

Letter from the Prelate (May 2010)

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

We are beginning this month that is dedicated especially to our Lady, within the Marian year we are celebrating in the Work. Our hearts and thoughts go immediately to Mary Most Holy, Mother of God and our Mother, to thank her for the countless favors we receive constantly through her intercession. Some of them we know, while others we are unaware of. But nothing is more certain than that, to honor his Mother more, God wants to grant us the treasures of his grace through his Blessed Mother, always in close union with and dependence on her Son. “Mary’s maternal mediation does not dim the unique and perfect mediation of Christ,” John Paul II said when commenting on some statements of the Second Vatican Council. On the contrary, “far from being an obstacle to the exercise of Christ’s unique mediation, Mary instead highlights its fruitfulness and efficacy.”[1]

During these days we specifically thank her (pardon the digression) for the priestly ordination of 32 brothers of yours, whom I will ordain to the priesthood on the upcoming 8th in the Basilica of St. Eugene. Let us ask our Lady for them and for all priests.

The history of Christian spirituality is filled with examples of our Lady’s maternal protection for her children, whom she assists with special graces. The oldest Marian prayer, the *Sub tuum praesidium*, which St. Josemaría so often repeated, goes back to the third century and expresses this trusting certainty: “We fly to your protection, O holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all dangers, O ever glorious and blessed Virgin.”[2]

We have all experienced Mary’s help in our life to grow in intimacy with our Lord. For this reason, and because she deserves it (no creature is more worthy than our Lady: greater than her, only God), we can never thank her enough for her care for us, nor praise her as she deserves. As St. Josemaría, in continuity with Christian tradition, said: “Theology in past centuries came up with a phrase that sums up the love of Christians for the Mother of God: *de Maria, nunquam satis*. We can never go overboard in speaking and writing about the dignity of the one who gave her flesh and blood to the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity.”[3]

These are the reasons that ground our Marian piety, which is seen more clearly throughout the world during these weeks. In our case, there are several added reasons to show our Mother special affection. I am referring to two anniversaries that come during this month: our Father’s first pilgrimage, to Sonsoles in 1935, and his novena before our Lady of Guadalupe in 1970. Our gratitude in recalling these events, which now belong to the history of Opus Dei, prompts us to consider that, as Benedict XVI said: “With the Incarnation of the Son of God, eternity entered time. . . Time was, so to speak, ‘touched’ by Christ, the Son of God and of Mary, and received from him new and surprising significance: it became a time of salvation and grace.”[4] Therefore, the Pope concludes, we need to “place all the varied events of our life, important or small, simple or undecipherable, joyful or sad, under the sign of salvation and hear the call God is addressing to us in order to lead us towards a goal that lies beyond time itself: eternity.”[5]

The two dates in our history that I just mentioned show very clearly God's "entrance" into the history of mankind, and specifically into the history of this portion of the Church, Opus Dei.

On May 2, 1935—tomorrow is the 75th anniversary—St. Josemaría began the custom of the *May pilgrimage*, from which so much spiritual fruit has come. Since then, millions of people have learned to show their filial affection to our Lady in a warm and intimate way. I suggest that we make a greater effort this month, so that many friends can accompany us on these Marian visits. We want to thank our Lady for her care for the Church and for each of her children.

Drawing close to our Lady on a regular basis is a clear sign that a soul is breathing a Christian atmosphere. We may have falls along our path (no one is perfect in this world), but anyone who prays perseveringly to our Lady, perhaps reciting prayers learned as a child, without setting them aside, shows that there is a breath of Christian air in their heart and our Mother will help them: now and, as we pray in the Hail Mary, also at the hour of our death.

We want to help many others share in our filial love for our Lady. By inviting our acquaintances, friends, relatives, to accompany us on the May pilgrimage, we can help them to discover the joy and peace that our Mother pours into the souls of those who realize they are her children. We want to help many women and men acquire the custom of praying the Holy Rosary every day. Do we overcome resolutely any fear about what others might think in order to begin these conversations? Does our love for Mary spur us to want what is good for people?

Another very significant anniversary for our family comes this month: the fortieth anniversary of our Father's trip to Mexico to pray before our Lady of Guadalupe. I recall the surprise and joy of those of us who were physically at his side when, on May 1, 1970, he told us that he had decided to undertake this trip. He immediately asked us to have the necessary arrangements made, and on the morning of May 15 he arrived in Mexico. Moved by his love for the Church, for the Pope, for souls, he wanted to place in our Lady's hands the intentions in his heart. As he told us: "What is the Father asking for? At the feet of our holy Mother Mary, the all-powerful Supplicant, the Father is asking for peace in the world, for the sanctity of the Church, of the Work and of each of his daughters and sons."^[6]

Already on the flight to America, one could see our Founder's intense recollection. And as soon as we arrived in Mexico City, even though it was 3:00 in the morning, he expressed his desire to go immediately to pray before our Lady of Guadalupe. This wasn't possible, because at that hour the Basilica was closed. But as soon as the doctors and his sons permitted it (because he had to adapt to the altitude and the change in time), he went to the *Villa* accompanied by some of his sons. It was the first visit that he made in Mexico City. After greeting our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, he knelt in the sanctuary and remained absorbed in prayer for approximately an hour and a half. During this time the Church was filling up with daughters and sons of our Father, and with cooperators and friends, who wanted to pray united to our Founder.

As that prayer was prolonged, Fr. Pedro Casciaro, who was the Counsellor then, told our Founder what was happening. And since our Father always fled from creating a "spectacle," he interrupted his conversation before the image of Guadalupe and asked if a way could be found to

prevent this minor problem. Starting the next day and for the rest of the novena, he made use of a small, somewhat uncomfortable, balcony which had the advantage of being situated higher up, quite close to the image of our Lady, where he couldn't be seen by the people below. There St. Josemaría was able to address our Lady of Guadalupe with great intimacy, speaking aloud to her to make known the needs in his heart. Thanks be to God, we were able to take notes of what he said in those periods of conversation with our Lady, in which he invited those of us who accompanied him there to take part.

It was a very intense filial prayer, with complete abandonment to God's will, and at the same time insistent, as a small and trusting child. The first day of the novena on the balcony, the 17th of May, after spending a few minutes in personal meditation, he suggested that we pray the three parts of the Rosary together, with a moment of silence after each mystery. At the end, he read some passages from the Gospel where our Lord insists on the need for prayer of petition. Here I have transcribed just a few words from that prayer, which you have already read and meditated on—at least in part—on other occasions.

“Jesus tells us: everything that we ask for in prayer, with faith, will be granted to us. And we are not lacking in faith, because you have given it to us, Lord. This promise, filled with certainty, will always be valid, because his words, the words of the Lord, will not pass away.

“We are here, representing so many thousands of souls, and we have come to ask, to ask like a small child who is sure he will be listened to. We ask like a small child, like a small family, and I want the Work to always be like that: a small family, closely united, although we are spread out everywhere. And we ask you demandingly, going to the intercession of your Mother, knowing that you have to listen to us.

“*Iterum dico vobis*—St. Matthew tells us—*quia, si duo ex vobis consenserint super terram, de omni re quamcumque petierint fiet illis a Patro meo qui in caelis est.* ‘Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven’ (Mt 18:19). We raise up a prayer of petition, united to the people who are here now, to the priest who is celebrating, to the veneration being given to your Mother. We who are here ask you as do the others, with a lot of faith, and with the hope that you will hear us, along all the pathways of the earth. It is a continuous prayer of souls from all walks of life, all races, all languages. Their prayer is our prayer, and to you, Lord, through your Mother, we raise up our constant petition.

“I want to encourage you, with these words, to feel the responsibility to continue urging our Lord, even when your soul is dry and you find it difficult to carry out a dialogue with him. Despite our weaknesses, despite not knowing what to say, it is enough that we want to address him to make it a reality, and we will attain what we need.”[7]

Let us pause a moment, my daughters and sons, to consider if we, now and always, are continuing our Father's petition, closely united to his prayer—which in heaven has become unceasing—for the Church and the Work. It doesn't matter if at times we feel arid—dry!—because our heart doesn't seem to be accompanying our times of meditation or vocal prayer. This is how St. Josemaría put it: “Don't worry, I insist, if you have no fervor, if it's hard for you to put yourself into your prayer. We are like soldiers on guard who are fulfilling a duty: like

soldiers, but also like children. If we don't know what to say, but know that we have to pray, we will do the prayer, like soldiers; but like children, with faith. We ask him now, although it may be only with our lips, that he fulfill his word; we tell him that we are asking so that he will hear us: this is a demand, but the demand of a child, that we address to the Father, relying on the promise of his Son. And naturally we have recourse to our Mother, to her omnipotent intercession: Mother, hear us!"[8]

I am sure each of us wants to pray or learn to pray in that way, with the same complete trust and abandonment in our heavenly Mother. In the current moment, as I have so often reminded you, we have to renew constantly our petition for the Church, for the Pope and those who assist him; for the priests and for the whole people of God. Let us try to present these intentions to our Lady, in our pilgrimages during this month, with great intensity. Do you consider the fact that, if your friends see your love for Mary Most Holy, they will feel invited to love her, to take refuge under her protection?

But we have to pray filled with confidence, with a faith that can move mountains, as our Lord said. Let us continue listening to our Father in that first prayer of his done out loud before our Lady of Guadalupe. "*Omnia quaecumque orantes petitis, credite quia accipietis, et evenient vobis (Mk 11:24)*. Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it, and it will be granted to you. It will be granted to you! These words contain a great certainty for us. They were spoken by his Son—his Son who can never lie! And on our part, faith is needed. A faith that we already have: that's why we have come here to ask! But also, with our petition, we say to him: *adauge nobis fidem! (Lk 17:5)*. Increase our faith! We have to insist, once and again, always, as when we were small, with our mothers: the same! And here, those of us who are here now, we ask for everyone, and in the name of everyone, also when we find ourselves personally in moments of little fervor, when it is hard for us to speak, to tell you what we want to.

"*Omnis enim qui petit accipit, et qui quaerit invenit, et pulsanti aperietur (Lk 11:10)*. 'Everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.' Once again it is Jesus who speaks, in words St. Luke has recorded for us. He has said this so clearly, so that we never forget it: to the one who asks, it will be given. Therefore we have to continue asking, and we have to be daring in asking with trust, demandingly. This is why we have come here, and why we have to strive to make our prayer continuous, full of stubbornness. Mother of ours, speak for us, and help us to ask always more insistently."[9]

I will stop here, my daughters and sons, although our Father's prayer continued for quite some time. But I cannot fail to remind you that, in the second part of the month, we will celebrate three liturgical solemnities of great importance: the Ascension of our Lord, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the Most Blessed Trinity. Our Lady, if we go to her, will spur us to prepare ourselves to take greater advantage of these feasts, as she did with the first disciples of Jesus. It seems clear to me that, after her hidden and silent life, our Lord wanted to have her very much present at the manifestation of the Church in the Cenacle, so that the Apostles would learn how to love Jesus, and the Trinity.

The final days of May should spur us to savor deeply the liturgical solemnity of Pentecost. Let us stay close to the one who is Mother of the Church and Temple of the Holy Spirit: this will

always be the best way to receive the Paraclete's gifts and fruits. And, as always, I ask you to bring my intentions (all of you are contained there) to our Lady, all-powerful Intercessor and Supplicant, so that we grow in intimacy with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, May 1, 2010

Footnotes:

1. John Paul II, Marian catechesis in a general audience, October 1, 1997.
2. Liturgy of the Hours, Marian antiphon at the end of Compline.
3. St. Josemaría, article "La Virgen del Pilar," published posthumously in the *Libro de Aragón*, Saragossa, 1976.
4. Benedict XVI, Homily at the close of the year. December 31, 2009.
5. *Ibid.*
6. St. Josemaría, October 1970.
7. St. Josemaría, Notes taken from his prayer at the Shrine of Guadalupe, May 17, 1970.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*