

PASTORAL LETTER

Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz

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Contents:

Fidelity to vocation, fidelity to Christ

Apostolic fidelity

Fidelity to one's vocation and ordinary life

What is permanent and what is changeable in the life of the Work

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(Pro manuscript)

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

Be faithful, it's worthwhile!

1. With this familiar expression, which inspired an old song, Saint Josemaría encouraged us to be very faithful. I often remember that on 23 August 1963, during a summer course in Pamplona, in a get-together with our Father, we sang that song. Some of us noticed that, as he listened to us singing those words, our Father repeated in a low voice *it's worthwhile, it's worthwhile*. We saw it as a spontaneous expression of his lived experience. Taking the Work forward had been worth it: so much work, so much suffering, so many difficulties and, at the same time, so much joy! Fidelity is necessarily joyful, even with suffering; with joy in our Lord, which is our strength (cf. *Neh* 8:10).

Fidelity is a broad concept, with various meanings: "accuracy or truthfulness in doing something," "exact copy of a text," "exact fulfilment of a duty, of a promise," etc. It is especially relevant to consider fidelity in relationships between people, in its most humanly profound aspect: love. "Faithfulness over time is the name of love."¹ Genuine love is by nature permanent; it is faithful, even though it may fail due to human weakness.

Fidelity embraces all the dimensions of our life, for it involves the whole person: intelligence, will, feelings, relationships and memory. In this brief letter, in the context of the approaching centenary of the foundation of the Work, I would like us to pause now to meditate on a few aspects, guided above all by passages from Saint Josemaría.

Fidelity to vocation, fidelity to Christ

2. The Christian vocation, in all its particular expressions, is God's call to holiness. It is a call from God's love to our love, in a relationship in which God's faithfulness always steps in first: *The Lord is faithful* (2 *Thess* 3:3; cf. 1 *Cor* 1:9). "Our faithfulness is only a response to God's faithfulness. God who is faithful to his word, who is faithful to his promise."²

Faith in God's faithfulness gives strength to our hope, even though our personal weakness sometimes leads us not to be entirely faithful, in small things or perhaps, on occasion, in great things. Then fidelity consists in following, with God's grace, the path of the prodigal son (cf. *Lk* 15:11-32). *Fidelity to Christ calls for continuous vigilance. It is not enough to trust in our own paltry strength. Until the very last step of our earthly existence we will always have to keep fighting: this is our destiny.*³

We need to seek union with our Lord perseveringly. We seek, and we find, this

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Address, 12 May 2010.

² Pope Francis, Homily, 15 April 2020.

³ *Letter* 28 March 1973, 9.

union with Jesus in our work, in our family, in everything... Especially in the Eucharist, in Penance and in prayer. Moreover, we are not alone; we also have the help of others, especially in personal spiritual direction. Let us be grateful for this possibility of opening our souls sincerely, to receive encouragement and advice on the path of growing in our love for God. And where our love is nourished, our faithfulness is strengthened: *Fall in love, and you will not leave him.*⁴

3. Fidelity is shown especially when it involves effort and suffering. Here too, the example of our Mother, the faithful Virgin, enlightens us: "Only a consistency that lasts throughout the whole of life can be called faithfulness. Mary's *fiat* in the Annunciation finds its fullness in the silent *fiat* that she repeats at the foot of the Cross."⁵

With God's help, we can be faithful. We can advance along the path of identification with Christ, so that our ways of thinking, of loving, of seeing people and the world, become more and more his, through a permanent beginning and beginning again in which *awareness of our being children of God brings joy to our conversion.*⁶ Thus, Saint Paul's exhortation to the Philippians will become a reality in our lives: *Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5).*

4. Encounter and union with Christ becomes a reality in the Church, which is visibly a People composed of many peoples. Constituted as the Body of Christ, the Church acts as a sacrament: all salvation comes from Christ through the Church, especially because the Church *makes the Eucharist* and the Eucharist *makes the Church.*

The constantly evident fact that the Church is made up of weak, flawed men and women should not diminish our love for her. Let us always bear in mind that, above all, *this is what the Church is: Christ present in our midst, God coming towards mankind to save us, calling us with his revelation, sanctifying us with his grace, sustaining us with his constant help, in the great and small battles of our daily life.*⁷

Fidelity to Christ is, therefore, fidelity to the Church. And in the Church, we strive to practise and foster union with everyone, especially with the Bishops and, in a special way, with the Roman Pontiff, the visible principle of unity of faith and communion. May we always keep alive in each of us our Father's desire: *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!*

Fidelity to Christ and to the Church entails for us fidelity to our vocation to Opus Dei, living with the spirit that we have received from Saint Josemaría, who was and truly is our Father in the Work. This is how he expressed it long ago in a letter addressed to all his children: *I cannot fail to raise my soul in thanksgiving to God, 'from whom proceeds all fatherhood in heaven and on earth' (Eph 3:15-16), for having given me this spiritual paternity which, with his grace, I have taken on with the full consciousness of being on the earth only for this purpose. Thus, I love you with the heart*

⁴ *The Way*, 999.

⁵ Saint John Paul II, Homily, 26 January 1979.

⁶ *Christ Is Passing By*, 64.

⁷ *Christ Is Passing By*, 131.

*of a father and a mother.*⁸ To be faithful daughters and sons of Saint Josemaría is our vocational path to being faithful daughters and sons of God in Christ.

You will surely remember these other words of our Father: *The divine calling demands of us an inviolate, firm, virginal, joyful and undisputed fidelity to faith, purity and vocation.*⁹ I will only pause here to underline the joy. Our fidelity is a free response to God's grace, lived out with joy and also with good humour. How helpful it is to remember these other words of his: *On the human plane, I want to leave you as an inheritance love for freedom and good humour.*¹⁰

5. Considering fidelity in the Work, how can we fail to think of Blessed Alvaro? I recall that on 19 February 1974, when Blessed Alvaro was not present, Saint Josemaría said of him: *I would like you to imitate him in many things, but above all in loyalty. (...) He has always had a smile and an incomparable fidelity.*¹¹ I often think of the biblical words *vir fidelis multum laudabitur*, a faithful man will be highly praised (*Prov 28:20*), engraved on the lintel of a door in Villa Vecchia, which leads to the very office Don Alvaro occupied for many years.

I also lift up my heart in gratitude to God for the faithfulness of so many women and men who have preceded us on the path and who have left us a precious testimony of that *worthwhile* life, mentioned at the beginning.

Our Father used to say that every person who comes close to the Work, even for a short time, will always have our affection. This applies even more to those who have been in the Work for a while and then have taken other paths; and those who have on occasion felt hurt, we wholeheartedly ask for their forgiveness.

Apostolic fidelity

6. The Christian vocation to holiness, to identification with Christ, is – in all its forms, in one way or another – an apostolic vocation: *One cannot dissociate interior life from apostolate, just as it is not possible to separate in Christ his being God-Man from his role as Redeemer.*¹²

In every age – and in our own we see it strikingly – there is in the world an immense, often unconscious, thirst for God. The prophetic words are ever fulfilled: *“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord God, “when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord”* (*Amos 8:11*).

How often we have meditated on Saint Josemaría's ardent exhortation: *Beloved: Jesus urges us on. He wants to be lifted up again, not on the Cross, but in the glory of all human activities, so as to draw all things to himself* (*Jn 12:32*).¹³

In experiencing the difficulties that Christian life encounters in this world –

⁸ Letter 6 May 1945, 23.

⁹ Letter 24 March 1931, 43.

¹⁰ Letter 31 May 1954, 22.

¹¹ St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, 19 February 1974.

¹² *Christ Is Passing By*, 122.

¹³ *Instruction*, 1 April 1934, 1.

atheism, indifference, relativism, materialistic naturalism, hedonism, etc. – Saint John’s warning may come to mind: *Do not love the world or the things in the world* (1 Jn 2:15). This refers to what is opposed to God in the world, which he sums up in the threefold concupiscence (cf. 1 Jn 2:16). But at the same time, the world, God’s creation, is good: *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* (Jn 3:16).

7. Let us try, like our Father, to be *passionately in love with the world*,¹⁴ for it is the place of our encounter with God and the way to eternal life. That love excludes *worldliness*: we are of the world, but we do not want to be worldly. This means, for example, living the spirit and practical reality of poverty, which frees us from so many bonds and, in a positive sense, makes us listen to Saint Paul, who assures us: *All things are yours; you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s* (1 Cor 3:22-23). The witness of sober and austere lives is – today and always – a way of being salt and light in this world, which we must transform with Christ’s love.

In the face of this reality – *all things are yours* – we rejoice in the joys of others; we enjoy all the good things that surround us, and we get involved in the challenges of our time. At the same time, we feel the world’s situation deeply, particularly the sad reality of war and other situations of great need and suffering on the part of so many people, especially the weakest. But, I insist, let us not give way to pessimism; on the contrary, let us renew our faith in the vitality of the Gospel – *it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith* (Rom 1:16) – and our faith in the means: prayer, mortification, the Eucharist!, and work. Then we will keep a hope-filled view of the world.

Faith is the basis of fidelity. Not vain trust in our human ability, but faith in God, who is the foundation of hope (cf. Heb 11:1). “God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety.”¹⁵

Let us listen again to our Father: *If you are faithful, and as fruit of your silent and humble dedication, the Lord will work marvels through your hands. That passage from Saint Luke will be re-lived: ‘The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’”* (Lk 10:17).¹⁶

Fidelity to one’s vocation and ordinary life

8. In the life of each one of us there may be, from time to time, circumstances that are out of the ordinary; but we know well that union with our Lord and, with him, our apostolic mission, must become a reality above all in ordinary life: family, professional work, friendships, social duties...: “This is the principal ‘setting’ for our encounter with God,”¹⁷ Don Javier reminded us in one of his first letters.

To encounter our Lord in all the events of each day means discovering the value

¹⁴ *Conversations*, 118.

¹⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe salvi*, 31.

¹⁶ *Letter 24 March 1930*, 23.

¹⁷ Bishop Javier Echevarría, Pastoral Letter, 28 November 1995, 16.

of the small things, the little things, the details, in which we can so often show our love for God and our love for others. Jesus himself told us: *He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much* (Lk 16:10). Faithfulness in little things is rewarded by our Lord with the greatness of his own joy (cf. Mt 25:21).

Our own personal experience shows us that this fidelity in “what is little” is not “something little.” On the contrary: *Perseverance in little things, for Love, is heroism.*¹⁸ It is love that gives the greatest value to all human endeavours. Fidelity is being faithful to a commitment of love, and it is love for God that is the ultimate meaning of freedom. This freedom of spirit gives us the capacity to love what has to be done, even when it involves sacrifice. And then we can experience what Jesus assures us: *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light* (Mt 11:29-30). And Saint Augustine says: “Where there is love, either no difficulty is felt, or the difficulty itself is loved. The labours of those who love are never burdensome.”¹⁹

9. We know well that finding God, loving God, is inseparable from loving and serving others; that the two precepts of charity are inseparable. With our fraternal love, which is a sure sign of supernatural life, we build up our own fidelity and make other people’s fidelity more joyful: *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love our brethren* (1 Jn 3:14). How forcefully Saint Josemaría encourages us to live fraternity! *Heart, my children: put your heart into serving one another. When our affection passes through the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Most Sweet Heart of Mary, fraternal charity takes on all its human and divine strength. It makes burdens bearable, it soothes pains, it ensures a cheerful struggle. It’s not something that ties us down: it strengthens the wings of the soul to soar higher. Fraternal charity, which doesn’t seek its own interest (cf. 1 Cor 13:5), enables us to soar, to praise God with a spirit of joyful sacrifice.*²⁰

Given the place that work occupies in our ordinary life, we need to consider – and make a personal examination of conscience about – the many aspects contained in the phrase *sanctifying work, sanctifying oneself in work, sanctifying with work.*²¹ Now I would like to invite you to meditate on how we can better turn work into prayer, which is not just a matter of including some small acts of piety while we work. Our Father has explained it to us in so many ways. Let us re-read his words: *So go about your work in the knowledge that God is watching: laborem manuum mearum respexit Deus* (Gen 31:42), *God saw the labour of my hands. Our work therefore has to be holy and worthy of him: not only finished down to the last detail, but carried out with moral rectitude, unselfishness, loyalty and justice. In this way our professional work will not only be upright and holy, but will be, on that account, prayer as well.*²²

In our work we often experience our limitations and defects. But if, in spite of

¹⁸ *The Way*, 813.

¹⁹ Saint Augustine, *De bono viduitatis*, 21, 26.

²⁰ *Letter 14 February 1974*, 23.

²¹ *Christ Is Passing By*, 45.

²² *Letter 15 October 1948*, 26.

everything, we strive to work *in the knowledge that God is watching*, we will be able to hear Saint Paul's words as addressed to us: *in the Lord your labour is not in vain* (1 Cor 15:58); as our Father summed it up: *nothing is ever lost*.

What is permanent and what is changeable in the life of the Work

10. Personal fidelity to one's vocation in the Work is necessarily related to institutional fidelity, that is, to the permanence of the Work as an institution in fidelity to God's will for it as transmitted by its founder.

In 2016, Don Javier reminded us of these words of Saint Josemaría: *Just as human beings retain their personality throughout the various stages of growth – childhood, adolescence and maturity – so too there is an evolution in our development: if there weren't we would be dead. The essential core, the spirit remains unchanged, but the modes of expression and of doing things evolve, always old and new, and always holy.*²³

In commenting on this text, I pointed out back then how it is above all in the area of personal apostolate – which is the main kind in the Work – and the area of guiding professions, institutions and human structures in a Christian direction, that we try to apply initiative and creativity, so as to build a relationship of sincere friendship with many people and bring the light of the Gospel to society. This very initiative and creativity also leads us to seek new apostolic activities, within the sea without shores that the spirit of the Work presents to us.

11. This creativity can be understood as a version of what is sometimes called *dynamic fidelity*, or also *creative fidelity*. Such fidelity excludes both a superficial eagerness for changes, and an attitude of being opposed *a priori* to anything that is or appears to be in some way new. *Through our vocation we are present at the very birth of the upright innovations that take place in the life of society, and we also make our own the progress of each era.*²⁴ For this reason, we must understand and share the longings of our time and, at the same time, not aim to adapt ourselves to any fashion or custom, however current and widespread it may be, if it is contrary to the spirit which God has transmitted to us through our founder, and inappropriate for the human tone and family atmosphere of the Work. Therefore, *we will never need to adapt to the world, since we are of the world. Nor will we ever have to follow behind human progress, because it is we – or rather you, my daughters and sons – who are bringing about this progress with your ordinary work.*²⁵

It should also be borne in mind that, in the case of decisions established for the whole Work (for example, concerning the means of spiritual formation: circles, meditations, retreats, etc.), discerning the appropriateness of possible changes is naturally the ultimate responsibility of the Father with the General Council and the Central Advisory. Moreover, not every change at this level is indifferent to our spirit, and so they need to be studied with prudence. On your part, don't hesitate to propose apostolic projects to those who direct the apostolate, in a spirit of initiative

²³ Letter 29 September 1957, 56.

²⁴ Letter 14 February 1950, 21.

²⁵ Letter 9 January 1932, 92.

and also unity – never ceasing to row together – with the desire to bring the joy of the Gospel to many people. In any case, let us be sure that “we are not alone in carrying out the Work. We don’t count on our poor strength alone, but on God’s strength and power.”²⁶

12. With our personal fidelity and everyone’s sense of responsibility for maintaining institutional fidelity, in spite of our personal limitations, with God’s grace we will be able to build, through changing historical times, the continuity of the Work in fidelity to its origin. This is the essential continuity between past, present and future that is proper to a living reality. In 2015, Don Javier encouraged us to ask Saint Josemaría that the Work would reach 2 October 2028 with the same strength and freshness of spirit that our Father had on 2 October 1928.

Thus, through God’s mercy, what Saint Josemaría saw can become a reality: *I see the Work projected down through the centuries, always youthful, elegant, beautiful and fruitful, defending Christ’s peace, so that all may come to possess it. We will help society recognise the rights of the person, the family, and the Church. Our efforts will help lessen fratricidal hatred and mistrust among peoples. And my daughters and sons, fortes in fide (1 Pet 5:9), firm in the faith, will know how to anoint every wound with Christ’s charity, which is the sweetest of balms.*²⁷

Entrusting the constant renewal of our fidelity to our Mother Mary, the faithful Virgin, and to Saint Joseph, with all my love I bless you,

Your Father,



Fernando

²⁶ Bishop Javier Echevarría, Pastoral Letter, 28 November 1995, 11.

²⁷ Letter 16 July 1933, 26.