

(Letter from the Prelate: August 2013)

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

Merely mentioning the month of August spontaneously calls to mind the treasure that our Mother is, since she is the “type” of the Church. In a special way during the coming weeks, let us have recourse to our Lady so that she obtain for us from the Holy Trinity a clean life that facilitates our dealings with the Truth “in everything and for everything.” May Mary make us women and men who have clean souls, who are more loyal to God; and then we will be more the Church, more Opus Dei.

I am writing to you from this land of Brazil where the World Youth Day has now ended. These days were spiritually very intense, close to the Holy Father and in the company of bishops, priests and millions of faithful who had come to Rio de Janeiro. I have presented our Lord with your prayer and your work, asking that there be abundant spiritual and also human fruit both in ourselves and in those we deal with. May the seed of God that the Holy Spirit has sown in so many hearts mature for the good of the Church and the whole world.

God’s gifts were very abundant last month. It began with the publication of the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* in which Pope Francis completed the trilogy on the theological virtues that Benedict XVI began. I invite you to meditate on it slowly, so that our minds are filled with light and our wills thoroughly moved to make a more ardent commitment to the new evangelization.

On the 5th of July, the day the encyclical was published, the papal approval of the miracle attributed to Don Alvaro’s intercession was also announced, which opens the door for his beatification. On the same day, Pope Francis approved a miracle that will make possible the canonization of John Paul II. I was filled with joy at the remarkable coincidence of these two papal acts on the same day, which I see as a manifestation of how “spiritually in tune” were that great Pope and my beloved predecessor at the head of the Work.

In his encyclical, the Pope recalls that faith in Jesus Christ and in all that he has revealed to us has remained intact since apostolic times. “But how is this possible? How can we be certain, after all these centuries, that we have encountered the ‘real Jesus’?”¹ The answer to this question, which many of our contemporaries ask, really comes down to one reply: through the Church. “The Church, like every family, passes on to her children the whole store of her memories. But how does this come about in a way that nothing is lost, but rather everything in the patrimony of faith comes to be more deeply understood? It is through the apostolic Tradition preserved in the Church with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.”²

This transmission by the Church, which never stops, is found chiefly in the Creeds and in other documents of the Magisterium that expound the doctrine of the faith. Therefore during the months of the Year of Faith we are striving to go more deeply into the Creed with the help of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or its *Compendium*, while also rejoicing that our faith shines out in the lives of the saints during the course of the liturgical year. The miracle attributed to Don Alvaro’s intercession is another spur to us to put into practice the spirit of Opus Dei, “as old as

1 Pope Francis, Enc. Letter *Lumen fidei*, June 29, 2013, no. 38.

2 Pope Francis, Enc. Letter *Lumen fidei*, June 29, 2013, no. 40.

the Gospel and also as new as the Gospel,”³ striving for holiness in ordinary life. This spirit was entrusted to St. Josemaría by God so that it would take shape in his soul and in the souls of many other people. Shortly after the news was made public, I suggested to you that we enter more deeply into Don Alvaro’s holy response: his fidelity to God, to the Church and to the Roman Pontiff, and his complete identification with the spirit of the Work that he received from St. Josemaría and that he continued to hand on to us in its entirety.

Now I will pause to consider another characteristic note of the Church: holiness. In order to help us properly appreciate this reality, Benedict XVI wrote that “one thing that will be of decisive importance in this Year is retracing the history of our faith, marked as it is by the unfathomable mystery of the interweaving of holiness and sin.”⁴ If we reflect on the holiness of the Church, made evident in her teaching, in her institutions, and in countless sons and daughters throughout the course of history, we will be moved to a deep thanksgiving to the thrice holy God, the source of all sanctity, with the realization that we are inserted into this display of the Trinity’s love for us. How do we turn to each divine Person? Do we feel the need to distinguish and love each of them?

When clarifying the nature of the Church, Vatican Council II highlighted three aspects in which the mystery of the Church is expressed more fittingly; namely the People of God, the Mystical Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, which are amply developed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.⁵ In each of them the note of holiness rings out, which, like the other notes of the Church, distinguishes it from any human association.

The name *People of God* goes back to the Old Testament. Yahweh chose Israel as a people especially his own as an announcement and anticipation of the definitive People of God that Jesus Christ was going to establish through his sacrifice on the Cross. *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*⁶ “*Gens sancta*, a holy nation, composed of creatures with infirmities. This apparent contradiction marks an aspect of the mystery of the Church. The Church, which is divine, is also human, for it is made up of men, and men have their defects: *Omnes homines terra et cinis* (*Sir* 17:31), we men are dust and ashes.”⁷

This is a reality that should move us to contrition, to loving sorrow, to reparation, but never to discouragement or pessimism. We must never forget that Jesus himself compared the Church to a field in which both wheat and thistles grow, and to a net that gathers both good fish and bad, and that their definitive separation will only take place at the end of the ages.⁸ At the same time we should also realize that there is more good than evil in the world, that grace is more powerful than sin, even though its action may be less visible at times. “But it happens that the personal sanctity of so many faithful—then and now—is not something externally apparent. Frequently we do not recognize the ordinary people, common and holy, who work and live alongside us. From an earthly viewpoint, what stands out most is sin and unfaithfulness: these are more conspicuous.”⁹ God wants his daughters and sons in *Opus Dei*, and many other Christians, to

3 St. Josemaría, Letter, January 9, 1932, no. 91.

4 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta fidei*, October 11, 2011, no. 13.

5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 781-810.

6 *1 Pet* 2:9.

7 St. Josemaría, Homily *Loyalty to the Church*, June 4, 1972.

8 Cf. *Mt* 13:24-30; 47-50.

9 St. Josemaría, Homily *Loyalty to the Church*, June 4, 1972.

remind all men and women that they have received “a call to holiness, and they must strive to correspond to grace and to be personally holy.”¹⁰

The Church is the *Mystical Body of Christ*. “In the course of time, the Lord Jesus forms his Church by means of the sacraments emanating from his plenitude. By these she makes her members participants in the Mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Christ, in the grace of the Holy Spirit who gives her life and movement.”¹¹

The Church “is therefore holy, though she has sinners in her bosom, because she herself has no other life but that of grace: it is by living by her life that her members are sanctified; it is by removing themselves from her life that they fall into sins and disorders that prevent the radiation of her sanctity . . . She suffers and does penance for these offenses, of which she has the power to heal her children through the blood of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit.”¹²

“First of all, the body reminds us of a living reality. The Church is not a welfare, cultural or political association but a living body that walks and acts in history. And this body has a head, Jesus, who guides, feeds and supports it . . . If one separates the head from the rest of the body, the whole person cannot survive. It is like this in the Church: we must stay ever more deeply connected with Jesus. But not only that: just as it is important that life blood flow through the body in order to live, so must we allow Jesus to work in us, let his Word guide us, his presence in the Eucharist feed us, give us life, his love strengthen our love for our neighbor. And this forever! Forever and ever! Dear brothers and sisters,” the Holy Father stressed, “let us stay united to Jesus, let us trust in him, let us orient our life according to his Gospel, let us be nourished by daily prayer, by listening to the Word of God, by sharing in the Sacraments.”¹³

We can see that the human body is made up of diverse organs and members, each having its own function subject to the governance of the head for the good of the whole organism. Therefore, by God’s will, in the Church “there is variety and a diversity of roles and functions; there is no flat uniformity, but a wealth of gifts that the Holy Spirit distributes. Yet, there is communion and unity: each one relates to the other and comes together to form a single living body, deeply tied to Christ.”¹⁴ This union with Christ, the invisible head of the Church, must of necessity be made manifest in a close union with the visible Head, the Roman Pontiff, and with the bishops in communion with the Apostolic See. Let us pray every day, as St. Josemaría did, for the unity of everyone in the holy Church.

Ever since ancient times it has been said that, within the Mystical Body of Christ, the Holy Spirit has the same role as the soul in the human body. He gives it life, preserves its unity, and makes possible its growth until it reaches the perfection that God the Father has desired for it. “The Church is not a fabric woven of things and interests; she is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Temple in which God works, the Temple in which, with the gift of Baptism, each one of us is a living stone. This tells us that no one in the Church is useless . . . No one is secondary.”¹⁵

As members of the same Mystical Body, we Christians can and should help one another to reach holiness through the communion of saints that we profess in the Apostle’s Creed. Besides

10 *Ibid.*

11 Paul VI, Solemn profession of faith (*Credo of the People of God*), June 30, 1968, no. 19.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, June 19, 2013.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, June 26, 2013.

alluding to the fact that all the faithful share in the *magnalia Dei*, the riches of God (faith, sacraments, diverse spiritual gifts), “the expression ‘communion of saints’ also refers to the communion between holy persons (*sancti*); that is, between those who by grace are united to the dead and risen Christ.”¹⁶ That is to say, the saints in heaven, the souls being purified in purgatory, and those who are on earth still fighting the battles of the interior life. We form a single family, the family of the children of God, in order to praise the Holy Trinity. With what integrity and firmness do we look after it?

St. Josemaría was greatly consoled by meditating on this truth of the faith. No baptized person can feel alone, either in one’s spiritual struggle or in material difficulties. *The Way* gives voice to this certainty: “The Communion of the Saints. How shall I explain it to you? You know what blood transfusions can do for the body? Well, that’s what the Communion of the Saints does for the soul.”¹⁷ Shortly after this he adds: “You will find it easier to do your duty if you think of how many brothers are helping you, and of the help you fail to give them if you are not faithful.”¹⁸

Let us always be optimistic, my daughters and sons. Even though we might stumble, even though we might at times feel weak and without strength in our spiritual battles, with God’s grace we can always renew our march toward holiness. We are surrounded by a multitude of saints, of people faithful to God, who are constantly beginning and beginning again in their interior life.

Besides, we only need to lift up our eyes to heaven. The great solemnity of the Assumption of our Lady that we will celebrate on the 15th is another invitation to have this certainty. Anchored in the intercession of Christ, who is constantly beseeching God the Father for all of us,¹⁹ how great is our consolation, how secure our refuge when we contemplate our Mother, who is ever solicitous for the salvation of Christians and of all mankind! In our Lady, the Church reached the perfection in virtue of which she is holy and without blemish.²⁰ We, all the faithful, are still striving to succeed in this noble task of attaining sanctity, completely distancing ourselves from sin. Therefore we raise our eyes to Mary, who is a resplendent model of virtue for the entire community of the elect.²¹ Let us turn to her, then, in all the vicissitudes of the Church and in the needs of each one of us. “Mother! Call her with a loud voice. She is listening to you; she sees you in danger, perhaps, and she—your holy Mother Mary—offers you, along with the grace of her Son, the refuge of her arms, the tenderness of her embrace... and you will find yourself with added strength for the new battle.”²²

May the clamor of this prayer rise up to heaven forcefully from the whole world as we renew the consecration of Opus Dei to the sweet and immaculate Heart of Mary on the upcoming 15th. Closely united in prayer, let us ask God for all the graces that the world, the Church, and each of us need.

With all my affection, I bless you,

16 *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 195.

17 St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no.544.

18 *Ibid.*, no. 549.

19 Cfr. *Heb* 7:25.

20 Cfr. *Eph* 5:27.

21 Cfr. Vatican II, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen gentium*, no. 65.

22 St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no.516.

Your Father,

+ Javier

Sitio da Aroeira, August 1, 2013