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Letter from the Prelate (October 2015)

A new anniversary of the founding of Opus Dei and Pope Francis' call to assist those who have been forced to flee their homeland are the central topics of this month's letter.

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Rome, 1 October 2015

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

Tomorrow is a special day of thanksgiving, because it is a new anniversary of the founding of the Work. We know that St Josemaría received the illumination from God while he was praying and sorting out some papers on which he had noted down what our Lord had shown him in his prayer, from the time when he first felt *inklings*. He had spent many years begging God to show him his Will: “*Domine, ut videam!* Lord, that I may see!” And, addressing our Lady, “*Domina, ut sit!* Lady, may what your Son wants of me be done!” And so when he saw God’s Will clearly, his reaction was to fall to his knees, adoring and thanking the Thrice-Holy God, while there rang in his ears the bells of the church of Our Lady of the Angels, celebrating the Queen of Heaven on the feast of the

Holy Guardian Angels. For all of us, falling on our knees means adoring God our Lord for his goodness and maintaining our unconditional readiness to serve.

Our Father never forgot the pealing of those bells. In a letter written to his children the year before he went to Heaven, he wrote: ***I would like this bell-stroke to put into your hearts for ever the same joy and as much vigilance of spirit as those bells of Our Lady of the Angels left in my soul nearly half a century ago. A bell, then, of divine joys, a whistle from the Good Shepherd, which (...) should move you to contrition and, if necessary, will awaken a desire for deep inner reform: a new step upwards for the soul, more prayer, more mortification, more spirit of penance, and more effort, if possible, to be good children of the Church.***[1]

I would like to remember and remind you of these recommendations of our Father's, so that we will do our best to put them into practice always – and especially during the month that is now beginning, the month of the Rosary. What is more, during this month the Synod of Bishops on the family will be held, for which we have been praying so much, strongly united to the Pope's requests; and it falls within a Marian Year for the Work. Regarding the value of your prayer and mine, there is something I want to recall. I went to visit a bishop in Australia, and after we had talked for a few minutes, he asked me, "In order to do the Work, the Founder prayed a great deal, didn't he?" I said yes, and added some details. Let's ask ourselves: in order to do the Work every day, do we pray a great deal?

Pause for a moment now, my children, wrote our Father, ***and***

think about yourselves. Perhaps we can already begin to hear the ringing of the great bell of heaven's grace in the depths of our souls. God is telling us, by his unconditional self-giving, that genuinely Christian behaviour is woven from both divine and human threads: our human will interwoven with God's will.[2]

St Matthew tells us: *Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*[3] And St Paul stresses: *This is the will of God: your sanctification.*[4] From 2nd October 1928, aware that God was pledged to Opus Dei being a *little part* of the People of God in the service of the whole Church, St Josemaría dedicated himself to this task without any reserves. And so he wrote with full certainty: **the Work of God comes to fulfil the Will of God. Therefore have a profound conviction that heaven is pledged to its being done.**[5]

At that time Opus Dei was like a seed that had barely sprouted above the surface of the soil, so the first men and women who followed our Father faithfully, although they were slow in coming, gave proof of great faith in God and our Founder, when they saw his constant self-giving. Our gratitude goes out to them too on this anniversary. Now, as we see how the spirit of the Work has taken root in souls and countries right round the world, I would make so bold as to say that *we hardly need faith*, because the development of the Work leaps to the eyes, we can touch it with our hands, and see for ourselves that God our Lord is faithful to his promises.

Yes, my daughters and sons: ***have a profound conviction that heaven is pledged to [the Work's] being done***^[6] throughout the world. God is calling us to this great adventure in our work surroundings, the wide circle of our social relations, and also

within our families. We unite ourselves to the grateful cry of so many souls in Heaven and on earth, who praise the Blessed Trinity ceaselessly for this gift to the Church and the world. *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*, we proclaim, knowing that words fall short when it comes to expressing God's greatness and mercy.

Let us also recall these considerations which our Father addressed to God: ***You are what you are: perfect goodness. I am what I am: the filthiest rag in this rotten universe. And yet, you look at me... and you seek me... and you love me. Lord, may my children look at you, and seek you, and love you. Lord, may I seek you, look at you, love you.***[7]

6th October, the anniversary of our Father's canonisation, is a good opportunity to redouble our

gratitude to God and our prayer for the Church, the Work, and all souls. Let's open our hearts wide to those close to us and far off, because our apostolic zeal has to reach them all. A particular responsibility falls to Christian families, and we try to stir it into life especially in those that have been set alight with the spirit of Opus Dei. As St John Paul II wrote, "To the extent in which the Christian family accepts the Gospel and matures in faith, it becomes an evangelising community. (...) This apostolic mission of the family is rooted in Baptism and receives from the grace of the sacrament of marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God's plan."[8]

In the new evangelisation, which needs to be a daily commitment, let us beg the Blessed Trinity to grant us zeal to take the light and salt of

Christ's disciples to the most varied surroundings. "In this regard everyone, beginning with the Christian family, must feel the responsibility to foster the birth and growth of vocations, both priestly and religious as well as in the lay state, *specifically directed to the missions*. This should be done by relying on every appropriate means, but without ever neglecting the privileged means of prayer." [9]

At the present time we are witnessing the sufferings of countless families who find themselves obliged to emigrate for all sorts of reasons: unemployment, poverty, war, persecution because of the faith... And it is also true that such people often find huge difficulties in being accepted into the places where they would like to go. The Church, who is called to be the Mother of all, is not indifferent to these situations. Pope Francis is constantly issuing calls to

human and Christian solidarity with these people. He recalled recently that, **faced with the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees who flee death from war and hunger, and who have begun a journey moved by hope for survival, the Gospel calls us to be “neighbours” of the smallest and the abandoned, and to give them concrete hope. It’s not enough to say, “Take heart. Be patient”.... Christian hope has a fighting spirit, with the tenacity of one who goes toward a sure goal.** [10]

The Pope has also asked us to make **a concrete gesture in preparation for the Holy Year**[11] that will begin in December. This migration of thousands of citizens is especially grave now in Europe, but is happening in other parts of the world too. The Pope speaks to everyone, stressing that this call should be supported, reminding us

that **Mercy is the second name of Love.**[12]

What should be done, by each of us too, with personal initiative and responsibility? The first thing is to ensure that these events do not merely *slide over* our souls passively. We have to pray, and see what concrete means we can apply to alleviate these people's needs in some way. Depending on each person's possibilities, it will often be appropriate to work together with the dioceses and parishes, whom the Pope addresses directly, or with organisations that are concerned with helping. Nobody can hold aloof from the crying needs of so many men and women, our neighbours, in whom we have to discover Jesus Christ himself. Let us beg the Holy Spirit to enlighten us and impel us to action, having obtained proper guidance.

In that way, family and social ties, rooted in the experience of the faith and of the love of God, will be able to **counteract the community desertification of the modern city.** (...) The smile of a family can overcome this desertification of our cities. This is the victory of family love. (...) The Babel project builds lifeless skyscrapers. The Spirit of God instead makes the desert fruitful (cf. *Is 32:15*).[13]

I will end this letter by renewing my desire, this month, to intensify my prayer for the Pope and the Synod, which begins on 4th October. Let us turn to the intercession of our Lady, Mother of the Church and Queen of the family; and then our petitions, together with those of all the thousands of people who are praying with us for the same intention, will reach God's throne more effectively.

I insist: let us look after our personal piety in the praying of the Holy Rosary and the contemplation of each mystery. As we get deeper into the lives of Jesus and Mary, our desire will increase to be more truly brothers and sisters of all mankind, wanting to reach every woman and every man.

A very affectionate blessing from
your Father

X Javier

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[1] St Josemaría, *Letter*, 14 February 1974, no. 1.

[2] *Ibid.*, no. 3.

[3] *Mt* 5:48.

[4] 1 *Thess* 4:3.

[5] St Josemaría, *Instruction*, 19 March 1934, no. 47.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] St Josemaría, notes from his personal prayer, 27 March 1975 (*In Dialogue with the Lord*, pp. 216-217).

[8] St John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 22 November 1981, no. 52.

[9] St John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 30 December 1988, no. 35.

[10] Pope Francis, Angelus, 6 September 2015.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Pope Francis, General audience, 2 September 2015.

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