

Pastoral Letter for the “Year of Faith”

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1. We all experienced great joy on receiving the Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, in which the Pope announced the *Year of Faith*. Benedict XVI has spared no effort in presenting the key contents of the Gospel, in language accessible to the men and women of the twenty-first century. And to further this aim, for the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, he convoked on 11 October 2011, a *Year of Faith*, which will begin on 11 October 2012 and conclude on the solemnity of Jesus Christ, King of the universe, on 24 November 2013. The date on which this Year begins is also the twentieth anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depósito*, whereby Blessed John Paul II ordered the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a text of extraordinary value for personal formation and for the catechesis we have to carry out unceasingly in all environments.

The *Year of Faith*, then, is a new call to each of the Church's children to reflect ardently on the faith, to strive to know it better and to put it faithfully into practice. And it is likewise a call to do all we can to spread it, communicating its content, by the witness of our example and word, to the multitude of people who do not know Christ or fail to draw close to him.

The Holy Father is saddened by the fact that a great number of Christians—including some who consider themselves Catholics—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, because of a profound crisis of faith that has affected many people.**¹

2. These considerations are not new. As paradoxical as it might seem, at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council people already foresaw the danger that, in many sectors of the Church, the enthusiasm stirred up by that Assembly might end up as mere words, without deeply affecting the life of the faithful; or even that, owing to mistaken interpretations and applications of the Council teaching, the genuine Christian spirit could end up being wrongly assimilated to the spirit of the world, instead of elevating the world to the supernatural order.

Those of us who lived through those times recall the sorrow with which Paul VI (once the Council was over) frequently voiced laments about the great crisis of faith, discipline, liturgy, and obedience, that some sectors in the Church were undergoing. St. Josemaria echoed the Holy Father's concern, and in a letter addressed to his children, written shortly before the end of the Council, he told us: ***You know the love with which I have followed the work of the Council during these years, cooperating with my prayer and, on more than one occasion, with my personal work. You also know my desire to be faithful and for you to be faithful to the decisions of the hierarchy of the Church even in the smallest details, acting not as subjects of an authority, but with the piety of children,***

¹ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, 11 October 2011, no. 2.

with the affection that comes from feeling like, and being, members of the Body of Christ.

Nor have I hidden from you my sorrow at the conduct of those who did not view the Council as a solemn act in the life of the Church and a manifestation of the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit, but rather as an opportunity for self-affirmation, to give free reign to their own opinions or, worse yet, to do damage to the Church.

The Council is ending; it has been announced repeatedly that this will be the last session. When the letter I am now writing reaches your hands, the post-Conciliar period will have already begun, and my heart trembles to think that this might be the occasion of new wounds to the body of the Church.

The years following a Council are always important years, which require docility in applying the decisions adopted, and also firmness in the faith, a supernatural spirit, love for God and for God's Church, and fidelity to the Roman Pontiff.²

When he spoke in this way, there was not the slightest note of pessimism in St. Josemaria. Rather he wanted to make it clear that, then and always, what is needed are women and men of faith.

3. Despite all the efforts of the Magisterium in the last half-century, and the faithful witness of so many people, including some saints, the disorientation has spread throughout the whole world. The Pope writes: **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). 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.³**

4. The *Year of Faith* offers us a marvelous opportunity to delve more deeply into the divine treasure we have received and, with God's grace, to spread this virtue in concentric circles that will reach far and wide. It presents us with an unsurpassable opportunity to give a strong impetus to the new evangelization needed in the world, beginning with our daily effort, shown with deeds, to grow in our friendship with the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. To do so, we can draw strength from the faith of Mary and Joseph, whom St. Josemaria so often contemplated and admired, in order to grow in his identification with Christ and with God's Will. If we want to spur souls on to draw closer to God, we have to speak to them, above all, through the witness of our Christian life.

² St. Josemaria, Letter, 24 October 1965, no. 4.

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

We know that our Father always looked to the example of the Apostles and the early Christians. In the Twelve and in those first communities of men and women who followed Christ, the security of their faith in Christ and in his teachings shines forth brightly. They learned, and loved, to ponder over every aspect of the Redeemer's passage through this world. It is not an exaggeration to think that they would have vividly retained in their memory the many occasions when Christ forcefully urged the sick, the crippled, and his followers themselves, to come to him with faith, to pray or ask with faith. And they would also have certainly kept deeply engraved on their hearts Christ's fatherly, clear rebuke at their lack of faith, just before entrusting them with the mission of bringing the Good News to the whole world (cf. *Mk* 16: 14-15).

The first Christians were very aware that they too (as the many testimonies they passed on to us by their conduct so marvelously attest) needed to believe firmly in the grace of Heaven, in order to fulfill the command to spread the Master's teachings.

The Twelve, and those early brothers and sisters of ours, knew that this virtue, so strongly required of them by the Son of God, would open the path to hope that God's redemptive plans would become a reality. At the same time, their love and gratitude to the triune God became stronger and more apostolic every day, capable of bringing people from all environments and professions to the Truth.

5. My daughters and sons, the same is true today, because the means, as St. Josemaria insisted, are the same: the Gospel—lived out in practice!—and the Crucifix.

Let us take every opportunity to tell others that rediscovering the joy and the security of the faith is an obligation for the universal Church, the whole Church; therefore, it is not only a task for the pastors, but one that falls to all the faithful. Certainly, the pastors have to mark out the way, with their example and exhortations, as the Pope says in the *motu proprio* by which he has convoked this special time in the Church. But he also invites everyone to take on this responsibility of transmitting to others the treasure of Christ's preaching.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in a note dated 6 January 2012, advised the Bishops to dedicate a pastoral letter to this topic, taking into account the specific circumstances of the portion of faithful entrusted to them.⁴ This is the reason for this letter of mine, whose only aim is to encourage each of you, on your own account and also in union with others, to admire anew the beauty of the faith we have received from God, to put it into practice in your daily lives, and to spread it without fear of what others may think.

As that document also states, “the saints and the blessed are the authentic witnesses of the faith.”⁵ Therefore, it recommends pastors to strive to make known the lives and teachings of so many saints. So it is only natural that in these pages I will draw frequent inspiration from the written and oral teachings of St. Josemaria, the beloved Founder of Opus Dei, a saint whose apostolic fruit shows us how completely he trusted in God.

NEED FOR A NEW EVANGELIZATION

⁴ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pastoral note, 6 January 2012, III, 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 5.

6. Mankind has always hungered, hungers now, and always will, for the word and knowledge of God, although many people are not aware of this deep need of their souls. And we who have received from God the gift of faith, have the duty to be wide awake ourselves and to awaken those submerged in that lethargy of death and ineffectiveness. The *Year of Faith*, which is being inaugurated within the framework of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops dedicated to the new evangelization, is yet another spur for all of us. The moment has come to quicken our pace, as runners do in a race as they come close to the finish line.

I have a vivid memory of how the Venerable Servant of God Alvaro del Portillo encouraged us to participate personally in the task of the new evangelization. At Christmas 1985, he wrote us a pastoral letter with suggestions on how to assist more intensely in the re-Christianization of countries in which a progressive weakening of Christian life was apparent. He alerted us against the “new paganism” stemming from the more economically developed countries, characterized, now too, “by the pursuit of material well-being at all costs, and by an aversion—a horror, indeed—of anything that might cause suffering.”⁶

That immense apostolic task has only been compounded by the additional need to assist the peoples and societies of central and eastern Europe, who were for decades subject to the yoke of Communist materialism, and who sustained the rest of us in freedom through a prolonged and silent martyrdom.

Each day we have to renew our desire to place Christ at the summit and in the heart of human realities. To do so, we need to develop our personal conversation with God and our service to others, contributing with our grain of sand—our total self-giving every day—to the task of building up a world renewed by the grace and salt of the Gospel, which our Lord has entrusted to his disciples. And if ever pessimism tries to gain entrance to our soul, when we don’t see the fruits of our efforts right away, we should throw out this lack of hope, since it is not we—so insignificant, so full of defects—who are to take God’s plans forward. Various passages from Scripture, in their multiple allusions, confirm for us that *inter médium móntium pertransibunt aquae* (Ps 103/104:10) —the waters shall pass through the mountains. This certainty is opposed to the slightest hint of discouragement, even when the obstacles seem to tower as high as the mountain peaks. And this is the right path to reach Heaven, with the assurance that the divine waters will wash away all our limitations and draw impetus from them to bring us to God.

7. There come to mind some words of St. Josemaria, written shortly before leaving us for Heaven. On seeing the crisis of faith, virtues and values that had already broken out back then (it was 1973) in many environments, he wrote with supernatural outlook and apostolic zeal: ***In moments of great crisis in the Church’s history, those who remained faithful and put up a determined resistance against the forces of evil, and who were sufficiently prepared spiritually and doctrinally, with the required moral and intellectual resources, have never been many in number. But those few filled the***

⁶ Venerable Alvaro del Portillo, Letter, 25 December 1985, no. 4.

Church and the world with light once again.⁷ We have to do all we can to help many women and men welcome the gift of grace, and find shelter and strength in this refuge.

The new evangelization is particularly urgent in Europe and in the more developed countries. In his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Európa*, Blessed John Paul II described the religious situation of society in the “old continent.” Although intended as a summary of the conclusions of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Europe, his words can be applied in great measure to many other places. For after twenty centuries, even in countries with a long Christian tradition, “the number of the unbaptized is growing, both because of the significant presence of immigrants of other religions and because children born into families of Christian tradition have not received Baptism.”⁸ The Pope concludes that “Europe is now one of those traditionally Christian places which, in addition to a new evangelization, require in some cases a first evangelization.”⁹ *First* evangelization and *new* evangelization: two forms of proclaiming the Gospel required of us now by the situation of the Church and the world.

8. In point 848 of *The Way* St. Josemaria calls on the Christian to be a ***missionary—with a mission—and not call yourself a missionary***. This reality is grounded in the radical, foundational moment of all Christian mission: *as the Father has sent me, even so I send you* (*Jn* 20:21). This first sending out gives shape to the different forms that Christ’s mission will take on in the Church’s life throughout history: from care for Catholics’ life of faith (pastoral work, fraternity), to the proclamation of Christ as Savior to the pagans (first proclamation, evangelization); from fraternal dealings with non-Catholic Christians, encouraging them to seek full communion (ecumenism), to the new proclamation of Christ and his doctrine to the baptized who have abandoned and rejected his teaching (the new evangelization). The faithful of Opus Dei, with our fully secular lives, are called to take part in these different dimensions of the one “mission” of the Church.

St. Josemaria insisted: ***We are missionaries, with a mission, without calling ourselves missionaries. Missionaries, just as much on the paved streets of Rome, New York, Paris, Mexico, Tokyo, Buenos Aires, Lisbon or Madrid, Dublin or Sydney, as in the heart of Africa.***¹⁰ The need to pass on the first proclamation of the faith no longer applies only to those countries traditionally known as “mission territories,” but unfortunately affects the whole globe. And we have to dedicate ourselves to this great task.

But this responsibility cannot remain a nice theory. Each of us has to consider: how am I contributing? And even before this, we have to consider how the faith influences our own way of acting, and also whether we thank God every day for this gift and, as a consequence, are striving to pass on this great treasure to others. Let us raise our hearts to our Lord, imploring: *adáuge nobis fidem*, “increase our faith!” (*Lk* 17:5), so that we may all pray better; *adáuge mihi fidem*, “increase my faith!” so that I may sanctify myself in my work and sanctify others, and give a constant Christian meaning to my friendship.

⁷ St. Josemaria, Letter, 28 March 1973, no. 18.

⁸ Blessed John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, 28 June 2003, no. 46.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ St. Josemaria, Instruction, May 1935 / 14 September 1950, note 231.

Remembering the saying “example is the best preacher,” let’s follow in the footsteps of Christ, who *coepit facere et docere* (see *Acts* 1:1), began to do and teach.

Let us be convinced that, in the most varied settings, “*a renewed proclamation is needed even for those already baptized*. Many (...) today think they know what Christianity is, yet they do not really know it at all. Often they are lacking in knowledge of the most basic elements and notions of the faith.”¹¹ We have to confront this challenge with our lives and our doctrinal formation. Without pessimism, let us reflect on the fact that the apostolic mission our Lord is urging Christians (those who realize we are God’s children) to undertake, takes on different nuances today, depending on the different environments and places, and on the people with whom we each come into contact. In any case, we have to strive to put people in contact with Christ, helping them to get to know, or to get to know again, the face of our Redeemer, and to follow him, even when they have to go against the current.

9. What a great task we have before us! With humility, with personal eagerness for holiness, we have to reach people, above all, with our example. Let us realize that our effort to live an integral Christian life despite our personal failings forms part of the light our Lord wants to enkindle in the world. And let us not be afraid of clashing with the environment, over points that are incompatible with the Catholic faith, even when this might cause us material or social harm. ***Be convinced, and foster this conviction in others, that we Christians have to go against the current. Don’t let yourselves be deluded. Think about it carefully: Jesus went against the current, Peter and the first disciples went against the current, and so did all those who throughout the centuries have wanted to be faithful disciples of the Master. Therefore be very clear that it is not the doctrine of Jesus which has to adapt itself to the times, but rather the times which have to open themselves to the light of the Savior.***¹²

Therefore, turning our eyes to the Redeemer, and asking him to grant us his peace and the capacity to forgive and love those who promote these misunderstandings, let us pray with determination for those who are determined to handcuff the Church, the hierarchy, and Catholics. Aware of our personal weakness, let us strive untiringly to repay evil with good. And as a consequence of our union with God, let us love those who are trying to persecute religion or confine it to the sacristy, keeping it exclusively in the private sphere.

Moreover, if human respects should never be allowed to restrain our apostolic zeal, still less should we be held back by the reality of our personal weakness or lack of means, for we don’t trust in our own strength, but in the grace of Heaven: *omnia possum in eo qui me confortat*—I can do all things in him who strengthens me (*Phil* 4:13). In this regard the Founder of Opus Dei said: ***All of us being united in prayer: this is (...) the source of our joy, our peace, our serenity, and therefore of our supernatural effectiveness.***¹³ And elsewhere he added: ***What other advice do I have for you? Well, simply to do what the Christians who have really tried to follow Christ have always done, and to use the same means employed by the first men who felt prompted to follow Jesus: a close relationship with our Lord in the Eucharist, a childlike recourse to the Blessed Virgin, humility,***

¹¹ Blessed John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, 28 June 2003, no. 47.

¹² St. Josemaria, Letter, 28 March 1973, no. 4.

¹³ St. Josemaria, Letter, 19 March 1954, no. 27.

*temperance, mortification of the senses (...) and penance.*¹⁴ We need a solid faith, firmly grounded in our Omnipotent God. It is hard to convey St. Josemaria's total optimism and firmness; one of the many texts from which he always drew strength was the psalm verse: *in lumine tuo vidēbimus lumen (Ps 35/36:10)*, in your light we shall see the light. For with God, all darkness is dissipated.

RETURNING TO THE ROOTS OF THE GOSPEL

10. Often, in the past, Europe has had to confront challenging periods of transformation and crisis, but “it has always overcome them, drawing new lifeblood from the inexhaustible reserve of vital energy in the Gospel.”¹⁵ These words of Blessed John Paul II, spoken in 1995, confirm for us the path we have to follow. There is no other way: going to the roots of our faith to imbue ourselves with the life-giving strength we draw from it (this is the reason for the doctrinal formation the Work gives us), and then bringing many other men and women into vital contact with Christ.

St. Josemaria said that *living the faith also means transmitting it to others*. To do so, we have to walk alongside them; and on the way we have to listen to the difficulties they raise about the Christian message, and show them that we understand them, so that they feel understood, enlightened, and oriented by our conversation. And thus, walking at their side, we will communicate the Gospel, the living word of God, to them with affection and warmth. That is, we will show them the marvel of the Christian spirit, which harmonizes reason and faith and offers an answer to all their questions and calms the disquiet of the human heart. And thus we will help them to desire the sacraments and to prepare to receive them.

In many cases, divine grace will have to build up the supernatural edifice in souls from the very foundation. Let us take advantage of the eagerness to do good and to act in solidarity with others that we see in the new generations (and not only in them), so that they may discover the Savior. We have to make Christ's teachings known to them with the *gift of tongues*, and lay down the foundations—little by little, advancing up a steady slope—until they acquire a firm Christian life.

Example of the first Christians

11. I want to stress to you once again that we should often turn our eyes to the conduct of the Apostles and of our first brothers and sisters in the faith. They were few in number, they had no human means, and they did not include among their ranks (at least to begin with) any great thinkers or people of high public standing. They carried out their activity in a social environment of indifferentism, of a lack of values, similar in many ways to the one we face today. Nevertheless, they were not intimidated. *They carried on a marvelous conversation with everyone they met, or sought out, on their trips and*

¹⁴ St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 186.

¹⁵ Blessed John Paul II, Speech, 9 September 1995.

*journeys. There would be no Church, if the Apostles had not carried on that supernatural dialogue with all those souls.*¹⁶

Women and men, their contemporaries, underwent a profound transformation on being touched by divine grace. They did not simply join a new religion that was more perfect than those they already knew, but, through faith, discovered Christ and fell in love with him, the God-Man who had given himself in sacrifice for them and had risen from the dead to open the gates of Heaven to them. This unheard-of fact penetrated into the souls of those early Christians with enormous force, giving them a strength capable of resisting any trial. “No one has believed in Socrates to the point of dying for his teachings,” St. Justin said in the middle of the second century. “But, for Christ, even manual workers and the unlearned have despised not only the opinion of the world, but even the fear of death.”¹⁷

In a world that ardently longed for salvation, without knowing where to find it, Christian doctrine shone forth like a lighted lamp in the midst of the darkness. Those first Christians, by their behavior, made this saving light shine out for their fellow citizens and became messengers of Christ, doing so simply and naturally, without any outward display, by the consistency between their faith and their deeds. “We don’t say great things, we do them,”¹⁸ one of the first Christians wrote. And they changed the pagan world.

In the apostolic letter that he addressed to the whole Church in preparation for the great jubilee of the year 2000, Blessed John Paul II wrote that “in Christ religion is no longer a ‘blind search for God’ (cf. *Acts* 17:27) but the *response of faith* to God who reveals himself. It is a response in which man speaks to God as his Creator and Father, a response made possible by that one Man who is also the consubstantial Word in whom God speaks to each individual person and by whom each person is enabled to respond to God.”¹⁹

It’s a question of faith

12. I find in these words another consideration that I would like to pass on to you, in light of the need to strive to carry out the task of the new evangelization of society unceasingly. Above all we need a deeply assimilated faith and hope; that is, we need to foster at each moment the deep conviction—stemming from our relationship with the Trinity—that it is possible to change the course of this world of ours, directing all human activities to the glory of God and the conversion of souls. Certainly this will require struggle and suffering. But we will always go forward *in laetitia*, with joy and trust, because we have God’s promise: *Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession (Ps 2:8).*

It is moving, I repeat, to contemplate how the Apostles, having no other means than faith in Christ and a sure and joyful hope, journeyed throughout the known world of those times, and spread Christian doctrine everywhere. How much St. Josemaria liked to

¹⁶ St. Josemaria, Letter, 24 October 1965, no. 13.

¹⁷ St. Justin, *Apology* 2, 10 (PG 6, 462).

¹⁸ Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, no. 38 (PL 3, 357).

¹⁹ Blessed John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 10 November 1994, no. 6.

celebrate their feasts, and those of the holy women who accompanied Jesus on his earthly travels! The figures of the Apostles, Mary Magdalene, Lazarus, and Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, enkindled his heart. From each of them we can learn to believe more firmly in Christ, wholeheartedly, and to love him as intensely as those who knew him did. Like us, they too had their failings and, despite being so few in comparison with the population of the known world, they spread the divine seed with their daily example and their consoling words.

I recall how strongly our Father assured us, when speaking about apostolic efforts in an adverse environment: ***It's a question of faith!*** Yes, it is a question of faith! The faith that, as our Lord says in the Gospel, is able to move mountains (see *Mt 17:20*) and overcome any obstacle; a faith like the rivers that open up a channel to the sea from the high peaks (see *Ps 103/104:10*). Therefore I ask you, and I ask myself: how much faith do we show when the right time comes for apostolate, knowing that it is always the right time? Are we truly convinced, as St. John wrote, that *this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith* (*1 Jn 5:4*)? Do we act accordingly? Do we confront obstacles with an optimistic spirit, with the morale of winners? And therefore, do we underpin every specific apostolic activity with prayer and sacrifice? Do we give witness to our faith, without letting ourselves be frightened by the obstacles in our surroundings?

Let us tell our Lord more frequently: *I believe; help my unbelief!* (*Mk 9:24*). St. Josemaria was deeply moved by the petition of the father of that sick boy. Let us not rest content with the way we are imploring our Lord for the theological virtues. St. Josemaria, knowing that faith is a supernatural gift that only God can infuse and intensify in the soul, said on one occasion: ***every day, not just once but many times, I say this to him (...) I tell him what the Apostles asked of him (...) adáuge nobis fidem! (Lk 17:5), increase our faith. And I add: spem, caritátem; increase our faith, hope and charity.***²⁰

A firm point of support

13. The Holy Father Benedict XVI, on various occasions, has pointed to the contradictions of the times in which we live. **In vast areas of the world today there is a strange forgetfulness of God. It seems as if everything would be just the same even without him. But at the same time there is a feeling of frustration, a sense of dissatisfaction with everyone and everything. People tend to exclaim: "This cannot be what life is about!" Indeed not. And so, together with forgetfulness of God there is a kind of new explosion of religion. I have no wish to discredit all the manifestations of this phenomenon. There may be sincere joy in the discovery. But to tell the truth, religion often becomes almost a consumer product. People choose what they like, and some are even able to make a profit from it. But religion sought on a "do-it-yourself" basis cannot ultimately help us. It may be comfortable, but at times of crisis we are left to ourselves.**²¹ And the Pope concludes with the following invitation: **Help people to discover the true star which points out the way to us: Jesus Christ!**²²

²⁰ St. Josemaria, notes taken at a family gathering, 7 April 1974.

²¹ Benedict XVI, Homily, 21 August 2005.

²² *Ibid.*

Despite the relativism and the permissive atmosphere reigning in broad sectors of society, many people are thirsting for eternity, perhaps because they have tried to quench this thirst without success in perishable goods. What a great truth those well-known words of St. Augustine contain! “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”²³ Only God completely satisfies the yearnings of the human spirit. Therefore, let us be women and men of strong piety, who have recourse to the various forms of prayer—the true solution to all our troubles—with sincere desires to pray more and better. Let us go to Mass with deep faith, convinced that there the Sacrifice of Calvary becomes sacramentally present, the Sacrifice that brought us salvation and that reinvigorates us for our daily battle for holiness.

14. It was deeply moving to see the faith, piety and recollection with which St. Josemaria entered, body and soul, into the moment of the Eucharistic Consecration. Each day he was overwhelmed, with renewed gratitude and devotion, by the mystery of transubstantiation, by this self-giving of the Son of God to the Father, with the Holy Spirit, for souls. I don’t think I’m exaggerating in saying that it was from knowing himself at those moments to be *ipse Christus* that he drew all the strength he needed for his wide-ranging and effective apostolic action. The same ardent faith was apparent in him when, before giving Holy Communion, he repeated John the Baptist’s words: *Ecce Agnus Dei!* He exhorted all Catholics, and he repeated it to his daughters and sons, and to priests, that we need to identify ourselves with Christ, because Christ himself invited us to do so and because thus we will draw souls to the Love of God. Stirring up our faith, as our Father did, precisely at the moment of transubstantiation, is a powerful help to make each day a “Mass.”

The certainty that God wants to count on us can and should be a firm point of support in renewing our apostolic zeal each day. And it should spur us on to serve those around us with hope and supernatural optimism. ***We have to be enkindled with the desire and the reality of bringing the light of Christ, the zeal of Christ, the sufferings and salvation of Christ, to 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!***²⁴

PRIORITY AREAS

15. Always and everywhere, the apostolate we do must have a deep intellectual content. We need to “pass on” ideas *about* the truth in order to “pass on” the Truth. This is a summary of our whole apostolic task. We should beseech God untiringly, humbly, insistently, and trustingly, to open people’s minds and hearts to his light. Many people today, like the Magi, say: *we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him* (Mt 2:2). They will say this to us if we who believe in Christ approach everyone with sincere friendship, imbued with charity and understanding, and with human warmth as

²³ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 1, 3 (CCL 27, 1).

²⁴ St. Josemaria, notes taken at a family gathering, 2 June 1974.

well, underpinned by a life of piety; and also with gratitude for the good that many people are doing in so many areas.

What amazes us in the Magi, 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 nations? 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.²⁵

Let us not forget that *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 (see 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.*²⁶

16. This task is not reserved to people who work in specially designated fields. The personal apostolate of each Christian is very effective in the ordinary setting in which he or she lives. Therefore, I suggest we devote time to examining our consciences personally on how we are trying to help souls get closer to God: what prayer, what sacrifices, how many hours of carefully-done work we have offered up; what conversations we have had, face to face or in writing, with our friends, relatives, companions, and acquaintances. Let us pass on this holy concern to those around us, because faith in the effectiveness of Christ's teachings has to spur us on to serve and love our brothers and sisters better: we can't be unconcerned about anyone.

The apostolate of the intellect is, as I was saying, everyone's task. But without losing sight of the many fields in which the new evangelization is urgently needed, special priority should be given today to imbuing *certain particular spheres* with Christ's doctrine. We only need think of the work of those in government, of scientists and researchers, of professionals in public opinion, etc., without forgetting that all men and women—we ourselves—experience the need to hear our Lord's voice and follow it.

"The struggle for the soul of the contemporary world is at its height where the spirit of this world seems strongest," wrote Blessed John Paul II. He goes on to speak of contemporary platforms for disseminating the truth, "*modern Areopagi*. Today these *Areopagi* are the worlds of science, culture, and media; they are the worlds of writers and artists, the worlds where the intellectual elite are formed."²⁷

²⁵ Benedict XVI, Homily on the solemnity of the Epiphany, 6 January 2007.

²⁶ St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 33.

²⁷ Blessed John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p. 112.

Research and teaching

17. Although we always have to be open to everyone, helping people who work in intellectual fields to know the Gospel is clearly of great importance. Specifically, those who work in universities need to recall some words of our Lord, addressed to everyone, and see them as especially directed to themselves: *vos estis lux mundi* (Mt 5:14), you need to be the light of the world. Indeed, their professional work places them in the vanguard of the new evangelization. St. Josemaria, who gave such a strong impetus (even before 1928) to the apostolate with intellectuals, said: ***the university has, as its highest mission, service to mankind, being a leaven for society.***²⁸

These words express very well the apostolic direction that those who work in these settings should follow: to be leaven, to give light and warmth—the light and warmth of the Gospel—so that the Good News of Christ may imbue the souls and actions of their friends, colleagues and students, in full fidelity to the Church’s Magisterium. Thus they will contribute to the evangelization of culture. This point in *The Way* is perennially up-to-date: ***You must inspire others with love of God and zeal for souls, so that they in turn will set on fire many more who are on a third plane and each of these latter spread the flame to their professional companions.***

What a lot of spiritual calories you need! And what a tremendous responsibility if you let yourself grow cold! And—I don’t even want to think of it—what a terrible crime if you were to give bad example!²⁹

Let us never lose sight of the important challenge of encouraging many people and institutions throughout the world—impelled by the example of the first Christians—to help bring about a new culture, new laws, new fashions, consistent with the dignity of the human person and our destiny, which is the glory of the children of God in Christ Jesus (see *2 Cor* 3:18). While we all need to pray and do everything we can, with full generosity, to accomplish this, university lecturers and researchers have a responsibility to make a real and persevering effort to use every opportunity that their profession affords them. In this context, our faith supports us in advancing towards the truth and at the same time in doing all we can, with the strength that the virtue of faith gives us, to take the truth to all spheres and help the people around us to accept it or grow in it.

18. Research occupies an important place in the work of university teachers and other intellectuals. In that task, a Christian who is resolved to seek and spread the truth, and who is spurred on by a noble zeal to help overcome fragmentation and relativism in building up human knowledge, will discover constant opportunities to carry out a deep doctrinal apostolate. No topic of research, no area in the wide range of teaching, is “neutral” with respect to the faith. All of our activities, even chemistry lectures—to take a graphic example—can assist or fail to assist the spread of Christ’s kingdom. ***The objectivity required by science rightly rejects all ideological neutrality, all ambiguity, all conformism, all cowardliness: love for the truth involves the life and entire work of the***

²⁸ St. Josemaria, Address at the act of investiture of honorary doctors by the University of Navarra, 7 October 1967.

²⁹ St. Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 944.

scientist.³⁰ If professors and researchers are moved primarily by the desire to give glory to God and serve souls, then the Christian consistency of their example, the availability they show towards students and colleagues, the noble focus they give to their work, their effort to educate their students and pass on their knowledge, will undoubtedly help those who listen to their words or receive the echo of their work to discover or sense the mark of Christ's followers.

Moreover, their work will facilitate professional relationships with researchers of high standing in their own country or in others; and it will lead to sincere friendships, which are the natural setting for personal apostolate, and which will enable them to help their colleagues, in their research, at least to respect the fundamental moral principles.

Responsible Catholics involved in these crucial areas for the new evangelization, should ask themselves how they can also reach, to the extent of their possibilities, the media and the forums of public opinion, in order to pass on good, solid doctrine in the area of their own specialty: by writing in the press; taking part in radio and television programs or communicating through the internet; participating in cultural activities and offering an informed scientific opinion on topics that arise in public debate, etc. And, on their part, Catholics who run press or publishing concerns, or who work professionally in these media, should strive to ensure that their pages or cameras present, with depth and rigor, clean and morally correct content.

I would like to emphasize strongly that those who work in these fields need to realize their responsibility to make good use of their talents. And they should never forget that many other people, who do manual work or jobs that might seem of little importance, are striving to turn their work into a petition to God that the men and women who have the most influence on the direction taken by society may fully realize their responsibility, knowing that God will ask them to render an account. And they should be very grateful for those who work, so to speak, in the "shadows." St. Josemaria's words are very relevant here: Who is more important, the president of a university, or the lowest person on the maintenance staff? And he answered without hesitating: the one who does his job with greater faith, with a greater zeal for sanctity.

Harmony between faith and reason

19. Those of us who know we are God's children have to help people realize there is no "competition of any kind between reason and faith: each contains the other, and each has its own scope for action (...). In their respective worlds, God and the human being are set within a unique relationship. In God there lies the origin of all things, in him is found the fullness of the mystery, and in this his glory consists; to men and women there falls the task of exploring truth with their reason, and in this their nobility consists."³¹

St. Josemaria's words are also very timely: ***Based firmly on solid scientific knowledge, we have to show people that faith and reason are not in any way opposed,***³²

³⁰ St. Josemaria, Address at the ceremony of conferral of honorary doctorates by the University of Navarra, 9 May 1974.

³¹ Blessed John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, 14 September 1998, no. 17.

³² St. Josemaria, Letter, 9 January 1951, no. 12.

on the contrary, there should be a complete harmony between them, since both spheres of knowledge stem from God, from the *Logos* who created the world, and who has taken on human nature.

In his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul II wrote: “For Christian witness to be effective, especially in these delicate and controversial areas, it is important that special efforts be made to explain properly the reasons for the Church’s position, stressing that it is not a case of imposing on non-believers a vision based on faith, but of interpreting and defending the values rooted in the very nature of the human person. In this way charity will necessarily become service to culture, politics, the economy and the family, so that the fundamental principles upon which depend the destiny of human beings and the future of civilization will be everywhere respected.”³³ For this effort, we need the *gift of tongues*, which we will attain if we invoke the Holy Spirit with faith, and use the human means.

Everyone is aware of the full freedom that, within Catholic doctrine, the Church recognizes for her children in their own professional activity and as citizens among their fellow citizens. Their clear awareness of mankind’s problems, and their supernatural sense in judging and solving these problems in a Christian way, in accordance with a correct and well-formed conscience, have to stimulate each individual’s personal apostolic responsibility, in order to bring a more human, Christian approach to scientific debate. Therefore, people who work in the fields of science and the humanities need to take a serious and well-informed approach to the areas of their work that have a more directly doctrinal or ethical dimension. The moral crisis society is undergoing, and the perennial need to evangelize, make it even more urgent for Christian researchers never to cease striving steadily and seriously to help resolve the problems of today’s world correctly.

Public morality

20. Another urgent challenge to evangelization is that of public morality. One of the obstacles most virulently opposed to the reign of Christ, in souls and in society, is the wave of sensuality that has invaded customs, laws, fashions, the media, and the arts. Moved by Christian responsibility, and human responsibility as well, to stop this virulent attack, besides praying and inviting others to pray, making reparation and asking others to make reparation, we have to mobilize many people (men and women of good will, whether Catholics or not), helping them to feel the urgency of *doing something*. Sterile laments are of little use, and even less so is the attitude of indifference, of being satisfied that at least one is not contributing to the evil oneself. On the contrary, every moment is a good time to launch out with greater optimism in a “capillary” apostolate, a radical change, beginning with one’s own life, one’s own home, one’s own professional milieu.

Let us listen to the Apostle to the Gentiles, who exhorts us: *We entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, “At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation.” Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:1-2)*. We Christians have to act with the security of our faith, in order to cleanse everything around us that is not in harmony with God’s law, doing so without human respects, without being afraid for others to realize that we are

³³ Blessed John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 6 January 2001, no. 51.

people who are convinced about our faith. Certain values are non-negotiable, as Benedict XVI has so often stressed: **protection of life in all its stages, from the first moment of conception until natural death; recognition and promotion of the natural structure of the family—as a union between a man and a woman based on marriage—and its defense from attempts to make it juridically equivalent to radically different forms of union which in reality harm it and contribute to its destabilization, obscuring its particular character and its irreplaceable social role; the protection of the right of parents to educate their children.**³⁴

The Pope explained that **these principles are not truths of faith, even though they receive further light and confirmation from faith; they are inscribed in human nature itself and therefore they are common to all humanity. The Church’s action in promoting them is therefore not confessional in character, but is addressed to all people, prescinding from any religious affiliation they may have. On the contrary, such action is all the more necessary the more these principles are denied or misunderstood, because this constitutes an offence against the truth of the human person, a grave wound inflicted onto justice itself.**³⁵

21. The same can be said equally about essential points of Christian teaching, which nowadays are being remorselessly assailed by groups of people obstinately determined to eliminate all religious awareness from civil society. Examples are unfortunately all too common: from crude attacks on Jesus Christ, whom they try to make look ridiculous, to slanderous accusations against the Church, her ministers, and her institutions.

To live up fully to our Christian vocation we have to reveal Christ to others, by enunciating Church teaching (firstly by our example, but also by timely interventions), especially in relation to issues that are currently the subject of heated public debate. There springs to mind what Don Alvaro expressed so clearly: “As one has to start by setting one’s own house in order (...), each of us should look and see how concerned we are about this eminently Christian commitment.”³⁶ These words are like an echo of the Apostle’s preaching to the first Christians: *This is the will of God, your sanctification (...) that each one of you know how to keep his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God; that no man transgress, and wrong his brother (...) For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness (1 Thess 4:3-7).*

St. Paul’s exhortation is particularly relevant at the present time. It is impossible to combat effectively this wave of slime and filth which is attempting to cover everything, if inside there is some element of complicity (even though it may appear insignificant) with ***those foul things that continually seem to boil and rise within you, trying to engulf in their fragrant corruption the high ideals, the sublime determination that Christ himself has set in your heart.***³⁷

The same note is sounded by St. Gregory Nazianzen, Father and Doctor of the Church, in a passage quoted by Blessed John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation about the mission of Bishops. This is how he puts it: “First be purified and then purify others, first

³⁴ Benedict XVI, Speech to a group of parliamentarians of the European Union, 30 March 2006.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Venerable Alvaro del Portillo, Letter, 1 January 1994.

³⁷ St. Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 493.

allow yourself to be instructed by wisdom and then instruct others, first become light and then enlighten others, first draw close to God and then guide others to him, first be holy yourself and then make others holy.”³⁸

Since we don’t consider ourselves better than others—and we’re quite right—we have to try again and again to ensure our own behavior conforms as closely as possible to Christ’s teaching. We must be convinced that in the first place we have to struggle interiorly, determined to conform our thoughts, aspirations, words, and deeds, even the slightest, to God’s will: ***The struggle has a battle-front within our very being, the battle-front of our passions. To be watchful, we have to fight interiorly to turn away decisively from occasions of sin: from whatever undermines our faith, diminishes our hope or weakens our Love.***³⁹

22. This provides us with a focal point for our daily examination of conscience for the coming months, and always. How do I struggle for holiness? Do I get down to specifics, following the advice I get in spiritual direction? Do I often appeal to God to give me a sensitive conscience (which has nothing to do with being scrupulous) in order to discover the little cracks in the walls of the soul through which the enemy tries to gain entry, and which diminish the effectiveness of my apostolate? Am I always happy to discover new points of struggle, and do I tackle them resolutely, with a sporting attitude, sustained by God’s grace?

Non enim vocavit nos Deus in immunditiam sed in sanctificationem (1 Thess 4:7)—God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness. Although some of the media, or misguided ideologies, may try to persuade us otherwise (aided and abetted in the first place by our own disordered tendencies), the battle for clean living is always attractive and always possible. Consequently, at all times it can and must be proposed to every individual, no matter how far removed they may seem to be from the goal. There isn’t a single human being who isn’t looking for a point of reference to cling to, in the sea of waves and tempests that our times are going through, but which is nothing new. As Christians we have the immense good fortune and ability to pass on this certainty, which many are seeking, perhaps without realizing it. Let us forge ahead, waging the Lord’s battles joyfully (cf. *1 Mac 3:2*), *in hoc pulcherrimo caritatis bello*, in this beautiful battle of charity, whose final outcome is fully assured. It will end in God’s victory, for those who remain faithful to his Love.

23. Benedict XVI has recently underlined the importance of frequent reception of the sacrament of Penance. Speaking to an audience of priests and seminarians in the context of the Year of Faith, he said: **the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is itself a proclamation and therefore a path to take for the work of the New Evangelization.**

In what sense then is sacramental Confession a “path” for the New Evangelization? First of all because the new evangelization draws its lifeblood from the holiness of the children of the Church, from the daily journey of personal and community conversion in order to be ever more closely conformed to Christ. Then there is a close connection between holiness and the Sacrament of Reconciliation,

³⁸ St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Prayer II*, 71 (PG 35, 479); quoted in Blessed John Paul II, *Apost. Exhort. Pastores Gregis*, 16 October 2003, no. 12.

³⁹ St. Josemaria, *Letter*, 28 March 1973, no. 10.

witnessed by all the saints of history. The real conversion of our hearts, which means opening ourselves to God’s transforming and renewing action, is the “driving force” of every reform and is expressed in a real evangelizing effort. In Confession, through the freely bestowed action of divine Mercy, repentant sinners are justified, pardoned and sanctified and abandon their former selves to be re clothed in the new.

Only those who have let themselves be profoundly renewed by divine grace are able to bear within them—and hence to proclaim—the newness of the Gospel.⁴⁰

The family

24. In the Work we should always act with the optimism and supernatural vision which spring from divine filiation, but we can’t ignore the fact that at this present time one of the areas most under threat from the wave of hedonism is the family. Among the grave consequences of the situation one can immediately identify the increase in matrimonial infidelity and the growing difficulty for young people to be able to hear and follow God’s call, especially in apostolic celibacy. And so a *crusade of manliness and purity*⁴¹ is especially urgent and necessary nowadays at all levels of society.

This battle for chaste living, like all the other virtues, requires each one of us to practise holy purity, that “joyful affirmation,” most meticulously, in accordance with our state, and also not to neglect the influence we can have on others in our apostolate of friendship and confidence. Moreover, as I said above, it is good to make use of interdisciplinary studies to help many people and institutions worldwide (following the example of the early Christians) to foster a new culture, a new jurisprudence, and a new approach to fashion.

To achieve such an ambitious target requires us to pray unceasingly and to work indefatigably. But that is how Christians fashion their goals: magnanimous in their scope and in tune with the reality that we are each capable of achieving. We have to be convinced that each one of us can do more, much more than we think, in all sorts of little ways (initiatives, example, holy intransigence) in our own environment. I recall an illustration St. Josemaria used in relation to the ecological problem, and which I copy here because I think it expresses very well what I am trying to say.

I was saying recently to your older brothers, recalling how we’ve often talked about boats and nets, that nowadays people everywhere talk and write a lot about ecology. Water samples are taken from rivers, lakes, and the sea, and analyzed... Nearly always the result is that things are in a bad way: the fish don’t have a healthy environment to live in.

When we spoke about boats and nets, you and I, what we had in mind were the nets of Christ, the boat of Peter, and souls. There was a good reason why our Lord said: Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Well, it could happen that one of those fish, of those men, seeing what’s happening around the world and within the Church of God, seeing that sea covered with filth, those rivers which seem to be full of disgusting

⁴⁰ Benedict XVI, Address to participants at a course on the internal forum, 9 March 2012.

⁴¹ St. Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 121.

scum, where they can't get any nourishment or oxygen, if these fish were to think (and we're speaking about fish which do think, because they've got souls), the thought could occur to them: I've had enough, one leap and I'm out! It's not worth living like this. I'm off to look for shelter on the bank, I'll take a few gasps and get some air. I've had enough!

No, my sons, we have to remain in this rotten world, in this sea of dirty water, in these rivers which flow thorough the great cities and the tiny villages, and whose waters lack the power to nourish men's bodies, to quench their thirst, because they are poisonous. My sons, the place we have to be is out in the street, in the middle of the world, trying to create around us a pool of clear water, so that other fish may come, and between us all we widen the pool, purify the river, and restore wholesomeness to the waters of the sea.⁴²

25. When the Church began the task of changing the environment of the decadent Roman Empire, the social and moral situation was the same as or worse than at present: as Christians, we will always be called upon to make a determined effort to bring Christ's values to mankind.

Parents have an irreplaceable role to play in this undertaking. The effort to create deeply Christian homes and to provide their children with a genuine Christian upbringing will cause their families to become sources of Christian living, pools of clear water, which will influence many other families too. This in turn will nurture vocations of self-giving to God in the priesthood and in the whole spectrum of Church life, both in the secular sphere and in consecrated life; and give rise to many new *bright and cheerful homes*, as St. Josemaria used to say.

Parents have the right, let me repeat, to carry out a wide-ranging personal apostolate in many different ways. And, given the importance of the issue, they will naturally, and freely, form networks with other people experiencing similar problems in order to tackle them together: in areas such as the use of free time, leisure activity and entertainment, travel, setting up establishments where their daughters and sons can mature humanly and spiritually, etc. Parents who have children of school-going age are fully entitled, as part of their responsibility for their education, to the free choice and even the running of schools and youth clubs. It is also obvious how important it is for them to take an active part in the educational establishments where their sons and daughters study, making use of all the resources provided by law to direct them appropriately.

In the last while, after many years of singing the praises of co-education, people are coming around to the idea that the separate education of boys and girls at primary and secondary levels is beneficial for their development. It is important to pay attention to this aspect, and to promote research and discussion, both legal and educational, and in the media, to demonstrate the validity and advantages of this method; it implies great respect for boys and girls, both infants and adolescents, and is of proven benefit educationally and in personality development.

26. In the same context, it is necessary to have a proper understanding of freedom, because it is often mistakenly interpreted as the simple ability to choose what one prefers at each moment, what satisfies one's fancy or comfort, without considering its close

⁴² St. Josemaria, notes taken at a family gathering, 20 May 1973; cf. *Mt* 4:19.

connection with the truth. Freedom, which is a great natural good, was weakened by sin, but Christ healed it through grace and elevated it to the category of the new and genuine supernatural freedom—the freedom of the children of God (cf. *Rom* 8:18-19 and 21). St. Josemaria, precisely because he saw himself as, and felt like, a son of God the Father (this filiation is at the heart of what it means to be a man or a woman), managed to achieve a particularly profound understanding of Christian freedom, and warned us against *the deception of those who appease themselves with the pathetic cry of “Freedom! Freedom!” Their cry often masks a tragic enslavement, he pointed out, because choices that prefer error do not liberate. Christ alone sets us free, for he alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life.*⁴³ And he added: *Freedom finds its true meaning when it is put to the service of the truth which redeems, when it is spent in seeking God’s infinite Love which liberates us from all forms of slavery.*⁴⁴

As responsible citizens, we Christians have to do everything possible to defend and foster our own freedom and that of others, and at the same time to help everybody discover that new freedom—*hac libertate nos Christus liberavit* (*Gal* 5:1)—by which Christ has freed us. This is one of the most urgent tasks of the new evangelization. I have already reminded you that those who are called to sanctify themselves in the married state have an irreplaceable role in this undertaking; but I wish to stress that the obligation to spread good doctrine about marriage and the family is the responsibility of every single individual.

KNOWING AND PROFESSING THE FAITH

27. Every effort to carry out the new evangelization, be it in the intellectual apostolate or in the priority areas I have just pointed to, has to be based on the solid foundation of the faith. *Without faith it is impossible to please God* (*Heb* 11:6), Sacred Scripture tells us.

This theological virtue, the gateway of the Christian life, demands the free assent of the intellect, and leads to complete fidelity to God’s Will, expressed through the truths he has revealed to us, giving us the certainty that they have to be accepted on the authority of the Creator himself, who, as the Book of Genesis explains, wills only good for the whole of creation. And so, when the faith is accepted and professed seriously, it generates an ongoing, total confidence in God; and as we practise this free and responsible abandonment, we participate in the divine life which is communicated to us along with these truths as the way to achieve union with God himself.

The Year of Faith, from this perspective, is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world. In the mystery of his death and resurrection, God has revealed in its fullness the Love that saves and calls us to conversion of life through the forgiveness of sins. For Saint Paul, this Love ushers us into a new life: “We were buried (...) with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk

⁴³ St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, 26; cf. *Gal* 4:31; *Jn* 14:6.

⁴⁴ St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, 27.

in newness of life.” Through faith, this new life shapes the whole of human existence according to the radical new reality of the resurrection.⁴⁵

Examples of faith

28. The Letter to the Hebrews places before our eyes a series of faithful men and women who, throughout the history of salvation, from Abel the Just onwards, believed in God and followed him with all their strength of mind and will, spending their lives joyfully in his service (cf. *Heb* 11:4-40). Over them all towers the figure of Abraham, *our father in faith*.⁴⁶ We can also learn a lot from the strength of his hope in God: we all have to grow in the three theological virtues in the coming months, trusting more and more in the means which lead us to Heaven, and asking the Blessed Trinity insistently to increase our faith, our hope and our love.

While Abraham was living in Ur of the Chaldees, he “heard the word of the Lord which took him away from his own land, from his people, from himself in a sense, to make him the instrument of a plan of salvation which embraced the future people of the Covenant and indeed all the peoples of the world.”⁴⁷ Immediately, without wavering, the Patriarch set out on his journey.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore (Heb 11:8-12).

The same story of firm faith continues and develops, more deeply and widely, in the New Testament. The Blessed Virgin shows herself to be an unparalleled teacher of faith. **By faith, Mary accepted the Angel’s word and believed the message that she was to become the Mother of God in the obedience of her devotion. Visiting Elizabeth, she raised her hymn of praise to the Most High for the marvels he worked in those who trust him. With joy and trepidation she gave birth to her only son, keeping her virginity intact. Trusting in Joseph, her husband, she took Jesus to Egypt to save him from Herod’s persecution. With the same faith, she followed the Lord in his preaching and remained with him all the way to Golgotha. By faith, Mary tasted the fruits of Jesus’ resurrection, and treasuring every memory in her heart, she passed them on to the Twelve assembled with her in the Upper Room to receive the Holy Spirit.**⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, 11 October 2011, no. 6; cf. *Acts* 5:31; *Rom* 6:4.

⁴⁶ Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer I.

⁴⁷ Blessed John Paul II, *Letter concerning pilgrimage to the places linked to the history of salvation*, 29 June 1999, no. 5.

⁴⁸ Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 13. Cf. *Lk* 1:38; *Lk* 1:46-55; *Lk* 2:6-7; *Mt* 2:13-15; *Jn* 19:25-27; *Lk* 2:19 and 51; *Acts* 1:14 and 2:1-4.

To meditate on and deepen in Mary's faith leads us to experience our total dependence on God. It enables us to see how, when we cling firmly to his hand, we can work wonders, and gives an extraordinary perspective to our lives, to the Church, and to the task of co-redemption we have received. This vision also extends to the apparently most insignificant details of our lives, because with God *póssumus!*—we can do all things; and without him, *nihil*, nothing.

By faith the Apostles left everything to follow the Master. So too did the first disciples, and the martyrs who gave their lives to witness to the Gospel, and countless Christians of all ages, including our own. **By faith, across the centuries, men and women of all ages, whose names are written in the Book of Life, have confessed the beauty of following the Lord Jesus wherever they were called to bear witness to the fact that they were Christian: in the family, in the workplace, in public life, in the exercise of the charisms and ministries to which they were called.**⁴⁹

The example of St. Josemaria

29. Let us turn our gaze to the history of the Church: there we never fail to find men and women who have been instruments in God's hands to give new energy and vitality to the Christian faithful in moments of difficulty. There comes to my mind the example of our Founder. St. Josemaria meditated a lot on our predecessors in the faith and how they responded to God. And so, like the patriarch Abraham, our Father abandoned all his own plans and, obedient to God's voice, became a pilgrim along all the paths of the earth, teaching his brothers and sisters a doctrine *as old as the Gospel, and, like the Gospel, new*,⁵⁰ namely, that God calls everybody to be saints in their work and in the circumstances of ordinary life, in worldly affairs. He was a man, a priest, of faith and of hope, virtues which, along with charity, God infused into his soul with growing intensity. By fostering this huge faith and this great hope, he managed to carry out the mission he had received, and today the people of all ages, races and backgrounds who are nourished by this spirit and who seek God's glory are as countless *as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore* (Gen 22:17).

St. Josemaria's life reveals how each day can and ought to be a time of faith, of hope, of love, without yielding to selfishness. We ought to ask ourselves: how do the theological virtues come out in our daily behavior? Do we see the provident hand of our Father God in everything that happens, in both agreeable and adverse events? In other words, are we firmly convinced that *omnia possibilia credenti* (Mk 9:23), that all things are possible for him who believes, even though we may be bereft of personal talents and resources? Are we optimistic in the apostolate, with a supernatural optimism based on the conviction that, as the Apostle says, *omnia possum in eo qui me confortat* (Phil 4:13), we can do all things in Christ, who is our strength?

Perhaps we have to conclude that as yet we haven't deepened sufficiently in the exercise of these virtues. We can, therefore, apply to ourselves these words of St. Josemaria: ***We lack faith. The day we practise this virtue, trusting in God and in his***

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*; cf. Rev 7:9, 13:8.

⁵⁰ St. Josemaria, Instruction, 19 March 1934, no. 45.

Mother, we will be daring and loyal. God, who is the same God as ever, will work miracles through our hands.

*Grant me, dear Jesus, the faith I truly desire. My Mother, sweet Lady, Mary most holy, make me really believe.*⁵¹

Our Father often beseeched God to increase the theological virtues in himself, in his numerous sons and daughters, and in all the faithful. Every day he used to pray: *adáuge nobis fidem, spem, caritátem!* Increase our faith, our hope, and our love! He would also make this prayer (silently, in his heart) while he elevated the Host or the Chalice during Mass. His only motive was his desire to be a better servant (and that we too should be better servants) of God and of souls at every moment and on every occasion. I stress that this is what it takes if the Church's path is to be filled with new fruits, now and always. As the Holy Father writes: **We want this Year to arouse in every believer the aspiration to profess the faith in fullness and with renewed conviction, with confidence and hope.**⁵²

To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed, and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make his own, especially in the course of this Year. Not without reason, Christians in the early centuries were required to learn the creed from memory. It served them as a daily prayer not to forget the commitment they had undertaken in baptism.⁵³

Asking for faith and growing in it

30. During the coming months (and indeed always) when we recite the Creed at Mass and on other occasions, let us strive to profess our faith in the Church more consciously, giving greater attention to the words and their meaning. It will help a lot if we frequently study and meditate on its various articles. Among the suggestions Pope Benedict XVI makes to help us benefit from the occasion, pride of place is given to studying the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or its *Compendium*. The *Catechism*, a precious legacy of the Second Vatican Council, contains in a complete, organic and systematic way all the truths of the Catholic faith.

There exists a profound unity between the act by which we believe and the content to which we give our assent.⁵⁴ Knowledge of the articles of the faith is essential in order to give them our personal assent, to accept fully, with mind and will, what the Church proposes. This acceptance implies, therefore, that when one believes, one freely embraces the whole mystery of the faith, because God himself guarantees its truth on revealing himself and offering his mystery of love to our reason.

On the other hand, the Pope continues, we must not forget that in our cultural context, very many people, while not claiming to have the gift of faith, are nevertheless sincerely searching for the ultimate meaning and definitive truth of

⁵¹ St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 235.

⁵² Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 10.

their lives and of the world. This search is an authentic “preamble” to the faith, because it guides people onto the path that leads to the mystery of God.⁵⁵

Let us not falter in this marvelous venture to unveil the spiritual aspirations which all souls harbor, in order to offer them the formation they need to satisfy their thirst for Truth. Especially at the present time, it is vital to teach or remind the people we come into contact with for one reason or another that this earthly life is a passing phase of human existence. God has created us for eternal life, he has destined us to participate in his own divine Life, and thereby attain complete and unending happiness. This gift of the Blessed Trinity is only obtained fully after death, but it begins here below. *This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (Jn 17:3). He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (Jn 6:54).*

31. The coming months provide us with a new opportunity to meditate deeply on the mystery of Jesus Christ. Through his words and deeds Jesus has revealed to us the Father and showed us the way that leads to him. He has given us the means to get there—the Church, with her sacraments and institutions. And moreover, he has sent us the Holy Spirit who, dwelling in our souls through grace, urges us constantly towards the Father’s house. All this is a fruit of God’s loving-kindness, because *in this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins (1 Jn 4:10).*

Let us be convinced of the importance of meditating and getting others to meditate on this essential truth: ***God loves us! The Almighty, the All-powerful, who made Heaven and earth.***⁵⁶ Let us be astonished and grateful for this awe-inspiring announcement, which we have to spread everywhere through a universal catechesis. The word “*catechesis*” in Greek means literally “to make resound in someone’s ears.” For Christians it has been the method of teaching used by the Church from the earliest times, since she first began to transmit to mankind the precious pearl and the treasure of salvation, as the Master himself put it. Thus, by listening, the first disciples of the Lord received the Good News, and they passed it on to others in a way that captured the minds and actions of their hearers and caused them to make it part of their lives.

And that is what we too have to do also now, after twenty centuries of Christianity: make the truth brought by Christ resound in the hearts of the people we meet on our earthly journey, and also, through prayer, those we’re not personally in contact with. We have to say to each of them, at the right moment: God has thought about *you* from all eternity! God loves *you*! God has prepared a wonderful abode, Heaven, for *you*, where he will make himself yours and bestow eternal joys on you, filling to overflowing the desires for happiness you carry in your heart!

32. These fundamental truths cannot be taken for granted. Many people know nothing about God or have a mistaken notion of him. Some think of him as a jealous enforcer of the law, always ready to punish, or a God to whom one turns only in time of need; others think of him as shut off in his own happiness, very distant from the sufferings and

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ St. Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 144.

longings of mankind... We should ask ourselves if our joy and our peace is such that those who see us can “touch” God’s goodness towards his children.

We all have to reinforce constantly *the basic ideas about fundamental issues which you need to be able to illuminate people’s minds and to defend the Church from the attacks she receives at times from all sides: clear ideas about dogmatic and moral truths; about the family, about Christian education; about the right to work, to relaxation, to private property; about the basic rights of association and of expression, etc. In this way you can experience joyfully the truth of those words: *véritas liberábit vos, the truth will make you free; because the truth will give you happiness, peace and effectiveness.**⁵⁷

Let us ask the Holy Spirit insistently to help us offer convincing witness and expound (in accordance with our learning and training) rational arguments that will help people to open their minds to the truth. Let us pray with unwavering confidence. This last is the most important point, and we should remember our Lord’s promise: *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)*. If we are very united in prayer, closing ranks *like an army in battle array (Song 6:4)*, a battle of peace and joy, we will obtain from Heaven what we ask God for.

Commenting on the passage of the Gospel I have just quoted, Pope Benedict XVI points out: **the verb used by the evangelist to say “agree” (...) includes a reference to a “symphony” of hearts. That is what touches God’s heart. Agreement in prayer is important if it is to be accepted by our heavenly Father.**⁵⁸ We should be always very much in tune with the Holy Father and his intentions, because that way we will be closer to Christ and, with him, through the Holy Spirit, our prayer will go straight to God the Father.

DOCTRINAL FORMATION

33. Our Father listed five fundamental aspects of formation: human, religious-doctrinal, spiritual, apostolic and professional. The Year of Faith offers us, in a very clear way, an invitation to reflect upon our doctrinal formation once more. And that is for the simple reason that the aim of all this formation is to help us in various ways to deepen personally in the *content* of the faith and in its *meaning*. And so, through means of this renewed *intelléctus fidei*, understanding of the faith, we can announce and proclaim the mystery of the Love of God in Jesus Christ appropriately to our friends and colleagues.

Formation in Church teaching

⁵⁷ St. Josemaria, Letter, 9 January 1959, no. 34; cf. *Jn* 8:32.

⁵⁸ Benedict XVI, Homily at Vespers for the feast of the conversion of St. Paul, 25 January 2006.

34. Our Founder summed up the fundamental activity of the Work in a graphic phrase: *to teach doctrine*. Whence derives the constant willing effort to provide the faithful of the Prelature with the nourishment of formation, especially in the field of religious doctrine. I think of how happy our Father must be on seeing from Heaven how these classes take place uninterruptedly, in accordance with the plans and needs of each place. I remind you all of what he used to say insistently, so we wouldn't forget it: ***Make every effort to assimilate the doctrine you get and don't let it ever stagnate; feel the need and the welcome duty to pass it on to others, so that it gives rise to good and noble works in their hearts also.***⁵⁹

Para servir, servir—in order to be useful, serve, St. Josemaria used to say, playing on the two meanings of the word *servir*: being useful to others and having a real ability to tackle different circumstances. In this phrase he summed up the importance of being well instructed, in all fields, out of a desire to contribute effectively to God's plans and to the Church. ***In order to serve others, we ourselves have first of all to be useful; that is, we need formation. If not, we won't be good instruments, we'll be useless.***⁶⁰ Applying this to our apostolic aim, it means that we are useful only insofar as we possess and nurture a living and enlightened faith, because only thus can we *serve* the apostolate of the Work and the doctrinal formation of others.

Convinced of this perennial need, St. Josemaria laid down the guidelines for the religious-doctrinal formation of the faithful of the Work and gradually developed them. Let us consider, in our conversation with our Lord, what he was always telling us. ***Our corporate aims are holiness and apostolate. To attain them we need above all formation. For our holiness, we need doctrine; and for the apostolate, doctrine. And doctrine requires time, in the proper place, and using the proper means. God is not obliged to grant us any extraordinary revelations, nor can we expect him to, when he has already given us the normal human means: work and study. Formation, therefore, requires study.***⁶¹

The Paraclete, dwelling in the soul through grace, together with the Father and the Son, is truly the one (for those who listen to his voice and are docile to his inspirations) who makes “the teaching of Jesus penetrate the spirit and the heart of man.”⁶² Jesus Christ himself called him the *Spirit of truth*, and assured us: *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak (...). He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you (Jn 16:13-14)*. Blessed John Paul II, in his commentary on this Gospel passage, explained: “If Jesus said of himself: ‘I am the Truth’, it is this truth of Christ which the Holy Spirit makes known and declares (...). The Spirit is Light of the soul: *Lumen cōrdium*, as we invoke him in the Sequence of Pentecost.”⁶³

We Christians are the freest of God's creatures, as long as we don't allow ourselves to be dragged down by the fleeting tendencies of the moment. The Church encourages her

⁵⁹ St. Josemaria, Letter, 9 January 1959, no. 34.

⁶⁰ St. Josemaria, notes taken at a family gathering, 6 May 1968.

⁶¹ St. Josemaria, notes from a meditation, 21 November 1954.

⁶² Blessed John Paul II, Address at a general audience, 24 April 1991.

⁶³ *Ibid.* Cf. *Jn* 14:6.

children to behave as *responsible and conscientious Catholics, so that our minds and hearts are not out of step, going in different directions, but work together harmoniously and steadily. Then at every moment we will see clearly what we have to do and won't allow ourselves to be dragged along (through weakness of character or cowardice in following our conscience) by the tendencies and fashions of the moment: "so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles."*⁶⁴

Deepening in the doctrine of the faith

35. If we desire to know and love God, if we want others to love and love him, it is essential that Catholic teaching enlightens our mind and moves our wills ever more and more. Nowadays, when the dominant culture is so alienated from God, this duty becomes especially crucial.

This explains how important and urgent it is to leave nothing undone in our doctrinal preparation. Don't ever neglect to study, and in particular to study theology, in accordance with your individual situation, to acquire the *intelléctus Fidei* I was speaking about. We ought to experience the vigorous and joyful tug of the *fides quaerens intelléctum*,⁶⁵ the mind informed by faith, leading us to understand ever more deeply that which we believe. When theology is studied not in a routine or rote-learning fashion, but as part of life, it helps the mind greatly to make the truths of faith its own and to think in the faith and from the faith. That is the only way to tackle the many complex issues that arise in professional life and in the overall progress of society. Precisely because you are free, my daughters and sons, because each of you decides and acts with full and complete autonomy, make a special effort to form your intellect and conscience well, so you can have at your disposal a wealth of knowledge, not only in the human sciences, but also in theology, to enable you to think, judge and act as Christians.

We have to enrich our minds so that we will have the capacity to deal competently with those aspects of Catholic teaching which are particularly relevant professionally, or currently topical in society. They will vary from place to place, but there are some which at the present time are relevant everywhere, namely, those related to marriage and the family, education, bioethics, etc.

36. In this sense, I have repeatedly reminded you to continue improving the standard of teaching and the specialization of the staff of the *Stúdia Generália* of the Prelature; to foster high-level lines of research in the universities where Opus Dei provides spiritual orientation; and to create interdisciplinary groups of, for instance, doctors, biologists, lawyers, philosophers, and sociologists to tackle these issues with an apostolic outlook.

Some members of the Prelature can do something similar, along with others, in the public or private academic institutions where they work. And many more, even though they are not professionally engaged in these particular fields, can contribute their own grain of sand, by helping to create a healthy state of public opinion, respectful of the natural law and informed by the Christian message, through the media. You have heard

⁶⁴ St. Josemaria, Letter, 6 May 1945, no. 35; cf. *Eph* 4:14.

⁶⁵ St. Anselm, *Proslogion*, introd. (PL 158, 225).

me say that a simple letter or e-mail to a newspaper, explaining some point of Catholic teaching attractively and clearly (with the *gift of tongues*), can sometimes be more effective than a weighty treatise. When a country's press and organs of public opinion present a deformed image of the Church, or organize openly sectarian campaigns, Catholics cannot stand idly by: we have to react against these abuses, out of justice towards God and society, to unmask their true nature and demand that the Church be given the respect she merits, while not trying to excuse the faults of some of her members.

To achieve this, I repeat, we have to recognize how urgent it is for us to improve our theological formation constantly, and (in accordance with our individual needs and circumstances) to deepen our grasp of current issues related to the fundamental truths of revelation. We need to make very good use of the classes and conferences of philosophy, theology and canon law, attending them with interest, punctually, trying to get as much as possible out of them. Moreover, these activities are also an occasion to offer other people the doctrinal and spiritual catechesis they seek.

37. In his catechesis on the Fathers of the Church, Pope Benedict XVI makes a point that is very relevant to the present time. He says that the great error of the ancient pagan religion was to not follow the paths imprinted on men's hearts by Divine Wisdom. **Therefore, the decline of the pagan religion was inevitable: it was a logical consequence of the detachment of religion—reduced to an artificial collection of ceremonies, conventions and customs—from the truth of being.**⁶⁶ And he adds that the early Christian Fathers and writers, on the other hand, chose **the truth of being against the myth of custom.**⁶⁷ He quotes a passage from Tertullian, who wrote: *Dóminus noster Christus veritátem se, non consuetúdinem, cognominávit*—**Christ has said that he is the truth, not the fashion.**⁶⁸ And the Holy Father comments: **it should be noted in this regard that the term *consuetúdo*, used here by Tertullian in reference to the pagan religion, can be translated into modern languages with the expressions: “cultural fashion,” “current fads.”**⁶⁹

We shouldn't doubt that, in spite of the apparent victory of relativism in some places, this form of thinking and sowing confusion will end up collapsing like a house of cards, because it is not anchored in the truth of a creative and provident God who guides the paths of history. At the same time, what we see happening around us has to spur us on not to give in, nor to abandon all those disillusioned people for whom life has no meaning.

UNION WITH CHRIST THROUGH PRAYER AND SACRIFICE

38. I know that St. Josemaria often quoted and meditated on the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch on his way to Rome to suffer martyrdom, as he described himself as “the wheat of God,” to be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts “that I may be found to be the

⁶⁶ Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, 21 March 2007.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Cf. Tertullian, *On the veiling of virgins*, I, 1 (PL 2, 889).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

pure bread of Christ.”⁷⁰ We Christians realize that we too are “the wheat of God,” because we have the pleasant duty of providing spiritual nourishment to those we come in contact with in one way or another.

We have to be deeply convinced that God wants us to be “Christ’s bread” to satisfy the hunger of souls. To become so, we must let ourselves be ground without resistance, like grains of wheat; we must employ all the means God provides (in depth, not just half-heartedly) to polish us, to smooth away the rough edges of our personality, to eradicate from our interior and exterior dispositions (through love, although it is difficult) that ego which each one of us cherishes to a supreme degree. Our own personal experience teaches us that this work of purification is very necessary if we are to obtain the desired supernatural fruits. The Master explains it to us very graphically: *unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit* (Jn 12:24).

Union with Christ on the Cross

39. Jesus *desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim 2:4). This holy ambition should influence our behavior: everything we do should be marked by a clearly apostolic character, at all times and in all places. Thus, each member of the Work, even when unable to do apostolate firsthand (because of illness, or changed environment, or inability to speak the language, etc.), will carry out a very fruitful and very direct apostolate. We can all do it, if we do our very best in our relationship with God through the Norms, trying finish our work well, offering it to God every day at Mass. Our Lord expects us to make him the offering of constantly seeking out and using small mortifications and hardships, *like the beating of the heart*.⁷¹

Union with Jesus on the Cross is essential if we are to carry out this apostolic program. It is not possible to follow Christ without self-denial, without cultivating a spirit of mortification, without practising specific works of penance. The Holy Father points out that **it is the glory of the Crucified One that every Christian is called to understand, live and bear witness to with his life. The Cross—the giving of himself on the part of the Son of God—is the definitive “sign” par excellence given to us so that we might understand the truth about man and the truth about God: we have all been created and redeemed by a God who sacrificed his only Son out of love. This is why the Crucifixion, as I wrote in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, “is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form.”**⁷²

Entering into Christ’s Wounds

40. We often heard St. Josemaria use the following illustration. He used to say that if we want to walk in the Master’s company we have to be *the seed in Christ’s wounded*

⁷⁰ St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans* IV, 1 (Funk I, 216).

⁷¹ St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 518.

⁷² Benedict XVI, Homily, 26 March 2006; Enc. *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 12.

*hands, and the divine Sower then casts the seed into the furrow. The Sower dips his hand into the big sack and brings it out full of shining golden grains, which he flings far and wide. That is how you and I have got to give ourselves, without looking for any recompense on earth, or inventing imaginary trials. But, as the Gospel states, the grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die, as it seems, in order to bear fruit. Only if we do that will we be good seed for the sowing that our Lord wants to do, to open up divine paths on earth.*⁷³

In the light of these considerations, let us examine our consciences to see if we are really trying to be devout and penitential, firmly convinced that ***action is worth nothing without prayer: prayer grows in value with sacrifice.***⁷⁴ Let us ask God to grant us daily longings for greater self-giving, efficacious desires to give ourselves willingly for the good of souls. And this is only possible if we try to renew every day at Mass the desire to be a living host in union with Christ.

Nobody can deny the grandeur and the importance of the possibility we are offered, namely, of being a host with Christ. Let us foster this holy desire in our periods of personal conversation with him. Let us beseech Jesus, through his Most Holy Mother, the Teacher of Faith, to grant us the grace to renew our apostolic zeal daily, and let us give effect to those resolutions in specific deeds, and in accordance with the advice we get in spiritual direction.

Then Jesus will indeed take us in his wounded hand and, and having soaked us, as St. Josemaria stressed, with his precious Blood, without leaving the place where he placed us, he will cast us far and wide: our self-giving will be fruitful in places both near and far; he will make use of our work and our relaxation, our joys and our sorrows, our words and our silences, to scatter his divine seed in myriads of hearts. We will indeed become ***bread for the altar and bread for the table: divine and human.***⁷⁵ And Jesus will perform new, spectacular miracles, as he did formerly in the souls and bodies of those who sought him, when the multitude were all trying to touch him because *power came forth from him and healed them all* (Lk 6:19).

Recourse to the Holy Spirit

41. Just as Jesus Christ preached the Good News impelled by the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 4:14), in the same way we Christians should turn to the Paraclete, filled with confidence, as Blessed Pope John Paul II recommended for the approach of the Jubilee Year 2000. “The primary tasks,” he wrote in an Apostolic Letter, “(...) include *a renewed appreciation of the presence and activity of the Spirit, who acts within the Church both in the Sacraments, especially in Confirmation, and in the variety of charisms, roles and ministries which he inspires for the good of the Church.*”⁷⁶

Nothing could be more natural, then, in our personal apostolate and any apostolic work, than for us to rely first and foremost on the consoling fact that the Holy Spirit is

⁷³ St. Josemaria, notes from a meditation, 28 May 1964; cf. Jn 12:24.

⁷⁴ St. Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 81.

⁷⁵ St. Josemaria, Letter, 31 May 1954, no. 29.

⁷⁶ Blessed John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 10 November 1994, no. 45.

acting ceaselessly for the sanctification of souls, even though he normally carries out his work in silence. He is “in our own day too (...) *the principal agent of the new evangelization* (...), the One who builds the Kingdom of God within the course of history and prepares its full manifestation in Jesus Christ, stirring people’s hearts and quickening in our world the seeds of the full salvation which will come at the end of time.”⁷⁷ Let’s never doubt it: if we have recourse to the Consoler with faith, he will inspire us with the right words, a timely suggestion, an affectionate and humble way of correcting wrongful behavior, that will help those people change.

Let’s make a serious effort to develop our relationship and conversation with the Holy Spirit, therefore; because, as St. Josemaria also taught, speaking of the way God acts within his faithful children, ***God does not just pass by, he remains in us. We could express this by saying that he is in the centre of our souls in grace, giving supernatural meaning to our actions, as long as we don’t oppose him and throw him out by sinning. God is hidden within you and me, in each of us.***⁷⁸

The weapon of prayer

42. Let’s re-read some words of Blessed John Paul II on the day of the canonization of the Founder of Opus Dei. “To fulfill such a demanding mission, there must be constant interior growth, nourished by prayer. Saint Josemaría was a master in the exercise of prayer, which he considered an extraordinary ‘weapon’ to redeem the world. He always recommended: ‘In the first place, prayer; then, atonement; in the third place, very much “in the third place,” action’ (*The Way*, 82). It is not a paradox,” the Pope continued, “but a perennial truth: the fruitfulness of the apostolate lies above all in prayer and in an intense and constant sacramental life. This is, in essence, the secret of the holiness and of the true success of the saints.”⁷⁹

That is the spiritual attitude which this holy priest, our Father, put into practice from the time God first entered his soul, as can be seen clearly in the early years of Opus Dei, when everything was still to be done. In 1930, when Opus Dei was still like a new-born baby, St. Josemaria wrote to Isidoro Zorzano, the only other member of the Work at that point, in words that are permanently applicable: ***If we are to be what our Lord and we desire***, he wrote, ***we need to be firmly based, above all, on prayer and expiation (sacrifice). Pray: never, I repeat, omit your meditation when you get up; and every day offer up as expiation all that day’s annoyances and sacrifices.***⁸⁰

Let’s follow that line of behavior, which is indispensable for increasing our life of faith and fulfilling the supernatural mission that the Master entrusts to Christians. In the first place, our personal relationship and conversation with Jesus Christ need to grow every day. Both in the middle of the most demanding professional work, and in the silence of an oratory or church, amidst traffic, and also at times of leisure or rest, and, naturally, in family occupations, in sickness and amidst difficulties,—all the time!—we need to be talking to God with our souls, our hearts, our senses and our lips, making the effort to turn

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ St. Josemaria, notes taken at a family gathering, 8 December 1971.

⁷⁹ Blessed John Paul II, Homily at the Mass of St. Josemaria’s canonization, 6 October 2002.

⁸⁰ St. Josemaria, letter to Isidoro Zorzano, 23 November 1930.

everything we do into a prayer that is pleasing to God, often a wordless one. But, I stress, prayer is the fruit of a life of faith. Great faith is needed to ask our Lord truly, with conviction, as St. Josemaria did: ***Jesus, tell me something; tell me something, Jesus!***

Let's not forget that the person who truly prays makes progress in the virtue of humility; possesses the joy of being a child of God; feels the urgency of daily apostolate; always acts in a friendly, approachable way; knows how to serve; aims to disappear; and is docile in spiritual direction.

The salt of mortification

43. As something inseparable from our conversation with God, we need mortification, which rises up to God as ***the prayer of the senses***. Some people are frightened by the word "expiation," imagining all kinds of unbearable pain. Nothing could be further from the truth. Normally God asks us for a spirit of penance that is shown in the well-finished-off fulfillment of our duties of state in our individual circumstances; a fulfillment that is persevering, full of joy however difficult it may be, with seamless, heroic faithfulness in little things.

St. Josemaria, who was so generous in the great penances our Lord invited him to offer, because they formed part of his mission as founder, also gave extraordinary importance to acts of expiation that were tiny, but overflowing with love. He explains this in some brief notes made in 1930, about his way of doing the examination of conscience. ***Expiation: How have I received today the difficulties that came from God's hand?; those provided for me by my companions' characters?; those arising from my own wretchedness? Have I offered to God as expiation the very sorrow that I feel for having offended him so often? Did I offer him the shame of my inner blushes and humiliations, as I consider how little progress I am making along the path of virtues?***⁸¹

The world today is in special need—and always will be—of souls who love sacrifice and embrace it willingly for love of God. At every moment such sacrifice is also a weapon that can conquer in the fight against hedonism, to which so many people, Christians and non-Christians alike, are falling victim; against the excessive cultivation of the body and the senses. Let's consider that, in order to trample under foot any disordered attachment to our own ego, what we need to do is make a total offering, a real holocaust, of our internal and external senses, our faculties, our souls and bodies, in close union with Jesus Christ.

We have to ***offer up our lives, our unstinting, uncalculating dedication, as expiation for our sins; for the sins of all men, our brothers; for the sins committed down through the ages, and those that will be committed from now to the end of the world; above all for Catholics, those chosen by God who don't respond properly, who betray the preferential love that God has shown for them.***⁸² We should add another aspect, one of which our Father was always mindful: that of fighting to win, with hope-filled optimism, in the certainty that God will grant us victory through our faith, our trust in him, and our charity for God and souls.

⁸¹ St. Josemaria, 28 July 1930, in *Apuntes íntimos*, no. 75.

⁸² St. Josemaria, Letter, 9 January 1932, no. 83.

44. Those words of St. Josemaria help us to face up to our habitual mortifications generously. We all need to purify ourselves unhesitatingly: only like that will we be in a position to heal the atmosphere we live in, with the joy that comes from being God's children. ***Atonement, and, more than atonement, Love. Love as a searing iron, to cauterize our souls' uncleanness, and as a fire to kindle with divine flames the wretched tinder of our hearts.***⁸³ I also suggest, if ever we feel cowardly, that we contemplate Jesus during the hours of the Passion he suffered for love of us. ***After this... can you ever fear penance?***⁸⁴

Using these basic parameters of Christian living, let's nurture in others a sense of the urgent need for specific, constant apostolic action with young and old, healthy and sick, the people we generally come into contact with through our daily work, friendship, relationship, hobbies, etc., —all the connections that make up the fabric of our presence in our habitual surroundings. Let's ask our Blessed Lady to give us more apostolic zeal in the coming months so that we can propagate the joy of faith in God, and do so always. Let's also ask her to send down abundant graces from her Son so that many men and women open their hearts to God's grace without shutting any part off from him, and make up their minds to journey with Christ along the path to the total happiness that he has prepared for each person from all eternity.

THE APOSTOLIC TASK

45. The “mission,” the apostolic task, that God has entrusted to us, is only possible from within the “life of faith” we have been talking about: it should be a sort of “epiphany” of faith. It is faith—doctrine and life—that gives solidity and effectiveness to Christian life and makes it so attractive, as witnessed by the number of people who don't have faith but wish—perhaps without doing anything about it—that they could have the happiness and security, the peace of mind, that they see in believers.

We should do our apostolate from within the virtue of faith, as I say. Therefore our daily self-abandonment in our Lord must not weaken. We need to atone a lot for the offences being committed against God and the harm being done to souls. My daughters and sons, we will realize the urgent need for ongoing atonement through the personal apostolate that we do: atonement is like a litmus test that indicates unfailingly the depth of our Christian feelings, the genuineness of our sorrow at the state of society. Let's offer atonement, in the knowledge that, as our Father said, we ourselves are capable of committing the errors and horrors of the worst of sinners, if we let go of God's hand. Let's reject every possibility of remaining inactive. Let's each personally, all united in our apostolic outlook, pray to our Lord for the people who share the same ideals in one way or another. Let's set about that sowing of peace fearlessly, using all licit means to bring the pealing of the bells of our *gáudium cum pace*, our joy and peace, to the very furthest corners of the earth.

⁸³ St. Josemaria, *Holy Rosary*, 4th joyful mystery.

⁸⁴ St. Josemaria, *Holy Rosary*, 2nd sorrowful mystery.

Everyone at their post

46. If we strengthen the basics of our dialogue with the Blessed Trinity with firm, persevering faith, our specific apostolic actions will be effective. Let's cultivate every opportunity of serving the souls we meet, and be spurred on by the great hope of creating more such opportunities. Let's try to finish off our work, whatever it is, with total rectitude of intention, keeping watch over ourselves so that no speck of vainglory gets into the work we do. The uprightness of our intentions should never disappear or be lacking from our daily work. Like that, every activity, finished off well and offered up to Heaven, will become identification with Jesus Christ, and will contribute powerfully to the unity of our lives.

At the heart of the new evangelization of society, each person has been assigned to a particular post by Providence. But we cannot remain passive, or be content with just trying to be faithful ourselves; we must go out to meet souls, to serve them, right where they are, in the thousand meeting-points of society—at the university, in schools, in the workplace and leisure activities, in families—to offer them the Christian formation they need. Let's feel a holy pressure to contribute to the work of the Church in the world, imitating the early Christians. Sometimes the obstacles will appear starkly before our eyes. Then is the time to apply to ourselves some paragraphs of a letter addressed by St. Josemaria to everyone without exception:

It is natural, my children, sometimes (...) for you to feel your own littleness and think: "All this apostolate, to be done by me? When I'm so pathetic? When I'm so full of faults and failings?"

At times like that I will tell you to open St. John's Gospel and meditate slowly on the passage that tells of the healing of the man born blind. See how Jesus makes mud from the dust of the earth and his spittle, and applies it to the eyes of the blind man to give him light (cf. Jn 9:6). Our Lord uses a bit of mud as an eye-salve (...). With the knowledge of our own weakness, our nothingness, but with God's grace and our good will, we are medicine to give light; we are—while experiencing our human littleness—God's strength for other people.⁸⁵

Some of you are in a position to contribute more directly to introducing a new culture, new laws, a new fashion—I have already mentioned them several times—imbued with the Gospel spirit, that need to be promoted unceasingly. But everyone, I insist, has been assigned to a specific post in this ***war of love and peace***. Every single one of us, whether in the vanguard or the rearguard, is in a position to carry out a very direct apostolate which, in communion with the whole Church, will contribute effectively to achieving those goals.

Like yeast in the dough

47. When, at a given moment, you experience more keenly the weight of the adverse environment, in your workplace, among your own relations, in the circle of your friends and acquaintances, think with a deep sense of responsibility that God is calling Christians to be yeast in the dough. *The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and*

⁸⁵ St. Josemaria, Letter, 29 September 1957, no. 16.

hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened (Mt 13:33). And St. John Chrysostom explains: “Just as the yeast transmits its own virtue into a great mass of dough, so you have to transform the whole world.”⁸⁶

That is how God has acted, and acts, in the history of the world. He has the possibility of making everyone fall at his feet in submission, because no creature can resist his power; but if he did, he would not be respecting the freedom that he himself has granted us. God does not want to conquer by force, but to convince by love, though the free, enthusiastic cooperation of others, who know that the Master is concerned for the crowds, for people, for those who are wandering like sheep without a shepherd. He does not want to impose his Truth like a despot, but nor is he left indifferent at people’s ignorance or moral deviations. And so the good father of the family who invites us to the banquet utters the invitation: *Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled (Lk 14:23): compéle intrâre!*

“Although Christ could have drawn people to himself, to come hear his preaching, while remaining in one place, he did not do so; he set us an example, so that we too should travel the roads, seeking those who are lost as the shepherd seeks out the strayed sheep, as the doctor goes to visit the sick person.”⁸⁷

By that method of constant work, countless conversions have been brought about as the Church has forged herself a path through the world. Rarely have they arisen from the action of one exceptional individual, or as the result of a well-thought-out strategy. They have come as the effect of the good example set by men and women, and whole families, who with the help of grace have practised their faith naturally and have been constantly able to give a reason for the hope that dwells in them (cf. *1 Pet 3:15*).

What a great responsibility falls to Christians, to each of us! On our behavior, on our zeal for souls, depend so many great works, highly effective and attractive ones. “If other people lose their savor, you can restore it to them; but if that happens to you, with your failure you will drag the others down too. Therefore the greater the charge that you have been given, the more fervor and zeal you need to have.”⁸⁸

Into the deep!

48. From the beginnings of Opus Dei, the apostolate of the faithful of the Prelature, its Co-operators and friends, has arisen in the heart of the Church as an instrument in God’s hands, to do great service throughout the world, in spite of our personal smallness. *Gratias tibi, Deus!*—Thank you, God!—we should constantly exclaim. And at the same time we have to do more. *Duc in altum!* (*Lk 5:4*): into deep water! Let’s go further without fear or hesitation, always relying firmly on the Master’s command, filled with sure faith in him. What apostolic panoramas the Year of Faith opens to us! It is up to each of us to make the most of them. That work with souls can be carried out in any situation we may find ourselves in, as long as we give primary importance to our prayer of petition to God for specific people and intentions.

⁸⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 46, 2 (PG 58, 478).

⁸⁷ St. John Chrysostom, quoted by St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 40, a. 1 ad 2.

⁸⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 15, 7 (PG 57, 231).

Let's think about the most urgent fields for the new evangelization that I mentioned above; and, with our eyes on the Year of Faith, let's review the way we ourselves are acting to pass on more of a Christian flavor to our own family, the professional sphere in which we work, the cultural, social or leisure circles to which we belong. Let's dwell courageously on this examination of conscience, and draw consequences from it for our personal situation, without giving in to vain worrying, but with love-sorrow when necessary. Then we will sometimes have to conclude that we have fallen short; that we could have prayed more intensely, more trustingly and more perseveringly; or that perhaps we have been ungenerous in offering sacrifices, or that we have to be more demanding in our apostolic conversations in the service of others; or that we are neglecting our doctrinal formation. On other occasions we will give thanks because our Lord has chosen to make use of us for his harvest of souls.

To admit all this, far from leading to discouragement, has to spur us on to ask Heaven for a livelier faith and begin again. *Nunc coepi!* St. Josemaria used to say, in words from the Psalm: *now I begin; this change is worked by the right hand of the Most High* (cf. *Ps 77:10, Vg.*). That is how we should react, when we find that the results do not measure up to our desires, and even when the reality of our personal littleness, or the apparent ineffectiveness of our efforts, becomes painfully clear. Then, still more urgently, the solution is to begin afresh: *eúntes docéte!*—go out and teach (cf. *Mt 28:19*), trusting in our Lord's words, when he sent his disciples out on that first expansion.

49. This was the invitation addressed to Catholics at the end of the year 2000 by Blessed John Paul II. "At the beginning of the new millennium, [as] a new stage of the Church's journey begins, our hearts ring out with the words of Jesus when one day, after speaking to the crowds from Simon's boat, he invited the Apostle to 'put out into the deep' for a catch: '*Duc in altum*' (*Lk 5:4*). Peter and his first companions trusted Christ's words, and cast the nets. 'When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish' (*Lk 5:6*)."⁸⁹

This scene, which our Father often considered and preached about throughout his life, is the one we contemplate in the Gospel reading for Mass on the feast of St. Josemaria. I invite you to meditate again, slowly, on each verse, because now too, as in the times of Jesus, the crowds are hungry to hear the word of God.

Our Lord has boarded Peter's boat so that his word can reach the crowd. Then he asks Simon and the other disciples for their material help: at that point to row out into deep water, and on so many occasions to spread his word more and more widely. This is one way of sharing in the mission to evangelize: providing the Church—as Peter did with his poor boat—with the appropriate material means so that she can work more effectively for the good of souls. But that is not enough. Our Lord is also asking us to do apostolate personally, each according to our own situation, making the most of our possibilities with total generosity. There is an urgent need for women and men who are seriously committed to the absorbing task of bring souls to Christ's feet, like the first disciples.

The miraculous catch of fish shows the apostolic effectiveness that comes from obeying the Master's word. After teaching the crowds, Jesus says to Peter and the others, *Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch* (*Lk 5:4*). Simon obeys our Lord's

⁸⁹ Blessed John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 6 January 2001, no. 1.

command, in spite of his recent experience of failure, and then, because of his docility, the miracle is worked: *they enclosed a great shoal of fish (Lk 5:6)*.

“‘Duc in altum!’ These words ring out for us today, and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever’ (*Heb 13:8*).”⁹⁰

I will also remind you, because of its great current relevance, of what Benedict XVI preached on the day of the solemn inauguration of his pastoral service in the See of Peter:

Today too the Church and the successors of the Apostles are told to put out into the deep sea of history and to let down the nets, so as to win men and women over to the Gospel—to God, to Christ, to true life. (...) We are living in alienation, in the salt waters of suffering and death; in a sea of darkness without light. The net of the Gospel pulls us out of the waters of death and brings us into the splendor of God’s light, into true life. It is really true: as we follow Christ in this mission to be fishers of men, we must bring men and women out of the sea that is salted with so many forms of alienation and onto the land of life, into the light of God. It is really so: the purpose of our lives is to reveal God to men. And only where God is seen does life truly begin. Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is.⁹¹

Using all the means

50. The first, indispensable condition for obtaining apostolic fruits is, I stress, cultivating our own life of faith, by having recourse to the supernatural means. If we nurture our friendship with Christ in personal prayer, if we go to the sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist, if we talk to our Lady, the Angels and the saints, our intercessors before God, we will make an effective contribution to that divine fishing in which our Lord Jesus wants to involve us. To do so, following the Master’s example, we should love our friends, companions and all souls sincerely, giving expression to the *mandatum novum*, the new commandment by which, the Saviour announced, people would know us for his disciples (cf. *Jn 13:34-35*).

In addition, our Lord also wants us to place at his service the material means available to us. We can deduce this from the first reading for the Mass of St. Josemaria. After creating the world with his omnipotence, and with particular love for the first man and the first woman, *the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the East, and there he put the man whom he had formed (...) to till it and keep it (Gen 2:8-15)*.

This passage of Sacred Scripture struck deep roots in the mind of the Founder of Opus Dei. From the moment when our Lord made known his Will to him, he understood that these words from the book of Genesis held one of the keys for fulfilling the duty of sanctifying one’s work and sanctifying oneself through work. Jesus’ example is decisive for us: he spent thirty years laboring in the workshop at Nazareth, to show that we also have the duty to use human means to restore the Kingdom of God.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Benedict XVI, Homily at the beginning of his pontificate, 24 April 2005.

Any apostolate requires us to trust above all in God's help and, at the same time, to use material means for that purpose. Opus Dei's projects, for instance, need the prayers and help of many people. And so, with God's grace and the generous contribution of piety, sacrifice, and alms, made by many people from very different backgrounds, the evangelizing work that is done in the service of the Church throughout the world becomes broader and broader.

St. Josemaria suggested that we should ask ourselves every day: "What have I done today to bring some of the people I know closer to our Lord?" On different occasions we will give effect to that urgent desire by offering guidance in a conversation; by inviting someone to go to the Sacrament of Penance; or by a piece of advice that helps them to understand some aspect of Christian life better. St. Ambrose, referring to the way Zachary, the father of John the Baptist, recovered his speech (cf. *Lk* 1:64), wrote: "No wonder his tongue was loosened immediately, because faith untied what had been tied up by unbelief."⁹² Faith, if it is alive, *unties* our tongues to bear witness to Christ in the apostolate of friendship and trust. And the generous offering up of personal prayer and penance, and of well-finished-off work, is always needed; these are the most important instruments we have for achieving our apostolic aims.

CONCLUSION

51. Before finishing, I will suggest to you three goals for strengthening your life of faith in the coming months: Eucharistic piety, conversation with the Holy Spirit, and devotion to our Blessed Lady. Each can adapt these to their personal circumstances with the help of spiritual guidance.

Eucharistic piety

52. Benedict XVI, in the Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, expresses his desire for this Year of Faith **to arouse in every believer the aspiration to *profess the faith in fullness and with renewed conviction, with confidence and hope***. And in particular, he suggests: **It will also be a good opportunity to intensify the *celebration* of the faith in the liturgy, especially in the Eucharist, which is "the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; (...) and also the source from which all its power flows" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). At the same time, we make it our prayer that believers' *witness* of life may grow in credibility. To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed, and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make his own, especially in the course of this Year.**⁹³

2012 has brought or will bring some especially significant anniversaries in the history of Opus Dei. I am thinking of the centenary of St. Josemaria's First Communion, on 23 April; the twentieth anniversary of his beatification (17 May) and the tenth of his

⁹² St. Ambrose, *Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel*, II, 32 (CCL 14, 45).

⁹³ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, 11 October 2011, no. 9.

canonization (6 October); the thirtieth anniversary of the pontifical establishment of the Prelature (28 November).... These and other moments from our history, in the context of the preparation and development of the Year of Faith, should be occasions that we make full use of in order to renew our gratitude to and praise of the Blessed Trinity. And how could we do that better than through the Sacrifice of Christ, sacramentally present in the Holy Mass?

Throughout the Year of Faith, then, we should give a new impulse to manifestations of sturdy, firm piety in the Blessed Eucharist, the mystery which *links all the mysteries of Christianity*.⁹⁴ We should try to delve more deeply, with personal awareness, into the gifts that have been given to us with our participation in the one priesthood of Christ. In Baptism we all received the common priesthood of the faithful, and some, being ordained, have received the ministerial priesthood as well. I invite you to bring your priestly soul more fully into action as you hear Mass or celebrate it. Every day, offer on the altar your work, your dreams, your difficulties, your sorrows and your joys. Jesus Christ will join them to his Sacrifice and will offer it all to the Father, turning the moments and circumstances of our earthly journey into an offering that is pleasing to God, so that it is a true sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving, and atonement for sins. The aspiration that St. Josemaria cherished deep in his heart will become a reality: that our whole life, the twenty-four hours of the day, will become a *Mass*, closely united to the Sacrifice of the Altar.

53. I invite you to multiply, during these months, your acts of faith in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. How lovingly and how profoundly our Father talked about the Blessed Sacrament! Every time he spoke about this treasure of the Church during his catechetical journeys, he took the opportunity to make a deep act of faith. ***Our Lord is not only on the altar. When the priest reserves the sacramental species of the Bread in the Tabernacle, Jesus Christ remains there, the Son of Blessed Mary ever Virgin, who was born of her womb; who worked quietly in Nazareth, after being born in Bethlehem; who preached, suffered the Passion and Death on the Cross, who rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven.***⁹⁵

At the beginning of 2012 I encouraged you to repeat the profession of faith made by the Apostle Thomas: *Dóminus meus et Deus meus!* My Lord and my God! (*Jn* 20:28). I also suggest to you that, as you contemplate our Lord hidden in the Blessed Eucharist, you say these or other words, like St. Josemaria: ***Lord, I believe that it is you, Jesus, the Son of God and of Mary ever-Virgin, who are really present: your Body, your Blood, your Soul and your Divinity. I adore you. I want to be your friend, because it is you who redeemed me. I want to be your love, because you are mine.***⁹⁶

My daughters and sons, let's show that we take after St. Josemaria, who was such a good father, by following carefully the path he traced out for us. Let's make every effort to be more sensitive every day in our Eucharistic piety. Let's focus all our attention on him, like real friends, when we greet Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, as we go into or come out of churches or the oratories in our Centres. Wouldn't it be natural for us to

⁹⁴ St. Josemaria, *Conversations*, no. 113.

⁹⁵ St. Josemaria, notes taken at a family gathering, 11 November 1972.

⁹⁶ St. Josemaria, notes taken at a family gathering, 22 November 1972.

address loving words to him frequently in our hearts? That is what we should do, from wherever we are working, savoring aspirations and spiritual communions. And let's make reparation when we see or hear some offence or neglect done to him. Let's think whether our genuflections are real adoration.

Those are just a few touches—there are many more—of the Eucharistic love that goes with wanting to *be Opus Dei* and *do Opus Dei*.

Veni, Sancte Spiritus!

54. Let's invoke the Paraclete with faith and hope, praying that the miracles of the first Pentecost may be renewed in the Church in our time. I think that we are always astonished at the profound change worked by the Holy Spirit in the twelve Apostles. They threw aside their fears and launched into the street, with confident daring, to talk about Christ to everyone they met. When serious difficulties arose, they took refuge in prayer, relying firmly on our Lord's promise that the Consoler would be particularly present at such times (cf. *Jn* 14:15-18; *Lk* 21:12-15). And so the *Acts of the Apostles* tells how, *when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31).*

The Master announced to the Apostles: *when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth (Jn 16:13).* The Paraclete inspired the Apostles until, at the death of the last one of them, the Revelation brought by Jesus Christ was complete. What is more, Jesus' words tell us that throughout time the presence of the Spirit of truth has never failed and will never fail the Church, and especially the authentic Magisterium; and the same Consoler leads each of us, if we turn to him, to a progressively deeper knowledge of the mystery of the Saviour. A knowledge that is also love, because charity is poured out in our hearts by the same Holy Spirit (cf. *Rom* 5:5).

55. The Lord also promised that the Spirit would convince the world concerning the sin of not believing in Christ (cf. *Jn* 16:8-9). We also need that conviction, meaning that we still need to *believe more* in our Lord, trust him more fully, and place our confidence and our joy in him, not in ourselves, our capacities or our resources.

Let's ask the Sanctifier to make us understand this need, and avoid falling into the sin of not believing completely in Jesus. Let's also beg the Paraclete to set us free, with his light and fire, from that limitation, so that our faith in and love for Christ grow more and more. Perhaps we can meditate on and savor often—I would say daily—the words that our Father composed as a prayer in the 1930s: ***Come, O Holy Spirit! Enlighten my understanding to know your commands; strengthen my heart against the snares of the enemy; inflame my will...***

I have heard your voice, and I don't want to harden myself and resist, saying "Later... tomorrow." Nunc coepi! Now I begin! In case there is no tomorrow for me.

O Spirit of truth and wisdom, Spirit of understanding and counsel, Spirit of joy and peace! I want whatever you want, I want it because you want it, I want it however you want it, I want it whenever you want it...⁹⁷

⁹⁷ St. Josemaria, hand-written prayer, 1934.

If we go more deeply into those petitions, we will be more and more enriched with a close friendship with the Paraclete, and, as St. Josemaria wrote, we will feel the need to relate to and converse with each Person of the Blessed Trinity individually.⁹⁸

Let's also pray to the Sanctifier to infuse our words and actions with his own fire, which is able to change souls. Let's seriously want him to set us on fire with his flame, to activate the apostolate everywhere. Let's pray with St. Josemaria's faith: *ure igne Sancti Spiritus!* Burn us, Lord, with the fire of the Holy Spirit!

Devotion to Mary

56. At the summit of all the great figures of Sacred Scripture stands our Blessed Lady. Mary is the perfect example of the fact that, to love God and become one with him, we have to abandon ourselves freely to God's Will, and believe ever more deeply. The Church sets her before us in a special way in this Year of Faith. "During this Year, it will be helpful to invite the faithful to turn with particular devotion to Mary, model of the Church, who 'shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues' (*Lumen Gentium* 65). Therefore, every initiative that helps the faithful to recognize the special role of Mary in the mystery of salvation, love her, and follow her as a model of faith and virtue, is to be encouraged. To this end it would be proper to organize pilgrimages, celebrations and gatherings at the major Marian shrines."⁹⁹

In the first place we will make an extra effort during this period to celebrate more and more joyously the memorials of our Lady that come up regularly in the calendar. My request to you is that we may experience them as real family parties, where, as her children, we are overjoyed at our Mother's anniversaries, and honor her with attentive love and affection.

Let's make a present to our Lady of our own selves, and other people, in visits to her sanctuaries and shrines, when we go with our relations, friends, fellow-workers or fellow-students. We should go there in close union with the Holy Father and his collaborators, and also with all the other Shepherds of the Church, praying for the fulfillment of the intentions that Pope Benedict had in mind when he convoked the Year of Faith. What better way could there be of presenting these desires to God, than by appealing to the intercession of our Blessed Lady, who was so closely associated with Christ in the Redemption?

Trusting in her powerful mediation, we will petition her to obtain for us from the Blessed Trinity the grace of bringing the world and society back to God. I remind you that, in this regard too, our Father always stressed the need for contrition, convinced that this is the mode of prayer that is best suited to people's limitations and lacks of generosity—starting with our own. Let's offer reparation for our personal offences and omissions, those of the Christian people, and those of all mankind.

57. Commenting on our Lady's canticle, the Magnificat, Pope Benedict XVI said that **Mary wanted God to be great in the world, great in her life and present among us all. She was not afraid that God might be a "rival" in our life, that with his greatness he**

⁹⁸ Cf. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 306.

⁹⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pastoral note, 6 January 2012, I, 3.

might encroach on our freedom, our vital space. She knew that if God is great, we too are great. Our life is not oppressed but raised and expanded: it is precisely then that it becomes great in the splendour of God.¹⁰⁰

When we turn to the unfailing intercession of her who is *omnipotent in her petition*, let's beg our Lord perseveringly to give effect to our desires and those of all Catholics for the evangelization of society. That is what this Year should lead us to do, *beata Maria intercedente*, through our Lady's intercession: to stir up the dormant or damaged faith of many people, and to awaken faith in others who do not yet possess it. Let's use every opportunity to make Christ and his teachings known, and to spread the spirit of Opus Dei in the service of the Church, through a more determined apostolate of friendship and trust; so that many more men and women, from all backgrounds, may join in the apostolate.

58. Let's examine our consciences to see how deeply we have each committed ourselves, every day, to making those desires come true. Let's be sincere with ourselves as we think whether we make the most of the various circumstances in the normal context of our social relations, including at weekends, on holidays, and during necessary times of rest, to reach further, to meet and serve more people—in short, how we fill the streets and other places with apostolic, proselytistic prayer.

Our Blessed Lady is the Teacher of faith. "Just like the Patriarch of the People of God, so too Mary, during the pilgrimage of her filial and maternal *fiat*, 'in hope believed against hope.' Especially during certain stages of this journey the blessing granted to her 'who believed' will be revealed with particular vividness."¹⁰¹ This stage in the history of the Church that we are living through should be characterized by our Lady's motherly presence. "Her exceptional pilgrimage of faith represents a constant point of reference for the Church, for individuals and for communities, for peoples and nations and, in a sense, for all humanity."¹⁰²

59. After Jesus Christ's Ascension into Heaven, the first disciples awaited the descent of the Holy Spirit gathered around Mary in the Cenacle at Jerusalem. Praying with and through our Lady is the firmest guarantee that our prayer will be heard promptly. So we should have recourse to the Mother of God and our Mother in all our apostolate. We renew this prayer now in St. Josemaria's words:

Holy Mary, Queen of Apostles, Queen of all those who desire to make the love of your Son known, you understand our failings so well. Ask Jesus' forgiveness for our shabby lives—for what could have been fire and has been ashes, for the lights that have gone out, for the salt that has turned insipid. Mother of God, you are omnipotent in your petition. Obtain for us, along with forgiveness, the strength to live truly a life of faith and love, so we can share our faith in Christ with others.¹⁰³

A very affectionate blessing from
your Father
+ Javier

¹⁰⁰ Benedict XVI, homily on the solemnity of the Assumption, 15 August 2005.

¹⁰¹ Blessed John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, 25 March 1987, no. 14.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, no. 6.

¹⁰³ St. Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 175.

