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Letter from the Prelate (April 2011)

The Prelate expresses his hope that, with the upcoming beatification of John Paul II, "the Holy Spirit will awaken many souls to a deep conversion and bring them close to God once again."

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

Let us always, also during Lent, love the immense riches the Church offers

us in the Word of God, for it spurs us to take up with new energy the path to Easter. “By meditating and internalizing the Word in order to live it every day,” the Pope tells us, “we learn a precious and irreplaceable form of prayer; by attentively listening to God, who continues to speak to our hearts, we nourish the path of faith initiated on the day of our Baptism.” [1]

We are guided on this path by our Lord Jesus Christ. He himself tells us: *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life* . [2] St. Augustine, when commenting on this passage from St. John’s Gospel, says: “It is not said to you, Labor in finding a way to come to the truth and life; this is not said to you. Sluggard, arise: the Way himself has come to you, and roused you from your sleep; if, however, you have awoken, up and walk.” [3]

The second part of Lent presents us with a good opportunity to review the resolutions we formulated as these weeks began and renew our sincere desire to reach Holy Week and Easter well prepared. Perhaps we can use, as a guide for our reflections, the Gospel texts that we will be reading at Mass over the next few Sundays, as Benedict XVI suggests in his Lenten Message for this year. We can also reflect closely on the other anniversaries and events of these days, including the sixth anniversary of the death of John Paul II, tomorrow April 2nd, and his beatification on the upcoming 1st of May.

The anniversary of the passing of John Paul II brings to our memory the example the Holy Father offered to the Church and the world of fidelity to God. The deep impact that his holy death had all over the world, as well as the extraordinary influx of

people of all ages, especially young people, who came to Rome during those days to accompany his sacred mortal remains, were a clear sign that the hearts of so many people still beat with the faith, although sometimes hidden under a cloak of routine, and even of sin. But the breath of the Holy Spirit (as happened during those unforgettable days in April 2005) can awaken many souls to a deep conversion and bring them close to God once again.

That same supernatural reaction was repeated, a short time later, with the election of Pope Benedict XVI, on April 19. We were deeply moved and grateful to witness the truth of the Holy Father's forceful words at the Mass beginning his Petrine ministry: "The Church is alive!" For the Church can never perish (though at times it may seem that she is collapsing) because the Paraclete always assists her and Jesus Christ, the resurrected

and glorious King of all creation, is the Head of his Church.

This certainty, which stems from faith, rises up perennially as the immovable rock for our hope and supernatural optimism. “Our Father God is a loving Father. To help us understand this, Scripture graphically tells us that he takes care of us like *the apple of his eye* (*Deut* 32:10). He never ceases to sanctify, through the Holy Spirit, the Church founded by his beloved Son.” [4] These words of St. Josemaría fill us with consolation and confidence in the midst of the obstacles that, on so many levels, obstruct the pilgrimage of the People of God. “Have confidence,” he continues, “for the Church is incorruptible . . . I would also like you to consider that even if human failings were to outnumber acts of valor, the clear undeniable mystical reality of the Church, though unperceived by the senses,

would still remain. The Church would still be the Body of Christ, our Lord himself, the action of the Holy Spirit, and the loving presence of the Father.” [5]

I am sure that the upcoming beatification of John Paul II will be another sign of the holiness of Christ's Mystical Body, of the renewing power of the Paraclete, and the mercy of God the Father: in a word, of the love of the Most Holy Trinity, who never abandons the Church. And I am convinced (and I beseech God for this) that the raising to the altars of this holy Pontiff will once again stir up in the world and in the Church an outpouring of faith and love and gratitude to our Lord, and a trust-filled adhesion to the Church, our Mother. I was always moved when John Paul II, in speaking of fidelity (using expressions similar to those found in the preaching of St. Josemaría),

would say that an indispensable requisite for this loyalty is “continuity” over the years.

But now, as I suggested at the beginning of this letter, let us try to prepare ourselves for Easter by considering in our personal prayer the Gospel texts that the Liturgy presents to us during these weeks. Let us look courageously at whether we have accompanied and are accompanying Jesus closely, listening to and applying to ourselves what he tells us, and never wanting to leave him alone.

Next Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we will read the scene of the cure of the man blind from birth, where Christ reveals himself as the Light of the world. After putting on his eyes a small amount of clay, made from dust and his divine saliva, he said: *“Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and*

washed and came back seeing . [6]

Later the evangelist relates the dialogue between Jesus and that man. Each of us should take personally the question our Lord addresses to the blind man: *Do you believe in the Son of man?* [7] Do you truly believe—not just with your intellect, but with your heart and will, with your whole being—that Christ is your Savior, that he is the Son of God incarnate, who died and rose for you and for me? This confession of faith, which we solemnly renew at the Easter Vigil, has to involve our entire being, without leaving any corner for selfish plans, for entanglements in our own ego. Let us struggle to give up promptly and joyfully any plans that, however well thought out, do not fit into the Plan (with a capital P) that God is indicating to each of us. Let us strive with determination to help others to open their eyes to God's light; and let us beg our Lord,

with humility, for the grace of faith for ourselves and for others.

On the following Sunday, the Fifth Sunday of Lent, we will listen to the passage about the resurrection of Lazarus. Jesus carries out a great miracle and eloquently manifests his divinity, for who besides God could restore to life a man who had been dead for several days? The Master addresses us as he did Martha, the sister of Lazarus: *I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?* [8] That woman, despite the deep pain caused by her brother's death, does not hesitate to confess her faith in the God of life and death: *Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.* [9] And the miracle took place. Miracles that will also be repeated in our life and in

those of so many other people we want to accompany on their path towards Jesus, if our faith is strong. As St. Josemaría assured us: “Never despair. Lazarus was dead and decaying: ‘By now he will smell; this is the fourth day’ says Martha to Jesus. If you hear God's inspiration and follow it—‘Lazarus, come forth!’—you will return to Life.” [10]

Our Father, with the keen sight God granted him to penetrate into the spiritual meaning of Sacred Scripture, often invited us to go deeper into this scene. When preaching to a small group of people in 1964, he said: “In thinking about the joy of that family, of those witnesses to the miracle; in thinking about the happiness of Jesus himself, with his heart overflowing with joy for the happiness of the others (in a manner analogous to how he wept upon seeing the tears of Martha and Mary), there came to my mind that

aspiration we so frequently repeat: *omnia in bonum!* (cf. *Rom* 8:28), everything that happens is for the good. Including suffering, as long as we don't foolishly try to foster it, or invent it with complications from our own imagination. No matter what happens in our life, if we abandon ourselves in God's hands, we will draw out peace and strength, because divine grace will make us effective instruments. [11]

Palm Sunday, at the end of Lent, inaugurates Holy Week; it is, as it were, the "portico" introducing us to those days so decisive for the history of salvation. On Holy Thursday, in the morning, the Bishop concelebrates Holy Mass surrounded by his priests and with the presence of a good portion of the People of God. In the course of that Mass, the Holy Oils are blessed that are used to consecrate altars, to anoint catechumens (who upon receiving

Baptism will be like altars dedicated to God's service), and to administer the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. In addition, the chrism is consecrated that will be used for the sacrament of Confirmation, which bestows maturity in Christ on the baptized. In the course of that ceremony, priests renew the priestly promises that they made on the day of their ordination. All the members of the priestly People, both ministers and lay faithful, can draw a lot out of that liturgical celebration. What a good moment to intensify our petitions to Jesus, the Eternal High Priest, that there be many holy priests and that the lay faithful as well, men and women, may seriously aspire to holiness, each in one's own state!

In the evening, during the Mass *in Cena Domini*, we especially commemorate the institution of the Eucharist and the ministerial

priesthood. The *today* of the sacramental renewal of the Paschal mystery, the *today* of the Cross (which our Lord anticipated at the Last Supper), becomes present in every Eucharistic celebration and, with a special emphasis, on Holy Thursday. Let us foster our amazement at the perennial “here and now” of the Sacrifice of Calvary, especially at the Mass *in Cena Domini*. On Holy Thursday, before the Consecration, the Roman Canon puts on the lips of the priest some words proper to this solemnity: “The day before he suffered to save us and all men, that is today, he took bread in his sacred hands....” [12]

Let us beseech the Blessed Trinity that the excess of love shown by Christ will never leave us unmoved. He not only gave his life on the Cross once and for all, but wanted to institute the Holy Eucharist and the priesthood so that always and

everywhere, until the moment of his glorious coming at the end of time, we might enter into living and true contact with his redeeming Sacrifice. Let us bow our hearts “in adoration before this mystery: a great mystery, a mystery of mercy. What more could Jesus have done for us? Truly,” wrote John Paul II in his final Encyclical, “in the Eucharist, he shows us a love which goes ‘to the end’ (*Jn 13:1*), a love which knows no measure.” [13]

The evening Mass on Holy Thursday prepares us for the memory of our Lord’s passion and death, on the following day. “There is an inseparable connection between the Last Supper and Jesus’ death. At the Last Supper Jesus gives his Body and his Blood, that is, his earthly existence, himself, anticipating his death, and transforming it into an act of love.” [14] While adoring the Holy Cross on that day, let us say a sincere

thank you! to our Redeemer, which, accompanied by the desire to be very faithful to him, will spur us to continue walking with perseverance and joy along the path of holiness.

We thus come to the eve of the Resurrection. Waiting for the definitive triumph of our Lord, Holy Saturday is meant to be a day of silence and recollection. The altars are stripped and there is no liturgical ceremony; we also notice the absence of the Blessed Sacrament, which is reserved in a separate place just in case it might be needed to administer Communion as viaticum. This year it falls on April 23, the anniversary of the First Holy Communion and Confirmation of St. Josemaría.

These circumstances (not being able to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice) bring to mind the memory that on the golden anniversary of our founder's priesthood, divine

Providence arranged that he could not celebrate Holy Mass, since it was Good Friday. Nevertheless, as always, his whole day was a “Mass” (perhaps even more intense than usual) because of his very close union with the Sacrifice of the Cross. I invite you to go to his intercession so that, during those days of the Holy Triduum, we may be especially united to our Lord’s Holocaust, trying to unite ourselves with great intensity to his self-giving for us.

Finally, at the Easter Vigil, “renewing our baptismal promises, we reaffirm that Christ is the Lord of our life, that life which God bestowed upon us when we were reborn of ‘water and Holy Spirit,’ and we profess again our firm commitment to respond to the action of grace in order to be his disciples.” [15]

And I renew as always this request: pray for my intentions. In these past

few weeks, as I already communicated to you, an important part includes the consequences of the earthquake in Japan and the military conflicts in various parts of the world, especially in the Ivory Coast and Libya. Let us go to our Lady, the Queen of Peace, invoking her with faith in the litanies of the Rosary. And let us remain closely united to the Holy Father, in a special way on April 19, the anniversary of his election to the Chair of Peter. Pray also for me, who on the 20th begin a new year of my pastoral service to the Church as Prelate of Opus Dei.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, April 1, 2011

Footnotes:

[1] Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2011, November 4, 2010, no. 3.

[2] *Jn* 14:6.

[3] Liturgy of the Hours, Second reading for the Fourth Sunday in Lent (St. Augustine, *Tractate 34 on the Gospel of John*).

[4] St. Josemaría, Homily *The Supernatural Aim of the Church*, May 28, 1972.

[5] Ibid.

[6] *Jn* 9:6-7.

[7] Ibid. 35

[8] *Jn* 11:25-26.

[9] Ibid, 27.

[10] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 719.

[11] St. Josemaría, Notes taken during a meditation, July 22, 1964.

[12] Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer I, Prayer *Qui pridie* from the evening Mass on Holy Thursday.

[13] John Paul II, Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, April 17, 2003, no. 11.

[14] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, March 31, 2010.

[15] Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2011, November 4, 2010, no. 2.

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