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Letter from the Prelate (April 2009)

"Our Lord is calling us to accompany him in his triumph, which we always reach through self-denial. Christ's death on Calvary was not the final word," the Prelate reminds us in his letter this month.

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My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

Next Sunday, with the commemoration of Christ's

triumphal entry into Jerusalem, we begin Holy Week, which culminates in the Paschal triduum of our Lord's passion, death and resurrection. Our Redeemer's sacrifice, made present every time Holy Mass is celebrated, is vividly shown to us in the solemn liturgical celebrations of Holy Thursday and Good Friday and in the Easter Vigil. Let us start preparing with greater intensity for those moments, opening our hearts to the grace that is offered to us with such abundance. We need to accompany our Lord very closely.

On finding ourselves at the threshold of Holy Week, let us remember St. Josemaría's words: "All the things brought to our mind by the different expressions of piety which characterize these days are of course directed to the resurrection, which is, as St. Paul says, the basis of our faith (cf. *1 Cor* 15:14). But we should not tread this path too hastily, lest we

lose sight of a very simple fact which we might easily overlook. We will not be able to share in our Lord's resurrection unless we unite ourselves with him in his passion and death (cf. *Rom* 8:17). If we are to accompany Christ in his glory at the end of Holy Week, we must first enter into his holocaust and be truly united to him, as he lies dead on Calvary." [1] How demanding have you been on yourself, how ardent has your preparation been during these five weeks of Lent? A few days are still left for us to do better, and to make reparation if necessary!

St. Paul's teachings are very clear; I invite you to meditate on them and put them into practice with renewed effort. In this year dedicated to the Apostle to the Gentiles, let us ask him to intercede for us so that, following his example, all Christians may be deeply convinced that in order to identify ourselves with Christ, which

is our greatest desire, there is no other path than that of accompanying him on the road to Calvary. We state this every day when we pray the final prayer of the Angelus: *per passionem eius et crucem, ad resurrectionis gloriam perducamur*. By imitating Christ's generous self-giving which Holy Week places before our eyes, may we also share in the glory of his resurrection.

Benedict XVI, in one of his addresses during the Pauline Year, said that Saul "while he was at first a persecutor and perpetrated violence against Christians, from the moment of his conversion on the road to Damascus he switched to the side of the Crucified Christ, making Christ his *raison d'être* and the reason for his preaching. His was a life neither quiet nor free from dangers and difficulties, but spent entirely for souls (cf. 2 Cor 12:15). In his

encounter with Jesus the central significance of the Cross had been made clear to him: he understood that Jesus *had died and rose for all* and for himself. Both these things were important—universality: Jesus really died for all, and subjectivity: he also died for me. Thus God's freely given and merciful love had been made manifest in the Cross."[2]

Let us stop to consider these words for a moment, now that we are about to enter Holy Week, because they point to the ultimate reason for Christ's Sacrifice. "It is Love that has brought Jesus to Calvary. And once on the Cross," our Father emphasized, "all his gestures and all his words are of love, a love both calm and strong."[3] Let us go more deeply into the reality that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became man, without ceasing to be God, in order to freely assume the weight of all the sins committed

throughout the centuries, offering to the Creator, for us, a reparation of infinite value. 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.*[4]

How great should be our gratitude to our Lord for the immense love that he showed us and that he continues to show us! How thankful we should also be to our Lady, his Mother, who cooperated by her *fiat* in the redemptive plan! But we must never forget that *love is repaid with love*. Our affection, even though it be great, is as nothing compared to God's infinite love. Although this is quite true, our Lord is satisfied with our "little" if we offer him all that we have. He will add the rest; *because God's love has been poured into our*

hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.[5]

So let us decide, once again, during this Holy Week to place our entire life and being, with complete generosity, in God's hands. Thus we will discover, with greater depth, the meaning of the renewal of our baptismal promises that we make at the Easter Vigil. Most of us were incorporated into Christ and the Church when we were very small, because our parents sought in our name the regenerative waters of Baptism. Now we are offered the liturgical opportunity to ratify those commitments that we acquired. Let us do so with gratitude and joy, mindful of the immense gift God has granted us, and with the desire to collaborate with Christ in bringing salvation to all mankind. When looking at a map of the world, when reading or hearing news from the communications media, do we have

an ardent desire that he may reach all souls?

"St. Paul sacrificed his own life, devoting himself without reserve to the ministry of reconciliation, of the Cross, which is salvation for us all. And we too," exhorts the Roman Pontiff, "must be able to do this: may we find our strength precisely in the humility of love and our wisdom in the weakness of renunciation, entering thereby into God's power. We must all model our lives on this true wisdom: not living for ourselves but with faith in the God of whom we can all say: *he loved me and gave himself for me.*"[6]

Let us spread this certainty among all the people we meet, although, humanly speaking, the circumstances may be difficult, including those that now stem from the economic crisis affecting countries in one way or another, in

the various levels of society. By employing the noble human resources that are within your reach to overcome problems and to help others, you will discover God's Providence in everything that happens to you.

We can ask ourselves: How do I react to things that are unpleasant or annoying? Do I struggle to rectify and to raise each question to the supernatural plane? After a moment of wavering, quite understandable since we are human, let us quickly and firmly respond: "Is that what you want, Lord?... Then, it's what I want also!"[7]

Let us not forget, however, that after the Cross came the Resurrection and the glorious Ascension into heaven. Our Lord is calling us to accompany him in his triumph, which we always reach through self-denial. Christ's death on Calvary was not the final

word; we find the final word in his glorification in body and soul for the glory of the Father.[8] St. Paul wrote to the faithful at Corinth: *if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... you are still in your sins.*[9] We Christians have to keep always present this great certainty. As St. Augustine wrote: "There is nothing great in believing that Christ died. The pagans believe this, as do the Jews and also those who are corrupt. All believe that Christ died. The faith of Christians rests on Christ's Resurrection. For us what is great is believing that Christ rose." [10]

"The Lord's death," Benedict XVI teaches, "reveals the immense love with which he loved us, to the point of sacrificing himself for us; but his Resurrection alone is our 'assurance,' the certainty that what he said is the truth which also applies for us, for all times....It is important to reaffirm

this fundamental truth of our faith whose historical veracity is amply documented, even if today, as in the past, there are many who in various ways cast doubt on it or even deny it. The weakening of faith in the Resurrection of Jesus results in weakening the witness of believers."[11]

Human suffering and even death, if they are not separated from faith in the Son of God, acquire their true meaning. I like to recall our Father's exhortation: "Have a strong supernatural faith. Be certain that we will move mountains, raise the dead, give speech to mute tongues. Bodies that are crippled will once again become effective! It isn't fanaticism to know and believe this, to be sure of our Lord's help at every single moment. It is to believe in the risen Christ, without whose resurrection *inanis est et fides vestra* (1 Cor 15:1), our faith would be

vain."[12] As the Pope said, "the theology of the Cross is not a theory; it is the reality of Christian life....Christianity is not the easy road; it is, rather, a difficult climb, but one illumined by the light of Christ and by the great hope that is born of him....Only in this way, through the experience of suffering, can we know life in its profundity, in its beauty, in the great hope born from Christ crucified and risen again."[13]

Therefore, the believer, voluntarily united to Christ in his paschal mystery, shares in Christ's mission and collaborates with him in bringing to completion—also in the material world—the complete victory of our Lord over the devil, sin, and death. "The great Christian revolution has been to convert pain into fruitful suffering and to turn a bad thing into something good. We have deprived the devil of this

weapon; and with it we can conquer eternity."[14]

The light of this teaching, illuminating each of our days, will help us to live Easter deeply, in intimate union with our Lord. Let us incorporate into our daily response the advice that St. Josemaría gave on one occasion, when he was asked how we could be closer to Jesus during Holy Week: "Read the Passion of our Lord, and meditate on it, becoming one more person there. Consider (and you can do this with complete truth, because St. Paul invites us to do so) that it is happening now, not two thousand years ago: *Iesus Christus heri et hodie, ipse et in saecula* (Heb 13:8). Our Lord is the same yesterday and today, and will always be the same. You can put yourself among the disciples, among our Lord's friends, and even among his enemies, to see what is happening. React with your

head and with your heart, as you would have reacted seeing how they were treating him. In this way you will live Holy Week very well."[15] And I add: resolve not to leave him alone. Ask Mary to help you achieve this.

At the end of March I made a trip to Bilbao, invited by the diocesan bishop, to give a lecture at a congress on Catholics and public life. I took advantage of this trip to also go to Pamplona and Saragossa. In the second city, I prayed before Our Lady of the Pillar, an advocacy so closely united to the early days of evangelization in Spain. Recalling the long periods of prayer by St. Josemaría in this Basilica, I beseeched our Mother with all of you for the Pope and his intentions, for the universal Church and for this "small portion" of the Church, the Work.

Let us continue invoking our Lord, closely united in prayer. The coming weeks offer us many opportunities. On the 16th we have the birthday of the Pope, and on the 19th the fourth anniversary of his election to the See of Peter: two very good dates to unite ourselves more closely to him and his intentions. Shortly afterwards, on the 20th, it will be fifteen years since my appointment as Prelate of Opus Dei. Pray for me, because I need it. On the 23rd we celebrate another anniversary of our Father's Confirmation and First Holy Communion. And at the end of the month, on the 29th, we celebrate the liturgical feast of St. Catherine of Siena, a great lover of the Church and defender of the Roman Pontiff, and the intercessor of the Work in the apostolate of public opinion. I am already filled with joy on thinking of the prayers that will rise up to heaven on the occasion of these anniversaries.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+Javier

Rome, April 1, 2009

1. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 95.

2. Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, October 29, 2008.

3. St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Eleventh Station.

4. *Jn* 3:16-17.

5. *Rom* 5:5.

6. Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, October 29, 2008.

7. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 762.

8. Cf. *Phil* 2:5-11.

9. *1 Cor* 15:14,17.

10. St. Augustine, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 120, 6 (CCL 40. 1791).
11. Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, March 26, 2008.
12. St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a meditation, March 30, 1964.
13. Benedict XVI, *Address at a general audience*, November 5, 2008.
14. St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 887.
15. St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a get-together, April 16, 1973.