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Letter from the Prelate (October 2007)

“Make it a habit to raise your heart to God, in acts of thanksgiving, many times a day,” the Prelate of Opus Dei suggests in his October letter, echoing words of St. Josemaría.

10/04/2007

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

The first days of October offer us an opportunity to increase our acts of

thanksgiving to God for his goodness towards the Church, the Work, and each one of us. The anniversary tomorrow of Opus Dei's foundation, the beginning of the 80th year of its history, and the fifth anniversary of the canonization of St. Josemaría, on the 6th, spur us to express our gratitude to the Blessed Trinity. And we do so, as is only natural, with a joyful eagerness for conversion, in order to love more!

Let us renew our thanksgiving for this manifestation of divine mercy towards mankind that is Opus Dei, an instrument of evangelization and sanctification, which God let St. Josemaría see on October 2, 1928. And let us give thanks for the faithfulness of our Founder, who responded from the first moment with total generosity to God's call. We also raise our gratitude to God for having offered to the universal Church the example of our Father's

sanctity, proclaimed through his canonization.

Examine your life, my daughters and sons, and you will discover many other personal reasons for giving thanks to our triune God: the gift of life and of forming part of the Church; the treasure of our Christian vocation in Opus Dei; the fact of having been called by our Lord to collaborate in the Church's mission precisely now, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, with the task of shaping society in a Christian way.... Let us raise our prayer of gratitude to heaven for the joys and for the sufferings, for what has gone smoothly and for what we have found hard, since everything works for the good of those who love God (cf. Rom 8:28).

St. Josemaría, right from when he was a young priest, taught us to be very grateful in all circumstances.

“Make it a habit to raise your heart to God, in acts of thanksgiving, many times a day. Because he gives you this and that. Because someone has despised you. Because you don’t have what you need, or because you do have it.

“And because he made his Mother, who is also your Mother, so beautiful. Because he created the sun and the moon, and this animal or that plant. Because he made that man eloquent and you he left slow of speech....

“Thank him for everything, because everything is good” (*The Way*, no. 268).

Let us join our gratitude closely to Christ’s sacrifice at the Holy Mass; there our Lord presents the offering of his life and of his Mystical Body, which God the Father receives *in odorem suavitatis* (Eph 5:2), as a

fragrant offering, through the action of the Holy Spirit.

Almost at the end of his life on earth, St. Josemaría urged us to “constantly give thanks to God, for everything: for what seems good and for what seems bad, for the sweet and the bitter, for the white and the black, for what is small and for what is great, for little and for much, for the temporal and for what touches eternity. Let us give thanks to our Lord for everything that has happened this year, and also in some way for our infidelities as well, because we have acknowledged them, and they have led us to ask his forgiveness. And we have made the resolution, which will do our souls a lot of good, to never be unfaithful again” (Notes taken during a meditation, December 25, 1972).

The fifth anniversary of St. Josemaría's canonization has to re-

enkindle in us the great desires for sanctity we experienced then. I wrote to you, and I have repeated it on other occasions, that *October 6th* has to be always active in our souls. Let us marvel at the confidence God has shown in us, by entrusting us with the task of spreading the spirit of the Work throughout the whole world.

Let us go forward confidently, carrying out our mission as “sowers of peace and joy.” Let us do so with our words and our deeds, helping by our actions to further—through a renewed spiritual struggle each day—what we know is God’s will: that *all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim 2:4).

God uses many ways to let us know his will. Let us strive to open our soul to receive these lights and to put them into effect. As the Pope reminds us: “Whoever wants to be a friend of

Jesus and become his authentic disciple...must cultivate an intimate friendship with him in meditation and prayer. Grasping Christian truths more deeply and the study of theology and other religious disciplines requires an education in silence and contemplation, because one must grow in the ability to listen to God speaking to our heart” (Address, October 23, 2006).

In this regard, among the traditional ascetical means in the Church, a special place is held by retreats. Leaving aside the concerns of daily life, one dedicates oneself to thinking about God and one’s own spiritual progress.

There comes to mind the fact that these days mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of a 1932 retreat of our Father, which provided him with new energy to carry out his foundational task. On various

occasions he told us about those first years of his apostolic work, always surrounded by people whose formation was a constant demand on him. When he wanted to spend a few days in retreat, he sought a place where he could be alone with God, totally separated from his usual occupations.

On October 3, 1932, he went to Segovia, to the monastery of discalced Carmelites built by St. John of the Cross. He had also prepared himself by asking many people for the alms of their prayers for that intention. There, on October 6, he received the divine impulse that led him to invoke the patronage of the Holy Archangels, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, for the apostolic works of Opus Dei (cf. Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. I, p. 367). He left that retreat with clear and specific resolutions for carrying out the Work, grounding everything

on prayer and expiation: this was his constant determination, and this is the path that we who are his daughters and sons must always follow.

I am recalling these facts with the desire that we prepare ourselves very well for the days of recollection and the retreats that we will take part in, and so that we speak to others about this very important means of formation. In many cases (we have abundant experience of this), attending a retreat means a radical conversion, for it helps souls to ask themselves the essential questions about their own life: where we have come from and where we are going, what path we have to follow to reach full union with God, what means we need to employ. “This intimate being with God, and therefore the experience of God’s presence, is what enables us, so to speak, to discover ever anew the

greatness of Christianity; it helps us to live it and put it into practice day after day, by suffering and loving, in joy and in sorrow” (Benedict XVI, Address, November 9, 2006).

If we strive to make the days of recollection and retreats grow, inviting a lot of people, our apostolic work will grow everywhere and we will be amazed at the results. With what conviction do we speak to people about the importance of this means of formation? Do we pray for the people, throughout the whole world, who come to that meeting with God?

As you know, during July and August I was in Pamplona, finishing some work I didn't want to delay. I thank you for the help of your prayers during those weeks. Before returning to Rome, I made a trip—with all of you—to Lourdes and to Torreciudad, where the Marian Family Congress

was being held. Let us continue to pray for the revitalization of this fundamental cell of society, on whose spiritual health to a great extent the new evangelization depends.

I also made a brief trip to some of the places that St. Josemaría traveled to in November 1937, during his crossing of the Pyrenees. We only traveled a few miles (and, of course, without the enormous difficulties our Founder and those accompanying him faced back then), but I was filled with joy and thanksgiving to God, considering once more our Father's heroism. Following in his footsteps, it was very easy to share in the concerns of his heart, and to remember each one of you. During those moments of great hardship, St. Josemaría did not think about himself, but about his daughters and sons, about the souls who would be able to travel along paths of eternal life, if he personally

remained faithful to the mission our Lord had entrusted to him.

This thought struck me with special force when we stopped in the place where the “St. Raphael cabin” had been, in the forest of Rialp. There they had camped for a few days, before beginning their nightly marches. It is moving to recall that, surrounded as they were by every sort of danger and amid those extraordinary circumstances, St. Josemaría set up a schedule that made time for everything: for the practices of piety, for formation and study.... Isn't this a marvelous example for us, now and in the future? There we prayed for the work of St. Michael, St. Gabriel and St. Raphael: for the apostolate that the faithful of the Prelature carry out in the service of the Church. Also, with you, we prayed the Preces of the Work in the place where our Founder found the wooden rose. It

was very easy to focus on each petition, with the care with which our Father took them from the prayers of Christian tradition. He wanted us to pray them everyday with devotion, living them!

Once again I ask you for the help of your prayer and mortification for my intentions. I need your help now urgently. Be generous and don't take your shoulder from the wheel.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, October 1, 2007