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Letter from the Prelate (May 2011)

Bishop Javier Echevarría highlights three reasons to be especially joyful this month: the joy of the Easter season, the beatification of John Paul II, and the beginning of the month dedicated to Mary.

05/03/2011

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

In our hearts there still resounds, now and always, the echo of the

Church's joy: *surrexit Dominus vere et apparuit Simoni* ; the Lord has truly risen and has appeared to Simon! [1] With this exclamation of supernatural and human joy, the Apostles in the Cenacle at Jerusalem, as the first Christian Easter was ending, received the two disciples who urgently returned from Emmaus in the middle of the night. Cleophas and his companion told them that Jesus had appeared to them on their way to that village and had even sat at table with them.

How easy it is for us to understand the surprise of those men, witnesses to the Master's ignominious death! And also why they had not believed the news of the holy women who at the first hour of the morning, next to the Lord's empty tomb, had received this extraordinary announcement: *Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me* . [2] Nevertheless

(how wonderfully close God is to us!), so great was Jesus' desire to console his own, to restore their faith and joy, that he did not wait for them to reunite in Galilee. That very night he entered the room where they were staying with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, [3] and he greeted them: *peace be with you*. The disciples *were startled and frightened*, St. Luke tells us, *and supposed that they saw a spirit*. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do *questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.*" [4] Then he asked them for something to eat, so that they would be firmly convinced it was really he, the good Master who had triumphed over the devil and over sin, who had broken the chains of death.

During the first week of Easter, the Church has meditated joyfully, once and again, on the Gospel texts that recount for us Christ's resurrection. She does so with gratitude and deep emotion, filled with faith in her Lord's victory. This event is unique in mankind's history, an event that shows us, at the same time, the exemplar of the universal resurrection on the last day. By Baptism we have been incorporated into Christ and made sharers in his death and resurrection. Dead to sin and resurrected to the life of grace, we now walk with a new life, while we await the complete renewal of our being. For, as St. Paul writes, *if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his* . [5]

Once more we marvel at the omnipotence and mercy of God. Christ's resurrection did not mean

simply a return to a previous life, as was the case with Lazarus, with the daughter of Jairus or with the son of the widow at Naim, whom our Lord called from physical death and extended their earthly existence for a few years until they once again would die. “The New Testament testimonies leave us in no doubt that what happened in the ‘Resurrection of the Son of Man’ was utterly different. Jesus’ Resurrection was about breaking out into an entirely new form of life, into a life that is no longer subject to the law of dying and becoming, but lies beyond it—a life that opens up a new dimension of human existence. Therefore the Resurrection of Jesus is not an isolated event that we could set aside as something limited to the past, but it constitutes an ‘evolutionary leap’.

.. In Jesus’ Resurrection a new possibility of human existence is attained that affects everyone and

that opens up a future, a new kind of future, for mankind.” [6]

In the history of the world, the announcement of Christ's resurrection is the “good news” *par excellence* . To bear witness to that fact, the Apostles dispersed throughout the world, after overcoming all their fears. The martyrs were strong under every torment and even death itself. Many confessors and virgins set aside their ambition and comfort here below, to strive with all their strength for eternal goods. And countless ordinary Christians throughout the centuries have raised their eyes to heaven, as they worked with rectitude and love for God and mankind in the concerns of this world.

What makes Christ's resurrection so special is that his Most Holy Humanity, with his body and soul

reunited again, was completely transfigured in the glory of God the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we see clearly in the accounts of his apparitions to his disciples, without thereby ceasing to be a true human nature. It is an event, certainly, that exceeds all our experience. This historical fact, based on the testimony of completely credible witnesses, is at the same time the fundamental object of supernatural faith. As St. Augustine said, “It is no great thing to believe that Christ died . . . All believe that Christ died. But that He rose from the dead is the belief of Christians. To believe that He rose again, this we deem of great moment.” [7]

Perhaps we sometimes have asked ourselves why Jesus after rising didn't show himself to everyone so that all would believe in him.

Benedict XVI writes: “The origins of anything new have always been

small, practically invisible, and easily overlooked. The Lord himself has told us that the ‘kingdom of heaven’ in this world is like a mustard seed, the smallest of all the seeds (cf. *Mt* 13:31-32), yet contained within it are the infinite potentialities of God.” [8] And he concludes: “So it is that the Resurrection has entered the world only through certain mysterious appearances to the chosen few. And yet it was truly the new beginning for which the world was silently waiting.” [9]

Over the centuries, faith in our Lord’s resurrection has spread throughout the world; it has taken root in new cultures and civilizations, with the assistance of believers, members of the Mystical Body journeying on earth. As St. Josemaría insisted so forcefully, now it is up to you and to me, to all Christians, to give witness to Christ with our conduct and our words.

“The Good News of Easter, therefore, requires the action of enthusiastic and courageous witnesses. Each disciple of Christ, and also each one of us, is called to be a witness. This is the precise, demanding and exalting mandate of the Risen Lord. The ‘news’ of new life in Christ must shine out in the life of Christians; it must be alive and active in those who bring it, really capable of changing hearts and the whole of life.” [10] Are we nourishing every day a firm, robust faith in the triumph of our Lord? Does the realization that Christ has truly risen imbue us with confidence on our path? Are we constantly striving to make this known to those around us, on all the crossroads of our earthly journey?

For all these reasons, “Easter is a time of joy—a joy not confined to this period of the liturgical year, but to be found really and fully in the

Christian's heart. For Christ is alive. He is not someone who has gone, someone who existed for a time and then passed on, leaving us a wonderful example and a great memory.

“No, Christ is alive. Jesus is the Emmanuel: God with us. His resurrection shows us that God does not abandon his own.” [11]

Jesus Christ, while now with his Father in glory, continues being present in the Church, especially in the Eucharist, and through grace in the heart of every Christian. By Baptism we have received the new life that our Lord possesses in its fullness; the other sacraments bring this supernatural existence to an ever greater perfection. Only with the resurrection of the body will there be fully accomplished in the members of the Mystical Body the full glorification that our Head, Jesus,

now possesses, with his Blessed Mother, who is our Mother also. Nevertheless, as our Founder stressed, already here below “our faith teaches us that man, in the state of grace, is divinized—filled with God. We are men and women, not angels. We are flesh and blood, people with sentiments and passions, with sorrows and joys. And this divinization affects everything human; it is a sort of foretaste of the final resurrection.” [12] Would that there may constantly rise up from our hearts an act of thanksgiving for the realization that we are children of God the Father, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit.

This foretaste of final glory shines more brightly in the life of the saints, especially those the Church holds up to us as an example of virtue and offers for our veneration. As is only natural, the final triumph of these brothers and sisters of ours brings us

great joy. And our joy is especially strong today, May 1, for the beatification of our beloved John Paul II. Although the great majority of you were not able to come to Rome to take part in this celebration, all of us feel very closely united in our hearts to this great feast of the whole Church.

We all knew this great Pontiff, who spent his life generously for souls right up to his final moments here on earth. We were witnesses to the strength of his faith, to the sureness of his hope, to the ardor of his charity, which embraced all men and women. Moreover in Opus Dei, as I have reminded you on various occasions, we have a great debt of gratitude to the new Blessed; above all because John Paul II was the instrument God used to grant us the Work's definitive juridical structure and the canonization of St. Josemaría. It is only natural then that

we now feel a special joy for his being raised to the altars and thank God for the gift he has granted to the Church. I myself will celebrate a solemn Mass of thanksgiving on the third of May. Unite yourself with greater intensity, if possible, to my Mass on that day, asking for all the intentions that I will present to our Lord through the intercession of the new Blessed.

We are also beginning the month of May. During these weeks, the Church invites us to honor Mary Most Holy in a special way. I suggest that you go to the intercession of our Father and John Paul II, asking them to obtain for us—in these days immediately following the Pope's beatification—the grace of loving and venerating the Mother of God with all of our strength. Karol Wojtyla, from his early youth, offered himself entirely to Mary, as the motto inscribed on his episcopal coat of arms expressed:

Totus Tuus . St. Josemaría as well wanted to be an absolutely faithful subject of the Queen of Heaven. On December 28, 1931, commenting on the custom of the nuns at the St. Elizabeth Foundation on the feast of the Holy Innocents, he wrote: “My Lady, not even for fun do I want you to stop being Mistress and Empress of all creation.” [13]

We too, who are, who want to be completely God’s, have to travel the Marian path that St. Josemaría left us as a legacy. “If you are going to imitate me in anything,” he said, “let it be in my love for our Lady.” [14] This month offers us a marvelous opportunity to foster Marian devotion, through the traditional May pilgrimage. Let us invite our friends and acquaintances to visit during these days some chapel or shrine of our Lady, praying and contemplating the mysteries of the Rosary. We will do them a great

spiritual good, because “to Jesus we always go, and to him we always ‘return,’ through Mary.” [15] Strive to do this pilgrimage with the devotion our Father had on his pilgrimage to Sonsoles. And as he suggested to us years later in his novena to our Lady of Guadalupe, in Mexico, let us bring to our Mother many small roses, those found in the events of each day.

On May 14th, the eve of the fourth Sunday of Easter (also called Good Shepherd Sunday, from the Gospel of the Mass), I will confer priestly ordination on 35 deacons, brothers of yours. As always on these occasions, I ask that we all be very closely united in prayer and in the offering of some sacrifice for the new priests and for the priests of the whole world. Keep the Pope and all the bishops especially present in your prayers, so that we may always imitate the Good Shepherd who gave his life for his sheep. [16]

Right after Holy Week, I made a quick trip to Slovenia and Croatia. In Ljubljana and in Zagreb I met with faithful of the Prelature and with many other people who are benefiting from the spirit of Opus Dei. I give thanks to God because the apostolic work of my daughters and sons is putting down strong roots in those two countries, which our Father prayed so much for. It would be hard to convey to you how much he loved every country, especially those going through difficulties of any kind.

I return to the beginning of this letter. *Surrexit Dominus vere!* “The Risen Christ is journeying ahead of us towards the new heavens and the new earth (cf. *Rev* 21:1), in which we shall all finally live as one family, as sons of the same Father. He is with us until the end of time.” [17] Hidden under the appearances of bread and wine, in a sacramental manner, he

has remained in the Holy Eucharist, to listen to our prayers, to console us and fill us with strength. Let us not separate ourselves from his company; and let us bring many others to him, so that they too (forgive me for the digression, but how grateful Don Alvaro was when recalling his First Communion!) may experience the joy of being with Christ, of accompanying Christ, of living in Christ. I don't have space here to consider all the important dates this month in the history of the Work: we can see how our Lady has shown her care for us! Let us thank her

With all my affection, I bless you.

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, May 1, 2011

Footnotes:

[1] *Lk* 24:34.

[2] *Mt* 28:10.

[3] Cf. *Jn* 20:19.

[4] *Lk* 24:36-39.

[5] *Rom* 6:5.

[6] Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, II, p. 244.

[7] St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*, 120, 6 (CCL 40. 1791).

[8] Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, II, p. 247.

[9] *Ibid.* [10] Benedict XVI, Address to a general audience, April 7, 2010.

[11] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 102.

[12] *Ibid.*, no. 103.

[13] St. Josemaría, *Apuntes íntimos* (December 28, 1931), no. 517 (cf.

Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. I, p. 315).

[14] St. Josemaría, in the year 1954.

[15] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 495.

[16] Cf. *Jn* 10:1-18.

[17] Benedict XVI, Message *urbi et orbi*, April 24, 2011.

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