

Letter from the Prelate (February 2010)

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

This month we celebrate the 80th anniversary of the moment when St. Josemaría saw that Opus Dei was also intended for women. We know that on October 2, 1928, when he received the foundational light, our Father thought that the Work was only for men. Thus we can imagine his surprise and joy when a few months later, on February 14, 1930, our Lord made him understand that he was also counting on women to carry everywhere—through their example and word—the message of sanctification in professional work and in all the circumstances of ordinary life. Years later, with deep gratitude to divine Providence, he said that “truly the Work, without that express wish of our Lord and without your sisters, would have been left crippled.”[1] He often made reference to this, my daughters, to show what a great responsibility each one of you has. Although it’s a small digression, I ask you to commend to heaven an intention that will make you very happy.

After February 14, 1930, St. Josemaría strove to open this path of sanctity in the midst of the world, Opus Dei, to women of all professions, races and walks of life. We raise our hearts in gratitude to the Blessed Trinity, because this work has taken root with depth and extension throughout the world, despite the great difficulties he had to overcome, especially at the start. If St. Josemaría’s preaching about the sanctification of earthly realities encountered so many obstacles in the 30’s and 40’s of the last century, imagine the added difficulties when the invitation to sanctify all noble human work was directed to a feminine public.

Today women, as is only right, have the same opportunities as men in many fields of work, but eighty years ago this was not the case. It was quite rare back then, for example, that women studied at the university or worked outside the home (except for the manual tasks that they had always carried out), and even rarer that they occupied positions of responsibility in civil, social or academic life. Several decades later, the Second Vatican Council proclaimed: “The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to assist mankind in not falling.”[2]

We have come a long way in the past eighty years, thanks to the efforts of countless people who have contributed to ensuring that the dignity of women, their equal rights and duties with men, is recognized, also in civil laws. Among these people, it is only right to recognize, a special role was played by St. Josemaría, who from the first moment encouraged his daughters, and the women who drew close to the Work, to attain the highest goals possible, in the most varied sectors of human activity. I recall many specific events in this regard: from the strength with which he encouraged those who had the required intellectual conditions to aim high in their professional life (in the fields of culture, science, etc.), to his effort, equally great, to ensure that the immense service women render to society in other areas of work also be recognized. It was due to his direct urging, for example, that many educational institutions dedicated to preparing

young women professionally for work in the home were begun all over the world, so that these tasks would receive the recognition they merit, both in civil laws and in society.

I give thanks to God because the Prelature's faithful, in close union with so many other people of good will, have fostered and continue to foster throughout the world this Christian vision of the feminine condition. Nevertheless, so much still remains to be done! Although in many environments the dignity and role of women is widely recognized, in other places this is still a distant possibility. In any case, we daughters and sons of God have to continue striving to make this a reality, teaching people, as our Founder wrote, that the "development, maturity, emancipation of women should not mean a pretence of equality, of uniformity with men, a servile imitation of a man's way of doing things. That would not get us anywhere. Women would turn out losers, not because they are better than men or worse, but because they are different. In terms of fundamentals, one can in fact speak of equal rights which should be legally recognised, both in civil and ecclesiastical law. Women, like men, possess the dignity of being persons and children of God. Nevertheless, on this basis of fundamental equality, each must achieve what is proper to him or her. In this sense a woman's emancipation means that she should have a real possibility of developing her own potentialities to the fullest extent—those which she has personally and those which she has in common with other women. Equal rights and equal opportunities before the law do not suppress this diversity, which enriches all mankind. They presuppose and encourage it." [3]

As in 2008, when we commemorated the 80th anniversary of the foundation of the Work, it has seemed to me that the best way to channel our thanksgiving is to stay very close to our Lady during these months. Therefore it gives me great joy to convoke a new *Marian year* in Opus Dei, from the upcoming 14th of February to the same date in 2011. During these months, let us strive to honor our Mother more and better, above all by putting great care into the prayer and contemplation of the Holy Rosary, and spreading this devotion among our families and friends. And let us give express thanks to God for the work of the women who look after the material care of the centers of the Prelature, which contributes so decisively to maintaining and improving the environment of a home that God infused into the Work, when he inspired it in our Father in 1928.

The first months of this *Marian year* coincide with the last months of the Year for Priests convoked by Benedict XVI for the whole Church. During this time, I have insisted that, in praying for priests, we should also pray that all the faithful may be more aware of our "priestly soul," shown by our daily dedication; and that we strive, daily as well, to communicate the joy of this gift—common to all the baptized—to the people we are in contact with.

February 14, is also a new anniversary of the foundation of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, in 1943. On that day, while St. Josemaría was celebrating the Sacrifice of the Altar in the oratory of a center of the women's branch, our Lord gave him the solution so that priests could be incardinated in Opus Dei. Our Father, a man of deep faith in divine Providence, saw clearly that, by this coincidence of dates, our Lord wanted to reaffirm the profound unity—of spirit, of vocation, and of government—in Opus Dei between men and women, laity and priests. As he himself said, "it was as though our Lord wanted to tell us: don't break the unity of the Work! Love it, defend it, foster it!" [4]

The *priestly soul* is nothing else than the common priesthood made a reality in the baptized, to the point of filling every moment of their life. Our Father thanked our Lord for this reality in the life of each and every one of the Work's faithful. In 1960, for example, he said: "I have often told you that all of us, priests and laity, have a priestly soul. Moreover, I would even tell all my children that they are priests—with that royal priesthood St. Peter speaks of (cf. *1 Pet 2:9*)—not only through receiving Baptism, but because *vos estis lux mundi*, you are the light of the world, and the light should not be hidden: *non potest civitas abscondi supra montem posita* (Mt 5:14), one cannot hide a city built on a mountain top. Christ has been raised on the Cross, to draw all things to himself, and my children strive to raise it at the summit of all noble human activities, to bring souls to him." [5]

In recalling this certainty to us, he urged us to actualize all the potentialities contained in the Christian vocation. He didn't limit himself to presenting this truth theoretically, but taught us how to put it into practice. He advised us "to live" the Holy Mass throughout the twenty-four hours of the day, presenting to our Lord, in the offertory, the tasks of each day, our successes and failures, sufferings and joys. He recommended that, as we carry out our work, we strive to exercise the virtues that every professional activity involves—hard-work, self-denial, service to others, etc.—with a Christian spirit. Thus, he said, the Holy Mass truly becomes "the center and the source of a Christian's spiritual life," [6] and we extend the Holy Sacrifice throughout the whole day.

And he liked to get down to details. During a gathering with young people, when asked how to put our priestly soul into practice, he answered: "what do you think a priest should be like? Sacrificed, zealous, smiling, attractive, someone who doesn't reject people who ask for his services, who knows how to forgive, how to understand, how to advise.... You already know this, and many other things as well, and I'm convinced, my son, that you try to put it into practice: that is why you have a priestly soul." [7]

And at another moment: "You share in Christ's royal priesthood because you have received the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, and because you also share in the charisms that the Holy Spirit grants, in the sense that you do many good things. A word of yours, at times, will open the eyes of a blind person; your way of behaving will enable someone who was paralyzed, who did nothing for his Christian life, to get up and begin working at your side. And even those who were dead, who were starting to decay, will come to the sacrament of Penance moved by your pleas, by your teachings, by your prayer. They will be purified, cleansed, and become capable of everything great: they will arise." [8]

In light of these considerations, we can ask ourselves if the Holy Mass is truly the point of convergence of our desires and intentions, the fountain that feeds our zeal for holiness and apostolate. Do we see souls in those we meet throughout the day? Do we react with acts of love and contrition at seeing the offenses our Lord receives? Also, let us foster solidarity with those who are suffering materially and spiritually because of wars, persecutions, natural catastrophes, etc., and let us try to accompany them with our prayers, and our material assistance whenever possible. Let us strive to ensure that news like the earthquake in Haiti does not become a mere memory.

Apostolic fruit depends on union with our Lord, as the Pope emphasized when referring to the extraordinary pastoral effectiveness of the Holy Curé of Ars. “It was not by virtue of his own human gifts that he succeeded in moving peoples' hearts, nor even by relying on a praiseworthy commitment of his will; he won over even the most refractory souls by communicating to them what he himself lived deeply, namely, his friendship with Christ. He was ‘in love’ with Christ, and the true secret of his pastoral success was the fervor of his love for the Eucharistic Mystery, celebrated and lived, which became love for Christ's flock, for Christians and for all who were seeking God.”[9]

On February 19 we will recall in a special way our beloved Don Alvaro, who celebrated his saint's day on this date. We entrust ourselves to his intercession to traverse this new *Marian year* with the same filial spirit with which the first successor of St. Josemaría convoked and lived other Marian years, for various anniversaries of the Work. On the following day, February 20, I will ordain two Associate brothers of yours as priests. Let us pray for them and for all priests.

A few days ago, the Holy Father received me in a private audience. I brought him the affection and prayers of all of you, and assured him that we are constantly praying for him and for his intentions. Let us continue doing so, closely united to the Successor of Peter, and also to all the bishops, priests and faithful of the Church. Benedict XVI blessed all the apostolic efforts of the faithful of the Work and each one of you.

There is no need to remind you that I am relying greatly on your prayer for my intentions. Continue being generous.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, February 1, 2010

Footnotes:

1. St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, February, 1955.
2. Second Vatican Council, Final message to women, December 8, 1965, nos. 3-4.
3. St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 87.
4. St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, March 31, 1974.
5. St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a meditation, April 15, 1960.
6. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 87.
7. St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, March 31, 1974.
8. St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, October 1972.
9. Pope Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, August 5, 2009.