

(Letter from the Prelate: November 2013)

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

Within a few weeks the Year of Faith will come to an end. The Holy Father will conclude it on the upcoming 24th, Solemnity of Christ the King. In this regard I invite you to reread some words that our Father wrote in one of his homilies: “When we recite the creed, we state that we believe in God the Father Almighty, in his Son Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. We affirm that the Church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic, is the body of Christ, enlivened by the Holy Spirit. We rejoice in the forgiveness of sins and in the hope of the resurrection. But do those words penetrate to the depths of our own heart? Or do they remain only on our lips?”¹

The Solemnity of All Saints that we are celebrating today, and the commemoration of the faithful departed tomorrow, are an invitation to remember our eternal destiny. These liturgical feasts reflect the final articles of faith. “The Christian Creed—the profession of our faith in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in God’s creative, saving, and sanctifying action—culminates in the proclamation of the resurrection of the dead on the last day and in life everlasting.”²

The Creed sums up the “last things”—both on the individual and collective level—that are to befall each person and the whole universe. Human reason can intuit, when it functions correctly, that after our earthly life a “beyond” exists where the justice that is so often violated here below will be fully re-established. But only in the light of divine revelation, and especially through the clarity of Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection, do these truths acquire clear contours, although continuing to be enveloped in a veil of mystery.

Thanks to our Lord’s teaching, the final realities lose the gloomy and fatalistic sense they have had, and still have, for many men and women throughout history. Bodily death is a reality obvious to everyone, but in Christ it acquires a new meaning. It is not just a consequence of being material creatures, with a physical body that naturally tends to disintegration. Nor is it only, as the Old Testament revealed, a punishment for sin. St. Paul insists: *to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*. And elsewhere he adds: *The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him*.³ “What is essentially new about Christian death is this: through Baptism, the Christian has already ‘died with Christ’ sacramentally, in order to live a new life; and if we die in Christ’s grace, physical death completes this ‘with Christ’ and so completes our incorporation into him in his redeeming act.”⁴

The Church is our Mother at every moment. She regenerated us in the waters of Baptism, communicating to us Christ’s life and, at the same time, the promise of future immortality. Then through the other sacraments, especially Confession and the Holy Eucharist, she sees to it that this “being” and “walking” in Christ strengthens in our souls. Later, when grave illness comes and, above all, at the moment of death, she once again bends over her daughters and sons and

¹ St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 129.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 988.

³ *Phil 1:21 and 2 Tim 2:11*.

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1010

strengthens us through the Anointing of the Sick and Communion in the form of viaticum. She provides us with everything we need to confront with hope and joyful peace the final voyage that ends, with God's grace, in the arms of our heavenly Father. St. Josemaría, like so many saints before and after him, when describing Christian death, wrote clear and optimistic words: "Don't be afraid of death. Accept it from now on, generously... when God wills it, where God wills it, as God wills it. Don't doubt what I say: it will come in the moment, in the place and in the way that are best: sent by your Father-God. Welcome be our sister death!"⁵

There come to mind so many people—men and women of Opus Dei, and their relatives, friends, and cooperators—who at this moment are on the point of surrendering their soul to God. For each and every one of them I ask the grace of a holy departure, filled with peace, closely identified with Jesus Christ. "The Risen Lord is the hope that never fails, that never disappoints (cf. *Rom 5:5*) . . . How often in our life do hopes vanish, how often do the expectations we have in our heart come to nothing! Our hope as Christians is strong, safe and sound on this earth, where God has called us to walk, and it is open to eternity because it is founded on God who is always faithful."⁶

During this month dedicated to the faithful departed, I suggest that you reread and meditate on the paragraphs the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* dedicates to the last things. You will find there reasons for hope and supernatural optimism, and a new impulse in the spiritual struggle each day. Even the visits to cemeteries, which during these weeks are a pious custom in many places, can be opportunities for those we deal with apostolically to consider the eternal truths, and seek ever more diligently this God of ours who follows us and calls us with a Father's tenderness.

With death the time for carrying out good works and meriting before God ends, and the personal judgment of each soul takes place immediately. For it is part of the Church's faith that "each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven—through a purification or immediately—or immediate and everlasting damnation."⁷

The main focus of this judgment will be our love for God and neighbor, shown in the faithful fulfillment of the commandments and our duties of state. Today many people turn a blind eye to this reality, as though they could thus avoid the just judgment of God, who is always filled with mercy. We children of God "should fear neither life nor death," as St. Josemaría used to say. If we are firmly anchored in our faith; if we go to our Lord contritely, in the sacrament of Penance, after having offended him or to purify our imperfections; if we frequently receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, we will have no reason to fear that moment. Consider what our Father wrote many years ago: "'I was amused to hear you speak of the "account" that our Lord will demand of you. No, for none of you will he be a judge—in the harsh sense of the word; he will simply be Jesus.' These lines, written by a good bishop, have consoled more than one troubled heart, and could well console yours."⁸

Besides (and this should fill us with great joy) even after death the Church does not abandon her children. In every Mass she intercedes, like a good Mother, for the souls of the faithful

⁵ St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 739.

⁶ Pope Francis, Address in a general audience, April 4, 2013.

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1022.

⁸ St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 168.

departed, asking that they be admitted into glory. Especially in November, her solicitude leads her to intensify these suffrages. In the Work, a “small part” of the Church, we strongly echo that desire, fulfilling with affection and gratitude St. Josemaría’s recommendations for these weeks, by offering generously the Holy Sacrifice and Holy Communion for the faithful of Opus Dei, for our deceased relatives and cooperators, and for all the souls in Purgatory. Don’t you see how considering the last things is in no way a cause of sadness, but rather a source of supernatural joy? With full confidence we await the definitive call of God and the consummation of the world on the last day, when Christ will come accompanied by all the angels to take possession of his Kingdom. Then there will take place the resurrection of all men and women who have lived on earth, from the first to the last.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out that this “has been an essential element of the Christian faith from its beginnings.”⁹ Therefore, right from the beginning, it encountered incomprehension and opposition. “It is very commonly accepted that the life of the human person continues in a spiritual fashion after death. But how can we believe that this body, so clearly mortal, could rise to everlasting life?”¹⁰ And this is what will really happen at the end of time, through God’s omnipotence, as the Athanasian Creed explicitly states: “all men shall rise again with their bodies, and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.”¹¹

The loving condescension of our Father God is cause for wonder. He created us as beings composed of soul and body, spirit and matter, and his plan is that we return to him as such, to enjoy eternally in the future life his goodness, beauty and wisdom. By God’s singular plan, a creature has gone before us in this glorious resurrection: the Most Holy Virgin, Mother of Jesus and our Mother, who was assumed in body and soul to the glory of heaven. Another reason for hope and trusting optimism!

Let us keep very present these divine promises, which can never fail, especially in moments of sorrow, tiredness, or suffering. Look at how St. Josemaría expressed it, when preaching about the last things on one occasion: “Lord, I believe that I will rise again; I believe that my body will unite once again with my soul, to reign eternally with you: through your infinite merits, through the intercession of your Mother, through the predilection you have shown me.”¹² I don’t want you to think that this letter is, in the least degree, pessimistic; on the contrary, it reminds us that God’s embrace awaits us, if we are faithful.

After the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment will take place. Nothing will change with respect to what was already decided in the particular judgment, but then “we shall know the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation and of the entire economy of salvation and understand the marvelous ways by which his Providence led everything towards its final end. The Last Judgment,” the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* concludes, “will reveal that God’s justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God’s love is stronger than death.”¹³

Naturally, no one knows when or how this final event in history will come about, nor

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 991.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 996.

¹¹ Athanasian Creed or *Quicumque*, 38-39.

¹² St. Josemaría, Notes taken from a meditation, December 13, 1948.

¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1040.

anything about the renewal of the material world that will accompany it; it is something that God has reserved to his providence. Our task is to watch since, as our Lord announced many times, *you know neither the day nor the hour*.¹⁴

In one of his catecheses on the Creed, Pope Francis urged: “may looking at the Last Judgment never frighten us: rather, may it impel us to live the present better. God offers us this time with mercy and patience so that we may learn every day to recognize him in the poor and in the lowly. Let us strive for goodness and be watchful in prayer and in love.”¹⁵ Meditation on the eternal truths becomes more supernatural in us through the *holy fear of God*, a gift of the Holy Spirit who urges us, as St. Josemaría said, to hate sin in all its forms, for it is the only thing that can distance us from the merciful plans of our Father God.

My daughters and sons, let us consider in depth these final truths. By doing so our hope will increase; we will be filled with optimism facing difficulties, and we will get up again and again from our small, or not so small, falls (God never denies us his grace), calling to mind the eternal happiness that Christ has promised us, if we are faithful. “This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity—this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed, is called ‘heaven.’ Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.”¹⁶

“Heaven: ‘the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things that God has prepared for those who love him.’ Don’t these revelations of the Apostle spur you on to fight?”¹⁷ I dare to add: Do you think of heaven frequently? Are you a person filled with hope, since God loves you with his infinite strength? Let us raise our heart to the Most Blessed Trinity, who never ceases nor ever will cease accompanying us.

You know that the Pope received me in an audience on October 18. How good it is to be with the Pope! He expressed his affection and gratitude to the Prelature for the apostolic work it is carrying out throughout the world. Yet one more reason, my sons and daughters, why we must not let up in our prayer for him, for his intentions and those who assist him. A few days ago we read at Mass how Aaron and Hur held up the arms of Moses from morning till night, so that the guide of Israel could intercede untiringly for his people.¹⁸ It is our task and that of all Catholics to sustain the Roman Pontiff, with our prayer and mortification, in the fulfillment of the mission Christ has entrusted to him in the Church.

The upcoming 22nd is another anniversary of the day when St. Josemaría, during his crossing of the Pyrenees in 1937, found the rose of Rialp. It happened on the day after the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, and our Father interpreted this as a sign that Heaven wanted him to continue his journey, in order to keep carrying out his priestly ministry freely in places where religious freedom was respected: another invitation from our Lady to go to her more frequently.

Continue to pray for my intentions. During these days pray especially for your brothers who will receive the diaconate on the 9th. Let us prepare for the Solemnity of Christ the King with the hope and optimism that meditating on the eternal truths brings to our hearts. And let us give

¹⁴ *Mt 25:13*.

¹⁵ Pope Francis, Address in a general audience, April 24, 2013.

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1024.

¹⁷ St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 751.

¹⁸ See *Exod 17:10-13*.

thanks to our Lord for the new anniversary of the erecting of the Prelature of Opus Dei by the Pope, on the 28th.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, November 1, 2013