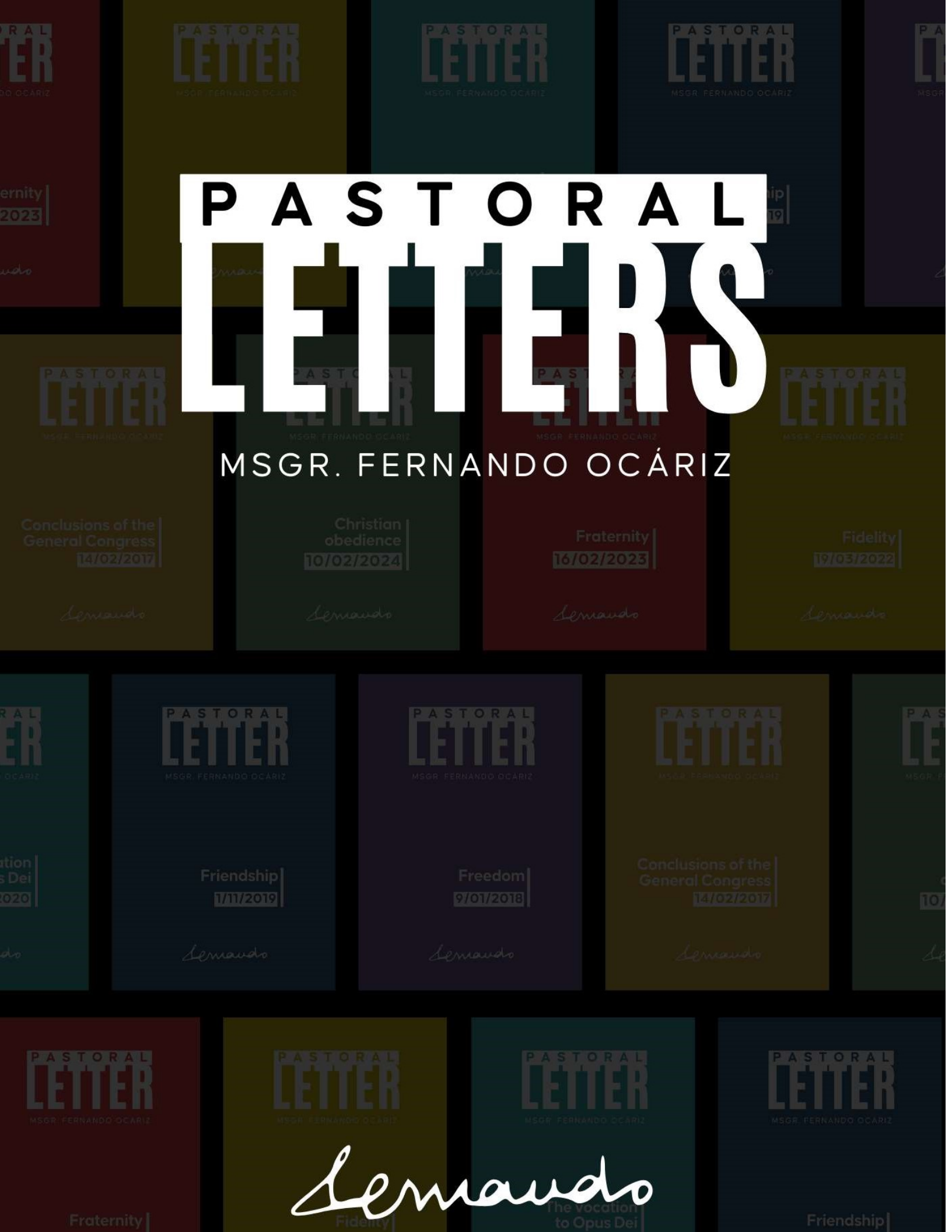


# PASTORAL LETTERS

MSGR. FERNANDO OCÁRIZ



Conclusions of the General Congress | 14/02/2017

Christian obedience | 10/02/2024

Fraternity | 16/02/2023

Fidelity | 19/03/2022

Friendship | 1/11/2019

Freedom | 9/01/2018

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*Serraucho*

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PASTORAL  
LETTER

MSGR. FERNANDO OCÁRIZ

Conclusions of the  
General Congress

14/02/2017

*Fernando*

## Conclusions of the General Congress (14 February 2017)

- All with Peter to Jesus through Mary (no. 1-2)
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### All with Peter to Jesus through Mary (no. 1-2)

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

1. I have been wanting very much to write to you again, now at more length. With this letter I want to let you share in the conclusions of the last General Congress, held in Rome this past January. I am doing so because, like Don Javier in 2010, I want all of you to feel the weight of the Work, the weight of souls, the responsibility of taking forward this small family that we are. With the whole Church, we aspire, in St Paul's words, to reconcile the world to God (see *2 Cor* 5:19). This is an immense task that would be too much for us if we did not rely on God's grace.

As I told you in St Josemaría's words, in my first letter as Father of this small part of the Church, our mission is to redeem and sanctify our time, to understand and share the concerns of our fellow men and women. I now take up the thread of those words: ***It is not true that everyone today – in general – is closed or indifferent to what***

***our Christian faith teaches about mankind's being and destiny. It is not true that people in our time are turned only toward the things of this earth and have forgotten to look up to heaven. There is no lack of narrow ideologies, it is true, or of people who maintain them. But in our time we find both great desires and base attitudes, heroism and cowardice, zeal and disenchantment: men who dream of a new world, more just and more human, and others who, discouraged perhaps by the failure of their youthful idealism, hide themselves in the selfishness of seeking only their own security or remaining immersed in their errors.***

***To all these men and women, wherever they may be, in their more exalted moments or in their crises and defeats, we have to bring the solemn and unequivocal message of St Peter in the days that followed Pentecost: Jesus is the cornerstone, the Redeemer, the hope of our lives. For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).<sup>1</sup>***

### ***All with Peter to Jesus through Mary***

2. The Pope is, for the Church, Peter who announces Christ to the world, proclaiming the joy of the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> The General Congress reaffirmed in the first place our filial union with the Roman Pontiff, and once again made its own the prayer that St Josemaría taught us: ***omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam.***<sup>3</sup>

We are grateful to Pope Francis, among many other reasons, for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, his example of piety and austerity, the apostolic stimulus that he is giving to the whole world, and his closeness to people, especially the most needy. We are also grateful for his decision, in the exercise of his Petrine ministry, to beatify Don Alvaro. The Congress also expressed its gratitude to the Pope for having confirmed me as successor of St Josemaría, Blessed Alvaro, and Don Javier at the head of Opus Dei, and for appointing me as Opus Dei's Prelate on the very same day as my election. I wrote to you earlier that I felt somewhat embarrassed, and at the same time joyful for the unity given to us by the Holy Spirit, infinite Love. My only desire in life is to be a good Father to each of you, by sharing, despite my limitations, in God's loving fatherhood. I am also moved by the fact that, in a

letter dated 1st February, the Pope wrote to encourage me and place me under the care of Our Lady.

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### Building upon rock (no. 3-6)

3. How are we to respond to so many graces, my daughters and sons? Let us renew our desire to incarnate and communicate the spirit of Opus Dei faithfully, as it was passed on to us by St Josemaría, building on a deep sense of our divine filiation in Christ, and determined to seek God in our professional work and in the ordinary circumstances of our life, in order to be salt and light of the world (see *Mt* 5:13-14). How great is the Christian vocation! It leads to our mysterious identification with the incarnate Word, which St John Paul II once expressed with daring words, taking up an expression from the Second Vatican Council: “Through the grace received in baptism, man participates in the eternal birth of the Son of the Father, for he becomes an adoptive son of God: a son in the Son.”<sup>4</sup>

4. Don Javier was a good son of God by being a faithful son of St Josemaría. That fidelity was the *raison d'être* of his life. He was our Prelate from 1994 to 2016, and the General Congress gave thanks to God for his life and his teachings. It has also echoed the desire of all the faithful of the Prelature, the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross and the Cooperators, to highlight Don Javier’s love for the Church and for this portion of the People of God that is Opus Dei. Don Javier left a fruitful example of pastoral charity, which was expressed in his union with the Holy Father and with all of his brothers in the episcopal college, in his zeal for souls, and in his active solicitude for the sick and the most needy. Therefore, certain that it will cause you joy, I want to record here the general opinion of the members of the Congress, and of so many other people, that it will be advisable to collect memories and testimonies about Don Javier and about his self-sacrificing life and teachings.

Moreover, the Congress has affirmed the good being done by the causes of beatification and canonization of faithful of the Work in various countries, and the importance of



continuing to spread private devotion to them. In this way we will help many souls discover divine love and the joy of living a Christian life in the middle of the world, to which Venerable Isidoro Zorzano and Venerable Montserrat Grases, among others, have given testimony. In crowning the merits of the saints, the Lord crowns his own gifts.<sup>5</sup> Through the saints we honour the Thrice-Holy God and we renew our own desires for sanctity: our love for God and for others in Him.

5. The Administrations of the Centres of Opus Dei, the ***apostolate of apostolates***, are as it were its “spinal column.”<sup>6</sup> The Congress has wanted to underline, once more, the decisive role of their work in making the family atmosphere in the Work real and in helping those who come to our houses to grasp it in a visible way. Let us respond to this gift by praying that our Lord may bless this apostolate with abundant vocations, and that it may be a radiant example of the value and dignity of work in the home. The women of the Prelature will review the services provided by the Administrations according to present circumstances and needs, so that they continue sustaining the atmosphere of a home, the human and family tone that truly makes each Centre a Bethany for us.

6. To those who were *Custodes* for Don Javier the Congress expressed its gratitude for their dedication in assisting him. In addition, it recognized the great help provided by the elderly and sick faithful of the Prelature, with the joyful and simple offering of their limitations, in spurring forward the continuing efforts of evangelization that the Work is carrying out throughout the world. Part of this quiet assistance, certainly, is the refined care of those who look after them with affection and a spirit of generous service, following the tradition we inherited from St Josemaría as an important part of our family spirit. My daughters and sons, so much depends on how we care for the elderly and the sick!

The General Congress also gave recognition to your brothers and sisters who, during these years, began the apostolic work in new countries, leaving their place of origin to help carry out the Work in other latitudes. You will recall how frequently Don Javier stressed that there are many good people waiting for us everywhere.

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## Present challenges in the adventure of formation (no. 7-9)

7. Our apostolic dynamism, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, has been sustained by the deep work of formation that the Prelature offers its faithful, and that constitutes its mission: ***the whole world becomes a great catechesis***.<sup>7</sup> The Congress wanted to emphasize some of the content of that formation in present-day circumstances. Allow me to list them below, so that in each circumscription of the Prelature, in each Centre, in each family of my daughters and sons, in each soul, the light and power of grace will make us see what more we can do and, above all, how we can do better what we are already doing.

8. In first place is the centrality of the Person of Jesus Christ, whom we want to get to know, deal with, and love. Putting Jesus at the centre of our life means deepening in our contemplative prayer in the middle of the world, and helping others to travel along *paths of contemplation*.<sup>8</sup> It means rediscovering with new light the anthropological and Christian value of the various ascetical means; reaching the person in all of his or her integrity: intellect, will, heart, relations with others; fostering interior freedom, which leads us to do things for love; helping people to think, so that each person can discover what God is asking of them and make decisions with full personal responsibility; nourishing confidence in God's grace, in order to be on the alert against voluntarism and sentimentalism; expressing the ideal of Christian life without confusing it with perfectionism, and teaching people how to live with and accept their own weakness and that of others; practising, with all its consequences, a daily attitude of hopeful abandonment to God's will, grounded on divine filiation.

In this way the sense of mission that our vocation entails will be strengthened along with our complete and joyful self-giving. We are called to contribute, with initiative and spontaneity, to improving the world and the culture of our times, so that God's plans for mankind are opened up: *cogitationes cordis eius*, the plans of his heart which are sustained *from generation to generation* (Ps 33 [32]:11).

In this regard it is good to encourage everyone to seek to live with their heart set on God, and therefore detached from material things. Free to love: this is the meaning of our spirit

of poverty, austerity and detachment, evangelical themes greatly valued by Pope Francis' magisterium.

Moreover, our love for the Church will spur us to obtain resources for the development of the apostolates, and to foster in everyone a great professional eagerness: in those who are still students and should harbour great desires to build up society, and in those who are carrying out a profession. With a right intention, they should foster the holy ambition of going far in their profession and of making an impact. At the same time, I encourage all Numerary men and women to have an active and generous availability, when necessary, to dedicate themselves with the same professional eagerness to tasks of formation and government.

9. This broad panorama invites us to renew our zeal for expansion, as in the early days of the Work, in order to bring the joy of the Gospel to many souls, so that many people may feel ***the attraction of Christ***.<sup>9</sup> Our Father used to tell us: ***If we want there to be more of us, let us be better***.<sup>10</sup> I would like this consideration to stir up in us a renewed sense of urgency in seeking, with God's grace and people's free and generous response, many vocations – all those that God wants – of Numeraries, Associates, Supernumeraries and priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross.

Freedom and vocation: here we have two essential dimensions of our human life, which call out to one another. We are free in order to love God who calls, God who is love and puts love into us so that we can love him and love others.<sup>11</sup> [ This charity makes us fully aware of our mission, which is not ***an apostolate exercised sporadically or occasionally, but habitually and by vocation, taking it as the ideal of our whole life***.<sup>12</sup> This ideal of love of God and others leads us to cultivate friendship with many people: we do not “do apostolate,” we are apostles! This is the path of the “Church that goes forth,” of which the Pope speaks frequently, reminding us of the importance of tenderness, magnanimity, and personal contact.

This “dynamism of ‘going forth’ which God wants to provoke in believers,”<sup>13</sup> is not a strategy, but the actual strength of the Holy Spirit, uncreated Charity. ***In a Christian, in a child of God, friendship and charity form a single thing: divine light which gives warmth***.<sup>14</sup> The current situation of evangelization makes it more

necessary than ever to give priority to personal contact. This relational aspect is at the heart of the mode of doing apostolate that St Josemaría found in the Gospel narratives. ***It can well be said, my dearest children, that the greatest fruit of Opus Dei's work is the fruit its members obtain personally through their apostolate of example and loyal friendship.***<sup>15</sup>

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### Giving and receiving formation (no. 10-13)

10. In preparing and giving the means of formation, we are enthused when we think of their fruitfulness in souls, through the grace of God who gives the growth (see *1 Cor* 3:6). In addition to putting the supernatural means very much in first place, we need to make an effort to use clear language, a positive and encouraging tone, and to give a hope-filled view of the world in which we are called to live, which is where we meet God. We should encourage active participation, and show the practical effects of the spirit of Opus Dei on family and social life, so that there is a growth in unity of life – a real, Christian consistency between what people think, the way they pray, and the way they live (see *Jn* 4:24; *Rom* 12:1; *2 Thess* 3:6-15).

11. For our fraternity and the apostolate of friendship and confidence, certain virtues are of great importance: humility, as well as joy and generosity. Also necessary is a sincere interest in others that takes the form of understanding them, along with respect and appreciation for different opinions. A positive tone in conversation enables us to better focus the questions being discussed. Ultimately, it is a matter of ***being sowers of peace and of joy***,<sup>16</sup> as our Father taught us, and of rectifying in a sportsmanlike manner when, instead of peace, we have sown a bit of discord. Our Centres, and the houses of the Associates, the Supernumeraries and the priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, have to radiate the attractive warmth of a home (see *Ps* 133 [132]:1; *Jn* 13:34-35).

I remember the peace and serenity that was radiated just by the presence of Don Alvaro, who practised what he taught us: “This family spirit is so essential for us that every

daughter and son of mine carries it always with them; so strong that straight away it can be seen in and around us, making it possible for us to create a family atmosphere in any place where we happen to be. That is why our being and feeling ourselves to be a family is not based on the material fact of living under the same roof, but on the spirit of filiation and fraternity which God has wanted for his Work from the first moment.”<sup>17</sup>

12. I ask our Lord that we may put a special effort into the formation of those who give personal spiritual direction, whether priests or laity, so that they are able to help others with dedication and skill. With the grace of God, they have to lead people to be generous in receiving the touches of the Holy Spirit, who speaks in the depths of their hearts (see *Mt 10:20*). Good example and the careful fulfillment of our professional, family, and social obligations are indispensable for helping others to follow our Lord. Our Father taught us that good professional standing, seen as authentic service, is ***your bait as a fisher of men.***<sup>18</sup> Faith enlightens people’s minds and gives meaning to their lives; it opens up a new dimension that leads them to Life in Christ.

13. We should take specific steps to provide on-going professional formation for those who direct apostolic works. The goal is to improve their capacity to direct and guide individuals and teams. Their responsibility to strengthen the Christian identity of these works, the quality of their functioning, and the service they offer to society, is a great one. Collegiality is an art which cannot be improvised; those involved must learn how to listen, exchange views, share opinions, and bring out the best in each person.

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### In the Church (no. 14-15)

14. For the new evangelization to be fruitful, communion among Catholics themselves is decisive. Part of our mission in the great family of God’s sons and daughters is to increase mutual appreciation among the faithful in the Church and all the very varied groups that can exist there. ***The principal apostolate we Christians must carry out in the world, and the best witness we can give of our faith, is to help bring about***

***a climate of genuine charity within the Church.***<sup>19</sup> To do this, we need to strengthen, as appropriate in each case, our relationships with those in other Church institutions and entities. Practising collective humility, we need to overcome possible misunderstandings and pray for the initiatives promoted by others.

15. The help offered to priests and seminarians is also very important for the good of the Church and of society. The Associate and Supernumerary members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, participating fully in the vocation to the Work, are active at the front lines, where they give a new dynamism to all the apostolates. They do so while fully respecting their sole dependence on their own Bishop, and within the context of their pastoral ministry. They normally carry out this ministry entirely and directly at the service of the diocese in which they are incardinated, which they should love more and more.

All the faithful of Opus Dei are called to pray for the Bishops and priests of the area where they live, be close to them and venerate them. The faithful collaborate with them to the extent of their possibilities, but always in ways consistent with the sanctification of their professional work and their family duties.

For the priests, I will limit myself to recalling some words of the Pope regarding the ministry of confession. Let us be welcoming to all, witnesses of the tenderness of God, *attentive* in helping penitents to reflect on their actions, clear, available, prudent, and generous. With a magnanimous heart, we will celebrate the mystery of the infinite mercy of a God who forgives.<sup>20</sup>

We should continue encouraging some members of the Prelature, Cooperators and young people, to offer to cooperate, with full freedom and personal responsibility, in catechesis, pre-marriage courses, and social works, in the parishes and other places which need them. These activities should be in accordance with their secular condition and lay mentality, and in doing them they do not depend in any way on the authority of the Prelature. At the same time, I would like to mention especially the men and women religious, who have done and are doing so much good for the Church and the world. ***Anyone who does not love and venerate the religious state, is not a good child of mine,***<sup>21</sup> our Father taught us. I rejoice, moreover, when I think of how many religious, in addition to diocesan priests, have seen their own vocation bloom in the warmth of the Work.

For greater service to the Church and solicitous attention to souls, the General Congress indicated that we should study, with creative imagination and flexibility, the best way to encourage and coordinate the apostolates. For example, occasionally some Centres of Opus Dei could be joined together in order to economize energies and facilitate joyful, affectionate family life. Or there can be more places with small, properly fitted out and flexibly organized apartments, so that we can give the means of formation to people right where they are: for example, in the focal points of cities, in areas where many people work, in zones of urban growth, or near high schools and universities.

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### New apostolic challenges (no. 16-20)

16. The General Congress reiterated the call made by the 2002 Congress, which Don Javier expressed as follows: to foster “a new culture, new legislation and new fashions, in keeping with the dignity of the human person and with its destiny to the glory of the children of God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>22</sup> All the faithful of the Prelature, the St Raphael people and the Cooperators should feel that they are agents of this new culture, which has to overcome today’s relativistic mentality. This challenge demands deep human, professional and doctrinal formation of everyone, according to their possibilities, and a strong presence in the forums to which they have access, with an open mentality that enables them to dialogue with everyone.

We also need a certain degree of influence, which we acquire if we take others seriously, and a personal *gift of tongues*, cultivated with a desire for permanent renewal. This will foster the sort of empathy which makes the Christian view of reality convincing, because it makes us aware of the existential questions of our neighbour, and keeps us from becoming strident or falling into a monologue. Respect for the dignity of every person despite their errors, and for the common good of society, plus calm, responsible work in collaboration with other citizens, make manifest the beauty and attractiveness of Christian values in the various spheres of society.

17. If we are to understand the complexity of certain sectors of social life, we need help from experts. Some examples are: the use of digital information and communication technologies; overseeing educational initiatives; institutional communications; the administration of university projects; the management and functioning of hospitals and clinics; social development projects; setting up and sustaining trusts, endowment funds, etc. The demand for professional competence is part of our lay mentality and is in step with the desires of our priestly soul: to perfect creation and to co-redeem.

To foster a new culture, it is necessary to train experts who have good criteria and, based on Christian anthropology, can help to tackle especially complex questions: gender, equality, conscientious objection, religious freedom, freedom of expression, bioethics, and the media, to mention only a few. Universities and research centres are the ideal places to study these subjects. In addition, we should draw up a prudent, daring plan of formation suitable for each person, beginning with the youngest, to give their ideas solid foundations. We should not enclose ourselves in a merely defensive attitude, but should take on board the positive aspects of different views, dialogue with other people, learn from everyone, and respect their freedom assiduously, especially in matters open to various opinions.

18. A well-known saying of Blessed Paul VI is: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers.” He continued, “and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”<sup>23</sup> In today’s culture, we need faces that make a message credible. It is good then, to present attractive witnesses of a Christian life placed at the service of others. In addition to forming opinion-leaders, we need to encourage initiatives that spread information about the Church and, within it, the Opus Dei Prelature, including the use of social networks that can reach thousands of people immediately and effectively. The development of these initiatives depends on the generosity and creativity of those who support or run them.

19. Together with the personal apostolate of friendship and confidence, the Congress expressed its full support for the corporate and personal works of apostolate. Their apostolic fruitfulness is proved by the integral formation that they give: they instruct, they educate, and they teach people to be open to serving others. These initiatives need to be able to reach many more people and introduce them gradually to the riches of the



Christian faith, which frees them from fear and from sadness. For this faith to be lived out in daily life, we need to tailor the means of formation to families, to high school and college students, etc. This requires motivating people and preparing them well.

20. For the evangelization of society and the sustained development of the apostolate, it will be useful to have new educational centres where human and Christian formation can be provided for parents and for their children from their earliest childhood. When the creation of these centres is subject to legislation that impedes or makes it difficult for them to be corporate or personal works of apostolate, it may nevertheless be possible for their beneficiaries to receive spiritual attention from priests of the Prelature.

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### Importance of the family (no. 21-22)

21. The Pope teaches in his second encyclical: “In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity.”<sup>24</sup> A person matures with time and by looking to the future with trust, and hence it is necessary to foster in families a deep sense of the virtue of hope.

We need to study practical ways to develop marriage preparation, to sustain the mutual love between spouses and Christian life within the family, and to foster the sacramental life of grandparents, parents and children, especially frequent confession. Christ embraces all ages of man. No one is useless or superfluous.

The Congress commended the activities of study groups focused on the educational, social and financial role of the family, with a view to shaping public opinion in favour of large families. We need to give more attention to people who are already in contact with the various apostolic instruments (kindergartens, schools, clubs, universities and residences).

Family Enrichment work, which Don Javier encouraged so strongly, continues to be a priority, for it contributes effectively to consolidating the mutual love between spouses and their openness to life. It also helps in leading the reality of the natural family into the joy of the family as a spiritual, Christian space. With many initiatives it is reaching more and more young families and providing formation to a wide range of people. It introduces many people to the beauty of sacramental marriage, which is the image of the union of Christ with his Church (see *Eph 5:32*). With this sacrament the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit enters into their homes. In the mutual love of the parents, as in the liturgy and in the communion of the Church, God “loves us, he makes us see and experience his love, and since he has ‘loved us first,’ love can also blossom as a response within us.”<sup>25</sup>

22. The Congress pointed out an apostolic field that has gained great importance in recent years: to contribute to the growth of the faith and the formation of the many immigrants coming from countries with a Catholic tradition (for example, the Philippines, Latin America, Poland, etc.) as well as giving them human formation. Besides helping them to develop their own identity, this formation makes them a true leaven for evangelization (see *Lk 13:20*) in the country which receives them. Throughout the world, the several dozens of churches entrusted by Bishops to priests incardinated in the Prelature can effectively support this work, following the pastoral plans of the diocesan Ordinaries on whom they depend.

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### The Work is in our hands (no. 23)

23. It is not only the Numeraries and Associates who should be taking our apostolates forward; the Supernumeraries too should be given many responsibilities and helped to carry them out. They need to feel the Work as their own, as if it were one of their own children. Thus, as our Father once said, ***all of us together will dry many tears and raise the level of many people’s lives. We will spread a lot of peace, and prevent many quarrels and conflicts. And we will bring people to look each***

***other in the eye with Christian nobility, without hatred.***<sup>26</sup> My Supernumerary children need to assist wholeheartedly in the St Raphael work, which has as its ***immediate aim*** to give ***integral formation***.<sup>27</sup> It is normal and even habitual in some places that Supernumeraries organize and run clubs for young people and other educational undertakings.

As the result of well-assimilated formation, without rigidity or anxiety, when it is prudent and suitable, the Supernumeraries collaborate with God in the birth of vocations of Numeraries and Associates. Aware of this possibility, they pray particularly for their own children, while with the greatest respect for personal freedom they leave everything in God's hands.

In St Gabriel work it is recommendable in some places to increase the number of Supernumeraries who are in charge of groups, or are coordinators, or give regular personal spiritual direction. Also we need to rely on them more to take care of retreats, and encourage them to spur forward the apostolate in places where there are not yet any Centres. It will also be good for Associates and Supernumeraries to take a more active part in the leadership groups and teams for specific apostolic initiatives. To facilitate their formation, suitable material will be made available to them in different languages.

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### Apostolate with youth (no. 24-28)

24. The General Congress stressed the importance of St Raphael work, ***the apple of our eye***.<sup>28</sup> It suggested giving priority to general and particular measures to develop the apostolate with all types of young people and, with God's grace, foster abundant vocations of young Numeraries and Associates. All the faithful of the Prelature and members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross will consider how they can help with prayer, mortification and action to reach many more young people.

In St Raphael work, a clear priority is forming young people to be *prayerful souls*,<sup>29</sup> by teaching them in practical ways how to talk to God and how to listen to him. They should discover the human and supernatural value of true friendship, as well as the importance of study, reading, and professional excellence so as to serve the Church and society. Among the virtues that should be nurtured in these young people, the Congress mentioned fortitude and toughness, temperance (e.g., the sober and intelligent use of various technologies), and everything that helps them develop a spirit of service. It is important to teach these young people how to explain their faith in their families, with their friends in the various social media, and to draw out the practical consequences of following our Lord.

25. It is a marvellous thing to help young people and their parents discover and appreciate the attractiveness of dedicating oneself totally to God with an undivided heart, while at the same time presenting to them the beauty of the vocation to form a Christian family. In the St Raphael Centres that do apostolate with university students, it is worthwhile explaining the different aspects of courtship and marriage. Helpful resources in this regard are the testimonies of Supernumeraries, courses of Family Enrichment for single people, lectures, movies and readings of proven value. The urgent need for the witness of a greater number of Christian families calls us to be there for them at the beginning of this vocational path, even before they are engaged, with authentic respect and deep faith in the evangelizing mission of the Christian family, “a community of faith, hope and charity.”<sup>30</sup>

26. Let us enthusiastically continue the apostolate with university students and young professionals, both single and recently married. Here we can build on the formation that thousands of them have received in so many apostolic undertakings, especially the schools, youth clubs and St Raphael Centres. In this regard, it is recommendable to make the alumni associations more professional, using initiative and creativity to develop ways of continuing the apostolate with these people in the context of St Gabriel work, and encouraging many of them to become Cooperators.

27. Following the constant teaching of the Church, the experience of St Josemaría and the example and words of Pope Francis, we should emphasize the spiritual and corporal works of mercy in the St Raphael and St Gabriel means of formation. Personal activities

and initiatives in the area of solidarity, service to those in need, and social responsibility are not something passing or marginal, but rather are at the very heart of the Gospel. Gaining a deeper understanding of the Church's social doctrine through activities like classes and lectures will especially help in situations where there is greater social inequality.

28. The universities that are apostolic works should continue promoting research that has an international impact, and creating opportunities for collaboration with intellectuals with a worldwide reputation. This work will help to develop scientific paradigms and conceptual models that are consistent with a Christian view of the human person, together with a conviction that society needs these perspectives in order to foster peace and social justice. This attitude of service to everyone is also expressed in friendship with colleagues from other universities.

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### Some priorities (no. 29-33)

29. Besides beginning stable apostolic work in new countries, the Congress suggested orienting our apostolic expansion toward some of the places where we are already working, which, because of the international bodies or centres of intellectual leadership found there, are very important for the future shape of society.

For the good of the Church and souls, the Congress encouraged the continuation of the publication and dissemination of the complete works of St Josemaría, as well as the corresponding historical research. Specifically, it suggested developing even more, and from different perspectives (academic, theological, sociological, and spiritual, among others) the central aspect of St Josemaría's message: the work of God's children as the "hinge" of sanctity and the natural setting for apostolate. This is a message with very many consequences for the Church and society.

30. Here I am coming to the end. After reading the previous pages, you might be asking yourselves: among the many conclusions from the Congress, what are the priorities that our Lord is presenting to us at this historical moment of the world, the Church and the Work? The answer is clear: in the first place, to care for our union with God with the refinement of people in love, beginning with the contemplation of Jesus Christ, the face of the Father's Mercy. The programme described by St Josemaría is always valid: ***May you seek Christ, may you find Christ, may you love Christ.***<sup>31</sup> The apostolate of the Work is and always has to be an overflowing of our interior life. Now is the time, my daughters and sons, to go deeper and deeper into the paths of contemplation in the middle of the world.

31. For decades the Church has turned her maternal attention to two priorities: the family and young people. As a small part of the Church, we too want to support the efforts of the recent Popes so that families respond with greater fidelity each day to the loving plans which God has laid out for them. At the same time we should help all young people, so that their dreams of love and service become a joyful reality. This idea of accompanying the family and young people provides a guiding principle for the conclusions of the Congress, and from it we can draw out many practical consequences for our daily apostolate.

Along with these priorities, I would like to emphasize the urgency that we all feel of enlarging our hearts – we ask God to give us hearts to his measure – so that there enter into it all the needs, pains and sufferings of the men and women of our time, especially the weakest. In today's world, poverty presents many faces: sick and elderly people treated with indifference, the loneliness felt by many abandoned people, the drama of refugees, and the destitution in which a large part of mankind lives, often as a result of injustices that cry out to Heaven. I know that all my daughters and all my sons will exercise “the creativity of charity”<sup>32</sup> in order to bring the balm of God's tenderness to all our brothers and sisters who are in need. ***A friend of ours used to say: “The poor are my best spiritual book and the main motive of my prayers. It pains me to see them, and in each one of them, Christ. And because it hurts, I realize I love him and love them.”***<sup>33</sup>

32. The Congress placed the conclusions that I have just transmitted to you explicitly into the hands of Our Lady. Only with her maternal mediation will we be able to move ahead in the exciting mission which has been entrusted to us as disciples of Jesus Christ. She is *Mater pulchrae dilectionis*, the Mother of Fair Love (see *Sir* 24:24), whose feast-day we celebrate today, 14th February, in the liturgical calendar of the Prelature.<sup>34</sup> On this day in 1930, God gave St Josemaría to see the vocation of women in Opus Dei and, in 1943, the place of priests in the Work. This underlined the unity of the Work, the unity of a ***disorganized organization***,<sup>35</sup> but above all the unity that is born from love, from being attentive to others, the children of her who is the ***Mother of God and our Mother***.<sup>36</sup>

Today, when we sang the *Te Deum* as an act of thanksgiving before our Lord solemnly exposed in the monstrance, I thought of you. ***Communion, union, conversation, confidence: word, bread, love***.<sup>37</sup> Considering how Jesus Christ, now hidden ***in the Bread and in the Word***, will come at the end of time, I asked him to come to help us and I entrusted all of you to his mercy.

33. My daughters and sons, if in this world, so beautiful and yet so tormented, anyone at any time feels alone, let them know that the Father is praying for them and is truly accompanying them in the Communion of Saints, and that he carries them in his heart. Here I like to recall how the liturgy sings of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple, the liturgical feast that we celebrated on the 2nd of this month. It seemed, the liturgy says, that Simeon was carrying Jesus in his arms; in reality, it was the other way around. *Senex Puerum portabat, Puer autem senem regebat*.<sup>38</sup> The old man carried the child, but it was the Child who sustained the old man and guided him. That is how God supports us, even though at times we can only perceive the weight of souls. That is how he sustains us, through the ***holy Communion of Saints***.<sup>39</sup>

*Per singulos dies, benedicimus te*. Day after day we bless you, O Lord, with all the Church. “Every day,” as Don Javier, a faithful son of St Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro, loved to repeat. A faithful son, as I say, who was determined to struggle daily to let himself be carried by divine Love. I raise my soul to God, Thrice-Holy, hand in hand with Our Lady, Mother of the Love that gives itself without measure. Grant, O Lord, that from faith in your Love, we may live each day with a love that is always new, in joyful hope.

With all my affection, I bless you.

Your Father,

*Fernando*

Rome, 14 February 2017

*Feast of Our Lady, Mother of Fairest Love*

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PASTORAL  
**LETTER**

MSGR. FERNANDO OCÁRIZ

**Freedom** |

**9/01/2018** |

*Fernando*

## Freedom (9 January 2018)

- Called to freedom (no. 1-4)
- Freedom of spirit (no. 5-9)
- Forming and governing free people (no. 10-13)
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### Called to freedom (no. 1-4)

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

1. Following a guideline of the General Congress, over the past months I have frequently made reference to freedom. Now, in accord with the teachings of Saint Josemaria, who throughout his life was a lover of freedom, I want us to recall some aspects of this great gift from God. “I will never tire of repeating, my children,” he once told us, “that one of the clearest characteristics of the spirit of Opus Dei is its love for freedom and for the need to understand others.”<sup>40</sup> As we reread and meditate on his words, let us give heartfelt thanks to God. And let each of us examine how we can give better expression to these words in our own life, with God’s grace. Thus we will also be better prepared to help more souls attain “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (**Rom** 8:21).

An ardent desire for freedom, the demand for it on the part of persons and peoples, is a positive sign of our times. Acknowledging the freedom of each woman and man means acknowledging that they are persons: masters of their own acts and responsible for them, able to direct their own lives. Although freedom does not always lead everyone to develop into their best selves, we can never exaggerate its importance, since if we were not free we would not be able to love.

But unfortunately, in many circles there is great ignorance about what freedom really is. Often an illusory freedom without limits is aspired to, as though it were the ultimate goal of progress. And not infrequently, we are pained to see that this claim goes hand in hand with many forms of oppression and of apparent freedoms that in reality are only chains that enslave. This form of freedom, sooner or later, reveals its emptiness. “Some people

think they are free if they can avoid God,” the Pope writes. “They fail to see that they remain existentially orphaned, helpless, homeless. They cease being pilgrims and become drifters.”<sup>41</sup>

### *Called to freedom*

2. We have been “called to freedom” (**Gal** 5:13). Creation itself is a manifestation of divine freedom. The Genesis accounts give us a glimpse of God’s creative love, his joy in sharing with the world his goodness, his beauty (cf. **Gen** 1:31), and with human beings, his freedom (cf. **Gen** 1:26-29). In calling each of us into existence, God has made us able to choose and to love the good, and to respond with love to his Love. Nevertheless, our limitation as creatures makes it possible for us to separate ourselves from God. “It is a mystery of divine Wisdom that, when creating man *in his image and likeness* (cf. **Gen** 1:26-29), God wanted to run the sublime ‘risk’ of human freedom.”<sup>42</sup>

In fact, at the dawn of history this risk led to the rejection of God’s Love through the original sin. Thus the strength of human freedom’s attraction to the good was weakened, and the will was left to a certain degree inclined towards sin. Afterwards, personal sins weaken human freedom even more, and therefore sin always implies, to a greater or lesser degree, a form of slavery (cf. **Rom** 6:17, 20). Nevertheless, “man always remains free.”<sup>43</sup> Even though “his freedom is always fragile,”<sup>44</sup> it remains an essential good of each human person and needs to be protected. God is the first to respect and love it, since he “does not want slaves, but children.”<sup>45</sup>

3. “But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (**Rom** 5:20). Grace gives rise to a new and higher freedom for which “Christ has set us free” (**Gal**, 5:1). Our Lord frees us from sin through his words and actions, all of which have redemptive efficacy. Hence “this hymn to freedom is echoed in all the mysteries of our Catholic faith.”<sup>46</sup> I often remind you that we need to put Christ at the centre of our lives. To discover the deepest meaning of freedom, we have to contemplate him. We are amazed to see the freedom of a God who, out of pure love, decides to abase himself by taking on flesh like ours. We see this freedom unfold throughout his steps on earth towards the sacrifice of the Cross. “I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (**Jn** 10:17-18). Human history has never witnessed an act as deeply free

as our Lord's self-giving on the Cross. "He gives himself up to death with the full freedom of Love."<sup>47</sup>

Saint John's gospel recounts a dialogue of our Lord with some persons who had believed in him. Jesus' words resound with a clear promise: "**Veritas liberabit vos**, the truth will make you free" (**Jn 8:32**). "How great a truth is this," Saint Josemaria writes, "which opens the way to freedom and gives it meaning throughout our lives. I will sum it up for you, with the joy and certainty which flow from knowing there is a close relationship between God and his creatures. It is the knowledge that we have come from the hands of God, that the Blessed Trinity looks upon us with predilection, that we are children of so wonderful a Father. I ask my Lord to help us decide to take this truth to heart, to dwell upon it day by day; only then will we be acting as free men."<sup>48</sup>

4. Our divine filiation enables our freedom to expand with all the strength that God has bestowed on it. It is not by emancipating ourselves from the Father's house that we become free, but rather by embracing the reality that we are sons or daughters. "Anyone who does not realize that he is a child of God is unaware of the deepest truth about himself."<sup>49</sup> Such a person is unaware of who he is and lives in conflict with himself. How liberating it is, then, to know that God loves us. How liberating is God's pardon that allows us to return to ourselves and to our true home (cf. *Lk 15:17-24*). And when we pardon others, we also experience this liberation.

Our faith in God's love for each one of us (cf. *1 Jn 4:16*) leads us to respond with love. We can love because he has loved us first (cf. *1 Jn 4:10*). It fills us with security to know that God's infinite Love is to be found not only at the origin of our existence but also at every moment in our lives. For God is closer to us than we are to ourselves.<sup>50</sup> Realizing that God is waiting for us in each person (cf. *Mt 25:40*), and that he wants to make himself present in their lives also through us, leads us to strive to share abundantly with others what we have received. And in our lives, my daughters and sons, we have received and we receive a lot of love. Giving love to God and to others is the most proper act of freedom. Love **fulfills** freedom, it redeems it. Love enables freedom to discover its origin and goal in God's Love. "Freedom finds its true meaning when it is put to the service of the truth which redeems, when it is spent in seeking God's infinite Love which liberates us from all forms of slavery."<sup>51</sup>

Our sense of divine filiation leads, then, to great interior freedom, to deep joy, and to the serene optimism of hope: *spe gaudentes* (Rom 12:12). Realizing we are God’s children also leads us to love the world, which came forth good from the hands of our Father God. It leads us to face life with the clear awareness that it is possible to do good, to conquer sin, and to bring the world to God. As Pope Francis said when contemplating our Mother: “From Mary, full of grace, we learn that Christian freedom is more than mere liberation from sin. It is freedom that enables us to see earthly realities in a new, spiritual light. It is the freedom to love God and our brothers and sisters with a pure heart, and to live a life of joyful hope for the coming of Christ’s Kingdom.”<sup>52</sup>

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### Freedom of spirit (no. 5-9)

5. Acting freely, without any sort of coercion, is proper to human dignity and, even more so, to the dignity of the daughters and sons of God. At the same time, we need to “fortify our love for a freedom that is not merely arbitrary, but is rendered truly human by acknowledgment of the good that underlies it”: a freedom that is reconciled with God.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, I would like to stop and consider the importance of *freedom of spirit*. I am not referring to the ambiguous meaning sometimes given to this phrase, as acting in accord with one’s caprices and without restraint by any law. In reality, the freedom of every human person is limited materially by natural duties and acquired commitments (family, professional, civic, etc.). Nevertheless, we can act freely in everything we do, if we do it for love: “*Dilige et quod vis fac*: Love and do what you will.”<sup>54</sup> True freedom of spirit is this capacity and habitual attitude to act out of love, especially in the effort to follow what God is asking of us in each circumstance.

“Do you love me?” (Jn 21:17). The Christian life is a free response, imbued with initiative and availability, to our Lord’s question. Therefore “it is utterly false to oppose freedom and self-surrender, because self-surrender is a consequence of freedom. Look, when a mother sacrifices herself for love of her children, she has made a choice, and the more she

loves the greater will be her freedom. If her love is great, her freedom will bear much fruit. Her children's good derives from her blessed freedom, which presupposes self-surrender, and from her blessed self-surrender, which is precisely freedom."<sup>55</sup>

In this context we can understand why encouraging the freedom of each person does not mean a lessening in demands. The freer we are, the more we can love. And love is demanding: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7). In turn, growing in love means growing in freedom, being more free. As Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote: "*Quanto aliquis plus habet de caritate, plus habet de libertate.*"<sup>56</sup> The more intense our charity is, the freer we are. We also act with freedom of spirit when we don't feel like doing something or find it especially difficult, if we do it out of love, that is, not because we like it, but because we want to. "We should all realize that we are God's children, and strive to fulfill the will of our Father. We should do things as God wants them done, **because we want to**, which is the most supernatural of reasons."<sup>57</sup>

6. Cheerfulness is also a sign of freedom of spirit. "In the human realm," Saint Josemaria said, "I want to leave you as an inheritance love for freedom and good humour."<sup>58</sup> These two things can seem quite distinct, but they are actually closely connected, since realizing that we are **free to love** floods our soul with joy, and with it good humour. Our vision of the world deepens beyond the merely natural and we learn to grasp the positive—and, sometimes, amusing—side of things and situations. As Pope Francis said, God "is the author of joy, the Creator of joy. And this joy in the Spirit brings us true Christian freedom. Without joy, we Christians can't be free, and we become slaves of our sadness."<sup>59</sup>

This joy needs to imbue our whole life. God wants us to be happy. In speaking to the Apostles, Jesus is also speaking to us: "that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (Jn 15:11). Therefore we can carry out joyfully even duties that we may find unpleasant. As Saint Josemaria tells us, "we shouldn't think that the only work we can do joyfully is what we find pleasing."<sup>60</sup> We can carry out joyfully—and not reluctantly—what we find hard, what doesn't please us, if we do it for and with love, and therefore freely. When doing his prayer out loud, on 28 April 1963, Saint Josemaria spoke about the lights God had granted him years before in 1931: "You have led me to understand, Lord, that having the Cross means finding happiness, joy. And the reason, as I now see more clearly

than ever, is this: having the Cross means being identified with Christ, being Christ, and therefore being a child of God.”<sup>61</sup>

7. The whole of the divine law, and everything that is God’s will for each person, is not a law that restricts freedom. Rather it is *lex perfecta libertatis* (cf. *Jas 1:25*), the perfect law of freedom. So too is the Gospel, since all of it is summed up in the law of love—and not only as an exterior rule that requires love, but also as the interior grace that gives us the strength to love. “*Pondus meum amor meus*”: my love is my weight, Saint Augustine said, referring not simply to the obvious fact that at times it is hard for us to love, but to the fact that the love we have in our heart is what leads us on, what carries us to wherever we go.<sup>62</sup> “*Eo feror, quocumque feror*”: wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me.<sup>63</sup> Each of us can consider: what is the love that carries me everywhere?

Anyone who lets God’s Love take hold in their heart, personally experiences how true it is “that freedom and self-surrender are not contradictory. They sustain one another. Freedom can only be given up for love; I cannot conceive any other reason for surrendering it. And I am not just playing with words or phrases. When people give themselves freely, at every moment of their self-surrender, freedom renews their love, and to be renewed in that way is to be always young, generous, capable of high ideals and great sacrifices.”<sup>64</sup> Obeying God, therefore, is not only a free act, but also a freeing, liberating act.

“I have food to eat of which you do not know,” Jesus tells his disciples. “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (*Jn 4:32-34*). For Jesus, obeying the Father is what nourishes him, what gives him strength. And so it should be for us. Being Jesus’ disciple, Saint John Paul II said, means “*holding fast to the very person of Jesus*, partaking of his life and his destiny, sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father.”<sup>65</sup>

Benedict XVI goes more deeply into this intimate relationship between freedom and self-giving: “It is in his very obedience to the Father that Jesus achieves his own freedom as a conscious decision motivated by love. Who is freer than the One who is the Almighty? He did not, however, live his freedom as an arbitrary power or as domination. He lived it as a service. In this way he ‘filled’ freedom with content, which would otherwise have

remained an 'empty' possibility of doing or not doing something. Like human life itself, freedom draws its meaning from love . . . Therefore, Christian freedom is quite the opposite of arbitrariness; it consists in following Christ in the gift of self even to the sacrifice of the Cross. It may seem a paradox, but the Lord lived the crowning point of his freedom on the Cross as a summit of love. When they shouted at him on Calvary: 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross!', he showed his freedom as the Son precisely by remaining on that scaffold, to do the Father's merciful will to the very end."<sup>66</sup>

"Lord, you enticed me, and I was taken in. You were too strong for me, and you prevailed" (*Jer 20:7*). What a breadth of feeling is found in this prayer of the prophet Jeremias. Seeing one's own vocation as a gift from God (and not as a mere list of obligations), even when we are suffering, is also a sign of freedom of spirit. How liberating it is to know that God loves us as we are, and that he calls us first of all to let ourselves be loved by him.

8. Freedom of spirit also means not binding ourselves to obligations that are not real—being able to set aside and change with flexibility so many small details in life that depend on our free personal initiative. As Don Javier wrote to us twenty years ago: "There are, of course, actions which we are obliged to carry out and others which, in a given instance, we are not specifically obliged to do. However, in both cases we have to seek to fulfill freely and responsibly the supreme commandment of love for God. Thus we are free and obedient at the same time and at every moment."<sup>67</sup>

We need to always preserve in the Work the atmosphere of trust and freedom that enables us to make known to the relevant person what is worrying us, and talk about what we don't understand or what we think should be improved. This atmosphere of trust, in turn, is also nourished by our loyalty and patience in accepting, with serenity and good humor, human limitations, annoying situations, etc. This is the attitude of good sons or daughters who, although they may be convinced they are right, exercise their freedom by seeking to protect goods greater than their own point of view, goods such as unity and family peace, which are priceless. In contrast, "when our ideas separate us from other people, when they weaken our communion, our unity with our brothers, it is a sure sign that we are not doing what God wants."<sup>68</sup>



9. Although sometimes situations can make us suffer, God frequently uses these to identify us more closely with Jesus. As we read in the Letter to the Hebrews, he “learned obedience through what he suffered” (*Heb 5:8*) and thus brought “eternal salvation to all who obey him” (5:9). Jesus brought us the freedom of the children of God. Accepting the human limitations that we all have, without giving up in our effort to overcome them as far as possible, is also a sign and source of freedom of spirit. Consider in contrast the sad attitude of the elder son in the parable (*Lk 15:25-30*). He complained to his father about so many things that he had been keeping bitterly in his soul, and was unable to join in the family’s joy. His freedom had become small and selfish, incapable of loving, of understanding that “all that is mine is yours” (*Lk 15:31*). He was living at home, but he was not free, because his heart was elsewhere.

How beautiful, in contrast, is the story of Ruth, the Moabite woman, whose freedom and self-giving are rooted in a deep sense of belonging to her family. It is moving to see how this woman responds to the insistence of her mother-in-law, who encourages her to remake her life on her own: “Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried” (***Ruth 1:16-17***).

In contemplating our Lady, we see even more clearly how freedom unfolds in faithful self-giving. “Consider now the sublime moment when the Archangel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary the plans of the Most High. Our Mother listens, and asks a question to understand better what the Lord is asking of her. Then she gives her firm reply: *Fiat!* Be it done unto me according to thy word! This is the fruit of the best freedom of all, the freedom of deciding in favor of God.”<sup>69</sup>

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Forming and governing free people (no. 10-13)

10. In our formation, personal spiritual direction plays an important role. It should always be carried out in an atmosphere of freedom and aim at forming people who feel “as free as the birds.”<sup>70</sup> As Saint Josemaria writes, referring to those who receive the personal chats of their brothers or sisters, “*the authority of the spiritual director is not power. Always instill in souls a great spirit of freedom. Consider what I have so often told you: **because I really want to** seems to me the most supernatural reason of all. The role of the spiritual director is to help the soul to want to fulfil, to **really want to fulfil**, God’s will. Don’t command, advise.*”<sup>71</sup> The aim of the advice given in spiritual direction is to second the action of the Holy Spirit in each soul and help each person to approach God and his or her own duties with personal freedom and responsibility. “In creating souls, God does not repeat himself. Each one is the way he or she is, and we have to treat each one according to what God has done, and according to the way that God is leading them.”<sup>72</sup>

Along with advice, ordinarily there can also be some affectionate encouragement that helps them realize ***it is always worthwhile*** to strive to be faithful out of love, freely. Spiritual direction can also occasionally contain a clear, but always affectionate and refined, “imperative counsel,” which reminds the person of the obligation to fulfill a duty. The force of this advice, however, does not stem from the advice itself, but from the duty involved. When there is trust, one can and should speak in this way, and the person who receives that indication is grateful for it, because they recognize in it the fortitude and affection of an older brother or sister.

11. The formation that we receive throughout our whole life, without disregarding its necessary demands, tends to a large degree to ***open up new horizons***. In contrast, if we limit ourselves to just making demands and being demanded of, we can end up seeing only what we are not managing to do, our defects and limitations. We can forget about the most important thing: God’s love for us.

In this context, let us recall how Saint Josemaria taught us that “in the Work, we are great friends of freedom, including in the interior life. We aren’t tied to particular schemes or methods . . . There is a lot—there should be a lot—of self-determination even in the spiritual life.”<sup>73</sup> Therefore sincerity in spiritual direction, which leads us to open up our soul freely in order to receive advice, also leads us to foster personal initiative, to make

known freely what we see as possible points for our interior struggle to identify ourselves ever more closely with Christ.

Therefore our formation, while passing on the same spirit to everyone, does not produce uniformity, but rather unity. Making use of a striking image, Saint Josemaria said that in the Work “we can travel along this path in many different ways: staying on the right or on the left, zigzagging from side to side, on foot or by horse. There are thousands of ways to advance along our divine path. Each one’s conscience, in keeping with their particular circumstances, will oblige them to go forward in one or another of these ways. The only thing essential is not to leave the path.”<sup>74</sup> The spirit of the Work, like the Gospel, does not impose itself on our way of being, but rather gives it life. It is a seed destined to grow in the earth of each person.

12. In our formation, it is also important to prevent an excessive desire for security or protection from inhibiting the soul and restricting us. “Those who have met Christ cannot shut themselves in their own little world; how sad such a limitation would be! They must open out like a fan in order to reach all souls.”<sup>75</sup> How important it is, then, to form ourselves in the need to live without fear of making mistakes, without fear of failing, without fear of an adverse environment. With supernatural outlook we need to be involved—with prudence and determination—in our own social and professional environment.

Love for freedom is also shown, therefore, in spontaneity and initiative in the apostolate, made compatible with one’s specific apostolic assignments. It is important always to be very aware that “our apostolate is, above all, personal apostolate.”<sup>76</sup> The same holds true for the encouragement directors give to apostolic activities. “I have never wanted to tie you down. On the contrary, I have tried to ensure that you work with great freedom. In your apostolic action you have to have initiative, within the very broad margins provided by our spirit, in order to find—in each place, in each environment, in each epoch—the activities best suited to the circumstances.”<sup>77</sup>

13. Another important sign of love for freedom is found in the pastoral government that falls to the Prelate and his Vicars, with the help of their corresponding Councils. Let us meditate once again with gratitude on these words of Saint Josemaria: “As a consequence

of this spirit of freedom, formation—and government—in the Work is based on trust. . . . Nothing can be accomplished if government is based on distrust. In contrast, governing and forming souls with respect produces fruit. It develops in souls the true and holy freedom of God’s children and teaches them to administer their own freedom. To form and to govern is to love.”<sup>78</sup>

Governing with respect for souls is, firstly, to delicately respect the privacy of consciences, without confusing government and spiritual direction. Secondly, this respect leads one to distinguish directives from what are only opportune exhortations, counsels, or suggestions. And thirdly—and not, for that reason, less important—is the need to govern with such great trust in others that one always tries to take into account, to the extent possible, the opinion of the people involved. This attitude of those who govern, their readiness to listen, is a wonderful manifestation of the fact that the Work is a family.

We also have grateful experience of the full freedom there is in Opus Dei in matters open to opinion in economics, politics, theology, etc. “In everything that is not a matter of faith, each member thinks and acts as he or she wishes with complete freedom and personal responsibility. The pluralism which logically and sociologically derives from this fact does not create any problems for the Work. Rather, it is a sign of good spirit.”<sup>79</sup> This pluralism should be loved and fostered, although someone may find this diversity hard to accept at times. A person who loves freedom manages to see the positive and attractive aspects of what others think and do in these broad areas.

As regards the way government is carried out, Saint Josemaria established and always forcefully reminded us of the need for collegiality, which is another manifestation of the spirit of freedom that imbues our life in Opus Dei. “I have reminded you in a great variety of circumstances, and I will repeat it many times over the course of my life, that I demand in the Work, at all levels, collegial government, so that no one will fall into tyranny. This is a manifestation of prudence, since with collegial government matters are studied more easily, errors are corrected better, and the apostolic works that are already going well are improved more effectively.”<sup>80</sup>

Collegiality is not only or principally a method or system for making decisions; it is, above all, a spirit, rooted in the conviction that all of us can and need to receive from others

insights, information, etc., that will help us to improve and even to change our opinion. At the same time, this leads to respecting—even more, to fostering in a positive way—the freedom of the others, so that they can make known their own points of view without any difficulty.

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### Respecting and defending freedom in the apostolate (no. 14-16)

14. Our apostolate stems from a sincere desire to help others find Christ or grow in intimacy with him. “Our attitude towards souls can be summed up in this phrase from the Apostle, which is almost a shout: ***caritas mea cum omnibus vobis in Christo Iesu!*** (1 Cor 16:24): my affection for all of you, in Christ Jesus. With charity, you will be sowers of peace and joy in the world, loving and defending the personal freedom of souls, the freedom that Christ respects and won for us (cf. Gal 4:31).”<sup>81</sup>

We love, first of all, the freedom of those we are trying to help come closer to our Lord, in the apostolate of friendship and trust which Saint Josemaria invites us to carry out by our witness and word. “Also in our apostolic activities—better: principally in our apostolic activities—we don’t want there to be even the slightest shadow of coercion. God wants to be served freely, and therefore an apostolate that did not respect the ‘freedom of consciences’ would not be upright.”<sup>82</sup>

True friendship entails sincere mutual affection, which is the true protection of the reciprocal freedom and intimacy that exists between friends. Apostolate is not something superimposed on friendship, because (as I wrote you), “we don’t ‘do apostolate,’ we are apostles!”<sup>83</sup> Friendship is itself apostolate; friendship is itself a dialogue in which we give and receive light. In friendship plans are forged as we mutually open up new horizons. In friendship we rejoice in what is good and support one another in what is difficult; we have a good time with one another, since God wants us to be happy.

15. As you know, proselytism, understood in its original meaning, is a positive reality, nothing other than the missionary activity of spreading the Gospel.<sup>84</sup> That was how Saint Josemaria always understood the term, and not with the negative meaning it has acquired in more recent times. Still, we need to keep in mind that, despite what we would like, at times words take on new connotations different from their original meaning. Therefore consider carefully, in light of the context, the fittingness of employing this term, since at times your hearers could understand something different from what you want to say.

Respecting and defending the freedom of everyone is also made manifest—if possible, even more clearly—when raising with someone the possibility of God’s call to the Work. Here we mean the freedom to seek advice from whomever one wants and, above all, full freedom in discerning one’s own possible vocation and in the ensuing decision. When commenting on a forceful expression in the Gospel, the ***compelle intrare*** (force them to enter) of the parable (*Lk 14:23*), Saint Josemaria wrote: “A chief characteristic of our spirit is respect for the personal freedom of everyone. Thus the ***compelle intrare*** that you should employ in your proselytism is not a physical push but an abundance of light, of doctrine. It is the spiritual stimulus of your prayer and work, which bear authentic witness to doctrine. It is all the sacrifices you offer. It is the smile that comes to your lips because you are children of God: the filiation that fills you with a serene happiness (even though setbacks will not be lacking in your life) and that others will see and envy. Add to this your human bearing and charm and here we have the content of the ***compelle intrare***.”<sup>85</sup> How clear it is, then, that the Work grows and should always grow in an atmosphere of freedom, by presenting to others—with determination and simplicity—the dazzling beauty of living close to God.

16. *Veritas liberabit vos (Jn 8:32)*. All the promises of liberation that have followed one upon another throughout the centuries are true to the extent that they are nourished by the Truth about God and man. And this Truth is a Person: Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. ***Jn 14:6***). “Today also, even after two thousand years, we see Christ as the one who brings man freedom based on truth, frees man from what curtails, diminishes and as it were breaks off this freedom at its root, in man’s soul, his heart and his conscience.”<sup>86</sup>

God has given us freedom forever; it is not a temporary gift, to employ only during our life here on earth. Freedom, like love, “never ends” (*1 Cor 13:8*), but it continues in heaven.

Our path to heaven is a path towards the freedom of the glory of the children of God: *in libertatem gloriæ filiorum Dei* (Rom 8:21). In heaven our freedom not only won't disappear, but rather will attain its fullness in embracing God's Love. "In heaven a great Love awaits you, with no betrayals and no deceptions. The fullness of love, the fullness of beauty and greatness and knowledge . . . And it will never cloy: it will satiate, yet still you will want more."<sup>87</sup> If we are faithful, by God's mercy, in heaven we will be fully free, with the fullness of love.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

Rome, 9 January 2018, *anniversary of the birth of Saint Josemaria*

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PASTORAL  
LETTER

MSGR. FERNANDO OCÁRIZ

Friendship |

1/11/2019

*Fernando*



## Friendship (1 November 2019)

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### The friendship of Jesus (no. 1-3)

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

1. In the first long letter that I wrote to you, which contained the conclusions from the General Congress, I said that “the current situation of evangelization makes it more necessary than ever to give priority to personal contact with people. This relational aspect is at the heart of the mode of doing apostolate that Saint Josemaria found in the Gospel narratives.”<sup>88</sup>

In many of my get-togethers with people from various countries, there have arisen spontaneous remarks and questions about friendship. Saint Josemaria frequently reminded us of the human and Christian importance of this great good. There are also abundant testimonies of how he personally formed many friendships that he kept up throughout his lifetime. As we well know, he insisted to us that the principal apostolate in the Work is that of friendship and confidence. In this letter, I would like to remind you of some aspects of our Father’s teachings about this topic.

#### *The friendship of Jesus*

2. Jesus Christ, a perfect man, lived out fully the human value of friendship. In the Gospels we see how, from a young age, he formed friendships with the people around Him. Already when He was twelve, Mary and Joseph, on returning from Jerusalem, assumed

that Jesus was traveling with a group of friends and relatives (cf. *Lk* 2:44). Later, during his public life, we see our Lord often in the homes of his friends and acquaintances, whether visiting them or sharing a meal: in Peter's house (cf. *Lk* 4:38), in the house of Levi (cf. *Lk* 5:29), of Simon (cf. *Lk* 7:36), of Jairus (cf. *Lk* 8:41), of Zacchaeus (cf. *Lk* 19:5), etc. We also see Him attending a wedding in Cana (cf. *Jn* 2:1) and in places of worship alongside other people (cf. *Jn* 8:2). On other occasions, He dedicated time exclusively to his disciples (cf. *Mk* 3:7).

Jesus takes advantage of any situation to begin a relationship of friendship, and we so often see Him stopping to spend time with specific people. A few minutes of conversation were enough for the Samaritan woman to sense that she was known and understood. And hence she asked: "Can this be the Christ?" (*Jn* 4:29). The disciples from Emmaus, after walking alongside and sitting at table with Jesus, recognize the presence of the Friend who made their hearts burn with his words (cf. *Lk* 24:32).

Our Lord often dedicated longer periods of time to his friends. We see this in the home at Bethany. There, in long days spent in family intimacy, "Jesus shares words of affection and encouragement, and responds to friendship with his own friendship. What marvelous conversations in the home at Bethany, with Lazarus, Martha and Mary!"<sup>89</sup> In that home we also learn that Christ's friendship produces a deep trust (cf. *Jn* 11:21) and is filled with empathy, especially the ability to accompany others in their suffering (cf. *Jn* 11:35).

But it is at the Last Supper that our Lord shows most deeply his desire to offer us his friendship. In the intimacy of the Cenacle, Jesus tells the apostles: *I have called you friends* (*Jn* 15:15). And in them he has said this to all of us. God loves us not merely as creatures but as children to whom, in Christ, He offers true friendship. And we respond to this friendship by uniting our will to His, by doing what our Lord wants (cf. *Jn* 15:14).

*"Idem velle atque idem nolle*—to want the same thing, and to reject the same thing—was recognized by antiquity as the authentic content of love: the one becomes similar to the other, and this leads to a community of will and thought. The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the

commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself. Then self-abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy (cf. *Ps* 73 [72]:23-28).”<sup>90</sup>

3. Realizing that we have a true friendship with Jesus fills us with confidence, because He is faithful. “Friendship with Jesus cannot be broken. He never leaves us, even though at times it appears that he keeps silent. When we need him, he makes himself known to us (cf. *Jer* 29:14); he remains at our side wherever we go (cf. *Jos* 1:9). He never breaks his covenant. He simply asks that we not abandon him: *Abide in me* (*Jn* 15:4). But even if we stray from him, *he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself* (*2 Tim* 2:13).”<sup>91</sup>

To respond to this friendship of Jesus is to love Him, with a love that is the soul of the Christian life and tries to manifest itself in everything we do. “We need a rich interior life, the sure sign of friendship with God and the indispensable condition for any work with souls.”<sup>92</sup> All apostolate, all work for the good of souls, stems from this friendship with God, which is the source of true Christian love for others. “By living in friendship with God, which is the first friendship we have to foster and strengthen, you will be able to make many true friends (cf. *Sir* 6:17). The effort our Lord has made and continues making to keep us in his friendship is the same effort that He wants to make for many other souls, making use of us as instruments to do so.”<sup>93</sup>

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### The human and Christian value of friendship (no. 4-7)

4. Friendship is a very rich human reality—a form of reciprocal love between two persons that is built on mutual knowledge and communication.<sup>94</sup> It is a form of love that is directed “in two directions and that seeks the true good of the other person, a love that produces union and happiness.”<sup>95</sup> Hence Sacred Scripture says that *there is nothing so precious as a faithful friend, and no scales can measure his excellence* (*Sir* 6:15).

Charity raises the human capacity to love to the supernatural level, and therefore friendship as well. “Friendship is one of the noblest and highest human sentiments, which divine Grace purifies and transfigures.”<sup>96</sup> This sentiment can sometimes arise spontaneously, but in every case it needs to grow through personal contact and consequently through dedication of time. “Friendship is no fleeting or temporary relationship, but one that is stable, firm and faithful, and matures with the passage of time. It is a relationship of affection that makes us feel united and a generous love that leads us to seek the good of our friend.”<sup>97</sup>

5. God often makes use of an authentic friendship to carry out his saving work. The Old Testament recounts the friendship between David, still a youth, and Jonathan, heir to the throne of Israel (cf. *1 Sam* 18:4). Jonathan did not hesitate to share with his friend all his possessions (cf. *1 Sam* 18:4), and in trying moments he reminded his father, Saul, of all the good David had done (cf. *1 Sam* 19:4). Jonathan even reached the point of risking his succession to the throne by defending his friend, *for he loved him as he loved his own soul* (*1 Sam* 20:17). This sincere friendship led both of them to be faithful to God (cf. *1 Sam* 20:8,42).

The example of the early Christians is especially eloquent in this regard. Our Father remarked that “they loved one another, through the heart of Christ, with a love both tender and strong.”<sup>98</sup> Love for one another has been, right from the Church’s start, the distinctive sign of Jesus’ disciples (cf. *Jn* 13:35).

We find another example from the first centuries of Christianity in Saint Basil and Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. The friendship they formed in their youth kept them united throughout their whole life, and even today they share the same feast day in the general liturgical calendar. Saint Gregory says that “our single object and ambition was virtue, and a life of hope in the blessings that are to come.”<sup>99</sup> Their friendship, rather than distancing them from God, led them closer to Him: “With this end in view we ordered our lives and all our actions. We followed the guidance of God’s law and spurred each other on to virtue.”<sup>100</sup>

6. “In a Christian, in a child of God, friendship and charity are one and the same thing. They are a divine light which spreads warmth.”<sup>101</sup> One could even say, with words Saint

Augustine addressed to Our Lord, that for Christians “true friendship exists only between those You unite through charity.”<sup>102</sup> Hence, since charity can be more or less intense, and since the time a person has is limited, friendship can be more or less deep. And thus people often talk about being “great friends” or having a “great friendship,” although this does not exclude the existence of true friendships that are not as great or intimate.

At the start of the new millennium, Saint John Paul II said all the apostolic initiatives that arise in the future will become “mechanisms without a soul” if they are not grounded on a sincere love for every person, on being “able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship.”<sup>103</sup> Our centers, which are destined to carry out a great catechesis, should be places where many people find a sincere love and learn to be true friends.

7. Christian friendship does not exclude anyone; with a big heart it needs to be intentionally open to every person. The Pharisees criticized Jesus, as though **being a friend of tax collectors and sinners** (*Mt 11:19*) were something bad. Striving to imitate Our Lord, within our own littleness, “we too do not exclude anyone; we do not refuse any soul a place in our love for Christ. Therefore you need to foster a firm, loyal and sincere friendship—that is, a Christian friendship—with all your professional colleagues. And, what is more, you have to do this with everybody, regardless of their personal circumstances.”<sup>104</sup>

Christ was completely immersed in the social setting of his place and time and thereby gave us an example also in this regard. As Saint Josemaria wrote, “Our Lord does not limit his dialogue to a small, restricted group. He speaks with everyone: with the holy women, with the large crowds; with representatives of Israel’s upper class like Nicodemus and with publicans like Zacchaeus; with persons viewed as pious and with sinners like the Samaritan woman; with the healthy and with the sick; with the poor, whom He loved tenderly; with doctors of the law and with pagans, whose faith He praised above that of Israel’s; with the elderly and with children. Jesus refuses no one his words, words that heal, console and enlighten. How often I have meditated and had others meditate on Christ’s way of doing apostolate—human and divine at the same time—based on friendship and confidence!”<sup>105</sup>

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### Manifestations of friendship (no. 8-10)

8. Friendship is especially valuable for that necessary sign of charity which is *understanding others*. “True friendship also means making a heartfelt effort to understand the convictions of our friends, even though we may never come to share them or accept them.”<sup>106</sup> Thus our friends help us to understand ways of viewing life that are different from our own, that enrich our inner world, and, when the friendship is deep, that enable us to experience the world in a different way. This is, in the end, a true sharing in others’ sentiments, which is sharing in their life and in their experiences.

Loving others means seeing and affirming them just as they are, with their problems, their defects, their personal history, their social surroundings, and their own times for drawing close to Jesus. Hence, to build a true friendship, we need to develop the capacity to look at other people with affection to the point where we see them with the eyes of Christ. We need to cleanse our way of looking of any prejudice, learn to discover the good in each person, and renounce the desire to remake them “in our own image.” For friends to receive our affection, they don’t need to fulfill any conditions. As Christians, we see each person above all as someone loved by God. Each person is unique, as is each relationship of friendship.

As Saint Augustine said, “All should not be given the same medicine, although all need the same love. The same love provides light for some and shares in the suffering of others ... it is gentle to some, stern to others; an enemy to none, and a mother to all.”<sup>107</sup> Being a friend means learning to treat each person as Our Lord does. “In creating souls, God does not repeat himself. Each person is as they are, and we need to treat each person in accord with what God has done and with how He is leading them.”<sup>108</sup> Since it is a question of discovering and loving the good of the other person, friendship also means suffering with our friends and for our friends. In difficult moments, it is a great help to renew our faith that God acts in a person’s soul in his own way and in his own time.

9. Friendship, moreover, has an incalculable social value, since it fosters harmony among family members and the creation of social environments more worthy of the human person. “By divine vocation,” our Father writes, “you live in the middle of the world, sharing with your fellow men and women—your equals—joys and sorrows, efforts and dreams, hopes and adventures. In walking along the countless paths of the earth you will have striven, because our spirit leads us to do so, to get along with everyone, to be welcoming with everyone, in order to help create an environment of peace and friendship.”<sup>109</sup>

This environment of friendship, which each of us is called to carry with us, is the fruit of many efforts to make life pleasant for others. Growing in cordiality, joyfulness, patience, optimism, refinement and in all the virtues that make living with others agreeable is important for helping people to feel welcomed and to be happy: *A pleasant voice multiplies friends, and a gracious tongue multiplies courtesies (Sir 6:5)*. The struggle to improve our own character is a necessary condition for facilitating relationships of friendship.

In contrast, certain ways of expressing oneself can disturb or hinder the creation of an environment of friendship. For example, being overly emphatic in expressing one’s own opinion, or giving the impression that we think our own viewpoints are the definitive ones, or not taking an active interest in what the others say, are ways of acting that enclose a person in himself. At times, these types of behavior show an inability to distinguish what is a matter of opinion from what is not, or the failure to give a relative value to topics that don’t necessarily have only one solution.

10. Our Christian concern for others stems precisely from our union with Christ and our identification with the mission to which He has called us. “We are called to serve the crowds. We are never closed in on ourselves, but live facing the multitude of men and women. And deep in our heart are those words of our Lord Jesus Christ: I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat (**Mk** 8:2).”<sup>110</sup>

Strengthening bonds with our friends requires time and attention, and often means avoiding comfort-seeking or setting aside our own preferences. For a Christian it means

in the first place prayer, with the assurance that there we find the authentic energy capable of transforming the world. “For this world of ours to move along a Christian path—the only worthwhile one—we have to exercise a loyal friendship with all men, based on a prior loyal friendship with God.”<sup>111</sup>

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### Sincerity and friendship (no. 11-13)

11. “A true friend can never be two-faced with his friend: *Vir duplex animo inconstans est in omnibus viis suis (Jas 1:8)*, a double-minded man is unstable in everything. If it is to be loyal and sincere, friendship demands sacrifice, integrity, an exchange of favors and of services that are noble and licit. A friend is strong and sincere in the measure in which, following supernatural prudence, he thinks generously about other people even at the cost of personal sacrifice.”<sup>112</sup> Friendship is mutual: it is a sincere, two-way communication in which the friends each share their own experience, so as to learn from one another.

Friends share their joys, like the shepherd who found his lost sheep (cf. *Lk 15:6*) and the woman who found her lost drachma (cf. *Lk 15:9*). In addition, they share their hopes and plans, and also their sorrows. Friendship is shown especially in readiness to help, as we see in the case of the man who came to Jesus asking Him to cure a servant of his friend the centurion (cf. *Lk 7:6*). And above all, the highest friendship will tend to imitate the greatness of the love of friendship of Jesus Christ: *No one has greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (Jn 15:13)*.

12. It may sometimes happen that out of a certain reserve or shyness, a person does not manage to show others all the affection he or she would like to. Overcoming this obstacle, losing this fear, can be a great opportunity for God to pour out his love on those friends. “True friendship entails sincere mutual affection, which is the true protection of reciprocal freedom and intimacy.”<sup>113</sup> Similarly, Saint Thomas says that genuine friendship has to be shown externally: it requires “a certain reciprocity in the loving, since friendship is between friend and friend.”<sup>114</sup>



At the same time, genuinely offering our friendship entails being willing to take a risk, since there is always a possibility that it may not be returned. This is something Our Lord experiences in his own life, when the rich young man prefers to take a different path (cf. *Mk 10:22*) or when, coming down from the Mount of Olives, He weeps over Jerusalem at the thought of those whose hearts are hardened (cf. *Lk 19:41*). After experiences like that, which will arise sooner or later, we have to overcome the fear of taking that risk again, just as Jesus also does with each of us. In other words, we need to accept our own vulnerability, to keep taking the first step without expecting anything in return, with our eyes on the great good that may come into being: a genuine friendship.

13. To bring about the sort of environment in which fruitful friendships can grow, we need to foster personal spontaneity and encourage the initiative of each person in family life and social life. These two qualities, spontaneity and initiative, will not grow by inertia in just any surroundings: they have to be nurtured and people have to be encouraged to show themselves as they really are. This naturally gives rise to pluralism, which “should be loved and fostered, although someone may find this diversity hard to accept at times. A person who loves freedom manages to see the positive and attractive aspects of what others think.”<sup>115</sup> The attitude of valuing people who are different, or who think differently, denotes inner freedom and openness, both of which are aspects of genuine friendship.

From another angle, friendship, like love (of which it is one expression), is not a univocal reality. There is not the same sharing of one’s own intimacy with all of one’s friends. For example, the friendship between husband and wife and the friendship between parents and children that was so strongly recommended by Saint Josemaria and the friendship between siblings or that between co-workers are not identical. In all of these there is a shared inner space which is specific to that particular relationship. Respecting this diversity in the ways we show our intimacy to others does not imply any lack of sincerity or any deficiency of friendship, but just the opposite: generally, it is a condition for maintaining the true nature of that relationship.

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## Friendship and fraternity (no. 14-17)

14. Blessed Alvaro del Portillo wrote that “for those who love God, being his children and being his friends are two inseparable things.”<sup>116</sup> Similarly, there is a very close connection between fraternity and friendship. Beginning with the simple relationship of being children of the same parents, fraternity becomes friendship through love and affection among the siblings, with all that implies of shared interests, understanding, communication, attentive and perceptive service, material help, etc.

Similarly, the fraternity that arises from a shared vocation to the Work also needs to be expressed in friendship, which achieves maturity when the good that is desired for the other person is their happiness, their faithfulness and their holiness. At the same time, this friendship is not “particular” in the sense of being exclusive or excluding other people, but is always open to others, even though limitations of time and space prevent us from having equally intense communication and dealings with everyone.

“With exquisite charity, which is characteristic of the Work of God, we help one another to live and love our own sanctity and everyone else’s. And we feel strong with the strength of playing-cards which cannot stand up alone, but by supporting one another can be built up into a castle.”<sup>117</sup> Thus the love that unites us with each other is the same love that keeps the whole Work united.

15. Friendship is a constant support and stimulus for the mission we all share. With our brothers or sisters we also share our joys and our plans, our worries and our hopes, although obviously there are aspects of our personal relationship with God which, normally at least, we keep for spiritual direction alone. The same thing happens in the friendship between husband and wife, between parents and children, and, in general, between good friends.

The effort to make life pleasant for others is a joyful commitment that forms part of our daily life. In this area, as long as we act with common sense and supernatural sense, it would be hard to go too far. On the contrary, it is a fundamental part of the path to holiness. “I don’t mind saying this often: everybody needs affection, and we in the Work need it too. Make sure that, without doing anything maudlin, your affection for one another grows continually. Anything that affects another of my children must—

genuinely!—be of great concern for us.”<sup>118</sup> For those who lived with our Father, what they especially remember is his affection. This was an affection that led him to try to obtain the best for each of his daughters and sons, and at the same time impelled him to have a deep love for their freedom.

16. Fraternal affection, which is charity, leads us on the one hand to see others through Christ’s eyes, always rediscovering their value. And on the other hand it impels us to want them to be better and holier. Saint Josemaria encouraged us: “Always have a very big heart for loving God and for loving others. I often ask Our Lord to give me a heart to the measure of his. I do this, in the first place, to be more full of Him, and then to love everyone without ever complaining. I am able to be understanding and forgive other people’s defects, because I cannot forget how much God has put up with from me. This understanding, which is true affection, is also shown in fraternal correction, whenever necessary, because it is a totally supernatural way of helping the people around us.”<sup>119</sup> Fraternal correction is born of affection; it shows that we want the others to be happier all the time. Sometimes it can be hard to do, and that is another reason we are grateful for it.

17. Our personal happiness does not depend on the successes we achieve, but rather on the love we receive and the love we give. The love of our brothers and sisters gives us the security we need in order to continue “fighting a most beautiful war of love and peace: *in hoc pulcherrimo caritatis bello!* We try to bring Christ’s charity to everyone, without any exceptions based on language, nation, or walk of life.”<sup>120</sup> We know how much our Father liked the phrase in Scripture, *Frater qui adiuvatur a fratre quasi civitas firma*: a brother helped by his brother is like a walled city (*Prov 18:19*).

In the last get-togethers he had with us, Don Javier frequently repeated, “Love one another!” It was a cry which, as always, echoed our Father’s intentions. “How very insistent the Apostle Saint John was in preaching the *mandatum novum*, the new commandment that we should love one another! I would fall on my knees, without putting on any act—it is what my heart calls for—and ask you, for the love of God, to love one another, to help one another, to lend one another a hand, to know how to forgive one another. And so, reject all pride, be compassionate, show charity; help each other with prayer and sincere friendship.”<sup>121</sup>

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### Apostolate of friendship and confidence (no. 18-23)

18. From the earliest years of Opus Dei, Saint Josemaria taught us the specific way by which God invites us to announce the Gospel in the middle of the world. “You are to bring souls closer to God by your timely words that open up apostolic horizons; by the wise advice that helps someone take a Christian approach in facing a problem; through your friendly conversation, which teaches others how to practice charity: that is, through an apostolate that I have sometimes called the apostolate of friendship and confidence.”<sup>122</sup>

True friendship—like charity, which raises the human dimension of friendship to the supernatural plane—is a value in itself. It is not a means or an instrument for gaining any social advantage, even though it may bring such advantages (as it may also bring disadvantages). Our Father, while encouraging us to cultivate friendship with many people, warned us at the same time: “You will act like that, my daughters and sons, not indeed to use friendship as a tactic for social penetration (that would make friendship lose its intrinsic value), but as a requirement, the first and most immediate requirement, of human fraternity, which we Christians have the duty to foster among men, no matter how different they are from one another.”<sup>123</sup>

Friendship has an *intrinsic value* because it denotes a sincere concern for the other person. Thus “friendship is itself apostolate; friendship is itself a dialogue in which we give and receive light. In friendship plans are forged as we mutually open up new horizons. In friendship we rejoice in what is good and support one another in what is difficult; we have a good time with one another, since God wants us to be happy.”<sup>124</sup>

When a friendship is like that, loyal and sincere, there is no way it can be instrumentalized. Each friend simply wants to pass on to the other the good they experience in their own life. Normally we will do this without even realizing it, through our example, our joy and a desire to serve that is expressed in a thousand little ways. Nevertheless, “the importance of witness does not mean that our words are not needed.

Why should we not speak of Jesus, why should we not tell others that He gives us strength in life, that we enjoy talking with Him, that we benefit from meditating on his words?”<sup>125</sup> And then, naturally, friendship ends up in personal confidences, full of sensitive respect for freedom, as a necessary result of the genuine character of that friendship.

19. Naturally, the relationship of friendship leads to many shared moments: talking together while on a walk or around a table, playing a sport, enjoying the same hobby, going on an outing, etc. In short, friendship requires spending time on mutual interactions and confidences. Without these confidences there is no friendship. “When I speak to you about the ‘apostolate of friendship,’ I mean a personal friendship, self-sacrificing and sincere: face to face, heart to heart.”<sup>126</sup> When friendship is real, when our concern for the other person is sincere and fills our prayer, there are no shared moments that are not apostolic: everything is friendship and everything is apostolate, without being able to distinguish them.

“Hence the enormous importance, not just human but divine, of friendship. I will tell you once again, as I have been doing since the beginning of our Work: be friends to your friends, sincere friends, and like that you will carry out fruitful apostolate and dialogue.”<sup>127</sup> It is not a question of having friends in order to do apostolate, but of making sure that the Love of God fills our friendship so that it is genuine apostolate.

20. The birth of a friendship comes like an unexpected gift, and for that very reason it also requires patience. Sometimes certain bad experiences or prejudices can mean that it takes time before the personal relationship we have with someone close at hand turns into friendship. Fear, human respects or certain preconceptions can also make it difficult. It is good to try and put ourselves in the other person’s place and be patient. We need to be like Jesus Christ, who “is ready to talk to everyone, even people who don’t want to know the truth, like Pilate.”<sup>128</sup>

There are many good ways of evangelizing. In the Work, however, the main apostolate is always that of friendship. This is what our Father taught us: “It can truly be said, my dearest children, that the greatest fruit of Opus Dei’s work is what its members obtain personally by their apostolate of example and loyal friendship with their colleagues at work: in a university or factory, in the office, in the mines or in the fields.”<sup>129</sup> Without

neglecting the tasks we have in hand, we need to learn how to look after our friends at all times.

21. In addition, our friendship with them will often be complemented by the corporate apostolate done in our centers and apostolic initiatives. “That friendship, that relationship with one of you is afterwards broadened, first by affection and understanding, and then by that person’s regular attendance at an Opus Dei house, where they start to go and are soon taught to consider as something of their own, as their home. All of this, clearly, is afterwards united to their friendship with the people they meet and get to know in that house of ours.”<sup>130</sup>

22. Also within the apostolate of friendship falls our apostolate *ad fidem* with people who do not share our faith. “My daughters and sons, have faith, a sturdy faith, a living faith, a faith that works through love, *veritatem facientes in caritate (Eph 4:15)*. Keep this spirit when dealing with our separated brethren and with non-Christians. Love everyone, be charitable to everyone, offer friendship to everyone. No one who has approached any of our corporate apostolates has ever been poorly treated because of his or her religious convictions, and we never speak to anyone about our faith if that person does not want us to.”<sup>131</sup>

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23. In these pages I have wanted to remind you how we all need friendship, that gift of God that brings us consolation and joy. “God has made human beings in such a way that we cannot help sharing the feelings of our hearts with others: if we have received some cause for happiness, we feel an inner force that makes us sing and smile, that makes us in one way or another bring others to share in our happiness. If it is sorrow that fills our soul, we want to have a quiet atmosphere around us, that shows us that the others understand and respect us. As human beings, my daughters and sons, we all need to be supported by one another, in order to travel along life’s path, to make our hopes into realities, to overcome the difficulties, to enjoy the fruit of our labors. Hence the great importance, both humanly and supernaturally, of friendship.”<sup>132</sup>

The first young people who came in contact with the Work in the 1930’s found around our Father a genuine atmosphere of friendship. That was the first thing that attracted them,

and it kept them united in very difficult times. Friendship multiplies our joys and offers comfort in our sorrows. A Christian's friendship desires the greatest happiness—a relationship with Jesus Christ—for those close to him or her. Let us pray, as Saint Josemaria did, “Give us, Jesus, hearts to the measure of Yours!”<sup>133</sup> That is the path. Only by identifying ourselves with Christ's feelings—*let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5)*—will we be able through our friendship to bring that full happiness to our home, our work, and every place we find ourselves.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

Rome, 1 November 2019

*Solemnity of All Saints*

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PASTORAL  
LETTER

MSGR. FERNANDO OCÁRIZ

The vocation  
to Opus Dei

28/10/2020

*Fernando*



# The Vocation to Opus Dei (20 October 2020)

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## I. The gift of a vocation

Dearly beloved, may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me.

1 With the centenary of the Work's birth on the horizon, and thinking of the vast apostolic panorama that our Lord is placing before our eyes, I would like us to meditate, slowly and deeply, on St Josemaría's teaching about how the universal Christian vocation to holiness is to become a reality for each one of us. From the beginning, our Father understood that the universality of this call implied that the fullness of love for God and others was possible also in the middle of the world – in our real world, with its lights and shadows.

*A sovereign grace*

2 God chooses and calls everyone: *He chose us in Christ, that we should be holy and blameless in his presence through love (Eph 1:4)*. Our awareness of this gift and of our responsibility in the face of it, nurtured with a youthful soul, will lead us to cooperate in sanctifying the world. In communion with everyone in the Church, let us try to respond generously to that Christian vocation as it is made specific for each one of us in Opus Dei.

Let us see the greatness of this call, which fills our journey in this world with an air of eternity, in spite of our limitations and mistakes and the difficulties we encounter along the way: “in spite of the in-spite-ofs,” as our Father used to say.

St Josemaría spoke of "the sovereign grace of our vocation." It is not something temporary, but a permanent grace. "It is a new vision of life (...) as though a light had been lit within us;" and it is, at the same time, "a mysterious impulse, a vital force which is somewhat like a sweeping avalanche."<sup>134</sup> In short, it is a grace that embraces our whole life and that shows itself as light and as strength: light, so that we can see the way, see what God wants of us; and strength, so as to be able to respond to the call, to say yes and to go forward on the path.

In one of his letters, our Father writes that "in a vocation, the only things that count are the grace of God – which is its cause – and the generosity of the person concerned, moved by this grace."<sup>135</sup> God always wants our freedom to have a decisive role in the response and, therefore, in the very configuration of the vocation – together with grace, which does not take away our freedom but perfects it. It is a freedom that, during the prior stage of discernment, also counts on the light shed by the advice of those who can and should give it.

### *One same spirit*

3 Everyone in the Work, each in his or her personal circumstances, has the same vocation. We are called to be and to do Opus Dei, with the same spirit, with the same apostolic mission, with the same means.

We all have *the same spirit*, which moves us to sanctify ordinary life and, in a special way, our work. "There is no noble human work on earth that cannot be divinized, cannot be sanctified. There is no work that we should not sanctify and make holy and sanctifying for us and for others."<sup>136</sup> This spirit leads us to seek union with God in whatever we face, at every moment of our lives. And so the sanctification of our work is the *axis* on which our search for holiness, for identification with Jesus Christ turns, through our correspondence to grace.

This brings with it a positive view of earthly realities, which are those God has given us. We love this world, without ignoring what is opposed to the good in it (see *1 Jn* 2:15). Its concerns are also our concerns, and if its joys usually make it easier for us to love it, its sorrows should lead us to love it even more. What a comfort and what a sense of

responsibility those words of St Paul should arouse in us: *All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's (1 Cor 3:23)*.

And if the sanctification of our work is the *axis* of our holiness, our sense of divine filiation has to be the foundation. Filiation which, through sanctifying grace, “introduces” us into the divine life of the Holy Trinity, as children of the Father, in the Son, through the Holy Spirit. “By the grace of baptism, we have been made children of God. With this free divine decision, man’s natural dignity has been incomparably exalted. And while sin destroyed this marvellous reality, the Redemption has restored it yet more admirably (see *Missale Romanum, Ordo Missæ*), by bringing us to share even more closely in the divine filiation of the Word.”<sup>137</sup>

As it is the foundation, our divine filiation shapes our whole life. It leads us to pray with the trust of God’s children, to pass through life with the poise of God’s children, to reason and decide with the freedom of God’s children, to face pain and suffering with the serenity of God’s children, to appreciate beautiful things as a child of God does. In short, divine filiation “is there in every thought, every desire, every affection.”<sup>138</sup> And it necessarily expands into fraternity. *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom 8:16)*. This witness is our filial love for God,<sup>139</sup> which brings with it fraternal love. “Others drink from other sources. For us, the wellspring of human dignity and fraternity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>140</sup>

In short, the centre and root of our spiritual life is the Eucharistic Sacrifice. It is the root objectively, because “as often as the sacrifice of the Cross, in which ‘*Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed*’ (1 Cor 5:7), is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is accomplished.”<sup>141</sup>

But whether our life is really subjectively centred on the Eucharist depends also on our personal correspondence to grace: “Keep struggling, so that the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar really becomes the centre and root of your interior life, and so your whole day will turn into an act of worship – an extension of the Mass you have attended and a preparation for the next. Your whole day will then be an act of worship that overflows in aspirations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the offering up of your professional work and your family life...”<sup>142</sup>

From the Eucharistic centre of our Christian life there arises also the development and effectiveness of our apostolic mission: “If the centre around which your thoughts and hopes turn is the Tabernacle, then, my child, how abundant the fruits of your sanctity and apostolate will be!”<sup>143</sup>

### *One same apostolic mission*

4 We have *the same apostolic mission*. We are all equally called to sanctify ourselves and to collaborate with the Church’s mission to transform the world in a Christian way; in our case, by living the spirit of Opus Dei. The mission of the Work can only be properly understood within the great mission of the Church, in which “all of us are called to offer others an explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord, who despite our imperfections offers us his closeness, his word and his strength, and gives meaning to our lives.”<sup>144</sup>

Only in the Church, Christ’s Mystical Body, do we receive the strength to serve the world of our time fruitfully. That is why, even with all our limitations, we share the concerns, worries and sufferings of the Church in every age and in every place. Each one of us can make our own that attitude of St Paul: *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? (2 Cor 11:29)*.

5 Our apostolic mission is not limited to certain activities, because with the love of Jesus Christ we can transform everything into a Christian service to others. Each one fully carries out the mission of the Work with our own lives: in our families, in our workplace, in the society in which we live, among our friends and acquaintances. This is why we understand St Josemaría’s insistence that in the Work, “we give primary and fundamental importance to the spontaneity of the individual, to free and responsible initiative guided by the action of the Spirit, and not to organisational structures.”<sup>145</sup> This is also why the main apostolate of the Work is the apostolate of friendship and trust that each one of us carries out personally.

In the light of all this, we can better understand in what sense “all our apostolic tasks and the instruments we use to carry them out are *onus et honor* – a burden and an honour – for all: for the numeraries, the associates and the supernumeraries, and also for the cooperators.”<sup>146</sup> Through the communion of saints, we carry out our apostolic mission all together, wherever we are. And so St Josemaría reminds us, referring to everyone in the

Church, that “if we use the means available to us, we will become salt and light and leaven for the world; we will be the consolation of God.”<sup>147</sup>

### *The same means*

6 In order to accomplish our mission, Christ is the way. And to follow him as disciples and apostles, all of us in Opus Dei have the *same means*: the same norms and customs of Christian life, the same means of spiritual and doctrinal formation. They are lived in different ways according to our personal circumstances, but the whole is always basically the same.

It is good not to lose sight of the fact that they are means (not ends) that lead us, by God’s grace, to grow in our contemplative life in the midst of our human concerns, nourished by the superabundance of life in Christ given to us by the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist.

These practices of piety are part of a loving dialogue that embraces our whole life and leads us to a personal encounter with Christ. They are moments in which God awaits us, in order to share his life with ours. The effort to fulfil them is something we find liberating, because “sanctity has the flexibility of supple muscles (...). Sanctity is not rigid like cardboard; it knows how to smile, to give way to others and to hope. It is life – supernatural life.”<sup>148</sup>

In this way, trusting in God’s mercy, we will try to live always seeking the perfection of charity, according to the spirit God has given us. Being holy does not mean doing more and more things, or fulfilling the task of meeting certain criteria we have set ourselves. The way to holiness, as St Paul explains, consists in corresponding to the action of the Holy Spirit, until Christ is formed in us (see *Gal 4:19*).

### *Unity and diversity*

7 Our Father saw the Work’s functioning as “one single fabric,” made up of the different ways we live out the same vocation. That is why he insisted that in the Work there are no classes, no first or second-class members: not on account of the different ways in which our vocation is lived out, nor because of the type of professional work we do. As in any

reality of a supernatural character, the essential thing – something that cannot be judged on this earth – is how we correspond to God’s love.

St Josemaría expressed this unity of vocation by saying that ours is “only one divine vocation, only one spiritual reality, which adapts flexibly to the personal circumstances of each individual and to his or her state in life. This identical vocation entails an equality of dedication, within the natural limits that differing situations impose.”<sup>149</sup>

Naturally, unity and diversity in the Work includes what corresponds to men and women: there is a unity of spirit, of apostolic mission, and of means, together with the separation of the activities proper to each. Furthermore, in matters common to the whole Work, there is a unity of direction between men and women at the central and regional levels. The governing bodies of the men and the women have equal initiative and responsibility. In specific important cases established by law, they have the same competence to accept or reject the proposals of the Prelate or, in the regions, those of the Regional Vicar.

#### *With all our life*

8 It might seem that some are more dedicated to the mission of the Work than others. This is not the case. All live with **equal dedication**, because being and doing Opus Dei does not consist only, or even mainly, in taking part in certain tasks or in corporate apostolic activities. Our vocation, and the mission that corresponds to it, encompasses our whole life, not just a part of it; our whole life is an opportunity and a means to meet Christ and to do apostolate.

St Josemaría wrote that our call presupposes a “full vocational encounter, because whatever a person’s marital status, he or she lives a full dedication to their work and to the faithful fulfilment of the duties of their state, according to the spirit of Opus Dei. Hence, to dedicate oneself to God in Opus Dei does not imply a selection of activities; it does not mean dedicating more or less time in our life to doing some good works, while abandoning others. Opus Dei is grafted onto our whole life.”<sup>150</sup> A *full vocational encounter*, embracing the whole of my own life, with full dedication, because everything contains a call from God to love him and to serve others, with a love that is inner freedom. As Don Alvaro commented, “the Work demands a great elasticity: a minimum of rules,

because they are necessary; but a minimum, so that the letter does not kill the spirit: *Littera enim occidit, spiritus autem vivificat (2 Cor 3:6).*”<sup>151</sup>

9 In these pages I would also like to invite you to renew your gratitude to God for the gift of your vocation. A joyful gratitude, not only for the beauty of the Work, when we see how God wants it to be in its fullness, but also when each one of us sees how that beauty is made fully present in the way in which each of the faithful of the Prelature personally lives out this single vocation: as numeraries (in the case of women, also as assistant numeraries), as associates, as supernumeraries, or as members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross.

In this context, I would like to emphasize what I wrote to you a few months ago: we cannot let ourselves be disheartened by the experience of our own personal weakness and that of others, compared to the wonderful vista that the Christian faith and the spirit of the Work place before us. In the face of the discouragement that can arise in us when we see the disproportion between the ideal and the poor reality of our lives, let us have the security that we can begin again every day with the strength of the grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>152</sup>

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## II. The vocation to the Work as a numerary

10 “At the heart of the Work, the numeraries place themselves at the feet of all their brothers and sisters, in a special mission of service to make their way of holiness pleasant. They look after them in all their needs of soul and body, they help them in their difficulties, and they make it possible for everyone’s apostolate to be fruitful, through their selfless sacrifice.”<sup>153</sup> In this way the numeraries “give life” to their brothers and sisters. Their work, “by keeping everyone spiritually active and awake, brings about an extraordinary reality of fraternity and unity.”<sup>154</sup>

In the numeraries, the vocation to Opus Dei is determined by the gift of apostolic celibacy and by their full availability for tasks of formation and apostolic activities. This

availability, understood and carried out as a special mission of service to others, is facilitated by the fact that, in principle, numeraries live in centres of the Work. However, many circumstances may arise that could make it better not to do so. This does not affect their identity or their mission, since they will always know that they are there to serve all the others, wherever they live.

### *An available heart*

11 The readiness of numeraries to serve others consists in a genuine *availability of heart*: the *effective* freedom to live only for God and, through him, for others, coupled with a willingness to take on the tasks required in the Work.

For some, this availability will involve taking part in tasks of formation and apostolic work, while they also dedicate themselves to some professional work that corresponds to their talents, studies and preferences, in order to bring the joy of the Gospel there. For others, it will be a matter of dedicating themselves professionally to the administration of the centres of the Work, or to tasks of formation, government, direction or cooperation in apostolic activities.

On the other hand, our availability cannot be limited to a passive attitude of doing *what I've been asked to do*, but shows itself fully when we think about what talents we have received from God, so as to put them at the service of the apostolic mission. And we “make the first move”: we offer ourselves, with initiative. Therefore, availability is not immobility but, on the contrary, the habitual desire to move at **God's pace**.

We have to understand and live out our full availability as freedom, in the sense of being tied down only by love (that is, not tied down as a necessity to a job, the place where we reside, etc., while also being well rooted where we are). What makes us free is not the external circumstances, but the love we carry in our hearts.

As a specific expression of this particular task of service, our Father foresaw that the work of government in Opus Dei would fall to the numeraries. We need some people to dedicate themselves to this work, since it sustains the life of the whole. But it would be a mistake to think that those who have this dedication to the tasks of government or formation are more available or are doing Opus Dei *more*. This is what Don Javier meant when he wrote in one of his letters: “There is no other option than for some of my daughters and sons to



cut back on their professional activity – or even to leave it completely, at least for a while – in order to devote themselves to helping their brothers and sisters in the spiritual life and directing the apostolic work.”<sup>155</sup>

Our Father expresses this full interior disposition in many places. For example: “all have a divine vocation, but the numeraries have to offer themselves directly and immediately to God in a holocaust, giving everything, their whole heart, their activities without limitation, their property, their reputation.”<sup>156</sup> It is precisely a matter of freely giving up all their activities, whatever they may be, without setting limits, in order to do the Work. Obviously, there are sometimes circumstances which objectively limit the possibility of their taking on certain assignments or tasks at a given time. So I say again that what is important is their interior disposition of full availability to serve others, for the love of Christ.

#### *A group nailed to the Cross*

12 Let us also remember those other words of St Josemaría: “Our Lord does not want his Work to be something merely transient. He wants it to be immortal: he wants there to be in the Work a group nailed to the Cross. The Holy Cross will make us enduring, always with the spirit of the Gospel itself, producing the apostolate of action as the sweet-tasting fruit of prayer and sacrifice.”<sup>157</sup> Our Father does not indicate who make up this group nailed to the Cross. But Don Alvaro, in his note commenting on this paragraph, points out that the different ways of living one’s vocation in the Work are already announced or alluded to here. From the context we can think that, in this case, it refers above all to the numeraries.

In some other places, St Josemaría also refers to priests as especially nailed to the Cross. In reality all of us, including the associates and the supernumeraries, must be nailed to the Cross, because that is where we find our Lord – as our Father says in words that express a profound personal experience of his: “To have the Cross is to identify oneself with Christ, it is to be Christ and, therefore, to be children of God.”<sup>158</sup>

Although it may sometimes be hard, from a human point of view, for numeraries to leave their previous profession for a time in order to dedicate themselves professionally to other types of activities (administration of centres of the Work, government, formation,

direction or cooperation in apostolic activities), it is a fruitful encounter with the Cross, the place of the most profound identification with Christ and the source of great – and often unexpected – supernatural joy.

13 When we ask for admission to the Work, we understand and freely adopt – out of love! – this attitude of availability, which leads us to plunge into a divine project. At the same time, like everything else in the spiritual life, the effective maturing of our self-giving grows over time. This growth occurs through our formation, through our interior life and through our various experiences of self-giving – in small changes of plan, tasks, etc. – which prepare our souls for larger changes, if necessary. Naturally, when it comes to major assignments or changes, the directors always seek first the opinion of the ones concerned; though the latter, while pointing out with simplicity any difficulties they may see, at the same time try to maintain a willingness to be available for whatever is needed, out of love for God and souls.

What is decisive, I insist, is that each one should have this habitual interior disposition of dedication to our brothers and sisters and to so many other people who are waiting for our Christian service: *Lift up your eyes and see how the fields are already white for harvest (Jn 4:35).*

This attitude is perfectly compatible with a healthy professional ambition and with a natural and responsible concern to support ourselves economically and to attend to the needs of our supernatural family. Our willingness to change professional tasks, if the Work requires it, precisely in order to dedicate ourselves to the formation of others, goes hand in hand with the conviction that we are women and men who want to take part in the challenges of the world, like our peers, because our mission is to help transform the world and bring it to God. And this is also done in a very effective way from the positions of direction and formation in the Work.

You, the numeraries, live the gift of apostolic celibacy as the fullness of love in Christ, which opens up a spiritual fatherhood and motherhood. You are called to be living witnesses of total dedication to God, in the middle of the world, being fully available to serve everyone: in love with Jesus, with those around you, and with the world. You have

received a special call to watch over a supernatural family and to care for your brothers and sisters.

You have a very broad horizon: with your committed life, at times perhaps hidden and without any human brilliance, you reach every corner of the world with your fruitfulness.

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### III. The vocation to the Work as an assistant numerary

14 You, the assistant numeraries, have a special function of serving, which you carry out by creating and maintaining the atmosphere of a Christian home in the centres of the Work. You make this task a reality through your professional work, which in your case is the Administration. As you know, it is not just a question of carrying out a series of material tasks which between us we can do and must do in one way or another, but of planning, organising and coordinating them in such a way that the result is precisely a home where everyone feels at home, welcomed, *affirmed*, cared for, and at the same time responsible. This task, which is of great importance for every human person, has repercussions on the physiognomy and spirituality of the whole Work, of each and every one of its members. You women thus become “an irreplaceable support and a source of spiritual strength for others, who perceive the great energy”<sup>159</sup> of your spirit.

The priority of the person and the family

15 By your work you care for and serve our life in the Work, making each person the focus and priority of your task. This is a very palpable expression of the fact that the Work is a family; a family in the true sense, not the metaphorical. You remember how our Father so often told us that the bonds in the Work are stronger than those of blood, something which also has consequences in terms of affection and mutual love.

St Josemaría often reflected on the fact that the work of the Administration is the same as the one Our Lady did. Thus the “family air” of the Work must be like a duplicate, a

continuation of the atmosphere (although we have not seen it, we can imagine it) of the home in Nazareth.

Although the work of the Administration of our centres is called by different names in different cultures, in reality you assistant numeraries are sisters, mothers, an integral part of the family, just like the Father and the other children. Because of the grace you have received from God to take care of everyone in the Work, St Josemaría used to say that if he had been able, he would have become an assistant numerary. He called you his “little daughters” because you were the last to arrive in the Work, not because he considered you to be minors: on the contrary, he relied in a special way on your mature and firm faithfulness in order to carry out the great plans of the Work.

#### *From all environments*

16 It is a wonderful reality that you, the assistant numeraries, come from all walks of life. In fact, people are sometimes unsure whether God is asking them to be a numerary or an assistant numerary. One element (among others) to keep in mind is the person’s inclination towards tasks more directly oriented to serving and caring for people. Of course, discernment depends ultimately on each individual, with the guidance received in spiritual direction and from the directors.

In any case, we understand that the work of the Administration takes on a great dignity: that of imparting and maintaining the warmth of the home in a family. Furthermore, those who work in the Administration, “through this profession – because it is a true and noble one – have a positive influence not only on the family but also on a multitude of friends and acquaintances, on people with whom they relate in one way or another, sometimes fulfilling a much more extensive task than other professionals.”<sup>160</sup>

#### *Apostolate of apostolates*

17 St Josemaría valued the work of the Administration to the point of considering it the *apostolate of the apostolates*: without it, the Work could not move forward.

It is the apostolate of the apostolates, in the first place because it is in itself a very direct apostolate. I repeat that it is not limited to providing material services, although these are necessary and important in themselves. Above all, this task – transformed into prayer –

has a very direct influence on the human and spiritual formation of the people in the centre being administered. The environment you create is formative, very formative.

In fact, your well-done work makes our spirit something palpable and communicates it effectively by way of deeds, in a tangible and constant way. That is why you try to give the greatest possible professionalism to your housework, just as each one of my children does with their own task. And by raising it to the ambit of sanctified work, you put your professional competence directly at the service of persons, making it a factor to humanise and inspire the professional work of all.

In the second place, the work of the Administration is the apostolate of apostolates because it makes the other apostolates possible, acting like the sap and stimulus for each of them, especially to the extent that you try to transform your work into a dialogue with God. “When you work in the Administration,” St Josemaría wrote, “you take part in all the apostolates, you cooperate in all the work we do. The good progress of your work is a necessary condition, the greatest impulse for the whole Work, if you do it with love for God.”<sup>161</sup> It is very noticeable when, at the beginning of the apostolic work in a country or a city, there is no Administration yet; it is also noticeable that, when there is one, the Work becomes more alive and more dynamic. In addition, it is logical that the assistant numeraries should take part in many other apostolic activities, as far as it is possible for each one.

We also say that the Administration is the “backbone” of the Work because it supports the whole body, which otherwise could not stand upright. And this is the truth, thank God; it is something we must always remember and value. Naturally, you other numeraries who work in the Administration also make up this backbone and this apostolate of apostolates.

You, my assistant numerary daughters, have an exciting mission: to transform this world – so full of individualism and indifference today – into a real home. Your task, when it is carried out with love, can reach all environments. You are building a more human and a more divine world, because you are dignifying it with your work turned into prayer, with your love, and with the professionalism you put into looking after people in their entirety.

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#### IV. The vocation to the Work as an associate

*With its own character*

18 You, the associates, carry out Opus Dei mainly through a deep personal apostolate in your own professional and family environment, and by working with the numeraries in caring for the other faithful of the Work. By your lives you show the completely free nature of the apostolic activity of every baptized person, carrying it out with all the energy of a celibate heart. That is why St Josemaría could say to you: “I am envious of you: your dedication to God is total and complete just like mine, but you can reach further.”<sup>162</sup> What did he mean by this? He meant that the key thing is to be in the middle of the world, in the middle of its activities, its work, its families, in order to lead a Christian life there.

You find yourselves in quite varied circumstances and you move in all kinds of professional environments. Your life is open to an unlimited field of possibilities in which to embody and spread the spirit of Opus Dei. Because your origins are so varied, you reach out into the whole social fabric; because you stay longer in each place, you make it much easier to implant the apostolates in the area; your way of life allows you to cultivate a great multiplicity of relationships, and to do so in a very stable way: in your family and your profession, in your neighbourhood, in the town, city or country where you live. “You reach further,” as St Josemaría said, not only in terms of the breadth of your apostolate, but also in its depth, because you show in your own lives what it means to give yourself to God in the *middle of the world*, with an undivided heart.

So we can understand very well why our Father wanted there to be twice as many associates as numeraries: because the key thing is our work in the middle of ordinary circumstances, the work that belongs to each one of us.

If someone, when considering their possible vocation to the Work, were to hesitate between becoming a numerary or an associate, we might have to make them see that it

would be a mistake to think that being a numerary is better than being an associate. This is very important in discerning a vocation. There are cases where the way in which the vocation to the Work is specified is obvious: for example, a married man can be a supernumerary, but not an associate or a numerary. But there are other cases which are less obvious, and the final discernment must be made by the person concerned: he or she is the one who experiences what God is asking specifically of them, within a single and common vocation. Logically, as a matter of prudence, it is very good to seek advice in spiritual direction, and also to speak to the directors, who know the person and wish to discern with him or her what God's will is.

### *The fragrance of Christ*

19 Referring specifically to the associates, St Josemaría wrote: “Through their work, in all walks of life, in all places (at times in corporate apostolates), in the most diverse corners of the world, they bear with them everywhere, among their companions, the fragrance of Christ; and they strive to give a Christian meaning to the social, professional and financial undertakings, both public and private, of those who come from the same background and have the same social position. And all this is normally done without having to change their work or place of residence.”<sup>163</sup> I myself have heard Don Javier say – picking up a teaching of St Josemaría's – that you associates express what Opus Dei is in a particularly clear way, through the sanctification of your ordinary life, your professional work and your family life, without changing your place.

You, the associates, sometimes work in corporate educational establishments or other apostolic activities. But that is not the main way you participate in the mission of the Work, for the whole of it is in your hands. Sometimes you have to take on these tasks, but your main way is to sanctify your ordinary life, treating people with friendship and trust and, when appropriate, accompanying your friends to the means of formation of St Raphael's and St Gabriel's work... In a word, God is calling you to be leaven within the dough. The important thing for you, I repeat, is your apostolic work in the middle of your ordinary circumstances and the professional work that belongs to each of you.

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## V. Priests of the Prelature

20 From among the numeraries and associates come the vocations to the priesthood in the Work, which are as essential as the laity in the theological and juridical reality of the Prelature. This call is not a crowning of the vocation to the Work, but a new way of living it, with “a greater obligation than the others ‘to put their hearts on the floor like a carpet, so that their brothers and sisters can tread softly’.”<sup>164</sup>

Together with the tasks belonging to their priestly ministry in the Church, which is centred on the Eucharist, the priests of the Prelature dedicate themselves chiefly to their ministerial service to the other faithful and to the priestly care of their apostolic activities. Specifically, in accord with the particular pastoral mission of the Prelature, they are concerned above all with celebrating the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance; preaching the Word of God; spiritual direction; and an extensive task of doctrinal formation.

The fact that the priests of the Prelature live the spirit of the Work, just like everyone else, implies a certain priestly style. They necessarily reflect a secular tone in their ministry; they are very careful to respect and promote the responsibility and initiative of the lay faithful; they act in a supernatural way in order to bring people closer to God; they foster in those around them that freedom of spirit which is love; they use their initiative to build up an abundant priestly work. Naturally, as far as possible, they also cooperate in the activities of the diocese where they live.

### *At the service of others*

21 At the beginning of one of his letters, which was addressed especially to his priestly sons, St Josemaría wrote: “My priest sons, you have been ordained to serve. Let me begin by reminding you that your priestly ministry is a mission of service. Since I know you well, I am aware that this word ‘service’ expresses all that you wish and all that you are. This good and sincere desire of yours to be forever occupied in doing good to others, just like your brothers and sisters, is for me a source of great pride and consolation, and is why I can say that you are *gaudium meum et corona mea* (*Phil 4:1*): my joy and my crown.”<sup>165</sup>



As priests, your spirit of service moves you to feel – and to be, in practice – just one more among your brothers, aware that in the Work there is “only one class, although it is made up of both clergy and laity.”<sup>166</sup> At the same time, with your example and your word you try to be like alarm clocks to awaken the desire for holiness in others, and to be instruments of unity in the Work. While staying very close to everyone, try to maintain a proper human level, a priestly seriousness in your appearance, your conversations, etc.

My children, if St Josemaría said to everyone that “it is Christ we must talk about, not ourselves,”<sup>167</sup> you priests must make a special effort not to shine, not to take the lead role, trying to ensure that the lead role and the brightness in your life are those of Christ, and that in any case it is your sisters and brothers who shine. To do this – you know it very well and are already trying to live it – you have a special need for union with God, prayer and joyful sacrifice, in a unity of life.

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## VI. On the apostolic celibacy of the numeraries and associates

22 In the numeraries and associates, the vocation to the Work involves apostolic celibacy, which is a gift from God and a response to that gift through a correspondence of love for Love. “Always bear in mind that Love is the reason for our celibacy – the Love of all loves.”<sup>168</sup> Hence we should not think of celibacy only or mainly as a functional choice: that is, as something that enables us to dedicate ourselves more to the tasks of the Work or go from one place to another. It is true that celibacy makes this possible, or easier, but its fundamental motive is that it is a special gift that identifies us with Christ’s life. “Celibacy must be a witness of faith: faith in God becomes palpable in this form of life, which can only draw meaning from God. To base our life on this, renouncing marriage and the family, means to welcome and experience God as a reality, so as to be able to bring him to others.”<sup>169</sup>

Apostolic celibacy does not separate us from others. But because it means making a commitment to God with an undivided heart, it has to be noticed in the tenor of our

dedicated life, analogous to that of a married person, who cannot behave as if they had not made a commitment of faithfulness to their spouse.

A vocation, when lived radically, will sometimes clash with the standards of the world. Here, too, we can apply those more general words of St Josemaría: “And in a paganised or pagan environment, when my life clashes with its surroundings, won’t my naturalness seem artificial?’ you ask me. And I reply: Undoubtedly your life will clash with theirs; and that contrast – faith confirmed by works! – is exactly the naturalness I ask of you.”<sup>170</sup>

Let us renew, once and again, our conviction that the gift of apostolic celibacy is a special sign of divine love, a call to a particular identification with Jesus Christ, which also brings with it a greater capacity to love everyone – even humanly speaking, but above all supernaturally. Thus it is that celibacy, in forgoing physical paternity and maternity, makes a much greater spiritual motherhood or fatherhood possible. But in any case, it is those who love God more, whether they are celibate or married, who will in fact be more identified with Christ, for marriage is also a “divine path on earth.”<sup>171</sup>

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## VII. The vocation to the Work as a supernumerary

*It is a great grace from God*

23 The majority of the faithful of Opus Dei is made up of you, the supernumeraries, who strive to sanctify all the dimensions of your lives, especially your married and family life, since you are usually married. In 1947, in response to some reflections he had received about supernumeraries, St Josemaría wrote to his children in Spain: “I read your notes on supernumeraries. (...) I’ll give your notes back to you next week with some specific comments. Anyway, I’ll say now that we cannot lose sight of the fact that we are not talking about the inscription of some gentlemen in a particular association (...) To be a supernumerary is a great grace from God!”<sup>172</sup> It is God who gives the grace, “a great grace,” says St Josemaría: that of the vocation to the Work. For supernumeraries, this vocation

is a special help for them to travel along their own path of sanctification: the path marked out by baptism and, in most cases, by the reception of the sacrament of matrimony and the formation of a family.

The call presupposes a choice and, as I wrote earlier, it is directed to a mission: to be and to do Opus Dei in the Church. In the *Instruction on St Gabriel's work*, referring to supernumeraries, St Josemaría wrote: "I see now this great team of men and women in action (...) each one, conscious of having been chosen by God to achieve holiness in the middle of society, precisely where he or she is, with a solid and learned piety, striving to fulfil joyfully the duty of every moment – although it requires an effort."<sup>173</sup> So let us never see our vocation as a set of demands, of obligations (although it has them, of course), but above all as a choice made by God, a great gift from God.

The horizon that gives meaning to your mission is to be "a leaven that will divinise men and, in making them divine, will make them at the same time truly human."<sup>174</sup> Like Aquila and Priscilla, who welcomed St Paul in Corinth (see *Acts* 18:2) and who proclaimed the Gospel to Apollos and many others (see *Acts* 18:26; *Rom* 16:3; *1 Cor* 16:19); like so many of those first Christians who led a life as normal as that of their contemporaries and who, at the same time, were salt of the earth and light of a world that was in darkness.

"Among the Supernumeraries there is the full range of social backgrounds, professions and jobs. All kinds of circumstances and situations are sanctified by my children, men and women who within their own state in life and situation in the world dedicate themselves to seeking Christian perfection with a 'fullness of vocation'."<sup>175</sup> Note how our Father insists on the "fullness of vocation." As far as variety is concerned, this clearly follows from the fact that the Work is a path of sanctification and apostolate in ordinary life; an ordinary life that admits all the variety of whatever is honest and human.

### *Marriage and family*

24 The vocation as a supernumerary in the Work develops in the first place in the family sphere. "Your first apostolate is in the home."<sup>176</sup> St Josemaría dreamed that the homes of supernumeraries would be "bright and cheerful, centres for the spreading of the Gospel and its message."<sup>177</sup> This is the heritage you leave to society. That is why he also wrote to you: "The formation that Opus Dei gives you leads you to appreciate the beauty of the

family, the supernatural work entailed in forming a home and the fount of sanctification that lies hidden in your conjugal duties.”<sup>178</sup>

Moreover, you are called upon to influence other families positively: in particular, by helping them to make their family life more Christian and by preparing the youth for marriage, so that many young people will be enthused and will be able to form other Christian homes, from which the many vocations to apostolic celibacy that God desires will also arise.

Even if you are single or widowed – or, of course, couples without children – you can see in the family your first apostolate, because you will always have, in one way or another, a family environment to nourish.

#### *Having a Christian influence on our own environment*

25 St Josemaría saw in you a great mobilization of Christians, who would radiate the love of Christ in their work and in their social surroundings, principally through their apostolate of friendship and trust; and who, in doing so, would also contribute to improving the structures of society, making them ever more human and suited to the life of God’s children, taking an active part in solving the problems of our time. “You are doing a most fruitful apostolate when you strive to orient in a Christian way the professions, institutions and human structures in which you move and work.”<sup>179</sup>

So it is clear that the vocation of the supernumeraries, and the mission it entails, cannot be limited to living some practices of piety, attending some means of formation and participating in some apostolic activity. Rather, it encompasses your whole life, because everything in your life can be an encounter with God and a form of apostolate. To do Opus Dei is to do it in our own lives and, through the communion of saints, to cooperate in carrying it out throughout the world. Or, as our founder reminded us in a graphic phrase, to do Opus Dei ***by each one being Opus Dei***.

When you feel the Work as your own, you will have a lively interest in forming yourselves, in bringing Christ to others, and in giving an account of your faith. In fact, “the formation you receive in Opus Dei is flexible; it adapts to your personal and social situation like a glove to the hand. (...) While we have only one spirit and only one set of ascetic means, these can and should become a reality in each situation without being rigid.”<sup>180</sup>

This flexibility that avoids rigidity does not mean that being a supernumerary entails a lesser demand to be heroic or radical in our following of Christ. Hence we should not focus so much on the diversity of your circumstances as on the real essence of what, in those circumstances, is your call from God, your God-given mission. In any situation, it is a question of being with Christ, loving Christ, working with Christ and taking him everywhere.

When St Josemaría wrote that “the supernumeraries dedicate themselves partially to the service of the Work,”<sup>181</sup> he was referring to your actual availability for specific apostolic undertakings, and not to your doing the Work partially, since – I repeat again – we carry out this task of doing the Work with our whole life. This is why our Father also wrote, when speaking about the apostolic mission of supernumeraries: “This apostolate is not carried out in a sporadic or fortuitous way, but habitually and by vocation, such that it becomes a life-long ideal.”<sup>182</sup>

God is counting on you to fan out, spontaneously and with initiative, and to bring the joy of the Gospel to all kinds of people. “In your apostolic action you have to take the initiative, within the very wide margin indicated by our spirit, to find the activities that best suit the circumstances – whatever the place, the environment and the time.”<sup>183</sup>

This is the great mission of my supernumerary sons and daughters, a mission that has no limits. “There should not be a single village without some Supernumerary there radiating our spirit.”<sup>184</sup>

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## VIII. The vocation to the Work as an associate and supernumerary of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross

26 “You are as much a part of Opus Dei as I am,” said St Josemaría to the priests and deacons, associates and supernumeraries of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, who are not incardinated in the Prelature.

Naturally, the call to holiness in the middle of the world also includes secular priests incardinated in their dioceses. The vocation to the Work is the same: the divine call to seek holiness and to exercise apostolate in each one's circumstances and in the fulfilment of the duties proper to each one, with the same spirit and the same ascetic means, and forming part of the family of Opus Dei.

The juridical manner of belonging to the Work is certainly different for the faithful of the Prelature and for the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross who are not incardinated in the Prelature. However, the difference in the juridical bond (respectively, of jurisdiction or association) does not detract in any way from the fact that the call is identical, to pursue holiness with the same spirit and the specific means of Opus Dei.

This juridical difference allows you to receive the call to the Work without being taken out of your place, as you remain incardinated in your respective dioceses without the slightest change in your relationship with your bishop and your fellow-priests. By providing the appropriate means, your vocation strengthens and facilitates the faithful and generous fulfilment of your priestly commitments and ministerial tasks, making your path to holiness more lovable. Moreover, you are especially concerned to promote priestly vocations; and you are called to be a leaven of unity with the bishops, and of fraternity within the presbyterate of your diocese.

How our Father encouraged you in this! "Try to accompany each other, even materially. You have to have a heart of flesh, because the heart with which we love Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit is a heart of flesh. If you see one of your brothers in difficulties, go, go to him: don't wait for him to call you."<sup>185</sup>

It should give us joy to consider that the sanctification of work (which is the **axis** of our spiritual life) fundamentally means, for the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, sanctifying their priestly activity. In its main aspects it is already, objectively, a sacred activity; but at the same time, like any work, it can also be a place and a means of personal sanctification and apostolate.

\* \* \*

27 We are approaching the centenary of that 2nd October 1928 when God showed the Work to St Josemaría. Since then, in the world and in the Church, and therefore also in the Work, there have been and continue to be so many joys and so many sorrows.

On 27th March 1975, as he preached a meditation, our Father recalled in prayer the relatively brief history of Opus Dei: “An immense panorama: so many sufferings, so many joys! And now, all is joy, all is joy... Because we have experienced the truth that suffering is the hammering of the sculptor who wants to make each one of us, of that shapeless mass that we are, a crucifix, a Christ, the alter Christus that we have to be. Lord, thank you for everything. Thank you so much!”<sup>186</sup>

The beauty of the Christian vocation, as God has determined it in the Work for every one of us, must fill us with joy: on the one hand, a healthy human joy when we see so many good people and good things; on the other hand, that very special supernatural joy which, as our Father assured us, has “roots in the form of the Cross.” It fills us with joy to know (let us reflect on it again) that “the Holy Cross will make us enduring, always with the spirit of the Gospel itself, producing the apostolate of action as the sweet-tasting fruit of prayer and sacrifice.”<sup>187</sup>

We ask our Lady to bless us and to remind us in her motherly way that we all have the Work in our hands. Thus, if we follow God’s will and correspond to his grace, the story that began on 2nd October 1928 will continue, despite our weakness and our mistakes, until the end of time. We will continue to work with joy, seeking to put Christ at the summit of all human activities, for God’s glory.

With all my love, I bless you

your Father

Rome, 28th October 2020

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PASTORAL  
LETTER

MSGR. FERNANDO OCÁRIZ

Fidelity |

19/03/2022 |

*Fernando*



## Fidelity (19 March 2022)

- Introduction (no. 1)
- Fidelity to vocation, fidelity to Christ (no. 2-5)
- Apostolic fidelity (no. 6-7)
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### Introduction (no. 1)

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.”<sup>188</sup> 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.

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### Fidelity to vocation, fidelity to Christ (no. 2-5)

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."<sup>189</sup>

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."<sup>190</sup>

We need to seek union with our Lord perseveringly. We seek, and we find, this 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."<sup>191</sup>

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."<sup>192</sup>

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."<sup>193</sup> 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."<sup>194</sup>

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 of a father and a mother."<sup>195</sup> 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.”<sup>196</sup> 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.”<sup>197</sup>

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.”<sup>198</sup> 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.

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### Apostolic fidelity (no. 6-7)

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.”<sup>199</sup>

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).”<sup>200</sup>

In experiencing the difficulties that Christian life encounters in this world – 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,”<sup>201</sup> 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.”<sup>202</sup>

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*).”<sup>203</sup>

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### Fidelity to one’s vocation and ordinary life (no. 8-9)

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,”<sup>204</sup> 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 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.”<sup>205</sup> 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.”<sup>206</sup>

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.”<sup>207</sup>

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*.<sup>208</sup> 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.”<sup>209</sup>

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

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## What is permanent and what is changeable in the life of the Work (no. 10-12)

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."<sup>210</sup>

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."<sup>211</sup> 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.”<sup>212</sup>

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 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.”<sup>213</sup>

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.”<sup>214</sup>

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,

Rome, 19 March 2022

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PASTORAL  
**LETTER**

MSGR. FERNANDO OCÁRIZ

**Fraternity** |

**16/02/2023** |

*Fernando*

## Fraternity (16 February 2023)

- Introduction (no. 1-2)
- Breadth of understanding (no. 3-6)
- The treasure of forgiveness (no. 7-8)
- Spirit of service (no. 9-10)
- Sowers of peace and joy (no. 11-12)
- Family life (no. 13-15)
- In the Church and in the world (no. 16-17)

### Introduction (no. 1-2)

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

1. With this letter, I wish to invite you to consider with me some implications of those words of our Lord that we have so often meditated upon: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12).

Jesus loved us to the end, to the point of giving his life for each and every one of us. We know this and we want to believe it with a more lively and operative faith, which we ask of Him, as the apostles did: “Increase our faith” (Lk 17:5). In this way, we will be able to say with Saint John, with full conviction: “We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us” (1 Jn 4:16).

“God is love” (1 Jn 4:8), and calls us to love: “This is our loftiest vocation, our vocation *par excellence*; and it is also tied to the joy of Christian hope. One who loves has the joy of hope, of reaching the encounter with the great love that is God.”<sup>215</sup>

Our love for God – supernatural charity – is a response to that divine love for each and every one of us, which our Lord himself sets before us as the model and goal of our love for others. Love for God and love for others are so closely united that, “in any act of fraternity, the head and the heart often cannot distinguish whether it is a matter of service to God or service to our brothers and sisters, because, in the second case, what we are doing is serving God twice over.”<sup>216</sup>

2. Love for others is so decisive in our lives that “we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love our brothers” (1 Jn 3:14). Charity unfolds in countless ways and reaches the entire world. We can’t view anyone with indifference, because “each one of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.”<sup>217</sup>

I would like us to reflect on some particularly relevant attitudes and manifestations of fraternity. In a certain sense, they are all summed up in these words of Saint Josemaría: “How very insistent the Apostle Saint John was in preaching the *mandatum novum*, the new commandment that we should love one another! I would fall on my knees, without putting on any act (but this is what my heart dictates) and ask you, for the love of God, to love one another, to help one another, to lend one another a hand, to know how to forgive one another.”<sup>218</sup>

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### Breadth of understanding (no. 3-6)

#### *Breadth of understanding*

3. The word “understanding,” in the context of personal relationships, could sometimes evoke only one of its aspects: that of not being surprised by others’ defects and faults. But if this were the case, we would not fully grasp the meaning of that point from *The Way*: “Charity does not consist so much in ‘giving’ as in ‘understanding.’”<sup>219</sup>

The understanding that is the fruit of charity, of love, is “comprehensive”: it “sees,” first of all, not the defects or faults, but the virtues and good qualities of others. I remember a meditation preached by Don Javier on 26 August 1999, during a summer course in Olbeira (a conference center in Galicia, Spain). He forcefully and affectionately exhorted us “not to see people through their defects, but through their virtues.” Love makes us see, with joy, what is positive in others. “We need to rejoice in the prosperity of our neighbor as well as in our own.”<sup>220</sup> This is the complete opposite of seeing others with that dark sin of envy, which is sadness for the good others possess.

Moreover, each person is always worth more than what we are able to see with our usual way of looking at them. In some sense, what we read about in Scripture often happens in our own lives, when the Letter to the Hebrews exhorts us not to neglect hospitality since, thanks to it, “some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb 13:2).

4. The understanding that is born of love also allows us to see others’ defects and faults; thus we understand people both with their positive and negative qualities. And we can be sure – love sees this, because it is very wise – that the positive points outweigh the negative ones. In any case, what is negative is not a reason for separation, but for prayer and offering help; if possible, for more affection; and, if needed, for fraternal correction

Our Father insisted in many ways on this manifestation of charity, which is sometimes heroic: “Practice fraternal correction, *ne sit populus Domini sicut oves absque pastore* (Num 27:17), so that this supernatural Family, which is the Work of God, may not look like a group of sheep without a shepherd. I have always taught you, my daughters and sons, that in the Work each one must be both shepherd and sheep.”<sup>221</sup>

5. We are all weak, and we cannot be surprised that we misunderstand or react negatively to other people. But we should not accept and justify these reactions; rather, they should be an opportunity to ask our Lord for forgiveness and to beg Him to increase our capacity to love, to give us the greater understanding that is the fruit of love. And thus, without becoming discouraged by our weakness, we will ask God for help, so that in the end we can tell Him, filled with gratitude: “You have enlarged my heart” (Ps 119:32).

It is important, for example, for us to struggle to master and mitigate the impatience that could spontaneously arise in the face of real or not so real defects in others (sometimes, the defect may be more in our way of looking). These reactions of impatience can lead to a lack of understanding, and therefore to a lack of charity. The centuries-old words of Saint Cyprian of Carthage are very forceful: “Charity is the bond that unites brothers, the foundation of peace, the tie that gives firmness to unity. Charity is superior to hope and faith; it surpasses almsgiving and martyrdom, and will remain with us forever in heaven. But rob charity of patience, and it will be undermined.”<sup>222</sup>

6. Understanding, the fruit of fraternal love, also helps to overcome biases in our relations with one another, which could arise when we notice our differences. In reality, this

diversity is often a richness of characters, sensitivities, interests, etc. Our Father told us: “You must also constantly practice a fraternity that rises above all natural sympathy or antipathy, loving one another as true brothers or sisters, with the dealings and understanding proper to those who form a closely united family.”<sup>223</sup>

Along with the effort to love and understand others, it is also important to make it easier for them to love us. I remind you of what I have already written you: “Growing in cordiality, joyfulness, patience, optimism, refinement and in all the virtues that make living with others agreeable is important for helping people to feel welcomed and to be happy.”<sup>224</sup> Thus an atmosphere of fraternity is created in which each of us fortifies the others’ affection and, all united, we experience the ***hundredfold*** that our Lord promised us, as we journey towards eternal life (cf. Mt 19:29).

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## The treasure of forgiveness (no. 7-8)

### *The treasure of forgiveness*

7. Understanding also has a close relationship with the extraordinarily important reality of forgiveness: both asking for forgiveness and forgiving. In April 1974, our Father told us that “the most divine reality in our life as Christians, as children of God in Opus Dei, is to forgive those who have hurt us.” And then he added, with great simplicity: “I have not needed to learn to forgive, because our Lord has taught me how to love.” Among the many consequences and manifestations of divine filiation, perhaps we would not spontaneously think first of forgiveness. Nevertheless, we realize that being children of God means ***being Christ***, identifying ourselves with Him. And Christ came into this world, the eternal Son became Man, precisely in order to forgive. Therefore we can reflect on the fact that “nothing makes us more like God than being ready to forgive.”<sup>225</sup>

How often we pray and meditate on the Our Father! Forgiving others is so decisive that it is a condition for God to forgive us. How good it is to ask God to teach us to forgive, truly and always. Moreover, let us have the holy audacity to ask Him that, like our Father, we

may come to love others so much that we do not need to learn to forgive.<sup>226</sup> It would be marvelous to want to reach the point of loving so much that we never feel offended.

8. Just as important as understanding and forgiving is learning to ask for forgiveness, even in small daily conflicts. A sincere gesture of asking for forgiveness is often the only way to re-establish harmony in our relationships, even if we think – with more or less reason – that we are the offended party. It was not strict justice, based on theoretical calculations, that led the Son of God to ask his Father for forgiveness on our behalf, but a gratuitous love that thinks only of what it can do for others.

My daughters and sons, let us not think that this is something very beautiful, but beyond our own littleness. Certainly, the goal is very high. But with God's grace we can approach it little by little, if we do not let up in our spiritual efforts, responding to Love with love in an effort that is renewed each day.

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## Spirit of service (no. 9-10)

### *Spirit of service*

9. The greatest ambition of the children of God in Opus Dei . . . must always be **to serve**.”<sup>227</sup> We understand very well Saint Josemaría's insistence when we read and meditate on our Lord's words: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve” (Mk 10:45); “I am among you as the one who serves” (Lk 22:27).

The spirit of service is an expression of love, of the affection of seeing the needs of the others as very much our own. How forceful are our Father's words “I do not mind repeating it many times. Everyone needs affection, and we too need it in the Work. Strive so that, without sentimentality, your affection for your brothers may always increase. Any concern of a child of mine must be – truly! – very much our own. The day we live as strangers or as indifferent to one another, we have killed Opus Dei.”<sup>228</sup>

Without wanting to, we could live as strangers or indifferent to one another because we spend too much time in activities that in fact prevent us from getting to know one another,



from spending time with one another, from taking a positive interest in others. My daughters and sons, there come to my mind and heart those words that Saint Josemaría used to tell us with all the strength of his soul: “Love one another!”

10. We desire to serve others, knowing that by doing so we are serving Christ: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). Hence it is good for each of us to consider: “Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me.”<sup>229</sup>

We all have the experience that serving others often involves effort. “Don’t think that it is easy to live a life of service. This good desire must be translated into deeds, *for the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power* (1 Cor 4:20). And we cannot be of constant assistance to others without sacrifice.”<sup>230</sup> But this effort, done for love, is always a source of joy; a joy which, in contrast, cannot come from selfishness.

Finally, a spirit of service is an expression of fraternal love, and “fraternal love can only be gratuitous; it can never be a means of repaying others for what they have done or will do for us.”<sup>231</sup>

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## Sowers of peace and joy (no. 11-12)

### *Sowers of peace and joy*

11. One manifestation of the spirit of service, which in some way includes all the others, is that of **sowing peace and joy**. Since we can give this peace and joy only if we have it ourselves, and both are a gift from God, the best way to grow in it is to take refined care of our times of intimacy with God: the sacraments and personal prayer.

Each person’s life includes, more or less frequently and with greater or lesser intensity, sorrows and sufferings that can produce feelings of unease and sadness. These sentiments

can threaten to overwhelm us, but we can and must overcome them, recovering our joy through faith in God's love, today and now, for each of us (cf. 1 Jn. 4:16).

We need to ground our joy, not in ourselves, but in our Lord. Thus, no matter what happens, we will find the inner strength needed to forget about ourselves more readily and transmit the joy that comes from God to others. Let us read these words from the book of Nehemiah, as though they were addressed to us: "Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh 8:10).

12. With some frequency, the letters you write me contain news of difficult situations you are going through. I would like to be very close to each and every one of you, accompanying you in caring for that sick child, that mother who is very limited by age, or in situations that bring special suffering. I try to carry all of you in my heart and in my daily Mass.

In these and so many other circumstances, let us remember that God blesses with the Cross and that, as our Father assured us with his abundant experience, "genuine love brings joy in its wake, a joy that has its roots in the shape of the Cross."<sup>232</sup> Moreover, when fraternity is well lived, we are never alone. Closely united – ***cor unum et anima una*** – we carry the sweet burden of our Lord's Cross, interiorly convinced that, in the end, his yoke is easy and his burden light (cf. Mt 11:30). We have often read and meditated on those words of Saint Josemaría, sincerely desiring to make them our own: "To forget about ourselves and give ourselves to the service of souls is so effective that God rewards it with a humility filled with joy."<sup>233</sup>

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## Family life (no. 13-15)

### *Family life*

13. The great majority of you do not live in a center of the Work. However, as our Father wrote, "all of us in Opus Dei, my children, form a single home. The reason that we are a single family is not based on the material fact that we live together under the same roof.

Like the early Christians, we are *cor unum et anima una* (Acts 4:32), and no one in the Work can ever feel the bitterness of indifference.”<sup>234</sup>

In order for the great majority in the Work not living in centers (the supernumeraries and associates) to receive and contribute to the warmth of the *home* of Opus Dei, it is necessary for some (the numerary women and men) to build that home materially in the centers, which all the others participate in according to your circumstances. Certainly, the centers are very useful for the means of formation, for hosting apostolic activities, etc., although you know that all these things take place also when there are no physical centers, especially in places where the apostolic work is still just beginning.

As is natural, sometimes work, health, family duties, and other situations make it advisable or even necessary for some numerary women and men not to reside in the centers, but this does not diminish your responsibility and commitment – different, but real – to building our home.

14. In many families, it is normal for people of different generations (grandparents, parents, children) and temperaments to live together; and many families have persons with chronic illnesses of greater or lesser severity. While it is true that all this can sometimes lead to making unity in the family challenging, it is also true that very often these and other difficulties can unite families more closely, when there is true love.

My daughters and sons, the Work is a very large family, with people of different ages and personalities, and also sick people. Thanks be to God, the care and affection with which we try to look after the sick in the Work is a magnificent reality.

15. In some centers there may be more difficult situations. If at times you find family life tiring, look sincerely for the cause of this tiredness in order to remedy it. Consider whether it is due only to a shortage of material means, or to the natural effort that diligently caring for others can entail; or whether it is also due to a cooling down of affection. If the latter is the case, do not be surprised or discouraged. I encourage you to ask God, with simplicity and daring, to enlarge your heart, to help you see Him in the others, so that you will be filled with joy, as the disciples were when they saw the risen Lord: “The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (Jn 20:20).

Moreover, underlying certain character traits are sometimes sufferings that perhaps explain a person's way of being or acting. God knows each of us in depth, also our suffering, and He looks on all of us with tenderness. Let us learn from our Lord to look at everyone in this way, to understand everyone (I am repeating this deliberately), to put ourselves in the place of the other person. "How many fears and dangers can be allayed by the true love among brothers, which is not mentioned, for then it would seem to be profaned, but which shines in every little detail."<sup>235</sup>

Let us never cease to thank God for the home He has given us, with its rich diversity of personal temperaments, social situations and cultures. And at the same time, let us feel the responsibility to preserve in it a tone, an atmosphere also characterized by "extreme refinement in mutual dealings."<sup>236</sup>

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## In the Church and in the world (no. 16-17)

### *In the Church and in the world*

16. Caring for fraternity is a sign that the Work, as part of the Church, is God's family. If we strive to love, understand, forgive and serve one another, we will also contribute very directly, through the Communion of Saints, to the unity of all believers and of all humanity. Saint Josemaría said that "the principal apostolate we Christians must carry out in the world, and the best witness we can give of our faith, is to help bring about a climate of genuine charity within the Church. For who indeed could feel attracted to the Gospel if those who say they preach the Good News do not really love one another, but spend their time attacking one another, spreading slander and quarreling?"<sup>237</sup> I ask our Lord that we may always be instruments of unity in our own home, in the Work, in the Church and in the whole of society.

Caring for fraternity will also bring light and warmth to our world, which is often in darkness, or suffers from the coldness of indifference. Our homes (those of the associates, those of the supernumeraries, and the centers of the Work) need to be "bright and cheerful." Open homes, in which many people can participate, even those who perhaps

lack the warmth of a home. The witness of a Christian family striving to be united, in which, despite their personal limitations, each person is ready to forgive, love, and serve, will be a point of reference for many people. This is what the home of Nazareth was, is and always will be. Let us not forget what Saint Josemaría told us: “We belong to that family.”

Fraternity well lived is a very direct apostolate. Many people will see our affection for one another and will be able to exclaim, as they did of the first Christians, “see how they love one another.”<sup>238</sup> They will be attracted by that Christian love, by that “charity which is a participation in the infinite love which is the Holy Spirit.”<sup>239</sup>

\* \* \*

17. I will end here, re-reading with you these other words of our Father: “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 fly, to praise God with a spirit of joyful sacrifice.”<sup>240</sup>

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

Rome, 16 February 2023

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PASTORAL  
LETTER

MSGR. FERNANDO OCÁRIZ

Christian  
obedience

10/02/2024

*Fernando*

## Christian Obedience (10 February 2024)

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### Introduction (no. 1-3)

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

1. Several years ago, I wrote you [a letter dedicated to freedom](#). All of us will have tried to meditate on it and bring it into our daily lives. I reminded you then that we are called to do things out of love and not simply out of obligation. We want to follow our Lord closely, fulfilling his will, moved by the desire to respond to his love. Now I am writing to you about obedience, which at first sight might seem to be a virtue opposed to freedom. Yet we know very well that, in reality, true obedience is a consequence of freedom. Moreover, contrary to what we might expect from a merely human point of view, Christian obedience leads to ever greater freedom.

Some decades ago, a great intellectual who studied in depth the works of Saint Josemaría pointed to an important contribution of our founder, namely the fact of emphasizing that in the Christian life freedom has a certain priority over obedience.<sup>241</sup> We obey because we “feel like” doing God’s will, because it is the deepest desire of our soul. In fact, obedience

without freedom is not worthy of the human person, nor, therefore, of a son or daughter of God.

Love, as we well know, is much more than simply a passing inclination of our feelings. Love entails the readiness to give one's life for someone (cf. *Jn 15:13*). Hence one of its deepest manifestations is identifying our will with that of the one we love: "I want what you want, I want because you want, I want how you want, I want when you want."<sup>242</sup>

2. We all have often considered, at greater or lesser length, God's loving plan for the world. This plan includes creation as well as supernatural elevation, out of pure love, to share the Blessed Trinity's happiness with every man and woman, and to give us a life that fulfills every yearning of our heart. But right from the beginning, sin also made its presence felt in the world, the sin of our first parents, which was fundamentally an act of disobedience.

Nevertheless, we should never tire of contemplating with gratitude that God did not want to abandon us to our fate. In a decision of the freest possible love, which we cannot understand because it surpasses our poor understanding, he sent his Only-Begotten Son to restore us to his friendship. When Jesus dies on the Cross for all humanity – for you and for me – he gives his life in an act of full obedience to his Father's will. Freedom and obedience are closely intertwined in the story of Salvation. The lamentable consequences of human disobedience are redeemed by Christ's obedience. His grace gives us the possibility of living with the freedom of the children of God.

3. In these pages I would like to invite you to meditate with me on some aspects of the virtue of obedience, so central to the mysteries of our faith and, at the same time, so present in the life of every person. The need to obey is part of human life on many levels, since there are obligatory laws and rules: from the content of the natural law to the laws of civil coexistence; from the obedience minors owe their parents to the obedience of those who have voluntarily taken on a serious commitment to other persons or institutions. In an analogous sense, for a person to follow his or her own conscience can also be viewed as obedience. And in an even broader sense, to follow specific spiritual counsels can also be called obedience.



Being fully immersed in today's culture, we all realize that obedience is rarely considered to be something positive. Rather it is seen as a sometimes unavoidable necessity, which one tries to evade as much as possible, since it seems contrary to the great value of freedom. In addition, in not a few environments, there is a crisis of authority figures, along with a view of any dependence as something negative, as an unavoidable exception to the capacity to judge and decide for oneself. Thus, for example, today's heightened sensitivity to any kind of abuse of power, while in itself very positive and necessary, can sometimes unjustly call into question all forms of authority. In reality, there is an innate tendency to disobey, which is the legacy of original sin when "man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart (cf. *Gen 3:1-11*) and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command."<sup>243</sup>

To understand the highest value of obedience and its existential connection with freedom, we need to rise above these necessary levels of obedience in human society and contemplate Jesus Christ. This is another aspect of his centrality that has to be the goal of our life: that Christ reign in our hearts and direct our entire existence.

"Let us learn from Jesus to live obedience. He wanted to place on the pen of the Evangelist that marvelous biography which, in Latin, has only three words: *erat subditus illis* (*Lk 2:51*): he was obedient to them. See how necessary obedience is for a child of God! God himself came to obey two creatures, very perfect creatures, but creatures nonetheless: Holy Mary – greater than her only God – and Saint Joseph. And Jesus obeyed them."<sup>244</sup> The Son of God wanted to be fully man and, like any good son, to obey Mary and Joseph, since he knew that by doing so he was obeying God the Father. And this obedience marked his whole life on earth, up to his obedience on the Cross (cf. *Phil 2:8*).

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## Obeying God (no. 4-5)

4. In a strict sense only God is worthy of obedience always and at all times, because He alone fully knows the path that leads each of us to happiness. "If you obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments which I command you this day,

the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth” (*Deut 28:1*). Moses then describes all the blessings that their obedience would bring to the people.

In some way, all biblical revelation is a pedagogy leading to the most intelligent and freest obedience. It is an obedience that leads us to the full attainment of who we truly are, by identifying our will with God’s in an unconditional *yes*. Thus, through the prophets and despite the many betrayals by his people, God continues to tell them: “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you” (*Jer 7:23*). Our small plans are made great when they are integrated into His; things are never better for us than when we walk in God’s ways.

Christ shows himself to us as an obedient son. Obedient, first of all to Mary and Joseph, to relatives and authorities. But above all, obedient to God the Father. Jesus finds his nourishment in doing the Father’s will: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (*Jn 4:34*). Even in his most difficult moments, the Son makes the Father’s will his own, despite his deep awareness of the suffering this entails: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done” (*Lk 22:42*). Saint Paul writes that “being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (cf. *Phil 2:7-8*).

But it is not Christ’s death in itself alone that has brought us salvation, but his free and loving obedience to the Father in order to become one of us and give his life for each of us: “By one man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (*Rom 5:19*). His is an obedience that is not restricted to specific moments or instances, but is a way of acting at all times, docile “to the end” (*Jn 13:1*).

5. When Saint Peter was forbidden by the national and religious authorities to preach in Jesus’ name, he responded, “We must obey God rather than men” (*Acts 5:29*). But as Benedict XVI remarked, “this implies that we truly know God and that we truly wish to obey him. God is not a pretext for one’s personal will, but is really the One who calls and invites us, if necessary, even to martyrdom. Therefore, in measuring up to this word that ushers in a new history of freedom in the world, let us pray above all to know God, to know God humbly and truly, and in knowing God, to learn the true obedience that is the foundation of human freedom.”<sup>245</sup>

Those who seek to know God undertake this continuous search with great hope and trust, for from Him we can expect nothing but blessings, even if at times they are obscure or hard to understand, or make us suffer. In this sense, personal prayer also entails an attitude of obedience. “Lord,” Saint Josemaría prayed, “we are ready to heed whatever you want to tell us. Speak to us: we are attentive to your voice. May your words enkindle our will so that we launch out fervently to obey you.”<sup>246</sup>

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### God’s will and human mediation (no. 6-7)

6. What God wants for us is often presented to us through the mediation of others. In the first place, it comes through the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. “Obedience is the fundamental decision to accept what is asked of us, and to do so as a concrete sign of that universal sacrament of salvation which is the Church.”<sup>247</sup> God can also make us see his will through the people around us, invested with greater or lesser authority, depending on the specific context. Because we know that God can speak to us through other people or through ordinary events, the conviction that we can hear his voice in them generates in us a docile attitude towards his designs, which can also be hidden in the words of those who accompany us on our path.

Saint Josemaría, aware of the delicate nature of this mediation (listening to God, but through ordinary men and women), advised fostering an attitude of humility, sincerity and interior silence. “Sometimes he suggests his wishes in a whisper, deep in our conscience; and we must listen carefully to recognize his voice and be faithful. Often he speaks to us through other people. But when we see their defects or doubt whether they are well informed – whether they have grasped all the aspects of the problem – we feel inclined to disobey. All this may have a divine meaning, for God does not impose a blind obedience on us. He wants us to obey intelligently, and we have to feel responsible for helping others with the light of our own intelligence. But let us be sincere with ourselves: let us examine, in every case, whether it is love for the truth that moves us or selfishness and attachment to our own judgment.”<sup>248</sup>

7. Moreover, we need to keep in mind that those who hold positions of authority at various levels are not called to do so because they are perfect. We do not give heed to those in authority because of their personal qualities. “What a pity that whoever is in charge doesn’t give you good example! But, is it for his personal qualities that you obey him? Or do you conveniently interpret Saint Paul’s *obedite praepositis vestris*, ‘obey your leaders,’ with a qualification of your own – always provided they have virtues to my taste”?<sup>249</sup>

Nor does this mean that those who give indications or advice cannot make mistakes. They are well aware of this and, if necessary, they will ask for forgiveness. With intelligence and sincerity and in a context of supernatural faith and trust, we can always confront this possibility of error in one way or another, depending on the nature of the matter and the area in question. And we do so with humility, because it is reasonable to doubt our own judgment at least a little and to dialogue trustingly with those in authority when it seems to us that a mistake has been made.

Saint Thomas explains that obedience is the virtue that inclines us to fulfill the legitimate directive of those in authority, inasmuch as this obedience is a manifestation of God’s will.<sup>250</sup> Naturally, not every legitimate directive is necessarily the best possible one. Nevertheless, obedience will then be the path to fruitfulness, since sometimes God gives more supernatural value to humility and unity than to the fact of being more or less right. Hence the importance of supernatural outlook, of not limiting oneself to a merely human evaluation of the indications received.

In any case, those in authority need to have extreme refinement in order not to impose their own criteria unnecessarily and to prevent their indications or advice from being interpreted as though they were a crystal-clear expression of God’s will. As I wrote to you in my 9 January 2018 letter: “Giving directives with respect for souls is, first of all, to delicately respect the privacy of consciences, without confusing government and spiritual accompaniment. Secondly, this respect leads one to distinguish directives from what are only opportune exhortations, counsels, or suggestions. And thirdly (and not, for that reason, less important), is the need to govern with such great trust in others that one always tries to take into account, to the extent possible, the opinion of the people involved” (no. 13).

Let us contemplate, above all, Christ's example. "Jesus obeys Joseph and Mary. God has come to the world to obey, and to obey creatures."<sup>251</sup> It is very significant that, after Jesus tells his parents in the Temple, "I must be in the concerns of my Father," Saint Luke adds that Jesus "*erat subditus illis*, he was subject to them" (cf. *Lk* 2:49-51). Following God's will, which we must seek always and in everything, is often found *in* trustingly following certain people.

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### Obedience and freedom (no. 8-10)

8. In all of human history, no act has been so deeply free as our Lord's self-giving on the Cross (cf. *Jn* 10:17-18). "The Lord lived the crowning point of his freedom on the Cross as a summit of love. When they shouted at him on Calvary: 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross,' he showed his freedom as the Son precisely by remaining on that scaffold, to do the Father's merciful will to the very end."<sup>252</sup>

The Cross, wrote Saint Josemaria, "is not pain, or annoyance, or bitterness. It is the holy wood on which Jesus Christ triumphs, and where we triumph too, when we receive cheerfully and generously what He sends us."<sup>253</sup> The Cross shows us most clearly what I mentioned at the beginning of this letter, namely that freedom and obedience are not opposed, because in fact one can obey out of love and one can only love in freedom. More specifically, Christian obedience not only is not contrary to freedom, but it is an exercise of freedom. "I am a great friend of freedom, and that is precisely why I love this Christian virtue so much,"<sup>254</sup> wrote our Father, referring to obedience.

It is always possible to do what we should "because I feel like it," out of love. And when it is for love of God, this "because I feel like it" is "the most supernatural reason," as Saint Josemaría also said. Hence "nothing is more false than to oppose freedom to self-giving, because self-giving is a consequence of freedom."<sup>255</sup>

9. “Love and do what you will.”<sup>256</sup> Saint Augustine’s famous statement, as he himself wrote, means that those who do what is good moved by charity do not act only out of necessity or obligation, because *libertas est caritatis*, “freedom belongs to charity.”<sup>257</sup> Thus we can understand why Christ’s law is “the perfect law of freedom” (*Jas 1:25*), since all of it is summed up, “recapitulated,” in love (cf. *Rom 13:8-9*).

In everything we can act freely like Christ, by making our own what we are told, out of love. Hence, “in obeying, we must listen, because we are not inert or passive instruments, without responsibility or thought. And then, with creativity, with initiative, with spontaneity, we put all the energies of our intellect and will into what is indicated, and into everything that is indicated and only what is indicated. Anything else would be anarchy. Obedience in the Work fosters the development of all your personal values and helps you to live, grow and acquire a greater maturity without losing your personality. You are the same person at the age of two as at the age of eighty-two.”<sup>258</sup> This initiative, naturally, is not limited to the occasions when we need to obey. We can always make suggestions and contribute with our creativity wherever we are, without waiting to receive indications, but always in union with those in authority.

Saint Basil the Great said that it is characteristic of children to obey out of love: “Either we turn away from evil out of fear of punishment and we are in the state of a slave, or we seek the incentive of a reward and resemble mercenaries, or rather we obey out of love for the one who commands . . . and then we have the disposition of children.”<sup>259</sup> To obey out of love is not a form of voluntarism that dispenses with our intelligence. Rather, it means bringing into play all the powers of our soul, using the best of our intellect in seeking the good by reasoning, and the best of our will in desiring to carry it out.

In fact, without intelligence and freedom – above all without interior freedom – a fully human obedience is not possible. And even less so is an obedience like that of Jesus. As our Father said, “I do not think that there can be truly Christian obedience unless that obedience is voluntary and responsible. The children of God are not stones or corpses. They are intelligent and free beings, all raised to the same supernatural order.”<sup>260</sup>

10. But we can ask ourselves: is it possible to obey without understanding, or even having a different opinion on the matter? Clearly it is. And then too – perhaps even more so –

what is asked of us can be done out of love, and therefore with freedom. Here, together with charity, faith will often come into play. I obey without understanding or without having the same opinion, when I accept that the indication comes from prudent people, who can judge better than I can myself; or when I accept that, once things have been carefully considered, a decision needs to be made, and it falls to some particular person to make it. Obedience becomes an act of faith, when we see the grace of the Holy Spirit in that decision and in our willingness to accept it.

As Saint Thomas taught, following Aristotle, the will is the faculty that properly directs the person, although it needs the understanding to present to it the objects of choice.<sup>261</sup> From the heart comes all that is good and all that is evil (cf. *Lk* 6:45); a person can decide not to want to understand, or not to want to dialogue in order to better understand a question. The will – as experience shows – can so dominate the intellect that it can even force it to deny something objectively evident. But our free will can also spur our intellect to embark on new paths, without having understood everything at a given moment.

If, in the face of difficulties and suffering, we find ourselves bewildered and unable to understand, it will be helpful to contemplate Jesus who, in his human nature, also wanted to undergo this kind of suffering. In praying “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (*Mt* 27:46), he fulfills the prophetic words of Psalm 22. His response, with an ardent freedom in the midst of his suffering, is also nourished by the psalms: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (*Lk* 23:46, cf. *Ps* 31:6). The obedience of Jesus makes reparation for the disobedience of Adam (cf. *Rom* 5:19). His whole life and death is obedience to God the Father and the cause of our salvation (cf. *Phil* 2:6-11).

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## Obedience and trust (no. 11)

11. Obedience and trust also require each other, to the point that, when they are genuine, we pass naturally from the one to the other. Where trust exists, consulting the judgment of another person and, if necessary, making it our own, is a normal manifestation of

wanting to choose what is best. On the contrary, when trust is weakened, obedience runs the risk of becoming something purely external, formal and distant. Therefore, in order to facilitate a healthy obedience, an atmosphere of affection and good will is essential. That people know they are loved and not controlled, that they are listened to carefully, that they see their opinions are valued: all these attitudes enhance freedom and, at the same time, obedience.

Saint Josemaría stressed that trust is the key to building a friendship between parents and children: “if they have no freedom, if they see that no one trusts them, children will always be inclined to deceive their parents.”<sup>262</sup> When trust is absent, distances are quickly created and transparency is easily lost, because intimacy is a delicate area that needs a safe environment to flourish. Trying to ensure a merely external obedience, without a communion of wills, is like building a house on sand (cf. *Mt 7:26*).

In the mission of creating an atmosphere of trust, those who occupy a position of authority in the family or in a group have a greater responsibility. In fact, their first act of service can be to actively foster this space of trust with everyone, while at the same leading the way in searching for God’s will for themselves and for their mission. Thus, by leaning on one another, the others will also seek and find God’s will. Even with the necessary organization (that which is indispensable, since the Work is a “disorganized organization”<sup>263</sup>), everyone should be able to know and feel, as our Father said, that they are “as free as birds.”<sup>264</sup>

It was precisely the need for a context of trust and family warmth that led Saint Josemaría to say that, in the Work, the strongest command is “please.” This was not simply a question of terminology, but a sign of the natural attitude found among intelligent and free adults within a family environment. Moreover, the fact that the Work is a *supernatural* family means that faith and charity, together with trust, are the true foundations both of the exercise of authority and of obedience.

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Obedience and apostolic fruitfulness (no. 12-13)



12. Our Lord “learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (*Heb 5:8-9*). Our salvation, as the fruit of Christ’s obedience unto death on the Cross, also illuminates the relationship between obedience and the apostolic fruitfulness of our life.

We have often meditated on that scene where Peter obeyed our Lord, even though from a human point of view it was not very reasonable to follow his instructions: “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch” (*Lk 5:4*). Let us consider this slowly. How much good followed from Peter’s obedience to our Lord’s words *Duc in altum!* “The power of obedience! The lake of Genesareth had denied its fishes to Peter’s nets. A whole night in vain. Then, obedient, he lowered his net again to the water and they caught *piscium multitudinem copiosam*, a huge number of fish. Believe me: the miracle is repeated each day.”<sup>265</sup>

13. In the apostolic mission, we can and should have a wide-ranging personal initiative, which is the fruit of our love for God and for others. And at the same time, following the person who directs them, we need to bring forward so many activities organized in the centers of the Work, with fidelity to the means that our Father transmitted to us. We do all this without forgetting that our principal means will always be prayer. “Prayer, this is our strength: we have never had any other weapon.”<sup>266</sup>

In the direction of the Work and in the organization of its apostolates, the manner of obeying is that proper to a family, to a communion of persons. To think of a communion of persons is to think of a communion of freedoms, a communion of personal initiatives that are also “doing Opus Dei,” and a communion of generations. The conviction that God acts in the hearts of all, and that we are all attentive to the divine will, gives rise to the obedience proper to a family, in which each member seeks actively to help carry out the common project. Understood and lived in this way, obedience is an expression of unity, of that unity which is precisely the condition for apostolic fruitfulness: *ut omnes unum sint... ut mundus credat*, that all may be one, so that the world may believe (*Jn 17:21*).

While respecting strictly the separation between spiritual accompaniment and the government of persons, we must always live and work with great gratitude for our

Christian vocation in the Work, fostering the riches of each person, so that we can all work together as a team and as a family.

Cultivating the authentic virtue of obedience protects us both from the inability to listen and from the servility that only executes without the mediation of all the interior richness that God has given to every person. Saint Josemaría warned us about these possibilities. He said that, on the one hand, “most acts of disobedience come from not knowing how to ‘listen’ to what one is being asked to do, and in the end are a lack of humility or of interest in serving.”<sup>267</sup> On the other hand, precisely as a consequence of the desire to listen with an attitude of service, he said that “in Opus Dei we obey with our head and our will; not like corpses. I can’t go anywhere with corpses; I bury them piously.”<sup>268</sup> Hence to obey is not simply to carry out the will of another person, but to collaborate with that person in a union of wills and heads, of thinking.

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### The intelligent obedience of Saint Joseph (no. 14)

14. In his letter on Saint Joseph, Pope Francis considered how “in every situation, Joseph declared his own *fiat*, like Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in Gethsemane.”<sup>269</sup> When Saint Josemaría spoke about obedience, he often referred to Saint Joseph, because he saw in the patriarch a heart eager to listen, a heart that was attentive to God and also attentive to the circumstances and the people around him. For example, in speaking about the return from Egypt, he points out how “Joseph’s faith does not falter; he obeys quickly and to the letter. To understand this lesson of the Holy Patriarch better, we should remember that Joseph’s faith is active, that his prompt obedience is not a passive submission to the course of events.”<sup>270</sup>

In this regard, our Founder appreciated the fact that Saint Joseph, being as he was a man of prayer, applied his intelligence to the situation facing him: “In the various circumstances of his life, Saint Joseph never refuses to think, never neglects his responsibilities. On the contrary, he puts all his human experience at the service of faith .

. . That is the way Saint Joseph's faith was: full, trusting, complete. And it expressed itself in an effective dedication to the will of God with an intelligent obedience."<sup>271</sup>

We can understand why Saint Josemaría, especially for those called to be saints amid the changing and challenging situations of this world, stresses the need to learn an intelligent obedience that is integrated into our personal freedom.

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### Mary's obedience (no. 15)

15. In recent years, devotion to Our Lady Untier of Knots has spread throughout the world. This devotion has very ancient roots, for already at the beginning of the third century Saint Irenaeus of Lyons wrote: "Eve, by her disobedience, tied the knot of misfortune for the human race; but Mary, by her obedience, untied it."<sup>272</sup> How many knots that seem impossible to untie in the world and in our lives will be undone if, like our Lady, we live for God's plans!

Our Father said, "Following her example of obedience to God, we can learn to serve with full freedom. In Mary we don't find the slightest trace of the attitude of the foolish virgins, who obey, but thoughtlessly. Our Lady listens attentively to what God wants, ponders what she doesn't fully understand and asks about what she doesn't know. Then she gives herself completely to doing the divine will: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word.' Isn't that marvelous? Our Lady, our teacher in all we do, shows us that obedience to God is not servile, and does not bypass our conscience. Mary will help us to discover, deep in our heart, the freedom of the children of God."<sup>273</sup>

If at some point our obedience should seem to conflict with our freedom, let us turn to Mary. Our Lady will obtain for us the grace to find, in authentic obedience, the freedom of God's children. And, along with freedom, joy.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

Rome, 10 February 2024

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PASTORAL  
LETTER

MSGR. FERNANDO OCÁRIZ

Joy |

10/03/2025 |

*Fernando*

## On Joy (10 March 2025)

- Letter on joy (no. 1)
- The joy of faith (no. 2)
- Rejoice in your hope, Rom 12:12 (no. 3-4)
- The joy of a heart in love (no. 5-6)

### Letter on joy (no. 1)

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

1. In this brief letter, following a suggestion one of your sisters made a few weeks ago, I would like to reflect with you on a few aspects of joy, especially by considering some words of St. Josemaría.

Joy, in general, is the effect of the possession and experience of something good. Depending on the type of goodness, joy has a greater or lesser intensity and permanence. When the joy is not the consequence of some particular experience of a good, but the consequence of one's whole existence, it is usually called happiness. In any case, the deepest joy and happiness is that which is principally rooted in love.

These are difficult times in the world and in the Church (and the Work is a small part of the Church). Actually, in one way or another all times have had their lights and shadows. For this reason it is especially necessary to foster a joyful attitude. Always and in every circumstance we can and should be happy, because this is what our Lord wants: “that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (Jn 15:11). He said this to the apostles and, in them, to all of us who would come afterwards. Therefore “joy is a condition proper to the life of the children of God.”<sup>274</sup>

On the contrary, “the sadness which is a vice is caused by a disordered self-love, and this self-love is not a special vice, but the general root of the vices.”<sup>275</sup> This statement by St. Thomas could surprise us if we think, for example, of someone suffering because of the

death of a loved one. In reality, such a situation would not necessarily bring sadness in that sense, but rather sorrow, which is not the same thing. In fact, it is a common experience that not all sorrow or all renunciation causes sadness, especially when they are accepted with love and for love. Thus a mother's sacrifices for her children, at times very great, can produce pain and sorrow, but without causing sadness.

"To be happy, what you need is not an easy life but a heart in love."<sup>276</sup> All of us who saw and heard our Father in Villa Tevere during the last seven or eight years of his life saw that he was truly content and happy, even though he suffered greatly during these years, both physically and, above all, because of the serious difficulties in the life of the Church.

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## The joy of faith (no. 2)

2. Our natural joy, elevated by grace, is found especially in union with God's plans. To the shepherds at Bethlehem, the angels announce the "great joy" (Lk 2:10) of Jesus' birth; when the Magi see the star again, "they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" (Mt 2:10). Finally, the apostles were filled with joy at seeing the Risen Jesus (cf. Jn 20:20).

Christian joy is not merely the joy of a "healthy animal,"<sup>277</sup> but the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the soul (cf. Gal 5:22). And it is usually permanent, since it is grounded in God, as St. Paul exhorts: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice" (Phil 4:4).

This joy *in the Lord* is the joy of faith in his fatherly love: "Cheerfulness is a necessary consequence of our divine filiation, of knowing that our Father God loves us with a love of predilection, that he welcomes us, helps us and forgives us. Remember this and never forget it: even if it should seem at times that everything is collapsing, *nothing* is collapsing at all, because God does not lose battles."<sup>278</sup>

Nevertheless, in the face of difficulties or suffering, our personal weakness can cause this joy to wane, especially because of a possible weakness at those times of our faith in God's omnipotent love for us. "A child of God, a Christian who lives by faith, can suffer and cry;

he or she may have reasons to be sorrowful, but never to be sad.”<sup>279</sup> And therefore in order to foster, or recover, joy, it is good to renew the conviction of our faith in God’s love. This conviction enables us to say with St. John: “We have come to know and believe the love God has for us” (*1 Jn* 4:16).

Faith tends to express itself, in one way or another (with words or without words), in prayer. And with prayer comes joy, because “when a Christian lives by faith, with a faith that is not merely a word, but a reality expressed in personal prayer, the certainty of divine love is manifested in joy, in interior freedom.”<sup>280</sup>

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### Rejoice in your hope, Rom 12:12 (no. 3-4)

3. Faith in God’s love for us brings with it great hope. This enables us to understand the definition given in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for” (Heb 11:1). Hope has as its specific object a future and possible good. And the good that faith leads us to hope to attain is, above all, full happiness and joy in definitive union with God in glory. As St. Paul tells us, it is “the hope kept safe for you in heaven” (Col 1:5). This certainty gives us the assurance that we will not lack the means to reach this goal if we freely accept them, that is, the means to begin and begin again, as often as necessary.

At times, in various ways, God’s will is made known to us and makes us feel inadequate and powerless. But even then we can have “the assurance of the impossible,”<sup>281</sup> like our Father at the beginning of the Work, when the means needed were totally absent and he was living in a social environment deeply opposed to Christian life.

4. We have, and can always have, a hope that “does not disappoint,” not because of assurance in ourselves or in anything in this world, but “because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5).

Sometimes, difficulties of various kinds can lead us to think, for example, that our apostolic work is not effective, that we fail to see any fruit from our efforts and prayers. But we know very well – and we should frequently renew this conviction of faith – that in



the Lord our work is not in vain (cf. 1 Cor 15:58). And, as our Father assured us, “Nothing is lost.”

Hope and joy are gifts from God. This is what St. Paul asks for everyone: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom 15:13).

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### The joy of a heart in love (no. 5-6)

5. Love for God and for others is linked, along with joy, to faith and to hope. “One who loves has the joy of hope, of reaching the encounter with the great love that is the Lord.”<sup>282</sup>

The various descriptions of love agree in what is essential: desiring –and to the extent possible, seeking – the good of the person who is loved, along with the consequent joy that comes from knowing that this good is finally present.

In the case of our love for God, does this include desiring for him a good he does not have? We know that, in creating us as free beings, God wanted to run the *risk* of our freedom.<sup>283</sup> We can refuse to give to God something that he desires: our love. In a certain way, the joy involved in loving God is not just that aspect of the love found in the good that it means for us, but also the joy of being able to give our love to God.

Love, as a source of joy, is manifested in a special way in giving ourselves to others, striving to be, despite our defects, “sowers of peace and joy.”<sup>284</sup> Moreover, in this way we rejoice in seeing the joy of others and, like our Father, we can truly say to them: “My joy is your joy.”<sup>285</sup>

6. “True love demands going out of ourselves, giving ourselves. Genuine love brings joy in its wake, a joy that has its roots in the shape of the Cross.”<sup>286</sup> Especially, the Cross accepted out of love for God is a source of happiness. This is our Lord’s teaching: “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt 5:11-12). In fact, all the Beatitudes

describe the roots of joy: “The Beatitudes always lead you to joy; they are the path to joy.”<sup>287</sup>

There are many causes for a person losing their joy, especially the clear experience of their own weakness, the awareness of their sins. But faith in God’s love and the sure hope that accompanies that faith are the foundation, as St. Josemaría said, of “the deep joy of repentance.”<sup>288</sup> And then, despite our limitations and defects, with our Lord’s help and with our affection we can help “make the path of others pleasant and easy.”<sup>289</sup>

We invoke the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, as *Causa nostrae laetitiae*. May our Lady help us to be always happy and to be sowers of peace and joy in all the circumstances of our lives. We ask her for this in a special way now in this jubilee year of hope, closely united to the suffering of Pope Francis.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

Rome, March 10, 2025

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- <sup>1</sup> St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 132.
- <sup>2</sup> See Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, *Incipit*.
- <sup>3</sup> St Josemaría, *The Way*, 833.
- <sup>4</sup> St John Paul II, Homily, 23 March 1980. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et spes*, 22.
- <sup>5</sup> Cf. *The Roman Missal*, Preface I of Saints.
- <sup>6</sup> Don Javier, Letter, 28 November 2002, 18 in *Family Letters* (5), 125. Cf. *Instruction*, 31 May 1936, 66.
- <sup>7</sup> St Josemaría, Notes from a get-together, 6 February 1967, in *Noticias* 1967, p. 84 (AGP, Library, P02).
- <sup>8</sup> St Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 67.
- <sup>9</sup> St Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, 1 April 1962 (AGP, Library, P09, p. 46).
- <sup>10</sup> St Josemaría, *Instruction*, 8 December 1941, note 122.
- <sup>11</sup> See St Josemaría, *The Forge*, 270.
- <sup>12</sup> St Josemaría, *Instruction*, May 1935-14 September 1950, 15.
- <sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 20.
- <sup>14</sup> St Josemaría, *The Forge*, 565.
- <sup>15</sup> St Josemaría, *Letter 11 March 1940*, 55.
- <sup>16</sup> St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 30.
- <sup>17</sup> Blessed Alvaro, Letter, 1 December 1985, in *Family Letters* (1), 204.
- <sup>18</sup> St Josemaría, *The Way*, 372.
- <sup>19</sup> St Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 226.
- <sup>20</sup> See Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera*, 20 November 2016, 10.
- <sup>21</sup> St Josemaría, *Instruction*, May 1935-14 September 1950, note 5.
- <sup>22</sup> Don Javier, Letter, 28 November 2002, 11, in *Family Letters* (5), 118.
- <sup>23</sup> Blessed Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, 41.
- <sup>24</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 213.
- <sup>25</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 December 2005, 17; see 1 *Jn* 4:10.
- <sup>26</sup> St Josemaría, Notes from a get-together, 18 June 1974, in *Catechesis en América* (1974) vol. I, p. 549 (AGP, Library, P04).
- <sup>27</sup> St Josemaría, Letter 24 October 1942, 3.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>30</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2204.
- <sup>31</sup> St Josemaría, *The Way*, 382.
- <sup>32</sup> St John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, 6 January 2001, 50.
- <sup>33</sup> St Josemaría, *Furrow*, 827.
- <sup>34</sup> See Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Decree 626/12/L, 10 November 2012.
- <sup>35</sup> St Josemaría, *Conversations*, 19.
- <sup>36</sup> St Josemaría, *The Forge*, 11.
- <sup>37</sup> St Josemaría, *The Way*, 535.
- <sup>38</sup> Liturgy of the Hours, Vespers of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, Antiphon *ad Magnificat*.
- <sup>39</sup> St Josemaría, *Furrow*, 56.
- <sup>40</sup> Saint Josemaría, Letter, 31 May 1954, no. 22.
- <sup>41</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, no. 170.
- <sup>42</sup> Saint Josemaría, Letter, 24 October 1965, no. 3.
- <sup>43</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe salvi*, 30 November 2007, no. 24.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 129.

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- <sup>46</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 25.
- <sup>47</sup> Saint Josemaria, *The Way of the Cross*, 10th Station.
- <sup>48</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 26.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 6, 11.
- <sup>51</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 27.
- <sup>52</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily*, 15 August 2014.
- <sup>53</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, 29 June 2009, no. 68.
- <sup>54</sup> Saint Augustine, *In Epist. Ioan. ad Parthos*, VII, 8.
- <sup>55</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 30.
- <sup>56</sup> Saint Thomas, *In III Sent.*, d. 29, q. un., a. 8, q1a. 3 s.c. 1.
- <sup>57</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 17.
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- <sup>67</sup> Javier Echevarría, *Pastoral letter*, 14 February 1997, no. 15.
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- <sup>70</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 14 September 1951, no. 38.
- <sup>71</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 8 August 1956, no. 38.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>73</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 29 September 1957, no. 70.
- <sup>74</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 2 February 1945, no. 19.
- <sup>75</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 193.
- <sup>76</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 2 October 1939, no. 10.
- <sup>77</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 24 October 1942, no. 46.
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- <sup>90</sup> Benedict XVI, Enc. *Deus caritas est*, 25 December 2005, no. 17.
- <sup>91</sup> Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, no. 154.
- <sup>92</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 31 May 1943, no. 8.
- <sup>93</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 11 March 1940, no. 70.

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- <sup>94</sup> Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, a.1, c.  
<sup>95</sup> Saint John Paul II, Address, 18 February 1981.  
<sup>96</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 15 September 2010.  
<sup>97</sup> Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, no. 152.  
<sup>98</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 225.  
<sup>99</sup> Saint Gregory Nazianzus, *Sermon* 43.  
<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>101</sup> Saint Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 565.  
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<sup>103</sup> Saint John Paul II, Apost. Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, 6 January 2001, no. 43.  
<sup>104</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 9 January 1951, no. 30.  
<sup>105</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 24 October 1965, no. 10.  
<sup>106</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 746. Cf. *The Way*, no. 463.  
<sup>107</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Catechesis of Beginners*, 15, 23.  
<sup>108</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 8 August 1956, no. 38.  
<sup>109</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 24 October 1965, no. 2.  
<sup>110</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 31 May 1954, no. 23.  
<sup>111</sup> Saint Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 943.  
<sup>112</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 11 March 1940, 71.  
<sup>113</sup> *Pastoral Letter*, 9 January 2018, 14.  
<sup>114</sup> Saint Thomas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q.23, a.1, c.  
<sup>115</sup> *Pastoral Letter*, 9 January 2018, 13.  
<sup>116</sup> Blessed Alvaro, Foreword, in *Friends of God*.  
<sup>117</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 29 September 1957, 76.  
<sup>118</sup> Saint Josemaria, quoted by Blessed Alvaro in *Family Letters* (1), 115.  
<sup>119</sup> Saint Josemaria, Notes taken in a family gathering, October 1972.  
<sup>120</sup> Saint Josemaria, Notes taken in a meditation, 29 February 1964.  
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<sup>122</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 24 March 1930, 11.  
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<sup>125</sup> Pope Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Christus vivit*, 176.  
<sup>126</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Furrow*, 191.  
<sup>127</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 24 October 1965, 16.  
<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.  
<sup>129</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 11 March 1940, 55.  
<sup>130</sup> Saint Josemaria, *Letter* 24 October 1942, 18.  
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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.  
<sup>133</sup> Cf. Saint Josemaria, *Furrow*, 813.  
<sup>134</sup> *Letter* 9 January 1932, 9.  
<sup>135</sup> *Letter* 12 December 1952, 35.  
<sup>136</sup> *Letter* 31 May 1954, 17.  
<sup>137</sup> *Letter* 19 March 1967, 93.  
<sup>138</sup> *Friends of God*, 146.  
<sup>139</sup> See St Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ch. 8, lec. 3.  
<sup>140</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, 277.  
<sup>141</sup> Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 3.  
<sup>142</sup> *The Forge*, 69.

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- <sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 835.
- <sup>144</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 121.
- <sup>145</sup> *Conversations*, 19.
- <sup>146</sup> *Letter 31 May 1954*, 34.
- <sup>147</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 74.
- <sup>148</sup> *The Forge*, 156.
- <sup>149</sup> *Letter 24 December 1951*, 137.
- <sup>150</sup> *Letter 25 January 1961*, 11.
- <sup>151</sup> Bl. Alvaro del Portillo, note 135 to the *Instruction on St Michael's work*.
- <sup>152</sup> *See Message*, 20 July 2020.
- <sup>153</sup> *Letter 29 September 1957*, 8.
- <sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.
- <sup>155</sup> Javier Echevarría, Pastoral Letter, 28 November 1995, 16.
- <sup>156</sup> *Instruction on St Gabriel's work*, 113.
- <sup>157</sup> *Instruction on the supernatural spirit of the Work*, 28.
- <sup>158</sup> Notes from a meditation, 28 April 1963
- <sup>159</sup> St John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, 30.
- <sup>160</sup> *Conversations*, 88.
- <sup>161</sup> *Letter 29 July 1965*, 11.
- <sup>162</sup> Notes from a get-together, 15 September 1962.
- <sup>163</sup> *Letter 29 September 1957*, 13.
- <sup>164</sup> *Letter 8 August 1956*, 7.
- <sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.
- <sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>167</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 163.
- <sup>168</sup> *Instruction on St Michael's work*, 84.
- <sup>169</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Address, 22 December 2006.
- <sup>170</sup> *The Way*, 380.
- <sup>171</sup> *Conversations*, 92.
- <sup>172</sup> *Letter to the General Council of Opus Dei*, 18 December 1947.
- <sup>173</sup> *Instruction on St Gabriel's work*, 9.
- <sup>174</sup> *Letter 9 January 1959*, 7.
- <sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.
- <sup>177</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 30.
- <sup>178</sup> *Letter 9 January 1959*, 53.
- <sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.
- <sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.
- <sup>181</sup> *Instruction on St Gabriel's work*, 23.
- <sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>183</sup> *Letter 24 October 1942*, 46.
- <sup>184</sup> *Letter 9 January 1959*, 13.
- <sup>185</sup> Notes from a family meeting with priests, 26 October 1972, in the General Archives of the Prelature, Section P04 1972, II, p. 767.
- <sup>186</sup> Words taken from his preaching, in the General Archives of the Prelature, Section P01 1975, p. 809.
- <sup>187</sup> *Instruction on the supernatural spirit of the Work*, 28.
- <sup>188</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Address, 12 May 2010.
- <sup>189</sup> Pope Francis, Homily, 15 April 2020.
- <sup>190</sup> *Letter 28 March 1973*, 9.

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- <sup>191</sup> *The Way*, 999.
- <sup>192</sup> Saint John Paul II, Homily, 26 January 1979.
- <sup>193</sup> *Christ Is Passing By*, 64.
- <sup>194</sup> *Christ Is Passing By*, 131.
- <sup>195</sup> Letter 6 May 1945, 23.
- <sup>196</sup> Letter 24 March 1931, 43.
- <sup>197</sup> Letter 31 May 1954, 22.
- <sup>198</sup> St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, 19 February 1974.
- <sup>199</sup> *Christ Is Passing By*, 122.
- <sup>200</sup> *Instruction*, 1 April 1934, 1.
- <sup>201</sup> *Conversations*, 118.
- <sup>202</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe salvi*, 31.
- <sup>203</sup> Letter 24 March 1930, 23.
- <sup>204</sup> Bishop Javier Echevarría, Pastoral Letter, 28 November 1995, 16.
- <sup>205</sup> *The Way*, 813
- <sup>206</sup> Saint Augustine, *De bono viduitatis*, 21, 26.
- <sup>207</sup> Letter 14 February 1974, 23.
- <sup>208</sup> *Christ Is Passing By*, 45.
- <sup>209</sup> Letter 15 October 1948, 26.
- <sup>210</sup> Letter 29 September 1957, 56.
- <sup>211</sup> Letter 14 February 1950, 21.
- <sup>212</sup> Letter 9 January 1932, 92.
- <sup>213</sup> Bishop Javier Echevarría, Pastoral Letter, 28 November 1995, 11.
- <sup>214</sup> Letter 16 July 1933, 26.
- <sup>215</sup> Francis, *Audience*, 15 March 2017.
- <sup>216</sup> Saint Josemaría, *Instruction*, May 1935-September 1950, no. 75. Hereafter, texts in which the author is not cited are by Saint Josemaría.
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- <sup>218</sup> *The Forge*, no. 454.
- <sup>219</sup> *The Way*, no. 463.
- <sup>220</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, 5, 3: PL 76, 1094 B.
- <sup>221</sup> Letter 15, no. 169.
- <sup>222</sup> Saint Cyprian, *De bono patientiae*, no. 15: PL 4, 631 C.
- <sup>223</sup> Letter 30, no. 28.
- <sup>224</sup> Pastoral Letter, 1 November 2019, no. 9.
- <sup>225</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *Comment. in Matthaëum*, Homily XIX, no. 7: PG 57, 283.
- <sup>226</sup> Cf. *Furrow*, no. 804.
- <sup>227</sup> Letter 15, no. 38.
- <sup>228</sup> General Archives of the Prelature, Library, P01.
- <sup>229</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 18.
- <sup>230</sup> Letter 8, no. 4.
- <sup>231</sup> Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, no. 228.
- <sup>232</sup> *The Forge*, no. 28
- <sup>233</sup> Letter 2, no. 15.
- <sup>234</sup> Letter 11, no. 23.
- <sup>235</sup> *Furrow*, no. 767.
- <sup>236</sup> *Instruction*, 1 April 1934, no. 63.
- <sup>237</sup> *Friends of God*, no. 226.
- <sup>238</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 39: PL 1, 471.

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- <sup>239</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 24, a. 7 c.
- <sup>240</sup> *Letter 14 February 1974*, no. 23.
- <sup>241</sup> Cf. Cornelio Fabro, "A Teacher of Christian Freedom," in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2 July 1977. Also see "[The Primacy of Freedom](#)."
- <sup>242</sup> Saint Josemaría, Prayer to the Holy Spirit, April 1934.
- <sup>243</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 397.
- <sup>244</sup> Saint Josemaría, *Letter 38*, no. 41. Below, quotations that do not mention the author are from Saint Josemaría.
- <sup>245</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily*, 15 April 2010
- <sup>246</sup> *Holy Rosary*, 4th Luminous Mystery
- <sup>247</sup> Francis, *Speech*, 17 February 2022.
- <sup>248</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 17.
- <sup>249</sup> *The Way*, no. 621.
- <sup>250</sup> Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 104 a. 1.
- <sup>251</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 17.
- <sup>252</sup> Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 1 July 2007.
- <sup>253</sup> *The Forge*, no. 788.
- <sup>254</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 17.
- <sup>255</sup> *Friends of God*, no. 30.
- <sup>256</sup> Saint Augustine, *In Epist. Ioannis ad parthos*, VII, 8 (PL 35, 2033).
- <sup>257</sup> Saint Augustine, *De natura et gratia*, 65, 78 (PL 44, 286).
- <sup>258</sup> *Letter 11*, no. 39.
- <sup>259</sup> Saint Basil, *Regulae fusius tractatae*, prol. 3 (PG 31, 895).
- <sup>260</sup> *Conversations*, no. 2.
- <sup>261</sup> Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Quaest. disp. De malo, q. VI: Intellego enim quia volo; et similiter utor omnibus potentiis et habitibus quia volo*.
- <sup>262</sup> *Conversations*, no. 100.
- <sup>263</sup> Cf. *Conversations*, no. 63.
- <sup>264</sup> *Letter 18*, no. 38.
- <sup>265</sup> *The Way*, no. 629.
- <sup>266</sup> *Letter*, 17 June 1973, no. 35.
- <sup>267</sup> *Furrow*, no. 379.
- <sup>268</sup> Notes from a family gathering, 9 November 1964, in Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei* (III), p. 407.
- <sup>269</sup> Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, 8 December 2020, no. 3.
- <sup>270</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 42.
- <sup>271</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>272</sup> Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, III, 22, 4 (PG 7-I, 959-960).
- <sup>273</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 173.
- <sup>274</sup> *Letter 13*, no. 99. The quotations where the author is not mentioned are by St. Josemaría.
- <sup>275</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 28, a. 4, ad 1. "Sadness is the dross of selfishness" (*Friends of God*, no. 92)
- <sup>276</sup> *Furrow*, no. 795.
- <sup>277</sup> Cf. *The Way*, no. 659
- <sup>278</sup> *The Forge*, no. 332.
- <sup>279</sup> "The Riches of Faith," published in the ABC newspaper on 2 November 1969.



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<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> *Letter 29*, no. 60.

<sup>282</sup> Francis, Audience, 15 March 2017.

<sup>283</sup> Cf. *Friends of God*, no. 35.

<sup>284</sup> *Furrow*, no. 59.

<sup>285</sup> *Letter 14*, no. 1.

<sup>286</sup> *The Forge*, no. 28.

<sup>287</sup> Francis, Homily, 29 January 2020.

<sup>288</sup> *Letter 14 February 1974*, no. 7.

<sup>289</sup> *Furrow*, no. 63.