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Letter from the Prelate (July 2016)

"The identity card of the Christian is joy," the Prelate tells us, echoing Pope Francis. And he urges us to put into practice the spiritual work of mercy of "comforting the sorrowful."

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

Throughout these months, we are striving to put special emphasis on the practice of the works of mercy. Let us consider today one that Jesus makes explicit reference to when setting forth the program of Christian life in the beatitudes. *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*[1]

This is a work of mercy that, like forgiving offenses, enables us to become more like God, to imitate him. Already in the Old Testament, the Lord had announced: *as one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you.*[2] And Jesus, at the Last Supper, shows us this consolation in the best way possible, since he promises to send the Holy Spirit, the divine Person to whom, as subsistent Love, is attributed the mission of consoling Christians in their sufferings and, in general, strengthening the afflicted to help them overcome every type of evil.

My children, in contemplating the situation in the world, we realize that many people weep and suffer. The dramatic situations provoked by war give rise to great calamities that can't leave us cold; the urgent needs of so many immigrants and the injustices that cry out to heaven are the source of many tears. I am thinking especially about those who are suffering in defense of their faith, even placing their lives at risk.

In reading your letters, and in my personal conversations with you, I share with all my heart in your joys and also in your sufferings and sorrows. How many families are suffering greatly, because one of its members is leading a life distant from God, or because someone in the family is suffering from an illness and the others feel powerless to provide any relief! We are people who live in the middle of the world, so it's only natural that the pressing

problems of contemporary society—the scourge of drugs, the crisis in family unity, the coldness produced by individualism, the economic crisis—affect us deeply.

Seeing this reality shouldn't lead us to become sad. We share the certainty that, if we remain close to the Heart of Jesus, we will be consoled, and not only in eternal life. Already here on earth our Lord offers us the consolation of his closeness. As a loving father, he never leaves us on our own. As Saint Josemaría always taught, the source of a Christian's supernatural joy stems from the awareness of our divine filiation. "I find myself greatly consoled by the assurance, so proper to God's children, that we are never alone, for He is always with us. Aren't you moved by God's great tenderness and constant care for all his creatures?"[3]

Among the reasons for the conversion of the pagan world, in the early days of Christianity, is the example of those predecessors of ours, the first baptized faithful, who didn't lose their supernatural joy in the face of the penalties and persecutions they suffered for their love of Christ. The Acts of the Apostles tells us expressly that the apostles, after being scourged for preaching the Gospel, *left the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name.*^[4]

Today too, the supernatural and human joy of Christ's followers, even when undergoing great opposition, has to be like a magnet capable of attracting those who find themselves immersed in sadness or hopelessness, because they don't know how much God loves them. "A Christian lives in joy and amazement thanks to Christ's Resurrection. As

we see in the First Letter of Saint Peter (1:3-9), although we are afflicted by trials, the joy for what God has done in us will never be taken from us . . . The identity card of the Christian is joy: the joy of the Gospel, the joy of having been chosen by Jesus, saved by Jesus, regenerated by Jesus; the joy of the hope that Jesus is waiting for us, the joy that—even in the crosses and sufferings of this life—is expressed in another way, which is peace in the certainty that Jesus is accompanying us, that he is with us. A Christian makes that joy grow through trust in God.”^[5]

In this context of theological faith and hope, we can understand the certainty with which our Father could say: “joy is a Christian possession which we will have as long as we keep fighting, for it is a consequence of peace,”^[6] a joy that “has its roots in the shape of the Cross.”^[7]

A Christian who realizes that he or she is a child of God should never be overcome by sadness. We may suffer in body and in soul, but even then the awareness of our divine filiation, fostered by the action of the Holy Spirit, will give us new energy to go forward, *semper in laetitia*! As Saint Josemaría advised, “as long as we struggle with tenacity, we will make progress on our way and reach sanctity. There is no saint who did not have to fight with great determination. Our defects shouldn’t lead us to become sad and discouraged. Because sadness can arise from pride or fatigue: but in either case, the one who goes to the Good Shepherd and speaks clearly will find the right remedy. There is always a solution, even if one has committed a very grave mistake!”^[8] —

The sure recourse for avoiding sadness or escaping its clutches is to open one’s heart to Jesus before the

Tabernacle, and to the person who—as his instrument—guides our soul among the twists and turns of the spiritual life. Let us always keep present, putting it into practice, this advice from Saint Josemaría: “raise your heart to God when the hard moment of the day comes, when sadness tries to worm its way in, when we feel the burden of this life, saying: *miserere mei, Domine, quoniam ad te clamavi tota die; laetifica animam servi tui, quoniam ad te, Domine, animam meam levavi* (Ps 85:3-4). Lord, have mercy on me, for I have called upon you all the day: gladden your servant, O Lord, for to you I have lifted up my soul.”^[9] —

What a beautiful work Christians carry out when they console those afflicted by a problem, whether great or small, that robs them of their peace! Besides praying for them, we need to try to offer them an affectionate welcome, for many souls

are only seeking someone who will listen to their problems with patience. How many sad faces we encounter on our earthly path, because no one has taught them to abandon themselves in God, and how warmly we should welcome them with our fraternal consolation! “How many tears are shed every second in our world; each is different but together they form, as it were, an ocean of desolation that cries out for mercy, compassion and consolation. The bitterest tears are those caused by human evil: the tears of those who have seen a loved one violently torn from them; the tears of grandparents, mothers and fathers, children . . . We need the mercy, the consolation that comes from the Lord. All of us need it. This is our poverty but also our grandeur: to plead for the consolation of God, who in his tenderness comes to wipe the tears from our eyes.”^[10] —

This is how the Master acted during his passage among us. Moved by mercy, he stopped to console the widow at Nain, who was weeping over the death of her only son; he did likewise with Martha and Mary in Bethany, grieving for the death of their brother Lazarus. He also wept over the fate the city of Jerusalem was to undergo.^[11] At the beginning of his Passion, in the Garden of Olives, he suffered to the point of sweating blood, and permitted “an angel—a creature—to console him (see *Lk* 22:39-46). Could there be a greater sign of humanity than to allow oneself to be consoled, just as we receive strength from another to overcome our lethargy, our weakness, our discouragement?”^[12]

Following in the Master’s footsteps, let us offer consolation to those in need of it. This effort lies right at the heart of the Christian spirit. Saint Francis addressed our Lord with a

prayer that has been repeated over many generations. “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is sadness, joy; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, your light.”^[13] —

On the 22nd of this month we remember Mary Magdalene. A few days ago, the Pope elevated her liturgical memorial to the category of a feast. Her tears of repentance erased all the mistakes of her past life, and enabled her to unite herself to our Lord in his Passion and Resurrection more closely than any of the other holy women, except, of course, for our Lady. Let us have recourse to the Mother of God and our Mother in all our needs; she is Consoler of the Afflicted, Refuge of Sinners, Help of Christians, and never ceases to watch over us.

“Mother! Call her, cry out to her. She is listening to you. She sees you in danger perhaps, and she, your Mother Holy Mary, offers you, with her Son’s grace, her consoling caress. And you will find yourself with added strength for the struggle ahead.”[14]

Let us continue praying for the Pope and his intentions. Let us accompany him spiritually on his apostolic trip to Poland for the World Youth Day that will be celebrated in Krakow.

With all my affection, I bless you.

Your Father,

+ Javier

Aix-en-Provence, July 1, 2016

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[1] *Mt 5:4*

[2] *Is* 66:13.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *Alone with God*, no. 143.

[4] *Acts* 5:41.

[5] Pope Francis, Homily in Santa Marta, May 23, 2016.

[6] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 105.

[7] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 28.

[8] Saint Josemaría, *Letter*, March 28, 1955, no. 25.

[9] Saint Josemaría, *Letter*, January 9, 1932, no. 15.

[10] Pope Francis, *Prayer Vigil for “Wiping Away” Tears*, May 5, 2016.

[11] See *Lk* 7:11-13; *Jn* 11:17ff; *Lk* 19:41-44.

[12] Saint Josemaría, *Letter*,
September 29, 1957, no. 34.

[13] Prayer attributed to Saint
Francis of Assisi.

[14] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no.
516.

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