

The Hour of a Saint

Time in the Teachings of Josemaría Escrivá

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In the summer of 1951 I read *The Way* for the first time. I began reading it with some skepticism, perhaps as an unjustified reaction to the praises of a friend who had suggested the book to me. But as I read through its pages, little by little I discovered the human and supernatural wisdom contained there. Among other things, I understood that the temporal and the eternal were not so far apart, and there opened before my eyes a new sense of time. Why? In the following pages I will try to answer that question, showing how the value of time depends on its relation to that which does not change, to the “presence of eternity” in it. In doing so, I will make use of the teachings of St. Josemaría. He was a saint deeply aware of the importance that the good use of time has for those who are seeking human and Christian perfection through their everyday activities.

1. The Sense of Time

Time is born

The story is told that he painted it in one day. Michelangelo Buonarroti clothed the Creator in a red tunic and pictured for us a God who is separating the light from darkness. In the Sistine Chapel we see a depiction of the first day of creation. And God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness he called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day (*Gen 1:3-5*). Thus time was born.

What is time? The holy bishop of Hippo said that he did not know the answer, but in the silence of his dialogue with God he had experienced very clearly what yesterday, today, and tomorrow mean.¹ Sixteen centuries later, Pope John Paul II once again asked, “What is time?” And he responded: “both faith and reason point, beyond verifiable and measurable data, to the perspective of mystery.”² Time is mystery reflected in the three great “moments” of the history of salvation: “at the beginning, Creation; the Incarnation-Redemption at the center, and at the end the parousia.”³

1. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, BAC, Madrid 1968, 478-479.

2. John Paul II, General Audience, November 19, 1997.

3. Benedict XVI, Angelus, First Sunday of Advent, November 30, 2008.

The usual notion of time refers to the duration of things that are subject to change. The permanence of an entity that does not experience change we call “eternity”; the permanence of an entity that is subject to change we call “time.” Time is the duration proper to a being that changes. Eternity is immutable permanence, not a compilation of many periods of time. God eternally and continually creates time; he gives us the watch and is the watchmaker.

How can we reconcile time and eternity? “This is possible precisely in the light of the revelation of Christ, who united in himself God and man, eternity and time, spirit and matter.”⁴ With the redemption, time is a path to discover eternity. This “discovery” brings to mind some words of St. Josemaría. Reminding us that God awaits us in the work of each day, he said to the professors and students at the University of Navarra: “Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.”⁵ The mystery of time begins to reveal itself in our life when we are eager to discover this “something” that imparts eternity to time, and that makes us understand that “there are no bad or inopportune days. All days are good, for serving God,”⁶ without excluding the “difficult” days.⁷

When we “divinizes” time, time joins hands with the timeless; the years advance and recede; a man may be a child and an adult at the same time. St. Josemaría received the grace of divinizing time. At the age of twenty-six he asked God with all his heart for “the maturity of an eighty year old man . . . so that I would know how to use my time well and learn how to make the best use of every minute, in order to serve him.”⁸ While at the age of seventy, he continued striving to be a child before his Father God.

A machine has not been invented that would allow us to go backward or forward in time, among other reasons because the inventor would have to be outside of time.⁹ A person who lives the logic of eternity in the midst of the logic of time makes an offering of one’s intellect, memory, and will, freely placing one’s freedom in God’s hands.

Time has a master

Since God makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good (*Mt* 5:45), it is difficult to say “that ‘old times were better,’ since every age has its good and bad

4. Benedict XVI, Address at the inauguration of the 85th School Year of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, November 25, 2005.

5. “Passionately Loving the World,” a homily given at the University of Navarra on October 8, 1967 in *Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá*, 114 (hereafter referred to as *Conversations*).

6. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 52 (hereafter referred to simply by title).

7. See *Conversations*, no. 68 and Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei, vol. I: The Early Years*, Scepter, NY 2001, pp. 63-64.

8. *Friends of God*, 54.

9. See Etienne Klein, *Les Tactiques de Chronos*, Flammarion 2007.

aspects.”¹⁰ The expenditure of time becomes an investment if our eyes are focused on eternity, on the Creator, not on ourselves. Therefore the best return comes when we are totally detached in our use of time, placing God’s will first.¹¹

But is it possible to spend time without being its master? A quick answer might be that everyone owns the use of his or her time. The error of this answer is obvious when we consider the reality of life and the reality of death. When we are born and die is set from all eternity.

Then who is the master of time? A friend of mine, an excellent jeweler and a wise businessman, some years ago acquired a shipment of “hour glasses” with sand in them, each timed for a quarter of an hour. Before placing them on sale, someone suggested putting a small inscription on each one in Latin: *Dominum tempus habet qui non est tu*. “Time has an owner, and it’s not you.” In a few days he sold all the hourglasses at a good price, either because of the Latin, or because they were attractive, or for both reasons. Yes, time does have an owner: “it does not belong to me because it belongs to our Father who is in heaven.”¹²

Under what title do we spend our time? We could say, taking a term from Roman law, that our title is that of “usufructuary” for an indefinite period. So we can never tell its owner: “my years are for me, not for you.”¹³ A person who has the right of usufruct of someone else’s property has the obligation to use it in conformity with the rules established by the owner, and thus the right to “use” those years of life although never knowing how many they will be.

From the teachings of St. Josemaría, we could highlight four characteristics of our use of time: it is brief, instantaneous, serene, valuable.

a) *Brief*

Jesus Christ “lived out the unique event of history which does not pass away,” the Paschal mystery.¹⁴ Everything else passes away: “Yesterday has gone, and today is passing by. Tomorrow will soon be another yesterday.”¹⁵ No matter how much anyone tries to eliminate clocks, time continues passing, as the sundial in a corner of Royal Tunbridge Wells in London has proclaimed for centuries: “Ye may waste but cannot stop me.”

The Bible refers often to the brevity of the years of our life, and even quantifies them: the years of our life are threescore and ten, or even by reason of strength fourscore; yet . . . they are soon gone, and we fly away (*Ps* 90:10). Job is more suc-

10. *Friends of God*, 105.

11. See *idem*, 124.

12. *Idem*, 54.

13. *Idem*, 48.

14. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1085.

15. *Friends of God*, 52.

cinct: my life is a breath (*Job* 7:6). St Paul told the first Christians: Brethren, the appointed time has grown very short (*1 Cor* 7:29).

Our time is brief, short; it passes rapidly, and besides it is . . . so small. The saint of Siena, to whom St. Josemaría had special devotion, pointed to time's smallness to show that our fatigues too are small. Time è *quanto una punta d'ago e non più*—is like the point of a needle, no bigger. And she concluded, “when time has passed, fatigue too has passed.”¹⁶ Perhaps being small helps time function as a sieve¹⁷ of events, which pass through the strainer of the years and thus acquire their true size. Because it is the sum of small amounts of time, each hour escapes in minutes and these seem to fly away in seconds. St. Josemaría sensed throughout his life a “lack of time,”¹⁸ although this scarcity of time had as its background: “when you are in love time flies.”¹⁹

b) *Instantaneous*

We could say that God always speaks in real time, because he does so from what is most intangibly real: eternity, where it is always “now.” Therefore the founder of Opus Dei advised us to cultivate “docility to the divine calls of every instant, because God awaits us precisely there.”²⁰ To postpone this dialogue by saying “tomorrow” or “later” would imply “resistance to grace,”²¹ in the face of the now open to “eternal happiness.”²²

St. Josemaría frequently united two adverbs—“today, now”²³—in order to emphasize that “time is pressing,”²⁴ and that “the Lord demands more from us *each day*.”²⁵ A consequence of living in the present moment is knowing how to correct others at the right moment,²⁶ transmitting the needed counsel on time.²⁷

Nevertheless, the “instant” of God does not necessarily coincide with our human “instant.” For example, we can consider the story of the fig tree in the Gospel. Figs usually mature at the beginning of autumn, but the Lord of Time asked the fig tree for fruit outside of that time frame. “It was not the season for figs, but our Lord comes to pick them, knowing full well that he won’t find any at this time of year. However, when the tree proves to be barren in spite of its apparent fertility and luxuriant leaves, Jesus commands, ‘let no man ever eat fruit of yours hereafter.’”²⁸

16. St. Catherine of Siena, *Il dialogo della divina provvidenza*, Edizioni Cantagalli, Siena 1998, 45.

17. See Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei, vol. II: God and Daring, (El Fundador del Opus Dei, vol. II*, Rialp, Madrid 2002, 523).

18. See Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei, vol. II God and Daring*, 195, 307. 332.

19. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, 151 (hereafter referred to simply by the name of the book).

20. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 224 (hereafter cited by the name of the book). The italics are mine.

21. St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 155 (hereafter cited by the name of the book).

22. *Christ Is Passing By*, 152.

23. For example, in *The Forge*, no. 163.

24. *Furrow*, no. 613.

25. *Friends of God*, 308. The italics are mine.

26. See *The Forge*, no. 596.

27. See *Friends of God*, 158.

28. *Idem*, 51.

The saints knew how to give fruit in the now that God granted them. St. John of the Cross advised: "Since when the moment comes to give an account you will be grieved not to have used your time in God's service, why don't you order and employ your time *now* as you would have liked to have done when you are dying?"²⁹

c) *Serene*

The family crest of St. Josemaría Escrivá had as its motto two words that refer to the serene use of time: "*alma, calma*" (energetically, but calmly). The calm use of time leads one to realize that "the works of God are done by God. But human monuments are made and unmade by time."³⁰ This is a diligent, not a lazy calm, which enables us to control our impatience and decide at the right time, because life teaches us that what is "urgent" is not always what is "most important."

Serenity requires balance in the expenditure of time. Referring to time in relation to God, St. Josemaría wrote: "When you go to pray, let this be a firm resolution: Don't prolong your prayer because you find consolation in it or shorten it because you find it dry."³¹ The serene and positive vision of time is grounded on this reality: with the coming of the Son of God into the world now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation (see *2 Cor* 6:2).³² We live in the best of times: if there were a better time, God would have given it to us.

d) *Valuable*

How much is time worth? It depends on who is evaluating it, and what it is used for. For example, the price of one second on television commercials broadcast during the Super Bowl in 2010 oscillated between \$83,000 and \$93,000. These figures are less than those of 2009, when the price of a thirty second commercial reached three million dollars. There are those who consider time as "a dimension of the new capitalism,"³³ but the real value of time—which surpasses the mere "market value"—cannot be put into figures no matter how many digits it contains. To truly understand time requires wisdom, a gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁴

For St. Josemaría, time is "our treasure, the "money" with which to buy eternity."³⁵ In a homily later published under the title "Time is a Treasure," he set forth what seems to me the "magna carta" for the sanctification of time, and which provides the underlying thread for these pages.

29. The italics are mine. San Juan de la Cruz, *Obras Completas. Dichos de luz y amor*, 76. BAC, 11th edition, Madrid 1982, 49.

30. See Vázquez de Prada, *El Fundador del Opus Dei*. vol. II: "Dios y audacia," op. cit., 528.

31. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 99 (hereafter this will be cited by the name of the book).

32. St. Josemaría often echoed this affirmation of St. Paul in his preaching; see *Friends of God*, 52 and *Christ Is Passing By*, 59.

33. See Richard Sennet, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, Norton and Co., New York, London 1998, p. 25.

34. *The mind of a wise man will know the time (Eccles 8:5)*.

35. *Furrow*, no. 882.

Time and intellect as intangible realities

An intangible is something that one cannot touch because it lacks a physical substance. The human intellect, the intangible reality par excellence, generates knowledge, which has an economic projection in so-called “intellectual capital,” a computable part of intangible assets. Time and knowledge are interconnected as two complementary intangible realities, whose economic value can be reflected in the rights conferred on the owner of a patent, on a commercial name, trademark, etc.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century intellectual work often entails a greater expenditure of time than work with immediate material results. Nevertheless, in spite of innovations in time measurement, no one has yet succeeded in finding a system of objective measurement of time devoted to intellectual work.

From the perspective of human work, intangible time becomes evident in some stages of the work process; for example, in the search for information, the interchange of ideas or concepts, and in other tasks that are immaterial in nature.³⁶

John Paul II said: “The immensity of time! If time is always a movement away from the beginning, it is also, when we think of it, a return to the beginning. And this is of fundamental importance.”³⁷ It is certainly important to recognize that time comes from God and returns to God. St. Josemaría wrote: “The kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel (*Mk* 1:15). . . . When you seek to draw close to our Lord, remember that he is always very close to you, that he is in you: *regnum Dei intra vos est* (*Lk* 17:21). You will find him in your heart.”³⁸

One of the dangers in negotiating business deals is to forget the importance of the long term, and to seek short term benefits in less than a year. This forgetfulness cuts down the horizons of one’s work; it diminishes hope, and makes the heart shortsighted. One needs patience to await the fruit, which will arrive in its time,³⁹ and the wisdom to discover the greatness hidden in a small beginning. To those who were beginning a university, St. Josemaría once said: “begin small, so the result is a baby eagle, and not a fried chick.”⁴⁰

A long term vision facilitates doing each thing at the right time,⁴¹ without anchoring oneself in the past, or complexes about the present, with the security that all times and places can be brought into accord with “the holiness of the moral doctrine of Jesus Christ.”⁴² The long-term view helps one to keep eternity in view,

36. See Aileen O’Carroll, “Fuzzy Holes and Intangible Time: Time in a Knowledge Industry,” *Time and Society*, 2008, 17, 185.

37. John Paul II, Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday, March 14, 1999, 2.

38. St. Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*. Third mystery of light. The Announcement of the Kingdom of God.

39. See *Furrow*, no. 617.

40. See Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei, vol. III, The Divine Ways on Earth*, Scepter, New York 2005, p. 249.

41. See *Furrow*, no. 950.

42. *Idem*, no. 307.

not moving hurriedly, being patient and understanding, “convinced that souls, like good wine, improve with time.”⁴³

The union of time and intellect goes back very far indeed. In ancient Greece, the Sphinx on the road to Thebes killed anyone who could not answer the question: What living being walks on four legs in the morning, on two at mid-day, and on three in the evening? Only Oedipus responded correctly: “man.” Time advances inexorably and we cannot prevent it from passing “like water over the pebbly bed of a stream, leaving no trace behind.”⁴⁴ But water can also be the greatest enemy of even the most solid rock: “the constant flow of water which drop by drop enters the crevices until it ruins the rock’s structure . . . the greatest danger for a Christian is to underestimate the importance of fighting skirmishes. The refusal to fight the little battles can, little by little, leave him soft, weak and indifferent, insensitive to the accents of God’s voice.”⁴⁵

A Christian employs his freedom in this struggle and, also “drop by drop,” constructs his own history. St. Josemaría reminded us that “history is undetermined and open to a variety of human options—all of which God respects.”⁴⁶ For “the life and conduct of those who serve God have changed history. Even many of those who do not know our Lord are motivated, perhaps unconsciously, by ideals which derive from Christianity.”⁴⁷ His sense of responsibility towards the time that constructs history led him to exclaim: “If only you and I had recognized the day of the Lord! If only men had wanted to give a different outlet to God’s love!”⁴⁸ We can change history if we make use of time properly, if we strive to make it bear fruit.

As the Chinese proverb says: “there is a time to go fishing, and a time to dry the nets.” If we don’t know the time for fishing, we can’t know where the fish are. And then it is of little use whether the nets are dry. The expenditure of time is in our hands. A frequently cited passage from Ecclesiastes says: there is a time for everything that is done under the sun. This is followed by fourteen verbs contrasted with fourteen other verbs: a time to be born and a time to die; to plant and to reap; to kill and to heal; to destroy, construct; weep, laugh; lament, dance; throw stones, gather them; embrace, dismiss; try, give up trying; guard, throw away; tear, sew; be quiet, speak; love, hate; wage war, make peace (see Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). Only man combines in time these twenty-eight verbs.

The liturgy of the Church, a gift of the Holy Spirit, year after year, century after century, recalls for us the history of salvation. St. Josemaría lived, and taught others to live, the liturgy with great love. Advent is a time for imploring divine mercy,⁴⁹ “a

43. *Friends of God*, no. 78.

44. *The Forge*, no. 7.

45. *Christ Is Passing By*, 77.

46. *Idem*, 99.

47. *Idem*, 150.

48. St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, “The First Station.”

49. See *Christ Is Passing By*, 7.

time for hope”⁵⁰ which renews the “real longing for Christ to come.”⁵¹ Lent is a time “of penance, purification, and conversion. It is not an easy program, but then Christianity is not an easy way of life. It is not enough just to be in the Church, letting the years roll by.”⁵² And there is also a time for joy,⁵³ which gains special significance in the time of Easter, without being limited to that epoch of the liturgical year, for joy should “always be present in the Christian’s heart.”⁵⁴

Christians have the obligation of administering their time well. Since it is a scarce commodity for most people, its value is increased, especially for those who “do not have time.” “He hasn’t got the time?” asked the author of *Furrow*. And he answered, “So much the better. Christ is interested precisely in those who do not have the time.”⁵⁵ In the economy of those “without time” minutes are worth hours and seconds are worth minutes.

For anyone who fails to realize the immense value of time, the words of Paul Valéry can be helpful: “Wait until you are hungry. Stop eating and you will see what time is.”⁵⁶

2. In Time

Always

If our intellect, memory and will try to do at each moment “what is pleasing to our Lord,”⁵⁷ then our use of “always” takes on connotations of eternity, it is above time: your time is always here.⁵⁸ The saints are the great promoters of that “always.” The recollections of sanctity are usually accompanied by the word “always”: that person was always cheerful, always generous, always helped as much as he or she could, was always praying, without meaning to praise simply that person’s human capacities. The first apostles who accompanied Jesus, as St. Josemaría said, “were nothing in their time.”⁵⁹

To understand the “always” that rests in God, we need to understand a saint’s constant readiness to serve others. St. Josemaría liked to repeat “*serviam!* I will serve”;⁶⁰ here is the key to the true “always.” Zeal to serve leads one to leave everything for God,⁶¹ without excessive concern for tomorrow—each day’s trouble is sufficient for today (see *Mt* 6:34)—and without being fearful about death because “it will come in the moment, in the place and in the way that are

50. *Idem*, 11.

51. *The Forge*, no. 548.

52. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 57.

53. See *Idem*, 63.

54. *Idem*, 102.

55. *Furrow*, 199.

56. Paul Valéry, cited in Étienne Klein, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

57. *Christ Is Passing By*, 58.

58. *Jn* 7:6.

59. St. Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 12 (Hereafter it will be cited by the name of the book.)

60. *Christ Is Passing By*, 179.

61. See Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei. Vol. III, The Divine Ways on Earth*, pp. 27-28.

best.”⁶² We need to realize that we are “instruments in the hands of God, instruments that he relies on every day. That is why, every day, we struggle to serve him.”⁶³

The day-to-day acquires a universal projection because one “is building the Kingdom of God,” a task entrusted to everyone and from which “no one can feel exempt.”⁶⁴ We need to make good use of time: we cannot throw “this treasure irresponsibly overboard. We mustn’t squander this period of the world’s history which God has entrusted to each one of us.”⁶⁵

Our longing to attain “always” surpasses time; it is transformed into the “forever” of eternity.⁶⁶ To reach that goal requires much patience, fortitude, and hope.

a) *Patience*

“God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them.”⁶⁷ Chesterton marvelled that God created the daisies one by one, and his admiration increased on seeing the eternal perseverance, patient and constant, of God’s creative action. God “always” wants to help us, as that owner of the vineyard who went to hire workers at the third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hours of the day (see *Mt* 20:5-13).

Knowing how to wait for the right time is a way of being patient. St. Josemaría pointed to a unique example in history: “[Our Lord] knew that mankind needed him greatly. He was longing to come into the world to save all souls, but he took his time. He came in due course, just as every other child is born.”⁶⁸

Patience is tested when we think “that Jesus is asleep, that he does not hear us.” This is the moment to “trust the Master completely, place ourselves unreservedly in his hands.”⁶⁹ This abandonment can be costly and even require heroism, but in exchange it brings peace and equilibrium to the soul. The patient person lives the motto that adorns a clock in the Vatican Museums: *Oneratam aequilibro*, put equilibrium into what is heavy and troublesome.⁷⁰ Then difficulties will be clothed in measure, prudence, and equanimity.

b) *Fortitude*

The search for “always” demands fortitude because it is absolute: we have to seek God “in all times and in all things.”⁷¹ The service of God includes every

62. *The Way*, no. 739.

63. *The Forge*, no. 613.

64. See *Christ Is Passing By*, 158.

65. *Friends of God*, 39.

66. See *The Forge*, 999.

67. G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, Project Gutenberg, May 1994 (orig. 1908).

68. *Christ Is Passing By*, 18.

69. *Friends of God*, 22.

70. Planisferologio Faresiano. Gift of the Count of Caserta to Leo XIII. Vatican Museums.

71. See Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei, vol. II: God and Daring*, p. 470.

moment, even a thought that lasts but a second, for “a single thought of man is worth more than the whole world; therefore, only God is worthy of it.”⁷²

The fortitude “always” requires is measured by freedom, not just by the clock. To serve in time is not to be a slave of the clock, but to dominate it. Fortitude is necessary so that the clock does not accelerate or slow down time.

c) *Hope*

If “always” looks to eternity, it is filled with the hope that includes all human values, the “hope of Christ.”⁷³ From this hope-filled position the mind of a wise man will know the time and way. For every matter has its time and way (*Eccles* 8:5-6). The hope of forever “made St. Teresa of Avila great. One day, as a child, she set out from Avila with her brother Rodrigo through the Adaja gate. As they left behind the city walls, intending to reach the land of the Moors where they could be beheaded for love of Christ, she kept whispering to her brother, who was beginning to get tired, ‘forever, forever, forever.’”⁷⁴

St. Josemaria asked: “What are we looking for all the time in things we do, even without thinking about it especially?” And he answered, “If we are motivated by the love of God, and we work with a right intention, then we are seeking whatever is good and pure, whatever brings peace to our conscience and happiness to our soul.”⁷⁵ When we encounter the good and pure we want to give it to others. In the words of a poet, “Let us give time to time: for the glass to overflow we have to fill it first.”⁷⁶ To fill time with good is to be at each moment doing what we should,⁷⁷ without thinking of selfish concerns,⁷⁸ or leaving the future in the hands of others.⁷⁹ Time is filled with work and also with rest.⁸⁰

At the end of the decade of the 1950’s, on the photograph of a young donkey with a serene look and alert ears, St. Josemaría wrote: *Semper ut iumentum*, always like a donkey. He liked to consider the humility of the working donkey, faithful and docile to the indications of its master. The saint described himself as Jesus’ donkey in a text from February 16, 1932, when he heard deep in his soul the words: “Love is deeds and not sweet words and excuses.”⁸¹

The search for “always” is demanding because God always asks us for more. In the homily “The Conversion of the Children of God” the founder recalled the

72. St. John of the Cross: Dichos de luz y amor, Obras completas, BAC 11th edition, Madrid 1982, 46.

73. *Furrow*, no. 293.

74. *Friends of God*, 200.

75. *Idem*, 292. The italics are mine.

76. Antonio Machado: *Proverbios y Cantares*, Ll.

77. See *Conversations*, 88.

78. See *Furrow*, no. 55.

79. See *Friends of God*, 15.

80. See Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei, vol. III, The Divine Ways on Earth*, p. 95. Also see the commentary of Pedro Rodríguez on point 357 of *The Way in The Way: Critical-Historical Edition*. Scepter, New York 2009.

81. The text is as follows: “February 16, 1932: For the last several days I have had a rather bad cold, and it has been an occasion for my lack of generosity towards my God to show itself. I slacked off in the thousand

words of St. Augustine: "If you say 'enough,' you are lost. Go further, keep going. Don't stay in the same place."⁸²

Using time well

Our use of time never limits the full dominion of the Lord of Time, for he can at any moment ask us for a definitive rendering of accounts. This uncertainty should spur us to make the best possible use of our time in life, to appreciate the gift of "living time well," making it render in work and sharing it with those around us.

a) *Living time well*

Looking at one's watch frequently is not what "living time" means, although we know that each hour goes by minute by minute. On the contrary, the tension this produces could lead to the "anguish of time," or to a subtle form of killing it by rushing around, without giving time to time so as to fill it with meaning. A person "lives" an hour well when he or she savors each of the sixty minutes that make it up.⁸³ Seneca already distinguished between living time and existing in time.⁸⁴ The one who "lives" time fills time with deeds, thinking of others for God. St. Josemaría advised: "Use this prescription for your life: 'I don't remember my own existence. I don't think of my own affairs, because I haven't the time.' Work and service!"⁸⁵

To live time is to have the possibility of multiplying it, as Joshua did in making one day become as long as two (*Sir* 46:4, *Josh* 10:12-14). God lengthens the days of those who live time with joy and, by being faithful, attain a happiness that "will grow greater every day."⁸⁶ The joy of living time is a way of exercising the right to "improve" what one has the usufruct of, converting life into "a continuous prayer, good humor and a peace which never ends."⁸⁷ Thus "our whole day can be a time for prayer—from night to morning and from morning to night."⁸⁸

little things that a child—especially a child donkey—can offer his Lord each day. I started noticing this, and that I was postponing the fulfillment of certain resolutions about putting more time and effort into devotional practices, but I calmed myself with the thought, 'Later, when you're well, when your family's financial situation is in better shape... then!' Well, today, after giving the nuns Holy Communion . . . I told Jesus what I tell him so many, many times both day and night: . . . 'I love you more than these.' And immediately I understood, without hearing any words: 'Love is deeds, not sweet words and excuses.' At that moment I saw clearly how little generosity I have. Suddenly there came to my memory many details, which I hadn't been paying attention to, which made me see with crystal clarity my lack of generosity. O Jesus, help me, so that your donkey will be fully generous. Deeds, deeds!"

82. *Christ Is Passing By*, 58. The citation from St. Augustine is from *Sermo* 169, 15 (PL 38, 926).

83. St. John records our Lord's words: *Are there not twelve hours in the day?* (*Jn* 11:9).

84. "Nothing should lead you to think that a person has lived for a long time because you see gray hair and wrinkles. That person has not lived a long time, but has existed for a long time." Lucius Aeneas Seneca, *De brevitate vitae*, in *Invitación a la serenidad*, Ediciones Temas de hoy, Madrid 1998, 20.

85. *The Forge*, no. 853.

86. *Furrow*, no. 86.

87. *Christ Is Passing By*, 144.

88. And he adds: "In fact, as holy Scripture reminds us, even our sleep should be a prayer" *Christ Is*

The interplay of day and night reminds me of the zoo in Chester, in the United Kingdom. In the “bat house,” in almost complete darkness, the bats fly past the visitors at high speeds. For those flying mammals it is nighttime, even though outside the sun is shining. At the end of their “working day,” the lights are turned on and they go to sleep. The bats “live time” in accord with the electric light. Man has his own key to mark day and night and, when he does so facing God, he lives his time at any hour.

Shortly before the end of the sixteenth century, Francis Bacon wrote: “to choose time is to save time.”⁸⁹ Enjoyment of life requires being correct in the choice of time for each activity, beginning with our relationship with God. And since “God is life for us, we should not be surprised to realize that our very existence as Christians must be interwoven with prayer.”⁹⁰ Therefore, to live time is an opportunity to redeem it and make it share in the co-redemption. A passage from St. Paul advises us to walk in wisdom *tempus redimentes*,⁹¹ “redeeming” or making the most of the time. This is a phrase also used in universities to relate time to wisdom: the student’s effort to attain wisdom leads to “redeeming” lost time.⁹²

“Every generation of Christians needs to redeem, to sanctify its own time,”⁹³ while participating in the “turbulent march of human history.”⁹⁴ Co-redemptive time puts eternity into the human calendar, and leads to the sublime moment of petition, sacrifice, adoration and thanksgiving: the Holy Mass. Just after his thirtieth birthday, in 1932, St. Josemaría wrote: “Time ought to stand still when Holy Mass is being said.”⁹⁵ For the priest is offering eternity in time.

b) *Making time render through work*

“Sanctify your work. Sanctify yourself in your work. Sanctify others through your work.” With these pithy phrases, the Founder of Opus Dei summed up the nucleus of the message that God had entrusted to him in order to remind Christians of it.⁹⁶ The words cited by Bishop Echevarría apply to our time of work, the work that makes time fruitful. Work gives meaning to life, for life means to fill time with physical and intellectual work, and with rest. For the Christian, work, rest, and time are enriched because they have God as their primary goal.

Passing By, 119. My soul yearns for thee in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks thee (*Is* 26:9).

89. Francis Bacon, *Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral*. See *On Dispatch*, first published in 1597.

90. *Christ Is Passing By*, 119.

91. “*In sapientia ad eos quae foris sunt: tempus redimentes*” (*Col* 4:5).

92. Two time pieces on university campuses that bear the inscription *In sapientia ambulate tempus redimentes* are the sundial in the Fellow’s Garden, Trinity College, Cambridge, England, and the clock in the Memorial Union, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

93. *Christ Is Passing By*, 132.

94. *Conversations*, 113.

95. *The Forge*, no. 436. Cited by the Servant of God, Álvaro del Portillo, in the conference closing the Eleventh International Theological Symposium of the University of Navarra (see Lucas F. Mateo-Seco (ed.), *La formación de los sacerdotes en las circunstancias actuales: XI Simposio internacional de teología de la Universidad de Navarra*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1990).

96. Homily of Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, at the Mass in honor of St. Josemaría, celebrated in St. Peter’s Square in Rome on October 7, 2002.

The Creator made man free and did not begrudge him his time;⁹⁷ we can order it and spend it in the way we freely choose. In Christ we find a paradigm of time dedicated to work, for “he earns his bread, for years, with his own work.”⁹⁸

To make time render is to make “the time God allots us” bear fruit.⁹⁹ A good worker makes good use of time not only because of the tangible results of his effort: “time is not only money, it is glory, God’s glory!”¹⁰⁰ It represents a foretaste of the glory that will be granted us hereafter.”¹⁰¹

In today’s world, where time is a scarce commodity, we frequently hear complaints about a “lack of time.” Like a good businessman, “we should never have time on our hands, not even a second—and I am not exaggerating. There is work to be done.”¹⁰² A second can have infinite value, that of all eternity.

There are many passages in which he advises making time render¹⁰³ in all the circumstances of life: in housework,¹⁰⁴ in study,¹⁰⁵ and he points to the example of the fig tree in the Gospel,¹⁰⁶ and the foolish virgins.¹⁰⁷

Every minute has sixty seconds; each hour consumes sixty minutes. But the will to work intensely makes some seconds as valuable as minutes, and the result is that an hour of work surpasses sixty minutes. Time and work increase in productivity when there is intensity in one’s effort.¹⁰⁸ But this effort makes rest indispensable to recuperate our strength.¹⁰⁹ In the teachings of St. Josemaría about making time render, we find a constant intertwining of a transcendent sense of life and common sense, proper to citizens who live in the ordinary situations of daily life.

c) *Sharing time*

From the creation of time—by the will of its Creator and Master—the best relationship is to share time with Him and, from that primary relationship, with the persons we interact with during our lifetime. There is no room for sharing time only with oneself and trying to use all of the hours “for me.” In the face of the temptation “to reserve some time for me alone,” we have “to remedy such mean-

97. See *The Forge*, 539.

98. *Christ Is Passing By*, 61.

99. *Idem*, 37.

100. *Friends of God*, no. 81.

101. *Idem*, 212.

102. *Idem*, 42.

103. For example, in *The Way*, *Furrow*, and *The Forge* there are, in total, 42 points on the good use of time.

104. See *Conversations*, 89.

105. See *Furrow*, no. 523.

106. See *The Way*, no. 354.

107. See *Friends of God*, 40.

108. See *The Way*, nos. 333, 335; *Friends of God*, 186.

109. See *Friends of God*, 137.

ness, by putting things right immediately.”¹¹⁰ Christian solidarity leads us to be generous in the expenditure of time when “the just and rightful needs of others are involved,”¹¹¹ and to help others who ask us for help.¹¹²

Sharing time requires knowing how to confront the passage of time, when it seems a “succession of apparently similar days.”¹¹³ Time will bring with it dryness or setbacks that require us “to ‘go against the grain,’ without any spiritual or human consolation,”¹¹⁴ filling our hours “above all, with love of God.”¹¹⁵

Restoring time to its owner

It is an obligation of the one who uses something on loan to return to the owner what has been entrusted to him for his use and enjoyment. The proprietor has a right to demand this restitution. But what does it mean to “restore time to its owner”?

This restitution looks, first of all, at the expenditure of time freely carried out and the alteration—positive or negative—of the time received as a loan. To try to return the same amount of time as that received would mean not realizing who the Owner is, what time is and what the conditions of the loan were. Once more we can recall the parable of the talents and the duty to render a profit from what we have received.¹¹⁶ We can never waste time,¹¹⁷ nor forget its purpose: “You think your time is for yourself? Your time is for God!”¹¹⁸

A clock helps to control the expenditure of time, and contributes to measuring its productivity. But measuring the hours does not indicate whether they are full or empty, whether they look towards heaven or towards oneself.¹¹⁹

How are we to restore time to its Owner? I will highlight here three characteristics of this endeavor: it is continuous, non-replaceable, and risky.

110. *Furrow*, no. 19.

111. *Friends of God*, 138.

112. St. Josemaría urged: “We have to make good use of our time here on earth! Help me to take advantage of it!” Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. III, *The Divine Ways on Earth*, op. cit., p. 501.

113. *Christ Is Passing By*, 24.

114. *Furrow*, no. 149.

115. *The Forge*, no. 705. St. John of the Cross says succinctly: “The soul that walks in love, neither tires nor gets tired.” *Dichos de luz y amor*, 96. *Obras Completas*, BAC, 15. Madrid 1982, 11th ed., 50.

116. The response of the master to the “wicked and slothful servant” is still valid: you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest (Mt 25:27).

117. See *Friends of God*, 5.

118. *Idem*, 49.

119. In regard to clocks and the use of time, I cannot resist transcribing a passage from St. Teresa of Avila: “Father Antonio had already gathered some of the things necessary. Insofar as we could, we helped him; although our help amounted to little. He came to Valladolid with great happiness to speak to me and told me what he had collected, which was very little. It was only with clocks that he was well provided, for he had five of them; this greatly amused me. He told me they were meant as a help to follow the daily schedule, which he wanted well fixed; I don’t think he even had any bed yet to sleep on” *The Foundations*, ch. 14, 1; in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, edited by the Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1985, p. 164.

a) *Continuous*

Our obligation to restore time to its Owner is permanent and continuous. Time is restored when it is spent, second by second, by our actions or omissions. St. Josemaría frequently used the word “moment”—a brief portion of time—to reflect the continuous passage of time: “The Lord has the right to be glorified by us ‘at every moment’—it is an obligation for each one of us. So if we waste time we are robbing God of his glory.”¹²⁰

How do we measure the “moments” of time? The response goes far beyond¹²¹ “How great is man when he acknowledges that he is a privileged creature of God and has recourse to him *tota die*, at every moment of his journey on earth!”¹²²

The continuous restoration of time finds an immediate response in the realm of work: “As soon as you offer it up and then set to work, God is already listening and giving encouragement.”¹²³

b) *Non-replaceable*

Practically all the products that flood the markets for rapid consumption can be replaced by equal or similar ones. This reality is one of the pillars of free market competition. In the case of time, substitution is impossible: its use is always personal and non-transferable. One can work for another, but the hours of work continue to be one’s own.

Human clocks—from the sundial to atomic ones—never recover past time or capture future time: they mark the present. But the eternal “master clock,” with the love of God as its ticktock, always provides time to “recover” the past.¹²⁴ God’s grace, especially in the sacrament of Penance,¹²⁵ permits us to begin again, and recuperate lost hours; also, for example, by a greater dedication and intensity in work.¹²⁶

We can waste time or it can be robbed from us. Already in the fifteenth century before Christ, the water clock was called *Clepsidra*, Greek for “water stealer.” We rob time from God and from others when we waste it.¹²⁷ Each person has specialized thieves of time, but one of the most common is called the imagination.¹²⁸

120. *Furrow*, no. 508; see also no. 509.

121. *Idem*, no. 147.

122. *Friends of God*, 248.

123. *Idem*, 67

124. See *Furrow*, no. 677 and *Friends of God*, 225.

125. “‘Blessed be God’ you said to yourself after having finished your sacramental Confession. And you thought: it is as if I had just been born again. You then continued calmly: ‘Domine, quid me vis facere? -Lord, what would you have me do?’

“And you yourself came up with the reply: ‘By the help of your grace I will let nothing and no one come between me and the fulfillment of your most Holy Will: Serviam—I will serve you unconditionally’” *The Forge*, 238.

126. See *Furrow*, nos. 167 and 996.

127. See *idem*, no. 552.

128. See *Idem*, no. 135.

An uncontrolled imagination consumes minutes, hours, and days. This danger is compounded by the new digital means of communication, which can absorb the imagination, leading it to consume days at a time.

c) *Risky*

The moment of rendering an account for our life is a supremely important one. It is a one-time act of presenting the final balance of the time we have lived, submitting it to the Lord of Time's judgment. When we can give an account of each "moment" in our life, there shouldn't be many surprises; but if the contrary is true, one risks losing eternal happiness.

One of the greatest risk factors is the dead time that we have "killed" through selfishness.¹²⁹ St. Josemaría was saddened by what is often called killing time. "What a pity to be killing time when time is a treasure from God!"¹³⁰ The risk is great; one could say that it is infinite because "when a Christian kills time on this earth, he is putting himself in danger of 'killing heaven' for himself."¹³¹ As he wrote so graphically: "if you kill time, you are opening the doors of your soul to the devil."¹³²

3. Transcending time

St. Josemaría taught that all men and women could "raise their daily duties, their job or profession, to the order of supernatural grace." Thus there is born "a new hope that transcends time and the inherent transience of earthly realities."¹³³ But this hope requires that we employ both supernatural and human means.¹³⁴ Then, as the angel in the Book of Revelation proclaimed: There is no more time (*Rev* 10:7); it will always be day and there shall be no night there (*Rev* 21:25).

In the image of eternity

The Book of Wisdom says: for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world (*Wis* 2:23-24). God created us in the image of and for eternity. But the mystery of sin and the Redemption impede our understanding of eternity, and human routine can erase its deep meaning. As the Founder of Opus Dei wrote: "What a strange capacity man has to forget even the most wonderful things, to become used to mystery!"¹³⁵

129. See *The Forge*, no. 1050.

130. *Idem*, no. 706.

131. *Friends of God*, 46.

132. *Furrow*, no. 620.

133. *Friends of God*, 210.

134. On the first day of 1972, the Founder of Opus Dei read to those who were around him the text of a note that he had written the previous afternoon, as a resolution for the coming year: "This is our destiny on earth: to struggle, for love until the last moment. *Deo gratias!*" Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*. Vol. III: *The Divine Ways on Earth*, p. 452.

135. *Christ Is Passing By*, 65.

At times the word “always” can even weaken mysteries, when one says, for example: “it has always been like that,” “it has always been an unanswered question,” etc., with no implication of eternity. From everlasting to everlasting thou art God (*Ps* 90:2). As point 999 in *The Forge* insists: “The only true ‘forever,’ in the complete sense, is the forever of eternity.”¹³⁶

The fact that man has been created in the image of eternity leads him to view his time here on earth as a pilgrimage, for which he has been chosen from all eternity, and hence which is filled with longings for the infinite.

a) *A time of pilgrimage*

The word “pilgrimage,” as applied to our life here below, means “to understand life as a journey that has to be carried out.”¹³⁷ This is how St. Josemaría saw it: “we are pilgrims, wayfarers.”¹³⁸ Thus he highlights the eternal value of things that are apparently unimportant,¹³⁹ and that our daily occupations “have a meaning which is divine, which belongs to eternity,”¹⁴⁰ a meaning filled with hope.¹⁴¹

In our pilgrimage through time, we have to strive to “see things with the eyes of eternity,”¹⁴² in the light of Jesus’ passage on this earth, trying to put ourselves into the Gospels “as just one more person there.”¹⁴³ Then, as our Lord promises us, Blessed are the eyes which see what you see (*Lk* 10:23). The joys and setback of our daily life are seasoned by “the promise of eternity.”¹⁴⁴

b) *Chosen from all eternity*

“I don’t like to speak of someone being singled out to be part of a privileged elect. But it is Christ who speaks, who chooses. It is the language of Holy Scripture: *Elegit nos in ipso ante mundi constitutionem*, says St. Paul, *ut essemus sancti* (*Eph* 1:4), He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy.”¹⁴⁵

God’s choice is personal; he calls people one by one: “God has you all numbered from eternity.”¹⁴⁶ And his call to be holy is also universal: “our Lord asks all men to come out to meet him, to become saints.”¹⁴⁷ It is a call which reaches each person “at a particular time, but which has been in his mind from all eternity.”¹⁴⁸

136. *The Forge*, no. 999.

137. The official Spanish dictionary (of the Royal Academy) indicates as a third meaning of the expression pilgrimage that: “in certain religions, life is understood as a road which one has to journey along in order to reach a future life of union with God after death.”

138. *Christ Is Passing By*, 177.

139. See *Conversations*, 112.

140. *The Forge*, no. 688.

141. See *Idem*, 1009.

142. *The Way*, 837; *The Forge*, 1017.

143. *Friends of God*, 222, 253.

144. *Friends of God*, 68.

145. *Christ Is Passing By*, 1.

146. *The Way*, no. 927.

147. *Christ Is Passing By*, 33.

148. *The Forge*, no. 18.

It is a call that surprises one at a particular moment in life, as happened with the Virgin Mary who, before the announcement by the Archangel Gabriel, did not know that she had been chosen from all eternity.¹⁴⁹

God's choice respects our personal freedom, but once it has been accepted it imbues our life with the desire to "live every moment of our lives with a lively awareness of eternity,"¹⁵⁰ with the security of God's constant help.¹⁵¹

c) *Longing for infinity*

To use time correctly we need to know the rules of the game. The first is to know that time has a Creator and that he marks the beginning and the end. The second is to recognize that the timelessness called eternity truly exists, and that "the present condition of mankind is not definitive."¹⁵² Our life entails a spiritual conquest, with "a desire for the Infinite, a desire for eternity."¹⁵³

The author of *The Way* wrote many years ago: "Have you seen the dead leaves fall in the sad autumn twilight? Thus souls fall each day into eternity. One day, the falling leaf will be you."¹⁵⁴

The Lord of time has reserved the day and the hour for that inevitable meeting; hence the importance of the Gospel's exhortation "to watch" (see *Mt* 25:13). To "watch" for this final encounter, we need to be vigilant in life, knowing that it is a stage leading to the rendering of accounts for the use we have made of time, paying our Lord back for the redemption he carried out on the Cross, "the price and the treasure of your eternity."¹⁵⁵

Directing himself to priests, St. Josemaría reminded them: "the greatest human failure we want to remedy, is sin, separation from God, the danger that souls may be lost for all eternity. Our overriding desire when we celebrate Mass is the same as Christ's when he offered himself on Calvary: to bring men to eternal glory in the love of God."¹⁵⁶ The immensity of the offense sin entails is seen by looking at the Cross: "Lord, you died on the Cross to save mankind. And yet for one mortal sin you condemn a man to a hapless eternity of suffering. How much sin must offend you, and how much I ought to hate it!"¹⁵⁷

The hope of earning eternal happiness requires diligent effort in the face of time that is passing. But the exercise of hope brings peace to the soul. In the homily

149. See *Christ Is Passing By*, 172.

150. *Friends of God*, p. 239.

151. See *The Forge*, no. 280 and *Friends of God*, 312.

152. *Christ Is Passing By*, 168.

153. *The Forge*, no. 1031.

154. *The Way*, no. 736.

155. *The Way*, no. 708.

156. *In Love with the Church*, 47.

157. *The Forge*, 1002.

The Christian's Hope, St. Josemaría exclaims. "I am happy because I am certain we will attain Heaven if we remain faithful to the end." But "only those things that bear the imprint of God can display the indelible sign of eternity and have lasting value."¹⁵⁸

God offers all men and women the chance of winning eternity; no one is excluded from salvation, unless they freely choose to be. Eternity is a conquest, which we should strive for at every moment. From the Cross Jesus told the repentant sinner: "today you will be with me in paradise."¹⁵⁹ There we will receive "the eternal embrace of love from God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and from the Blessed Virgin."¹⁶⁰

Song of Alphonse the Wise

To speak of eternal happiness without thinking of our Lady, is like speaking of the dawn without the sun. Mary is the Gate and Queen of Heaven, the Mother of Eternity. She "is the masterwork of the Son and the Spirit in the fullness of time."¹⁶¹ Our Lady, who is "a full participant in the work of our salvation, follows in the footsteps of her Son: the poverty of Bethlehem, the everyday work of a hidden life in Nazareth, the manifestation of his divinity in Cana of Galilee, the tortures of his passion, the divine sacrifice on the cross, the eternal blessedness of paradise."¹⁶²

There are many passages in the writings of the Founder of Opus Dei that praise the glories of Mary. Among the earliest is *Holy Rosary*, a book written in 1931, when the author was only 29. There he advises his readers to reach Jesus through a "confident love for Mary."¹⁶³ The angels themselves marvel at Mary "taken body and soul to Heaven," where "the most Blessed Trinity receives and showers honors on the Daughter, Mother, and Spouse of God"¹⁶⁴

The centuries have produced many signs of the devotion of Christians to their Mother: poems, paintings, sculptures, songs.... As St. Josemaría recalled. "I remember a lovely poem, one of the songs collected by Alfonso X the Wise. It's a legend about a simple monk who begged our Lady to let him see heaven, even if only for a moment. Our Lady granted him his wish and the good monk found himself in paradise. When he returned, he could not recognize the monastery—his prayer, which he had thought very short, lasted three centuries."¹⁶⁵

158. *Friends of God*, 208.

159. See *Christ Is Passing By*, 180.

160. *The Forge*, 1012.

161. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 721.

162. *Christ Is Passing By*, 176.

163. *Holy Rosary*, Prologue.

164. *Idem*, Assumption of our Lady.

165. And the text continues: "That's how I explain Christ waiting in the Eucharist. It is God waiting for us,

This song is number 103 in his *Songs to the Virgin Mary*.¹⁶⁶ The refrain of the poem, repeated fourteen times, reminds all Christians that whoever serves our Lady faithfully, will reach Paradise. As the old Spanish reads: *Quen Virgen ben servirá / a Parayso irá.*

God who loves man." *Christ Is Passing By*, 151.

166. Tradition sees the protagonist as the monk Virila (ninth century), at the Monastery of San Salvador de Leyre, Navarra. See Kevin R. Poole: "In Search of Paradise: Time and Eternity in Alfonso X's Cantiga 103," *eHumanista*: Volume 9, 2007, pp. 110 and ff.