

(Letter from the Prelate: August 2010)

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

I am writing you on my return from a trip to several countries in South America. When I was in Ecuador, Peru and Brazil, besides the joy of being with many of your brothers and sisters, and many other people, I prayed before several images of the Blessed Virgin. Supported by each one of you, I endeavored to pray with the piety with which St. Josemaría prayed before images of our Lady. I thanked our Mother for her constant prayer for the Church and the Work, and asked her to continue to bless us abundantly. I did indeed rely upon your prayer to Mary, because I bear deeply engraved on my heart some ardent words of our Father in the Sanctuary of the “Aparecida,” which he later repeated in São Paulo: “I told our Lady that I want to pray with great faith.” Earlier, in Ecuador, I considered the splendid lesson given by St. Josemaría when suffering from altitude sickness, the so-called “*soroche*.” This forced him to reduce his catechetical activity almost completely while he continued to grow in his personal devotion to St. Joseph and in spiritual childhood. There, for two weeks, he was “actively inactive.” In Peru, many memories passed through my mind. They include his great joy on seeing a representation of a scene that he carried deep in his heart: the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph adoring Jesus hidden in the tabernacle. With what great affection he remained there before the altar!

Let us intensify our manifestations of love for our Lady during the months that remain in this Marian year. Precisely on the 15th, feast of the Assumption, we will begin the second part of it. Let us strive to live it with a renewed filial spirit, at the pace of St. Josemaría’s Marian life. “If there is anything in which I would like you to imitate me,” he frequently said, “it is in the love that I have for our Lady.” On other occasions he told us: “imitate Jesus Christ, who is our Model for everything, also in his love for his Mother.”[1]

We are now at the midpoint of the year we have put in our Lady’s hands for the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Work among women. This is an opportunity to draw up a balance sheet of the weeks that have already gone by, in order to spur us to continue forward at a good pace. “When the feasts of our Lady come round let us not be sparing in our tokens of affection. Let us raise our hearts to her more often, asking her for what we need, thanking her for her constant, motherly care and entrusting to her the people we love. Though, naturally, if we really want to act as good children, every day is a good day for loving Mary, just as every day is a good day for those who really love one another.”[2]

The solemnity on the 15th invites us to diligently put our Father’s advice into practice. God’s marvelous choice of her from all eternity to be the Mother of the Word Incarnate reaches its culminating point when she is gloriously received, body and soul, into heaven. Mary’s Assumption, which terminates the arc that began with her Immaculate Conception, strongly spurs us to fix our attention more carefully on our Mother and meditate more deeply on her daily pilgrimage through this world, until arriving at her heavenly dwelling.

In the gospel of the Mass for this feast, the Church sets before us the passage about our Lady’s visitation to her cousin St. Elizabeth. The Fathers and ecclesiastical writers have always seen this

episode as a graphic portrayal of what characterized Mary's entire life, defined by prompt, joyful obedience to whatever God indicated to her. From the *fiat* that she said at the Annunciation until that other *fiat*, expressed without words at the foot of the Cross, the whole of Mary's life can be summarized as complete faithfulness to God's most lovable will, without the slightest breach.

St. Luke, the evangelist who most spoke about Mary, gives us many details about our Lady's visit to St. Elizabeth. It is a scene deeply impressed upon our memory, like many others in the Gospel, because we contemplate it every day when we meditate on the mysteries of the Rosary. Let us savor it once more.

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zachary and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." [3]

The Blessed Virgin, also inspired by the Holy Spirit, replied to Elizabeth's words with the canticle filled with gratitude and uncontainable joy that we call the *Magnificat*. We can't stop to consider all of its riches. I only want to stress here a few details of this scene, on which St. Josemaria meditated deeply.

St. Gabriel informed Mary that Elizabeth was expecting a child, as a proof of God's omnipotence. He didn't ask or suggest that she visit her cousin. Nonetheless our Lady senses that her cousin needs her assistance and finds God's will here as well. She sets out immediately for the village where her elderly cousin lives. As St. Luke opportunely stresses, Mary does so with haste, *cum festinatione*. The reason, as St. Ambrose explains, is clear: "The grace of the Holy Spirit does not permit slowness." [4] The Holy Father Benedict XVI follows that Doctor of the Church in commenting: "with these words the Evangelist wishes to emphasize that for Mary to follow her own vocation in docility to God's Spirit, who has brought about within her the Incarnation of the Word, means taking a new road and immediately setting out from home, allowing herself to be led on a journey by God alone." [5]

The Gospel provides us with the first lesson that we learn from our Mother's steadfast conduct. When God's love is manifested to our soul, our duty lies in corresponding urgently to his grace, responding with full generosity to the divine inspirations, without hesitation or delay. When God passes by our side (he has called and calls all of us by our name to follow him very closely), we have to set aside anything that could impede our following him, our living with him. Our entire existence has to be marked by the "sacred haste" that, as the Pope says, is expected of anyone who realizes that "God always has first priority and nothing else should create haste in our existence." [6]

I recall certain events in our Father's life that illustrate how our Founder nourished this haste to love God and our Lady ever more deeply.

His biographers recount how from the earliest years of the Work, as affection for our Mother grew in his soul, he would strive to greet Mary in the images he encountered along the streets of Madrid. On one occasion he recorded in his personal notes: “This morning I retraced my steps, becoming a little child, to greet our Lady in the image on Atocha Street, high up on the house of the Congregation of St. Philip. I had forgotten to greet her. What child would miss the opportunity to tell his mother that he loves her? Lady, may I never become an ex-child.”[7]

One day in Villa Tevere, when he was beginning to feel weak towards the end of his life, he passed by a relief of the Blessed Virgin holding the Child. He wanted to kiss the image, but it wasn't easy because of the bench in front of it. But he made an effort to do so. Afterwards he invited us to consider that, although the effort he had had to make didn't amount to anything, we ought to ask ourselves how diligently we strive to show our affection in corresponding to the love of God and our Lady, shown so abundantly in the Incarnation. I pass this question on to you. What specific effort have we decided to make during the remaining months of the Marian year in order to correspond to the special love that our Lord and his Blessed Mother constantly show us? Do we want to love her more? [Sp: Queremos quererla más?] This is not redundant. Do we seek her with the desire that she bring us to her Son?

Let us consider another facet of the scene of the Visitation. When Mary exclaims her praise for God in the *Magnificat*, she follows this immediately, as earlier at the Annunciation, with an acknowledgement of her lowliness, proclaiming her nothingness before God. This acknowledgement is an essential part of the virtue of humility. “How great is the value of humility! ‘*Quia respexit humilitatem...*’ —‘Because he has regarded the lowliness...’ It is not of her faith, nor of her charity, nor of her immaculate purity that our Mother speaks in the house of Zachary. Her joyful hymn sings: ‘Because he has regarded the lowliness of his handmaid, behold: henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.’” [8]

St. Augustine pointed out that “the dwelling place of charity is humility.”[9] Sincere charity grows only in soil that has been fertilized by deep humility. Our Lady's extraordinary humility led her to always want God to work in her soul, without claiming any merit for herself. Thus God looked upon her with ever increasing love, leading her from fullness to fullness until receiving her in glory.

My daughters and sons, let us learn from this good Mother of ours how to act in the same way in every circumstance. Until the last moment we will have to struggle against the enemies of our sanctification, especially against self-love, which is the principal obstacle to our union with God. Let us listen once again to St. Josemaría. On one occasion, responding to someone who asked him how to struggle in this aspect of the spiritual life, he stressed: “it is good that you have the desire to fight against pride. Nevertheless I, though not a prophet, tell you that you will have problems with pride right up to the final moments of your life. Ask God to make you humble.... *Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae* (Lk 1:48). God our Lord looked upon her because he saw the humility of his servant. Therefore, you should strive to serve our Lord and to imitate our Lady in her humility. In the Gospels we don't find Mary present at the moment of her Son's great triumphs. We find her at the foot of the Cross. But we also find her at the first miracle, which our Lord works because the Blessed Virgin requests it. Ask him for the miracle of making

you humble and making me humble.”[10]

Meditating on Mary’s great privileges certainly fills us with astonishment. Our heavenly Mother is so very marvelous! We contemplate her, in the scene from the Apocalypse, clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet and crowned with the stars.[11] Nevertheless, “we know that all these privileges were not granted in order to distance Mary from us but, on the contrary, to bring her close.”[12] From heaven, she follows the steps of each of us as though each were her only son, her only daughter. And she never ceases to care for us, so that one day, in union with her Son and all the angels and saints, we may reach eternal beatitude.

We will recall this once again on August 15 as we renew the consecration of Opus Dei to her sweet and immaculate Heart. On that day let us foster a communion of intentions among all the faithful of the Prelature—those of us still here on earth and those who have already surrendered their souls to God—and very especially with our Father. Let us be closely united to the consecration that he made at Loreto in 1951 and to the one that I will personally renew in everyone’s name in this Marian year. We will entrust our desires and endeavors to the care of our Mother, who is, in the fitting words of St. Thomas Aquinas, “*totius Trinitatis nobilis triclinium*,”[13] the place where the Blessed Trinity finds repose. As the Holy Father said in a recent audience, “because of the Incarnation, the three divine Persons dwell in her soul full of grace and feel delight and joy as in no other creature. Through her intercession we can obtain every help.”[14]

We will do so also on the 22nd of this month, feast of the Queenship of Mary, and on the following day, the anniversary of the divine locution that left in our Father a “savor of honey and the honeycomb” at a time when he was especially in need of it: *adeamus cum fiducia ad thronum gloriae, ut misericordiam consequamur!* Let us go with confidence to the throne of glory, that we might obtain mercy!

Let us intensify our prayer for the Holy Father, for his intentions, for all the hopes and plans that, for the good of souls, he bears in his heart, and also that he be able to rest during these months

And, along with all this, help me with my intentions.

I bless you with all my affection,

Your Father,

+Javier

Pamplona, August 1, 2010

Footnotes

1. St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, April 12, 1974.
2. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 291.
3. *Lk* 1:39-45.
4. St. Ambrose, *Exposition on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, II, 19 (PL 15, 1560).
5. Benedict XVI, Homily on the Solemnity of the Assumption, August 15, 2009.
6. Ibid.
7. St. Josemaría, *Apuntes íntimos*, no. 446 (December 3, 1931). Cited in A. Vázquez de Prada, *El Fundador del Opus Dei*, vol. I, p. 341.
8. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 598.
9. St. Augustine, *Holy Virginity*, 51.
10. St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, October 21, 1972.
11. See *Rev* 12:1.
12. Benedict XVI, general audience, January 2, 2008.
13. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Exposition on the Hail Mary*, chap. 1.
14. Benedict XVI, general audience, June 23, 2010.