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Letter from the Prelate (January 2013)

The Prelate continues his reflections on the Creed in the Year of Faith. Jesus Christ is true God and true man: "by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man."

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

During the holy feast days of Christmas, we have frequently drawn close to the cave at Bethlehem to contemplate Jesus in his Mother's arms. We have gone there to adore him, moved also by the desire to represent in some way all mankind. And today, at the beginning of the new year, we were moved by some words of St. Paul in the second reading of the Mass: *But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons .* [1]

In our souls we sense a great eagerness to communicate to the whole world this “good news,” as our Father repeated—each year with new accents!—when the feast of our Lord's birth arrived. “We would like the whole world to treat him very well, to welcome him affectionately. And we try to cover over the

indifferent silence of those who do not know him or do not love him, by singing Christmas carols, the popular songs that both young and old sing in all countries with a Christian tradition. Have you noticed how these always speak about going to see, to contemplate the Infant God, as the shepherds did on that blessed night? *And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger (Lk 2:16).*" [2]

Filled with amazement, we have contemplated during recent days this great manifestation of divine compassion. Let us never cease to be amazed! "You must look at the Child in the manger. He is our Love. Look at him, realizing that the whole thing is a mystery. We need to accept this mystery on faith and use our faith to explore it very deeply." [3] Therefore, besides imitating the shepherds who went with haste to the stable, we can consider the example of the Magi,

whom we will recall on the upcoming solemnity of the Epiphany. Thanks to their humble faith, those men overcame the obstacles they encountered on their long journey. God enlightened their hearts so that, by the light of a star, they could discover the announcement of the Messiah's birth. They were docile, and this availability to do what God wanted led them to Bethlehem. There, on entering the place where the Holy Family was staying, *they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh .* [4]

Let us too be docile to the promptings of grace, which reaches us through the sacraments; also in our personal prayer, when meditating on the scenes of the Gospel, and in accepting willingly the advice we receive in spiritual direction, and

trying to put it into practice. The exhortation of St. Thomas Aquinas is easy for us to understand: “such is the weakness of the human mind that it needs a guiding hand, not only to know but also to love divine things by means of certain sensible objects known to us. Chief among these is the Humanity of Christ, according to the words of the Preface for Christmastide, ‘that through knowing God visibly, we may be caught up to the love of things invisible.’” [5]

The Creed at Mass sets forth with great simplicity the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation of the Son of God: “For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.” [6] These brief words, which we pronounce or sing accompanied by a deep bow, narrate the central event of history, which has opened for us the gates of

heaven. In that text, like an authenticating watermark, one hears an echo of the three narrations of the Incarnation transmitted to us by the Gospels. St. Matthew, in recounting the annunciation of the mystery to St. Joseph, puts on the angel's lips the same description referring to the Son of the Virgin Mary: *You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins* . [7] Jesus' incarnation and birth show forth the infinite goodness of God. Since we could never return to God by our own strength, owing to sin, both original and personal, he came in search of us: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* . [8] I remind you of our Father's remark, when urging us to have a deep and lively faith: "one can end up losing the faith, if we do not remain astonished at God's mysteries." [9] Do we strive lovingly to remain close to Jesus? Are we

grateful for the omnipotence of our God, who seeks our submission as a proof of our love?

Verbum caro factum est . [10] The Word of God has not only come to speak to us, as before in the Old Testament, but he has made himself one of us, a descendent of Adam and Eve, in taking flesh and blood from the Virgin Mary, equal to us in everything except sin. [11] He wanted to come to earth to teach us that “all the ways of the earth, every state in life, every profession, every honest task can be divine.” [12] And he urges us to live them in a holy way, with supernatural and human perfection. How infinitely and marvelously the *God with us* has drawn close to us!

St. Luke, in narrating the annunciation to our Lady, recounts the Archangel Gabriel’s conversation with Mary, when explaining to her

God's plan: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God* . [13] Our Lady draws the loving gaze of the three divine Persons, who have chosen her from all eternity to be the true Ark of the Covenant, the Refuge of Sinners, because in her most pure womb the Son of God was to take on human flesh. Her immediate and decisive response—*fiat mihi secundum Verbum tuum* , [14] be it done unto me according to your word—opened the way to this great and consoling mystery. Each day, when reciting the Angelus, we commemorate that unique moment in the history of salvation. How much devotion imbues our prayer? Do we give thanks to our Lady from the bottom of our heart, for her complete self-giving to the fulfillment of the divine plan? Let us savor ever more deeply St. Josemaría's words: "Mother, Oh

Mother! With that word of yours—*fiat* , ‘be it done’—you have made us brothers of God and heirs to his glory. Blessed art thou!” [15]

All of these reflections, and many more that could be mentioned, can be summed up in just one: “The Word became flesh to make us ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 *Pet* 1:4): ‘For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God.’” [16]

Jesus Christ is truly the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity: the Son of the eternal Father who has truly taken on our human nature, without ceasing to be God. Jesus is not a being partly divine and partly human, an impossible mixture of the divine and the human. He is *perfectus Deus*,

perfectus homo, as we proclaim in the *Quicumque* or Athanasian Creed. Let us endeavor to go more deeply into this truth; let us ask the Paraclete to illumine us in order to grasp it more fully, making it life of our life, and in order to communicate it with holy enthusiasm to others. Let us not forget that we have to manifest at all times, in every circumstance, the holy pride of being brothers and sisters of Jesus, children of God the Father in Christ.

Let us consider this once again: “For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man. God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of the substance of His mother, born in the world. Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and

inferior to the Father as touching His manhood. Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of that manhood into God. One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.”
[17]

Clearly we find ourselves before a mystery so luminous that our reason is dazzled in considering it. It is, to use a poor analogy, as when someone tries to look directly at the sun and has to look away because so much light cannot be endured. Facing the mystery of the Incarnation, there is no alternative but what our Father tells us: “We must have the humble attitude of a Christian soul. Let us not try to reduce the greatness of God to our own poor ideas and human explanations. Let us try to understand that this mystery, for all

its darkness, is a light to guide men's lives." [18]

In the stable at Bethlehem we see manifested not only God's infinite charity towards his creatures, but also his unfathomable humility. The Child who cries for the first time, who is cold, who needs the warmth of Mary and Joseph, is the almighty and eternal God who, without abandoning heaven to come to earth, freely sets aside the glory of his divinity: *who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men* . [19] Seeing such a marvelous reality, we can understand why our Father frequently exclaimed: "why do you love me so much, Lord?"

"The Christian paradox," says Benedict XVI, "consists precisely in the identification of divine Wisdom,

that is the eternal *Logos* , with the man Jesus of Nazareth and with his story. A solution to this paradox cannot be found if not in the word ‘Love,’ which naturally in this case is written with a capital ‘L,’ in reference to a Love that infinitely exceeds human and historical dimensions.” [20]

To make it clear how indispensable humility is to receive the light of the Incarnation, Scripture tells us that the first witnesses of the divine self-lowering—apart from Mary and Joseph—were some poor shepherds who watched over their flocks in the surroundings of Bethlehem, unassuming people whom others held in low regard. God singled them out because “it is especially humility of heart that attracts God’s kindness.” [21] Jesus himself, years later, will give thanks to his heavenly Father, because *thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and*

revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will . [22]

The Magi also recognized the Messiah because they were simple, generously attentive to the divine sign. “Our Lord asks all men to come out to meet him, to become saints. He calls not only the Magi, the wise and powerful. Before that he had sent, not a star, but one of his angels to the shepherds in Bethlehem (cf. *Lk 2:9*). Rich or poor, wise or less so, all of us have to foster in our hearts a humble disposition that will allow us to listen to the word of God.” [23]

I recall with emotion the times when St. Josemaría described for us the scene of our Lord’s birth. He spoke of the “teaching chair of Bethlehem,” from which the Child Jesus teaches us many lessons; among others, and especially, that of humility, so that we learn to surrender our pride and vanity, by contemplating the divine

Infant. Let us also marvel at how, in choosing the Virgin Mary to make her his Mother, he was attracted—speaking in human terms—especially by her humility, her lowliness: *for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed .*
[24]

This disposition, which we should ask our Lord for, does not exclude the aspiration to become more effective in the task that falls to each of us, making use of all the human means within our reach to improve, to honor God with our daily activity. On the contrary, as the Holy Father says, it is a matter of “deepening one’s knowledge while maintaining a spirit similar to the ‘little ones,’ an ever humble and simple spirit, like that of Mary, the ‘Seat of Wisdom.’” How often have we been afraid to draw near to the cave in Bethlehem out of fear that doing so would be an

obstacle to our critical sense and to our ‘modernity’! Rather, each of us can discover there the truth about God and about humanity, about ourselves. In that Child, born of the Virgin, the two came together: mankind’s longing for eternal life softened the heart of God, who was not ashamed to assume the human condition.” [25]

In this holy battle to ensure that only God shines forth in us, in our work, in our apostolate, let us go to our Father’s intercession, especially on the 9th, the anniversary of his birth, and on the 13th, the anniversary of his baptism, asking him to obtain for us more light from heaven. Do not cease to pray for the Church and for the Pope, for the apostolates of the Work, closely united to my intentions and with the awareness that we need the prayer of our fellow Christians.

Thanks be to God, the apostolic work is growing everywhere, but we have to reach more people, more environments, new places. Jesus is calling us from the stable of Bethlehem, because he wants us to assist him in the Church's mission to bring the redemption to all souls. I have experienced the hunger for God on the part of so many people, also during my recent trip to Verona—how wonderful it is to be with you, with the others!—in the middle of last month, and I “see” it in the news I receive from all over the world.

At the beginning of the new year, on this solemnity of the divine motherhood of Mary, and on the various feasts which during this month mark the history of the Work, I invoke—going to our Mother—the blessing of God on each one of you and your families, on your work and your apostolic activities.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+Javier

Rome, January 1, 2013

[1] Roman Missal, Solemnity of Our Lady, the Mother of God, Second Reading (*Gal* 4:4-5).

[2] St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a meditation, December 25, 1973.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 13.

[4] *Mt* 2:11.

[5] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* , II-II, 1. 82, a. 3 ad 2.

[6] Roman Missal, Ordinary of the Mass, *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* .

[7] *Mt* 1:21.

[8] *Jn* 3:16.

[9] St. Josemaría, Notes from a conversation, October 25, 1973.

[10] *Jn* 1:14.

[11] Cf. *Heb* 4:15.

[12] *Conversations*, no. 26.

[13] *Lk* 1:35.

[14] *Lk* 1:38.

[15] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 512.

[16] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 460. The citation is from St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, 3, 19, 1 (PG 7/1, 939).

[17] *Quicumque* (Athanasian Creed), nos. 30-36.

[18] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 13.

[19] *Phil* 2:6-7.

[20] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily at Vespers, December 17, 2009.

[21] Blessed John Paul II, Address at a general audience, November 6, 1996.

[22] *Mt* 11:25-26.

[23] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 33.

[24] *Lk* 1:48.

[25] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily at Vespers, December 17, 2009.

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