

(Letter from the Prelate: May 2012)

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

The arrival of May always fills our souls with a special joy. The joy of Easter is reinforced by the beginning of several weeks dedicated especially to our Lady in many countries. And how could children fail to be filled with joy on sensing their mother's presence in a special and closer way? It is only natural that this should happen. As an early Church writer assured us, our Lady, during her visit to St. Elizabeth, "by her words . . . caused a river of divine gifts to spring forth for her cousin as from a fountain. Indeed, where the one who is *full of grace* is present, everything is filled with joy."¹

Today I want to consider once again with you some of the reasons for joy and gratitude that this fifth month of the year brings us. Already the first day, the feast of St. Joseph the Worker (which we commemorate today), is a cause of true *gaudium*, of deep joy for the women and men who, like ourselves, need to seek personal sanctification and carry out apostolate in their professional work and through their daily activities. I recall our Father's joy when this liturgical memorial was begun, for (as he wrote in one of his homilies), "this feast, which ratifies the divine value of work, shows how the Church publicly echoes those central truths of the Gospel which God wants to single out for special consideration in our own time."²

The feast of St. Joseph the Worker invites us to remember the transcendent value of honest professional work that is well done, as was the work the Holy Patriarch carried out for many years. As an indispensable prerequisite, it needs to be done with supernatural and human perfection, that is to say, with the desire of giving glory to God and serving our neighbor, independently of the importance society attributes to it. How often I heard St. Josemaría say that the divine value of human work depends on the love for God with which it is done, on the spirit of service with which it is begun and finished.

I want to take advantage of this letter to ask you to pray for the 35 deacons of the Prelature whom I will ordain as priests in four days. In previous years, each of these men tried to attain sanctity and be apostolic in the context of his secular profession. From now on, priestly work will become for them, so to speak, their "profession," to which they will dedicate all the hours of their day, with the immense joy of knowing themselves to be our Lord's instrument in applying the redemption to souls. Let us pray that they live as holy, learned and joyful priests, with a sporting spirit in the supernatural field, as St. Josemaría wanted: "'priest-priests,' priests through and through."³

Another cause of joy for me has been the pastoral trip I made to Cameroon in Easter week—a country that offers so much hope for the Church in Africa and throughout the world. And, more recently, the days I spent in Pamplona for the fiftieth anniversary of the Navarra University Hospital. In the past five decades, countless people—doctors, nurses, administrative personnel—have dedicated themselves to caring for the sick with a Christian spirit. And thousands of patients have regained their health, and learned to offer their sufferings to God; and some have

1 Pseudo-Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Homily II on the Annunciation*.

2 St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 52.

3 St. Josemaría, *Homily A Priest Forever*, April 13, 1973.

offered their death, in close union with Jesus Christ on the Cross. I give thanks to God with all my heart—you too join me in doing so—because St. Josemaría’s solicitude for the sick, shown right from the beginning of the Work and even earlier, found a channel in this great undertaking that our Founder personally urged forward, and in so many similar initiatives that have arisen throughout the years in various countries.

However, my daughters and sons, the month of May speaks to us above all of our Lady’s continual presence on the path of the Church and of every Catholic. So it’s only logical that we try to draw out the greatest possible spiritual and apostolic fruit from the coming weeks.

In first place, I would like to consider the much loved Marian custom of the May pilgrimage. Tomorrow, the 2nd, is the anniversary of St. Josemaría’s pilgrimage to the Shrine of our Lady of Sonsoles in 1935, accompanied by two of his sons, thus starting this Marian custom in the Work. Since then, how many thousands of shrines and sanctuaries of our Lady throughout the world have been visited with piety, following the footsteps of our Father! Let us ask him to help us make the pilgrimage with the same recollection and trust in our Mother, with the same apostolic spirit as he did. And, in so doing, let us also invite a friend, colleague or relative to accompany us in this filial sign of affection for our Lady.

Towards the middle of the month, we will celebrate both the feast of our Lady of Fatima and the anniversary of the novena that St. Josemaría made to Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1970: two memories that should spur us to put great care into our times of mental prayer and our vocal prayers, especially the Rosary, so strongly recommended by our Lady to the three young shepherds. Let us have a holy ambition in our apostolic intentions, beseeching Mary for the Church and the Pope; for the fruitfulness of the *Year of Faith* we are preparing to celebrate; for the renewal of Christian life throughout the whole world.

The 17th, which this year falls on the Solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord, is the twentieth anniversary of our Father’s beatification. What memories of the marvels of grace this date brings us, shared with Blessed John Paul II and with our beloved Don Alvaro! What a marvelous opportunity to increase our gratitude to God and our eagerness to follow the example of the faithful instrument that Heaven chose to found Opus Dei!

During the following days of the month, we can closely accompany our Lady in preparing for the feast of Pentecost, which this year is celebrated on Sunday the 27th. St. Josemaría urged us to apply ourselves personally during this time (or even after the feast) to our meditation on the ten day devotion to the Holy Spirit. It is vitally important that we remain very close to our Lady during those days, learning from her how to have greater intimacy with the Sanctifier of our soul.

A few weeks ago, reflecting on our Lady’s presence in the Cenacle at Jerusalem with the apostles and the holy women, awaiting the coming of the Paraclete, Benedict XVI said that “with Mary begins the earthly life of Jesus, and with Mary the first steps of the Church also begin.”⁴ God wanted his Son to become flesh in the most pure womb of the Virgin, and our Lord gave her to us as Mother beside the Cross. Therefore, when the first disciples gathered in the Cenacle awaiting the promised Consoler, the Holy Virgin was found among them, “implored by her prayers the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation.”⁵

The Pope points out that “the presence of the Mother of God with the Eleven after the

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

5 Vatican II, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 59.

Ascension is not, therefore, a simple historical record of something that happened in the past. Rather, it takes on a significance of great value, for she shares with them the most precious possession she has, the living memory of Jesus, in prayer. And she shares with them as well the mission of Jesus: to preserve the memory of Him and so preserve his presence.”⁶

It is not hard to imagine that, in the time between our Lord’s Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples, having the Mother of Jesus at their side, listened with great piety to her recounting of so many memories that she conserved in her heart: the Annunciation and the birth in Bethlehem; the dangerous months of Herod’s persecution, and the years living and working in Nazareth; the happy times of our Lord’s preaching and miracles during his public life, and the sad hours of his passion, death and burial. And then the joy of the resurrection, the apparitions in Judea and Galilee, the Master’s final instructions.... The Holy Spirit used Mary’s recounting of so many marvelous deeds to prepare the apostles and the other disciples for the fullness of Pentecost.

What a good school, my daughters and sons, the Cenacle is! A school of prayer, where Holy Mary is the matchless teacher. “Teacher of prayer,”⁷ our Father said; and also “Teacher of hidden and silent sacrifice.”⁸ Our Lady is present there listening closely to the Paraclete’s inspirations and teaching those first disciples to listen to God in the recollection of their prayer. “Venerating the Mother of Jesus in the Church means, therefore, to learn from her to be a community that prays: this is one of the essential notes of the first description of the Christian community sketched out in the Acts of the Apostles (see *Acts* 2:42). Frequently people turn to prayer for difficult situations, for personal problems that lead them to have recourse to God for light, consolation and help. Mary invites us to broaden the dimensions of prayer, to direct ourselves to God not only in our personal needs, but also in a united way, persevering and faithful, with *one heart and soul* (*Acts* 4:32).”⁹

This is a mission our Lady entrusts to those who want to be faithful children of hers: to teach others to direct themselves to God at every moment, not only for urgent needs or in difficult situations. “For some of you, all this may sound quite familiar; for others, it may be something new; for everybody, it is demanding. As for me,” wrote St. Josemaría, “as long as I have strength to breathe, I will continue to preach that it is vitally necessary that we be souls of prayer at all times, at every opportunity and in the most varied of circumstances, because God never abandons us. It is not a proper Christian attitude to look upon friendship with God only as a last resort. Do we think it normal to ignore or neglect the people we love? Obviously not! Those we love figure constantly in our conversations, desires and thoughts. We hold them ever present. So it should be with God.”¹⁰

We find Mary on Calvary, “at the foot of the Cross, praying. This is nothing new for Mary. She has always acted like this, as she fulfilled her duties and looked after her home. As she went about the things of this earth she kept her attention on God. Christ . . . wanted us also to have the example of his Mother, the most perfect of creatures, she who is full of grace, to strengthen our desire to lift our eyes up to the love of God at every moment.”¹¹

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

7 St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 502.

8 *Ibid.*, no. 509.

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

10 St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 247.

11 *Ibid.*, no. 241.

Now, from Heaven, where she lives glorified in body and soul, our Lady continues being very close to each one of us, fulfilling to the letter the mission that Jesus gave her in the person of St. John: *Woman, behold your Son.*¹² “Let us entrust to her all the moments of our personal and ecclesial life,” recommends Benedict XVI, “among them that of our final passage from this earth. Mary teaches us the need for prayer and tells us that only with a constant, intimate, loving bond with her Son, will we be able to leave behind ‘our house,’ our selfish concerns, in order to reach even the furthest corner of the world, announcing everywhere our Lord Jesus Christ, Savior of the world.”¹³

Do we pray the *Dominus tecum* of the Ave Maria with the daily piety our Father had? How insistently do we ask our Lady to help us make good use of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit?

Continue being closely united to my intentions, which are summed up in an intense prayer for the Church, for the Pope, for priests and religious, for the holiness of the entire Christian people. Let us ask the Holy Spirit, through our Lady’s intercession, to enkindle in everyone, pastors and faithful, an eagerness to fulfill at every moment the Most Holy Will of God.

And accompany me on the trip I am planning to make to Slovakia in a few days, so that there too the spirit of Opus Dei may spread more and more, sowing in all sectors a love for the Church and a desire to sanctify oneself and to sanctify others in the midst of one’s ordinary tasks. You can’t imagine the insistent piety with which our Father prayed for that land in 1968, when people there tried to free themselves from the yoke of Marxism.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, May 1, 2012

¹² *Jn* 19:26.

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