



iPray[®]

>>>> With the Gospel

RESOURCES TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE PRAY

SEPTEMBER

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ipraywiththegospel.org

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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*.

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.

"A man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability...But he who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'"

The man who received one talent *"was afraid,"* and thus, he did nothing. He was afraid to risk and lose. Fear paralyses people. What really offended the master of the parable wasn't that he didn't get more talents, but that he didn't even try! God is a Father. No father or mother on earth could ever be disappointed if they saw their children trying their best. All that God asks His children is to try hard. God will help us provided that we try our best.

Wishing to encourage her young son's progress on the piano, a mother took her boy to a Paderewski concert. After they were seated, the mother spotted an old friend in the audience and walked down the aisle to greet her. Seizing the opportunity, the little boy decided to explore the concert hall. He went through a door marked 'No Admittance', found a piano and started practising there. When the mother returned to her seat, the child was missing. As the curtains parted and the spotlights focused on the stage, she saw in horror her child sitting at the keyboard, innocently picking out *'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.'* Suddenly, the great piano master made his entrance, quickly moved to the piano, and whispered in the boy's ear, *"Don't stop. That's it. Keep it up. Give me your best."* Then leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began a melodic bass part. Soon his right arm reached around to the other side of the child, adding a running *'obbligato'*. Together, the old master and the child transformed what could have been an embarrassing situation into a wonderful symphony. That's what Our Father God does with our efforts. We just need to keep playing the best we can, without giving up, and He transforms our efforts into a masterpiece. There is no fear. We can't disappoint Our Father if we try our best. Our Lady will encourage us to try to give our best, however little it seems to be.

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...there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him.'"

These Pharisees and scribes thought that contamination would come from outside. But they were wrong. It's the heart that contaminates the man. They were like the man who seals his house because of external contamination, even though he has a big fire lit inside. The Pharisees were doing lots of good things but not with the right intention. All those things were wasted. The human heart is extremely powerful to purify (but also to contaminate) our actions.

St Paul taught: *"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God."* That will give a supernatural value to all our actions. We call it 'rectitude of intention'. St John Vianney would say, *"all that we do without offering it to God is wasted."* Or, else, in a more positive way, he preached, *"We will never come to understand the degree of glory we would receive in heaven for every good action, if performed purely for God."* We need to try to do everything, always, only for the Glory of God. Whatever it is: study, work, chores, sports, rest, conversations, games, reading... everything!

A priest, well known for his moving homilies, was dying. A younger priest was helping him to get ready for that critical moment. In order to comfort him, the young priest said to him, *"Remember your beautiful sermons when you are brought before God."* *"I can assure you,"* replied the dying priest, *"that I will not mention them, unless He brings it up in the conversation."* The poor priest had realised at the end of his life that those sermons were driven more for vainglory than for 'God's Glory.' St Josemaría used to mark his handwritten pages with the initials 'D. O. G.' meaning *Deo omnis gloria!* (for God all the Glory!) to remind himself to do everything only for the Glory of God. Mary, my Mother, may I never forget to always do everything for God.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah...And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"...When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong. But passing through the midst of them he went away.

Jesus came to preach the Good News but they didn't like what they heard or they didn't like Him. The fact is that something had got into them. When we don't like what we hear, for example our neighbour's music, we can shut the windows or go for a walk but we don't try to throw the neighbour off a cliff (even if we are tempted to think about it...)

Sometimes people react in that way. You want to offer them help or share your faith and they go *'up the wall.'* When Jesus was a baby Simeon said that He would be a *"sign of contradiction"* and that the *"hearts of many would be revealed"* (Lk 2:35). And some hearts turn violently against the truth of the Gospel.

Just like in the life of Jesus, many saints have had to fight against a similar violent persecution. But Jesus didn't answer back or panic. The Gospel says that *"passing through the midst of them He went away."* And saints and all Christianity will always do the same thing, *'pass through'* the midst of those who do not want to hear us, without answering back, without panicking, and *'go away'* to try in another place.

"The truth that sets us free cannot be kept to ourselves; it calls for testimony, it begs to be heard. In our own time, the price to be paid for fidelity to the Gospel is no longer being hanged, drawn and quartered but it often involves being dismissed out of hand, ridiculed or parodied. And yet, the Church cannot withdraw from the task of proclaiming Christ and his Gospel" (Pope Benedict XVI). Mary, Queen of the Apostles, with your help, may I never waver when having to witness to the Truth.

A man who had the spirit of an unclean demon cried out with a loud voice, "Ah! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. And they were all amazed and said to one another, "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out."

Your Word, Jesus, has authority and power. It can rebuke every evil. That unclean spirit had maybe bound that poor man for many years and everyone had failed to cast it out. Perhaps that devil was at ease there until he met You face to face. And that was the end of it! The power of Your Word! At times the enemy tries to convince me that I will always be lazy or proud or selfish... But I know that's not true. You, Lord, can heal my miseries in one go.

Son of one of the wealthiest noble families in England, Philip Howard (1557-1595) could afford any pleasure he liked - and he liked them all. At court he was a notorious playboy, gambler and fop. In 1581, he went to the Tower of London to hear a debate between several Anglican ministers and a prisoner, the Jesuit priest St. Edmund Campion. Although the ministers were armed with books and assistants, Father Campion was alone and had only his memory to rely on, yet he did so well in the debate that the government cancelled it before a verdict was rendered. Inspired by Father Campion, Howard was reconciled with his wife and they both returned to the Catholic faith. When they tried to leave the country secretly for the Continent, where they could practice Catholicism freely, they were stopped and Howard was imprisoned in the Tower of London. He died there 10 years later. The power of the Word of God changed him in one go.

God's Word can cast out my bad tendencies, my laziness and love of comfort, and help me to start anew; I should never forget that You can do everything. Mary, my Mother, help me to prepare for the new academic year so that over the next few months I become, with the Grace of your Son, the person He wants me to be.

When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them...And when it was day he departed and went into a lonely place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them; but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose."

What a wonderful day! The sunset found Jesus attending to hundreds of people queuing to be healed at the door of St Peter's house in Capernaum. The weary Apostles were happy to help the people, organising lines and calming down the anxious crowd which was pressing in around Jesus. The evening came and there He was... *still* laying His hands "**on every one of them.**" And when the sun rose, exhausted as He was after a long day and a long night, Jesus left for a lonely place to pray. But people didn't want Him to leave. Maybe even the Apostles preferred to stay there: the mob was coming to Him, 'why should they go'? Yes, probably it was lovely and more comfortable to be at Peter's house. But Jesus wasn't content with serving only those who sought Him. His Will was to go "*to the other cities also*" and seek more souls.

We, like Jesus, can't be content with just helping those around us. Jesus told us to **go** "*to the whole world,*" not to stay with the same souls and in the same place. We have to search souls out and get out of our comfort zone to bring them to Christ. One day the Bishop of Madrid, Leopoldo Eijo y Garay (1878-1963), was told of a dying person in hospital who didn't want to go to confession. In order to put off the nun who was insisting that he should receive the sacrament, he said that his sins were so many that he would need to confess them to a bishop. As soon as the bishop heard about it he took a taxi and went to the hospital straightaway. You can imagine the face of that sick person when the bishop entered the room and said with a smile, "*Let's get down to business. Where do we start?*"

Mary, Queen of the Universe, bury deep in my heart the sentiment that where souls are concerned, nothing is too much trouble. Everyone is worth all the Blood of Jesus.

While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

Contemplating this text of the Gospel, St Josemaría used to point out that Jesus didn't ask for permission to get into Peter's boat. We can imagine the scene: Peter had been working the whole night with his partners but caught nothing. He was tired and frustrated. Getting close to the shore he saw a great crowd; they were pressing upon a Rabbi who was teaching them. Who was that Man? Why were there so many? Why was He preaching on the shore instead of in the synagogue? As Peter's boat drew near he could hear the Voice of that Rabbi and see His Face. Who was that captivating Man?

Imagine the surprise on Peter's face when, as soon as the boat touched the shore, Jesus jumped into his boat without saying a word! That's how Jesus jumps into our lives. All of a sudden, you find Him in your boat. When someone told St Josemaría how God entered his life with no warning, he replied, *"I didn't think God would get hold of me the way he did, either. But, let me tell you once again, God doesn't ask our permission to complicate our lives. He just gets in: and that's it!"*

The key moment came later when Jesus asked Peter to *"put out a little from the land"* because He wanted to teach the people from that 'platform': Peter's place of work. Once Jesus jumps into our lives, He asks for permission then, to use your boat, your life, your work, to reach out to many others. And from the platform of your work well done, your Christian life, your good example, He can teach many and 'jump' into others' lives.

Peter never forgot the day when Jesus jumped into his boat. Peter and James and John, who were also there, fell in love with this Rabbi that day, at the end of which they *"brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him"*... forever. Mary, Queen of the Apostles, help me to follow their generous example.

Jesus told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it upon an old garment; if he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins."

In the old days they didn't store wine in bottles which were far too expensive. They used containers made of animal skin, particularly convenient for transportation, as they could be carried easily, were lightweight, and would occupy less and less space as the liquid was consumed. However, wineskins had to be treated with care, since the leather became worn over time and could easily rupture, especially if filled with unfermented ('new') wine.

Over the years, the Pharisees had begun resisting more and more any 'new' approach to Divine Revelation to the one they already held. They thought they 'knew' everything and therefore they expected nothing 'new'. But Jesus came to preach the Good 'News' and the Pharisees weren't ready to receive it, like old wineskins that can't retain new wine: they leaked, they broke and they spilled everything.

Nowadays, some people (like the Pharisees) aren't ready to receive the Word of God. Jesus wants to speak to them and change their lives but they are not receptive. They don't want to know. They don't like anything new. They are comfortable as they are. They may even pray; they come, tell their story and leave; but they don't listen to God. Like the tale of a lady who was praying about her vocation; maybe God wanted her to become a nun, but she wasn't very keen on the idea. She would go to the chapel and pray in front of a statue of Our Lady holding Baby Jesus, and repeat again and again, *"Should I become a nun or a wife?"* One day the Baby Jesus opened His mouth and replied, *"A nun, my dear."* And the unhappy lady, a bit upset, replied, *"Be quiet, Child! I'm talking to Your Mother..."* She obviously didn't want to know.

Mary, my Mother, may I learn from you to listen to God and to do what He wants me to do.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to send her away. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."

Today is the birthday of Our Mother, Mary. On our mother's birthday we, as good children, try to offer her a present. In order to make the right choice of gift, you have to put yourself in your mother's place and think what she would love to have. And we know that, much more than material things, mothers long for affection, thoughtfulness. They love to have their children around and to see them happy. That's always the best gift for a mother and Mary is very much Our Mother.

Little children offer little things... but with great love. Blessed Álvaro told a story that can help us to pray today. During the month of May, an African Catholic family lived the custom of offering something special to Our Lady every day. At the end of the day, each member of the family would leave a note with their offering under a small image of Mary. The offerings were very simple: to study better, help a younger brother or sister, do their jobs, pray with more attention and devotion... One day, however, the boy (who was about 12 years old) had a horrible day: he was especially lazy that day and was told off in school, he was disobedient, he had a few fights at home, he didn't finish his homework... and, finally, he was sent to bed without dinner. His mother thought he wouldn't dare to leave a note that day. But before she went to bed she checked and was surprised to see his note at the feet of Our Lady. She never read those notes, but that day she felt curious to know what he had written. This is what the note said: *"I'm sorry, Mother. I've done everything wrong today."* His mother was moved and so was Bl Álvaro when telling the story. And, surely, so was Our Lady. Because mothers know that, even if we have nothing else to offer, *contrition is a great present*. Happy Birthday, Mother!

And 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.

It's a funny way to perform the miracle; isn't it? But all Your miracles, Lord, are different, because all of us are different. We never see You, Lord, in the Gospel, curing everyone together in 'one size fits all' healings. I can't imagine the Apostles organising the groups: *'All blind people, please, group yourselves together on this hill... right, now: voilà, recover your sight!'* or: *'Deaf people, please, over here ... I said, deaf people, PLEASE!!!'* You, Lord, had something special for each person, something special to say to each one.

Like that British lady who, after trying many different gardeners, she finally found one who maintained all her roses perfectly. She asked the man, *"How do you manage to make them look so beautiful?"* "Madam," he replied, *"They all have different lives."* By that he meant that even roses have variable needs for soil, food, water, light... Because all souls have 'different lives', God has wanted to give each of us the precise help we need to 'bloom' perfectly. That's what we call a spiritual director or spiritual guide. All the great saints have had one. Someone to advise us about our spiritual life.

Like the 'control tower' in any airport that gives instructions to pilots but doesn't take control of the planes. Each pilot is responsible for their own flight. Precisely because of that, the pilot wants to count on help and information about the wind, the weather, the other planes around... It would be unwise and imprudent to try to 'fly' without that help. St Teresa of Avila explained how much she suffered in her life as a nun until at last she asked for the help of a good spiritual guide. He was none other than St John of the Cross; the same one who wrote bluntly: *"He who has himself as guide has a fool as a disciple."*

Mary, my Mother, help me find a good spiritual guide, to meet that person regularly, to open my mouth to *"speak plainly"* and *'open my ears'* to listen to the advice I receive.

On another sabbath, when he entered the synagogue and taught, a man was there whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him. But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come and stand here." And he rose and stood there. And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?"

The man didn't ask for the miracle but Jesus saw him and reacted as the scribes and Pharisees expected Him to. When it comes to people in need, Jesus is very predictable: He is always ready to help. The scribes and Pharisees didn't care at all about that man. They were obsessed with the things that 'could not' be done and forgot to do the things that 'should' be done. They were the 'omissions men'.

Some people are like them: they haven't hurt anyone, but they just couldn't care less. It is not what they do that condemns them; it is what they don't do. Just like the man in the Gospel, many people today are in need also. They need money, sometimes. But more often it is another kind of help that they need: attention, affection, advice, understanding, or even a simple smile...

On September 2nd 1827 a humble French lady was travelling from Milan to Lyon with her family. She was pregnant and gravely sick when she knocked at the door of a parish. Given her state, the priest took her to the hospital but she wasn't admitted because she was a foreigner. He tried other hospices but no one wanted to help. After a long agony, the lady died in his arms. There and then, he understood the need of such people: the helpless, the destitute, orphans, mentally ill people... And he started housing and caring for them all. That priest became St Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo. Today there are hospices of St Cottolengo all around the world. And it all started with the sad story of a lady whom no one wanted to help... Mary, Mother of Mercy, teach me to see the needs of others, as you did at the wedding feast in Cana, and to be always ready to help those in need.

He went out to the mountain to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles; Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

'If Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray Him... why didn't He choose someone else?' The truth is that when Jesus called him, Judas must have had a beautiful soul. He was a fine young man, full of energy, practising his faith sincerely. Don't forget that Judas was able to leave everything to follow Jesus. He was a generous young lad. One day he was entrusted with carrying the money bag, paying the expenses of the group and giving money to the poor. There wasn't much money in that bag, anyway. But that clinking of the coins in his pocket started one day to bother him. Maybe one day he took just one little copper to quench his thirst with a glass of wine. Another day two coppers for a bite... never anything big, no. But venial sins make the sinner weaker and blinder. He still loved Jesus... within limits. One day they offered him thirty pieces of silver if he led them to Jesus. All would be fine - he thought - Jesus will escape as He always has done before. Thus, repeated venial sins made it so easy for Judas to justify his evil doings.

We can also betray Our Lord if we don't fight against venial sins and defects: swearing, gossiping, laziness, procrastination, wasting time, vanity in front of the mirror, sarcasm, cheating... On one occasion St John Paul II was meeting a Bishop who got carried away and suddenly used a rude word. A bit embarrassed, the Bishop immediately apologised. But after a short while another swear word came out. He apologised again, *"Sorry, Holy Father. I'm like that when I get carried away."* St John Paul II didn't hesitate and replied, *"If you are like that, then... change!"* There is no excuse. We can always change and overcome our defects. It's necessary to struggle against venial sin to avoid having to struggle with mortal sins. Mary, my Mother, help me to abhor venial sin.

Jesus lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. "Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. "Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets."

I can see You, Lord, explaining to Your disciples that they were blessed when they were poor or suffered hunger, blessed for weeping and for being hated and excluded on Your account. You explained that being poor and hungry, hated and persecuted is a sign of being 'with' You and of being 'like' You... And to be with You, my Jesus, is itself a blessing.

The example of St. Peter Claver, whose feast we celebrate this month, can help us to pray. He was a Spanish Jesuit priest. While studying in Majorca, he decided to go to the Indies and save 'millions of perishing souls.' In 1610, he landed at Cartagena (Colombia), which received 10,000 slaves every year. He dedicated himself to serving the slaves and fighting for the abolition of the slave trade. In his time the great majority of people thought slavery to be a good and profitable thing for society so only a few opposed it. Fewer still stood up for those slaves whom St Peter saw as the 'people of the beatitudes': rejected, abused, hungry... Boarding the slave ships as they entered the harbour, he would hurry to serve them, care for the sick and catechise them as well; it is estimated that he personally baptised around 300,000 people.

We Christians are called to persevere and never give up in defending the innocent victims of injustice, even when everyone thinks the opposite (think about abortion, for instance). Today St Peter is a universal hero but in his time he was a revolutionary. Pope Francis is calling us today to be rebels against injustice and to defend those outcasts of society who are the present-day 'men of the beatitudes'.

Let's ask Our Lady, Mother of Mercy, to help us to be merciful as Pope Francis is asking us to be.

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Your children never get tired of blessing you, Mother. *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"* We celebrate your birthday on the 8th, and your Most Holy Name today because, as good children, we enjoy praising you and celebrating with you before the whole of creation today: *"Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother."*

It's a powerful name which leaves no one indifferent. Devils flee from it, angels rejoice on hearing it, saints smile at it, the Holy Souls in Purgatory find relief in it and Jesus... Jesus... well, HE LOVES IT! He was the first to venerate that Holy Name and pronounce it with pride when people asked Him who He was: *"I am the Son of Mary."* Mary! Those four letters are an aspiration in themselves. Let's use that name - 'Mary' - to give thanks, to say sorry, to ask for help... let's say it in times of temptation to get help, in times of distress to be comforted, in times of doubt to get answers, in times of joy to rejoice with her and in times of suffering to find relief. Let's pronounce this name like St Joseph, with great affection and love, like the saints who were most in love with Our Lady. Let's keep that name on our lips and we will keep our Mother in our hearts. Let us say it again and again: *"Blessed be your name, Mary, Virgin and Mother."*

"O name of Mary! Joy in the heart, honey in the mouth, melody to the ear of Her devout children!" said St. Anthony of Padua. *"O most sweet name! O Mary, what must thou thyself be, since thy name alone is thus amiable and gracious"* (Bl Henry Suso). Let us use this name - 'Mary' - frequently as an aspiration, for God and the entire Heaven exult in it.

"But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also...And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them...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...For the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Many people are convinced that the "golden rule" is 'don't do to others what you wouldn't like to be done to you.' And so, if you don't like people poking a finger in your eye, you don't poke a finger in their eye; if you don't like people calling you names... you don't call them names; if you don't like people using your stuff without permission, you don't use their things without permission either... fair enough! But that is *not* the 'Golden Rule.'

Because Jesus didn't say, 'Don't do to them what you don't like to be done to you.' He said instead, *"And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."* He didn't speak about things to avoid doing to others, but about things to do to others. And in order to live the *Golden Rule* we need to keep our eyes open to the needs of others. Then we will see what many don't see: that people need each other. Blessed John Henry Newman described a gentleman as someone who *"has his eyes on all his company,"* who pays attention to the needs of others and is always ready to help.

A mother was talking with a young priest about one of her children: *"He doesn't need to be told to do anything. Whenever he sees something he can do he doesn't hesitate for a second to do it. He lets me rest."* Apparently, when that child was around, his entire family was at ease. That could be good food for prayer, couldn't it? Am I the kind of child, brother, sister, student or friend who lets people rest? Do people like to be around me? Do I live the *Golden Rule*?

Mary, Mother of Fair Love, with your intercession, may I become the kind of person who makes people feel at ease, one of those I would love to have always around me.

No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

On one occasion, when the people of Israel were in the desert, they faced the curse of a multitude of snakes which bit and killed many of the Israelites. They prayed to the Lord and He ordered Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it up on a pole. Those who looked at it were healed from the poison of the serpents. The Holy Cross of Our Lord has real healing power. Such a simple sign means a lot to us. Every crucifix reminds us of God's Love for each one of us. Every crucifix is like a label with the price of our ransom paid by Jesus with His Blood. Lovers carry with them a picture of their beloved. A father has in his wallet a picture of his wife and children. Good Christians should also carry a crucifix in their pockets.

The crucifix is an effective weapon against the poison of the enemy. The devil has been described as a roaring lion to be feared. But in the presence of a crucifix, the lion becomes a tame cat. In times of difficulty, in times of temptation or when we suffer setbacks of any kind, having a crucifix to hand which we can kiss or caress becomes the most valuable instrument.

To kiss the crucifix is a great act of love and can also be a great act of contrition. One day St Josemaría went to assist a man who was dying in hospital. He was a gipsy who had been a great sinner. After his confession, when St Josemaría gave him his crucifix to kiss, that contrite gipsy started to shout, and no one could stop him, *"I can't kiss Our Lord with this filthy, rotten mouth of mine!"* St Josemaría was moved by that act of contrition and answered him, *"But listen: very soon you are going to embrace him and give him a big kiss, in Heaven!"*

Mary, Mother of Sorrows, teach me to meditate on the Cross and keep me always close to your Son, close to you, on Calvary.

(Good advice from St Josemaría: *get a pocket crucifix and carry it with you always.*)

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

After the Feast of the Holy Cross we look at Our Lady at the foot of Jesus Crucified. If we hold our Mother close to us and stand by her Son's Cross, we will learn something great from her. Consider that Mary wasn't hysterical in her grief or shouting back at those who tortured her Son. The Gospel does not mention whether she spoke encouraging words to Jesus as He was dying. It only says that she *"was standing by the Cross."* She was in a place where she could be seen by Jesus. And there she contemplated her Son in agony. What great comfort she gave to Jesus just by being there with Him!

Bear in mind that Our Lady was not there out of a sense of duty. Rather, she knew that for Jesus it was important to look down and find the lovely face of His Mother; to let Him know that He wasn't left alone. Until the end of time that is the place of Our Lady: at the foot of the Cross, close to her Son, co-redeeming with Him. That's where we find her constantly. Every Christian who suffers finds Mary always beside him or her. Because this Mother cannot ever abandon her children, and even less in time of suffering. By the bed of a sick child you find the mother. She may not say anything, but her presence comforts the child. Since that day on Calvary, it's impossible for a Christian to suffer alone. If we suffer, we are with Jesus on the Cross. And if we are there we will see Mary at our side.

As we try to learn from Mary how to pray, we see that prayer does not always imply words. We can pray as Our Lady does, by looking at Jesus and contemplating Him on the Cross. Love doesn't always need words. In fact, many times it needs no words.

Mary, Mother of Sorrows, may I be a comfort for Jesus as He looks down from the Cross and finds you, His Mother, and me, holding your hand, *"standing by the Cross."*

Jesus began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things...and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men."

It seems ridiculous to try to rebuke God for what He does, as if Peter knew better than Jesus what was best. It sounds as bizarre as a three-year-old child correcting the doctor's prescription. Peter couldn't possibly know what it would take for Christ to redeem us. But perhaps we are even more shocked to hear Our Lord's reply, because Jesus had never spoken like this before: *"Get behind me, Satan!"* None of the disciples could ever forget the lesson: **'God knows what He has to do.'**

Peter challenged Him out of love. He couldn't bear hearing about Jesus' Crucifixion and Death. Out of love and affection some people can also try to stop others from following God's plan. As if they knew better than God what a soul should do. Or even as if they loved that person more than God does.

Theodora de Theate came from the illustrious family of the Caraccioli, related to Emperor Frederick II. She had in mind to make her son Abbot of Monte Cassino and she certainly had enough influence to make that happen. But when he decided to join the friars of St Dominic she saw red: *'My son a mere mendicant friar!'* she thought. *'Over my dead body!'* Her son, however, decided to follow God's Will and left the family home. She tried everything (including kidnapping and confinement) to make him change his mind. But her son Thomas never gave up God's dreams for him and in time became St Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest minds in history.

We don't have to understand God's plan for other souls, but should encourage them to do His Will. When St John Bosco explained his vocation to his mother, she said, *"You've chosen your path, my son. Don't explain anything else to me. I know you have chosen God. I'll just give you a tip: Take up the Cross, and don't ever leave it!"* Mary, my Mother, help me to follow that piece of advice.

A centurion had a slave who was dear to him, who was sick and at the point of death. When he heard of Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his slave...And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed."

We use these words during the Holy Mass before we receive Holy Communion: *"Lord, I am not worthy."* St John Vianney explained that if Jesus had taken into account our 'worthiness', He would never have instituted the Eucharist. But He took into account only His love for us. Ordinarily we can only receive Him once a day but our desire would be to receive Him many times. According to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Alphonsus Liguori, the value of a spiritual communion can be as great as Holy Communion itself. It depends, obviously, on the internal dispositions. If God can unite Himself to souls with a piece of bread, would it not be possible for Him to do the same with a strong desire? St. Teresa of Jesus wrote: *"When you do not receive communion and you do not attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you."* St. John Vianney taught, *"If we are deprived of Sacramental Communion, let us replace it by spiritual communion, which we can make every moment ... when we cannot go to the church, let us turn towards the tabernacle; no wall can shut us out from the good God."*

In 1975 the Communist Army took control of Vietnam, sending numerous bishops and priests to prison. Many disappeared, leaving no trace. A prisoner described what he found once in a cell he was moved to. It had been used by a priest who disappeared. On the wall, with a loose stone, the priest had drawn a huge Host and Chalice. Presumably, unable to say Mass, he had spent a long time there in 'adoration', longing for the Eucharist. Lord, I know I'm not worthy, but I wish to receive You *"with the purity, humility and devotion with which your most holy Mother - my Mother - received you, with the spirit and fervour of the saints."*

As he drew near to the gate of the city of Naim, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"

God has certainly visited His people. That was sort of a visit. He came into the city exactly when He was needed. He saw the suffering of that widow and, the Gospel says, Jesus *'had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."* And before anyone asked for help, He resurrected the young man. Jesus is the real picture of God, the Perfect Image of God: a compassionate God, a merciful God, a Lover more than a judge.

Some people still have a different picture of God. A good Christian who went to China to spread the Good News spent the first month of his stay learning the language, attending Chinese lessons in a public academy. One day the Chinese teacher pointed at a word and asked for the meaning. As the pupils were hesitating, she wanted to give a clue and said, *"What God is...?"* The Christian pupil suddenly understood the mistake. She was pointing at the word *'chastiser.'* Before anyone could answer, the young Christian asked his Guardian Angel for help and tried to find in the dictionary the word he had in mind. He found it at once and showed it to the teacher: *'Merciful.'*

We have the mission to spread the real picture of Our Lord. *"God's face is the face of a merciful Father,"* said Pope Francis. In the same way that Jesus approached this lady and said to her *"Do not weep,"* He gets closer to us. In moments of suffering, He is always closer than ever. We can understand that the tears of this lady didn't stop flowing. They were changed into tears of joy. That's what God does. Mary, Mother of Mercy, help me to show to the world the real face of God.

"To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the market place and calling to one another, 'We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep.' For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

That was a children's game in the time of Jesus. Some children would play music and others had to react appropriately. They had to adapt their dancing to the rhythm of the music that was played. This was Jesus' complaint against people who didn't react to His preaching. They didn't react to the teachings of St John the Baptist either. No one was good enough for such people. John the Baptist? 'Ah, well', they may have thought, 'too bizarre, dressed in camel skins and eating locusts and wild honey'. Jesus? 'Too rustic, just a carpenter, you know'...

They had a mental picture of the 'perfect prophet' they would follow, and no one could match that imaginary picture. Some live in that imaginary world where things and people never meet their expectations, and that serves them as an excuse not to listen to them. They don't want to complicate their lives by following Jesus. God sends everyone the help that they need, which may not be the help that they expect.

Some don't pray because they don't feel anything special when they pray. They have a mental picture of what prayer should feel like but they don't feel it! So they quit. And they even blame God for it because He doesn't 'give' them prayer. The truth is that in our prayer God is the Master and He plays the music He wants us to dance to. We need to ask God to teach us to pray as He wants us to pray and not as we would love to pray. I've no excuse for not reacting to God's promptings; no excuse for saying, *'I can't pray in this situation.'* Because I don't pray for my sake and my feelings, but for God's sake.

Mary, my Mother, Master of Prayer, teach me to pray.

A woman of the city, who was a sinner...brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment...Jesus said to the Pharisee, "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly."

I love Your forgiveness, my Jesus. I love it because I am a sinner as well. The more sins You forgive me, the more I love You. I love it that there is no sin that You won't forgive. I love it that there is no human 'misery' that can exceed Your Divine Mercy. I love reminding all sinners that You are looking for them more than they are looking for You. I give You thanks for Your Mercy, for You are more willing to forgive us than we are willing to be forgiven; and I beg You for millions of souls to be reconciled with You this year.

There is a crucifix in St Eulalia's parish in Majorca given by Pope Innocent to King James I. It's called the 'Christ of the miracles'. The story is told that a man who had led a very sinful life decided to change and went to Confession. This crucifix was hanging in front of the confessional – a silent witness to the man's Confession. But when the priest heard his sins he was scandalized and thought that he couldn't grant the man absolution. The poor sinner left the church, devastated. But a young man found him in tears at the gates of the church, approached him and said, "*Go back; try again!*" The man hesitated but the young fellow insisted so he gave in and went back to the confessional. The priest was surprised to see him back and was about to send him away for a second time when suddenly the right hand of the Christ on that Crucifix came away from the nail. Showing the priest the scar from the nail, Jesus said to him, "*Give him absolution. Look how much it has cost me!*"

Mary, Refuge of sinners, help me to be always grateful for your Son's Mercy; help me to remind everyone that Jesus has already paid for their sins, and so they just have to come to the confessional to 'cash in' forgiveness.

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him... And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Thank you, Matthew, for your story; because it is you who write your own story. Thank you, because you were a sinner and became an Apostle. And that is very encouraging for me because I'm a sinner and have to become an apostle. Thank you, Matthew, because you were a publican who was lining his pockets with the money of the Jews, but when Jesus called you, you were ready to leave everything and follow Him.

Thank you, Matthew, because you could have stayed where you were thinking that it was crazy to leave your job, your money, your plans and your future... but you were brave enough to follow Jesus instead. And I give thanks with you to Jesus because He knew you well and was aware of the great things that you could do. While on that day some of the Jews looked at you with disdain, that Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, passed by your tax office and smiled at you. He stood there, gazing at you with affection, a loving look, the like of which a publican in Palestine had probably never experienced. And you couldn't look anywhere else. That loving Face of Jesus was inviting you to do something special with your life.

You weren't happy and Jesus offered you Happiness. You were wasting your life and Jesus invited you to do something great with it. You only loved your money but Jesus helped you to expand your heart to love God and others more than yourself. Your talents were wasted in that tax office and millions of souls were waiting for you. Thank you, Matthew, because you said "Yes" to Jesus.

Mary, Queen of Apostles, help me to have the courage to say "Yes" to Him as well, and become a saint, like you, like St Matthew.

Jesus said in a parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell along the path, and was trodden under foot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew, and yielded a hundredfold."

The seed is the Word of God that was sown everywhere. The sower didn't choose to cast the seed in just a few places, but everywhere. He sowed bountifully and without calculating because he knew that the rain would eventually come, and if he had tried to avoid the paths, rocks and thorns, maybe an important part of the field wouldn't have received seed. We are now sowers of the Word of God. With our Christian life, our prayer and our words, we bring the Good News to many people. We shouldn't be held back, thinking that this or that person might or might not understand - God will rain down His grace on everyone and He certainly wants everyone to be saved.

A Mexican architect called Bosco Gutierrez was held hostage in 1990 for 257 days. His captors put him in a small cell; they masked their faces and never talked to him. Being a good Christian, Bosco prayed a lot every day. He had a dream one night when he saw himself in hell. One of his masked captors in front of him was yelling, *"I am in hell because I was bad. Nobody told me I was wrong. And you... You are in hell because you didn't help me."* Bosco realized that his captors also had souls to be saved, so he started to pray especially for them. At Christmas, he told them he wanted to pray together with them. They opened his door a little and he saw all five captors ready to listen. He then read the Christmas story from the Bible, talked to them about the love of God and prayed a decade of the Rosary. At the end, one by one, they came forward and shook his hand. *"Can you imagine the happiness inside my soul?"* he said months later. *"It was the happiest Christmas I ever had."*

Mary, Queen of Apostles, help me to sow God's Word abundantly, so that It can reach out to everyone.

They came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

You can imagine the silence when Jesus asked his disciples about the topic of their previous discussion. They were silent because they were embarrassed: the conversation was a childish, ridiculous argument and they knew it. You can almost hear one of them saying, '*I was among the first to join Jesus,*' and another answering, '*Long before you came I was with Him already.*' And a third one, '*But I'm older than you*'; and another replying, '*I'm His cousin!*'

Do you want to be the first? Then you "*must be last of all and servant of all.*" We will be surprised in Heaven to see in the first row, very close to Jesus, many people whose names were not remembered on earth. They were humble people, as Our Lady was, who devoted their lives to serving others without attracting attention. They never expected to be thanked; their joy was to serve and to pass unnoticed. When they gave they always forgot, when they received they never forgot.

Towards the end of what had been a long day at work, a vet cut his finger. He dressed it and drove back home. On his way he saw a family huddled around their dog. They were all worried and the children were crying because it had swallowed a ball and was suffocating. The man stopped his car and with his bare hands (and his dressed finger), fought to extract the ball. When he had finally succeeded, the children cheered him as he left. A few days afterwards he received a letter of thanks, addressed to the "*Vet with the dressed finger.*"

'In gaudio serviamus' Let's serve with joy, trying to be the first... in service, the first to volunteer, ready to do anything for everyone who may need us.

Mary, my Mother, you called yourself "*the handmaid of the Lord.*" Teach me to serve!

"No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hid that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light. Take heed then how you hear; for to him who has will more be given, and from him who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."

When we illuminate a room that has been dimly lit for a while, we discover dust and cobwebs that have been accumulating there. The inhabitants of that room may not like to know that they've been living in such a place, but that doesn't change the truth: the dust and cobwebs are real. St John Paul II wrote an encyclical called *'The Splendour of Truth'*, because when truth shines it gives light. When we share the Truth of the Gospel we are giving light. *"I am the Truth,"* said Jesus. And the brightness of this Truth can't be hidden. Someone compared the truth to a lion. A lion doesn't need to be defended. It just needs to be unleashed. It can defend itself.

There is an 'urban legend' about the encounter of a battleship with another vessel. This is the transcript of the radio conversation...
Battleship: *"Please divert your course 15 degrees to the North to avoid a collision."* **Voice from the other side:** *"I recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision."*
Battleship: *"This is the Captain of an aircraft carrier. I repeat, divert your course."* **Voice:** *"Hi, Captain, this is Frank. I repeat, you divert your course."* **Battleship:** *"This is the Captain. We are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers and numerous support vessels. I demand that you change your course, or countermeasures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship."* **Voice:** *"Well Captain. I'm here alone with my dog... surprised to see your fleet heading straight for my lighthouse. Your call."*

Truth gives light, like the lighthouse. And it stands firm, founded on solid ground: God Himself. Like the sun, it can't be hidden. It can't be put out. It can't be shaken. It prevails. The splendour of God's Truth gives light to every soul. Christians give light wherever they are. Mary, Lady of Light, help me to share this Light with those around me.

Then his mother and his brethren came to him, but they could not reach him for the crowd. And he was told, "Your mother and your brethren are standing outside, desiring to see you." But he said to them, "My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and do it."

Again Jesus reminds His disciples that to listen is not enough. Some people had no problem listening to Jesus. Their difficulty was in doing what Jesus said. The Pharisees, for example, listened to the reading of the Bible and very often we find them listening to Jesus' preaching. You can listen to the Word of God as you listen to the rain falling. But it's not just about listening, it's about acting. Jesus Christ doesn't need spectators, but actors.

Our Lady was following Jesus and listening to Him. Apparently, that day there were so many people that His Mother had to wait outside. Someone mentioned Our Lady to Jesus and He used her example to teach a lesson: Mary listened to God's Word but she also did God's Will. When we pray we come to 'listen' to Him and to 'do' what He tells us to do. Do I want to DO what Jesus wants? When I pray, do I tell Jesus that He can count on me for whatever He wants me to do?

It's very comfortable to listen but not necessarily want to DO anything. The '*audience*' of a movie never changes the script. We have to be ready to give everything to God. There is the story of a hen and a pig who lived together on a farm. The hen suggested giving the farmer a surprise. "*Why don't we give him something special for breakfast today?*" she asked. "*We could give him fried eggs and bacon.*" But the pig wasn't very enthusiastic about the idea. "*It's not fair,*" said the pig. "*You only lay the eggs, but I have to commit my life for his breakfast!*" And the pig was right. The hen only had to co-operate with laying eggs; the pig, however, had to die to produce the bacon. Some Christians are happy co-operating, giving some time or some things to God, but not their lives. They are spectators but they are not willing to give their lives in the fulfilment of the Will of God. Mary, Virgin Most Faithful, teach me to listen and to obey the Word of your Son.

And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal. And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

Jesus gave them power and taught them to rely on nothing else. So they were to take nothing for the journey, *"no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money..."* In order to spread the Good News, Saints (like the Apostles) were to rely on nothing else but grace, the power given by the Holy Spirit to those who want to become His apostles.

One day St Josemaría went to see Manuel Valdes, a young medical student who was in bed with a painful throat infection. Sitting at his bedside, St Josemaría began explaining to him the importance of the new apostolate he was planning to do with his help, to reach out to many university students. Listening to him, the patient was wondering how the priest planned to do all that. Since he was unable to speak, he took a piece of paper and wrote, *"But... what about the means?"* St Josemaría took that same piece of paper and wrote, *"They are the ones that Peter and Paul had, and Dominic and Francis, and Ignatius and Xavier: the Crucifix and the Gospel. Are they insufficient for you?"*

Do you see? In order to spread the Word you just need the Word. The Holy Spirit needs instruments, you and me. But we need no more instruments than the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. When St Josemaría sent people to start the apostolic work in a foreign country he used say to them, *"My children, I'm sorry I can't give you any material help. I give you the best I have: a crucifix, a picture of Our Lady and my blessing."* Nothing else is needed but the apostolic zeal that the Paraclete places in the hearts of His apostles. Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, Queen of the Apostles, help me to grow in apostolic zeal and to trust in the means that God sends me.

Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen. Herod said, "John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?" And he sought to see him.

If Herod sought to see Jesus... why didn't he go to Him? Everybody knew where to find Jesus. As king of Judea, Herod had everything he could wish for; what would a powerful and rich king want from a poor Rabbi who had nothing except a few disciples? The fact is that the tetrarch's house was full of things but his heart was empty, and as Pope Francis says, *"The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume."*

We are attracted by God like iron to a magnet, and nothing on earth will stop that attraction. God made us to be happy, and the only real and complete happiness can be found in Him: *"You made us, Lord, for Yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in You"* (St. Augustine). To try to satisfy our longing for happiness with things is like scratching itchy skin; it may relieve the discomfort for a few seconds, but the burning feeling eventually only gets worse. God wants to fill your heart up with His Love, but if a heart is full of 'junk' there is no room in it for God's Love.

A young boy explained his conversion in an interview. When he was young his parents and grandparents had given him everything he wanted and more - tablet, smartphone, video games; he explained that he *"had more gadgets in his room than the NASA research centre."* But he wasn't happy. For his birthday, not knowing what to give him (since he had everything already), a family friend bought him a good edition of the Gospels. He was amused at the idea but he decided to read it, out of curiosity. There he found Jesus Christ, and was so fascinated by His Life and Death... that he changed his life and is now studying to become a priest, *"I was looking for Him,"* he said, *"but I didn't know it; I was trying to find God but I had so much junk in front of me that I couldn't see Him!"* Mary, my Mother, *"may I seek Jesus, may I find Jesus, may I love Jesus."* (St Josemaría)

Now it happened that as he was praying alone the disciples were with him; and he asked them, "Who do the people say that I am?" And they answered, "John the Baptist; but others say, Elijah; and others, that one of the old prophets has risen." And he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

Many people had different opinions about Jesus because each one had a different relationship with Him. The entire Gospels give us an accurate description of Jesus written by God Himself. And yet different readers can see Jesus in different ways. For that reason the Holy Spirit comes to assist us when we read the Gospel so that we know Jesus, the 'real' Jesus Christ that walked on earth two thousand years ago and not just an "opinion" of Jesus.

The Apostles transmitted what they saw. Then the early Christians transmitted what they heard from the Apostles. Some of those things were put in writing and became the New Testament. Some other things were never written, just transmitted from generation to generation. That's what we call *Tradition*. Tradition allows us to understand the Gospels appropriately and know the 'Real Jesus' rather than my 'opinion' about Jesus.

In 1865 missionary priests were allowed to go to Japan after more than 250 years of prohibition and persecution of Christians. Some people who lived in Urakami (a village near Nagasaki) received a French priest, Bernard Thadee Petitjean, and confessed to him that their families had kept the 'Kirishitan' (Christian) faith all that time without priests. But they wanted to ask three questions: 1) Where is your wife? "*I have no wife*," said the priest; 2) Do you have a Mother in Heaven? "*The Virgin Mary is my Mother*," he replied; and 3) Do you follow a bishop dressed in white? "*Yes, I follow the Pope*." They explained that three centuries before, the priests told them that other priests would come one day and, in order to make sure that these priests were the successors of the Apostles, they had to ask those questions. They were satisfied with the answers.

Mary, Mother of the Church, help me to read the Gospel with the same Spirit with which it was written; to see Jesus as you, Mother, saw Him.

Jesus said, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

Many people have no experience of the power of the Angels and Archangels. If we knew how mighty they are and how willing to help us, we would ask them for their intercession many times during the day. Today we celebrate the feast of the three Archangels whose names we know: St Michael, St Gabriel and St Raphael. St Michael is mentioned in the Book of Daniel, in the Epistle of St Jude and in the Book of Revelation, where it describes the battle fought by the Archangel Michael and his host against 'the dragon' (the devil) and all his evil angels, defending all the friends of God. He is a really powerful protector against the snares of the devil.

The 'dragon' fears him. The devil himself told St John Marie Vianney that St Michael was protecting him at the door of his church. Rather than assault him, all the devil could do was to yell and insult him. St Padre Pio also recommended devotion to him. He said, *"You will need the help of St Michael, living in this world."*

On October 13, 1884, after celebrating Mass, Pope Leo XIII was found staring blankly. A moment later, he suddenly snapped back, went to his office and composed the Prayer to St. Michael. Supposedly, he had had a vision in which he heard a guttural voice, the voice of Satan in his pride, boasting to Our Lord, *"I can destroy your Church."* As a reaction to that vision, Pope Leo asked for this prayer to St Michael to be said after Holy Mass throughout the universal Church: *St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in 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 thrust into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world for the ruin of souls. Amen.*

We are still fighting this constant battle with the devil and his angels and for that reason we should ask for protection from this powerful Archangel very often. Mary, Queen of Angels, remind me to have recourse to St Michael the Archangel.

Jesus said to Nathanael, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

One of those Angels that Nathanael could see ascending and descending from Heaven was you, dear St Gabriel. Only to you could God entrust the most important of missions; only you could deliver the greatest message in history.

It is probably not very theological to say that Angels can get nervous, but if that were possible, this would be the most appropriate time to be anxious. The salvation of mankind depended on it. Dear Gabriel, had you ever thought that Mary could say 'No'? Because, in fact, she could have said 'No' to her mission. Mary was perfectly free.

We might think that Our Lady was 'far too holy' to say 'No'. However, the magnificence of it is that Mary, the second Eve, could have said 'No' to God but she said "Yes" instead. Otherwise, the most important decision that a human person ever took in history, would have been just 'inevitable'. As if God was forcing us: 'I will redeem you, whether you like it or not!' Yes, Our Lady was holy, but she still found the message difficult: "*How can this be?*" she asked St Gabriel. The Archangel reassured her. She didn't have to do anything special, the Holy Spirit would do it. She just had to accept. And thank goodness she accepted, because St Gabriel wasn't given a 'plan B', in case Mary said 'No'.

Today God still sends His messages through His Angels. Millions of people are given the chance to accept God's plans for them; you and I, the divine mission that God has entrusted to us. Like Our Mother, we are certainly free to say 'Yes' or 'No'. But there is an alarming thought that should help us to be generous and say 'Yes': God has no 'Plan B'. What I fail to do will remain undone for eternity. Mary, Queen of Angels, help me to be generous and say a big 'YES' to whatever God has prepared for me, because if I accept, God will do all the rest.

Jesus said to Nathanael, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

Angels are ascending and descending from Heaven in order to assist us in many ways. The story of St Raphael summarises all the missions that an Angel can be entrusted with by God. His story is told in the Book of Tobit. Tobit was a very good man, known for his works of mercy such as burying the abandoned bodies of some people who had died. For this and other things, he suffered persecution. On top of those sufferings, he even became blind. We are also told the story of Sarah, a young woman who had married seven times, but each of her husbands died on their wedding night. Both Tobit and Sarah felt miserable. God heard their prayers and sent Raphael on a mission to help them.

Tobit had to send his only son, Tobias, on a long trip to recover their money. Before sending him off, he instructed his son on how to live a good life and asked him to find a good companion. It is then that St Raphael (introducing himself as Azarias) joined young Tobias on his journey.

It's a long story (you may want to read it) but the gist of it is that God solves all the problems they prayed for and even a few more. (Spoiler alert!) With the help of St Raphael, Tobias recovered his money; Sarah got rid of the spell and happily married Tobias himself; Tobias got back home safe and sound with his new wife and, finally, even Tobit recovered his sight. Towards the end, Tobit raised the question of the Archangel's wages. Tobias felt he should receive half of the money they had recovered. It is then that the Archangel revealed who he was and that *'Angels earned no salary'*. Instead of money, he asked them to *'praise God forever.'* After reading the story, you may also feel like asking St Raphael to be your companion on this journey of life. Don't miss the opportunity today!

Mary, Queen of Angels, remind me to have recourse to these three powerful Archangels, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael.

John said "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire."

These are strong words from Our Lord. Think just how serious this sin must be if Jesus says of him who commits it that *"it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea."* He is referring to the sin of scandal, which, according to the Catechism, consists of any *"attitude or behaviour which leads another to do evil."*

How easily one gets carried away by the bad example of others! How many people excuse themselves because *'everybody does it!'* It happens, for instance, that someone has no intention to gossip, but as soon as others start talking of someone else behind their back it's very easy to drop an uncharitable comment; or how easily one behaves meanly when others are doing the same. But just as bad example spreads, so does good example. A bad odour can empty a room, but a good fragrance makes it attractive and inviting.

We have to give good example. In the words of St Josemaría, we need *"to drown evil with an abundance of good"*. Like the boy who went to confession and told the priest that he had been lying... but *"everyone was lying as well."* He thought that the priest could excuse him in that situation, but the answer he got was quite the opposite of what he expected: *"If everyone else is lying, all the more reason for us to tell the truth. We only can overcome darkness with light, lies with truth, hatred with charity, and sin with holiness."*

In this world of ours which is starved of truth, love, beauty and light, let's be faithful and bold in trying *"to drown evil with an abundance of good"* in any situation, especially when it's more difficult to be a good Christian.

Mary, Virgin Most Faithful, Help me to get rid of all human respect and cowardice, so as to always be a good example for everyone.

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.

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:

Angel of God, my Guardian dear, to whom His love commits me here, ever this day (or night) be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. 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.

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

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.

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,

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.

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. 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.

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.

Prayer to Mary for Holy Purity

Blessed be your purity,

May it be blessed for ever,

For no less than God takes delight

In such exalted beauty.

To you, heavenly Princess,

Holy Virgin Mary,

I offer on this day

My whole heart, life, and soul.

Look upon me with compassion;

Do not leave me, my mother.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit (St Josemaría)

Come, O Holy Spirit! Enlighten my mind to know your commands; strengthen my heart against the snares of the enemy; inflame my will... I have heard your voice, and I don't want to harden myself and resist, saying "Later..., tomorrow." Nunc coepi! Now I begin! In case there is no tomorrow for me.

O Spirit of truth and wisdom, Spirit of understanding and counsel, Spirit of joy and peace! I want whatever you want. I want because you want, I want however you want, I want whenever you want.

SEPTEMBER

■ «“My friends, Jesus is the Lord of risk, he is the Lord of the eternal “more”. Jesus is not the Lord of comfort, security and ease. Following Jesus demands a good dose of courage, a readiness to trade in the sofa for a pair of walking shoes and to set out on new and uncharted paths. To blaze trails that open up new horizons capable of spreading joy.”

“God expects something from you, God wants something from you. God hopes in you. God comes to break down all our fences. He comes to open the doors of our lives, our dreams, our ways of seeing things. God comes to break open everything that keeps you closed in. He is encouraging you to dream. He wants to make you see that, with you, the world can be different. For the fact is, unless you offer the best of yourselves, the world will never be different. This is the challenge.”

“So today, my friends, Jesus is inviting you, calling you, to leave your mark on life, to leave a mark on history, your own and that of many others as well.”»

(Pope Francis, in Krakow, 30 July 2016)



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