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Letter from the Prelate (January 2012)

The Prelate asks us to give thanks to God for all the gifts we have received during the past year, including "the spiritual fruit of work offered to God and carried out with a spirit of service to souls."

01/04/2012

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

When singing the *Te Deum* yesterday in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the monstrance, we gave thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for the gifts we have received in the year that has just ended. I felt closely united to the Pope and to the whole Church, especially to each and every one of you, and to the many thousands of Cooperators and friends of the Prelature. I myself saw and heard how our Father prayed this hymn, with a hunger to unite himself to the song of praise that all creation renders to God. Every morning, after celebrating Holy Mass and while taking off his priestly vestments, he would recite it with immense devotion, closely united to his daughters and sons.

During these days of Christmas, and always, it is logical that we raise our acts of thanksgiving to Heaven with greater intensity—first of all, for the

incarnation and birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. This gift is the perennial reason for our gratitude, praise and adoration, for raising our hearts to a God who never ceases to love us madly and who makes this known to us without interruption.

The beginning of the new year should help us to keep this proof of divine love more firmly in mind. The Fathers of the Church and all the saints, throughout the course of history, have been filled with admiration on considering that, with Christ's birth, the Eternal One has entered into time, the Immense One has made himself small, assuming our limited human condition. "What greater grace could God grant us?" St. Augustine asked, "than to make his only Son become the Son of man, so that a son of man might in turn become a son of God? Ask if this is merited; ask for its reason, for its justification, and see whether you

will find any other answer but sheer grace.” [1]

Our surprise and thanksgiving become even greater if we consider that God not only gave us this gift for a time, or for a particular moment, but forever. “The Eternal One entered the limits of time and space to make the encounter with him possible ‘today.’ The liturgical texts of Christmas help us to understand that the events of salvation brought about by Christ are always up to date and concern every person and all people. When in the liturgical celebrations we hear or proclaim: ‘today is born our Saviour,’ we are not using an empty, conventional expression. Rather, we mean that God is offering to us ‘today,’ now, to me, to each one of us, the possibility of recognizing and welcoming him, as did the shepherds in Bethlehem, so that he may also be born in our lives and renew, illuminate and transform

them by his Grace and by his Presence.” [2]

In the light of God’s loving plan for all mankind and for each one of us, the events of the year that has just ended take on their true importance: health and sickness, successes and failures, happy and sad events, what we view as good and what seems less good to us.... How well our Founder put it in that point of *The Way*, when he urged us to raise our heart to God, “in acts of thanksgiving, many times a day. Because he gives you this and that. Because someone has despised you. Because you don’t have what you need, or because you do have it.

“And because he made his Mother, who is also your Mother, so beautiful. Because he created the sun and the moon and this animal or that plant. Because he made that man eloquent and you he left slow of speech....

“Thank him for everything, because everything is good.” [3]

It's true that tragedies and sufferings abound in the world: natural catastrophes that take the lives of thousands of people, scenes of war and violence in many places, disease and the lack of the most basic necessities in many parts of the world, divisions and feuds in families and between peoples.... And to all this we now have to add the deep economic crisis in many countries, with so many men and women out of work.

Nevertheless, although our intellect cannot understand the reason for these situations, faith assures us that this time of ours “in a definitive and indelible manner contains the joyful and liberating newness of Christ the Savior...Christmas makes us rediscover God in the humble, frail flesh of a Child. Is this not perhaps

an invitation to rediscover God's presence and his love which gives salvation even in the brief and stressful hours of our daily life? Is it not perhaps an invitation to discover that our human time—even in difficult and demanding moments—is ceaselessly enriched by the Lord's grace, indeed by the Grace that is the Lord himself?" [4]

Let us remember, my daughters and sons, all the gifts we have received in the months that have just gone by. We can meditate on them in the intimacy of our prayer. In spite of our personal littleness, it has been another year of faithfulness to our Christian vocation in the Church, following the spirit of the Work. And we can list many other gifts: the spiritual fruit of work offered to God and carried out with a spirit of service to souls; the people who, thanks to the example and the apostolic words of the children of

God, have drawn much closer to our Lord, or have discovered him in the midst of their ordinary life; the beginning of stable apostolic work by faithful of the Prelature in new countries and its consolidation in others; the divine call to serve him in Opus Dei that our Lord has addressed to many persons throughout the world; the deep interior impact, the conversions and the vocations to total dedication, following the most varied spiritual paths, that God has raised up in the Church as a result of the World Youth Day in August... And so many other gifts in personal, family and social life, which each of us should discover and give thanks for.

Before this immense panorama, we can make our own the prayer that St. Josemaría so often prayed, especially in the last years of his earthly life:

Sancte Pater, omnipotens, aeterne et misericors Deus, Beata Maria

intercedente, gratias tibi ago pro universis beneficiis tuis etiam ignotis.
[5] “Holy Father, omnipotent, eternal and merciful God: through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I give you thanks for all your benefits, including those that are unknown.” Because, in fact, we receive more gifts that pass unnoticed to us than those we know about. Who could count how often God, in his fatherly providence, has freed us from dangers of soul and body? Who would be able to list all the graces that our Lady has obtained for us in these months?

Therefore, it is naturally and supernaturally logical that we try to maintain a constant attitude of gratitude. As St. Josemaría urged us at the beginning of a new year: “*Ut in gratiarum semper actione maneamus!* May we be constantly giving thanks to God for everything: for what seems good and for what

seems bad, for the sweet and the bitter, for the white and the black, for what is small and for what is great, for little and for much, for the temporal and for what touches eternity. Let us give thanks to our Lord for everything that has happened this year, and also in some way for our infidelities as well. For we have acknowledged them, and they have led us to ask him for forgiveness. And we have made the resolution, which will do our souls a lot of good, to never be unfaithful again.” [6]

Let us turn our eyes now to the year that is beginning. How many gifts God will grant us if we go to him led by the hand of Holy Mary! Let us ask our Mother for this on this feast when the Church solemnly commemorates her divine maternity.

The feasts during these weeks spur us to immerse ourselves in the

atmosphere of the first Christmas. Before the crèche, imagining the affectionate care of Mary and Joseph for the newborn Child, we will have considered our own conduct towards others: those of our own family, our friends, our colleagues, and all those whom God—in one way or another—puts at our side. We have to be for all of them light that leads them to Christ, as the Pope said when reflecting on the lights adorning the Christmas tree: “May each of us bring a little light to the places where we live: in the family, at work, in the neighborhood, in towns, in cities. May each be a light for those nearby; may we step out of the selfishness which often closes hearts and makes us think only of ourselves; may we give a little attention and love to others. Every small act of kindness is like a light of this great tree. Together with other lights it is able to illuminate the obscurity of the night, even the darkest.” [7]

Let us apply these considerations to our daily life, so rich in opportunities for self-giving to God and others. It is true that we are, and we feel ourselves to be, of little value. For that very reason, I pass on to you our Founder's invitation to willingly become small children before God, so that our heavenly Father and our Mother Mary will take special care of each one of us. This decision requires the desire of "renouncing our pride and self-sufficiency, recognizing that we can do nothing by ourselves. We must realize that we need grace, and the help of God our Father to find our way and keep to it. To be little, you have to abandon yourself as children do, believe as children believe, beg as children beg." [8]

The behavior of little children towards their parents—their abandonment in their hands, their trust, their daring requests—can serve as a model for our relationship

with God. This is the fundamental attitude a Christian should have, which, renewed one day and the next, day after day, assures us that we are walking on the right path, independently of the successes or failures that might arise. Do we often stop to consider whether we are walking with our Lord? Do we let him accompany us at every hour? How do we speak to him about what happens to us at each moment?

Who could be a better Teacher than our Lady? When Mary heard the announcement of St. Gabriel, she abandoned herself fully to the divine will— *fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum!* —and firmly believed that *what was spoken to her from the Lord* would be fulfilled, as St. Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, proclaimed. [9] Later, in Cana, Mary directed to her Son a request filled with faith, interceding for the needs of the young couple— *they have no*

wine —and advising the servants to fulfill exactly what our Lord would tell them: *do whatever he tells you* .

[10] Let us turn our eyes more frequently to our Lady, invoking her intercession.

In a few days, on January 9, we will celebrate the 110th anniversary of St. Josemaría's birth. Let us take advantage of this anniversary to go with faith to his intercession, pleading for the Church and for all mankind. Bring to him in a special way the needs of the Work, of his daughters and sons throughout the whole world, and continue praying for my intentions. All of you are constantly present in my prayer; especially those who are going through moments of greater physical or spiritual suffering. With words of St. Paul, I assure you that *it is just for me to feel thus about you all, because I hold you in my heart...God is my*

witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus . [11]

It also seems very opportune that we recall the supernatural and human drive, the optimism born of faith, that St. Josemaría transmitted to his sons in his Circular Letter of January 9, 1939, a year after his arrival in Burgos, thinking of the growth of the Work's apostolic activity on the conclusion of the Spanish Civil War, whose end was now imminent.

“Obstacles? I'm not worried about the obstacles from outside: we will overcome them easily. I see only one formidable obstacle: your lack of filiation and fraternity, were such ever to occur in our family. Everything else—scarcity, debt, poverty, scorn, slander, lies, ingratitude, opposition by good people, misunderstanding and even persecution by authorities—all of that is of no importance when Father

and brothers are fully united through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ. There will be no bitterness that can rob us of the sweetness of our blessed charity.” [12]

With the strength of our Father, and in his name, I ask that we redouble our efforts to live our filiation and fraternity very well. If we do not take great care of these pillars of our supernatural family, crevices will develop in the structure of the Work which no one should consider of little importance. I tell you what he also told us back in the fifties: that we pray the *oremus pro unitate apostolatus*, because we are living it without interruption.

With all my affection, desiring for you the best gifts of Heaven in this new year, I bless you,

Your Father,

+Javier

Rome, January 1, 2012

Footnotes:

[1] St. Augustine, *Sermon* 185 (PL 38, 999).

[2] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, December 21, 2011.

[3] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 268.

[4] Benedict XVI, Homily on the Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, December 31, 2010.

[5] St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, September, 15, 1971.

[6] St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a meditation, December 25, 1972.

[7] Benedict XVI, December 7, 2011.

[8] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 143.

[9] *Lk* 1:38 and 45.

[10] *Jn* 2:3 and 5.

[11] *Phil* 1:7-8.

[12] St. Josemaría, Circular letter from Burgos, January 9, 1939; in Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. II, pp. 275-276.

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(08/11/2025)