

(Letter from the Prelate: September 2012)

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

As in other years, I hoped to take advantage of this pause to spend some time with my daughters and sons from various places. It helps me a lot to see you, to be with you and feel the urgency—always present—of the apostolic expansion. But it wasn't possible. *Omnia in bonum!* For from Pamplona we have “traveled” all over the world with greater intensity.

At the beginning of July, before arriving in Pamplona, I stopped in Barcelona and Gerona. There we had a large get-together and I blessed an image of St. Josemaría in a place where quite a lot of apostolic work with young people is carried out. Afterwards, as I've already told you, I went to Portugal to pray before our Lady of Fatima and to meet with a large group of your sisters and brothers. And on the 23rd I was in Lourdes, honoring our Lady with the whole Work and imploring her intercession. I gave thanks to her in the name of each and every one of you.

I also made a quick trip to the Netherlands. Besides the joy of seeing the people of the Prelature there, I relived part of the “prehistory” of the Work in that country, when I was accompanying our Father and our beloved Don Alvaro. How much they prayed while traveling along its highways and through its cities, thinking of the men and women who would come to Opus Dei, with a hope we now see made a reality! Let us be sure to live the Communion of Saints each day.

Tomorrow, on September 2nd, I will ordain to the priesthood three of your Associate brothers, who received the diaconate six months ago. Also for this reason my thoughts have turned to St. Josemaría, who dreamt of this step: the moment when some priests would come from among these sons of his. Pray for them and for the fruit of the many activities now being carried out throughout the world; also for the Regions in the southern hemisphere who, by their ordinary lives, are sustaining all of us.

At the heart of the month now beginning, on September 14, we will once again thank our Mother the Church for the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Our Father used to prepare for and celebrate it with special joy, fully convinced that the Cross is the throne of glory from which Christ draws all creatures to himself.¹ You cannot imagine how eagerly he asked that, in the central headquarters of Opus Dei, a large mural be painted representing the scene that is celebrated in the liturgy: the return of the Holy Cross to Jerusalem after it had been rescued from the hands of non-believers.

As a sign of that deeply-rooted devotion, he always carried with him a relic of the *lignum crucis*, and he wanted his successors to carry it as well: first the unforgettable Don Alvaro, and now me. We were all moved by the great reverence with which he

¹ See *Jn* 12:32.

kissed that holy relic every day, before retiring to sleep at night, and on beginning a new day and at other moments.

On the day following that feast, on September 15, we commemorate the presence of our Lady at the foot of the Cross, suffering with Jesus and collaborating with him in the work of redemption. There her new motherhood was made manifest, when she heard our Lord's words: *Woman, behold, your son.*² Mary wholeheartedly and tenderly opened her arms to us, welcoming us as true children of hers. These two feasts are a powerful and unshirkable call for us to embrace lovingly the small or great crosses that arise in our lives, without complaints or laments, because they all bind us closely to Christ and are a very special blessing from God. Let us not forget the remark by St. Josemaría that many people call whatever they find bothersome a cross, and end up removing the crucifix from their homes and, above all, from their conduct. They fail to recognize that the Holy Cross, in all its manifestations, gives freedom and strength to wage the battle of the new evangelization, beginning with each one's personal conversion.

Several years ago, the Holy Father said in a homily: "There is no love without suffering—without the suffering of renouncing oneself, of the transformation and purification of self for true freedom. Where there is nothing worth suffering for, even life loses its value. The Eucharist—the center of our Christian being—is founded on Jesus' sacrifice for us; it is born from the suffering of love, which culminated in the Cross. We live by this love that gives itself. It gives us the courage and strength to suffer with Christ and for him in this world, knowing that in this way our life becomes great and mature and true."³

Let us help everyone we can to consider the value of suffering confronted in this way, with peace and also with joy. As our Founder stressed on one occasion, asking a question that caused him pain: "Who today seeks out the Holy Cross? Very few people. You see how the world reacts when faced with the Cross, including so many who call themselves Catholics, for whom the Cross is a scandal or foolishness, as St. Paul wrote: *iudaeis quidem scandalum, gentibus autem stultitiam* (1 Cor 1:23). Lord! After centuries have gone by this abnormal situation continues to be the case, even among those who say that they love you and follow you."⁴ For we see in the world around us the truth of St. Paul's words to the Corinthians: *Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*⁵

"My children," our Father continued, "you see that I am not exaggerating. The Cross is still a symbol of death, instead of being a sign of life. People still flee from the Cross as though it were a scaffold, when it is a throne of glory. Christians still reject the Cross and identify it with sorrow, instead of identifying it with love."⁶ Do

² Jn 19:26.

³ Benedict XVI, Homily on the inauguration of the Pauline Year, June 28, 2008.

⁴ St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, May 3, 1964.

⁵ 1 Cor 1:22-24.

⁶ St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, May 3, 1964.

you and I, each one of us, truly love the Holy Cross? Are we convinced that union with Christ crucified is the source of supernatural effectiveness and true joy? Are we diligent in accepting each day what we find disagreeable: sickness, obstacles to our plans, daily setbacks? If we do so with supernatural outlook, each day we will discover many opportunities to unite ourselves to Jesus and to our Lady, gathering with love the small annoyances—or perhaps not such small ones—and offering them up at Holy Mass. What a great treasure for heaven we can store up, built with very small things!

This was the constant teaching of St. Josemaría. “I invite you to gather up throughout the day—with your mortification, with acts of love and self-giving to our Lord—milligrams of gold, and specks of diamonds, rubies and emeralds. You will find them in little things along the way. Gather them up to make a treasure in heaven, because with the passage of time, from milligrams of gold one can amass grams and kilograms; and from fragments of precious stones one can make wonderful diamonds, great rubies and splendid emeralds.”⁷

This advice is easy to put into practice, but it requires the desire to accompany Christ on Calvary. “Three attitudes are possible when facing the Cross,” our Founder said. “To flee from this gift, which is what almost everyone does. To go recklessly in search of it, desiring great trials, undertaking very extraordinary penances: if that impulse doesn’t come from God, it doesn’t seem good to me, because it can be the fruit of a hidden pride. The third attitude is to receive it with joy, when our Lord sends it: here, I think, is the best way to react when facing the Cross.”⁸

Let us turn our eyes again to our Lady. The fact that Mary remains steadfastly beside the Cross, closely accompanying her Son, was undoubtedly a special grace from God. But it was a grace to which she responded with a preparation that lasted for years (from the moment of the Annunciation and even earlier), by the complete opening of her heart and soul to the divine requirements. “The stages of Mary’s path, from the home at Nazareth to Jerusalem, passing through the Cross, where her Son entrusted her to the apostle John, are marked by her ability to persevere in recollection, meditating on all those events in the silence of her heart, before God (see *Lk* 2:19-51). And in her meditation before God she also understood the will of God and accepted it interiorly.”⁹

My daughters and sons, this is the great lesson the Church transmits to us on this Marian feast. Our Lady’s entire earthly existence was consumed with the ardent desire to fulfill the divine will, also when God’s providence presented itself with painful contours. And she carried everything out without complaint, with human and supernatural refinement, without calling attention to herself. As St. Josemaría so often reminded us, Mary is the “Teacher of hidden and silent sacrifice.”¹⁰ By her example she encourages us to receive with love the hardships of life, both the small ones—which are the most common—and the big ones.

⁷ St. Josemaría, from the year 1968.

⁸ St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, May 3, 1964.

⁹ Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, March 14, 2012.

¹⁰ St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 509.

Let us try to make our own our Blessed Mother's attitude, the model for souls who want to be contemplatives in the middle of the world. Let us bring to our personal meditation the events of our day, whether joyful or sorrowful, to discover in each one the most lovable will of our Father God and to embrace them calmly. By doing so we will bring joy to the Heart of Christ, and he will bless us and imbue with efficacy our efforts to bring many souls to him. Let us love mortification and penance, with naturalness, without making a show, as we see in Mary's life. "The world admires only the spectacular sacrifice, because it does not realize the value of the sacrifice that is hidden and silent."¹¹

When looking at the Cross above the altar during Mass, when kissing the small crucifix that I advise you to carry with you always (as our Father wrote), or kissing or making a sign of reverence before the wooden Cross in our oratories, let us realize the deep significance of those gestures. They speak to us, the Pope says, of the fact that "God saved the world not by the sword, but by the Cross. In dying, Jesus extends his arms. This, in the first place, is the posture of the Passion, in which he lets himself be nailed to the Cross for us, in order to give us his life. Yet outstretched arms are also the posture of one who prays, the stance assumed by the priest when he extends his arms in prayer. Jesus transformed the Passion, his suffering and his death, into prayer, and in this way he transformed it into an act of love for God and for humanity. That, finally, is why the outstretched arms of the Crucified One are also a gesture of embracing, by which he draws us to himself, wishing to enfold us in his loving arms. In this way he is an image of the living God, he is God himself, and we may entrust ourselves to him."¹²

On rereading these words of Benedict XVI, I have also recalled very clearly a characteristic image of St. Josemaría. When he spoke of our Lord being fastened to the Cross—more than by the nails—by the great love that he had for us, not infrequently he would, with naturalness, open up his arms slightly and turn the palms of his hands, in a gesture that perhaps passed unnoticed to most people. I am sure, as I have mentioned in the past, that this gesture was a sign of his eagerness to unite himself closely with our Lord, nailed to the wood of the Cross, striving to identify himself with Christ in order to embrace all humanity.

The Pope points out that "Mary discretely followed the entire path of her Son during his public life, right up to the very foot of the Cross. And now, with her silent prayer, she also follows the path of the Church."¹³ Let us go to our Lady's intercession with greater insistence during these difficult moments, asking that she may make us strong in accepting and embracing suffering. Let us place under her maternal mediation (for she is *Mater Ecclesiae*, Mother of the Church) the Year of Faith that will begin in a few weeks on October 11, the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of Vatican II. And echoing the Holy Father, let us strive to conduct ourselves at every moment as good Christians, giving clear witness—in word and deed—of our Catholic faith. Civil society, the environment in which we move, needs a supplement of spiritual life, of supernatural life, which can only come from Christ's Cross. And

¹¹ Ibid., no. 185.

¹² Benedict XVI, Homily at Marizell, September 8, 2007.

¹³ Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, March 14, 2012.

without any hint of masochism, with peace and constancy, let us try to learn the lesson our Lord left us, when about to go to his appointment with Calvary: *I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you.*¹⁴

Continue praying for my intentions, *consummati in unum*,¹⁵ completely united in prayer, sacrifice, and zeal to serve the Church, the Roman Pontiff and all souls. To accomplish this, let us ask the help of Don Alvaro, who took over from our Father precisely on this feast of our Lady, Mother of Sorrows. I think the peace that always characterized the first successor of St. Josemaría became even stronger, so that, in dealing with him, people felt themselves powerfully drawn towards God our Lord.

Let us accompany the Pope during his pastoral visit to Lebanon from the 14th to the 16th of this month, where he will sign and deliver the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Middle East, fruit of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops held in Rome two years ago. Let us pray for those lands that our Lord sanctified by his presence and implore from our Lady, *Regina Pacis*, the gift of peace for the people of that region and for all mankind.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Torreciudad, September 1, 2012

¹⁴ *Lk* 22:15.

¹⁵ *Jn* 17:23.