

April

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Easter Monday
Monday 1st April
Mt 28:8-15

So the women departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Hail!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

They say that the sentence: "Do not be afraid!" can be found in the Bible more than 300 times. Good teachers always repeat the message that they want to get across. And You, Lord, said it many times to Your disciples. So many times that they never forgot the tone of Your voice saying, "Do not be afraid!"

But what could Mary Magdalene be afraid of now?! Probably she had one single fear: the fear of losing Jesus again. Have you ever found a little child in a crowd, crying because he or she couldn't find Mum? You saw the mother looking for the child nearby and said to the child, "Look, there she is!" and the tearful child rushed off towards her. Children of God should never be afraid of anything. The disciples were afraid because they had lost Jesus on Good Friday. Their hopes were over, their discouragement stopped them moving forward; fear paralyses. It happens to Christians when, like the little child, they don't feel Jesus' close presence, when they move away from Him by sinning.

My God, may I never be afraid of anything except losing You through sin. And if that happens again - for I know very well how weak I am - I beg You to come and search me out as You did these holy women and Your frightened Apostles. O my Jesus, if ever You see me in distress or on the verge of temptation, come and let me hear Your voice again: "Do not be afraid."

"I plead with you - never, ever give up on hope, never doubt, never tire, and never become discouraged. Do not be afraid... Do not be afraid to become the saints of the new millennium!" (St John Paul II). "Today I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything" (Pope Benedict XVI). My Mother, stay close to this little child of yours that I am. Then I will fear nothing.

Easter Tuesday
Tuesday 2nd April
Jn 20:11-18

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb...she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rab-boni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father."

Mary loved Jesus but something prevented her from recognising Him. When she heard her name, spoken by *that Voice*, with that 'tone', we can imagine how she shuddered with delight. That name she had heard so many times coming from Jesus' Lips, "Mary!"

There are many ways to pronounce a name. Think about the many people who have said your name, always differently: your parents, grandparents, siblings, friends... you could recognise each one of them on the phone just by hearing them say your name. But even the same person (your mother, for instance) could say your name in different tones and modes. You could tell what was coming just by listening to her say your name in the distance.

Jesus didn't need to say anything else to Mary; just her name. Jesus called everyone by their name. All of them remembered well how Jesus pronounced their names: Peter, John, Andrew, James, Nicodemus, Martha... and Our Lady, "Mother", and St Joseph, "father". And you... Can you imagine the sound of Jesus' voice speaking your name? Because He uses it every day to talk to you in your prayer.

"Just like our mother, he calls us by our name, by the name we're fondly called at home, by our nickname. There, in the depths of our soul, he calls us and we just have to answer: Ecce ego quia vocasti me - here I am, for you have called me" (St Josemaría).

My Mother, Handmaid of the Lord, you also use my name when you talk to your Son about me. Help me to always have that answer on my lips: *"Here I am, Lord, for you have called me by my name."*

Easter Wednesday
Wednesday 3rd April
Lk 24:13-35

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" Jesus said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe..." And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

How naïve you are, Cleopas, you and your friend, trying to explain to Jesus His own story! Walking side-by-side with Jesus... and you couldn't recognise Him. He explained to you the Scriptures that you knew so well but had never fully understood. After that, you had the "breaking of the bread", as they called the Eucharist at the beginning. And then your "*eyes were opened*." I see the picture now: first, Scripture and homily; secondly, Eucharist and Holy Communion: that was the first Holy Mass after His Death and Resurrection.

Today, Lord, you walk at my side, ready to talk to me even if I don't see or recognise You. Today my heart burns when You explain the Scripture to me in my prayer. I listen to You and I receive You in Mass as well. May I always recognise You at my side; may I always see You, in Mass, as we break the Bread; may You explain to me what I can't understand and may my heart burn also when I talk to You and beg You, *Stay with me, Lord!*

My Mother, Mary, help me to always *stay with Him!*

Easter Thursday
Thursday 4th April
Lk 24:35-48

As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you" ...And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet...Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

First He showed His Wounds; through those Wounds our sins can be forgiven. But those Wounds can't heal the wounds of your sins if there is no repentance; that is why *"repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations."*

You and I have that mission now: to remind everyone, no matter what sins they have committed, that through His Sacrifice, through those Wounds, Jesus can forgive any sin in Confession; to remind people that there is no sin, no misery that can't be wiped away by His infinite Mercy. In Confession the Wounds of Jesus erase forever the sins that we confess with contrition. But there has to be real contrition, real sorrow for our sins.

A boy went to confess: *"Father, forgive me for I have stolen £7 to buy chocolates... but for the penance let's say £10."* "So, which one is it?" asked the priest, puzzled, *"did you take £7 or £10?"* "It was £7, father," answered the boy, *"but it wasn't enough; I need £3 more!"* Obviously he wasn't very sorry for his sin. Remember: if there is no contrition, there is no forgiveness.

St John Vianney would hear up to 300 Confessions per day! One day, he started weeping on hearing the Confession of a man who spoke without any sign of sorrow; hearing his sobbing, the penitent asked why he was weeping. The holy Curé of Ars replied, *"My friend, I weep because you do not weep."*

"Turn to Our Lady and ask her - as a token of her love for you - for the gift of contrition. Ask that you may be sorry, with the sorrow of Love, for all your sins and for the sins of all men and women throughout the ages... 'Acts of contrition, the more the better!'" (St Josemaría).

Easter Friday
Friday 5th April
Jn 21:1-14

Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat; but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"

There were at least seven of Jesus' disciples in the boat. But only one recognises Him from a distance: *the Beloved one*. Imagine St John squinting, shielding his eyes from the sun and looking at the Man on the shore when he heard those words, "*Cast the net on the right side of the boat.*" Maybe he thought, 'I have heard that phrase before. That voice reminds me of...' He was still hesitant, but when he saw the amount of fish they caught, the penny dropped. He smiled first, then laughed to himself, like someone who has been tricked for a while, and, full of joy, like a madman - madly in love - he shouted, "*It is the Lord!*"

"He was more beloved than all the other Apostles," writes St. Thomas Aquinas, "*on account of his purity.*" And St. Anselm wrote, "*God revealed more mysteries to him than to the other Apostles, because he surpassed all in virginal purity.*" Let's keep our eyes today on that teenager, his look clean, his heart in love: his purity allowed him to recognise Jesus from a distance. Our Lord Himself taught, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*" Many people are unable to see Jesus, not because He is hidden but because their glasses are dirty; sins blind men, purity gives light.

St John was also pure because he was close to Our Lady. Mary, Mother most pure, Mother most chaste, intercede for me to resemble the young St John, to be pure like him and always close to you. "*How I would like - you told me - the young apostle, John, to take me into his confidence and give me advice: and encourage me to acquire purity of heart. If you really would like it, tell him so: and you will feel encouraged, and you will receive advice*" (St Josemaría).

Easter Saturday
Saturday 6th April
Mk 16:9-15

Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene...they would not believe it. After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country...but they did not believe them. Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation".

First there is a reproach; then there is a command. The reproach is that they didn't believe those whom Jesus sent to them. The command is to go and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. First, we need faith; then we can bring that faith to others; and this is what Jesus has commanded us to do.

The French Cardinal Roger Etchegaray once told a story which he had heard from an Orthodox priest. After the Passover, as Jesus ascended into Heaven, He gazed down on earth and saw it in darkness, except for a few tiny lights in Jerusalem. On His way to Heaven He met the Angel Gabriel, who was accustomed to undertaking earthly missions. The Angel asked Him, "*What are those little lights?*" "*They are the Apostles that surround my Mother,*" Jesus answered him. "*This is my plan: once I return to Heaven, I will send them the Holy Spirit so that these small lights can turn into a great bonfire that will ignite the world with charity.*" The Angel dared to ask, "*And if this plan does not work?*" After a moment's silence, Jesus answered, "*I do not have any other plan!*"

God has no other plans! If the Apostles had failed, many souls would have remained oblivious of the Gospel message. We are the Apostles now. What a great responsibility! How many souls may depend on whether you and I become real apostles! What we don't do... remains undone, because God has no other plans. "*Many great things depend - don't forget it - on whether you and I live our lives as God wants*" (St Josemaría).

My Mother, Queen of the Apostles, pray for me that I may never forget it: many souls depend on me.

Divine Mercy Sunday
Sunday 7th April
Jn 20:19-31

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Today is the Second Sunday of Easter, known as Divine Mercy Sunday, when we commemorate the day on which Jesus gave his Apostles authority to forgive sins in His Name. The text is very clear: *"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven."* It couldn't be easier! Some, like the Apostle St Thomas, would only believe if Jesus Himself appeared to them and gave them absolution.

Saints went to Confession very often; many of them even went every week. They went to Confession because they were sinners and needed forgiveness as well. They loved Our Lord and wanted to erase their sins, including venial ones. When G. K. Chesterton was asked why he became a Catholic, his short answer was: *"To get rid of my sins."*

Once Jesus told St Faustina, "Tell souls to look for relief in the Tribunal of Mercy [Confession]. To benefit from this miracle, it is enough to come with faith to the feet of My representative [the priest] and to reveal to him one's misery. Were a soul like a putrefying corpse so that from a human standpoint, there would be no [hope of] restoration and everything would already be lost, it is not so with God. The miracle of Divine Mercy restores that soul in full. Oh, how miserable are those who do not take advantage of the miracle of God's Mercy!"

Mary, Mother of Mercy, help me to become 'an Apostle of Mercy' so that I can bring many to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Annunciation of Our Lord
Monday 8th April
Lk 1:26-38

The angel said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus".

Today we celebrate the Annunciation, which is also the Incarnation: God becoming a human being, like you and me. He was already in the world nine months before Christmas but only Mary and St Joseph knew it. Jesus was not in a hurry, you see? He didn't have to spend all those months in Mary's womb but He wanted to. Jesus didn't want to be an exception. Today is a good day to pray for all those children who are still in their mothers' wombs, called to be the saints of the 21st century with you and me.

St Gabriel announced to Mary the Name of her Son, **Jesus**; that Name which was going to be pronounced billions of times and which we try to keep on our lips frequently every day. A Name that is often associated with that other name, 'Mary', in the lovely prayer that the Angel taught us. Every time we say the *Hail Mary* we remind Our Lady of the happiest moments of her existence. She always listens to her children through this prayer.

A priest was asked by a hospital sister to visit a patient in Ward 3. On entering he found the man dying, surprised to see the priest since he hadn't received the Sacraments for many years. "Nevertheless," he explained to the priest, "I have always kept up a promise I made to my mum on her deathbed: to pray three Hail Marys every night." After a long conversation, the man made his Confession and received the Eucharist with great devotion. Leaving the Ward, the priest met the sister and found that he had been in Ward 4, and patient number 7 in Ward 3 was still waiting for him! This was soon put right, but the priest felt thankful for the mistake. He felt still more thankful when the following day he found out that the man in Ward 4 had died suddenly that night. The man had kept his promise... and Our Lady kept hers! *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners, now and at the hour of our death.*

Tuesday 2nd week of Easter
Tuesday 9th April
Jn 3:7b-15

Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'You must be born anew'...Nicodemus said to him, "How can this be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen...No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Nicodemus - a doctor of the Law and learned in the Scriptures - was confused. Therefore, he did what we should do in our mental prayer: ask You, Jesus, because You are the only One Who has all the answers. You, Lord, are the only One Who can reveal the Truth that we need to believe because You are the **Truth**. But You can't get all these things across in just one conversation! You need us to foster a habit of chatting with You. Nicodemus probably met and talked with You on many more occasions because eventually, as we read in the Gospel, when all the others left You during Your Agony and Death on that Good Friday, he was there to stand up for You, to take Your Body and bury It.

That is the effect of regular and frequent prayer. And that is also why I need to foster that daily conversation with Jesus. It's like eating healthily: you don't notice striking changes after one meal or one week; but after a time you can tell something has changed, even though you don't remember your meals. Only over time do we come to see its good effect. Likewise, to pray every day can be demanding and many times you will not remember what you chatted with God about the day before... but only by that daily contact with Jesus can He get across what you need to believe and transform you into another Nicodemus: a faithful friend who stands with Him when others have deserted!

Let's give Our Lord the great comfort of our daily conversation with Him. *"Mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us"* (St Teresa of Avila). My Mother Immaculate, teach me to talk to Him as you did then, as you do now.

Wednesday 2nd week of Easter
Wednesday 10th April
Jn 3:16-21

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him...This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

For God so loved the world... did you get that?! God loves the world. He always has and always will, for He is its 'Craftsman' (or *Crafts-God*). As a good artist loves his paintings, God loves His creation. Some people think that the world is bad and takes us away from God. How come, if it's God's gift to us? Genesis states clearly that "*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.*" If He Himself said that *it's good*, who am I to disagree?

Men have sometimes masked the beauty of creation with their sins, but that doesn't diminish its value. You can crumple a £20 note and step on it with your dirty shoes; it doesn't lose a penny of its worth. Every artist leaves some trace of himself in his work. Experts can recognise an artist's work without looking at the signature. Have you ever found yourself astounded looking at a beautiful sunrise, a sunset of fire, a magnificent rainbow, gentle waves lapping the seashore, a thin crescent moon hung in a crystal-clear sky, a spectacular waterfall...? God made it for you and He loves it because of you. As a Good Father, He loves to see that you delight in His gifts to you, not for the gift itself, but because He gave it to you; just like a child keeps a pen or a watch for years and cherishes it, because *'my dad gave it to me.'*

God loves His creation so much *that he gave his only Son*, to be part of it. Think about it: this world has been walked upon by God. He has worked in it. He has rested His Head on its grass, had His Face stroked by the wind, heard its birds singing... He has looked up to the sky and loved it. He has drunk from its brooks and swum in its lakes. And now He has entrusted this world to me as a stage for my happiness, and I love our world passionately, as a gift from my loving Father. My Mother, Queen of the Universe, help me to give thanks to God for His wonderful creation.

Thursday 2nd week of Easter
Thursday 11th April
Jn 3:31-36

John the Baptist said to his disciples: "He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth belongs to the earth, and of the earth he speaks; he who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony; he who receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true."

Some people only seem able to view things negatively. One such cynic was walking by the pier watching a man trying to start a boat's engine. Feeling 'obliged' to give his opinion on everything, he commented, *"That engine will never start."* Immediately the engine made a big noise and started. Not wishing to be proven wrong, he held his ground, *"Anyway... it'll probably never stop."* All those who belong to the earth are like this fellow. They only see shadows, never lights.

He who is *"of the earth belongs to the earth, and of the earth he speaks,"* says Our Lord. That person only knows how to utter calamities, complaints, criticism and sarcasm. They see everything dimly, as through very dark shades. But we belong to Heaven, don't we? We were made for happiness, for love, for paradise. And we must bear witness to it. That's what a Christian should be. Wherever a Christian walks by, Jesus is passing by with him and, therefore, there is light.

Our conversation and our attitude in life should reflect our supernatural faith. That behaviour will bring others to the realisation that there is more to life than meets the eye; there is a God who loves us so much that He made the world as the anteroom of Heaven. Real Christians overflow with joy. People want to be with them, to stay with them, to converse with them. St Josemaría taught that *"happiness in Heaven is for those who know how to be happy on earth."* Like Jesus Himself: do you remember how people were looking for Him? Even children loved to be with Him. And children aren't fools: they don't like to be with gloomy people. Let's show the world, with our lives, that we have many reasons to be happy. *"How I wish your bearing and conversation [your smile!] were such that, on seeing or hearing you, people would say: This man reads the life of Jesus Christ"* (St Josemaría). Holy Mary, Cause of our Joy, pray for us.

Friday 2nd week of Easter
Friday 12th April
Jn 6:1-15

Seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?"

"*There is a lad here...*" We don't know the name of the *lad*. We only know that he had five loaves and two fish and that he gave them all. This anonymous lad gave them (and us) a lesson in how to be generous. What we can give to God is always little, but He multiplies the effect of it. Jesus doesn't '*need*' our help, but He *wants to need* our generosity.

It is like a mother who lets a 3-year-old child help her bake a cake: beating the eggs, for instance. She could do it herself, of course (probably quicker and better) but she is teaching and having a great time with her child. And she loves it when Dad comes and the little one says, "*We made your favourite cake!*" Dad surely knows the child did very little, but he likes the cake all the more for it.

When St Josemaría was a young priest and still no one had joined his Work (Opus Dei), he used to meet a beggar-woman next to the church. In those days he was extremely poor. One day he approached her and said, "*My daughter, I have no money to give you. All I have, I give it to you,*" and making the sign of the Cross, he gave her a blessing. Finally he added, "*I beg you to offer up what you can for an intention of mine.*" The intention was his 'Work'. A couple of months later St Josemaría found the woman dying from tuberculosis in a hospital he used to visit. "*But how come... what happened to you?*" he asked on seeing her. She replied, "*Don't you understand, father? You told me: "Offer up what you can". I didn't have anything to offer up... So I offered up my life!*" St Josemaría was deeply moved and never forgot the generosity of that woman whom he called '*the first vocation of his future daughters.*' Mother, what I can give to Our Lord is very little, but help me to give it all.

Saturday 2nd week of Easter
Saturday 13th April
Jn 6:16-21

It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea rose because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat. They were frightened, but he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."

The apostles are suffering in the middle of the storm and Jesus comes to help. We don't know what kind of assistance they were expecting, but certainly not Jesus walking on the water! St Matthew explains in this passage that they thought it was a *ghost*. The captivating figure of Jesus Christ, whom they loved to have with them, has, in their terrified imagination, become a ghost!

It's not the first time that the help God sends is not recognised at all. When the people of Israel were slaves of the Egyptians, God sent Moses to release them. The pharaoh wasn't very keen on the idea, so he decided to afflict them a bit more and demanded a heavier workload. Then the Israelites went to complain to Moses: *"You have made us offensive in the sight of Pharaoh."* You see? They called on God to be released and when God sent help they complained. So often men ask God for help but then don't like *'the sort of help'* He is offering, because they were expecting something else.

During a flood in a village, a man was trapped on the roof of his house surrounded by water. As he was there, someone came to rescue him with a canoe, but he replied, *"Oh! Don't bother: God will come and rescue me."* Minutes later another man came in a boat, but he gave the same reply; after a few minutes even a helicopter came, but he said the same: *"God will come and rescue me."* He eventually drowned and met St Peter at the gates of Heaven. There he complained, *"Why did Heaven abandon me?"* And St Peter answered, *"What?! We sent you a canoe, a boat and a helicopter!"* The man had his own plan of rescue, and God didn't follow his plan. When God comes, He sets His own conditions. He knows *what* we need, *when* we need it, *how* we need it and *how much* we need it. He is also our Father: trust Him!

Holy Mary, Help of Christians, teach me to recognise God's help *when* and *how* He offers it to me.

Third Sunday of Easter
Sunday 14th April
Lk 24:35-48

Jesus said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

So much time spent with Him, so many conversations with Him, so many things Jesus had explained to them... and they still hadn't understood His Words. After His death and Resurrection, Jesus "opened their minds" - and then they got it.

Gray Bean was a Baptist pastor who started raising doubts over some doctrinal issues. Reading the works of some Catholic theologians, he started wavering, considering his conversion to the Catholic faith. The last stand preventing his conversion was the doctrine of the Eucharist. He decided to go to daily Adoration, to ask Our Lord for lights to understand it. But after six months he got tired of waiting and so, he confronted Our Lord in the Tabernacle and said to Him, "I'm tired of this. If You REALLY are in that piece of bread, make it clear to me." Then he opened his Bible randomly and found John 6:51-55: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever...For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." As a pastor, he had read that passage and preached about it dozens of times. But that day Jesus 'opened his mind,' and the penny dropped. He is now a Catholic priest.

Reading the Gospels, Jesus opens our minds if we give Him the chance. But read them as a letter written by God to you, not as 'spam', a kind of text written for thousands, photocopied, and then thrown into your letterbox. Sacred Scripture has been written for you; God has left there all He wanted you to read. If you read it, Jesus will 'open your mind' also. Mary, my Mother, help me to be consistent in my reading and meditation of the Gospels, to talk to your Son and allow Him to 'open my mind.'

Monday 3rd week of Easter
Monday 15th April
Jn 6:22-29

When the people saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Caperna-um, seeking Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life."

This happened right after the multiplication of the loaves and fish. These people came after Jesus again but maybe not for the right reason. They ate delicious loaves and fish for free and, perhaps, just wanted some more! So Jesus invited them not to look for ordinary bread, but for the Bread of Heaven: the Eucharist. That is the content of the whole sixth chapter of St John.

At the end of this chapter we read that *"many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him."* We can recognise people like that today: they follow Him when it is easy, when it isn't demanding, when they need something, but not when Jesus is crucified, not when He asks for help, for their time, for their presence in the Holy Mass or before the Tabernacle, for their time of prayer... Those are not 'real' friends of Jesus. They are like 'friends' who turn up to a birthday party without a present and disappear before it is time to clear up. It's like a *one-way* friendship: there is no 'give and take'. They take but don't give.

In the summer of 1921 three boys discovered Red Army soldiers breaking into the church of Petrograd, near Finland. They resolved to *"shield the dear, loving Jesus"* and entered the church, greeting the soldiers. When the soldiers threatened to shoot they replied that they *"would not suffer their dear Jesus to be insulted."* Two boys were killed. The third boy blocked the altar steps with his body and was brutally beaten. Before he died, though, he managed to tell the people of the village what had happened: Jesus had appeared on the altar steps and blessed the two dead boys. The soldiers screamed that the church was haunted and fled. The third boy died radiant, saying, *"We have shielded Jesus."* My Mother, may I learn from you to shield Jesus in the Eucharist with my prayer and love.

Tuesday 3rd week of Easter
Tuesday 16th April
Jn 6:30-35

So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you?...Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness..." Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst."

This whole Chapter 6 of St John focuses on the Eucharist. Saints have always been in love with the Eucharist. They could endure anything except to be deprived of the Mass. Bishop Van Thuan was imprisoned in Vietnam for more than 9 years in solitary confinement. Years later he wrote: *"The day I was arrested I had to leave everything behind. The following day I was allowed to write and ask my friends to bring my clothes, toothpaste, etc. I also asked them to include some wine 'as medicine'. They sent me a little bottle of Mass-wine labelled 'Medicine for Stomach Aches'. Every night I kept a tiny piece of bread for the following day's Eucharist."*

He explained how every day he would ask the guards for a bit of 'medicine', and they would hand him the bottle of wine. *"I never will be able to express my great joy,"* he said later. *"Every day for many years I had the joy of celebrating Mass with three drops of wine and one of water in my palm. This was my altar, my cathedral. For me it was the true medicine of body and soul...Each day in reciting the words of Consecration, I confirmed with all my heart and soul a new pact, an eternal pact between Jesus and me through His Blood mixed with mine. Those were the most beautiful Masses of my life!"*

St Josemaría taught: *"When you approach the Tabernacle remember that he has been awaiting you for twenty centuries."* My Immaculate Mother, help me to convince Our Lord with deeds that His '20-century wait' for me has been worthwhile. Help me, Mother, to become a Eucharistic soul, because a Eucharistic soul is a powerful soul. Teach me to fall in love with Jesus in the Eucharist, and to receive Him with the purity, humility and devotion with which you, Mary, received Him.

Wednesday 3rd week of Easter
Wednesday 17th April
Jn 6:35-40

Jesus said to them, "All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

The Father has entrusted Jesus with a mission: that He "*should lose nothing of all that the Father has given Him*". Not a single soul should be lost. All are destined to rise with Him at the end of time. Jesus Himself says, "*him who comes to me I will not cast out*"; no one who comes to Him... but they need to *come*. Yet, some don't come to Him; some even run away from Him when He wants to bring them close to Him. They want to be saved, but not *badly*. They want to go to Heaven, but '*kind of*' or '*more-or-less*'. They lack determination.

They pray as St Augustine did when he was young. Although he had no desire to renounce his life of misery and sin, he knew that he had to change. He explains in his *Confessions* how he would pray: "*Lord, give me chastity and continence, but not yet.*" Our Lord needed him for an important mission. Many souls depended on Augustine and his fulfilling the Will of the Father, so God granted him the grace of conversion when he was 31 years old.

After his conversion he worked hard to serve God. He made up for his delay in bringing himself to do the Will of God. Nevertheless, when he looked back at his early life and thought about how much he made Jesus wait until he followed Him, he wrote this lovely prayer: "*Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside. You were with me, but I was not with you. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.*"

Holy Mary, our Hope, may I never make God wait for me to fulfil His Will.

Thursday 3rd week of Easter
Thursday 18th April
Jn 6:44-51

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

"I am the bread of life." We never have enough of the Eucharist for we can't ever have enough of God. He is that Bread that we ask for many times a day, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" This is the fuel of the saints. To go up to Heaven we need the Bread that came down from Heaven. Remember *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* pointing to the sky and saying "*Home*"? Well, he was right. Our home is up there, and to climb up there our 'rocket' runs on the Eucharist.

In the same way that E.T. managed to get a device to "phone home", persecuted Christians have found the most amazing resources to be able to receive the Eucharist. In nearly two thousand years the Sacramental Jesus has been in all kinds of places: cathedrals and dungeons, basilicas and caves... The daily Bread can reach everywhere when needed. A Latvian Bishop, Boleslas Sloskans (1893-1981), was arrested soon after his episcopal ordination, jailed in seventeen Soviet prisons, deported to Siberia and exiled for over thirty years. With other priests, prisoners also in the Solovki Archipelago, they used a glass for a chalice and the lid of a tin can for a paten. The bread was provided by the jailers. The wine was made from raisins soaked in water. They celebrated Mass at night, in secret. In the morning, in the convoy going to work, Bishop Sloskans distributed the consecrated Hosts to the Catholics, under the utmost secrecy. He hid the remaining Hosts under the roots of a tree, wrapped in a piece of cloth so that those who had not received Communion could do so during the day.

Living in such difficult conditions (hard labour, insufficient food and all sorts of inhuman deprivations and treatment) they survived - as the bishop pointed out - thanks to that "*daily Bread.*"

Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, may I never get used to receiving Jesus in this *daily Bread.*

Friday 3rd week of Easter
Friday 19th April
Jn 6:52-59

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."

Jesus couldn't be clearer: "*my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed*" and "*he who eats me will live because of me.*" He didn't say 'my flesh is like food' or 'kind of food' or 'reminds you of food' or 'if you sort of eat my kind of flesh...' The meaning was so obvious that the Jews were scandalised, saying, "*How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*" But Jesus repeated the same message again with different words.

In October 1995 St John Paul II was to greet the seminarians at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore (USA). On arriving, he expressed his desire to first visit the Blessed Sacrament in the oratory. The security personnel quickly flew into action, doing a sweep of the building and especially the chapel. They brought highly trained dogs used to locate survivors trapped in collapsed buildings after earthquakes and other disasters. The dogs went through the halls, offices and classrooms quickly, and then ran through the chapel and into the side chapel where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved. Upon reaching the Tabernacle, the dogs sniffed and whined and pointed it out, refusing to leave (as if they had discovered '*Someone trapped*' there) and firmly remained, their attention riveted on the Tabernacle. Their handlers asked in amazement what was in that box. And they were told that the right question wasn't '*what*' but '*Who*' was there.

The bishop of that diocese commented, "*It's funny that even dogs can recognise what some Catholics can't: that there is a real living Person in the Tabernacle and that He has been there for 20 centuries waiting for each one of us.*"

Holy Mary, Mother, your Son has been 'trapped' in the Tabernacle for twenty centuries out of love for me; help me to be grateful with deeds of love.

Saturday 3rd week of Easter
Saturday 20th April
Jn 6:60-69

Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"...After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

The sixth chapter of St John's Gospel ends like this. It could have ended: "*many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him.*" But that is not the end. No. It finishes on a high note: '*Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?"*' And Peter gave the answer for all those Christians who, throughout history, have decided to stay with Jesus no matter what. We could translate his answer from ancient Aramaic into modern English: '*No, no way! Absolutely not!*'

Perseverance is the virtue that allows us to be steady, persistent and loyal in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement. Where there are obstacles, perseverance is needed. And saints have had tons of both. Of course there have been people who haven't been faithful and have left Our Lord. But that has only been a stimulus for saints to be holier. When St Peter saw that multitude leaving Jesus, he decided to stay. And sure enough, he did. He made mistakes, like on Good Friday, but he died crucified upside down, faithful, loyal. St Maximilian Kolbe had decided to leave the seminary when his mum visited him to explain that his brother wanted to join the seminary too. As you may know, he persevered and became a martyr.

A young priest was moved when chatting with a sixteen-year-old lad. He had decided at a very young age to follow God in a life of celibacy. Many of his best friends also joined him in his vocation. But over time all his friends left that vocation to live mundane lives. "*They have gone! All of them!*" said the boy, weeping, "*they have left me alone.*" Then he took the crucifix that was in front of him in his hands, and looked the priest in the eyes. The priest was speechless when he saw tears streaming down the lad's cheeks and heard him say, "*But I will NOT leave Him alone. I will NOT! I'd rather die.*" Mother most Faithful, pray for us!

Fourth Sunday of Easter
Sunday 21st April
Jn 10:11-18

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me."

A group of boys were hiking in the forest when they met a shepherd coming with his sheep. Out of curiosity the leader of the group decided to check what they had read in the Gospel. He approached the shepherd and asked him what he would do if a sheep were lost. With total indifference, the man said, *"Too bad! It will become part of the ten per cent loss,"* and kept walking unconcerned. One of the boys commented sarcastically, *"O.K. He must be a hireling."*

It is sad to consider that the shepherd had calculated a 10% loss. God certainly doesn't behave like that. For Him, no one is lost. He has paid far too dearly for each of His sheep - the price was all His Blood. So He is not ready to give up on anyone. Some would have given up on Mary Magdalene, St Matthew, the Good Thief, Saul of Tarsus or Augustine of Hippo. But not God. He doesn't give up on anyone.

At age 12, Mary (c.344-c.421) ran away from home and spent 17 years as a seductress in the city of Alexandria. She enjoyed seducing young men and was led by her passions. Mary later confessed, *"There is no depravity of which I was not their teacher."* Feeling compelled to tag along with a group of pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem, she boarded the ship and seduced everyone before reaching their destination. However, on reaching the Holy City, it was she who was 'seduced', in this case by Jesus Christ. She repented of her sins and spent the rest of her life as a hermit in the desert making amends for her sins. St Mary of Egypt was a lost cause for many, but not for the Good Shepherd. This thought should fill us with comfort: God will never give up on me, no matter what. Mary, Queen of the Apostles, may I never give up on my friends until they come back to the Good Shepherd.

St George, martyr
Tuesday 23rd April
Jn 15:18-21

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me.

One day Blessed Pius IX had a meeting with seminarians. They were all studying theology and the Pope wanted to check how much they knew. He approached one of the students and asked him, "What are the marks of the Church?" The young fellow remembered the answer very well and said quickly, "The Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic." Bl Pius IX smiled and said, "There is another one." The boy looked at him, puzzled, and the Pope went on, "'Persecuted': The Church of Christ will always be One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and 'Persecuted', or she will stop being the Church of Jesus Christ. Do you remember? 'If they persecuted me, they will persecute you'."

Jesus was persecuted and killed; the Apostles followed in His footsteps and were persecuted as well. Since St Stephen was martyred, millions of Christians have given their lives in persecutions spanning twenty centuries. We shouldn't be surprised that even today Christians are persecuted, imprisoned and killed in many places [think about Syria, Egypt, Libya, Pakistan, China, Nigeria, North Korea, Iraq...] To those we could add all Christians who are persecuted in many ways in our countries for defending the truth of the Gospel, marriage and the right to life. Jesus said that it was going to happen, and so it does; but He also said, "I will be with you every single day until the end"... and He certainly is.

Today is a good day to pray for all persecuted Christians around the world, that they may feel our prayers for them, that they may feel the presence of Jesus Crucified next to them, that they may feel comforted by Our Lady, standing as she does beside their crosses.

St George, martyr for the faith, pray for them!

Tuesday 4th week of Easter
Tuesday 23rd April
Jn 10:22-30

The Jews gathered round him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep."

The problem wasn't that Jesus didn't speak plainly enough. The problem was that the Pharisees weren't ready to listen. Some people ask Jesus questions but don't want to hear His reply. They may say, *'If God wants me to do this or that... He can tell me plainly!'* He does; but they don't get it because they are not ready to listen. A radio station can emit music, but if you don't tune in to the station you won't be able to hear it.

It was winter, 1917. A 15-year-old boy was walking through the little town of Logroño (Spain), early in the morning. He stared at the spectacle of the snow-covered town. Then something caught his attention that changed his whole life: some footprints of bare feet in the snow. He followed their trail until he caught up with the Carmelite friar whose feet had made the prints. The boy was dumbfounded. He couldn't stop considering those people in the world, like that man, who are able to make great sacrifices for God and for others. *'What about me?'* he thought, *'Am I not going to be able to offer him anything?'* That was the beginning of his vocation... and a life of sanctity which led this young lad to become St Josemaría, as he is known today.

How many other people saw those same footprints that morning? Did they react as Josemaría did? He was ready to listen to the voice of God, because he was tuned in; he was starting to be a soul of prayer. And he continued to listen to God's voice throughout his life until the end of his days, trying to do the Will of God in everything. *"Blessed are those who hear the word of God,"* said Our Lord, *"and obey it!"* (Lk 11:28)

Those were the words of Jesus when someone mentioned His Mother, for that is precisely what she did. She was always in tune with God. She listened to Him... and obeyed. Mother, teach me to listen and obey always, just as you did.

Wednesday 4th week of Easter
Wednesday 24th April
Jn 12:44-50

And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And he who sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness...For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me."

Jesus fulfilled the Will of His Father and said what He had to say. That was the mission of the prophets: to speak up. When the prophet Jeremiah was given his mission, he said, "*Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.*" But the reply of God was: "*Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you*" (Jer 1:6,7).

Moses too excused himself, saying: "*Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent...I am slow of speech and of tongue.*" But God said to him: "*Who has made man's mouth? ...Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak*" (Ex 4:11,12). It's as if saying, 'I know you, because I made you. I know what I can ask from you. Now, go and talk to them! Don't be afraid: I am with you.'

Christians are *prophets* in that sense. We are called to talk and not to be afraid of spreading the light of the truth. A university professor of Spanish literature was in the habit of telling dirty jokes while he lectured. Many students weren't comfortable with it but didn't say a word. Suddenly he asked if anyone knew a poem with verses in a particular metre called '*Decima espinela.*' A good Catholic girl sprang up and started reciting in a clear loud voice a prayer to Our Lady asking for 'Holy Purity' that fitted in that pattern: "*Bendita sea tu pureza, y eternamente lo sea...*" (Blessed be your purity, may it be blessed for ever...) There was a moment of silence when she finished; and then sudden applause. The lecturer felt a bit embarrassed and apologised. That was the end of his inappropriate jokes. My Mother, Queen of Prophets, help me to have the courage to speak up and give light, whenever necessary, to all those around me.

St Mark, Evangelist
Thursday 25th April
Mk 16:15-20

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation"...And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it."

How many people have left everything to devote their lives to preaching the Gospel! One of them was St Mark, whose feast we celebrate today. Tradition suggests that the Upper Room where the Last Supper was celebrated belonged to his parents. That room served as a meeting place for the early Christians. It's also possible that as a little boy, he met Our Lord and was probably one of those children Jesus kissed and laid His Hands on many times.

We know that he went with his cousin St Barnabas and St Paul on their first apostolic journey, but on arriving in Cyprus he left them and went back home. Maybe he couldn't take so much suffering or he was just tired. We don't know why he left Paul and Barnabas but we do know that Paul was so upset that, later on, when Barnabas was planning their second journey with him, Paul would not hear of Barnabas bringing his cousin Mark with them again. They argued and eventually went their separate ways.

About ten years later we find Mark in Rome, this time helping St Peter as interpreter and writing his Gospel. In Rome he met St Paul again and started serving him also. The man who Paul didn't want to travel with on his second missionary journey later became, as St Paul himself explained, a "*faithful companion*" and a "*comfort*" (Col 4:10-11) to him in Rome. Shortly before his death (around the year 66) the Apostle writes to Timothy, "*Get Mark and bring him with you; for he is very useful in serving me.*" (2 Tim 4:11)

All had been forgotten in the end. Mark had fled in the past; he was weak, but he came back. We can have flaws and mistakes as well, but it's never too late! St Mark is a great example of *beginning again* when we have made a mistake. God always counts on us, no matter what we've done. He always gives us the grace we need to start again. Holy Mary, help me to begin again every time I make a mistake.

Friday 4th week of Easter
Friday 26th April
Jn 14:1-6

Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way where I am going. Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me."

"*Let not your hearts be troubled*" doesn't mean that there won't be troubles. Our Lord also warned about them a couple of chapters later in the same Gospel: "*In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*" (Jn 16:33). Leave your troubles aside. Don't let them touch your heart. '*Sounds nice*', someone might think, '*but how do I do that?*' The answer is given by Jesus: "*Believe in God.*" Faith!

You see? *Gaudium cum pace* [joy and peace], are fruits of the Holy Spirit. You don't get fruits directly from nothing. They come from trees or plants. From the tree of the virtue of Faith we get the 'fruits' of peace and joy. If we believe in God, we trust Him. If we trust, then we have peace and joy. You find these virtues together in the lives of the saints. They were in love and, therefore, happy. "*May God protect me from gloomy saints,*" prayed St Teresa of Avila.

A four-year-old girl had a new baby brother. On the day he was born she was told that he was a "Gift from Heaven". But the sister found it a bit annoying that the baby was crying all the time. A few days later, seeing the baby crying again, she asked her mum, "*Mum, is it true that the baby came from Heaven?*" "*Of course, sweetheart,*" replied her mother. "*No wonder Jesus threw him out!*" Even if it wasn't the true reason, it fits with the definition of Heaven that gloomy people aren't found there. Saints had many troubles and tribulations, but they never allowed these to affect them. It doesn't mean that they went around with a '*selfie grin*' all the time. They just "*believed in God*", trusted Him.

Holy Mary, Cause of our Joy, pray for me that I may never lose my peace and cheerfulness.

Saturday 4th week of Easter
Saturday 27th April
Jn 14:7-14

"If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him. Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip?"

It sounds like a reproach, doesn't it? I have been with you all this time, *"and yet you do not know me"*. How often this happens with Our Lord! St John Mary Vianney told the story of St Alexis, the only son of a rich Roman senator, who left everything to follow God and, in disguise, he travelled to Syria in the East and lived in great poverty near a Church of Our Lady. After seventeen years, he became a famous holy man there, which was the last thing he wanted, so he ran away and ended up, one day, begging at his parents' home. His parents used to do great works of mercy for the poor. Whilst helping hundreds of other poor people, they assisted him as well; but they did not recognise him. They let him stay in a corner under the stairs, where Alexis lived for seventeen more years, until he died. On the day he died, his own mother was taking care of his dead body when she recognised that it was her son who had lived for years under the stairs in her own palace. Tradition says that she exclaimed in tears, *"O my son! Too late have I known thee!"*

Commenting on the story, St John Mary Vianney said, *"The soul leaving this life will at last see Him, whom she possessed in the Eucharist so many times, and at the sight of the consolations, beauties and riches that she had ignored, she will likewise cry out: "O Jesus! O my Life! O my Treasure! O my Love! Too late have I known Thee!"*

Saints could recognise Jesus in the Eucharist from the very beginning of the history of Christianity: *"I hunger for the bread of God, the flesh of Jesus Christ...I long to drink of his blood, the gift of unending love,"* said St Ignatius of Antioch in the first century. Let's adore Him with the Angels who stand in His presence, constantly glorifying Him: before the *Divine Host* there is always an *angelic host* in adoration. Mary, my Mother, Jesus received His Body from you. Help me to recognise Him in every Tabernacle of the world.

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Sunday 28th April
Jn 15:1-8

"Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit...As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

The branch receives sap from the vine and can only give fruit if it remains united to it. By itself, separated from the vine, the most beautiful branch will be just a stick or fuel for the fire. We, Christians, are united to Christ and receive Life from Him, for *"apart from Him we can do nothing."* However, united to Him... *'we can do anything.'*

Saints never forget that it's Jesus (the Vine) who gives fruit through them; they were always aware that they are just branches, united to the Body of the Vine. Branches don't need to be 'beautiful', or 'elegant' or 'attractive'; they are not displayed in museums. Some of them are even scary in the dark. And yet, the ugliest branch can produce the most wonderful grapes. In the lives of the saints there is always a huge *'gap'* between their talents and their fruits.

Blessed Solanus Casey was born in Wisconsin. He received very little education growing up and, after feeling a call to the priesthood, entered the seminary. However, he wasn't able to keep up with the classes. He was advised to become a friar, so that he could be ordained a *simplex priest*. This meant he would not be able to hear confessions or preach. He became a Capuchin, was ordained a *simplex priest* because of his general ignorance, and they assigned him the post of doorkeeper - one of the lowest tasks in the community. Casey took his job very seriously, listening to everyone who came to the monastery. His reputation for holiness spread and he was transferred to a different monastery to get away from the crowds who came to him. They soon found out where he was stationed and came by the busload. At his death an estimated 20,000 people filed past his coffin prior to his funeral. The branch wasn't a great thing, but it was united to the Vine and the Life of Christ gave fruit through him. Mary, my Mother, may I remain always closely united to your Son.

Monday 5th week of Easter
Monday 29th April
Jn 14:21-26

"He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?"

This same question has been asked many times in history: Why does Jesus reveal Himself to only some people? Why am I a Christian and my neighbour is not? Why doesn't God manifest Himself to everyone? The Apostles had been chosen by Jesus to spend more time with Him. He taught them all they had to know and then, sent them to preach to the 'whole world'. And so, like the links of a chain, all the others depended on them.

God has created every human being to love Him and be happy. Everyone in the depths of their heart longs for happiness, goodness and beauty. They long for God. And God plans to meet everyone. However, why don't they find Him? Maybe because they are not in the habit of listening to their hearts for that longing. That's where you and I have work to do.

Have you ever swum in cold water and accidentally cut or bruised your skin without noticing it? Eventually, someone may have drawn your attention to it or you went out of the water and saw the blood but felt no pain. The reason is that cold numbs your skin's sensitivity. In the same way, the absence of God in the world, the coldness of the spiritual life, can have this effect in people's souls. They feel no longing for God because they feel nothing at all. The continuous rumble and racket, the ceaseless rush and activity, numbs their souls and makes them oblivious to the fact that their souls are bleeding for God, for true happiness.

When those people get out of the water, out of themselves, they get a bit warmer and gradually begin to feel the wound. Then they will want to go to the Doctor. The mission of Christians is, in the words of St Josemaría, to strive to '*raise the spiritual temperature*' so that people will feel the loss of God and will want to search Him out. Mary, my Mother, may I raise the spiritual temperature around me, with my Christian life, to help everyone feel their need of God.

St Catherine of Siena, virgin, Doctor of the Church
Monday 29th April
Mt 11:25-30

At that time Jesus declared, "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

St. Catherine of Siena was the 25th child born to her mother. At the age of 16, Catherine's sister died leaving her husband as a widower. Her parents proposed Catherine to marry the widower but she opposed. She began fasting and cut her hair short to mar her appearance. While living at home, she confirmed her vow of virginity made privately when she was still an adolescent and dedicated herself to prayer, penance and works of charity, especially for the benefit of the sick. She learned to read with difficulty and dictated letters, prayers and her mystical work, *'The Dialogue'*. For those works she was named *'Doctor of the Church'*.

Those were difficult times for the Church. She faced opposition and slander for speaking with the confidence of one completely committed to Christ. Pope Gregory XI had left Rome to live in Avignon. Out of love for the Church and the Pope, she went to mediate to Avignon but she was virtually ignored by the pope. After the death of the pope in 1378, the Great Schism began, confusing Christians with the presence of three popes. Catherine spent the last two years of her life in Rome, in prayer and pleading on behalf of the unity of the Church. She offered herself as a victim for the Church and died on 29 April 1380 at the age of 33.

St Josemaria had great admiration for her *"because of her courage to speak the truth for the love of Christ, of the Church and of the Pope,"* he said. Next to her relic, he wrote: *"Dilexit opere et veritate Ecclesiam Dei ac Romanum Pontificem"* (She loved the Church and the Pope truly and with deeds).

My Mother Immaculate, help us to have the courage of St Catherine to stand for the truth. St Catherine, Patron saint of Europe, teach me to love the Church and the pope!

Tuesday 5th week of Easter
Tuesday 30th April
Jn 14:27-31a

Jesus said to his disciples: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father."

Jesus prepared His disciples for His Ascension: He will go to Heaven, but they shouldn't be afraid. Christians have no reason whatsoever to be anxious, because He didn't leave us by ourselves. The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, is in charge now. And when you work for God and with God, there is nothing that can shake your 'spirit'.

One day a journalist asked Pope St John XXIII if he could sleep well at night with all the worries and anxieties of having to lead the Church. He explained that he had problems at the beginning, until one night he told himself, "*John, why don't you sleep? Is it you or the Holy Spirit who governs the Church? The Holy Spirit, right? Well then, what are you worried about? Go to sleep, John!*" Since then, he said, "*I've been able to sleep like a log.*"

When Bl Alvaro del Portillo was dying, the doctor who was assisting him was very upset. Bl Alvaro took his hand and calmed him down. Many remember how his face and his look always filled those around him with peace. On one occasion someone who worked with him was very anxious about the economic situation they were in. He thought that Bl Alvaro didn't understand it well and said to him, "*Don Alvaro, if this continues you could end up in prison.*" Bl Alvaro replied with serenity, "*If that ever happens, remember to bring me plenty of paper and the type-writer. I can work from there... no problem.*"

Peace is a common feature of all saints; when you are with them you feel at peace. Their own peace 'infects' everyone around them. Our worries and anxieties have to be seen in perspective. When you have a speck of dust on your glasses you see it as a huge stain obstructing your vision. But in reality it is a tiny speck. Mother, Our Lady of Peace, bring peace to the world; bring this fruit of the Holy Spirit into my soul so that I can become, wherever I am, a source of peace for everyone.