

iPray

>>>> With the Gospel

PRAYER RESOURCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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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.

"The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

Seeds take time to sprout and grow. The rain and the sun make them grow at the proper rate. Sometimes we might wish them to grow faster but we can't change nature. It would be of little help if the farmer went to a shoot of grain and started pulling at it to make it grow faster. It could actually kill the plant outright. A good gardener is patient. He knows when to plant, when to water, when to fertilise and when to reap. As the Gospel says, *"when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."*

Souls take time to change. Bernard Nathanson was a medical doctor, director of the *"largest abortion clinic in the Western world,"* as he described it. For thirty years, he oversaw the destruction of about 75,000 fetuses. But God put the seed in his heart. He was moved by hundreds of pro-lifers selflessly praying for the unborn and for him with constancy. He was changed definitively when he saw for the first time an ultrasound scan with a foetus moving inside its mother. He left the abortion clinic and little by little started to defend the life of the unborn. It took him more than 17 years to find God but he was eventually baptised in December of 1996. He spent the rest of his life *making up*, as he said, for his sins, defending life at all cost. He talked many times about the deep pain he felt for the lives he had taken. For years he fasted and travelled all around the world offering sacrifices in reparation for his past life. He entrusted himself to the Mercy of God to be able to go to Heaven, or at least to be allowed to visit all those babies he killed and say to them: *"I AM SORRY!"*

Overall, it was a long process. Forty years of misery. But through the persevering prayer of Bernard's friends and others, once the seed sprouted, he raised an amazing defence of life.

Mary, Refuge of Sinners, may I learn to be patient: If God has patience with souls... why shouldn't I?

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.*

Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country. But in truth, I tell you...there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." 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.

They had the "hometown syndrome". They didn't like that Jesus had 'worked miracles' in other places but not in His hometown. Besides, they couldn't believe that the Son of Joseph and Mary could be a prophet. They couldn't believe it. But nevertheless it was true. But some of them hesitated: some remembered Him as a remarkable Boy, some had fond memories of Him, some were childhood friends... and yet they allowed others to take Jesus to a cliff in order to throw Him down. It is the power of *peer pressure*.

One day a professor of calculus at university was surprised to see that only one student had come to the lecture that day. Apparently the class team had a football match and the other students didn't want to miss it. They asked the best pupil to attend the lecture and take notes for the rest. But as the pupil was taking his notes in a hurry, he made a mistake. On the day of the exam all the students made the same mistake in one of the questions. Thinking that all of them couldn't be wrong, they concluded that the teacher had got it wrong and they asked for a re-mark. The teacher explained that it didn't matter how many people had got it wrong; the answer was still wrong. *'A lie is a lie even if everyone believes it. The truth is true, even if no one believes it.'*

The truth is not relative. Your age, for instance, is exactly what it is. And even if everyone in the world thinks you are younger or older, or they vote and decide to change it, they are still wrong. Sometimes as Christians we find ourselves defending the truth against those with mistaken beliefs. Let's remember that we are witnesses to the Truth and should defend It with charity always. Mary, Mother Most Admirable, in the face of peer pressure we ask you for the courage to stand up always for what is true, what is right... Even if they also bring us to a cliff...!

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had come out of the boat, there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who lived among the tombs...And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped him; and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many."

A bit cowardly these unclean spirits, aren't they? Like bullies, they come in groups. Shame on them! A legion of bad angels against one single man. In this battle you can't expect nobleness and fair play. Fair play would be if the devil were to struggle against St Michael, but he doesn't dare. St Peter explains how *"the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* Imagine yourself attacked not just by one lion but surrounded by whole a *legion* of them.

Yet God knows this. And He has kitted us out with appropriate means. Firstly, we have the Sacraments, especially the Holy Mass. Holy Communion is the most powerful weapon against the enemy. Then the Sacrament of Confession. The devil hates it! But apart from the Sacraments, the Church also counts on other effective weapons of 'devils destruction': the Sacramentals. They are consecrated objects like medals, scapulars, Holy Water, crucifixes... that indeed help when we use them with faith and when we are trying to live a virtuous life. But remember: they are not 'amulets'. They are spiritual weapons.

Have you ever used an insect repellent? We sometimes don't even smell it but insects can't stand being near it. Holy Water, a crucifix or your scapular have the same effect on the enemy. They don't work as if by magic. Their effect depends very much on your faith. Like any weapon, their effectiveness depends on the skills of the user. Little help is a machine gun against a *legion of roaring lions* if you don't know how to use it! Mary, most fearful antagonist of the devil, teach me to use these 'spiritual weapons'.

A great crowd gathered about Jesus...Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and seeing him, he fell at his feet, and besought him, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." And he went with him...While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" But ignoring what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe."

We remember the story well. Jairus was a man of faith. He came to ask Jesus for a miracle. On the way there Jesus got delayed by a woman with a blood flow that Jesus healed as well. The miracle had happened in front of their faces when some servants of Jairus said to him, 'Too late. Your daughter is dead.' You may imagine the disappointment of the man who came to ask Jesus for help but a woman detained Jesus and got the miracle first. His daughter was now dead. Jesus couldn't heal her anymore.

But we know that Jesus is NEVER late. He had a plan and He didn't have to inform anyone about it. Jesus didn't want to heal Jairus' daughter... He had a better plan. And so when the 'wet blanket' servants came to discourage Jairus, the Gospel says that Jesus *ignored* what they said, He didn't listen to them. Instead He said to the mourning father, "*Do not fear, only believe.*" Only believe. You don't have to do anything else, Jairus - *only believe!*

The world is populated with 'wet blanket' people whose main argument is always: '*It's too late.*' You and I have to 'ignore' them and "*only believe.*" It's never too late for an 'eternal' God. When we pray we have to be convinced to the marrow that it is never too late, that we don't know the times of God, that our only job is to believe. God does the rest in its proper time. It wasn't too late for Jairus' daughter, for the son of the widow of Naim, nor for Lazarus (four days dead), it wasn't too late for the woman with the haemorrhage, for the blind men, for the leper, for the paralytic... it wasn't too late for the prodigal son, for the Good Thief, for Saul of Tarsus or St Augustine... It's NEVER too late for God! Mary, Virgin Most Faithful, help me to '*only believe.*'

On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offence at him.

"Where did this man get all this?" they wondered. This happened in Nazareth, Jesus' hometown. It happened among His people, those who saw Him growing up. They couldn't make head nor tail of it. A carpenter is supposed to be a carpenter all his life, not a Rabbi. The Gospel says that *"they took offence at him."* Why? There is no need to be offended just because they don't understand! But it happens sometimes. You find some 'learned' people who think that anyone who doesn't think as they do are not just wrong, but ignorant. Some think that religion is not just difficult to believe, but nonsense. Some are convinced that, just because they haven't found the truth, truth doesn't exist at all. They are like children who, just because a Maths problem is difficult to solve, claim that the formula is wrong and the problem *has no solution*.

A university student was seated on a train beside an old person praying the Rosary. "Sir", interrupted the student, *"do you still believe in gods and prayers?"* "Yes, I do" replied the man with a smile. *"Do you not?"* The student burst out laughing and said, *"I do not believe in such silly things. Take my advice: Learn what science has to say about religion."* "Science?", asked the old man in distress, *"What Science?"* The student saw the man's grief and to avoid hurting his feelings further, said, *"Please give me your address and I will send you some literature to help you on the matter."* The old fellow fumbled inside his coat pocket and gave the boy his visiting card. Glancing at the card, the student bowed his head in shame and became silent. On the card he read: *'Louis Pasteur, Director of the Institute of Scientific Research, Paris'* - the most famous French scientist of 19th century, discoverer of rabies and anthrax vaccines. He is popularly known as the *father of microbiology* so, not really ignorant, was he? Mary, Seat of Wisdom, may I grow in this gift of the Holy Spirit.

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 quattròcchi*' (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.

When Herodias' daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will grant it." And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." And she went out, and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the baptist."

St John the Baptist and so many others were killed for being faithful to the truth. Thus they watered the seed of the Gospel with their blood. They never compromised the truth. That truth frustrated their enemies so much that they didn't discuss it or argue about it, nor even think about it. They killed Christians to stop the message from spreading... But it didn't work. St Maximus the Confessor (580 – 662), for instance, was a Christian monk, theologian and scholar. He fought against heresy with his teachings. He was condemned to exile but he kept preaching. Then they had his tongue cut out. But he kept writing. So they also had his right hand cut off. He died soon after but no one ever forgot what it really cost him to defend the truth.

We also have to *defend* the truth. And to do that it's not enough to pray. We need to *know* the truth. And for that we need formation, study. Learning is not enough. We need love. But the more we learn about God the more we can love and defend the Truth. Frank Sheed explained it when he wrote: *"I cannot say how often I have been told that some old Irishman saying his rosary is holier than I am, with all my study. I daresay he is. For his own sake, I hope he is. But if the only evidence is that he knows less theology than I, then it is evidence that would convince neither him nor me. It would not convince him, because all those rosary-loving, tabernacle-loving Irishmen I have ever known (and my own ancestry is rich with them) were avid for more knowledge of the faith. It does not convince me, because while it is obvious that an ignorant man can be virtuous, it is equally obvious that ignorance is not a virtue; men have been martyred who could not have stated a doctrine of the Church correctly, and martyrdom is the supreme proof of love. Yet with more knowledge of God they would have loved him more still."* Mary, Seat of Wisdom, help me to grow in the knowledge and defence of the Truth.

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.

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. And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men."

'The Carpenter' gave instructions to the fisherman to go for a catch. Peter could have thought: 1) I'm the expert here, You are a carpenter! 2) we are tired; 3) we tried: we've spent the whole night fishing; 4) the fish may be on the other side of the lake today; 5) fishing during the night is better (fish don't see the nets), fishing during the day is nonsense; 6) the nets are a mess now, we are cleaning them; 7) You, Jesus, have been preaching from my boat for a while... I should've been back home by now! 8) You'll have to explain this to my wife! 9) You also may have to convince my companions; 10) What about trying tomorrow?

We don't know what came to Peter's mind but we do know what he did: he obeyed. The same happened at the wedding feast of Cana when Our Lady said to the servants, "*Do whatever he tells you.*" The servants obeyed and water was transformed into wine. By obeying you will have wine if you need wine, fish if you need fish, even bread for five thousand, if that's what you need.

But in today's Gospel the miracle wasn't only the amount of fish. The miracle was the change in Peter and his companions because from that day on, after having obeyed Him they stayed with Him for life, for death — and now, for eternity! Holy Mary, Virgin Most Obedient, St Peter, St Andrew, St John and St James, pray for me that I may become an obedient — and therefore effective — fisher of men and women.

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 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 Canosian Sister, spending 50 years in His service until she died. St Josephine reminds us how God is always close to those who suffer.

Mary, Mother of God, help me to remind people that only Jesus can settle wounded hearts with His healing 'touch'.

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.

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 Josemaría 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.

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 4am! 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,"* 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.

After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

Jose Luis was twelve years old on December 27 1942. He was spending his Christmas holidays with his priest uncle in a country hamlet in the north of Spain. That night someone came from the neighbouring town to ask the priest to attend a dying old lady. It was dark and snowing. But nothing stopped the priest from taking his coat and setting off to walk the three-mile distance. His young nephew volunteered to accompany him. They had walked two miles when the snowfall became very heavy, covering their way. Their feet were freezing and, in few minutes, they got lost. Suddenly the old priest fell. In pain, he realised he couldn't walk anymore and sent the boy for help. Jose Luis ran and knocked at the first house he found. The word spread through the village. A party of young men came to rescue the priest. They found him unconscious, freezing. They took him to the house of the old lady and there, by the fire, the wounded man recovered a bit of strength. Then he asked to be placed close to the old dying lady to fulfil his duty. In the little room the priest comforted the old lady, heard her confession in whispers and gave her Holy Communion. The priest knew what was coming. He too received Communion. *"I sat next to the fire"*, Jose Luis explained years later, *"hearing my uncle's heavy breath, like a broken machine; somehow I saw him being consumed like a log in the fire...fading away. His smile didn't fade, though. He was happy to die in the line of duty, warming up others like a log in the fireplace...Then it came clear to my mind: why couldn't I be the 'log' that had to replace him in the 'fire'?"* Both died the following day. Moved by the example of his uncle, Jose Luis became a priest years later, to *'keep the fire burning,'* to give light, warmth, comfort, to set others aflame.

Mary, my Mother, I pray for labourers, for generous souls – first of all, myself - that would like to labour for your Son's harvest, to be consumed keeping the fire burning.

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.

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.

"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."

The message is clear: persecution on account of Jesus is a blessing. The history of the Church proves that it has always been a constant challenge. There are martyrs in every country, in every century. From the Apostles' times up until today, the enemy has been and still is furious, attacking the Church of Jesus Christ with all his might. But when Christians die, Christianity revives. And because of that, we feel blessed.

Fr Ragheed Ganni was an Iraqi priest born in 1972 in a town in the Plain of Ninevah. He studied theology in Rome between 1996 and 2003, after which he decided to return to Iraq, despite the war and persecution of Christians there. As soon as he arrived at his new parish in Mosul, he started receiving all sorts of threats. His church was blown up. His house was blown up. He had to say Mass in the basement. But he continued on. Attacks persisted until the day of his death, June 3, 2007, when a group of armed men confronted him after Mass. They asked him why he was still there and why he hadn't closed the church as they had demanded. *"How can I close the house of God?"* he responded, right before they shot and killed him. Ragheed was just 35 years old.

The Church grows with the blood of Martyrs and Martyrs bleed the Blood of Christ they receive in the Eucharist. Fr Ragheed once wrote, *"There are days when I feel frail and full of fear. But when, holding the Eucharist, I say, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,' I feel His strength in me. When I hold the Host in my hands, it is really He who is holding me and all of us, challenging the terrorists and keeping us all united in His boundless love."*

I pray today to you, Mary, Mother of the Persecuted Church, to help all those who suffer persecution for the sake of your Son, that they feel blessed, that they *'rejoice and leap for joy, for behold, their reward is great in heaven.'*

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.

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.'

Some people brought to him a blind man, and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the village; and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" And he looked up and said, "I see men; but they look like trees, walking." Then again he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and saw everything clearly.

This miracle was not instantaneous, like some other miracles. This one was a 'process'. We know that Jesus could have said: 'You are healed' and it would have happened. He could also have touched him and that would have been enough. Instead, Jesus took him *"by the hand, and led him out of the village."* The blind man – and probably those who brought him – didn't expect that. Where was Jesus taking him? What for? Jesus didn't say. But even more importantly: the blind man didn't ask.

The blind man abandoned himself, allowed himself to be led out because he trusted Jesus. Then Jesus spat on his eyes! Yes, you read it correctly: Jesus actually spat in his face! Did the blind man complain? No. Then Jesus laid His hands on him. And something happened: the blind man could see... just a bit. Did the blind man complain? Did he feel disappointed that after the walk, the spit, the laying on of hands... he could only see a bit? No. He didn't understand what Jesus was doing, but he didn't care. Because he trusted. Then Jesus laid hands a second time and the miracle happened. Was all that necessary? If Jesus thought it was, then... Yes, it was.

When we pray for something, keep in mind that God has His own *modus operandi*. God does everything 'His Way.' When I ask for help for a friend or a relative, or to get rid of a particular defect, to achieve a particular virtue, can God grant me that? Yes. Does He want to grant it? Most surely, yes. So why doesn't it happen? Because God will do it 'His Way'. It may take time, it may be a long process, but remember this: **God's Way is 'way better' than 'my way'**. Mary, Virgin Most Prudent, teach me to trust God, to let myself be led by the hand, to be patient, because led by God's Hand, what can I fear, what can I lack?

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."

Jesus' Apostles had seen Him eating, sleeping, laughing, crying, healing, performing miracles... they had heard Him talking to peoples of all walks of life: shepherds, farmers, housewives, fishermen, centurions, tax collectors, outcasts, sick people, lepers and the possessed - and scribes, Pharisees... If Jesus had different sides, they had seen all of them. They knew Him well. What about me? How well do I know Him? How well do I know His life, His words, His deeds, His death? Meditating on the Gospel allows us to know God better and to start a personal relationship with Him.

Ernest Gordon wrote a book entitled 'Through the Valley of the Kwai' in which he describes his experience as a prisoner in Thailand during WWII. He worked on a railway which the Japanese were building. Over 12,000 allied prisoners died of starvation there. Gordon says their worst enemy was not the Japanese but themselves. The law of the jungle took over among them. They stole from each other and informed on each other to win favours from the Japanese. Morale was at rock bottom. So two men whose faith kept them going decided to try to do something. They organized Bible reading and discussion groups. They met at night and at first the numbers were small but after a short while the numbers grew into the hundreds. When reading the Bible they noticed that Jesus faced the same problems as they did; he often had no place to lay His Head, no food, no friends in high places. He too had known weariness from too much toil; the suffering, rejection and disappointments that are part of life. Everything about Jesus began to make sense. The prisoners underwent a change of heart and stopped destroying one another as they had been doing. Reading Jesus' life and death, using it for prayer and discussion, transformed an entire prison camp. Mary, Mother of Christ, do not let one day go by without my reading your Son's life in the Gospel, without meditating on it, without getting to know Him better and learning from Him.

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!

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." For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid.

Overcome with awe, Peter didn't know what to say. Contemplating Our Lord Transfigured, the trio couldn't say anything at all, just enjoy the contemplation: *"it is well that we are here!"* 'How wonderful it is, how well we are here', they thought, 'Let's stay!' It is a normal reaction, isn't it? When you are enjoying something you don't want it to end. How well we understand Peter's not knowing what to say. For times such as those are not for talking, but for contemplating.

Peter proposed making 'three tabernacles'. But we don't need three, do we? One Tabernacle is enough. Our life of prayer, if it is steady and regular, will end up allowing us to contemplate Jesus in the Tabernacle like the saints did. Augustinian Father Llamas was once giving St Josemaría a tour of the Monastery of El Escorial. When they passed in front of the Tabernacle they prayed for a while and stood up to continue with the tour. *"Then we went down,"* Fr Llamas explained. *"But before we left, the Father, who was in front, turned back to ask me for a favour: 'Could you leave me there alone for a little while?' 'For as long as you like,' I replied. 'I'm not in a hurry... St Josemaría went back up and stayed there for some twenty minutes. When he reappeared he said, 'It's so good to be there!' I pretended not to hear, and we continued going round the church. I still haven't explained what I wanted to say, and I don't think I can. The only way to explain it would have been with a camera that could catch the expression on the Father's face when he begged me to grant him that little time alone with Jesus. I could see in his face the indescribable love of that very manly man for Jesus of Nazareth in his Real Presence in the Eucharist."* Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, may I learn to contemplate your Son in the Tabernacle like you do, with the *spirit and fervour of the saints.*

"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... And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them...But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

In other words, *'Don't let evil defeat you; defeat evil with good.'* Joe Louis was a black world heavyweight champion. At age 23, he became the youngest man in history to win the heavyweight title, holding it for a record 12 years and retired in 1948, still undefeated. He invested some of his winnings in a 500-acre farm. One day he went out riding to visit his farm for the first time.

During his ride, he came upon a tiny whitewashed cabin in a secluded corner of his new farm. He got off his horse, walked over to it, and knocked on the door. An elderly white man opened it. *"What do you want?"* the man snarled. Joe tipped his hat and said, *"I was just riding by and..."* *"Well, keep riding!"* said the old man. *"Is there anything wrong?"* asked Joe, looking a bit sad. *"Wrong? Of course something's wrong,"* snapped the old man. *"Some nigger just bought this place."*

Joe looked down at his feet, paused a few seconds, and then said, *"Yes! That's why I'm here. I have a message for you from the new owner. He sent me to tell you that you're welcome to stay here for the rest of your life. He also said that you'll never be bothered, and that there won't be any rent."* Then Joe tipped his hat again, got back on his horse, and rode off, humming, leaving the man standing there speechless.

We love these kind of stories, don't we? But we are happier telling them than experiencing them in our own lives. Often we fail to recognise the many opportunities we have in our daily life to love those who are annoying, impertinent, rude, inconvenient, unpleasant, irritating, selfish, opportunist, insensitive... Take a few moments to identify your daily chances to love your 'enemies'. Mary, Mother of Mercy, help me to learn to be merciful like our Father in Heaven.

A man said to Jesus, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a dumb spirit...I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."... [The father] said, "if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

This happened when Jesus was coming down from Mount Tabor with Peter, James and John after His Transfiguration. We can imagine what happened. This man brought his son to be healed but Jesus was up on the mountain. The Apostles waiting there thought, *'Well, maybe we can try. After all, we have done this before.'* One after another they did what they knew: imposition of hands, commanding the devil to leave, different prayers aloud, but all to no avail. The devil was still tormenting that boy and his father grew discouraged. The Apostles then told the man to have courage - Jesus wouldn't fail.

Maybe the father replied to them, *'Yes, He has done it before with others; but so have you, disciples of His, and today you couldn't! What if this case is different? What if this demon is more powerful? What if Jesus can't do anything either?!'* Then Jesus arrived. The father explained everything to Him and said that sad tag line, *"if you can do anything..."* Jesus didn't like that sentence. *"If you can!"* He repeated; it is not about what I CAN, but about what YOU BELIEVE, because *"all things are possible to him who believes."* Then the man understood: his lack of faith could be responsible for his son not being healed. So he begged for faith: *"help my unbelief!"*

A doctor told a couple that, despite all their efforts, they would not be able to have children. The woman went to Mass and heard the priest proclaiming today's Gospel: *"all things are possible to him who believes."* During Holy Communion she asked for 'the miracle' - and as soon as she arrived home, she took out her knitting needles and started making a baby outfit. The following year the same bewildered doctor was delivering the couple's baby. Holy Mary, Virgin Most Faithful, *increase my faith!*

Jesus was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him.

The reaction of the Apostles is quite surprising: *"they were afraid to ask him."* They knew Jesus well. They had heard Him preaching and teaching - and all of them had spent memorable times in conversation with Him. But now He is talking about suffering and death. They didn't like that. They preferred not to know. Later, on Good Friday, all of them (with the exception of John) ran away from the Cross.

In a primary school, the new RE teacher was asked by the headmistress what book she planned to use. She said that she only wanted to use the Bible. The headmistress pointed out, *"That's fine by me. But make sure that you leave aside **those nasty bits at the end.**"* By 'nasty bits' she was referring to the Passion and Death of Our Lord. For many Christians the Cross is just a *nasty bit* they prefer not to know about. Like an ostrich, some think that if they bury their head in the sand and don't see the Cross... it may disappear.

The Cross is necessary. It was necessary for Jesus to redeem us and it is necessary for us to follow Him: *"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple."* Those who prefer not to hear about sacrifice don't know anything about love, because *love suffers*. A mother suffers for her children. Husbands suffer for their wives. Friends suffer for their friends. God suffers for us. And we... we should be ready to suffer for Him.

St Josemaría wrote, *"Don't drag the Cross... Carry it squarely on your shoulder... Don't bear your Cross with resignation: resignation is not a generous word. Love the Cross. When you really love it, your Cross will be... a Cross, without a Cross"*, a noble burden of love.

Mary, My Mother, with your help may I learn to take up my cross for Jesus with generosity, following Jesus' steps closely - because then (with Him) it won't be just 'my' cross, it will be 'ours', Jesus' and mine.

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us."

The Apostles saw someone preaching in Jesus' Name and, because he hadn't been 'officially appointed', they wanted to stop him. But to become an apostle we don't need a diploma. Jesus sent everyone to "*go into all the world and preach the gospel*" (Mk 16:15). There are many ways to proclaim the Gospel. God doesn't expect the same things of everyone. He has different missions, charisms and talents for different people. We don't need to approve or understand someone else's mission. We just need to fulfil ours.

The same Apostle, St John, became himself one day the object of suspicion. At the end of his Gospel he mentions how Our Lord called Peter to Him. *'Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved [John himself]... When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!"'* In other words: 'I don't have to explain to you the vocation of the others. You mind your own business!'

This is a very interesting lesson of Our Lord because often the sufferings of saints came, not from a lack of understanding from Jesus' enemies, but from His own disciples. Suspicions that arose from the fact that they are not like 'us'. Fr Josef Kantenich was removed from Schoenstatt, the institution he had founded, due to slanders against his person and a misunderstanding about his institution. Previously he had spent 4 years in Dachau during WW2. But when he recalled those times, he confessed that the years he was removed from Schoenstatt were more painful than his experience in the concentration camp. In 1965 (after 15 years), everything was proved to be false and he could return to his rightful place. His 'detractors' were 'good Christians' who had their own opinion about his apostolate. Let us ask Our Lady for her to reassure those who suffer this kind of 'internal misunderstanding'.

"For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward. 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 ... For every one will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

It is a great consolation, Lord, that *everything* we do for You – no matter how little – will be rewarded. Something as small as a cup of water, My Jesus, will never be forgotten by You.

One cold winter's day, when St Martin was a young soldier, he met a shivering beggar in rags. As he had nothing to give him he took his sword and divided his cape in two, giving half to the beggar. That night in a dream he saw Jesus covered with half of his cape... It is not a valid excuse to say that we can only give a little. As St Teresa of Calcutta said, *"If you can't feed a hundred... then feed just one."*

In actual fact, what we can do for the others is usually very little. The great deeds of the saints were, very often, a large number of little deeds. Venerable Pope John Paul I taught: *"I have never had an opportunity to throw myself into the waters of a rushing stream to save someone whose life was in danger; very often I have been asked to lend something, to write letters, to give simple little directions. I have never run into a mad dog in the street; on the other hand, I have encountered any number of tiresome flies and mosquitoes; I have never had persecutors who beat me, but many people disturb me by speaking loudly in the street, by turning up the volume of their TV, or even by making certain noises while eating soup. To help others as best you can, to avoid losing your temper, to be understanding, to keep calm and smiling on these occasions (as much as possible!) is loving your neighbour, without fancy talk, but in a practical way."* And all that will never be forgotten by Our Lord who will reward us as if we did it to Him. That's the salt of Christians: when we can help, we do help. Even if it is a little thing. Because there is nothing little for God. Our Lady, how many times you helped your friends and neighbours! Mother, teach me to serve!

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:

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.

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.

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.

FEBRUARY

«“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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»»» With the Gospel

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