

(Letter from the Prelate: November 2011)

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

During the month of November, the Church invites us to raise our eyes above the horizon of this world. The solemnity of All Saints, which we celebrate today, and the commemoration of the faithful departed, tomorrow, remind us that God created us to serve and praise him on earth and to enjoy him eternally in heaven. Our earthly life, no matter how long it may last, is only a brief moment in comparison with eternity. As one of the Psalms teaches: *As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear him.*¹ I often heard our Father comment on these words, which led him to exclaim, *vultum tuum, Domine, requiram!* Lord, I long to see your face!²

The only definitive reality, the only truly worthwhile one, is to reach the Father's house, where Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us.³ The blessed souls who are already enjoying the beatific vision in heaven know this now in its fullness; and those who are being purified in Purgatory before being admitted to glory are eager to arrive there.

These liturgical commemorations, and the entire month that we are beginning, are a good opportunity to make a deeper examination of conscience, re-enkindling our eagerness to see God and rectifying what needs to be rectified. *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?*⁴ These questions of our Lord should be very present to us each day and illumine all our actions. "What use to man are all the things of the earth, all that our intelligence and will can aspire to? What is the point of all that, if it is all to come to an end and sink out of sight; if all the riches of this world are mere theater props and scenery, and if after all this there is eternity for ever, and ever, and ever?"

"Men lie when they say 'forever' about things on earth. The only true, totally true, 'forever' is that which we say with reference to God. This is how you ought to live your life, with a faith that will help you to taste the honey, the sweetness of heaven whenever you think about eternal life which is indeed 'forever.'"⁵

A glance at the world moves us to consider with sadness that many men and women, young and old, travel the paths of this world with scarcely a thought for their eternal destiny. Other concerns and needs almost completely occupy their life's horizon; and at times without their own fault, they are ignorant of the dignity to which God is calling them, the unending happiness to which he destines them. You and I, every Christian aware of the greatness of our vocation, cannot remain indifferent on seeing so many people who do not know God, or who put him in parenthesis. Faced with this reality, there is no room for pessimism. We have to beseech our Lord to fill us with his zeal and to make us realize that, with our prayer and mortification, we can reach the furthest corner of the planet. Do we love all mankind? How do we react to news

1 Ps 103[102]:15-17.

2 Cf. Ps 27[26]:8.

3 Cf. Jn 14:2-3.

4 Mt 16:26.

5 St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 200.

from distant countries?

In the apostolic letter published a few days ago convoking a *year of faith* within a few months, Benedict XVI stressed once again this fundamental responsibility of all the Catholic faithful. “We cannot accept that salt should become tasteless or the light be kept hidden (cf. *Mt* 5:13-16). The people of today can still experience the need to go to the well, like the Samaritan woman, in order to hear Jesus, who invites us to believe in him and to draw upon the source of living water welling up within him (cf. *Jn* 4:14).”⁶ The thought of the Communion of Saints, so alive in the coming weeks, will spur us to ask the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity to increase in each of us the desire to bring many souls closer to him. *Ure igne Sancti Spiritus!*, we cry out with the invocation that so moved our Father. Enkindle us, Lord, with the fire of the Holy Spirit! May your action in our souls—light in our intellect, operative decisions in our will, strength in our heart—spur us to a constant apostolate, taking advantage of every opportunity (and knowing how to create new ones) to help the people we meet to come closer to God.

We have to take up the apostolic task each day with renewed ardor. As the Pope went on to say in his recent letter: “We must rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples (cf. *Jn* 6:51). Indeed, the teaching of Jesus still resounds in our day with the same power: ‘Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life’ (*Jn* 6:27). The question posed by his listeners is the same that we ask today: ‘What must we do, to be doing the works of God?’ (*Jn* 6:28). We know Jesus’ reply: ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent’ (*Jn* 6:29). Belief in Jesus Christ, then, is the way to arrive definitively at salvation.”⁷

Let us turn our eyes, as always, to our most lovable Redeemer. We have to believe in him, our God and Savior, who wants to bring us to the glory of God the Father with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. So intensely does he desire this that on one occasion he told his disciples: *ignem veni mittere in terram, et quid volo nisi ut accendatur?*⁸ “I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled.”

These words were a spur in St. Josemaría’s soul right from his early youth. “For years, I found my love for God enkindled by considering Jesus’ zeal to set the world ablaze with his fire. I couldn’t contain the irrepressible ardor that welled up within me, making me cry out with the Master’s words: *ignem veni mittere in terram, et quid volo nisi ut accendatur?*... *Ecce ego quia vocasti me* (*Lk* 12:49; *I Sam* 3:9). ‘I have come to set fire to the earth and what will I but that it be enkindled?’ ‘Here am I, for you have called me.’”⁹ He said that, for his soul, those words were “a spur. May they be so for you as well. May your fire never die out. May you be bearers of divine fire, divine light, the warmth of heaven, God’s love, in every sector of society.”¹⁰

Let us ask the Paraclete to enkindle in our hearts, to make us experience, with Christ, zeal for the salvation of all souls. “Those words, *ignem veni mittere in terram!*, I’ve come to set the earth aflame, should burn in our hearts. We have to be determined, absolutely determined,

6 Benedict XVI: Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, October 11, 2011, no. 3.

7 Ibid.

8 *Lk* 12:49 (Vulgate).

9 St. Josemaría, *Letter*, January 9, 1959, no. 9.

10 St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family get-together, February 12, 1975.

to tell our Lord: *ecce ego quia vocasti me (I Sam 3:9)*. Here I am, because you have called me to be a Christian! A father of a family? Yes, a father of a family. A son or daughter in a family? Yes, a son or daughter. A mother? Yes, a mother. But setting everything you touch aflame. If you don't enkindle your surroundings, then you'll be consumed foolishly, leaving behind only ashes, instead of being a burning ember that gives off light and warmth."¹¹

The apostolate, a joyful duty for Christians, makes us eager to continue Christ's mission that is being carried out by the Church, each one from his or her place in the Mystical Body. Good example, always fundamental, has a special importance today. Some people distant from God, or from religious practice, may not be open to a conversation with supernatural or even simply spiritual content. But the witness of upright behavior—in personal, family, professional, social life—never goes unnoticed. Those women and men, although perhaps they do not admit it openly, frequently ask themselves for the reason for that conduct in their hearts; and thus they begin to open themselves to God's light. "By their very existence in the world," writes the Pope, "Christians are called to radiate the word of truth that the Lord Jesus has left us."¹² Therefore, as Benedict XVI suggests, the study or review of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* acquires a special importance, so as to know the faith and its consequences better, and communicate this knowledge to others. Let us not fail to go to this source and to recommend it to those we know.

The faith is not simply a matter of knowing the truths contained in the deposit of revelation, but requires, by its own dynamism, to be manifested outwardly. As St. Paul teaches, the faith *per caritatem operatur*,¹³ it works through charity; and charity is shown in specific deeds of service to others, in being attentive to them and taking an interest in their concerns, beginning with those who are closest to us. This leads directly to wanting what God wants, *who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*.¹⁴ In a word, to communicate the faith we have received. As the Pope said in his recent apostolic letter: "it often happens that Christians are more concerned for the social, cultural, and political consequences of their commitment, continuing to think of the faith as a self-evident presupposition for life in society. In reality, not only can this presupposition no longer be taken for granted, but it is often openly denied. Whereas in the past it was possible to recognize a unitary cultural matrix, broadly accepted in its appeal to the content of the faith and the values inspired by it, today this no longer seems to be the case in large swathes of society."¹⁵

During his whole life, St. Josemaría preached the need to imbue our thoughts, words and deeds with our faith. He insisted that, on coming into contact with anyone, we should immediately consider how to help them come closer to God. "Don't you see how everyone—you and me, too—has a sort of psychological prejudice, a professional 'preoccupation,' as it were? When a doctor sees someone passing on the street, without even realizing it, he thinks: 'this person has liver trouble.' And if a tailor sees him, he remarks to himself: 'what a terrible suit, or what a good one, what a fine cut!' And the shoemaker takes note of the shoes.... Well you and I, children of God, dedicated to serving others in the world, out of love for God, when we see people pass by we have to see souls: here is a soul (we have to say to ourselves),

11 St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family get-together, February 9, 1975.

12 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, October 11, 2011, no. 6.

13 *Gal* 5:6.

14 *I Tim* 2:4.

15 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, October 11, 2011, no. 2.

a soul who has to be helped, a soul who has to be understood, a soul we have to live alongside, a soul who has to be saved.”¹⁶

This is only natural, since “anyone who has discovered Christ must lead others to him. A great joy cannot be kept to oneself. It has to be passed on.”¹⁷ This is how the faithful followers of our Lord have behaved in every era. “When you find that something has been helpful to you,” said St. Gregory the Great, “try to draw others to it. You have to desire that others accompany you along the paths of the Lord. If you are going to the forum or the baths, and you meet someone who is not busy, you invite him to accompany you. Apply this earthly custom to the spiritual life and, when you go to God, don’t do so alone.”¹⁸

We should remember that, despite the atmosphere of neglect and relativism, in the heart of everyone there is a hunger for eternity that only God can satisfy. This reality can be a great help for renewing daily our apostolic zeal, realizing that our Lord wants to make use of Christians, of you and me, as instruments to bring others to heaven. Although we see ourselves as of very little value, and really are such, “we have to be enkindled with the desire and the reality of bringing the light of Christ, the holy zeal of Christ, the sufferings and salvation of Christ, to so many souls: to our colleagues, friends, relatives, acquaintances, and strangers too, no matter what their opinions on earthly matters may be, so that we can give all of them a warm fraternal embrace. Then we will become a burning ruby, and we will no longer be just a poor, wretched piece of coal. We will act as God’s voice, God’s light, the fire of Pentecost!”¹⁹

In recent days, I have been in Pamplona to preside at the investiture of several honorary doctorates awarded by the University of Navarra. After this, in Madrid, I had get-togethers with thousands of faithful of the Prelature, cooperators and friends. I asked the Blessed Trinity to renew in everyone their apostolic zeal, in order to assist the new evangelization of society with their personal apostolate of friendship and confidence, and promote formative activities that bring Christ’s message to all environments.

Before ending, I ask you to pray for the thirty-five brothers of yours who will receive ordination as deacons on the fifth of this month in Rome. Ask that they, and all the ministers of the Church, may have a heart to the measure of the Heart of Christ.

Let us continue to be closely united to the Roman Pontiff and in communion with the diocesan bishops. Thank our Lord for the spiritual fruit he is granting the Church through the apostolic efforts of the faithful of the Work. We will do so especially on the upcoming 28th, the anniversary of erecting Opus Dei as a personal prelature. May our gratitude reach God through the hands of our Lady.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

16 St. Josemaría, Notes taken from a meditation, February 25, 1963.

17 Benedict XVI, Homily, August 21, 2005.

18 St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospels*, I, 6, 6 (PL 76, 1098).

19 St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, June 2, 1974.

Rome, November 1, 2011