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Wholeheartedly united to the Pope

Pastoral letter of Bishop Javier Echevarría to the faithful and cooperators of the Prelature of Opus Dei on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Pope's election.

10/08/2003

Twenty-five years ago we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Opus Dei. Our Lord so arranged it that this date coincided with a period of sede vacante in the Church. John Paul I, the Pope who

had moved the entire world with his smile in only thirty-three days, had just died. That anniversary of the Work, prepared for with so much prayer and joy, was saturated with the sadness of that period of mourning. Shortly thereafter, on October 16, we were filled with joy at the election of John Paul II as the successor of Peter. As we celebrate now the twenty-fifth anniversary of that event, we unite ourselves to the homage that millions of people, believers and non-believers, render to the Roman Pontiff.

The fact that this feast practically coincides with Opus Dei's seventy-fifth anniversary grants us another opportunity to discover the workings of the divine Providence that governs all things well (1) and that guides history throughout the ages. It seems as though our Lord wants to confirm an essential characteristic of the spirit of Opus Dei: a great love for the

Church and for its visible head, as our founder stated in 1934, when he wrote, after having often preached it: “Christ. Mary. The Pope. Haven’t we just indicated, in three words, the loves that make up the entire Catholic faith?”(2). And in 1964, after an audience that Pope Paul VI granted to him, he said: “In Opus Dei we have an extraordinary affection and a great veneration for the Pope: an affection and a veneration that we want to see grow every day. In my desire to serve the Church, I have always seen to it that my children have a great love for the Pope”(3).

These desires of St. Josemaría continue to be followed, thanks be to God, all over the world. This is testified to by the hundreds of thousands of souls who receive formation in the Prelature’s centers or are involved with its apostolates. There Catholics learn to pray every day for the Pope and his intentions,

or to put more effort into this filial duty. They are encouraged to get to know his teachings deeply and to put them into practice. They are urged to spread them among their relatives, friends and acquaintances, making themselves amplifiers for the pontifical magisterium in whatever environment they find themselves. And the many non-Catholics who help out in Opus Dei as Cooperators respect and admire the Holy Father, in whom they discover, as do innumerable people of upright heart, a man of God, an intrepid defender of human rights, a peace-bearer for peoples and consciences. For they find in the Pope a living image of Jesus Christ.

Through God's goodness, the aspiration of St. Josemaría that I have tried to echo frequently in your ears becomes a reality each day: "Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!" May all the men and

women God places at your side go with Peter, to Jesus, through Mary. Thank you, Lord!, I repeat again, while raising my heart filled with affection to the Mother of the Church, through whose intercession all good things come.

For this anniversary, many places will hold acts of homage in honor of Pope John Paul II, to which we want to join ourselves wholeheartedly. But we Catholics cannot limit ourselves to these exterior expressions of affection, because that would be very little. As children of the Church we must accompany the Pope, above all, by the generous offering of our prayer, our sacrifice and our work for him, his health, and his intentions. Let us try to pass on to many people this way of taking part in the approaching anniversary. Persevering prayer and generous mortification should always be the

foundation for our affection and veneration for the Holy Father.

A year has gone by since the canonization of St. Josemaría. As I have repeated frequently during these months, October 6 should never be erased from our memory or conduct. This date is etched forever in the history of Opus Dei, and we must return to it again and again to find once more the impetus towards personal holiness and apostolate that we all felt that day with special intensity. The Pope's words have to unceasingly nourish our prayer and that of those we are trying to bring closer to God by following the spirit of Opus Dei. The Pope told us on that occasion: "To raise the world to God and transform it from within: this is the ideal the holy founder points out to you, dear brothers and sisters, who rejoice today to see him raised to the glory of the altars. He continues to remind you of the need

not to let yourselves be frightened by a materialist culture that threatens to dissolve the genuine identity of Christ's disciples. He liked to repeat forcefully that the Christian faith is opposed to conformism and interior inertia.

“Following in his footsteps, spread in society the consciousness that we are all called to holiness whatever our race, class, society or age. In the first place, struggle to be saints yourselves, cultivating an evangelical style of humility and service, abandonment to Providence and constant attention to the voice of the Spirit. In this way, you will be the “salt of the earth” (cf. Mt 5:13) and “let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:16)”(4).

By his example and words, St. Josemaría taught us to go to our Lady

at every moment, to show her our affection and our trust in her maternal mediation. Don Alvaro, his first successor as head of Opus Dei, urged us to strive “to stay closely united to our Lady, going to her in everything and for everything”(5). Let us strive to pray the Rosary with a tender and strong devotion, especially during this month of October, the final month in the “year of the Rosary” proclaimed by the Pope. Let us put great care into contemplating the mysteries, in accord with the Holy Father’s suggestions, who exhorted us to turn our eyes to Christ, to strive to understand him, to configure ourselves with him, to address our petitions to him and to announce him to others, always through Mary and with Mary (6).

As you begin each decade, put the Pope’s intentions in first place. Thus you will be very united to the

intentions of your Father and Prelate. As St. Josemaría once told us: “Children of my soul, we have the great joy of knowing that God has chosen us from all eternity and has brought us to this family of Opus Dei, which finds its pride in serving: serving all souls and, above all, serving the Church, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic; serving the Roman Pontiff with an unconditional love. Faithful to Jesus Christ, docile to the Church’s magisterium, we work and pray to extend the Kingdom of God, united to the Pope in a deep filial obedience (7).

(1) Wis 8:1.

(2) St. Josemaría, Instruction, March 19, 1934, no. 31.

(3) St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a conversation, January 24, 1964.

(4) Pope John Paul II, Homily at the canonization of St. Josemaría Escrivá, October 6, 2002.

(5) Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, Letter, January 9, 1978, no. 6.

(6) Cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic letter Rosarium Virginis Mariae, October 16, 2002, nos. 13-17.

(7) St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a conversation, January 1, 1964.