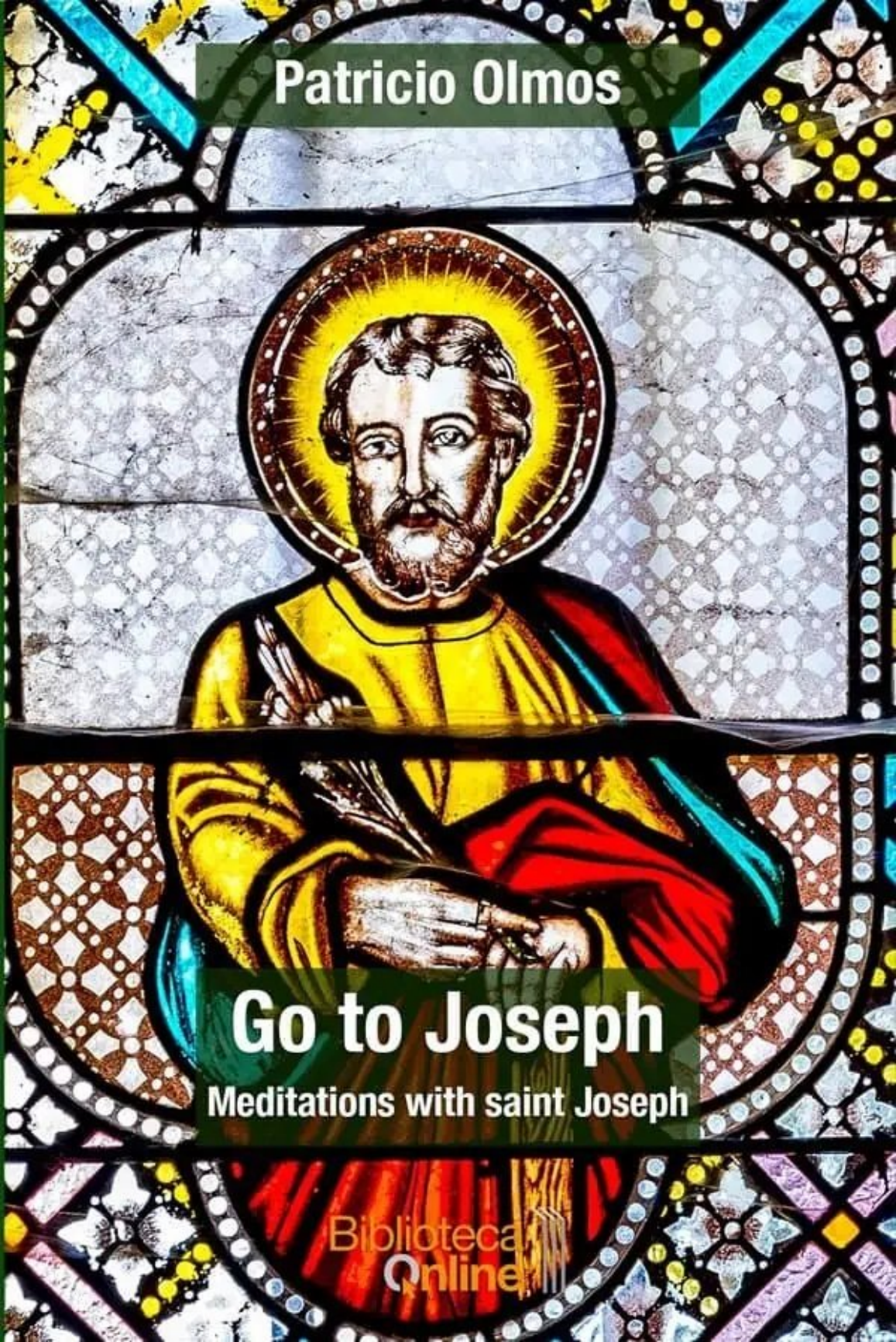


A detailed stained glass window depicting Saint Joseph. He is shown from the chest up, with a beard and long hair, wearing a yellow tunic and a red cloak. He holds a bundle of arrows in his left hand. A bright yellow halo surrounds his head. The background features a diamond-shaped mosaic pattern. The entire scene is framed by a decorative border with blue, yellow, and white elements.

Patricio Olmos

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Meditations with saint Joseph

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Go to Joseph

Meditations with Saint Joseph

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To Saint Josemaria, thanks to whom I started the wonderful habit of doing days of spiritual retreat every year, and thanks to whom I learned a little of his great devotion to Saint Joseph.

INTRODUCTION

Look, I make all things new.
Apocalypse 21:5

Why meditate? Why go on retreat? Why do it with Saint Joseph? For over forty years I have been doing a few days of spiritual retreat every year. At first, it was two or three days, then almost a week. I must confess that I love work, I am interested in what happens in the world and enjoy being with people. And precisely because of this, I feel the need from time to time to call a halt, to get away from the daily routine, step back, to correct the course of my life and regain the enthusiasm that fatigue or poorly faced routines have tended to wear me out. I have always looked forward to those moments of peace and have savored them a lot.

In my years of priestly work, I have preached dozens of retreats of different durations, and I have had the opportunity to talk with those who do it: learning from these people, and intuiting what usually helps – and what does not – in preaching, and in the advices I give in spiritual accompaniment.

There are some basic issues that should always be considered on an extended retreat. But there is the risk of going back on the same issues and approach them without further reflection, as one who repeats without thinking or listens without pondering over them. Therefore, to help me and help my listeners, each year I choose in each retreat a background theme: the Virgin Mary, Saint Peter, Saint Paul, the Transfiguration, the Adoration of the Magi, etc. because, as Saint Paul teaches: in Him, “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden” (Col 2:3) and everything that can satisfy our restless hearts. In other words, the theme of each year is a backdrop that allows us to meet Jesus Christ again.

On this occasion, moved by the invitation of Pope Francis to live a year dedicated to Saint Joseph¹, the proposal is to use the Holy Patriarch as an aid. He is a very holy man, who, because of his closeness to the Blessed Mary and her son Jesus Christ, has a great power of intercession. With his figure "so close to our human condition", he is very near to us, ordinary people, who do not stand out in any way, without this fact making our lives lack in importance, like his didn't before God or others.

Anything that can be said to show the exceptional qualities of Saint Joseph is bound to fall short, and on this point I cannot claim any expertise. And so I hope I will be allowed to refer to two excellent works that have served as an inspiration to write these pages: a book by Fr. F. Suarez and a homily by Saint Josemaria Escriva, "At Joseph's workshop"²: "For a Christian..., the fact that God chose Joseph to make him the husband of the Virgin Mary and legal father of Jesus is reason enough to think that, after all, he was not such an ordinary and common man when it was God himself who chose him - indeed had created him - to carry out one of the most difficult and most responsible missions that was ever entrusted to any man"³. That is the reason why Pope Francis has said that "my predecessors have deepened the message contained in the few data transmitted by the Gospels to highlight his central role in the history of salvation"⁴.

With this booklet I would like to transmit the "enthusiasm" I have for retreats and offer some considerations to make them useful, and I hope that at the same time it will serve to increase the readers' devotion to Saint Joseph. Although reference is made here to all the Gospel passages mentioned, it is by no means an attempt to make a biography or history of Mary's husband. These are considerations addressed to those who do a few days of retreat, either based mainly on

1 Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*, 12-VIII-20.

2 Enclosed in *Christ is passing by*, 39-56; later mentioned as *Joseph's workshop*.

3 F. Suarez, *Joseph, Mary's husband*. Patmos 2006, p. 18-19.

4 *Patris Corde*, Introduction.

this book or as an addition to other reflections they may have had. They are also designed for those who want to pray or do some spiritual reading about the different aspects of the "man who goes unnoticed, the man of the daily, discreet and hidden presence"⁵.

I don't necessarily offer new topics; the novelty will be in what each one considers again in the presence of God, even if they already know the life of Joseph or have been on retreats for decades. If there is a new encounter with our Lord, He will shed hope on whoever is looking for him and will strengthen him in his struggle, giving him the possibility of a renewal.

At the beginning of these reflections, I invite you to join the request with which Pope Francis ends his letter on the Holy Patriarch, "There is nothing left but to implore Saint Joseph for the grace of graces: our conversion"

5 Id.

CHAPTER 1

SAINT JOSEPH'S SILENCE

But Jesus remained silent.

Matthew 26:53

INNER RECOLLECTION

The first thing that draws our attention to Joseph is his discreet and attractive silence. No word of his is known. He was the main character and witness of magnificent events, and one would expect some comment or remarks. The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles collect words from different characters, some made into long speeches, others into short dialogues or phrases. Peter, John, James, Thomas, Judas, Mary Magdalene, Stephen, Paul speak there... even Pilate and Herod have things to say. But not Joseph. Although ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who inspires the evangelists, everything seems to indicate that it is Joseph's proper style.

If his words are unknown, it is not because he had nothing to say, in the sense that he could not think of anything or that he was a laconic person. It might rather be that there was nothing to add to what had already been said. He knew how to be in his place. He was not chosen to witness by speaking, but to watch over Jesus and Mary, and to protect them. His silence is significant and what do we learn from it? What does he teach us who live immersed in so much chatter, and not only on the outside, but also interiorly?

He teaches us not to talk too much and to have that command of the language about which Saint James preaches us in his epistle (cf. 3:1-12). Following Joseph's style, we will not have to give an account to God for foolish or vain words (also those uttered on social networks). He had no need to prove anything to anyone, as can happen to whoever wants

to justify himself, or to appear more intelligent, or more knowledgeable. He was at peace with God, he selflessly and diligently fulfilled his mission and he enjoyed it without feeling the need to making himself felt.

What God asked of him, what happened in his life, could have justified on his part an excuse, a complaint or requested an explanation. Nothing of that happened. The enigmas that God created for him by not immediately revealing the cause of Mary's pregnancy or by changing plans to make him flee with his family to Egypt, did not cause any complaint on his part. And not because he was insensitive but rather, thanks to his interior richness of great faith and humbleness, he learned to trust God, who would have his reasons and would communicate them to him when necessary, as in fact happened.

"The most silent person in the Gospel is Saint Joseph, from whom the New Testament does not know a single word. Saint Basil considers silence a condition for our encounter with God"⁶.

This serves to underline one of the first requirements that are necessary in order to pray, and more so to make profitably a retreat: silence, with the subsequent recollection.

GOD SPEAKS QUIETLY

Important things for the soul usually happen during times of reflection and silence. It is the experience we find in the Bible. Thus, Moses will know the name of God and receive his mission to free the Jewish people from Egyptian oppression while he was in the desert of Midian (cf. Ex 3:14). Elijah will recognize the Lord's passage in "the whisper of a gentle breeze", and not in other thunderous phenomena: a hurricane, an earthquake and a fire (cf. 1 R 19:12). John the Baptist will prepare for his significant mission to be the

⁶ R. Sarah, *La fuerza del silencio. Frente ala dictadura del ruido*, Palabra 2017, p. 162.

forerunner of Jesus living in the solitude of the Judean desert. Jesus himself, before the start of his public ministry, dedicates forty days to fasting and silence, in an atmosphere of prayer. And of the great apostle Paul we are told that after his baptism he retired to Arabia (Gal 1:17), from where he came out strengthened for his mission

It is the experience of thousands of Christians throughout the centuries. There were many who were converted or approached God from this practice. For example, Saint Josemaria was doing his spiritual exercises in October 1928 when one morning he "saw" Opus Dei. They were days of silence, in which he was reviewing notes made during previous moments of prayers and he realized what God was asking of him. Sometimes a good part of a successful retreat will be to re-read outstanding notes or resolutions from other retreats.

Doing a retreat is an immense grace. It is a time to be close to God and receive the gifts that He always wants to bestow on us. For this reason, a first invocation should be: "Thank you, my God, because you give me this extended time of prayer"; "I thank you for having brought me here"; "Help me and help us to take advantage of this opportunity"; "Make me tune in with you soon"; "Free me of the worries I have at this moment since it does not make sense that I continue to cling to them: I leave them in the hands of your fatherly providence".

Leaving work or family to take time to pray, could be seen as a disorder. In a letter to a mother of a family, Saint Jerome advised her to withdraw a little from the "family din" in order to pray, read the Bible and meditate", and he ended: "I am not telling you this because I'm trying to make you draw back from your people, what I am rather trying to do is for you to learn and meditate on how you should behave with your people"⁷. Praying is not an act of selfishness, it is really opening up to God, who shows us how to open up to others.

⁷ Epistle, 148.

"Solitude is a beautiful thing when you are at peace with yourself and have a definite work to do" (Goethe). And what is a "definite work" these days? In part, being open to what God inspires us: letting ourselves be surprised by the Holy Spirit, who blows where He wishes (cf Jn 3:8). It is not good having everything planned in advance (the themes, the books and, almost, even the resolutions) and leaving no space for divine inspirations... Wishing to know clearly God's plans for us and the means that he grants us to live them is a "beautiful thing".

TO KNOW MYSELF AND TO KNOW GOD

Apart from the fact of being open to what God wants to show us, we find in an expression of Saint Augustine what should always be present in our prayer, and particularly in a spiritual exercise such as a retreat. "Noverim me, noverim te"⁸. May I know myself and may I know you. The task is to know ourselves and to know God. The task itself is exciting: that we may be able to accomplish it is a different matter

Self-knowledge is not an easy task. It is difficult for us to be objective being the subject of our own life. But whoever tries to beseech divine help will succeed. He will see its lights and its shadows. He will be filled with joy for so many blessings received throughout his life. He will discover the gifted talents and the challenging task involved in developing them and bringing them to their prime. He will also recognize his mistakes and sins, and what remains to be done. And since the fundamental knowledge about who we are is knowing that we are children of God, this certainty will give us a way of facing life as one who knows he is backed by the love of his Father, who shows his infinite love, among other things, understanding our weakness and giving us the strength of his grace. Thus, it is possible to achieve being at

8 "Knowing my and knowing You. That's my prayer", *Soliloquies* 2.1, 1.

peace with oneself, which is what Goethe spoke of. To go deeply into this is a beautiful task.

And what about the attempt to get to know God better? God is the greatest of all and holds in Himself an infinite perfection: it is worthwhile getting to know Him! To get close to Him is to get closer to beauty, goodness, truth, joy and to all his perfections. It is a fact that in a period of retreat the preacher will never be perfect, or that the books that are used for meditation will have dense or boring parts, or that effort of paying attention for a long time to various subjects can be tiring. But it is also true that the experience of anyone who has tried these tasks is mostly joyous. How can we not be happy to discover, experience or remember that "God is love" (1 Jn 4: 8)? How is it not going to bring peace to our consciences to contemplate the divine mercy? And so we could continue in relation to so many truths that are meditated on during a retreat.

Recollection is easier on retreat days, although it should not be taken for granted. From time to time, I have met someone who arrives full of good intentions, but does not know how to "cut off" from his work - because - he considers himself indispensable, or because he does not know how to reasonably defend his time from unnecessary demands, and so, when he realizes it, those days are over. It can also happen that someone does not know how to do without his phone with everything it contains. To "connect" with God, you have to know how to "disconnect" from everything else.

Perhaps it can help many people, to favour concentration, to take notes during meditations or classes, at least at the beginning. They will rarely hear brilliant ideas, though sometimes God can give us some. It happens that when we write, our attention span increases a lot. I remember a man who told me with a surprised look: "Taking notes changed my way of participating in retreats".

THE BLESSED LONELINESS IN MIDST OF THE NOISE

From Joseph's silences we can also aspire to achieve better recollection during the year. Life is hectic at times and noisy, and there are situations or professions that coexist with the hassle without there being anything wrong in itself: a large family with small children, a school, driving vehicles in densely populated areas, work in a factory, etc. This is reason enough to seek "daily a few minutes of that blessed solitude that is so necessary to keep the interior life in motion"⁹: to seek the grace of God, to become aware that He is with us, to rectify the intention or to tell him that we love Him. Short whiles dedicated exclusively to dealing with our Lord.

It pays to fight and avoid distraction. Someone spoke of "mental zapping": constantly changing the focus of attention and not having it focused on anything in particular. In this way a poor human relationship does not take long to arrive (people gathered together but each one in his own world, be it a cellphone, a tablet, etc). As a result, the quality of intellectual work -study, reading- is poor. In a book by Cardinal Sarah he gives the example of someone walking through a noisy city with a radio on in his pocket, and not realizing that it was switched on. But if he entered a quiet place, he would notice it right away and try to turn it off. And, he adds "unfortunately, there is no button that lowers the chatter of our imagination"¹⁰. I think there are many of us who have seen how the proportion of dispersed people, absent from their environment, has grown at the rate of technology and who, because of this attitude, usually have a superficial relationship with God and with others. Perhaps this is our case.

How good it is to be able to speak, to know how to communicate. And how good it is also to know when to keep

9 Saint Josemaria. *The way*, 304. As for now the following books by this author will only be mentioned by its name: *Furrow*, *Forge*, *The way*, *Christ is passing by*, and *Friends of God*.

10 Cf. *La fuerza del silencio. Frente a la dictadura del ruido*, Palabra 2017, p. 231.

quiet, for example, so as not to speak all the time about one self. At one point in the book "Furrow", among the obvious faults of humility the author points out the following: "to use in the conversation words of self-praise or that imply your honesty, your wit or skill, your professional prestige..."¹¹. This attitude can be a lack of interest in others and, because of how annoying it can be, it is a lack of charity, but also of little benefit to us: whoever does not keep quiet, does not listen, and misses the opportunity of enriching himself with other people's conversation.

With his style, Joseph shows himself to us as a man focused on what is important: Mary and Jesus. Everything else is secondary. With his contemplative attitude, he was able to recognize, to listen to the angel of the Lord, who addressed him four times while he slept. God often speaks in a low voice: may our recollection lead us to hear what God tells us in a subtle but unequivocal manner.

11 N. 263.

CHAPTER 2

PURITY OF HEART

Mary's husband.
Matthew 1:36

THE MOST CHASTE HUSBAND

When they introduce the Holy Patriarch in their respective Gospels, both Matthew and Luke do so in relation to Joseph's marriage to Mary: "Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of her was born Jesus who is called Christ" (Mt 1:16); the angel Gabriel was sent to "a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary" (Lk 1:26-27).

Mary and Joseph were true husband and wife, even though they never had marital intimacy. "According to the practice of the Hebrew people, the marriage was carried out in two stages: first the legal marriage (a true marriage) was celebrated and, only after a certain period, the husband brought the wife into his house. Before living with Mary, therefore, Joseph was her husband, but Mary kept in her intimacy the desire to give herself exclusively to God"¹².

Everything seems to indicate that Mary's purpose to remain a virgin was known and accepted by her husband. Their love for each other was sublimated by the love of God and moved by a supernatural motion they had resolved to marry, renouncing the right to their bodies.

The adjective "most chaste" has often been mentioned in spiritual literature alongside the noun "husband". On this point, Pope Francis comments: "It does not merely refer to

¹² John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, 18.

a virtuous disposition, but the synthesis of an attitude that expresses the opposite of possessing. Being chaste is being free from the desire to possess in all spheres of life. Only when a love is chaste, it is true love”¹³. Pope Francis also adds: “He never became the center. He knew how to be off-center in order to have Mary and Jesus at the center of his life”. Joseph had a great capacity to love, to sacrifice himself for those he loved and to serve them properly. He mainly served God made man – Jesus – and Mary most holy, but there is no doubt that because of his capacity for love with a clean heart he also served all the inhabitants of Nazareth.

It is appropriate to believe Joseph as a young person, of a similar age as Mary. “To live the virtue of chastity, one must not wait to be old or to lack vigor. Purity is born of love, and the robustness and joy of youth are no obstacles to a clean love. The heart and body of Saint Joseph was young when he married Mary, when he learned of the mystery of her divine Maternity, when he lived with her respecting the integrity that God wanted to bequeath to the world, as one more sign of his arrival among creatures. Whoever does not understand such a love, knows very little of what true love is, and he is completely unaware of the Christian meaning of chastity”¹⁴. Chastity is the virtue that helps to love more and better, therefore it is logical to always see it as something positive and never as a set of useless prohibitions or limitations.

FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD

Although chastity is not the main virtue, it is essential in order to achieve dialogue with God. The clean love of Saint Joseph can help us seek the purification of our soul to make a good retreat, and in a normal way to listen and see God: “Happy the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). It is necessary to keep the senses to be able to relate to God.

13 *Patris Corde*, 7.

14 *In Joseph's workshop*.

For example, it has always been necessary to take care of your eyesight, but it would seem that at times when so many things are just a “click” away on the phone or computer, or the visual offer has been increased through dozens of television channels and applications Netflix type, you have to create good habits and not rest on one’s laurels because the consequences can be devastating.

We want to see God in a normal way to recognize him in our daily lives. Like Joseph who was regularly contemplating Mary and Jesus, those two great wonders that had been entrusted to him. It is true that from time to time he saw surprising things, such as when the shepherds appeared next to the manger moved by the indication of an angel, or when he saw and heard the reaction of the old Simeon: “His father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him” (Lk 2:33). But most of the time Joseph did not “see” anything special: he was close to Jesus, first a child and then a young man, always growing, behaving like any other. Despite not perceiving special things, through the purity of his heart he was able to realize the greatness of the mystery of a hidden God, a patient God and a humble God.

When commenting on how the apostle John recognized Jesus during the miraculous fishing that he performed after his Resurrection (cf. Jn 21:1-13). Saint Josemaria reflects: “Then the disciple whom Jesus loved turns to Peter: It is the Lord. Love, love can see from afar. Love is the first to grasp these refinements. The adolescent Apostle, with the strong affection he feels towards Jesus, because he loved Christ with all the purity and all the tenderness of a heart that has never been corrupted, exclaimed: It is the Lord”¹⁵.

Let us ask God to grant us a pure heart, and let us work to shape it like this, with the action of grace, present in the Eucharist, the Confession and the times of prayer. How good it is to be able to recognize the Lord in everyday life. He awaits us in our daily existence, to be more positive or smiling. At

15 *God’s friends*, 266.

work, to provide effective service to those with whom we interact. In the unexpected contradiction, so that we can offer a small sacrifice that adds merit to the community of saints.

A THANKFUL LIFE

Joseph was always very appreciative of the gift God gave him of being the husband of Mary and Jesus' guardian. He thus perceived the absolute love and trust God had for him. This love was being progressively increasing during their life together. Surely, in his own way, he would say what Elizabeth said in the presence of Mary in her home: "who am I for the Lord to give me such a gift of living continuously next to the mother of my Lord, next to this wonderful woman. Who am I to be able to offer my services to the Savior who condescended to live in my house". Somehow in a silent manner, he also recited his Magnificat of thanks when considering the great benefits received.

How good it is to recognize the gifts of God: "It is right to give him thanks", as it is said in the Preface of Mass. How much good it does to the soul. It helps to properly focus the vision of our life, often obscured by the daily hustle. When we give thanks for the blessings received, we naturally find a remedy against envy and lack of realism. "How many people would like to be in our place": It is not a phrase of easy consolation, it is a truth that asserts itself when one takes the trouble of opening up to the recognition of how much has been given to us.

A psychologist relates that one day a depressed man came to her consulting room. He was blind and in his forties. After listening to him she gave him the task of writing down the good things that were happening to him. To her surprise, on the next session he brought four notebooks full of positive remarks. And there he mentioned simple things, like the temperature of the shower in the morning, the wonder of using a dry towel, getting into bed with clean sheets, going to bed with clean pajamas, the smell of toast, the sun shining

on his face when taking a walk, the smell of jasmine when strolling along, the sparkles of the soda reaching his nose, the courtesy of a cashier in the supermarket, and a very long etcetera. With this thoughtful task he considered himself cured and never felt depressed again¹⁶.

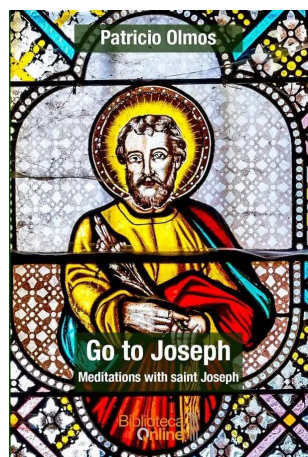
If we seek to have a clean heart, which among other things implies having a grateful heart, we should make a list of the good things that happen to us in our own life. And surely, along with small things like those the blind man in the anecdote valued, we will find numerous others of great significance: family, friends, health in so many good aspects, heritage, faith, training, opportunities in life, and also a long etcetera. It is a good way to start a retreat.

The apostle John, who was so close to Jesus and who calls himself in his Gospel as the "disciple that Jesus loved" could confirm years after the departure of Our Lord: "we have known and believe in the love that God has for us." (Jn 1:4-16). Not only did he believe in the love of God but he knew it, he experienced it. He was aware of how much Jesus had done for him: he chose him to be with him and to send him to preach, he gave him the power to perform miracles, he called him his friend. He took care of his rest by taking him out one day for a walk. But John, above all, knew the love of Jesus when he saw how He put into practice what He preached, "no one has greater love than the one who gives his life for his friends" (1 Jn 15:13). The same happened to Saint Paul, who was deeply moved by this personal love of Jesus: "And the life that I now live in this body I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me" (Gal 2:20). We are also invited to a similar experience. It is not enough that we are told that God loves people, or that he especially loved this or that saint, we need to go through the personal experience and savor his love. Gratitude is an attitude of the heart that helps to experience the savoring of love that God has for us. We can become aware of it being alone with him.

16 In: <https://bit.ly/2NwwiFN>

Blessed Alvaro del Portillo said a simple prayer of great wisdom. He addressed Our Lord saying: "Thank you, pardon me, and help me more". He repeated it especially on his personal anniversaries. It is a good way to start a dialogue with God, and a very appropriate way to end the day. For example, while one falls asleep making a brief recount of the day, the "Thank you!" arises naturally. How many good things happened! We should also be able to give thanks for those events that have upset us, because in some way they have been for our good. "Pardon me!". There will be things that, far from filling us with pride, lead us to repentance and, if we share them with God, they will not plunge us into discouragement because we will also feel the kindness of a God who forgives. And "Help me more!". Life goes on, the challenges are in force and we seek your strength to restart the fight. What a good aspiration to repeat in retreats.

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