

SOMETHING GREAT THAT IS LOVE (XI): The Fruit of Fidelity

The Book of Psalms begins with a hymn of praise for the fruitful life of the person who strives to be faithful to God and his law, and who resists the pressure of the ungodly: *He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers* (cf. *Ps* 1:1-3). It is a teaching found frequently in Sacred Scripture: *A faithful man will abound with blessings* (*Prov* 28:20); *one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward* (*Prov* 11:18). All of God's works are fruitful, as are the lives of those who respond to his call. Our Lord told the Apostles at the Last Supper: *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide* (*Jn* 15:16). The only thing He asks of us is that we remain united to Him like branches to the vine, since *he who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit* (*Jn* 15:5).

Down through the centuries, the saints have had abundant experience of God's generosity. Saint Teresa, for example, wrote: "His Majesty is not wont to offer us too little payment for His lodging if we treat Him well."¹ He has promised those who are faithful to Him that He will receive them in his Kingdom with warm praise: *Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master* (*Mt* 25:21). But God doesn't wait until Heaven to reward his children; already in this life He lets them share in his divine joy through many blessings. He fills their life with fruits of holiness and virtue, and draws out the best from each person's talents. He helps us not to become discouraged by our own weakness and to trust ever more fully in his strength. Moreover, through his faithful children God also blesses those around them. *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit* (*Jn* 15:8).

We are going to consider here some of the fruit produced by our fidelity, both in our own life and in that of others. Hopefully these fruits, and many others that only God knows, will spur us to never stop thanking God for his care and closeness. And thus we will learn to appreciate each day more his Love.

A Heaven within us

A few days before leaving for Heaven, Saint Josemaria told a group of his children: "God has wished to deposit a very rich treasure in us ... God Our Lord, with all his greatness, dwells within us. Heaven dwells habitually in our hearts."² Our Lord promised the Apostles: *If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him* (*Jn* 14:23). This is the principal gift God offers us: His friendship and presence in us.

¹ Saint Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, ch. 34.

² Cf. Salvador Bernal, *A Profile of Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer, Founder of Opus Dei*, Scepter, p. 399.

Each day we can contemplate anew in our prayer the truth of God’s presence in us, and keep it in our memory. Filled with astonishment and gratitude, we will strive to respond as good children to God’s immense affection for us. For our Lord “does not come down from Heaven each day in order to remain in a golden ciborium, but to find another Heaven in which He takes such delight—the Heaven of our soul, created in his image and the living temple of the adorable Trinity.”³ This divine gift alone should make us feel infinitely rewarded, and certain of the joy we give to God by being faithful to Him.

When physical or moral tiredness comes, when setbacks and difficulties weigh on us, we need to remind ourselves once again that “if God is dwelling in our soul, everything else, no matter how important it may seem, is accidental and transitory, whereas we, in God, stand permanent and firm.”⁴ The certainty that God is with me, is in me, and that I am in Him (cf. *Jn* 6:56), is the source of an interior security and hope that has no human explanation. This conviction leads us to be ever more simple—like children—and gives us a broad and trust-filled outlook, a peaceful and joyful heart. Joy and peace well up from the depths of our soul, as the natural fruit of faithfulness and self-giving. This peace and joy are so important and so effective for evangelization that Saint Josemaria beseeched God for this gift each day at Mass, for him and for all his daughters and sons.⁵

We have a Heaven within us in order to bring it everywhere: to our home, our workplace, our moments of rest, time spent with our friends... “In our day and age, when a lack of peace is seen so frequently in social life, in the workplace, in family life, it is more necessary than ever that we Christians be, as Saint Josemaria said, ‘sowers of peace and joy.’”⁶ We know by experience that this peace and joy don’t belong to us. Hence we strive to be aware of God’s presence in our hearts, so that He may fill us with his gifts and spread them to those around us. This humble sowing is always effective, and can reach far beyond our immediate environment: “Peace in the world perhaps depends more on our personal daily and persevering efforts to smile, to forgive and not take ourselves too seriously, than on the great negotiations carried out between countries, however important these may be.”⁷

A firm and merciful heart

When we allow God’s presence to take root and bear fruit in us (which in a certain sense is what fidelity is), we progressively acquire an “inner firmness” that enables us to be patient and gentle when faced with setbacks, unexpected events, situations that bother us, and our own and others’ limitations. Saint John Vianney said that “our faults are like grains of sand next to the

³ Saint Therese of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, ch. 5.

⁴ Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 93.

⁵ Cf. Javier Echevarría, *Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Madrid, Rialp 2000, p. 229.

⁶ Fernando Ocariz, *Homily*, 12 May 2017.

⁷ *Ibid.*

great mountain of God’s mercies.”⁸ This conviction helps us to react as God reacts to our failings—with gentleness and mercy—and not to become upset when we encounter obstacles to our personal plans and preferences. We discover, as Saint Josemaria said, that all the events in our day are in some way “vehicles of God’s will and should be received with respect and love, with joy and peace.”⁹ Thus, little by little, we find it easier to pray, to forgive and find excuses for others, as our Lord did, and we quickly recover our peace, if we should lose it.

At times this effort to foster gentleness and mercy in our heart might seem like cowardice to us when faced with behavior that seems to call for condemnation, or with the malice of those trying to do harm. We should recall then how Jesus rebuked his disciples when they suggested calling down from heaven punishment on the Samaritans who refused to receive Him (cf. *Lk* 9:55). “The Christian’s program—the program of the Good Samaritan, the program of Jesus—is ‘a heart which sees.’ This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.”¹⁰ Our patient mercy, which does not become upset or complain when faced with setbacks, thus becomes balsam with which God heals the contrite of heart, binds up their wounds (cf. *Ps* 147:3), and makes the path of conversion easier and more attractive for them.

An effectiveness we can’t even imagine

Building up and making known a strong self-image and personal profile is often indispensable today in order to make an “impact” in the social media and the working world. Nevertheless, if we lose sight of the reality that we live in God, that He “is continually by our side,”¹¹ this concern can become a subtle obsession to be accepted, to be recognized, “followed” and even admired. We could then experience the constant need to verify the value and importance of everything we do or say.

This eagerness to be recognized by others and to receive tangible verification of our own worth reflects, although in a misguided way, a deep truth. For each of us is of great value—so much so that God has wanted to give his life for each one of us. But we can easily fall into demanding, in quite subtle ways, the love and recognition that we can only receive as a gift. Our Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount: *Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven (Mt 6:1)*. And even more radically: *do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (Mt 6:3)*.

The risk of demanding Love instead of receiving it will be less if we foster the conviction that God contemplates even the smallest events in our lives with love—because love is in the details. “If you wish to have spectators for your deeds, here you have them: the angels and archangels, and even the God of the Universe.”¹² We then experiences the self-esteem that comes

⁸ In G. Bagnard, “El Cura de Ars, apóstol de la misericordia,” *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia* 19 (2010) p. 246.

⁹ Saint Josemaria, *Instruction, May 1935 — 14 September 1950*, no. 48.

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Enc. *Deus Caritas est* (25 December 2005), no. 31.

¹¹ Saint Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 267.

¹² Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Saint Mathew*, 19.2.

from knowing we are always accompanied, and we don't need external proofs in order to trust in the effectiveness of our prayer and life; this is true both when we have attained a certain public fame and when our life passes unnoticed by almost everyone. God's loving look is enough for us, and these words of Jesus that we take personally to heart: *your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Mt 6:3)*.

We can learn a lot in this regard from the hidden years Jesus spent in Nazareth. There He spent the greater part of his life on earth. Under the loving eyes of his Father in Heaven, of our Lady and Saint Joseph, the Son of God was already carrying out in silence, with an infinite effectiveness, the Redemption of mankind. Few people knew Him, but there, in the humble workshop of a craftsman, God was changing forever the history of all men and women. Our life too can share in the abundant fruit produced by Jesus' life, if we show Him to others through our own life, if we let Him love with our own heart.

Hidden in each Tabernacle, and in the depths of our heart, God continues changing the world. Therefore our life of self-giving, in union with God and our fellow men and women, takes on through the Communion of Saints an effectiveness we can't measure or even imagine. "You don't know whether you are making progress, nor how much. But what use is such a reckoning to you? What is important is that you should persevere, that your heart should be on fire, that you should see more light and wider horizons; that you should work hard for our intentions, that you should feel them as your own—even though you don't know what they are—and that you should pray for all of them."¹³

God is the same as always

Saint Paul encouraged the first Christians to be faithful, to not be afraid to go against the current, and to work with their eyes set on our Lord: *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58)*. Saint Josemaria often echoed this exhortation of the Apostle: "If you are faithful you will be able to boast of victory, and in your life you will not experience defeat. If we work with an upright intention and the desire to fulfil God's Will, there is no such thing as failure. With success or without it, we have still triumphed because we have worked for Love."¹⁴

On any vocational path it can happen that, after a period of joyful self-giving, we may feel the temptation to become discouraged. We may think that we haven't been generous enough, or that our faithfulness has yielded scant fruit and little apostolic success. It is good then to recall God's assuring words: *My elect shall not labor in vain (Is 65:23)*. As Saint Josemaria said: "To be a saint necessarily entails being effective, even though the saint may not see or be aware of

¹³ Saint Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 605.

¹⁴ Saint Josemaria, *Alone with God*, no. 314.

it.”¹⁵ God sometimes allows his faithful ones to undergo trials and hardships in their work, in order to make their soul more beautiful and their heart more tender. When, despite our eagerness to please God, we become discouraged or tired, let us continue working with a “sense of mystery”—realizing that our effectiveness “is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable. We can know quite well that our lives will be fruitful, without claiming to know how, or where, or when. No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted ... Let us keep going forward; let us give Him everything, allowing Him to make our efforts bear fruit in his good time.”¹⁶

Our Lord asks us to work with abandonment and trust in his strength and not in our own, in his vision of the world and not in our limited perception. “As soon as you truly abandon yourself in the Lord, you will know how to be content with whatever happens. You will not lose your peace if your undertakings do not turn out the way you hoped, even if you have put everything into them, and used all the means necessary. For they will have ‘turned out’ the way God wants them to.”¹⁷ The awareness that God can do all things and that He sees and stores up all the good that we do, however small and hidden it may seem, will help us “to be sure and optimistic in the difficult moments that may arise in the history of the world or in our personal life. God is the same as always: all-powerful, all-wise, and merciful. And at every moment He is able to draw good out of evil and great victories out of defeats, for those who trust in Him.”¹⁸

Relying on God’s strength, we will live in the middle of the world as his children, and become sowers of peace and joy for everyone at our side. This is the patient work that God carries out personally in our hearts. Let us allow Him to illumine all our thoughts and inspire all our actions. Like our Lady, who rejoiced to see the great works God was carrying out in her life. May we too say with Mary each day: *Fiat! Let it be done to me according to your word (Lk 1:38)*.

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¹⁵ *The Forge*, no. 920.

¹⁶ Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 279.

¹⁷ Saint Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 860.

¹⁸ Don Javier, *Pastoral Letter*, 4 November 2015.