

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.”¹

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

¹ *Pastoral Letter*, 14 February 2017, no. 9.

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!”² 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).”³

- 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).”⁴

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.”⁵ 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

² Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 24 October 1965, no. 10.

³ Benedict XVI, Enc. *Deus caritas est*, 25 December 2005, no. 17.

⁴ Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, no. 154.

⁵ Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 31 May 1943, no. 8.

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.”⁶

The human and Christian value of friendship

- 4 Friendship is a very rich human reality—a form of reciprocal love between two persons that is built on mutual knowledge and communication.⁷ 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.”⁸ 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.”⁹ 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.”¹⁰

- 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.”¹¹ 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

⁶ Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 11 March 1940, no. 70.

⁷ Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, a.1, c.

⁸ Saint John Paul II, Address, 18 February 1981.

⁹ Benedict XVI, Address, 15 September 2010.

¹⁰ Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, no. 152.

¹¹ Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 225.

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.”¹² 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.”¹³

- 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.”¹⁴ 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.”¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶ 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.”¹⁷

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

¹² Saint Gregory Nazianzus, *Sermon 43*.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Saint Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 565.

¹⁵ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 4, 7.

¹⁶ Saint John Paul II, Apost. Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, 6 January 2001, no. 43.

¹⁷ Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 9 January 1951, no. 30.

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!”¹⁸

Manifestations of friendship

- 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.”¹⁹ 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.”²⁰ 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.”²¹ 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,

¹⁸ Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 24 October 1965, no. 10.

¹⁹ Saint Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 746. Cf. *The Way*, no. 463.

²⁰ Saint Augustine, *The Catechesis of Beginners*, 15, 23.

²¹ Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 8 August 1956, no. 38.

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.”²²

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*).”²³

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.”²⁴

Sincerity and friendship

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

²² Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 24 October 1965, no. 2.

²³ Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 31 May 1954, no. 23.

²⁴ Saint Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 943.

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.”²⁵ 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.”²⁶ 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.”²⁷

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.”²⁸ The attitude of valuing people who are different, or who

²⁵ Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 11 March 1940, 71.

²⁶ *Pastoral Letter*, 9 January 2018, 14.

²⁷ Saint Thomas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q.23, a.1, c.

²⁸ *Pastoral Letter*, 9 January 2018, 13.

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.

Friendship and fraternity

14 Blessed Alvaro del Portillo wrote that “for those who love God, being his children and being his friends are two inseparable things.”²⁹ 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.”³⁰ 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.

²⁹ Blessed Alvaro, Foreword, in *Friends of God*.

³⁰ Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 29 September 1957, 76.

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.”³¹ 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.”³² 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.”³³ 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

³¹ Saint Josemaria, quoted by Blessed Alvaro in *Family Letters* (1), 115.

³² Saint Josemaria, Notes taken in a family gathering, October 1972.

³³ Saint Josemaria, Notes taken in a meditation, 29 February 1964.

with prayer and sincere friendship.”³⁴

Apostolate of friendship and confidence

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.”³⁵

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.”³⁶

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.”³⁷

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?”³⁸ 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.

³⁴ Saint Josemaria, *The Forge*, 454.

³⁵ Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 24 March 1930, 11.

³⁶ Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 11 March 1940, 54.

³⁷ *Pastoral Letter*, 9 January 2018, 14.

³⁸ Pope Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Christus vivit*, 176.

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.”³⁹ 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.”⁴⁰ 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.”⁴¹

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.”⁴² 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

³⁹ Saint Josemaria, *Furrow*, 191.

⁴⁰ Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 24 October 1965, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴² Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, 11 March 1940, 55.

afterwards united to their friendship with the people they meet and get to know in that house of ours.”⁴³

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* (cf. *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.”⁴⁴

* * *

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.”⁴⁵

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!”⁴⁶ 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.

⁴³ Saint Josemaria, *Letter* 24 October 1942, 18.

⁴⁴ Saint Josemaria, *Letter* 24 October 1965, 62.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁶ Cf. Saint Josemaria, *Furrow*, 813.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leonardo". The script is cursive and fluid.

Rome, 1 November 2019

Solemnity of All Saints

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(Pro manuscripto)