

Letter from the Prelate (January 2010)

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

During the past few days, the Church has invited us to travel frequently the road to Bethlehem, to adore and give thanks to Jesus. Everything has revolved around Him in the first week of Christmas time. The other people in the scene—our Lady and St. Joseph first of all—remain in the background because the principal Protagonist is our Lord, the Eternal Son of the Father—Light from Light, true God from true God—who has become true man for us and for our salvation. Now, as the new year begins, we are invited to turn our attention to the other protagonists of Christmas: to the Virgin Mary, in first place; and, next to her, inseparable from her, St. Joseph.

Today, on the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God, our soul is filled with admiration and joy, as we address our Lady with this invocation, the root of all the graces with which our All-powerful God has enriched the one whom, from all eternity, he chose as the Mother of his Son according to human nature. "Because of it, she was conceived immaculate and is full of grace; because of it, she is ever virgin, she was taken up body and soul to heaven and has been crowned Queen of all creation, above the angels and saints. Greater than she, none but God." [1] All of this is God's will, as the Church teaches and as we Christians believe. "There is no danger of exaggerating," St. Josemaría insists. "We can never hope to fathom this inexpressible mystery; nor will we ever be able to give sufficient thanks to our Mother for bringing us into such intimacy with the Blessed Trinity." [2]

Today's feast is a marvelous opportunity to give new impetus to our filial relationship with our Lady and to thank her for her maternal care. Mary always leads us to Jesus, as happened with those figures from the Orient, the Wise Men, who followed a star to Bethlehem to adore the newborn Messiah. And where did they find him? St. Matthew tells us with great simplicity: *going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.* [3] Are we striving to be closer to Mary, in order to be entirely God's? Do we sincerely repeat those words of our Father: "Mother of God and our Mother"?

The second part of the Christmas season, which begins today, while continuing to be centered on Jesus, presents us with the consequences of our Lord's incarnation and birth. In various ways, it reminds us that God has taken our nature so that all men and women might become sons and daughters of God. Thus the *good news* that the angels announced to the shepherds was for *all the people*. [4] It was addressed not only to the House of Israel but to all mankind, whom God wants to call together in the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. The prophet Isaiah had proclaimed this many centuries earlier, when he wrote: *Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms. Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to*

you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.[5]

This prophecy was fulfilled "when the three Magi, called from a far country, were led by a star to find and adore the King of heaven and earth. The docility of this star," writes St. Leo the Great, "invites us to imitate its obedience and become ourselves, to the extent of our possibilities, the servants of this grace that calls all men and women to Christ." [6]

The Epiphany speaks to us of the feast of all humanity, for it makes clear that all peoples and nations are called to form part of the People of God; and, inseparably, it is a call to a sense of responsibility for Christians, on whom our Lord wants to count to bring the good news to the ends of the earth. As Pope St. Leo explains, "spurred on by this zeal, you should strive to be useful to one another, so as to shine as children of the light (cf. *Eph* 5:8) in the kingdom of God, which we reach by an upright faith and good works." [7]

"Twenty centuries have gone by since that mystery was revealed and brought about in Christ, but it has still not reached complete fulfillment," [8] the Roman Pontiff says. The Church's mission continues to be carried out until the end of the world, because every historical epoch, every country, every new generation, has to be brought to Christ. The scene of the Epiphany is always timely. Faced with this panorama, Benedict XVI asks: "in what sense is Christ still the *lumen gentium*, the Light of the peoples, today? What point—if one can so describe it—has the universal journey of the peoples toward God reached? Is it in a phase of progress or of regression? And further: who are the Magi today? How, thinking of today's world, should we interpret these mysterious figures in the Gospel?" [9]

The reply to these questions is in the hands of each Christian. Everything depends on God's grace; and, at the same time, everything depends on the correspondence of Christ's followers, who have to continue the furrow opened by our Lord and deepened by successive generations of the faithful, from the Apostles and the women of the first hour up to today. Doesn't it fill you with joy to consider that our Lord is counting on each and every one of us, despite our personal weaknesses, to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth?

Today there is an urgent need to spread Christ's doctrine, especially in certain sectors. I am thinking above all of those in government, of scientists and researchers, of people working in the field of public opinion, etc. But all of us need to listen to God's voice and follow it. Therefore we should beseech God, with humility, with insistence, with confidence, that he open minds and hearts to his light. Today too many men and women need to be able to say: *we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.* [10] And they will do so if we who believe in Christ approach them with sincere friendship imbued with charity and understanding, and also with human warmth, strengthened by prayer and sacrifice; and also with gratitude for the good that they carry out.

What amazes us in the Magi's response, says Benedict XVI, "is that they prostrated themselves before a simple baby in his mother's arms, not in the setting of a royal

palace but, on the contrary, in the poverty of a stable in Bethlehem (cf. *Mt 2:11*). How was this possible? What convinced the Magi that the Child was 'the King of the Jews' and the King of the peoples? There is no doubt that they were persuaded by the sign of the star that they had seen 'in its rising' and which had come to rest precisely over the place where the Child was found (cf. *Mt 2: 9*). But even the star would not have sufficed had the Magi not been people inwardly open to the truth. In comparison with King Herod, beset with his interests of power and riches, the Magi were directed toward the goal of their quest and when they found it, although they were cultured men, they behaved like the shepherds of Bethlehem: they recognized the sign and adored the Child, offering him the precious and symbolic gifts that they had brought with them." [11]

Once again I insist: "Our Lord asks all men to come out to meet him, to become saints. He calls not only the Magi, the wise and powerful. Before that he had sent, not a star, but one of his angels to the shepherds in Bethlehem (cf. *Lk 2:9*). Rich or poor, wise or less so, all of us have to foster in our hearts a humble disposition that will allow us to listen to the word of God." [12]

This is the task of all Christians who want to be consistent with their vocation: to show Christ to others, to be a "loudspeaker"—first by their example, but also by their opportune words—of the Church's teachings, especially in the topics most under debate in public opinion: respect for human life in all its phases; the duty of trying to ensure that civil laws foster and protect the true nature of the family established by the Creator, based on the indissoluble marriage of a man and a woman, open to life; the right to choose an educational format for one's children that corresponds to each one's spiritual and moral ideals, etc.

Don't think, however, that this effort is reserved to those who work or act directly in these areas. As I mentioned to you recently, taking a thought from our Father, in counting you begin with one, and then add another one, and another.... Each one's personal apostolate is very effective in the setting where his or her ordinary life unfolds. Therefore we should consider carefully, in our examination of conscience, how we have helped souls to get closer to God: how much prayer, how much sacrifice, how many hours of well-done work we have offered, how many conversations we have had—personally, or in writing, making use of all the means within our reach—with friends, relatives, colleagues, acquaintances. And we should speak about this holy concern in personal spiritual direction, so that we can be helped and encouraged in the apostolate, which is the duty of every Christian.

Right after the Epiphany we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of our Lord. If the manifestation of the Messiah to the Wise Men was a "pre-announcement" of God's universal salvific plan, with the Baptism in the Jordan that plan begins to be fulfilled. As the Fathers of the Church explain, "the Savior, by the mystery of his baptism, consecrated the waters of all the fonts." From that moment on, changed into an instrument and sign of sanctification, baptismal water, through the efficacy conferred by the invocation of the Most Blessed Trinity, has within it the power to forgive all sins.

The Epiphany is a mystery with many facets. The liturgy recalls the manifestation of Christ not only to the Magi or during his Baptism in the Jordan, but also at Cana of

Galilee, when he changed water into wine. This year, in the Gospel for the second Sunday of Ordinary Time, Jesus' Mother receives special emphasis.[14] By her intercession in favor of men, Mary to a certain extent "obliges" Christ to advance "the hour" of his Messianic manifestation, thus increasing the faith of his first disciples. Let us go to her so that she also stirs up our faith in the face of the apostolic challenges—marvelous challenges!—that we Christians confront.

Let us listen to St. Josemaría's advice: "If our faith is weak, we should turn to Mary. Because of the miracle at the wedding feast at Cana, which Christ performed at his Mother's request, his disciples learned to believe in him (*Jn* 2:11). Our Mother is always interceding with her Son so that he may attend to our needs and show himself to us, so that we can cry out, 'You are the Son of God.'

"Grant me, oh Jesus, the faith I truly desire. My Mother, and my Lady, Mary most holy, make me really believe!"[15]

Within a few days we will once again celebrate St. Josemaría's birthday. Speaking in a human way, it is only natural that we try to offer him some present. And what could be a better "present" than the desire to grow in our apostolic zeal, with specific deeds that manifest the hunger for the salvation of souls that Jesus has enkindled in our heart? Later, in the middle of January, we have the traditional octave of prayer for the unity of Christians, which offers us a new opportunity to beseech the Paraclete that the ecumenical efforts of the Holy Father Benedict XVI, and with him those of all Christians, may produce the desired fruit.

Thanks be to God, the incident that the Pope suffered on Christmas Eve did not have serious consequences. From the perspective of faith, we have to see this as a call by Providence to make our prayer for the Roman Pontiff more constant and intense.

My intentions are still very numerous. Let us all be closely united in this year that is beginning, with a unity of prayer and intentions, so that our Lord, through the intercession of his most holy Mother, might grant us all that we are asking of him.

A few days ago, for various reasons, I went to Switzerland. As always I traveled together with all of you. I had the opportunity to pray in Einsiedeln, the Marian shrine that St. Josemaría, and also our beloved Don Álvaro, visited many times. At our Lady's feet I earnestly placed your life, so that we truly want and know how to transform it into *Opus Dei*, offered to God with constant sincerity.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, January 1, 2010

Footnotes:

- [1] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 276.
- [2] Ibid.
- [3] *Mt* 2:11.
- [4] *Lk* 2:10.
- [5] *Is* 60:1-6.
- [6] St. Leo the Great, Homilies on the Epiphany 3, 5(PL 4, 244).
- [7] Ibid.
- [8] Benedict XVI, Homily on the Solemnity of the Epiphany, January 6, 2007.
- [9] Ibid.
- [10] *Mt* 2:2.
- [11] Benedict XVI, Homily on the Solemnity of the Epiphany, January 6, 2007.
- [12] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 33.
- [13] St. Maximus of Turin, Homily 13A, 3 (CCL 23, 46).
- [14] Cf. Roman Missal, Second Sunday of Ordinary Time (C), Gospel (*Jn*2:1:11.)
- [15] St. Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*, commentary on the second Luminous Mystery.