

*V. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
R. Spare us, O Lord.*
*V. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
R. Graciously hear us, O Lord.*
*V. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
R. Have mercy on us.*
V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray:

O God, whose only-begotten Son, by his life, death and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life; grant, we beseech thee, that meditating on these mysteries of the most holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may both imitate what they contain, and obtain what they promise, through the same Christ our Lord.

Amen.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ipraywiththegospel.org

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V. Lord, have mercy.

V. Christ, have mercy.

V. Lord, have mercy.

V. Christ hear us.

V. God the Father of heaven,

V. God the Son, Redeemer of the world,

V. God the Holy Spirit,

V. Holy Trinity, one God,

Holy Mary

Holy Mother of God,

Holy Virgin of virgins,

Mother of Christ,

Mother of the Church,

Mother of divine grace,

Mother most pure,

Mother most chaste,

Mother inviolate,

Mother undefiled,

Mother most lovable,

Mother most admirable,

Mother of good counsel,

Mother of our Creator,

Mother of our Saviour,

Virgin most prudent,

Virgin most venerable,

Virgin most renowned,

Virgin most powerful,

Virgin most merciful,

Virgin most faithful,

Mirror of justice,

Seat of wisdom,

Cause of our joy,

Spiritual vessel,

Vessel of honour,

Singular vessel of devotion,

R. Lord, have mercy.

R. Christ, have mercy.

R. Lord, have mercy.

R. Christ graciously hear us.

R. have mercy on us.

R. have mercy on us.

R. have mercy on us.

R. have mercy on us.

R. Pray for us

Mystical rose,

Tower of David,

Tower of ivory,

House of gold,

Ark of the covenant,

Gate of heaven,

Morning star,

Health of the sick,

Refuge of sinners,

Comfort of the afflicted,

Help of Christians,

Queen of Angels,

Queen of Patriarchs,

Queen of Prophets,

Queen of Apostles,

Queen of Martyrs,

Queen of Confessors,

Queen of Virgins,

Queen of all Saints,

Queen conceived without

original sin,

Queen assumed into heaven,

Queen of the most holy Rosary,

Queen of the family,

Queen of Peace.

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V. Christ, have mercy.

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The Mysteries of Light

(recited Thursday)

1. The Baptism of Jesus
2. The Wedding Feast at Cana
3. The Proclamation of the Kingdom and the call to Conversion
4. The Transfiguration
5. The Institution of the Eucharist

The Sorrowful Mysteries

(recited Tuesday and Friday)

1. The Agony in the Garden
2. The Scourging at the Pillar
3. The Crowning with Thorns
4. The Carrying of the Cross
5. The Crucifixion and Death of Our Lord

The Glorious Mysteries

(recited Wednesday and Sunday)

1. The Resurrection
2. The Ascension
3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit
4. The Assumption
5. The Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

At the end of the fifth Mystery we say the Hail, Holy Queen:

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy; Hail our life, our sweetness and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears! Turn, then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us, and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

How should I do my mental prayer?

— **Can I pray – as in talk with God?** Most certainly! God created you to be His friend; and friends talk to each other. To do mental prayer you don't need training. There is no standard method.

— **How do I begin?** You can begin with the *Introductory prayer* to tune in. Then... just start talking to Him. As St Josemaría teaches, it is all a matter of getting the conversation started: “*You don't know how to pray? Put yourself in the presence of God, and as soon as you have said, “Lord, I don't know how to pray!” you can be sure you've already begun.*”

— **What should I do then?** You can read the Gospel and the comments of the iPray. They can trigger a topic for your prayer. But remember: the most important part of your prayer is not written in this booklet. The main part is what *you say to Him* and, especially, what *He says to you*.

— **What should I talk about?** About everything! “*About Him, about yourself—joys, sorrows, successes and failures, noble ambitions, daily worries, weaknesses! And acts of thanksgiving and petitions—and Love and reparation*” (St Josemaría).

— **How do I finish?** At the end of your prayer you can ask Our Lady for help; you should also give thanks to Our Lord for that dialogue. You can finish, if you want, with the *Closing prayer*.

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Holy Rosary:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.

Then you can say one "Our Father", three "Hail Marys" and the "Glory be to the Father."

V. Thou, O Lord, wilt open my lips,

R. And my tongue shall announce thy praise.

V. Incline to my aid, O God.

R. O Lord, make haste to help me.

V. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

R. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

After each decade say the following prayer requested by the Blessed Virgin Mary at Fatima:

"O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of your mercy."

The Joyful Mysteries

(recited Monday and Saturday)

1. The Annunciation
2. The Visitation
3. The Birth of Our Lord
4. The Presentation
5. The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple

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Introductory prayer

My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence, I ask you for pardon of my sins, and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Mother Immaculate, Saint Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

Closing prayer

I give you thanks, my God, for the good resolutions, affections and inspirations you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask you for help to put them into effect. My Mother Immaculate, Saint Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

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Prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee of Mercy

Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father, and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him. Show us your face and we will be saved. Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money; the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things; made Peter weep after his betrayal, and assured Paradise to the repentant thief. Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman: "If you knew the gift of God!"

You are the visible face of the invisible Father, of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy: let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified. You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error: let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing, so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord, and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind.

We ask this of you, Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy; you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.

Amen.

Prayer to St. Michael:

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in the day battle: be our defence against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do you, O prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world for the ruin of souls. Amen.

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And he called to him the twelve, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts...And if any place will not receive you and they refuse to hear you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet for a testimony against them." So they went out and preached...

Jesus sent them to all those places instead of going Himself. Certainly He could have gone in Person and could have preached far more effectively than St Peter and the others. It seems better to receive Jesus in your village than to receive Philip or Andrew... But Jesus wanted to send His disciples instead. They didn't need anything else: "no bread, no bag, no money..." Because it wasn't about human means but supernatural ones. Just go! Just obey! But 'who am I', they could wonder, 'to preach in Jesus' Name?' You are an *apostle*, that's what you are! Apostle in Greek means envoy, ambassador or messenger. That's what every baptised person is.

The temptation comes when we compare ourselves with them and realise that we can't do what the Apostles did. We can't preach to multitudes, we can't go through the whole world and persuade crowds of unbelievers. You are right! But we don't have to. Our *apostolate* is personal. It's one-to-one; what Italians call 'a *quattrocchi*' (with four eyes), just you and your friend. We can't help a hundred, but we can help one.

A man was walking on the beach. The tide was out and had left thousands of starfish on the sand. There he came across a man bending down, picking up the starfish and throwing them back into the water. The first man smiled and said, "Why do you bother? Don't you see that there are thousands of them and it won't make any difference?" The other man reached down and picked another starfish, threw it into the sea and replied, "It has made a difference for **this one**. This one will live."

God wants "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). All men; everyone! You can continue your prayer now thinking about those you can return to the sea of the Mercy of God.

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Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ...he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace".

He followed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the promise was fulfilled. A long life was crowned with that encounter. You can imagine the old Simeon, so many years dreaming about it, wondering what the Child and His parents would look like... When he saw the Child coming into the temple in the arms of Mary he asked to hold Him in his arms too. Joseph was a bit wary at the sight of that old weak man. But the man, full of faith and love, insisted. *"Now I can die,"* he said (and at this moment Joseph's wariness started to be a real concern!) *"Now I can die,"* he said, for he had finally seen and held Jesus! All his life getting ready for that moment...

Blessed Imelda Lambertini (1322 - 1333) is the patroness of First Holy Communicants. She had a special devotion to the Eucharist. From the age of five she insistently requested to receive Holy Communion but the custom of the time had fixed twelve as the earliest age for First Holy Communion. She would sometimes exclaim: *"Tell me, can anyone receive Jesus into his heart and not die?"* On May 12, 1333, when she was eleven years old she was attending Mass, as she did each day, watching in tears as others received Communion. But when the Mass finished and everyone was ready to leave, suddenly some of them were startled to see a Sacred Host hovering in the air above Imelda as she knelt before the closed tabernacle, absorbed in prayer. The priest understood that Our Lord wanted to be received by her and gave Imelda her first Holy Communion then and there. Immediately she was enraptured: she sank unconscious to the ground, and when they picked her up, they found that she was dead. *"Now I can die!"*

Mary, Mother of the Eucharist: teach me to attend Mass as if it were my first Mass, my last Mass, my only Mass.

Morning offering:

O Jesus, through the most pure heart of Mary, I offer you all the prayers, works, sufferings and joys of this day, for all the intentions of your Divine Heart. Amen.

Memorare:

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

Blessing before meals:

Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts which we are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Grace after meals:

We give you thanks, Almighty God, for all Your benefits, who live and reign, world without end. Amen.

Act of contrition:

O My God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you, and by the help of your grace, I will not sin again. Amen.

Guardian Angel:

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Common prayers

Visit to the Blessed Sacrament:

VI O Sacrament most holy! O Sacrament divine!

R/ All praise and all thanksgiving, be every moment Thine!

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...

[After repeating this three times, we repeat the aspiration 'O Sacrament most holy...' and then say the following Spiritual Communion]:

I wish, Lord, to receive You, with the purity, humility and devotion with which Your most holy Mother received You; with the spirit and fervour of the saints.

Angelus:

VI The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,

R/ And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary.

VI Behold the handmaid of the Lord,

R/ Be it done unto me according to thy word.

Hail Mary.

VI And the Word was made flesh,

R/ And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary.

VI Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,

R/ That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray. Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts: that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ, Thy Son, was made known by the message of an Angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Common prayers

Visit to the Blessed Sacrament:

VI O Sacrament most holy! O Sacrament divine!

R/ All praise and all thanksgiving, be every moment Thine!

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...

[After repeating this three times, we repeat the aspiration 'O Sacrament most holy...' and then say the following Spiritual Communion]:

I wish, Lord, to receive You, with the purity, humility and devotion with which Your most holy Mother received You; with the spirit and fervour of the saints.

Angelus:

VI The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,

R/ And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary.

VI Behold the handmaid of the Lord,

R/ Be it done unto me according to thy word.

Hail Mary.

VI And the Word was made flesh,

R/ And dwelt among us.

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VI Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,

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The apostles returned to Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves.

The activity was intense; people were following them everywhere. But the Apostles needed to rest and spend time alone with God. And that was prayer time. They must have enjoyed those moments with the Lord, telling Him countless stories: what happened when they entered that town, what a woman told them after hearing His teachings, questions they asked them, comments, misunderstandings... Jesus already knew all that, but He must have enjoyed those stories and the enthusiasm with which the Apostles explained their experiences. Jesus loved those get-togethers. And now He also thirsts for a dialogue with you.

A woman asked a priest to visit her sick father. When the priest entered the room of the sick man, he found a chair beside the bed and thought it was for him. But the sick man wasn't expecting him. "I'm sorry," said the priest, "When I saw the empty chair, I thought you were expecting me." "Oh, the chair," said the sick man. "Would you mind closing the door?" he asked from his bed. "I have never told this to anyone. I didn't know how to pray. But one day a priest told me that prayer was simply a conversation with Jesus. He suggested that I place an empty chair in front of me and imagine that Jesus was sitting in it. Then, I should talk to Him as with a loving friend. So that was what I did. And it has helped me so much that I have been doing it ever since." The priest urged the man to continue doing the same thing. Two days later, the daughter called the priest to tell him that her father had passed away. She explained how as she was about to leave the house, he called her and told her how much he loved her. An hour later, when she returned home, he had already passed away. "But there is something strange," the woman explained. "It seems that before he died, he got the chair that was beside his bed and placed his head upon the armrest. That was how I found him. What do you think this could mean?" Mary, Master of Prayer, teach me to converse with God as friends do.

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That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered together about the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him pursued him, and they found him and said to him, "Every one is searching for you."

Everyone is searching for Jesus; everyone has some 'illness' to be healed, some advice to seek, some problems to tell Him. Everyone feels, deep in their hearts, the need to find the One who can put their spirit at rest. And that One can only be Him: "*For You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You.*" (St. Augustine). Our soul is thirsty for God and God is thirsty for our prayer.

Everyone was searching for Jesus and... where was He? In prayer. We are also searching for Him so... where could we find Him? In prayer. Prayer is not just a duty, not only a privilege: prayer is a need. As a famous psychiatrist put it: *"Everyone needs to talk. Everybody needs someone to talk to. And if they can't find anyone, you will find them talking to their dog or their goldfish."* Well, we Christians have God ready to talk. 24/7.

When we begin to pray, it can be quite easy. But after a while prayer becomes more demanding and... it's so easy to give up! We see no progress and think: '*it may work for saints, but not for me.*' However, how can you measure your progress? Prayer is like a plane. When the plane is taking off, you feel the acceleration and see the tarmac rolling past under the wings. But when you are high in the sky you don't see the land moving fast under the plane or feel any acceleration. Nonetheless, it is then that the plane is flying faster than when it was taking off.

We don't need to feel any progress in prayer. We just need to search for God in our prayer, find Him, talk to Him, stay with Him and give Him what He needs: the unconditional love of a friend who will not give up. Mary, Master of Prayer, teach me to pray!

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Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him, with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."...whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus teaches His disciples that the only ambition they should have is the ambition to serve. In fact, He taught this not just with words, but with deeds: they could never forget the God-made-man washing their feet. We too should always keep that picture in mind when we don't feel like serving the people around us. Lent is a *time of service* which is charity, and the disciples of Jesus follow His footsteps and example.

We need to make a resolution to serve always and to serve everyone. And the first way to serve souls is by fulfilling our duties. Work is service. And to work diligently and with generosity is the best way to serve others. The journalist André Frossard said that the only 'known' means to prevent St John Paul II from working was '*general anaesthesia*'. Nothing else could stop the Pope fulfilling his duties. And when someone recommended that he take care of himself and rest a while, he answered: "*My health is not important. My holiness is. After one Pope there comes another Pope. Let me fulfil my duty.*"

"How I like that word: service! To serve my king and, through him, all those who have been redeemed by his blood. I really wish we Christians knew how to serve, for only by serving can we know and love Christ and make him known and loved." (St Josemaría)

Mother of Christ, Handmaid of the Lord, teach me to serve as you served your cousin St Elizabeth, with haste, as you did at the wedding at Cana and as you serve your children now.

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When they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized him, and ran about the whole neighbourhood and began to bring sick people on their pallets to any place where they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or country, they laid the sick in the market places, and besought him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment; and as many as touched it were made well.

Wherever Jesus went, there was a procession of suffering people: lepers, blind and deaf people, paralytics, victims of evil spirits... Their only hope was to be able to touch the fringe of His garment, for they knew that Jesus is the only answer to suffering and the only effective relief. Just as they brought sick people to Him, so we have to do likewise: bring Him souls who suffer so they can touch Him, especially in the Eucharist.

In 1920 in Zaragoza St Josemaría saw a famous bullfighter in the street. Some children approached the celebrity and one of them exclaimed happily: "*I touched him! I touched him!*" The saint was moved and would often recall this memory to encourage us to stop and reflect on the real and extraordinary event of intimately approaching Jesus every day in the Eucharist.

On the 8th of this month we will celebrate the life of St Josephine Bakhita (1869 - 1947). Born in Sudan, when she was still a girl she was kidnapped and sold as a slave. She experienced the physical and moral sufferings of slavery. But one day she was 'bought' by an Italian consul and for the first time they didn't use the lash with her. From that family she was 'transferred' to a good Christian family where she was loved for the first time in her life. The 'touch' of Love healed her wounded heart. She was baptised and touched the Eucharist for the first time. She understood that it was Jesus who had released her, not from the slavery of men, but the slavery of sin. Then she fell in love with Him and became a Canisian Sister, spending 50 years in His service until she died. St Josephine reminds us how God is always close to those who suffer.

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The Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?" And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'"

Poor Pharisees, they had lost the plot! You see? It's not that they didn't do anything; they usually did everything that God had asked them to do. Well... not everything. They omitted the first commandment: Love. They fulfilled their duties as good servants. But they forgot that God doesn't need servants. He wants children.

A priest explained his conversion like this: "I wasn't a bad priest. I just wasn't a good one. I did all that I was supposed to do. I 'said' Mass every day; I 'said' the Breviary, the Rosary and my prayers every day. I did my prayer, half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening. I 'read' the Gospel and a spiritual book for 15 minutes every day. I did all that and thought that was fine. I wasn't unhappy but I wasn't happy either."

"On the second day of my retreat I was reading the parable of the Prodigal Son. Suddenly the words of the older brother hit my soul: 'he answered his father, "Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command". Here I had a son who was more like a butler. And I felt like that too: I was giving to God what 'I had to', but reluctantly. I was like the Pharisees. Then I looked at the Crucifix. I felt tears coming to my eyes. There, bleeding, was Him suffering for me to become a child... not a servant. I felt I was cheating Our Lord. From the Cross He seemed to be saying: 'This is not it! I didn't shed my Blood just to make you a butler! I died to make you a child! I don't want your 'things'. I want your love. I want your heart. I want you!'"

"That day I asked Mary to help me to stop being a 'butler of God' and to become a child... to stop saying Mass and to start celebrating it; to stop doing my prayer and to PRAY instead. Since then, I don't feel like a servant who fears: I'm now a child who LOVES!" Mary, my Mother, I ask the same for myself.

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Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice... They do all their deeds to be seen by men... He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Humility is indispensable to follow Christ. The best example of humility is Jesus Himself: being God, He became Man for us; and later, He became a Host of Bread. Who could ever humble himself so much? The second best example of humility is His Mother: being the most perfect creature, she recognised that all the good in her was a gift from God. The third example of humility is St Joseph: being a man gifted beyond comparison, he never let himself become the centre of attention. Saints are humble souls who know how to remain in the background and let people see God instead.

The problem with the scribes and Pharisees was that they loved to be seen, recognised and praised for their deeds and talents. They wanted to be the centre of attention. A Spanish saying describes this kind of person well: 'They want to be the bride in all the weddings, the baby in all the baptisms and the dead in all the funerals.'

Holiness is just the opposite: you see? *Holiness and humility are proportionate*. In the words of St Josemaría, the passion of the saints is "to hide and disappear. That only Jesus could be seen." In the lifetime of the Holy Curé of Ars, St John Mary Vianney, people came from distant places to listen to his homilies. He did everything in his parish (Ars had about 350 inhabitants) that he very seldom left. He could be found in the confessional most of the time (16 hours a day!) Elsewhere in France at the same time was another famous preacher who also attracted many people with his brilliant sermons. One day someone asked this preacher which of them was the *better preacher*. "Most certainly he is!," answered the man: "For when people listen to my homilies they say: 'How good is this preacher!', but when they listen to Vianney they say: 'How good is God!'"

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Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Have you heard the story of the teacher in the college for 'Older Students'? The man loved asking questions about the things he had explained before in order to keep his students attentive in his lessons. "Let's see, you...the fellow in the corner," the teacher said. "When was Rome destroyed by fire?" "To be honest..." the unfortunate 'student' replied, taken by surprise, "I...don't remember." "Very well, then," the teacher insisted, "do you remember when Vesuvius wiped Pompeii off the map?" The man, visibly embarrassed, answered, "No idea, really." "This is quite disappointing," the annoyed teacher complained, "What about the destruction of Jerusalem?" "My mind is a blank right now," the poor man said. "May I know," the teacher asked in anger, "why did you come to my class?" The man produced a bulb from his pocket and replied shyly, "To change this bulb...I'm the caretaker."

"Judge not, and you will not be judged", since we never know everything about others, we are not in situation to judge anyone. You know the saying, 'Before you judge a man, walk a mile in his shoes.' The truth is that walking a mile in someone else's shoes can give you an idea of what they feel. But still, after a mile, you don't know anyone well enough to judge them. You should walk more than a mile, in his shoes, through the paths he walks, in the same weather, same time, same company, to step on the same footprints; still that wouldn't be enough, you should walk, not just in his shoes, but in his feet. Of course, that is impossible. That is why to judge anyone is always utterly inaccurate except if you are him or if you are God. God has given us a conscience to judge ourselves. No one can know better than myself when I haven't been generous with God (except God). Mary, my Mother, if you teach me to love everyone, I will always understand and help them to be holy, instead of wasting time and humility trying to judge them.

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Jesus said, "What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man."

"For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, theft, murder, covetousness..." But also from within, out of the heart come the acts of love, of thankfulness and adoration. The world doesn't help much to be pure of heart. For that reason, St Josemaria wrote: "There is need of a crusade of manliness and purity to counteract and undo the savage work of those who think that man is a beast. And that crusade is a matter for you."

"I was born into a Christian family," wrote a young girl. "My parents went to daily Mass and in school they taught me what was right and wrong in relation to the 6th and 9th commandments. As a child, I always wanted to be pure, but as an adolescent, my world changed. I fell in love with a boy. My friends encouraged me not to miss the opportunity: if I really loved him, they said, I should invite him to go a bit further and lose my purity with him. I allowed myself to be convinced that 'everyone did it', that it was 'normal'. So, one day when we were alone I suggested that we go a bit further... I thought he was going to accept. But to my dismay, he sprang up from the sofa, looked at me with the saddest face I had ever seen in my life and left without a word. I cried, I called him, texted him... But all to no avail. One day I went to see him. He opened the door – but he was still sad. Taking my hands in his, almost with tears in his eyes, he said, '**You are worth much more than that.**' That day the penny dropped. I learned a lesson I never forgot. Still today I remember those sad eyes, like Christ's staring at me and reminding me: **I'm worth more... much more than that!**'"

The world needs Christians like that boy. My Immaculate Mother, I ask you for Christians committed to this crusade of purity, able to remind everyone with their deeds and their words, boldly, that those who sell themselves to impurity are worth much more than that: they are worth all the Blood of your Son.

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A woman, whose little daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter... "you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." And she went home, and found the child lying in bed, and the demon gone.

St Josemaría once said that the problem we face today is that *"few people pray, and those who pray... pray little."* The world needs more and more Christians who 'believe' in the power of prayer. We could say that people don't know how to pray. The woman of the Gospel teaches us that prayer, to be effective, *"ought to be humble, fervent, resigned, persevering, and accompanied with great reverence. One should consider that he stands in the presence of a God, and speaks with a Lord before whom the angels tremble from awe and fear."* (St Mary Magdalen de Pazzi)

Children can teach us. A parish priest decided to have a 24-hour vigil every Friday. To this purpose he left out a timetable for Adoration so that parishioners could sign up to take turns. When the timetable was complete, he discovered that a First Holy Communion boy had chosen the slot between 3 and 4 am! He called the parents and found out that they had agreed to it. The boy told the priest that he wanted Jesus to 'heal his family'. His dad was an alcoholic, unemployed and violent at times. On the first Friday, his mum woke him up and brought him to the church and stayed with him. On the second Friday it was his dad's turn. He took the child to the church but waited for him outside. However, after a few weeks the dad started waiting 'inside'. Little by little the father started praying with the child during those vigils. In less than three months Jesus healed the family: dad stopped drinking, found a job and became a new man. When the priest saw what had happened he went to congratulate the boy for his perseverance. *"Congratulations,"* said the priest, *"Jesus has done it!"* The boy was surprised at the priest's words. *"Of course. Why?"* he replied. *"Did you ever doubt it?"* The priest never forgot the lesson in faith given by an 8-year-old. How is my faith when I pray? Mary, Mother Most Faithful, teach me to pray.

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, *"Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."*

Our Lord showed Peter, James and John His glory so that they would remember it when they saw His agony. That day they saw His divinity and, on Good Friday, they saw His suffering Humanity. Jesus was the same, the Man-God, but it wasn't easy to recognise Him all the time. This is what happens today in the Eucharist. His Glory is not seen, but He is there.

St Manuel Gonzalez was ordained on September 21st 1901. His first assignment was to preach in a little village of Seville. He went there, riding on a donkey and full of enthusiasm. But, when he arrived at the church, he was shocked to see how much the Blessed Sacrament had been neglected. That shock changed his life. *"I went straight to the Tabernacle."* He explained later: *"There, on my knees, before that pile of shreds and dirt, my faith saw a Jesus so quiet, so patient, looking at me... It seemed to me that, after looking around with His gaze at that wilderness of souls, He stared at me, sad and pleading... a look that reflected everything sad in the Gospel: the sadness of having no place to be born in Bethlehem, to rest His head, the crumbs for which poor Lazarus was begging, the sadness of His betrayal, denial, of abandonment by everyone... [There] I saw a new occupation that was being prepared for my priesthood: to become the priest of a town that did not want Jesus Christ, so that I may love Him in the name of all the people; to use my priesthood to take care of Jesus Christ in the needs that His life in the tabernacle demanded, feeding it with my love, warming it with my presence, entertaining Him with my conversation, protecting Him from abandonment and ingratitude..."* Jesus, my Lord, really present in the Eucharist with Your Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity and with Your Mother (my Mother) and all the Angels and saints, I shout to You: *"Master, it is well that we are here..." with You!"*

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"I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?...You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"

To hold a grudge is like building a prison and locking oneself inside. We have to ask Jesus for the gift of being able to love everyone, no matter what they do or think or say. That is to be like our *heavenly Father*: Perfect in Love. St John of the Cross has given us a great piece of advice: "*Where there is no love, put love - and you will draw out love.*"

"If you love those who love you, what reward have you?" That is very easy! But to love those who despise you, who scorn you, who insult you... That is very '*virtuous*'! In 1993 Cardinal Joseph Bernardin was falsely accused by a young fellow of improper conduct. The story was spun by the media and a big campaign flared up against him. He confessed later that his internal suffering during that time would hardly be endurable were it not for his faith and knowledge of his innocence. After three months of ordeal and media persecution, his accuser admitted that the accusation was false. Soon after, Stephen (the accuser) was dying from AIDS in a hospital bed. Cardinal Bernardin went to visit him. The poor man apologised for the wrongs he had committed against the Cardinal. Bernardin forgave him immediately and with affection, becoming concerned only with Stephen's spiritual health and making sure that he could prepare himself properly for his death.

This has been the example of the saints. As soon as he managed, St John Paul II went to visit Ali Agca, the man who shot him. There, in his prison, Ali Agca was forgiven and ended up kissing the hand of the Pope he had tried to kill just a few weeks before.

Mary, Mother of Mercy, help me to forgive *everyone... everything... always...* and to bring to your Son in my prayer those who offend me in any way.

They brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him. And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Incommunicado, he could not hear or speak properly. He was unable to explain his problems. But when he put himself in Jesus' hands (*Ephphatha!*) "*his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.*" Many people have a '*speech impediment*'; they find it difficult to talk about their miseries. To recognise our sins and to talk about our mistakes can be embarrassing, but like a doctor, until we explain our problem and show our wound, Jesus can't help and heal us. That's the essence of confession.

"I was a good child." writes a young boy. "*I prayed, received the sacraments and went to confession every other week. At the age of 14 I understood that God wanted something from me and started praying more intensely. But one day I made a mistake. I committed a sin against Holy Purity. I felt so embarrassed that I didn't dare go to confession. After a while I stopped praying. I was grumpy, defiant and exploding for silly reasons. I was stuck. It wasn't my mind that was blocked, it was my soul. My mum suspected that something had happened; my sisters, my friends, my teachers too... But more than anyone else, I knew that something HAD happened. My silence was consuming me within. One day I couldn't take it anymore. I went to the priest and told him. I expected an angry reprimand. Instead, very kindly, he explained to me how silly it would be to keep a splinter in my finger hurting for weeks because I was afraid of the pain when it would be pulled out. In two minutes the priest solved all my problems. I went out in peace. I was again the same boy my mum, my sisters, my friends and teachers knew... but with more experience. How silly to keep silent, to feel embarrassed to go to confession; what folly to carry my sins as splinters in my skin when the solution is so simple and easy to get.*" Mary, Mother of Good Counsel, may I never be embarrassed of being sincere, confessing my sins and starting again.

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In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him, and said to them, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come a long way." And his disciples answered him, "How can one feed these men with bread here in the desert?...And they ate, and were satisfied; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. And there were about four thousand people."

That's the introduction to the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fish according to St Mark. *"How can one feed these men with bread here in the desert?"* his disciples asked Jesus. *"How can it be possible?"* people ask today when facing a difficult situation. How can it be? It's possible because Jesus is God. And God is Almighty. Faith. Faith. It is all a matter of faith.

Four thousand people ate and at the end the disciples collected seven baskets full of scraps. *"How can one feed these men...?"* He could feed those and many more. Jesus' miracles have no number limit. That's the meaning of Almighty: God has no limits. If there were seven thousand or a hundred thousand, it would be the same. It makes no difference for an Almighty God to multiply a piece of bread by two or by two million. Both are miracles anyway.

When we pray, when we offer the Mass for the conversion of a sinner or for a particular deceased, it is the same for God if we pray for one as for all the sinners of the world. Some think that if you offer the Mass for two souls, each one gets 'half of a Mass'. That's nonsense. If you offer a Mass for a million souls, they all get 'a Mass'. For God it's the same to perform one or a million miracles. Let's not put limits when we ask, since God has no limits. They say of St Bernard that, when he was about to die, someone asked him if he regretted anything about his life. *"After all that God has given me,"* said the saint, *"I regret not having had more desires!"* He knew that, if he had asked for more, he would have received even more. Mary, Virgin Most Faithful, may I never put limits when I pray, may I never be mean in prayers or in demands.

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"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

Few things wound the heart of a father more than seeing that his children don't love one another. And few sins wound the Divine Heart of our Father God more than bitterness among His children. During Lent we try to grow in charity, which is always the most important virtue. So much so, that Jesus warns us, *"if ever you come to offer anything to Me,"* make sure that you are at peace with my other children first. If you aren't, then *"leave your gift there before the altar and go"*, for I will not accept your offering until you are *"reconciled to your brother."*

Some people think that only Cain, with his blood-stained hands, would be forbidden to offer up other sacrifices. But there are so many ways to harm others! Indifference, scorn, insensitivity, laughing at others' mistakes, indiscretion, rudeness, ingratitude, sarcasm, irony, gossip, bearing grudges, impatience, and so many other names for selfishness...

During Lent there are lots of suitable sacrifices to offer up, but remember: over and above any sacrifice... Charity! It would be useless to give up chocolate and be angry all the time, talking back to everyone. 'Keep eating chocolate, please', your friends will advise you, 'and leave us alone!' What's the point of fasting in Lent if you become insufferable at home? 'Stop fasting, please', your family will tell you, 'we can't cope with your fasting!' So first of all, choose sacrifices that those around you would like.

Ask Our Lord for help to always be charitable towards everyone, so that, at any time of our life, we're ready to stand before His altar.

Holy Mary, Mother of Mercy, help me grow in the virtue of charity!

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Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Today we celebrate the feast of the Chair of St Peter which is not merely about a piece of furniture. The seat of the bishop is the Chair or 'cathedra' (origin of the word cathedral, a church that has the cathedra of the bishop). It signifies the authority of Peter. In the apse of the Basilica of St Peter you can see the chair, a bronze sculpture of Bernini (17th century). On top of it you see the Dove symbolizing the Holy Spirit who inspires the Pope.

Why did Jesus choose Peter? Only He knows. God didn't choose a wise man who knew the Scriptures and who could write, for Peter probably couldn't. He didn't choose a man of easy speech who could be persuasive when preaching the Gospel. He didn't choose a man with influence, a rich man, a politician...

Jesus needed a strong man, a rock on which to build His Church. A rock that serves as a foundation doesn't need to be beautiful; just strong. Peter wasn't perfect when Jesus chose him, but his faith and love would become strong enough to make the Church stand firm. Over the centuries many strong empires have fought against this Rock. They disappeared but the Church stands erect. Whoever fights against this Rock "shall not prevail."

Stronger than Superman, Spiderman or Batman... is our Fisherman!

Holy Mary, our Hope, Queen of the Apostles and Mother of the Church, pray for the Pope and for us!

And a leper came to him beseeching him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

Jesus was moved with pity wherever He met someone in need, and touching the sick with His hand He healed them. Today Jesus touches us in the Eucharist. However, many people have never touched God in Holy Communion. Think of those who are not Catholic or even those Catholics who have never been told they could have such a privilege and, therefore, had never approached the sacrament. How could God reach them? In the same way He did it from the beginning: through His disciples. Jesus sent them, you remember, to "cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons..." (Mt 10:8)

During World War II when the Nazis were bombing London, there was a church that had a statue of Jesus on their lawn with his arms outstretched. As the bombs fell, the church was destroyed and the statue was blown up. When reconstruction of the church began, the arms and hands were found to be so pulverized that they could not be salvaged. Today, the statue of Jesus Christ stands with no arms, accompanied by a text that reads, "Christ has no hands but yours. And Christ has no arms but yours." You and I have to reach out to people on Jesus' behalf.

As St Teresa explained: "Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world, Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now but yours..."

Jesus is still moved with pity, He still stretches out His hand and touches the poor, comforts the sick, accompanies the suffering, helps those in need... but that hand is yours and mine. Jesus still looks with compassion, but He does it through your eyes and mine. Mary, my Mother, help me to be another Christ for those who need it - Christ Himself!

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Today we celebrate the feast of the Chair of St Peter which is not merely about a piece of furniture. The seat of the bishop is the Chair or 'cathedra' (origin of the word cathedral, a church that has the cathedra of the bishop). It signifies the authority of Peter. In the apse of the Basilica of St Peter you can see the chair, a bronze sculpture of Bernini (17th century). On top of it you see the Dove symbolizing the Holy Spirit who inspires the Pope.

Why did Jesus choose Peter? Only He knows. God didn't choose a wise man who knew the Scriptures and who could write, for Peter probably couldn't. He didn't choose a man of easy speech who could be persuasive when preaching the Gospel. He didn't choose a man with influence, a rich man, a politician...

Jesus needed a strong man, a rock on which to build His Church. A rock that serves as a foundation doesn't need to be beautiful; just strong. Peter wasn't perfect when Jesus chose him, but his faith and love would become strong enough to make the Church stand firm. Over the centuries many strong empires have fought against this Rock. They disappeared but the Church stands erect. Whoever fights against this Rock "shall not prevail."

Stronger than Superman, Spiderman or Batman... is our Fisherman!

Holy Mary, our Hope, Queen of the Apostles and Mother of the Church, pray for the Pope and for us!

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The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation." And he left them, and getting into the boat again he departed to the other side.

The Gospel today comes after the multiplication of the loaves and fish for four thousand people. That miracle wasn't impressive enough for these Pharisees who came asking for another sign. There is no worse blind man than the one who doesn't want to see. There is no worse deaf man than the one who doesn't want to hear. For someone who doesn't want to believe no miracle is enough.

Those who don't believe in God do not look for proofs of His existence. They reject every argument before it is exposed. They are like the lad who was taking driving lessons. His teacher was worried because every time a lorry was coming in the opposite direction the lad panicked and the teacher had to hold the steering wheel. But one day the teacher saw that the youngster had improved. "*You seem more confident now*", he said. But then it was the teacher who panicked when he heard the reply: "*Yes. That's because now, every time I see a lorry coming, I just close my eyes.*" That's what the Pharisees were doing with the Messiah.

But God still has a plan to meet those who don't want to believe. Giovanni Papini (1881-1956) was an Italian writer and famous atheist. No reason or argument was convincing enough for him. Until one day when he went for a walk with a friend – an atheist like him. They found a beggar, blue with cold, stretching out his hand for a coin. Papini produced a coin from his pocket and said with a big grin: "*This coin is yours if you utter two or three good blasphemies.*" The beggar, astonished, hid his hand and walked away, saying "*Poor man! God have mercy on you.*" To be called 'Poor man' by a beggar made Papini think and it changed his life. Keeping his eyes closed didn't take the truth away, like the lorries in the road. That day he 'crashed into' God and became a devout Catholic soon afterwards. Mary, Virgin Most Faithful, I pray through your intercession today for those who don't want to believe.

When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be to this generation...The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

God needed someone to preach in Nineveh, and decided that Jonah was 'the man for the job'. But you know the story, don't you? The instructions were simple: *Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and preach against it.* As a matter of fact, Nineveh was an idolatrous, proud, and ruthless nation which had long been a threat to Israel. So Jonah, being an Israelite, decided to put as much distance as he could between himself and them. Whatever happened to Nineveh, Jonah would not be there to see it. So he **fled in the opposite direction** to Nineveh. He got on a boat to go to Tarshish. *God has His plans*, Jonah may have thought: *but I have mine!*

God loves us; He created us and knows what we can do. We can be certain that He will never ask you for 'more' than you can give... But He will never ask you for 'less'. Because it is not just about you. It's about the many souls who depend on you. Nineveh could have been condemned if God had not gone after Jonah to 'convince' him (in a very persuasive way) that the people of Nineveh needed him. When Jonah eventually complied and did what God had asked for, the result was impressive: the people of Nineveh converted and turned to God.

What would have become of those thousands of people if Jonah had not gone back? What will become of your relatives and friends who may be far from God if you do not do anything to help them?

There are many souls who depend on my generosity in following my vocation; souls who will not hear about God's Love for them if I don't tell them; souls whose salvation depend greatly on me. Mary, Refuge of sinners, I beg your assistance to help those souls and, if ever I run away from those who need me, please come and *fetch me!*

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"And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, As we also have forgiven our debtors; And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Today's Gospel reminds us that prayer is one of the legs of Lent, along with sacrifice and charity. During Lent we are offering sacrifices for the conversion of sinners. We are charitable towards others as we considered yesterday, because everything that we do for them we do for Our Lord. Now we do the same when we pray. Jesus told us to say: *Our Father*, and not simply *Father*; and in the four last petitions we say: "give us" ... "forgive us" ... "lead us not" ... "deliver us". For God loves it when we are united in prayer, when we pray together and we pray for each other as a family.

During Lent you can go slowly over the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father. In her autobiography, St. Thérèse of Lisieux says "*Sometimes when I am in such a state of spiritual dryness that not a single good thought occurs to me, I say very slowly the 'Our Father,' or the 'Hail Mary,' and these prayers suffice to take me out of myself, and wonderfully refresh me.*" Let's ask ourselves: How many times do I pray these prayers every day, and how many times do I not pay attention to what I am saying? Pray the Lord's Prayer today with St. Thérèse, slowly, to get the most out of it, rather than rattling it off on auto-pilot, as we all do sometimes!

"Slowly", St Josemaría wrote, "*Consider what you are saying, who is saying it and to whom. For that hurried talk, without time for reflection, is just noise, the clatter of tin cans. And with Saint Teresa, I will tell you that, however much you work your lips, I do not call it prayer.*" Mary, my Mother, help me to be focused in my prayers so that I can follow St Josemaría's advice.

Jesus said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

It looks like Jesus was losing His patience with His disciples. After all the time they had spent with Jesus, they were unable to understand Him. They were not in tune. They had their own things in their minds and couldn't understand what Jesus was saying. Jesus often had to explain His parables to them. Many people have this same problem. From the same Bible, people can extract the most diverse and random conclusions. That is why God has given us the Holy Spirit and the Magisterium of the Church – to help us understand the Sacred Scriptures according to the mind of the Author Himself.

Imagine that, in an art gallery, you come across one of those modern paintings composed of a few warm colours mixed randomly and sold for £10,000. Perplexed, you ask some art enthusiasts what it represents and they give you different opinions: that it represents internal suffering, a tornado, The Holocaust, violence, a tablecloth... someone says that probably a cat or the artist's baby knocked over some paint pots on the canvas... How can you tell who is right? Easy: you ask the artist!

In the same way, throughout history millions have read Sacred Scripture and concluded different things – even opposing things. That's why Our Lord sent the Holy Spirit. The Paraclete would explain everything to us (Jn 14:26) not just to everyone individually, but to the whole Christian Family through the Magisterium of the Church. Any individual interpretation of the Bible has to be compared and contrasted with two thousand years of meditation on Scripture by saints, condensed in that Magisterium. Mary, Mother of the Church, thank God with us for those *guidelines* that the Church offers us to understand the 'exact meaning of your Son's Words.'

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Today we start Lent, a time of preparation for Easter. The word "Lent" comes from an old English word which means "springtime". It reminds us of 'spring cleaning' and the new life evident in nature at this time of year. Lent is a time of special grace for us when we can do some spring cleaning in our lives and enjoy new life as a result. Sometimes people ask, 'What are you doing for Lent?' And they expect an answer like: 'I'm giving up chocolate!' Jokingly, someone would say that he is giving up 'homework' or a particular chore... But there is only one thing that we should all strive to give up during Lent – sin!

To encourage people to try to do their best, you often hear motivational slogans like 'You can do anything if you really believe', or 'you are powerful' or 'you have no limits'... Instead, if you attend Mass today you will receive the ashes on your forehead. Then you will be reminded that you are 'dust and unto dust you shall return'. That's the way the Church explains to us the purpose of Lent: an exercise in holy desire. Lent is like a stool which has three legs: prayer, sacrifice and charity. Lent cannot stand if a leg is missing. So our Lenten resolutions should be in these three areas. Maybe we do not need to pray more but to pray better, to offer our usual mortifications but with a firmer intention; to be more generous when we give, and always give with a smile... Think carefully: What can I do during Lent that will make a big difference to my prayer life?

Mary, my Mother, help me to be generous this Lent, to make a real change in my life of prayer, in my sacrifice and in charity with those around me.

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Mary, my Mother, help me to be generous this Lent, to make a real change in my life of prayer, in my sacrifice and in charity with those around me.

"Before the Son of man will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me...Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'"

Lent is a time for charity. And charity is something we should pray about. When you talk to Jesus about your family members, your friends... you discover things that you can do for them. If we don't pray for them, we spend our lives missing opportunities to practise charity with people that need us. I can imagine You, Lord, smiling when You told your followers about the Last Day, thinking of the millions of billions of acts of charity that people would do for Your sake until the end of time.

One day St Teresa of Calcutta was interviewed for a TV programme. Before the interview, as an introduction, they recorded her performing various tasks; among others, caring for some lepers. The wounds left by leprosy can be very repulsive in the final stages. But St Teresa was washing each leper with the same affection that a mother uses with her baby. The reporter, unable to restrain her repugnance, said aloud: "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars!" St Teresa looked at her peacefully and answered: "Neither would I!"

Because she didn't do that for any other reason than for Christ. She knew that every time she did something for a sick person, she was doing it to Christ because she was doing it for Christ.

Jesus: I imagine Your look and the expression on Your face when I meet You at the end of my life and You see all that I did for others. Then You will smile at me and Your lovely Voice will say, in front of all the Angels and my Mother: "**Come, O blessed of my Father...**"

Holy Mary, our Hope, Help of Christians, pray for us that we may grow in charity during this Lent.

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The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness. That doesn't mean that Jesus was 'forced'. The Holy Spirit 'drives' us in the right direction, always counting on our freedom. The Holy Spirit is like a Satellite Navigation System giving directions to reach our destination. It doesn't 'drive' the car for you. That's the way the 'promptings' of the Holy Spirit work. Instead of clashing with our will, they strengthen it - reinforcing our freedom.

Did Jesus choose to be tempted by Satan in the desert? In a way, we could say that the Holy Spirit suggested the idea and Jesus liked it and implemented it. His freedom was necessary. And the same applies to us: our freedom is a very expensive gift (it cost Jesus all His Blood) and we have no right to neglect its use. Without freedom nothing that we do has any value. Indeed, even *love* is impossible if it is not *free*. We can only love God because we want to.

A mother was having problems during the pregnancy of her eighth child. Every day the whole family would pray and offer sacrifices for mum and the baby. The eldest boy was in charge of bathing his younger siblings and put them in bed. Each night mum was surprised to hear the laughter and shouting in the bathroom. One day, on kissing her three-year-old son before he went to bed, she noticed he was freezing and asked what was going on. He explained that, each night, like soldiers in formation, they all stood up in the bathtub; then the eldest brother shouted: "*Shower WITH or WITHOUT sacrifice?*" They all replied in unison: "*With sacrifice!*" And then he proceeded to drench them all with cold water. Mum ended the ritual that very day. This is certainly not the way the Holy Spirit 'drives' us to offer up sacrifices. He has more respect for our freedom. Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, help me to be generous to respond to the promptings of the Paraclete.

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

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"The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised...If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"

There is just one way to follow Jesus: *with the Cross*. Trying to follow You, Lord, while avoiding sacrifice would be like a bird trying to fly without wings. It's not that Christians *like* pain or suffering in itself; but that they recognise it as a means to improve.

Bosco Gutierrez was an architect who was kidnapped for 257 days. He underwent all kinds of suffering locked in a tiny room without windows and with no verbal contact with anyone for months. One day his captors saw that he had given up on himself and offered him a whiskey. He loved whiskey! Slowly, in order to enjoy it to the full, he smelt it and ran the glass along his unshaven dirty face. Then he heard an internal prompt: "*Give up the whiskey! Give me something that is under your control.*" He hesitated for a moment. That was his only pleasure for months. He told to himself: "*I have offered enough already...*" But then understood the difference. All the hardships and sufferings he had offered before had been 'inflicted' on him. This was the first time 'he' could choose to offer up something. And so, he poured it on the floor. That day everything changed for him: "*That day I won my first battle.*"

We have many battles to win this Lent. Let's be practical and choose *useful* mortifications: let's wake up straightaway, eat more of what we do not like, and less of what we like; do the dishes, smile at someone we may find annoying, avoid complaining (about anything, to anyone); tidy our room, do the jobs we don't like before the ones we find easier, rather than putting them off; accept what we have been told without answering back, and many others... Mary, Mother of God and my Mother, help me to take up my cross to the bitter end, no matter how bitter it is. I will try to make a list of sacrifices that I intend to fulfil so as to be close to your Son throughout Lent.

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Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."

There is a time for celebration – such as a wedding – and a time for mortification – such as Lent. Today is the third day of Lent; let's check how my mortification is going so far. Do I have a list of sacrifices? Am I following it? Can I improve or be more consistent in my sacrifice? *Let's be really generous!*

In terms of generosity in sacrifice, let's look at Jesus on the Cross. He didn't accept the Cross half-heartedly and nor should we. Besides, mortification doesn't harm your health; if anything it makes you stronger. Carthusian monks offer many sacrifices each day; among them, not eating meat on any day of the year. When Pope Urban V (1310-1370) was told about this harsh diet, he decided it must stop because it would give the monks *health* problems. Ten Carthusians were sent to visit the Pope and explain their sacrifices; the youngest of them was already over 90 years old. Another approached the Pope, walking without any support, and said: *"I'm over 100 years old... What do you mean by health?"* The Pope then understood, and the monks were allowed to continue with their diet which has remained unchanged for 1000 years!

There is no holiness without mortification. Jesus was very clear: *"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* It is necessary for personal holiness and for the salvation of others. As Jesus said to St Faustina: *"You will save more souls through prayer and suffering than will a missionary through his teachings and sermons alone."* St. Philip Neri summarised it well when he taught *"without mortification nothing can be done."*

My Mother, I learn to be generous in sacrifice when I contemplate you at the foot of the Cross, accompanying your Son during His ordeal. With my daily sacrifices, may I come close to Jesus on Mount Calvary, so that, with you, Mother, I can help Jesus to save the world.

Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a large company of tax collectors and others sitting at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Jesus came to seek those who need conversion and He wants your help and mine to reach out to them. With our apostolate, we can help others to realise that Jesus has given His Life for each one of them. No one can be left behind. We are apostles and there are many souls to save. One of the reasons why we offer more sacrifices during Lent is precisely to pray that many sinners receive the grace of conversion.

In the apparitions at Fatima in 1917, Our Lady insisted: *"Men must amend their lives, and ask pardon for their sins... They must no longer offend Our Lord, Who is already so much offended."* Sr. Lucia wrote: *"What has remained most deeply imprinted on my heart is the prayer of our heavenly Mother begging us not to offend Almighty God any more, Who is already so much offended."* But for people to amend their lives, Our Lady asked the three children: *"Pray, pray very much and make a sacrifice for sinners, because many souls are going to hell because no one offers sacrifices for them."* The three children started to look for ways to mortify themselves. One day Lucia found a rough rope that irritated her skin and suggested it be cut into three pieces so each of them could wear it continuously around their waists. Pleasing as it was to God, Our Lady had to ask them not to use the rope at night, for they couldn't sleep. They also gave their lunches to poor children they met along the way, or would spend all the daylight hours without drinking a single drop of water. The three children were aged 10, 9 and 7!

If those little children could please God with their sacrifices, what about me? Mary, my Mother, would you help me this Lent to be generous in my sacrifices? In that way, like the children of Fatima, I can have a big impact in the conversion of souls.

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