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Letter from the Prelate (November 2015)

The Prelate writes about the holy souls in purgatory and the last things: "Because of Christ, Christian death has a positive meaning."

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

The diaconal ordination yesterday of a group of your brothers in the basilica of St. Eugene brought me great joy. By dedicating themselves to the apostolic activities of the Prelature, a living part of Christ's Mystical Body, these sons of mine will wholeheartedly serve the Church, so greatly in need of sacred ministers who are striving to be holy, learned and cheerful, with a sporting spirit in their spiritual life, as St. Josemaría wanted. Let us ask God insistently that this gift never be lacking throughout the world, with holy seminarians and priests for the dioceses.

The beginning of this month reminds us of the consoling truth of the Communion of Saints. Today we especially remember the faithful who are already rejoicing in the Blessed Trinity in Heaven, and tomorrow our prayers will be centered on the faithful departed,

who are still being purified in Purgatory, and with whom we need to forge a strong friendship.

I remember our Father's devotion during this day. He had a deep desire that the holy souls, thanks also to the suffrages the Church offers, might receive the total remission of the temporal punishment due to their sins and thus be able to reach the beatific vision. So great was his desire for this manifestation of mercy, of charity, that he indicated that in Opus Dei the celebration of Mass, Holy Communion, and the praying of the Rosary should frequently be applied to the eternal rest of his daughters and sons, our parents and brothers and sisters, the deceased Cooperators, and all who have left this world. Let us be generous in the application of these suffrages and add on our own part whatever we deem appropriate; above all the offering of our work

finished as perfectly as possible, with a joyful spirit of prayer and of penance.

St. Paul's recommendation is also very pertinent here: *cotidie morior*, [1] each day I die to sin, in order to resurrect with Christ Jesus. St. Josemaría, taking up the Apostle's advice, invited us to meditate frequently on the end of our earthly life, eager to prepare ourselves as well as possible for our encounter with God. Death is a reality that affects everyone, without exception. Many fear it and do all they can to forget about it. It should not be so for Christians who live up to their faith. "For others, death is a stumbling block, a source of terror. For us, death—Life—is an encouragement and a stimulus. For them it is the end: for us, the beginning." [2]

Nevertheless, that step sometimes takes on dramatic contours,

especially when it comes unexpectedly, or when it affects persons who are still young, with their whole life ahead of them. The Holy Father says that in such cases, for many people, “death is like a black hole that opens up in the life of the family, and for which we have no explanation.”[3]

But we should never forget that, as Sacred Scripture tells us, *God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living.*[4] Man was created with a mortal nature, but God's wisdom and omnipotence had disposed that he was not to die, if our first parents had loved and obeyed the divine commandments. They allowed themselves to be deceived by the tempter, and the result is plain to see: *sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned.*[5]

Our Father has so many helpful and consoling considerations on this topic. Among others: “Death comes and cannot be avoided. What empty vanity it is, then, to center our existence on this life. See how much many men and women suffer. Some suffer because life is coming to an end and it pains them to leave it; others because it is going on, and they are sick of it. In no case is there room for the mistaken view that makes our passage through this world an end in itself.

“One must leave that way of thinking behind and anchor oneself to another, an eternal one. A total change is required: emptying oneself of self-centered motives that pass away, and being renewed in Christ, who is eternal.”[6]

Only by looking with faith at Christ crucified do we begin to glimpse the meaning of this mystery, filled more

with consolation than sadness. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “Because of Christ, Christian death has a positive meaning: ‘For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain’ (*Phil* 1:21). ‘The saying is sure: if we have died with him, we will also live with him’ (2 *Tim* 2:11). What is essentially new about Christian death is this: through Baptism, the Christian has already ‘died with Christ’ sacramentally, in order to live a new life; and if we die in Christ’s grace, physical death completes this ‘dying with Christ’ and so completes our incorporation into him in his redeeming act.”^[7] Although not completely correct, there is some truth in the response of the mother of a brother of ours, who remarked with faith, when on the point of dying: “How can our Lord refuse to receive me when I’ve been receiving him every day in Communion for so many years?”

The certitude of faith, united to hope and charity, can undo the pall of sadness and fear that often mars the final steps of earthly life. Even more, as we see with special clarity in the saints' passage from this earth, with faith death can be welcomed with peace, because our encounter with God is near. "Don't be afraid of death. Accept it from now on, generously... when God wills it, where God wills it, as God wills it. Don't doubt what I say: it will come in the moment, in the place and in the way that are best: sent by your Father-God. Welcome be our sister death!"[8]

These are traditional reflections found in Christian doctrine and conduct. They aren't meant to be negative, nor do they try to foster irrational fears, but rather a holy filial fear, filled with trust in God. They reflect both supernatural and human realism, and make clear that Christian wisdom, grounded on faith,

brings tranquility and confidence to the soul.

Our Father taught us to draw practical consequences from meditating on this moment and, in general, on the last things. “Let us not consider these things coldly, therefore,” he once preached to a group of his young sons. “I don’t want any of you to die. Leave them, Lord, don’t take them yet! They are still young, and you have so few instruments here below! I hope our Lord is listening to me.... But it could come at any moment.”[9] And he concluded: “What objectivity the consideration of death brings. What a good remedy for dominating the rebellion of the will and the pride of the intellect. Love it, and tell our Lord trustingly: as You wish, when You wish, where You wish.”[10]

The fact of death is often harder to accept, obviously, when it affects

those we love the most: parents, children, spouses, brothers and sisters.... Nevertheless, with God's grace, "in the light of the Resurrection of the Lord, who abandons none of those whom the Father entrusted to him, we can take the 'sting' out of death, as the Apostle Paul says (*1 Cor 15:55*); we can prevent it from poisoning life, from rendering vain our love, from pushing us into the darkest chasm."[11] Nothing is more certain than that our Lord wants us by his side, to enjoy his holy vision and presence. Do we foster this hope each day? Do we pray with fervor, as our Father did, those words: *vultum tuum, Domine, requiram*,[12] I will seek, O Lord, your face?

If a Christian family has deep roots of faith, those moments, accompanied by sorrow, can become (as in fact often happens) an opportunity to strengthen the bonds that unite its

various members. “In this faith, we can console one another, knowing that the Lord has conquered death once and for all. Our loved ones are not lost in the darkness of nothingness: hope assures us that they are in the good and strong hands of God. Love is stronger than death. Thus, the way is to let love grow, make it stronger, and love will guard us until the day that every tear shall be wiped away, when ‘death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain’ (*Rev 21:4*).”[13]

This Christian vision offers the true antidote against the fear that often afflicts men and women on realizing the fleetingness of earthly life. At the same time, it is only natural, as I mentioned above, that we are saddened by the death of loved ones, and that we weep at their parting. Jesus too wept at the death of Lazarus, his best friend, before

raising him from the dead. But we shouldn't overdo it, since for a consistent Christian "to die is to go to a wedding feast." This is how St. Josemaría described it: "When they say to us: *ecce sponsus venit, exite obviam ei* (Mt 25:6)—go forth, for the bridegroom is coming; He is coming to seek you—we will go to our Lady's intercession. 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now...' And how happy you'll be at the hour of death! What a smile you'll have at the hour of death! There won't be even a twinge of fear, because the arms of Mary will be there to welcome you."[14]

Our Father, when God called into his presence a daughter or son of his at a young age, "protested" in a filial way and experienced a profound sorrow, although he right away accepted God's will, who knows what is truly best for us. *Fiat, adimpleatur...*, he prayed. "May the most just and

lovable Will of God be done, be fulfilled, be praised and exalted above all things for ever! Amen. Amen.”^[15] And he attained peace.

All these considerations need to be always united to the realization that Divine Omnipotence will restore life to us: *vita mutatur, non tollitur*,^[16] life is changed, not taken away. The security of knowing we are close to God, with all the assistance that our Mother the Church dispenses to us in these final moments, will lead us to reason thus: “Lord, I believe that I will rise; I believe that my body will be reunited with my soul, to reign eternally with you: through your infinite merits, through the intercession of your Mother, through the predilection you have shown me.”^[17] —

My daughters and sons, let us strive to transmit this joy and this sureness of faith. Let us pray each day for the

people who will render their souls to God, so that they open themselves to the great abundance of grace that God, through the intercession of his Most Holy Mother, grants at those moments. And let us continue to pray for the holiness of all the world's homes, so that the conclusions of the recent Synod may spur them to follow with complete fidelity the salvific plans that God has inscribed in the very core of marriage and the family.

I would like you to stop to consider the wisdom of the Holy Church in uniting the Solemnity of All Saints to the day dedicated, on the following day, to the commemoration of all the faithful departed: savor the celestial joy that saturates the liturgy this month, and throughout the whole year.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, November 1, 2015

P.S. In a few days I will go to the University of Navarra Hospital, to undergo a surgical operation. I will be closely united to each and every one of you, and I hope you will sustain me with the strength of your prayer.

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[1] *1 Cor* 15:31.

[2] *The Way*, no. 738.

[3] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, June 17, 2015.

[4] *Wis* 1:13.

[5] *Rom* 5:12.

[6] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 879.

[7] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1010.

[8] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 739.

[9] St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, December 13, 1948.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, June 17, 2015.

[12] See *Ps* 26 [27]:8.

[13] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, June 17, 2015.

[14] St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, June 23, 1974.

[15] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 769.

[16] Roman Missal. Preface for the Dead I.

[17] St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, December 13, 1948.

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