

(Letter from the Prelate: September 2013)

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

I am writing to you from Germany, after the trip I made through several countries of South America. There I had the joy of being with so many sisters and brothers of yours and with many other people who share in the spirit of the Work. Let us give thanks to Heaven because we have experienced, also during World Youth Day, as Benedict XVI said, that the Church is and always will be youthful and beautiful. And just as you accompanied me spiritually during those weeks, continue doing so now, so that the apostolic fruit may be very abundant.

During recent months we have been considering the Church's beauty, reflecting on the notes that distinguish her and that we profess in the Creed. By Baptism, we were introduced into Christ's sheepfold, and made sheep of his flock. The Good Shepherd continues watching over each one of us, especially with the grace that he pours into us through the other sacraments, above all in the Eucharist, which identifies us ever more closely with Christ and makes us active members of his Mystical Body, living stones of the spiritual Temple animated by the Paraclete. And also in Penance, where our Lord pardons our sins and grants us renewed strength to win out in the spiritual struggle.

It gives me joy to consider this reality as we draw close to the feast of the Birth of our Lady, on the 8th. In Mary we see fully realized the ideal to which we have all been called. Right from her Immaculate Conception, our Lady—immune from all sin and filled with grace—is the specially beloved daughter of God the Father, the living Temple of the Holy Spirit, predestined to be the Mother of the Word Incarnate. Let us prepare for this feast with filial affection, congratulating our Lady and bringing her—as the good children of hers that we want to be—the gift of our filial love and our undisputed faithfulness to her Son Jesus. Let us try to stay very close to her during the other Marian feasts we will celebrate this month, and always.

I would also like to draw our attention to the feasts we will celebrate in the middle of this month: the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, on the 14th, and the following day, the liturgical memorial of our Lady at the foot of the Cross, which is also the anniversary of the election of our beloved Don Alvaro, the first successor of our Father at the head of Opus Dei.

These dates are intimately connected to the Church. The Church receives her salvific strength from Christ's open side on the Cross, with the collaboration of his Mother, the *new Eve* who, by God's plan, cooperated with Christ, the *new Adam*, in humanity's redemption. Thus at the conclusion of one of the sessions of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI proclaimed Mary *Mother of the Church*, "that is to say Mother of all the People of God, of the faithful as well as of the pastors, who call her their most loving Mother. And we wish that she should be honored and invoked by the entire Christian people by this very pleasing title."¹ It isn't easy to describe how great was our Father's joy in invoking our Lady with that title, which he had already been using in his private prayer.

In Mary all the essential characteristics of the Church shine forth with the greatest splendor: intimate unity with God and with mankind; eminent holiness; the catholicity by which her heart

¹ Pope Paul VI, Address at closing of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Council, November 21, 1964, no. 25.

is open to all her children's needs; and also apostolicity. During these weeks, it fills me with joy to remind you of this note, by which we confess that the Church "is built on a lasting foundation: 'the twelve apostles of the Lamb' (*Rev* 21:14). She is indestructible (see *Mt* 16:18). She is upheld infallibly in the truth: Christ governs her through Peter and the other apostles, who are present in their successors, the Pope and the college of bishops."²

This aspect of the Church shines forth brightly in our Lady. For it was Mary who, at Cana of Galilee, made it easier for the Master's first disciples to have faith in him, preparing them for the call to the apostolate they would later receive.³ And from the Cross Jesus addressed his Mother, entrusting to her the care of the beloved apostle and, in him, of all the disciples.⁴ Holy Mary, faithful to this commission, kept the apostles united while waiting for Pentecost.⁵ It is moving to see how closely she followed their initial steps in the first evangelization, after the coming of the Paraclete, as testimonies from the early Church tell us. "Our Lady not only encouraged the holy apostles and the other faithful to be patient and strong in all their trials; she shared with them in their fatigue, sustained them in their preaching, and was in spiritual union with the Lord's disciples in their privations and ordeals, in their imprisonment."⁶ Now from heaven, and with even greater effectiveness, she continues urging forward the Church's apostolate all over the world; she strengthens the pastors and faithful so that, each in accord with the gifts and graces received, all may give witness to Jesus Christ and bring his name, like St. Paul, to *the gentiles, and kings and the sons of Israel*,⁷ to the environment where their human and divine vocation has placed them.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us: "the whole Church is apostolic, in that she remains, through the successors of St. Peter and the other apostles, in communion of faith and life with her origin: and in that she is 'sent out' into the whole world. All members of the Church share in this mission, though in various ways."⁸ So no one should think that the mission received by the Twelve before Christ's ascension to heaven is meant only for the sacred ministers. "In the Church there is a diversity of ministries, but there is only one aim: the sanctification of men. And in this task all Christians participate in some way, through the character imprinted by the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. We must all feel responsible for the mission of the Church, which is the mission of Christ. He who does not have zeal for the salvation of souls, he who does not strive with all his strength to make the name and doctrine of Christ known and loved, will not understand the apostolicity of the Church."⁹

In his first months as universal Pastor, Pope Francis has not tired of reminding all Catholics of this joyful mission. In one way or another he invites us to ask ourselves: "How do we live our being Church? Are we living stones or are we, as it were, stones that are weary, bored or indifferent? Have you ever noticed how grim it is to see a tired, bored and indifferent Christian? A Christian like that is all wrong. Christians must be alive, rejoicing in being Christian; he or she must live this beauty of belonging to the People of God which is the Church. Do we open

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 869.

³ See *Jn* 2:11; *Mk* 3:13-15.

⁴ See *Jn* 19:26-27.

⁵ See *Acts* 1:12-14.

⁶ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Life of Mary* VIII, 97.

⁷ *Acts* 9:15.

⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 863.

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

ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit . . . or do we withdraw into ourselves, saying; ‘I have so much to do, it isn’t my job!’?”¹⁰ And recently, in concluding the World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, he addressed the same call with special insistence to young people when he summed up his message in three clear ideas: “Go, do not be afraid, and serve.” And he continued: “Careful, though! Jesus did not say: ‘go, if you would like to, if you have the time,’ but he said: ‘Go and make disciples of all nations.’ Sharing the experience of faith, bearing witness to the faith, proclaiming the Gospel: this is a command that the Lord entrusts to the whole Church, and that includes you; but it is a command that is born not from a desire for domination, from the desire for power, but from the force of love, from the fact that Jesus first came into our midst and . . . gave us the whole of himself, he gave his life in order to save us.”¹¹

A lukewarm Christian, a passive Christian, “has failed to understand what Christ wants from all of us. A Christian who goes his own way, unconcerned about the salvation of others, does not love with the heart of Jesus. Apostolate is not a mission reserved for the hierarchy, priests and religious. The Lord calls all of us to be, with our example and word, instruments of the stream of grace which springs up to eternal life.”¹² This was St. Josemaría’s teaching right from the first moments of Opus Dei’s founding, as a most important part of the mission he had received from God in the Church. His message, valid for everyone, was directed more specifically to ordinary Catholics, to the women and men who, by divine vocation, live in the midst of earthly realities, striving to turn them into means for spreading the Kingdom of God. “Bear in mind, son,” he wrote as early as the 1930’s, “that you are not just a soul who has joined other souls in order to do a good thing. That is a lot, but it’s still little. You are the Apostle who is carrying out an imperative command from Christ.”¹³

Two main conditions are required if the participation by the faithful in the Church’s apostolic mission is to bear fruit: docility to the inspirations of the Paraclete and close union with the Pope and the bishops in communion with the Apostolic See. The two are indispensable.

The Holy Spirit, as Paul VI said, is “the principal agent of evangelization,”¹⁴ the inspirer of apostolate in our personal life and in that of everyone in the Church. To evangelize is “the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.”¹⁵ And the same is true for every Catholic: the meaning of our life is to reach Heaven bringing with us many other people. We should beseech the Paraclete for the light and strength needed to carry out the task of the *new evangelization*, which has been entrusted to all of us.

“To evangelize, therefore, it is necessary to open ourselves once again to the horizon of God’s Spirit, without being afraid of what he asks us or of where he leads us. Let us entrust ourselves to him! He will enable us to live out and bear witness to our faith, and will illuminate the heart of those we meet.”¹⁶

What a great joy it is to spread knowledge and love of Jesus! Let us not lessen our efforts in the face of possible difficulties. On the contrary, like the first Christians, sheltered under the

¹⁰ Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, June 26, 2013.

¹¹ Pope Francis, Homily at closing Mass for World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro, July 28, 2013.

¹² St. Josemaría, Homily *Loyalty to the Church*, June 4, 1972.

¹³ St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 942.

¹⁴ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhort. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975, no. 75.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* no. 14.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, May 22, 2013.

mantle of Mary, let us strive to be ever more effective “loudspeakers” for the Paraclete wherever we may find ourselves: by our upright Christian conduct, by our opportune word spoken in the ear of that person who is vacillating, by the charity with which we always have to treat everyone.

The second condition is union with the Pope and the bishops: a union of prayer and intentions. I always insist on this point because only with Peter and under Peter, in union with the Episcopal College, will we serve the Church effectively. “We help to make that apostolic continuity more evident in the eyes of all men by demonstrating with exquisite fidelity our union with the Pope, which is union with Peter. Love for the Roman Pontiff,” our Father wrote, “must be in us a delightful passion, for in him we see Christ. If we deal with the Lord in prayer, we will go forward with a clear gaze that will permit us to perceive the action of the Holy Spirit, even in the face of events we do not understand or which produce sighs or sorrow.”¹⁷

We will find the strength needed to press forward without misgivings or fear in the effort to restore the world to Christ, loving our Lord on the Cross. This is what the feast of the Exaltation, the feast of the glorious Cross teaches us. The path of glory passes through the voluntary and joyful acceptance of the suffering, physical and moral, that God permits in our life: *per crucem ad lucem*, through the cross to the light, our Father used to pray. With Mary’s constant presence at our side, the Cross is filled with joy; on the wood roses bloom (as on the wooden crosses in our oratories), although at times thorns are also present. But despite our own littleness, the joy of assisting Jesus in the salvation of souls is a marvelous reality!

In a few days I will be back in Rome where, as always, many tasks await that have to be tackled and resolved. Among others, preparing for the beatification of our beloved Don Alvaro, although the date has not yet been set. Pray especially for this intention and take advantage of the time that still remains to get to know him and his writings better, and to spread them; to show gratitude for his response of full fidelity to the Blessed Trinity, to the spirit of the Work, to our Father.

And continue praying for the sick—for those in the Work and for everyone—so that they know how to unite themselves to our Lord’s Cross. And thus they will participate more intensely in applying the redemption worked by Christ to all souls.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Solingen, September 1, 2013

¹⁷ St. Josemaría, Homily *Loyalty to the Church*, June 4, 1972.