

(Letter from the Prelate April 2014)

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

As we approach Holy Week, let's try to foster in ourselves the desire to prepare as well as possible for those days, when we recall and re-live the central events of the Redemption. Let's redouble the desires for personal conversion which are so much a part of Lent.

In his Lenten Message this year, the Holy Father invites us to consider how **when Jesus stepped into the waters of the Jordan and was baptized by John the Baptist, he did so not because he was in need of repentance, or conversion; he did it to be among people who need forgiveness, among us sinners, and to take upon himself the burden of our sins. In this way he chose to comfort us, to save us, to free us from our misery.**¹

Our Lord came down to earth to remedy our poverty, which takes very different forms. As well as the material poverty which affects so many people, the Pope highlights other still more serious forms of poverty, which are the result of turning away from God: *moral destitution* and *spiritual destitution*. The first is shown by the fact that many men and women, especially young people, suffer from a serious addiction, which is in fact slavery, to alcohol, drugs, gambling, or pornography, causing intense anguish to themselves and to their families, who do not know what to do to help them. **This type of destitution, which also causes financial ruin, is invariably linked to the spiritual destitution which we experience when we turn away from God and reject his love. If we think we don't need God who reaches out to us through Christ, because we believe we can make do on our own, we are headed for a fall. God alone can truly save and free us.**²

Let's not forget that, through our personal struggle, through our lives, we need (and will always need) to show these people the path that will lead them to recover joy and peace; and that path lies through the Sacrament of Penance. Let's try to improve our personal dispositions as we go to this means of sanctification, instituted by Jesus Christ, and let's tell others how to benefit from God's mercy.

This is **the real antidote to spiritual destitution: wherever we go, we are called as Christians to proclaim the liberating news that forgiveness for sins committed is possible, that God is greater than our sinfulness, that he freely loves us at all times and that we were made for communion and eternal life. The Lord asks us to be joyous heralds of this message of mercy and hope! It is thrilling to experience the joy of spreading this good news, sharing the treasure entrusted to us, consoling broken hearts and offering hope to our brothers and sisters experiencing darkness. It means following and imitating Jesus, who sought out the poor and sinners as a shepherd lovingly seeks his lost sheep. In union with**

¹ Pope Francis, Message for Lent, 26 December 2013.

² *Ibid.*

Jesus, we can courageously open up new paths of evangelization and human promotion.³

St Paul urged Christians to put on the Lord Jesus Christ;⁴ and it is precisely *in the Sacrament of Penance that you and I put on Jesus Christ and his merits*,⁵ as St Josemaría wrote. Moved by his example and his words, Don Álvaro also stressed the need to prepare carefully to receive this sacrament. He was convinced that people will listen to the inspirations of our Lord, who calls everyone to holiness, if they do their best, energetically but peacefully, to travel along the pathways of grace, guided by God. “This is why,” he added, “the apostolate of Confession is particularly important. Only when souls acquire a habitual friendship with God, a friendship based on the gift of sanctifying grace, can they be ready to hear the invitation which Jesus Christ is addressing to us: *If anyone would come after me... (Mt 16:24).*”⁶

Now, coming up to Holy Week, we can examine our consciences on how we personally have made use of this means of sanctification, how we are spreading it among the people we know, and how we take care of it throughout the year. The forthcoming canonization of John Paul II reminds me of how often this holy Pontiff used to say that the faithful of the Opus Dei prelature have received the *charism of Confession*: a special grace from God to bring many souls to this tribunal of mercy and forgiveness, so that they can recover their Christian joy. Let’s not slacken in this task of having recourse to God’s forgiveness, and remaining in his friendship.

The nearer Easter came, the more Don Álvaro prepared to make good use of the Paschal triduum. He said to us once, “We have to try and be *just another of the people there*, living out each of the different steps of the Master during the Passion in close union with his self-sacrifice and his feelings. We have to keep our Lord and our Blessed Lady company, with our hearts and heads, in those terrible events, from which we were not absent when they took place, because our Lord suffered and died for the sins of each of us individually. Ask the Blessed Trinity to grant us the grace to enter more deeply into the suffering we have each caused Jesus Christ. This will lead us to acquire the habit of contrition, which went so deep in the life of our holy Founder, and led him to heroic levels of Love.”⁷

Naturally, the liturgy of Holy Thursday made a deep impression on Don Álvaro; and, filled with hope and joy – humanly as well – he would consider Christ’s self-giving for the Church, for each soul, shown in the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood. He used to visit the Altars of Repose with the intention of meditating on and taking to himself the supreme Sacrifice of Jesus. He liked to go to churches where it was set up with the greatest solemnity, desiring, among other things, to prepare better to give a constant welcome to God in his soul.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Cf. *Rom* 13:14.

⁵ St Josemaría, *The Way*, 310.

⁶ Don Álvaro, Letter, 1 December 1993.

⁷ Don Álvaro, Letter, 1 April 1987.

He very often remarked that he was moved by the readings of the different liturgical offices of those days, and very especially by the narration of the Passion according to St John. He recommended reading and meditating on the Passion of our Lord, and adoring the Holy Cross. He dwelt prayerfully on the singing of the *Lamentations* on Good Friday, and the *Exsultet*, the Proclamation of the Easter Vigil.

As a sign of his gratitude and hope, he often kissed the crucifix that he carried in his pocket or put on his desk. Let's treat Jesus with the genuine affection of people in love, as Don Álvaro did, following our Father's advice: ***Your Crucifix. As a Christian, you should always carry your Crucifix with you. And place it on your desk. And kiss it before going to bed and when you wake up: and when your poor body rebels against your soul, kiss it again.***⁸ I have seen how this way of acting spread to others, who ended up by imitating him in those practices, filled with sturdy piety and Christian naturalness.

The memory of St Josemaría's first successor, precisely in this year of his beatification, can well serve to increase our personal piety. Now, specifically, it can help us to prepare to live through Holy Week with love and gratitude. "Let's meditate slowly and deeply on the scenes of these days. Let's contemplate Jesus in the Garden of Olives, let's look and see how he turns to prayer to find the strength to face up to those terrible sufferings, which he knows are so near. In those moments his Blessed Humanity needs the physical and spiritual closeness of his friends; and the Apostles leave him alone. *Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? (Mk 14:37).* He says this to you and me too, who have so often assured him, like Peter, that were ready to follow him even to death, and yet often leave him alone and fall asleep.

"We have to be sorry for our personal desertions, and for those of others; and we have to consider that we desert our Lord, perhaps every day, when we are careless about fulfilling our professional or apostolic duties; when our piety is superficial or coarse; when we make excuses, because humanly we feel weighed down and tired; when we don't feel the divine enthusiasm of following God's Will even though our soul and body resist."⁹

At the *school* of St Josemaría, Don Álvaro learnt to meditate on our Lord's Passion; and so, as I have written, he impelled us to enter more and more fully into the Gospel, ***like another of the people there***, turning the scenes we contemplate into personal prayer. In that way there will arise in our souls a powerful commitment to atone, with a big heart, for the sins of all mankind, and not only for our own faults. "As we meditate on the Passion," he confided to us in a family letter, "there arises spontaneously in our souls the desire to atone, to console our Lord, to alleviate his sufferings. Jesus suffers for the sins of everyone, and in these times of ours, men seem determined, with unhappy tenacity, to offend their Creator a great deal.

"Let's be determined to atone! Isn't it true that you all feel the desire to offer many joys to our Love? Isn't it true that you understand that one fault of ours, no matter how small, must cause Jesus great suffering? Therefore, I stress that you should give a lot of value to what is little, take special care of little details, and have a

⁸ St Josemaría, *The Way*, 302.

⁹ Don Álvaro, Letter, 1 April 1987.

genuine horror of falling into routine. God has given us so much, and Love is repaid with love! I turn to Jesus, contemplating him on the scaffold of the Holy Cross, and I beg him to grant us as a gift that our sacramental Confessions may be more contrite. Because, as our Father taught us, he is still on that Wood after twenty centuries, and it's time that we put ourselves there. I also implore him to increase in us the urgent desire to bring more souls to Confession.”¹⁰

At the beginning of Holy Week, we will recall with gratitude the anniversary of St Josemaría's First Holy Communion. It was on 23 April 1912. From that day until the day he went to Heaven, how often did Jesus in the Eucharist come to stay in the heart and soul of the good and faithful servant that our Founder was! In that way he prepared him, with a shower of graces, for the mission he was going to entrust to him within the Church. Afterwards, on 27 April, comes the canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II. On that day our thanksgiving will rise up to Heaven imbued with the joy of having two new intercessors, who knew and loved Opus Dei when they were on earth.

Keep bringing my intentions before our Lord every day, especially in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar. All of you are always there, with the Church, and the whole of mankind. And let's not stop praying for – and loving, because they need it – those who abandon or attack our Holy Mother the Church, and those who display hostility to the Work and its apostolates.

A very affectionate blessing from

your Father

✠ Javier

¹⁰ Don Álvaro, Letter, 1 April 1987.