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Letter from the Prelate (May 2016)

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05/04/2016

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

The Marian month par excellence has just begun, when we try to put devotion to our Lady at the center of each day. Many of us recall the practices we learned as small children: prayers dedicated to our Mother (perhaps the praying of the family Rosary), the offering of small sacrifices, adorning images of Mary with flowers.... Therefore I suggest to parents that you practice these gestures, inviting your young children to accompany you. You will find it helpful to read and meditate on the Holy Father's advice on the way family members should treat one another, in his recent apostolic exhortation.[1]

Let us also act in this way, following our Father's suggestions and advice, so that each and every one of us may feel the responsibility "to create a family spirit" in the Work, aware that —with this family concern for one

another—Opus Dei is a reflection of heaven.

Saint Josemaría showed a great eagerness to foster Marian piety in the Work, a requisite without which it is impossible, or at least very difficult, to follow Christ. The May pilgrimage is a specific devotion that is now spread throughout the whole world. He also encouraged us to put more affection and refinement into how we treat our Lady: praying the Rosary slowly, contemplating the mysteries of her Son's and her own life; praying the Angelus at midday, etc. These norms of piety, well lived, help us to keep God present throughout the whole day.

Prayer to our Lady is an expression of love and a sign of total trust in her. It is not just a matter of feelings, which can also be plentiful in these prayers. "But we shouldn't be concerned if, at the beginning, all we

can muster is a good effort to say, almost mechanically, a short prayer to our Lady. When this sincere prayer flows from a heart that, in spite of everything, has not forgotten her motherly vigilance, our Mother Holy Mary enkindles that flickering ember and stirs up in the soul the desire to form itself in the teachings of her Son. That short prayer, the faint ember hidden under the ashes, is transformed into a fire that burns away our personal miseries, and draws others to the light of Christ.”[2]

Perhaps we have reflected on the fact that the Gospels record only a few of our Lady’s words, and none of Saint Joseph’s. Nevertheless, what is contained in Sacred Scripture enables us to see how “the Mother of Jesus follows her Son step by step, playing a part in his redemptive mission, rejoicing and suffering with him, loving those whom Jesus loves,

looking after all around her with maternal care."^[3] Let us pause to consider, for example, the description of the marriage feast at Cana: "At the wedding of Cana, Mary turned to the waiters and said: 'Do whatever he tells you' (*Jn 2:5*). That's what it's all about—getting people to face Jesus and ask him: *Domine, quid me vis facere?* Lord, what do you want me to do? (*Acts 9:6*)."^[4]

In light of these words, the Church invokes our Lady in the litanies as *Mater Boni Consilii*, Mother of Good Counsel, because truly no recommendation is more important than this one: directing souls to Jesus, our Master and Redeemer, so that each may come to know Him, speak with Him, and fall in love with Him. This is what Saint Josemaría did right from the beginning of the Work. And those of us who had the opportunity to accompany him on his Marian visits, saw how he savored each Hail

Mary, in order to enter more fully into the life of the Blessed Trinity. And let us not forget that “many conversions, many decisions to give oneself to the service of God have been preceded by an encounter with Mary.”^[5] — We have experienced this frequently ourselves, both in our own life and in our apostolic efforts.

The advice of our Mother to the servants at Cana is addressed today to each one of us, for we are all called to bring others to Christ. In fact, one of the spiritual works of mercy, especially recommended in this jubilee year, is that of *giving counsel to the one who needs it*. The Master wants to make use of us as he did the first disciples, whom he sent to all the cities where he would be going, to prepare the way for him. For he “not only speaks to us in the intimacy of the heart,” says Pope Francis. “Yes, he speaks to us, but not only there; he also speaks to us

through the voice and witness of the brethren. It is truly a great gift to be able to meet men and women of faith who, especially in the most complicated and important stages of our lives, help to bring light to our heart and to recognize God's will!"^[6] —

Saint Josemaría wanted us to realize we are Christ's instruments in the effort to bring light to people's hearts and intellects. "You cannot just be passive," he wrote. "You have to become a true friend of your friends. You can help them first with the example of your behavior and then with your advice and the influence that a close friendship provides."^[7] —

Thus the way is opened up for giving advice, in the personal apostolate of friendship and confidence that our Father taught from the beginning. "Those well-timed words, whispered into the ear of your wavering friend; the helpful conversation that you managed to start at the right

moment; the ready professional advice that improves his university work; the discreet indiscretion by which you open up unexpected horizons for his zeal. This all forms part of the ‘apostolate of friendship’.”^[8] —

To help others effectively, through advice that best suits their needs, we have to speak about these topics, first, with God in our prayer. It is there, in filial conversation with God, that we will receive light, in order to communicate it to our friends and companions. It is there that “the Spirit makes us grow interiorly . . . and helps us not to fall prey to self-centeredness and one’s own way of seeing things . . . The essential condition for preserving this gift is prayer.”^[9] —

Prayer is the most important “weapon” within our reach. The Church has gone forward by prayer

throughout the centuries, and by prayer it will continue going forward, despite the obstacles encountered in its path. The same has happened with Opus Dei, a “small portion” of the Church, and therefore Saint Josemaría repeatedly stressed that prayer is the most effective remedy for every need. So let us prepare our apostolic conversations in our times of dialogue with God, and let us have recourse to our Lady’s intercession.

On the upcoming 12th of May we will celebrate with great joy the liturgical memorial of Blessed Alvaro. I remember some of his visits to our Lady of Good Counsel, close to Rome; he went there to pray on the vigil of the conclave that chose Saint John Paul II as the successor to Saint Peter. During one of the Marian years that he convoked in Opus Dei, Don Alvaro made reference to this advocacy: “If we want our thanksgiving to be

expressed in deeds of greater self-giving to God, and not just remain a superficial gesture or nice words, we need to go each day with more intensity to our Lady, *Mater boni consilii*.”[10]

Echoing these words of my beloved predecessor, I ask that in your May pilgrimage and in the other Marian visits that each one’s personal piety will inspire, we may beseech our Mother Holy Mary for the good of families, for peace in the world, for the Pope and his intentions, for the needs of the Church and the Work, for vocations, for the effectiveness of the apostolic undertakings. Let us leave these petitions in her hands, so that on the upcoming solemnity of Pentecost she may present them to the Holy Spirit: “So that Mary may lead us to Jesus, to the triune God, in a homage of thanksgiving and in a petition for forgiveness.”[11]

I won't stop to dwell on other anniversaries during the month. I hope that each day will be, for each and every one of us, a new encounter with our Lord, led by our Lady's hand.

With all my affection I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

P. S. When I was about to send this letter to the printers, the news that the Pope had declared the heroic virtues of Montse Grases reached me. Let us give thanks to God and to our Lady under her advocacy of Montserrat, on whose liturgical memorial we received this joyful news. And let us have recourse to the intercession of this young woman for our needs.

Rome, May 1, 2016

[1] See Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, March 19, 2016, chapters 3 and 7.

[2] Saint Josemaría, “Our Lady of the Pillar,” a posthumous article published in 1976 (“Por las sendas de la fe,” Ed. Cristiandad, p. 172).

[3] Saint Josemaría *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 141.

[4] *Ibid.*, no. 149.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, May 7, 2014.

[7] Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 731.

[8] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 973.

[9] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, May 7, 2014.

[10] Blessed Alvaro, *Letter*, January 9, 1978, no. 8.

[11] *Ibid.*

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