**The Forge, 548: *Advent is here. What a marvellous time***

***in which to renew your desire, your nostalgia, your real longing for Christ to come***

***— for him to come every day to your soul in the Eucharist. The Church encourages***

***us: Ecce veniet! — He is about to arrive!***

**1st December (2nd day of the Novena to the Immaculate Conception)**

Mt 8:5–11

*When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him and appealed to him, saying, Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully. He said to him, “I will come and cure him. The centurion said in reply, Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed*.

This man is giving us two lessons: The first one is humility. Do you see how he considers himself unworthy? He does not deserve the miracle, not to have Jesus at home, nor even to address to him without introduction... But he is asking nothing for himself. He asks for his servant. He does not hesitate to intercede on behalf of his servant. *Jesus, make me learn the lesson!*

The second lesson in on faith: He KNOWS that if Jesus says the word... it just happens! *If my faith were the size of a mustard seed*, then, you Lord would say a word and transform me: you would make me a soul of prayer, you could make me a courageous apostle; you could give me humility, and fortitude, and holy Purity, and charity, and hope, and faith! With just one word... *Please, Lord, say it!*

Do I have that faith?

**2nd December (3rd day of the Novena)**

Lk 10:21–24

*Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike*.

No wonder that Jesus loves children: Children are vulnerable, open, trusting, reliant, weak, and must depend on others. A child is an open vessel ready to receive. And when you open it, you give him the opportunity to fill it. St Josemaría writes in Holy Rosary: ***My friend, if you want to be great, become little. To be little it is necessary to believe as children believe, to love as children love, to give yourself up as children give themselves up... to pray as children pray***.

The most important thing that children do not forget is that the can do nothing by themselves: ***To become children we must renounce our pride and self-sufficiency, recognizing that we can do nothing by ourselves.***

Jesus, help me to become a child who knows how to love you. Am I like a child that does not give up, nor gets discouraged, nor stops trying until he gets what he is asking for? Am I asking for a prayerful soul, full of love for God?

**3rd December** Saint Francis Xavier. **(4th day of the Novena)**

Mt 15:29–37

*Jesus summoned his disciples and said, “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. [...] Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” “Seven,” they replied, “and a few fish.” [...] Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over – seven baskets full.*...

Jesus is always caring for souls, you see? And when He wants to do something for them He asks for help. It is usually very little what we can give: 7 loaves? Actually: also a few fish... I love to see the apostles being generous to the full. They want to give everything. They put everything at Jesus’ disposal. Am I generous like them. Do I give all that God asks for?

And then He can multiply everything. But if we give nothing, Jesus can multiply nothing; people get nothing and they starve.

What does He want? What do I give?

**4th December: (5th day of the Novena)**

Mt 7:21, 24–27

*Jesus said to his disciples: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven*.

Only those who **LISTEN** and **DO**. Do you listen to Him in your prayer? “*Simon, I have something to tell you*...,” Jesus told the Pharisee who had invited Him. And He could say the same thing to you: *I have something to tell you*. But sometimes, we lack the silence in our hearts, and we are unable to listen: We seem incapable of “*tuning in*” to Him because there is so much interference.

A little child complained to his mom when she asked how the school had been that day: —*Lessons are boring! Teachers speak all the time and don’t let us say a word!*

Well, maybe your prayer is boring as well. You never give God room to speak. Prayer is a dialog: Do I make an effort to listen to Him in my prayer? Do I let him speak?

Once you listen, then you can do what He asks for. Do you do it?

**5th December (6th day of the Novena)**

Mt 9:27–31

*As Jesus passed by, two blind men followed him, crying out, “Son of David, have pity on us!” [...] Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I can do this?” “Yes, Lord,” they said to him. Then he touched their eyes and said, “Let it be done for you according to your faith.” And their eyes were opened*.

It all depended on their faith: since the power of Jesus has no limit, the limit is our faith. If the two blind men had had only a bit of faith maybe they would have passed from blind men to one-eyed men... or short-sighted with myopia... The only limit for miracles is our faith.

When you ask for something to Him, do you do it with faith? A rural church in the middle of farming country had a special Mass to pray for rain. A drought had hit the area hard. In the homily, the priest expressed his amazement: —*This is funny! A hundred people praying for rain and no one brought umbrella!*

When the Apostles saw that their faith was not even like a mustard seed, they asked Jesus: *Increase our faith!* Do you ask for it?

The same who brought sight to the blind can bring to you what you need: *What is it?*

**6th December** **(7th day of the Novena)**

Mt 9:35–10:1, 5a, 6–8

*Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching [...]. At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is abundant but the labourers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out labourers for his harvest.”*

I understand your pity, Jesus, and your complaint, that there are few that want to work for You. You can’t count on many for they do not want to give themselves to the full. Can you Lord, count on me?

If a man fills a large earthenware jar with wine, and leaves some other jars half full, when he returns to look at his wine jars, he does not examine the one he filled: he knows that the wine will be well preserved. Instead, he observes those that are half-full, because he fears that they may have turned sour. The same thing happens with the soul. Giving oneself partially ends up corrupting our friendship with Jesus. Only complete generosity can allow us to follow in His footsteps. Do I give myself to the full?

**7th December (8th day of the Novena)**

Mk 1:1–8

*John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.*

The first move for a new life is to acknowledge our sins. Because we all have sins, we all need Mercy: “*in Confession we ask for forgiveness from Jesus. Forgiveness is not the fruit of our own efforts but rather a gift, [...] of mercy and of grace that flows unceasingly from the open heart of the Crucified and Risen Christ*.” (Pope Francis) You Lord,never get tired of forgiving us. Thank you, Jesus!

Peter, who loved Jesus deeply knew how to repent for his denial. But he does so precisely through an act of love: “Lord, he said after that second miraculous fishing, you know all things; you know that I love you.” How many times have I told Him that!

Someone once asked blessed Álvaro del Portillo what were the happiest moments of his life, and he answered, “*Those in which the Lord forgave my sins in the sacrament of penance*”.

**8th December: Immaculate Conception**

Lk 1:26–38

*The angel Gabriel said, “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.” But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end.”*

As I was one day listening to a really gifted violinist, a little child approached to me and, with pride in his eyes, the smile from ear to ear and full of satisfaction he said to me: —*He is my dad!*

And I can imagine yourself today like that boy, as millions of angels and saints and Holy Souls and people contemplate the Immaculate Conception, the supreme masterpiece of Almighty God, the most beloved, the most admired, revered, cherished, esteemed, impressive, extraordinary, magnificent, sublime creature...

Rejoice: —*She is your good Mother!*

*Are you a good child?*

**9th December**

Mt 18:12–14

*Jesus said to his disciples: “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost*.”

You, Lord, are the Good Shepherd and do not give up on anyone. You draw on all Your means—and they are many—so that no one will be left behind forever. This fills me with hope. You will not leave me; You will do everything on Your part to guide me to Heaven, and You will do the same for those who are dear to me..., who are slightly lame. You will help them reach their eternal destiny. You want everyone with You.

“*My God, how easy it is to persevere when we know that You are the Good Shepherd, and that we—you and I—are sheep belonging to your flock! For we know full well that the Good Shepherd gives his whole life for each one of his sheep*” (St Josemaría). For me. For you.

You leave no one behind. Thank you, Lord.

[I can now pray about my apostolate and my friends, also sheep of His flock]

**10th December**

Mt 11:28–30

*Jesus said to the crowds: “Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”*

Some people think of Jesus as a *spoilsport*: someone who comes when everything is great and weights down on your shoulders a cross, as if saying: —«*Fun is over! Let’s pray...*». They feel overwhelmed with all the demands: *I have to pray, to offer sacrifices, to offer up my work, to live charity with this and that one*... So they do not want to do His Will. Do you feel overwhelmed? Then know that your burden does not come from Jesus.

Teach us to rest on You, Jesus; to go to you at all times; to learn from you to be meek and humble. *Accepting the will of God wholeheartedly is a sure way of finding joy and peace: happiness in the Cross. Then we realize that Christ's yoke is sweet and that his burden is not heavy* (St Josemaría). What are your burdens? Do you ask Him to take them with you?

**11th December**

Mt 11:11–15

*Jesus said to the crowds: “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force. All the prophets and the law prophesied up to the time of John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, the one who is to come. Whoever has ears ought to hear.”*

I see it clear, Lord: without fight there is no Heaven. To follow you, at times... is so hard! Of course it is. Climb to heaven is like climb a high peak.

When the climb up becomes extremely difficult, we are tempted to give up or at least to make a stop which would make it impossible to reach the summit on time. But, like other times, we will overcome the difficulties and will continue walking.

Make up my mind and tell Him: I will fight until the end to love You more each day, to reach the summit of Heaven, “*come what may, happen what may, whatever work is involved, whatever criticism arises, whether they arrive or whether they die on the road, or even if they don’t have courage for the trials that are met, or if the whole world collapses*.” (St Teresa). Is my resolution as firm as that?

**12th December: Our Lady of Guadalupe**

Lk 1:39–47

*Mary set out and travelled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”*

On December 12th, 1531, Juan Diego, an Indian convert was going to the Church at Tlatelolco in order to bring a priest to his dying uncle. He was stopped by the Lady, who had come down from Tepeyac Hill to meet him in the road. She listened quietly to Juan's excuse for not having kept his appointment with her the day before. When he had finished speaking she said, "*It is well, littlest and dearest of my sons, but now listen to me. Do not let anything afflict you and be not afraid of illness or pain. Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Are you not in the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else you need?"*

How do you talk to your mother? And... to your Mother? When you talk to her: Do you consider that? How is your devotion to her?

**13th December**

Mt 17:9a, 10–13

*As they were coming down from the mountain, the disciples asked Jesus, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” He said in reply, “Elijah will indeed come and restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also will the Son of Man suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist*.

I am always stricken by the lack of sight of some people. They can have a prophet right in front of their faces and fail to recognize him. On one occasion Elijah gently brings a dead boy back to life for the sake of the widowed mother (1 *Kgs* 17:22), St John the Baptist was followed by thousands.

The Israelites were awaiting Jesus from centuries. And when He came... they also failed to recognize Him. That is advent for: that I may be ready to see Him coming and to recognize Him: *Advent is here. What a marvellous time in which to renew your desire, your nostalgia, your real longing for Christ to come — for him to come every day to your soul in the Eucharist. The Church encourages us: Ecce veniet! — He is about to arrive!* (St Josemaría). How are you going to make yourself ready?

**14th December**

Jn 1:6–8, 19–28

*A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.*

*And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, “Who are you?” [...] He said: “I am the voice of one crying out in the desert”*

St John the Baptist came to testify. He was the messenger, but not the message. Now I am the messenger, the apostle. There is the story that when Jesus was ascending into Heaven, He gazed down and saw a few tiny lights in Jerusalem. During His Ascension, He met the Angel Gabriel, who asked Him: “*What are those little lights?*”

“*They are the apostles that surround my Mother*,” Jesus answered him. “*This is my plan: once I return to Heaven, I will send them the Holy Spirit so that these small lights can turn into a great bonfire that will ignite the world with charity*.”

The Angel dared to ask: “*And if this plan does not work?*” After a moment of silence, Jesus answered: “*I do not have other plans!*”

If I do not my apostolate... no one will. How is your apostolate?

**15th December**

Mt 21:23–27

*When he had come into the temple area, the chief priests and the elders of the people approached him as he was teaching and said, “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?” Jesus said to them in reply, “I shall ask you one question, and if you answer it for me, then I shall tell you by what authority I do these things.*

It is not very frequent to find someone who came to You with a question and went away without an answer, but of course... not everyone was interested. You always give answers to those who are ready to listen. But there is a group of people that do not want to hear what You have to say. They may even come and talk to You, but do not want to listen to You.

Some souls may think that they *pray*, because they *talk* to You... but they never *listen*, lest You say something that can complicate their lives.

Am I ready to listen to Him? Do I ask Him to talk to me, and to ask me anything, and give me His grace to do it?

«*When it's God Who is speaking the proper way to behave is to imitate someone who has an irresistible curiosity and who listens at keyholes. You must listen to everything God says at the keyhole of your heart*» (St John Vianney).

**16th December**

Mt 21:28–32

*Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: “A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, ‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’ The son said in reply, ‘I will not,’ but afterwards he changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, ‘Yes, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did his father’s will?” They answered, “The first.”*

Like in the Gospel yesterday: there are people who pray but do not listen to You. When You call *blessed those who hear the Voice of God*, You always add: and *obey it* (*Lk* 1:38,11:28). They are blessed because they know God personally and are glad to hear and obey His Word. St James made the point in his letter: *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says* (*Jas* 1:22).

Do I hunger for God and for His Word? Lord, increase my hunger for your word. May I always prefer Your Will over my will and seek to please You in all things.

*It only takes a second. Before setting about anything, ask yourself: What does God want of me in this? Then, with divine grace... do it!* (St Josemaría)

Do I realize what “*Your will be done”* means when I say it everyday?

**17th December**

Mt 1:1–17

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

*The total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Christ, fourteen generations*.

Today the Gospel comes full of names of Jesus’ ancestors. Some of them well-known patriarchs and saints, but some others well-known sinners. The story before Jesus was one of a mixture of saints and sinners, so also is the story since Jesus, e.g. Peter who denied Jesus and Paul who persecuted Christians. You, Lord can do good counting on bad people and work with whom You can.

The last third of the genealogy contains people who are unknown, a sign to us that we too like them can continue the story of Jesus even if unknown.

Am I faithful instrument in His Hands? Do I allow Him to work wonders and transform the world through me?

**18th December**

Mt 1:18–25

*The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” [...] When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.*

How good Joseph is! He did as the Lord commanded: *Your Will be done!* I have to learn from him: So humble, so chaste, so docile, so good. *On* *the* *Holy Patriarch felt the mission to guard the Son of God, King of the world, the mission to guard the virginity and holiness of Mary, the duty of cooperating (he was the only called to share the knowledge of the great mystery hidden for ages) in the divine incarnation and salvation of mankind* (Bl Pius IX).

*We have to have a holy envy of* St *Joseph, and say him that we want to live like him very close to Jesus, to learn so many things as he learn from Jesus; to teach us to treat the Lord and our Lady* (Bl Álvaro)

**19th December**

Lk 1:5–25

*The angel said to Zechariah, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John” [...] Then Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”*

Zechariah was a godly man who was tuned to God’s voice. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth were “*upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly*.” God’s angelic messenger greeted Zechariah with a blessing beyond his expectations. “*Your prayer is heard!”* Of course it has been... God always listens to our prayers.

You, Lord long for my prayer. You thirst for my dialog. No one ever has sought to speak to men as much as you have... and no one ever had paid higher price that the price you paid. I firmly believe that you are here, *that you hear me!*

Do I?

**20th December**

Lk 1:26–38

*The angel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.” Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her*.

*Fiat! Be done!* Everything that our Lady is told by the angel is very mysterious. She may not have understood great part of it, but she stills knows that God does not make mistakes, and that whatever He asks for is the best, always. Every day, when I pray “*your will be done*” I am actually asking for help to do your will, for I know that is the best for me.

Do I really want to do what God wants me to do? Or do I still think that my plan is better? The example of Mary is the same as Jesus in Golgotha: *Not my will, but your Will be done!*

**21st December**

Lk 1:39–45

*Mary set out in those days and travelled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb*.”

You see: no one has asked Mary to go to help there. She knew that Elisabeth was pregnant, and old, and went “*in haste*”. In Cana... no one came to Mary to tell her that they were running out of wine. A soul that has his eyes in the others has no need to be asked for, for they are ready to help before anyone knows they need help.

Am I able to find the needs of the others before they ask for help? Do I wait until I am asked to do something for them?

*Turn your eyes towards the Blessed Virgin and see how she practises the virtue of loyalty. When Elizabeth needs her, the Gospel says that she went cum festinatione, — joyfully making haste. Learn from her!* (St Josemaría)

**22nd December**

Lk 1:46–56

*Mary said: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my saviour, for he has looked upon his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children for ever.”*

Of course all generation would call her blessed, is she not? She was chosen among millions of women to be the mother of Jesus. So humble! The only creature in the world that could boast considers herself *the lowly servant* of God. Blessed is she!

And blessed are we for we can be called *children of Mary!* Keep praying about the humility of Mary, and your lack of humility...

**23rd December**

Lk 1:57–66

*When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, “No. He will be called John.” They made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, “John is his name,” and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God.*

Zechariah was dumb since nine months before. In that time Zechariah had time to meditate upon the goodness and the mercy of the Lord. So, when the moment came to give his son a name, he wrote it on a tablet: "*His name is John!*" And after he had obeyed, he recovered the use of his voice...

God always fulfils His promises. He promised a child of an elderly couple... and John was born. Do you trust God, that He will fulfil His promises?

When you have to overcome resistance, as Zechariah to name his child... are you firmly resolved to do the will of God?

**24th December**

Lk 1:67–79

*Zechariah his father, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied, saying: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; for he has come to his people and set them free. He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, born of the house of his servant David. Through his prophets he promised of old that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us. He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant*”.

*He promised*, and He has fulfilled His promise. Tonight is Christmas. The promise of God will be there, on a manger, between Mary and Joseph, an ox and a donkey, and you and me.

«*Again and again the beauty of this Gospel touches our hearts: a beauty that is the splendour of truth. Again and again it astonishes us that God makes himself a child so that we may love him, so that we may dare to love him, and as a child trustingly lets himself be taken into our arms. It is as if God were saying: I know that my glory frightens you, and that you are trying to assert yourself in the face of my grandeur. So now I am coming to you as a child, so that you can accept me and love me*». Pope Benedict XVI

**25th December**

Lk 2:1–14

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrolment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

*Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a saviour has been born for you who is Christ and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:  “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.*”

If that is not enough for you to pray... well, you need more help than I can provide!

**26th December:** St **Stephen, first Martyr.**

Mt 10:17–22

*Jesus said to his disciples: “Beware of men, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. You will be hated by all because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved*.”

St Stephen was the first Christian to be killed for his beliefs. Well, they couldn’t say that Jesus did not warn them. In fact, that is a clear sign that you are in the right path: *If you follow Jesus’ footsteps, you get what He got, and you end up where He ended up*. The message of Jesus cannot be “digested” by the world. Who could be surprised that people laugh at you, or they despise you for your beliefs, or they even mistreat you.

How do you react when you see that the prophecy of Jesus happens also in your life? Do you pray for those who do not understand you?

**27th December** St **John, Apostle and evangelist**

Jn 20:1a and 2–8

*On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they put him.” So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; [...] Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed*.

The *beloved one*. The young disciple. He was a teenager when met Jesus and since then he never left Him. Nor even when all the others did: in Calvary. It is never too early to follow Jesus with everything. One is never too young to give himself to God. St Louis Gonzaga was 15 when he understood his vocation. St Therese of Lisieux was 14, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta by the age of 12 had made up her mind, St Dominic Savio was 12 when he said to Don Bosco: "*If God gives me the call, I very much want to be a priest*."

Among the twelve, the young disciple was the beloved one, and one wonders if that young teenager, with a clean heart and a courageous soul was shown that predilection because he loved Jesus with an undivided heart. There is no age for love.

Could you be called the beloved one? Do you look like St John?

**28th December: Holy Family**

Lk 2:22, 39–40

*When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.*

Here you have a synopsis of three decades of life of Jesus Christ. When we think about the plan of salvation that God established, we find it difficult to understand that, to redeem men, He thought that 33 years could do. 30 years of family and work life, 3 years going around Judea and Galilee preaching and healing, 3 hours hanging on the Cross, and after 3 days: Resurrection. I do not think that many angels could agree, or even understand the plan of Redemption?

But it is crystal clear: If we cannot sanctify our ordinary work and family life, then there is nothing that we can sanctify.

Do your parents and siblings think that you are sanctifying yourself?

**29th December**

Lk 2:22–35

*Simeon took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: “Lord, now let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled: my own eyes have seen the salvation which you prepared in the sight of every people, a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.” The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him.*

Mary and Joseph were amazed. Mary was considering all these things in her heart. Do you read the Gospel every day? Do you know the story of Jesus, his words and actions?

*My advice is that, in your prayer, you actually take part in the different scenes of the Gospel, as one more among the people present. First of all, imagine the scene or mystery you have chosen... Next apply your mind, concentrating on the particular aspect of the Master's life you are considering — his merciful Heart, his humility, his purity, the way he fulfils his Father's Will. Then* ***tell*** *him what happens to you in these matters, how things are with you, what is going on in your soul. Be attentive, because he may want to point something out to you, and you will experience suggestions deep in your soul, realising certain things and feeling his gentle reprimands* (St Josemaría). That is how we want to pray!

**30th December**

Lk 2:36–40

*When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him*.

Jesus fulfils the law because that is what normal and responsible men do. And then, the son of God's came back to his hometown Nazareth. And there he lived with Mary and Joseph, doing apparently nothing special. Redeeming the world without haste in his hidden life.

The whole life of Jesus is redemption: fetching water, throwing stones in the river, sweeping the workshop at night, chatting with inopportune neighbours, running under the rain, sweating under the sun, whistling local melodies, or caressing his faithful donkey.

Do you see Jesus sanctifying exactly what you have to sanctify? Do you do it?

**31st December**

Jn 1:1–18

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

*He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him.*

It always strikes me, like a reproach from Heaven: *He came to his own, but his own people did not accept him*. All of them were waiting for him for centuries and when He came, they did not receive him! They had in their minds they own picture of the Messiah. And Jesus was probably too demanding for them. So they were disappointed with the Messiah that God sent. They had other plans.

Do you also have your own picture of Jesus, as if He had to fit in your plans and not you in His plans? How do you receive Him? What do you do with those who do not receive Him?

**1st January: Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**

Lk 2:16–21

*The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.*

St John Paul II invited us to contemplate the Virgin’s gaze on her Child: *“The contemplation of Christ has a remarkable model in Mary. In a unique way the face of the Son belongs to Mary. It was in her womb that Christ was formed, receiving from her a human resemblance which points to an even greater spiritual closeness. No one has ever devoted himself to the contemplation of the face of Christ as faithfully as Mary”*.

«*The shepherds made haste. Holy curiosity and holy joy impelled them. In our case, it is probably not very often that we make haste for the things of God. God does not feature among the things that require haste. The things of God can wait, we think and we say. And yet he is the most important thing, ultimately the one truly important thing*» Benedict XVI

**2nd January**

Jn 1:19–28

*This is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, “Who are you?” [...] He said: “I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.” Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.”*

How great is the humility of St John the Baptist! He, [*among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than him*, Jesus said] considers himself just a messenger, an instrument. He does not even consider himself worthy of untie his sandals, as servants do to their masters. Saints are humble: Mary, *the handmaid of the Lord*, and Joseph, not a single word of him in the Gospel. St Paul considered himself like the *refuse* of the world...

«*Humility is another good way to arrive at interior peace. He has said so: 'Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart: and you will find rest for your souls.'*» St Josemaría

«*Get rid of those proud thoughts: you are but the brush in the hand of the artist. And nothing more. Tell me: of what use is a brush, if it won't let the painter do his work?*»

**3rd January: Most Holy Name of Jesus**

Jn 1:29–34

*John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one of whom I said, ‘A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.’ I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel.”*

Today we celebrate his name, and like St John, we also want him to be made known. God the Father also wanted to give the name of Jesus through the words of an angel. Sometimes, instead of bending the knees before the name of Jesus to revere Him as Saviour and Redeemer, His name is used in blasphemy or disrespectfully and in an improper manner. That is why we should make amends and pronounce it with respect and love.

Treat Him simply and trustfully—”*Jesus, I need...*”, “*Jesus, I would like*...” Mary and Joseph repeated this name many times with piety and love: “*Don't be afraid to call our Lord by his name—Jesus—and to tell him that you love him*” (St Josemaría). Do you say aspirations during the day? The Name of Jesus is the best!

**4th January: Epiphany of Our Lord**

Mt 2:1–12

*When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.”*

These people left everything: their home, their family, the security of their palaces... to follow a star that was leading them to Jesus. The heat of the desert, the annoying nights in the open, the tiredness of a long journey, and specially, the uncertainty of what could they find... nothing stopped them. They did everything in their hands to find Jesus: “*May you seek Christ. May you find Christ. May you love Christ*”(St Josemaría)*.’*

*They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way*.

Joy. Finding Christ. Generosity. They always come together.

**5th January**

Mt 4:12–17, 23–25

*Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan*.

Crows following Jesus. But there are different kinds of followers. Some are like *twitter* followers: they just check your quotes once a day. You cannot count on them for anything. Jesus had many of those. When Jesus said to them: “*take up your cross and follow me!*” they didn’t do it. Jesus had many *followers*, many *fans*, but not many disciples He could count on.

His disciples had no particular talent but, turned the world upside down without one single *iPhone*. They had an *intimate relationship* with Jesus.

What kind of follower are you?

**6th January**

Mk 6:34–44

*When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. By now it was already late and his disciples approached him and said, “This is a deserted place and it is already very late. Dismiss them so that they can go to the surrounding farms and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” He said to them in reply, “Give them some food yourselves.”*

Jesus was moved with pity for those people, and He asked His disciples to take care for them. *“Give them some food yourselves.” But we have nothing!* —They could have said. *I know: but I do have* —Jesus could have answered.

When Jesus ask for something... He gives it! If He asks you to do something, He does it with you. If He asks you to give something, He gives it to you first. Jesus never asks for anything He will not give before. He will never ask you to do something that He will not do with you.

Has He asked you for anything lately? Do you trust Him that He will not let you do it by yourself?

**7th January**

Mk 6:45–52

*Then he made his disciples get into the boat and precede him to the other side toward Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And when he had taken leave of them, he went off to the mountain to pray.* So Jesus also had to find his peaceful place to pray as well. And He did pray a lot; Sometimes the whole night. If Jesus needed it, how much you and I do need it!

*When it was evening, the boat was far out on the sea and he was alone on shore. Then he saw that they were tossed about while rowing, for the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them walking on the sea.*

Do you realize that Jesus knew the forecast better than the BBC, and nevertheless He sent them? Trust Him: He knows what He is doing and what He is asking for. Do you have that confidence when you feel like sailing in a storm?

«*If you agree to let God take command of your boat, if you let him be the master, how safe you will be!... even when he seems to have gone away, to have fallen asleep, to be unconcerned; even though a storm is rising and it's pitch dark all around you*» (St Josemaría)*.*

**8th January**

Lk 4:14–22

*Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. [...] Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They also asked, “Isn’t this the son of Joseph?*”

Everyone looked intently at Him. That is what you and I do in our prayer, don’t we? “*I look at Him and He looks at me*,” said a farmer who used to pray before the Blessed Sacrament during the time of the holy Cure of Ars (CCC 2715): I have gazed at you so many times, Lord! And you have looked back at me so many times!

*The eyes of all looked intently at him.* In Christmas we have been contemplating him in the Crib, as Mary and Joseph, we have spent time knowing that He is looking back at us: *I know your gaze well. You rest your eyes on me serenely and firmly. Sure. It is probably why you allow the thick fog to remove all doubt. I always search for my answer in your eyes* [Francisca J. Gonzalez].

**9th January**

Lk 5:12–16

*Now there was a man full of leprosy in one of the towns where he was; and when he saw Jesus, he fell prostrate, pleaded with him, and said, “Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean.” Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, “I do will it. Be made clean.” And the leprosy left him immediately. Then he ordered him not to tell anyone, but “Go, show yourself to the priest.”*

Have you ever seen such simple a miracle? «*If you wish... I do will*». We need to learn to come to Him with that simplicity when we show to Him our leprosy. What do you need to ask for? Lord, if You wish you can clean my heart of impurity; if You wish You can fill my heart with love for You and the others; if You wish, You can clean me from pride and vain thoughts; if You wish, You can help me to get rid of this or that defect; if You wish, You can give this or that virtue...

Do you come to Him with that confidence? And then: *Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, “I do will it”.* In the Eucharist He touches you and cleanses you. That is why you should go to the priest: *“Go, show yourself to the priest.”* The priest is one more instrument of God to touch your soul. Do you show your soul to the priest?

**10th January**

Jn 3:22–30

*They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing and everyone is coming to him.” John answered and said, “No one can receive anything except what has been given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said (that) I am not the Messiah, but that I was sent before him. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man, who stands and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made complete. He must increase; I must decrease*.”

They thought that St John would be concern or upset, but they have given him the joy of his life: he came to prepare the mission of Christ, and now Christ is at work already. No more waiting, no more uncertainty: Jesus is at work!

John’s mission has been a great success: he wrought people close to Christ, and now Christ is taking possession of them. You and I, as apostles, have the same mission: bring your friends to him; that is why they are your friends. It is not about you. It is about Jesus: “*He must increase; I must decrease*.” He definitely *must increase* in my life and that of my friends. Do I imitate St John in this?

**11th January: Baptism of Our Lord**

Mk 1:7–11

*In the course of his preaching John the Baptist said, 'Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.' It was at this time that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised in the Jordan by John. No sooner had he come up out of the water than he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit, like a dove, descending on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you*.

Why was Jesus baptized if He had no sin? Well, obviously not to be purified with water, but to purify water for your Baptism and mine. As Jesus emerges from the water after his Baptism, the skies break open and the Holy Spirit descended upon him. He came to *baptise you with the Holy Spirit*, as St John said. Do you remember often that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit? And now, with the Holy Spirit, you and I are different creatures.

*Get to know the Holy Spirit, the great Stranger, on whom depends your sanctification. Don't forget that you are God's temple. The Advocate is in the centre of your soul: listen to him and be docile to his inspirations* (St Josemaría).

Do you pray with the Holy Spirit? Give Him a try!