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Letter from the Prelate (December 2012)

Bishop Javier Echevarría continues his reflections on the Creed during the Year of Faith. This month he considers the words: "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God...."

12/04/2012

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

On the eve of my trip to the principality of Andorra, I left this letter prepared so it could be sent to you on the first of December. I came here, invited by the Archbishop, to participate in the celebration of the 75th anniversary of St. Josemaría's arrival, after he had evaded—with clear divine protection—the sad religious persecution during the Spanish Civil War. He arrived at Sant Julià de Lòria, the first village on Andorran soil, on the morning of December 2, 1937. There, with those who accompanied him, he made a visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the village church (he wasn't able to celebrate Mass, since the liturgical norms then in force required a Eucharistic fast from the preceding midnight). But on the following day, December 3, he celebrated the Holy Sacrifice dressed in priestly vestments, which he had not been able to use for many months. This first Mass in Andorra took place in

the church of Les Escaldes, a village situated close to the capital, where they had found lodging.

I want to begin the letter with these recollections, so that we give a lot of thanks to God who, through our Lady's intercession, watched over St. Josemaría with a special providence during those difficult months. Let us follow the example of our Founder's faithfulness, by always abandoning ourselves with complete trust in God's hands, especially when circumstances are more costly. We also have a good lesson left us by those first ones back in the thirties, when the Work was already "going ahead," because of their great faith in God and in St. Josemaría, when there was "nothing else" but our Father's faith: may each and every one of us be loyal instruments.

Last month I invited you to consider the first article of the Creed, the

foundation of all our belief. “We believe in one only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, creator of things visible such as this world in which our transient life passes, of things invisible such as the pure spirits which are also called angels, and creator in each man of his spiritual and immortal soul.” [1] Thus Paul VI begins the *Credo of the People of God* in 1968, when concluding the Year of the Faith that he had convoked to commemorate the nineteenth centenary of the martyrdom of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul.

Mindful of the unfathomable riches contained in revelation, and constantly assisted by the divine Paraclete, the Church has striven, through the use of reason, to go more deeply into the mystery of the Trinity. Thanks to the efforts of generations of saints (Fathers and Doctors of the Church), she has succeeded in illuminating to some

extent this great mystery of our faith, before which, as our Father used to say, “we are astonished” each day, while also seeking to draw closer to each of the three divine Persons.

“God is one but not solitary,” [2] states a very old symbol, or creed, of the faith. In commenting on it, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: “‘Father,’ ‘Son,’ ‘Holy Spirit’ are not simply names designating modalities of the divine being, for they are really distinct from one another: ‘He is not the Father who is the Son, nor is the Son he who is the Father, nor is the Holy Spirit he who is the Father or the Son.’” [3] You cannot imagine our Founder’s joy when, in Marseilles, he saw an image carved in stone with a reference to the Trinity, which he decided to have placed in the crypt of the Prelatic Church.

I continue now with the second article of the Creed. *I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made . [4]*

In God, generation is absolutely spiritual. Thus, “by analogy with the cognitive process of the human mind, by which man, in knowing himself, produces an image of himself, an idea, a ‘concept,’ that is, a ‘conceived idea,’ which from the Latin *verbum* (word) is frequently called the interior word . . . *we dare to think of the generation of the Son, or the eternal ‘concept’ and interior Word of God. God, in knowing himself, begets the Word, the Son, who is God just as the Father. In this begetting, God is—at the same time—Father, as he who begets, and Son, as*

he who is begotten, in the supreme identity of the divinity which excludes a plurality of ‘gods.’ The Word is the Son of the same substance of the Father, and with him he is the one God of the Old and New Testament revelation.” [5] I will not consider here the Person of the Holy Spirit, one God with the Father and the Son.

Certainly it is impossible to eliminate the obscurity our mind encounters when thinking of the One who *dwells in unapproachable light* . [6] No created intellect, neither human nor angelic, is capable of grasping the unfathomable Divine Essence: “If you understand it, it is not God,” says a well-known aphorism. Nevertheless, our souls, created by God and for God, have a longing to know our Creator and Father better, in order to love and glorify him more; we long to see the Trinity and rejoice in God’s eternal presence.

In this regard, Benedict XVI encourages believers to never be satisfied with the knowledge of God we have been able to attain. “It is precisely the truest joy,” he said in a recent audience, “that unleashes in us the healthy restlessness that leads us to be more demanding—to want a higher good, a deeper good—and at the same time to perceive ever more clearly that no finite thing can fill our heart. In this way we will learn to strive, unarmed, for the good that we cannot build or attain by our own power; and we will learn to not be discouraged by the difficulty or the obstacles that come from our sin.” [7]

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, one of the first Fathers who strove to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of the Trinity’s creative action, explained that “there exists but one God . . . he is the Father, God, the Creator, the author, the giver of order. He made all things by himself, that is, by his

Word and by his Wisdom, by the Son and the Spirit.” [8] And using a graphic metaphor (since there is not the least inequality between the divine Persons), he added that the Son and the Paraclete are, as it were, the “hands” of the Father in creating. This text is cited in no 292 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* , which concludes: “Creation is the common work of the Holy Trinity.” [9] In this complete unity of action, the creative work is attributed to each divine Person according to what is proper to each one. Thus the Father is seen as the ultimate Source of being, the Son as the supreme Model, and the Holy Spirit as the Love that inspires the communication of goods to creatures.

Let us meditate, my daughters and sons, with profound adoration, on these great truths. And we should try to go to God in the way St. Josemaría

advised us to, feeling the need to go to each of the divine Persons, distinguishing them.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

[10] In God the Son, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, in the omnipotence, wisdom and love of the one God, is the origin and the final end of all creatures, spiritual and material, and especially of men and women.

So great is God's goodness that he chose to create our first parents in his image and likeness, [11] and left in them and their descendents a deep mark, a participation in the uncreated Wisdom that is the Word, when he infused into their souls intellect and free will. However, there are many people who don't

know this, or who ignore it, or put it between parentheses, and try to place man at the center of everything. How our Father was saddened by that benighted vision of some people! He spoke about this, for example, during a family gathering at the beginning of the year 1973, making his personal prayer aloud. “Some are trying to set up an anthropocentric Church, in place of a theocentric one. This is absurd. All things have been made by God and for God: *omnia per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil, quod factum est* (*Jn 1:1-3*). It is a terrible mistake to try to make man the summit of everything. It is not worthwhile working only for man, and nothing more. We should work for mankind’s good, but out of love for God. Otherwise, nothing useful will be done, and one won’t be able to persevere.” [12]

Our Lord is waiting for Christians to raise him again—with our prayer, with our sacrifice, with our sanctified professional work—to the summit of all human activities; he wants us to help him to reign in the deepest recesses of human hearts, and to vivify with his teachings civil society and its institutions. “It depends on us in part” — I repeat to you with St. Josemaría—“that many souls remain no longer in darkness, but walk along paths leading to eternal life.” [13] How much devotion do we put into praying the prayer *Ad Trinitatem Beatissimam* of the Preces? How do we give God thanks for his infinite perfection? How deeply do we love this central mystery of the faith, and therefore of our life?

Advent begins tomorrow, the liturgical time that prepares us for our Lord’s Birth. The first week presents us with the events that will

take place at the end of time, when Christ will come in glory to judge mankind and take possession of his kingdom. *Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength . . . to stand before the Son of Man.* [14] And he adds: *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.* [15] “We know that in the Bible the word of God is at the origin of creation: all creatures, starting with the cosmic elements—sun, moon, the firmament—obey the word of God, they exist since they have been ‘called into being’ by it. This creative force of the divine word is concentrated in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, and also passes through his human words, which are the true ‘firmament’ that directs the thought and journey of man on earth.” [16] So let us meditate frequently on the words of Christ contained in the Gospel, and broadly speaking in all the New Testament. Let us strive to draw out new light

from this consideration, in order to apply it to our daily life. I suggest, in accord with our Father's example, that we put real effort into making each period of meditation a dialogue: God sees us, he hears us, he is with us, his daughters and sons.

Don't forget that, starting on the 17th, the Church intones the so-called *major antiphons* , by which she prepares us for our Lord's imminent Birth. The first one is: *O Wisdom, O holy Word of God, you govern all creation with your strong yet tender care. Come and show your people the way to salvation* . [17] It is a pressing invocation to the incarnate Word, whose birth from the Virgin Mary we are about to commemorate. For "the One born in Bethlehem is the Wisdom of God. St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, uses the phrase: 'a hidden wisdom of God' (*1 Cor 2: 7*): in other words, a divine plan, which has long been kept hidden and which

God himself has revealed in the history of salvation. In the fullness of time, this Wisdom took on a human Face, the Face of Jesus.” [18]

Let us prepare with faith for this great feast, which is the feast of joy *par excellence* . Let us live it with all mankind. Let us live it with all the faithful of the Work. And let us approach it with the firm decision to contemplate Christ’s infinite greatness and humility, who took on our nature (another sign of how much he loves us), and let us not tire of looking at Mary and Joseph, marvelous teachers of prayer, of love for God.

The Word made flesh is the eternal Word of God, who has won for us the condition of being in him children of God: *See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are!* [19]
As St. Josemaría writes: “Children of

God, brothers of the Word made flesh, of him of whom it was said, 'In him was life, and that life was the light of man' (*Jn* 1:4). Children of the light, brothers of the light: that is what we are. We bear the only flame capable of setting fire to hearts made of flesh." [20] Let us be eager to be present for the celebration of God's arrival on earth, and consider during these days how we are striving to draw close to Jesus, to live with Jesus, to belong to Jesus.

In the middle of the month that has just ended, I went to Milan, where I had been awaited for some time. I was there only one weekend, but a very intense one, because I took advantage of it to visit with my daughters and sons from northern Italy and with many other people who take part in the Prelature's means of formation. I tried to encourage them to live this Year of Faith very well, and asked our Lord

for abundant grace so that the three theological virtues may take firmer root in everyone's life, and that God may make us better children of his.

The Year of Faith, Christmas: what a marvelous opportunity to put more effort into the apostolate, and to feel more closely united to all mankind!

I haven't forgotten to ask you to help me obtain the intentions that I carry in my heart, with the conviction that we have to be, in the Church and for the Church, *acies ordinata* , [21] an army of peace and joy to serve souls. Let us live the Novena to the Immaculate Conception holding tightly to our Lady's hand, and giving thanks to her for her holy response.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Andorra, December 1, 2012

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Footnotes: [1] Pope Paul VI, *Professio Fidei*, June 30, 1968.

[2] *Fides Damasi* (DZ 71). A symbol of the faith attributed to Pope St. Damasus.

[3] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* , no. 254. The cited text comes from the Eleventh Council of Toledo, year 675 (DZ 530).

[4] Roman Missal, *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* .

[5] Blessed John Paul II, Address at a general catechesis, November 6, 1985.

[6] *1 Tim* 6:16.

[7] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 7, 2012.

[8] St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Contra Haereses* 2, 30, 9 (PG 7, 822).

[9] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* , no. 292;cf. St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Contra Haereses* 4, 20, 1 (PG 7, 1032).

[10] *Jn* 1:1-3.

[11] Cf. *Gen* 1:26.

[12] St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, January 1, 1973.

[13] St. Josemaría, *Letter* , March 11, 1940, no. 3.

[14] Roman Missal, First Sunday of Advent, *Gospel* (C) (*Lk* 21:36).

[15] *Mk* 13:31.

[16] Benedict XVI, Words spoken at the Angelus, November 18, 2012.

[17] Liturgy of the Hours, Vespers of December 17, *Canticle of Mary*. [18]

Benedict XVI, Homily on the Vespers
of December 17, 2009.

[19] *1 Jn* 3:1.

[20] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing
By*, no. 66.

[21] *Song* 6:4.

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