer sees the rest of paradise;

she sees only that attractive fruit, apparently full of divine promises; she becomes obsessed with it. And she eats, and even that light goes out. Paradise vanishes. It will only become visible again in the light of the Lord, our Saviour (cf. Gn 3:1-7).

We too sometimes face choices of this kind: withdrawing to spend some time in prayer or letting ourselves fall onto the sofa to watch a series or read a novel. If we consider both things before God, it becomes clear that prayer is a paradise full of fruits, whilst the alternative gives us only a brief moment of relaxation and entertainment, good perhaps for another time. However, why do we so easily choose this second option? Because the enemy, and sometimes simply our own frailty, plays games with lights: he manages to dim the light over prayer, whilst the alternative appears under a seductive spotlight.

The devil disguises himself as an angel of light (cf. 2 Cor 11:14) and leads people to call "darkness light and light darkness" (Is 5:20). But the Lord wants to count on "children of light" (Jn 12:36) who learn to decipher that game, and above all who discover and spread the beauty of true light: "We are children of God. —Bearers of the only flame that can light up the paths of the earth for souls, of the only brightness which can never be darkened, dimmed or overshadowed. —The Lord uses us as torches, to make that light shine out... It depends on us that many should not remain in darkness, but walk instead along paths that lead to eternal life."^[3] —

Illuminating paths

We have considered a whole spectrum of attitudes to life, all of them open to people of our time. Ways of seeing and living do not

occur to people in isolation, but together, as if in layers. There are those who, perhaps because they have received a distorted version of the Gospel, see no further than a few ideas that seem to explain reality to them and which, above all, leave them at peace. The fact that their access to the world is largely mediated by relationships and algorithms that confirm them in their mentality and lifestyle does not make it likely that they will change. At the same time, the enormous “public square” of the internet, as well as emerging artificial intelligence, may end up leading them to unexpected discoveries.

Alongside them are many others who, disappointed by relativism or other ideologies they once embraced, are searching, eager for light and meaning. But their search is sometimes mixed with a certain fear of that very light they desire,^[4] and

with the dispersion to which the hyperconnectivity in which we live subjects them. Whilst the immense development of the digital world has notably improved some facets of life, it has also generated an unlimited offering of possibilities at all levels (travel, entertainment, information...) which can hinder personal relationships, particularly a relationship with God.

Those of us who want to follow and radiate the God who is light also sometimes find ourselves tempted by the false refuge of darkness, or subjected to that dispersion that seems stronger than us: "A change! You say you need a change!... opening your eyes wide so as to take in better the images of things, or almost closing them because you are short-sighted. Close them altogether! Have interior life, and you will see, in undreamt-of colour and relief, the wonders of a better world, of a new

world: and you will draw close to God..., and know your weakness..., and be deified... with a deification which, by bringing you nearer to your Father, will make you more a brother of your fellow-men."^[5] —

Saint Josemaría speaks to us of having interior life, of things happening within us, so that the dynamics of our inward life are stronger than those of the next person or sensations to pass by, selling others. This life is nourished by prayer, silence, and the sacraments. But also by reading, writing, cinema, art, podcasts, conversations... Each of these immense fields reserves for us both offers of simple entertainment, to pass the time, and possibilities of expanding our interiority, of enriching our experience of the world, our conversation with others and with God.

We shall show others the beauty of the world and of life as God dreams of them — that is the gaze of faith — if we discover that beauty ourselves. The Lord wants to make us see with his eyes, but He needs us to want to see. And that requires us to resist the flickering, ephemeral lights of a world centred on the latest thing; it requires us to seek the light of the stars, away from the light pollution of the streets. We can try, for instance, to do just one thing at a time: pray, read a book, watch a film, or talk to someone, without trying to answer messages or resolve small tasks at the same time. Choosing simplicity allows us to be present here and now. Only when there is true presence, true attention, can there be epiphany, revelation. And then yes, we can bring the illumination and warmth of the light.

"Filling the world with light, being the salt and light — that was how our

Lord described the mission of his disciples. To bring to the ends of the earth the good news of God's love. All of us Christians should devote our life to doing this, in one way or another."^[6] Our mission is to illuminate the true paths for humanity; the paths towards the only destination that does not disappoint, which is heaven. And there is only one path, Jesus Christ, but there are also many *paths within the path*, because He allows Himself to be found in many ways. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light" (1 Jn 1:7), we shall illuminate paths for so many who did not even know before that those paths existed. Perhaps, before, they saw nothing but the horizon of pleasure or success. Now they see a landscape with a path full of joyful people and, at the end, the light of the rising sun, the risen Lord.

^[1] Qtd. in Pacheco, J.-F. *Amar y ser feliz*, Madrid, Rialp, 2007, ch. 6 (our translation).

^[2] Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, Inferno, Canto I. *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita* ("in the middle of the journey of our life") is the celebrated verse with which this pinnacle of universal literature begins.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 1; see also *Letter* 6, no. 3.

^[4] Cfr. Leo XIV, Homily, 25-XII-2025.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 283.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 147.

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