

Pastoral Letter

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Prelate of Opus Dei

Rome, October 2, 2011

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

1. Since receiving the Lord's apostolic mandate (cf. *Mt* 28:19-20), the Church has never stopped evangelizing. Many fruits came with the passing of centuries, including, by the grace of God, the Work and each one of her faithful. As in other times, now also a vigorous process of de-Christianization is unfolding in many spheres, bringing with it grave losses for humanity. God has always sent saints to the Church who, with their word and their example, have been able to lead souls back to Christ. As Pope Benedict XVI has written in his encyclical about hope, Christianity is not *only* "good news" – *the communication of a hitherto unknown content*, but *one that makes things happen and is life-changing*.¹

I will now dwell on some aspects of that formation for our spiritual life and for taking part in the "new evangelization", as Blessed John Paul II defined it.

In 1985, the first successor of our Father wrote us a pastoral letter, encouraging us to participate very actively in this apostolate, and insisting on the need to take great care in personal formation and in extending that work to souls.

Now also Benedict XVI guides Christians along the same paths. The recent creation of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization² is a sign of that interest. All of us felt he was addressing us at the recent World Youth Day, when he encouraged young people *to bear witness to the faith wherever you are, even when it meets with rejection or indifference. We cannot encounter Christ and not want to make him known to others. So do not keep Christ to yourselves! Share with others the joy of your faith. The world needs the witness of your faith, it surely needs God*.³

FORMATION FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

Like the first Christians

2. As the Work came into the world specifically to bring to mind again the universal call to holiness and apostolate, St Josemaría declared that **the easiest way to understand Opus Dei is to consider the life of the early Christians. They lived their Christian vocation seriously, seeking earnestly the holiness to which they had been called by their Baptism. Externally**

¹ Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, November 30, 2007, 2.

² Cf. Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Ubicumque et Semper*, September 21, 2010.

³ Benedict XVI, Homily at the Final Mass, World Youth Day, August 21, 2011.

they did nothing to distinguish themselves from their fellow citizens.⁴

At Pentecost, the Paraclete prompted the Apostles and the other disciples to evangelize, reawakening in their minds the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is enough to read the writings of the New Testament to realize how one of the first concerns of the Twelve was to plant the seed of faith and nourish it with their teachings, by word of mouth and by letter. The patient work of formation which our Lord carried out with the Apostles for three years, and which was carried on without interruption by them and their co-workers, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, transformed the ancient world to the point of making it Christian.

Need and importance of formation

3. St Josemaría encouraged everyone to acquire and constantly improve their own Christian formation, an indispensable requirement for growing in intimacy with Jesus Christ and making him known to other souls. *Discite benefacere* (Is 1:17), learn to do good, he used to repeat with the words of the prophet Isaiah; **a doctrine may be a marvelous one, with the power to save, but it will all be pointless if there is no one who has been taught how to put it into practice.⁵** Since he took his first steps as a priest, he dedicated a lot of energy to the doctrinal formation of the people who approached his pastoral work. Later, with the development of Opus Dei, he intensified that dedication and prepared the necessary means to give continuity to the task of formation: first that of his children, but also that of the countless people – men and women, young and mature, healthy and sick – who showed themselves willing to welcome his message into their souls.

Our Father considered five aspects of formation: human, spiritual, doctrinal-religious, apostolic and professional. He stated that a man, a woman, **matures little by little, and never attains all the human perfection that by nature they are capable of. In a specific area, they may even become the best compared to everyone else, perhaps unsurpassable. But as a Christian, their growth knows no limits.⁶**

Humanly, if we examine ourselves sincerely, we immediately discover that we need to perfect our character, our way of being, acquiring and improving in the human virtues that constitute the basis for the supernatural ones. The same happens in spiritual formation, since it is always possible to progress in the Christian virtues, especially in charity, which is the essence of perfection.

As regards the doctrinal-religious aspect, our knowledge of God and of revealed doctrine can and ought to grow: to conform our intellect, our will and our heart better with the mysteries of the faith, and to assimilate them in greater depth.

⁴ St Josemaría, *Conversations*, 24.

⁵ St Josemaría, *Letter May 6, 1945*, 19.

⁶ St Josemaría, *Letter March 24, 1931*, 9.

The apostolate, in turn, is **a sea without shores**, and preparation is required to proclaim the love of Christ in new environments and in more countries. This was St Josemaría's program from the beginning, as is seen in a handwritten note from the first years of the Work: **to know Jesus Christ. To make him known. To take him everywhere.** Professional standing becomes *your* **"bait"** as a **"fisher of men"**,⁷ to extend the reign of Christ – already present in his Church – in society.

The panorama is so vast that we will never be able to say: now I'm formed! **We never say enough. Our formation never ends: all that you have received up to now** – our Father used to explain – **is the foundation for what will come later.**⁸

Freedom, docility, sense of responsibility

4. Identification with Jesus Christ requires free human cooperation: "God who created you without you, will not save you without you".⁹ This personal response plays an indispensable role, but where the human creature cannot reach, God's grace can. **The Lord has left us with freedom, which is a very great good and the source of many evils, but it is also the source of holiness and love.**¹⁰ The source of love: only free beings are in a position to love and be happy. Only with difficulty does love grow where coercion rules. And there is no fidelity without the free and firm decision of identifying oneself with the Will of God.

The Church possesses the remedy to cure human weakness, a consequence of sin, which shows itself – among other things – in the lessening of interior freedom. That remedy, divine grace, not only heals natural freedom; it also elevates it to a new and higher freedom. Jesus Christ, in fact, has wrested us from the *bondage to decay to obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God* (Rom 8:21). *Stand fast therefore* – the Apostle exhorts us – *and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery* (Gal 5:1).

Ask yourself now, St Josemaría invites us, (...) **whether you are holding firmly and unshakably to your choice of Life? When you hear the most lovable voice of God urging you on to holiness, do you freely answer "Yes"?**¹¹ The personal decision we have made to respond to God's call, in the Church and in the Work, is precisely the reason for our perseverance. Furthermore, that freedom is fully accomplished, and attains all its meaning, only through our loving surrender to the Will of God, like that of Jesus.

Personal freedom, which I defend and will always defend with all my strength, leads me to ask with deep conviction, though I am well aware of my own weakness: "What do

⁷ St Josemaría, *The Way*, 372.

⁸ St Josemaría, Notes taken from a family gathering, June 18, 1972.

⁹ St Augustine, *Sermon*, 169, 13 (PL 38, 923).

¹⁰ St Josemaría, Notes taken from a family gathering, 1963.

¹¹ St Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 24.

you want from me, Lord, so that I may freely do it?”¹² And our Father adds: **Christ himself gives us the answer: *veritas liberabit vos* (Jn 8:32), the truth will set you free. How great a truth is this, which opens the way to freedom and gives it meaning throughout our lives. I will sum it up for you, with the joy and certainty which flow from knowing there is a close relationship between God and his creatures. It is the knowledge that we have come from the hands of God, that the Blessed Trinity looks upon us with predilection, that we are children of so wonderful a Father.**¹³

5. On incorporation into Opus Dei, each one freely accepts the commitment to be formed in order to fulfill the mission of the Work in the heart of the Church, and accordingly has grateful recourse to the specific means of formation which St Josemaría, faithful to the God’s wishes, established.

Let us consider seriously and often that we have **an obligation to form ourselves well doctrinally, an obligation to prepare ourselves so as to be understood, and so that those who hear us may know how to express themselves well later.**¹⁴ Hence the necessity to go to the means of formation, ready to take thorough advantage of them.

As John Paul II pointed out, “some convictions reveal themselves as particularly necessary and fruitful. First of all, there is the conviction that one cannot offer a true and effective formation to others if the individual has not taken on or developed a personal responsibility for formation: this, in fact, is essentially a ‘formation of self’. In addition, there is the conviction that at one and the same time each of us is the goal and principle of formation: the more we are formed and the more we feel the need to pursue and deepen our formation, still more will we be formed and be rendered capable of forming others”.¹⁵

HUMAN FORMATION

6. As regards the human aspect, formation tends to strengthen the virtues and contribute to the shaping of character: our Lord wants us to be very human and very divine, with our eyes fixed on Him, who is *perfect God and perfect man*.¹⁶

The edifice of holiness rests on human foundations: grace presupposes nature. Therefore the Second Vatican Council recommends the lay faithful to hold in the highest regard “the virtues relating to social customs, namely, honesty, justice, sincerity, kindness, and courage, without which no true Christian life can exist.”¹⁷

¹² *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ St Josemaría, *Letter January 9, 1932*, 28.

¹⁵ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, December 30, 1988, 63.

¹⁶ *Athanasian Creed*.

¹⁷ Second Vatican Council, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4.

A solid personality is built on the family, the school, the workplace, friendships, and the various situations of human existence. One needs, besides, to learn to conduct oneself nobly and uprightly. In this way, character is improved as a basis for strengthening the faith in the face of internal and external difficulties. There is no shortage of men and women who perhaps **have not had an opportunity to listen to the divine words, or (...) have forgotten them. Yet their human dispositions are honest, loyal, compassionate and sincere. I would go so far as to say that anyone possessing such qualities is ready to be generous with God, because human virtues constitute the foundation for the supernatural virtues.**¹⁸

Currently it has become more necessary to rediscover the value and necessity of human virtues, since some regard them as opposed to freedom, spontaneity, and to what they wrongly think is “authentic” in man. They forget, perhaps, that those habitual perfections of intellect and will make it easy to act well and honestly, and make living together in society just, peaceful and pleasant.

Even though in some places the atmosphere one breathes makes it difficult to grasp these values, human virtues still do not stop being attractive. In the face of the manifold claims that fail to fill the heart, the human person ends up seeking something that is really worth the effort. Hence, it is to us Christians that the great task falls of showing, first with our own example, the beauty of a virtuous (that is, a fully human) life, a happy life.

At present it is temperance and fortitude that seem to be especially important.

Temperance

7. Temperance is self-mastery. A self-mastery that is achieved when we realize that **not everything we experience in our bodies and souls should be given free rein. Nor ought we to do everything we can do. It is easier to let ourselves be carried away by so-called natural impulses; but this road ends up in sadness and isolation in our own misery.**¹⁹

This virtue introduces order and measure into our desires, and the firm and moderate control of reason over our passions. Its exercise is not limited to sheer denial, which would be a caricature of this virtue. It acts in such a way that delightful good, and the attraction which this arouses, are integrated harmoniously into the overall maturity of the person, into health of soul. **Temperance does not imply narrowness, but greatness of soul. There is much more deprivation in the intemperate heart which abdicates from self-dominion only to become enslaved to the first caller who comes along ringing some pathetic, tinny cow bell.**²⁰

Experience shows that intemperance hampers one’s capacity to determine what is truly good. What a pity to see those in whom pleasure is converted into the rule for their decisions!

¹⁸ St Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 74.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

The intemperate person lets himself be guided by the multiple sensations which the environment arouses in him. And leaving to one side the truth about things, and seeking happiness in fleeting experiences which, since they are transient and sense-based and never satisfy completely, but rather cause upset and instability, they send the person into a spiral of self-destruction. By contrast, temperance confers serenity and calm; instead of silencing or denying good desires and noble passions, it restores man's self-mastery.

The Supernumeraries, with their commitment to create Christian homes, take on a special responsibility in this area. St Josemaría remarked that parents ought to teach their children **to live soberly (...). It is difficult, but one has to be brave: have the courage to educate in austerity.**²¹ The most effective way to transmit this attitude, above all to young children, is example, for they will only understand the beauty of the virtue when they see how you renounce a whim for love of them, or you sacrifice your own rest to look after them, to accompany them, to fulfill your mission as parents. Help them to manage what they use: you will do them a great good. I insist: if you look after temperance in your homes, our Lord will reward your self-denial and sacrifice as mothers and fathers; and there will arise in the heart of your own home vocations dedicated to God.

Fortitude

8. On occasions we experience within us a certain disinclination to effort, to what work, sacrifice, and self-denial imply. Fortitude “ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions.”²²

Let us struggle to acquire the habit of conquering in small things: keeping to a timetable, looking after material order, resisting whims, controlling irritations, finishing tasks, etc. Thus we will be able to respond more promptly to the demands of our Christian vocation. Moreover, fortitude will lead us to the good kind of patience: to suffer without making it afflict others, to bear the hardships that result from our own limitations and defects, tiredness, other people's characters, injustices, or lack of means. **The person with fortitude is one who perseveres in doing what his conscience tells him he ought to do. He does not measure the value of a task exclusively by the benefit he receives from it, but rather by the service he renders to others. The strong man will at times suffer, but he stands firm; he may be driven to tears, but he will brush them aside. When difficulties come thick and fast, he does not bend before them.**²³

Certainly, firmness is required to undertake, day after day, the task of one's own

²¹ St Josemaría, Notes taken from a family gathering, November 28, 1972.

²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1808.

²³ St Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 77.

sanctification and apostolate in the middle of the world. Obstacles may arise, but the person driven by God's strength – *quoniam tu es fortitudo mea* (Ps 30[31]:5), because You, O Lord, are my strength – is not afraid to act, to proclaim and defend his faith, even when this means going against the grain. Let us turn our eyes once more to the first Christians: they encountered numerous difficulties, since the doctrine of Christ appeared – then as now – to be a sign of contradiction (Lk 2:34). Today's world needs women and men who in their daily conduct offer ***the silent and heroic witness of so many Christians who live the Gospel without compromise, doing their duty.***²⁴

Human tone

9. The zeal to cultivate human virtues will contribute to people's breathing in the *bonus odor Christi* (cf. 2 Cor 2:15), the sweet fragrance of Christ. In this context, one sees the importance of "human tone", friendly and respectful behavior in one's relationships with others. Let us foster it in the heart of the family, in the workplace, in moments dedicated to entertainment, sport, and rest, even though there too we may at times have to go against the grain. Let us not be afraid if, on occasions, our simple Christian naturalness "clashes" with the environment, because, as St Josemaría taught us, that is precisely the naturalness that God is asking of us.²⁵

Today there is a pressing need to look after this human tone and to foster it around us. Frequently, in the family and in society, these signs of refinement in conduct are neglected, for the sake of a false naturalness. There are abundant ways of contributing to formation in this field. Example, as always, comes first, although it is also good to make use of personal conversations and talks to groups of people. Respect in one's dealings with others is shown by dressing decently and respectably, by the topics of conversations and get-togethers, by promoting a joyful spirit of service within the home, the school, and places of entertainment or rest; and by the material care of homes and attention to little things.

It is particularly important to take an interest in acquiring and developing a serious level of culture, suited to each one's circumstances of education, social sphere, and personal tastes and hobbies. I will merely remind you that an important role is played here by what we read and the good use of time dedicated to appropriate rest.

10. In the Centers of Opus Dei and in the apostolates inspired by faithful of the Prelature, the effort is made to help young people get used to thinking about others, generously, with a desire to serve. Let us encourage them to forge ideals in life that do not keep them restricted within miserly, comfortable and selfish limits. Let us remember how St Josemaría would encourage us to foster and supernaturalize all the young people's noble ambitions.

²⁴ Benedict XVI, Angelus Address, October 28, 2007.

²⁵ Cf. St Josemaría, *The Way*, 380.

If they cultivate such noble ambitions, with a spirit of striving and sacrifice, then it will be more realistic and accessible for them to appreciate the importance and supernatural meaning of their efforts; it will also be easier to help them advance in their interior life and become suitable instruments in the hands of Christ, at the service of the Church and society.

Many young girls and boys, as John Paul II said on one occasion, “are demanding about the meaning and form of their life, and would like to free themselves from religious and moral confusion. Help them to do so! In fact, the younger generation is open and sensitive to religious values. They sense – although at times unconsciously – that religious and moral relativism do not bring happiness, and that freedom without truth is a deceptive illusion.”²⁶ It is very hard for a person who settles for a stunted view of life to acquire true human and Christian formation. Let us not stop encouraging young people to learn how to face up to the problems of this world.

The human tone of sacred ministers

11. The exercise of the human virtues is also essential for priests, by the very nature of their pastoral ministry. Priests carry out their work in the middle of the world, in direct contact with a great variety of people who, as Don Álvaro explained, “tend to be stern judges of a priest, and who watch particularly his behavior as a man.”²⁷

A priest who is friendly, well-mannered, and available to dedicate his time to others, makes a positive impression on people and shows them that the Christian struggle is attractive.

No circumstance could lead St. Josemaría to lower his lofty view of priests. Although, on the one hand, a priest must make himself all things for all men in order to reach all (cf. *1 Cor* 9:19), on the other hand, he must never forget that he is Christ’s representative among men. Therefore, it is only logical that he strive – within his personal limitations – to make it possible for the other faithful to discover, through his personal behavior, the face of our Lord. Our Founder’s advice to priests is still very timely: that they put care into dressing properly, so that people can always recognize them as Christ’s ministers, as dispensers of God’s mysteries (cf. *1 Cor* 4:1).

The priesthood embraces a priest’s entire life. Precisely for this reason – because he has to show that he is truly and constantly available – a priest has to be easily recognized. And priestly attire (the cassock or clerical suit) distinguishes him very clearly. In today’s society, so impacted by the culture of “image” and also, perhaps, distant from God, the way in which priests dress does not go unnoticed. Therefore the priests of the Prelature who exercise their pastoral ministry in a church habitually wear a cassock there, and also in our Centers. **As regards countries where other customs prevail, our Father wrote, I have nothing to say. We will always do whatever the Church disposes. Nevertheless, within the house we will always wear the**

²⁶ John Paul II, Address to a group of bishops on an *ad limina* visit, November 18, 1999.

²⁷ Don Álvaro del Portillo, *On Priesthood*, Four Courts Press, Dublin 1980, p. 12

cassock: those who speak about freedom should at least respect our freedom to dress at home the way we want to.²⁸

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

12. This facet has to occupy “a privileged place in a person’s life. Everyone is called to grow continually in intimate union with Jesus Christ, in conformity to the Father’s will, in devotion to others in charity and justice.”²⁹

Pope Benedict XVI has reminded us that *in the Church’s most ancient tradition, the process of Christian formation always had an experiential character. While not neglecting a systematic understanding of the content of the faith, it centered on a vital and convincing encounter with Christ, as proclaimed by authentic witnesses.*³⁰ The life of union with Christ, the search for holiness, is nourished by spiritual aids: knowledge of Catholic teaching, liturgical and sacramental life, and spiritual accompaniment.

Identifying oneself with Christ

13. Under the action of the Holy Spirit, the ways of following Christ within the Church are countless. Our Father wrote: **You should be as different from one another, as are the saints in heaven, for each one has his own very special personal characteristics. –But, also, as alike to one another as are the saints, who would not be saints if each of them had not become identified with Christ.**³¹

Opus Dei, besides the practices of piety – all of them traditional in the Church – which she recommends to her faithful or to those who take part in her apostolic works, transmits a spirit, to take up and give meaning to one’s own life, grounding it on divine filiation in Christ. The axis, the “hinge”, on which the whole endeavor of sanctification rests – one’s own and that of others – is professional work carried out as well as possible, in union with Jesus Christ and with the desire to serve others.

This spiritual assistance facilitates unity of life, because the faithful of the Prelature and the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross learn to take advantage of the specific situations in which they find themselves, in order to turn them into an opportunity and means of holiness and apostolate, always acting with the greatest personal freedom in the professional, family, social and political questions that the Church leaves to the personal decision of Catholics.

²⁸ St Josemaría, *Letter August 8, 1956*, 47.

²⁹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, December 30, 1988, 60.

³⁰ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, February 22, 2007, 64.

³¹ St Josemaría, *The Way*, 947.

St Josemaría said that **it is impossible to distinguish between work and contemplation. You can't say you spend this much time in prayer, and that much time at work. You spend all your time in prayer, contemplating in God's presence. Though our vocation may appear to be to the active life, we end up where the great mystics did: *I flew aloft so high, so high, that in the end I seized my prey. I flew to the heart of God.***³² How can we fail to find an echo of these teachings in the words that Pope John Paul II addressed to faithful of Opus Dei at Castelgandolfo? "Living united to God in the world, in any situation, trying to improve yourselves with the help of grace and making Jesus Christ known through the witness of your life. What ideal could be more beautiful and exciting? Inserted and mixed in with this joyful and sorrowing humanity, you want to love it, enlighten it, and save it."³³

The means

14. The union of work with ascetical struggle, contemplation and the carrying out of an apostolic mission, requires a deep preparation. Therefore Opus Dei offers us a broad range of resources for personal and collective formation. Among the personal ones, special importance attaches to the fraternal chat, which we also call the Confidence, precisely because of its interpersonal nature filled with confidence.

It is a conversation of spiritual direction, situated in the context of fraternal service, in order to live out deeply, with freedom and responsibility, our daily encounter with Christ in the middle of the world. In the pages of the New Testament we see how our Lord wanted to make use of the mediation of men and women in order to help guide souls towards the goal of holiness. When he called St Paul on the road to Damascus, he asked him to go to another man, Ananias, who would tell him what he needed to know about the new path on which he was about to embark (cf. *Acts* 9:6-19; 22:10-15). Later Paul went to Jerusalem *videre Petrum*, to see Peter and to learn from him many aspects of Christian life and doctrine (cf. *Gal* 1:18). In fact, spiritual direction is a tradition that reaches right back to the first steps of the Church.

In Opus Dei, this spiritual helps people more easily and faithfully assimilate the spirit that our Founder received from God and transmitted to us, and that has been endorsed by the Church as a path of holiness.³⁴

15. St Josemaría explained that, in the Work, personal spiritual direction takes place *in actu*, that is, at the moment when this conversation takes place. This advice is directed to helping us make progress in the Christian life. Our Father sometimes compared spiritual direction to the task of a brother or sister who is concerned about how one's younger brothers or sisters are doing; or that of a loyal friend moved by the desire to invite others to be better Christians.³⁵ In

³² St Josemaría, Notes taken from a family gathering, October 30, 1964.

³³ John Paul II, Homily, August 19, 1979.

³⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Ut Sit*, November 28, 1982.

³⁵ Cf. St Josemaría, *La Abadesa de las Huelgas. Estudio teológico jurídico*, Rialp, Madrid 1974, 3rd ed., p. 153.

Recently the Congregation for the Clergy has published a document *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, March 9,

short, the Confidence is a conversation between brothers or sisters, and not that of a subject with one's superior. Those who look after these fraternal chats act with special refinement, fruit of an exclusive concern for the interior life and apostolic tasks of their brothers or sisters, without ever trying to influence them in the temporal concerns – professional, social, cultural, political, etc. – in which each one is involved.

In the Work, the separation between the exercise of jurisdiction and spiritual direction is assured in practice, among other things, by the fact that precisely those who receive chats of spiritual direction (the local Directors and other faithful who are especially prepared, and the priests in the sacrament of Penance) do not have any power of government over the people they are looking after. Local government as such does not refer to persons, but only to the organization of the Centers and apostolic activities; the function of the local Directors, in what refers to their brothers or sisters, is that of fraternal advice. The same individual does not therefore exercise functions both of jurisdiction and of spiritual assistance. In the Prelature, the sole basis of governing authority over persons is the jurisdiction which resides only in the Prelate and in his Vicars.

What then does Opus Dei offer? Fundamentally, spiritual direction to her faithful and to other persons who request it. The faithful of the Prelature, because we aspire to our personal sanctification and the carrying out of the mission of Opus Dei in the Church, ordinarily do not find any problem in speaking with whichever person the Directors indicate (even though it might be someone younger), always with full freedom and with faith in divine grace which makes use of human instruments. The fraternal chat is not an account of one's conscience. If in this spiritual direction we are asked about something (and on occasion it could be good and even necessary that this happens), it will be done with great refinement, because no one is obliged, specifically, to say in the Confidence what is matter for confession.

Everything I am telling you, my daughters and sons, will seem obvious to you, but I wanted to recall this in the context of our present-day society, which shows a special sensitivity in regard to people's privacy, although we also see, in certain sectors, a great deal of lack of modesty and of respect for the privacy of others. We were all told, soon after coming to the Work, that it would never occur to us to call the person who hears our chat "my spiritual director," simply because, I repeat, this type of personal tie is not found in the Work, nor has it ever been. The one who receives a Confidence transmits the spirit of Opus Dei without adding anything: those with the task of offering this help "disappear" in order to place souls face to face with our Lord, within the characteristics of our path. The path of the Work, our Father said, **is very broad. You can travel on the right or on the left; on horseback, on bicycle, on your knees, on all fours like when you were infants, and even along the curb, only provided you don't go off the road.**³⁶

2011, in which it states explicitly that "[t]here are to be found also well formed lay faithful (...) who offer this service of counsel along the journey of holiness" (no. 65).

³⁶ St Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, December 31, 1970.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

16. Besides the fraternal chat, we go – ordinarily, each week – to a priest to receive the spiritual help that is united to sacramental Confession. As you can well understand, we are helped by the confessors assigned to the various Centers, who have been ordained in the first place to serve their sisters and brothers, with total availability, and who (because they know and live the same spirit) have a special preparation to guide us, never to command. This is analogous to someone who goes to – if they have one – their family doctor, rather than to someone they don't know.

At the same time, as St Josemaría always made very clear, the faithful of the Prelature, as is true of all Catholics, enjoy full freedom to go to Confession or talk to any priest who has ministerial faculties. You will be surprised that I am reminding you of such an obvious truth, but I want to mention it because it may not be so familiar to those who know nothing about Opus Dei or the spirit of freedom proper to Christ's followers. Moreover, our Father established that ordinarily it would be different people who assist us in our fraternal chat and in Confession.

A spirit of initiative and docility

17. Spiritual direction requires, from those receiving it, the desire to make progress in following Christ. They are the ones who are primarily interested in seeking out this helping hand as frequently as is needed, opening their heart sincerely so that it is possible to suggest goals to them, point out possible deviations, provide them with encouragement in difficult moments, and offer them support and understanding. Therefore they act with a spirit of initiative and responsibility. **The advice of another Christian and especially a priest's advice, in questions of faith or morals, is a powerful help for knowing what God wants of us in our particular circumstances. Advice, however, does not eliminate personal responsibility. In the end, it is we ourselves, each one of us on our own, who have to decide for ourselves and personally to account to God for our decisions.**³⁷

When receiving spiritual direction, in order to respond to the action of the Holy Spirit and to grow spiritually and identify ourselves with Christ, we need to cultivate the virtues of sincerity and docility, which sum up the attitude of the believing soul before the Paraclete. This is what St Josemaría advised in this regard, addressing all the faithful, whether in the Work or not. **You well know the obligations of your Christian way of life; they will lead you safely and surely to sanctity. You have also been forewarned about the difficulties, or practically all of them, because you can already get a rough idea of them at the beginning of the road. Now I wish to emphasize that you must let yourselves be helped and guided by a spiritual director, to whom you can confide all your holy ambitions and the daily problems affecting your interior life, the failures you may suffer and the victories.**

³⁷ St Josemaría, *Conversations*, 93.

Always be very sincere in spiritual direction. Don't make allowances for yourselves without checking beforehand; open up your souls completely, without fear or shame. Otherwise this smooth and straight road will become tortuous, and what at first was trivial will end up strangling you like a noose.³⁸

And echoing the teaching of Fathers of the Church and spiritual authors, based on the experience of many years of pastoral practice, he insisted: **If the dumb devil gets inside a soul, he ruins everything. On the other hand, if he is cast out immediately, everything turns out well; we are happy and life goes forward properly. Let us always be *brutally sincere*, but in a good-mannered way.**³⁹

God pours out his grace abundantly on the humility of those who receive with supernatural vision the advice given in spiritual direction, seeing in this help the voice of the Holy Spirit. Only true docility of heart and mind makes progress possible on the path of sanctity, since the Paraclete, with his inspirations and with the advice of those assisting us, **gives a supernatural tone to our thoughts, desires and actions. It is he who leads us to adhere to Christ's teaching and to assimilate it in a profound way. It is he who gives us the light by which we perceive our personal calling and the strength to carry out all that God expects of us. If we are docile to the Holy Spirit, the image of Christ will be formed more and more fully in us, and we will be brought closer every day to God the Father. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God, are sons of God" (Rom 8:14).**⁴⁰

Humility and prudence in giving spiritual direction

18. I want to consider now the dispositions needed by those who assist others in spiritual direction. The most important one is to love others as they are, exclusively seeking their good. Thus their attitude should always be positive, optimistic and encouraging. In addition, they should also foster in themselves the virtue of humility, so as not to lose sight of the fact that they are only an instrument (cf. *Acts 9:15*), which our Lord wants to make use of for the sanctification of souls.

Moreover, they will put great care into preparing themselves as well as possible to carry out this task, striving to know well the fundamental principles of the spiritual life which souls ordinarily lead, and having a prudent doubt (that is, not trusting exclusively in their own criteria) if special situations arise. In these cases, besides praying more, they will ask the Holy Spirit for more light, in order to clarify and consider the matter. If necessary, in accordance with the teachings of moral prudence, they can consult people who are more learned, presenting the matter as a hypothetical case and altering the circumstances, so that – in order to ensure that they rigorously safeguard silence of office – the identity of the person involved is protected, and due

³⁸ St Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 15.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴⁰ St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 135.

prudence is always observed.

In the Work, we have always known and expressly accepted that the person with whom we speak fraternally can consult the relevant Director when he or she considers it opportune to do so, so as to be of better assistance to the person involved. In order to make the spirit of freedom and trust even clearer in these situations (which are neither habitual nor frequent), the person receiving the fraternal chat will ask those concerned whether he or she wishes to consult a Director themselves, or whether they prefer that the person who hears their Confidence does so. This way of acting reinforces the refined and prudent practice which has been followed since the beginning.

At the same time, everyone is free to have recourse directly to the Father or to a Regional Director or someone on the Delegation, to speak about their own interior life. This offers us the guarantee that, in receiving spiritual direction in Opus Dei, we will receive what we need and desire: the spirit that St Josemaría transmitted to us, without any additions or modifications. Nor does this in any way lessen the duty to respect the natural confidentiality involved, which is safeguarded with the maximum care and strictness. A person who was not exemplary on this point would lack a basic disposition required to give spiritual direction.

Those who assist others strive to foster the interior freedom of those souls at every moment, so that they respond willingly to the requirements of God's love. Spiritual direction, therefore, is offered without trying to "standardize" the faithful of Opus Dei: that would be illogical and a lack of naturalness. The Work **wants us to be very free and diverse. But she wants us to be responsible and consistent Catholic citizens, so that the mind and heart of each of us do not operate unevenly, each going off in its own direction. Rather they should be united and firm, in order to do at every moment what it is clear has to be done, not allowing themselves to be dragged along – through lack of personality or of loyalty to one's conscience – by passing trends or styles.**⁴¹ Naturally, those helping others will have to speak with the strength needed to urge them to travel the path God is marking out for them; but also with great gentleness, because they are not, nor do they consider themselves to be, owners of souls, but rather their servants,; *fortiter in re, suaviter in modo*. **Prudence demands that the right medicine be used whenever the situation calls for it. Once the wound has been laid bare, the cure should be applied in full and without palliatives (...). We must apply these procedures first to ourselves, and then to those whom, for reasons of justice or charity, we are obliged to help.**⁴²

The fact that we ourselves have to improve in a specific point shouldn't be a hindrance here. **Can't a doctor who is sick cure others, even if his illness is chronic? Will his illness prevent him from prescribing proper treatment for other patients? Obviously not. In order to cure others, all he needs is to have the necessary knowledge and to apply it with the same concern as he would in his own case.**⁴³

⁴¹ St Josemaría, *Letter May 6, 1945*, 35.

⁴² St Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 157.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 161.

Liturgical formation

19. Within the ambit of spiritual formation, and closely united to doctrinal-religious formation, is love for the Church's sacred liturgy, where – above all in the Holy Mass – the work of our Redemption is carried out.⁴⁴ **The holy Mass brings us face to face with (...) the central mysteries of our faith, because it is the gift of the Blessed Trinity to the Church. It is because of this that we can consider the Mass as the centre and the source of a Christian's spiritual life.**⁴⁵

The Christian message is “performative”: that is to say, the Gospel, and the liturgy which brings it into our life, is not simply the communication of realities that can be known, but a communication that makes things happen and is life-changing.⁴⁶

No one with common sense and supernatural sense could think that the liturgy is “something for clerics”; or that the clergy “celebrate” and the people simply “attend.” St Josemaría, far from any such view of the liturgy, encouraged everyone to participate: from a grasp of the intimate connection between the liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic liturgy, or of the essential element of adoration in the celebration, down to specific details such as the use of a missal by the faithful to facilitate their participation, first from the heart and then with the prescribed words and gestures. I recall having heard that as far back as the thirties of the last century, in order to reinforce this teaching he wanted the Mass to be dialogued, where those attending would respond aloud to the prayers of the priest. This was not a widespread practice back then: there were still thirty years to go to the Second Vatican Council.

Liturgy of the Word

20. The whole of salvation history, and the liturgy which celebrates it and makes it present, is characterized by the initiative of God who calls us and expects from each of us an ongoing response, with a love that then imbues our whole day, striving to ensure that the Sacrifice of the Altar is prolonged throughout the twenty-four hours.

The celebration of the Word in the Holy Mass is a true dialogue that demands a sensitive response. It is God who is speaking to his people, who in turn make this *divine word* their own, by means of silence, song, etc. They show their adherence to that announcement by professing their faith in the Creed, and filled with trust they place their petitions before the Lord.⁴⁷ In the readings, the Paraclete **speaks through human voices so as to make our intelligence come to know and contemplate, so that our will is strengthened and the action is performed.**⁴⁸ That these words become a reality in our life depends on God's grace, but also on the preparation and

⁴⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2.

⁴⁵ St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 87.

⁴⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, November 30, 2007, 2.

⁴⁷ Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 55.

⁴⁸ St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 89.

fervor of the one who reads them and meditates on them, the one who listens to them. “Through the Holy Scriptures, we are led to virtuous actions and to contemplation.”⁴⁹

Here we have a very specific point for examination and improvement. What fruit do we take from those readings each day, in the Holy Mass? Do we savor the prescribed moments of silence after the Gospel, to apply our Lord’s preaching to ourselves? I have written elsewhere: “Many of us have witnessed how St Josemaría used to *get deep inside* the readings of the Mass; it even showed in his tone of voice. Not infrequently, after the Holy Sacrifice, he would write down in his notebook the phrases which had struck him most, so as to pray about them afterwards. And in this way his soul and his preaching were constantly being enriched. Let us try to imitate such a good teacher. God has revealed himself so that we may get to know him more and better; and so that we make him known, in a natural way, without worldly respect.”⁵⁰

The Eucharistic Liturgy

21. In this part of the Mass, the priest does not address principally the faithful gathered there. Rather the spiritual and interior orientation of everyone, both priest and lay faithful, is *versus Deum per Iesum Christum*, towards God through Jesus Christ. In the Eucharistic liturgy, ***the priest and people are certainly not praying to one another, but to the one God. Therefore during the prayer they look in the same direction, towards an image of Christ in the apse, or towards a cross or simply towards heaven, as our Lord did in his priestly prayer on the night before his Passion.***⁵¹ How greatly this helps us to live this common adoration, this going out to meet the Lord, and to fix our eyes on the altar cross!

22. In the Sacrifice of the Altar obedience and piety, intimately united, are essential. They are also fundamental requirements for the liturgy to be the source and summit of the life of the Church and of every Christian. Obedience, first of all, because “the liturgical words and rites (...) are a faithful expression, matured over the centuries, of the understanding of Christ, and they teach us to think as he himself does (cf. *Phil 2:5*); by conforming our minds to these words, we raise our hearts to the Lord.”⁵² Here is a profound reason why we have to obey – to love – each word, each gesture, each rubric, since they bring God’s gift to us: they help us to be *alter Christus, ipse Christus*.

The Second Vatican Council reminded us that the full effectiveness of the liturgy depends also on everyone, priests and lay faithful, striving to align their hearts with the words that are spoken.⁵³ Benedict XVI explained that in the liturgy ***the vox, words, precede our mind. This is not usually the case: one has to think first, then one’s thought becomes words. But here, the***

⁴⁹ St John Damascene, *Exposition on the Orthodox Faith*, IV, 17 (PG 94, 1175).

⁵⁰ *Vivir la Santa Misa*, Rialp, Madrid 2010, pp. 65-66.

⁵¹ Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, *Opera Omnia*, vol. XI, Preface.

⁵² Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, March 25, 2004, 5.

⁵³ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 11.

*words come first. The sacred Liturgy gives us the words; we must enter into these words, find a harmony with this reality that precedes us (...). This is the first condition: we ourselves must interiorize the structure, the words of the Liturgy, the Word of God. Thus, our celebration truly becomes a celebration “with” the Church: our hearts are enlarged and we are not just doing anything but are “with” the Church, in conversation with God.*⁵⁴

In St Josemaría’s life piety and obedience are admirably fused, and point to a deep reality: **There is no better way to show how great is our concern and love for the Holy Sacrifice than by taking great care with the least detail of the ceremonies the wisdom of the Church has laid down.**

This is for Love: but we should also feel the “need” to become like Christ, not only inside ourselves but also in what is external. We should act, on the wide spaciousness of the Christian altar, with the rhythm and harmony which obedient holiness provides, uniting us to the will of the Spouse of Christ, to the Will of Christ himself.⁵⁵

I would like these very brief considerations about the structure of the Holy Mass to help all of us to foster interest in the liturgy, as nourishment and a necessary part of the spiritual life. How can I fail to recall here that our Founder, as far back as 1930, wrote that everyone in the Work **must make a special effort to follow, with the greatest interest, each and every liturgical regulation, even the ones that seem to have little or no importance. A person who loves does not miss a single detail. I have realized this: those trifling things are in fact something very big: Love. And to obey the Pope, down to the last detail, is the way to love him. And to love the Holy Father means to love Christ and His Mother, our most holy Mother, Mary. And we aspire to this alone: because we love them, we want *omnes, cum Petro, ad Iesum per Mariam* – that all may go, with Peter, to Jesus through Mary.**⁵⁶

FORMATION IN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

23. Anyone who sincerely loves God feels impelled to get to know him more and better. He or she will not be satisfied with a superficial relationship, but will seek to understand more deeply everything that relates to him. **Our desire to advance in theological knowledge, in sound, firm *Christian doctrine* is sparked, above all, by the will to know and love God. It likewise stems from the concern of a faithful soul to attain the deepest meaning of the world, seen as coming from the hands of God.**⁵⁷ Therefore the formation with which Opus Dei provides her faithful – considered from the doctrinal-religious point of view – is directed to helping us acquire the doctrine of the Church and to grasp it more deeply.

⁵⁴ Benedict XVI, Meeting with priests from the Diocese of Albano, August 31, 2006.

⁵⁵ St Josemaría, *The Forge*, 833.

⁵⁶ St Josemaría, *Apuntes íntimos*, 110 (November 17, 1930). Cited by Don Álvaro del Portillo, *Letter*, October 15, 1991.

⁵⁷ St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 10.

Within the same framework – looking at God and at the world – Blessed John Paul II stressed the current need for formation in Catholic doctrine. “The situation today points to an ever-increasing urgency for a *doctrinal* formation of the lay faithful, not simply in a better understanding which is natural to faith’s dynamism, but also in enabling them to ‘give a reason for their hoping’ in view of the world and its grave and complex problems. Therefore, a systematic approach to *catechesis*, geared to age and the diverse situations of life, is an absolute necessity, as is a more decided Christian promotion of *culture*, in response to the perennial yet always new questions that concern individuals and society today.”⁵⁸

Right from the beginning of Opus Dei, and even earlier, St Josemaría showed a special interest in helping those he was assisting spiritually to go deeper in their doctrinal-religious formation, because **each of us should try hard, as far as we can, to study the faith seriously, scientifically.**⁵⁹

24. As St Gregory the Great wrote, “piety is useless if it lacks the discernment of knowledge”,⁶⁰ and “knowledge is empty without the balm of piety.”⁶¹ Our Founder insisted that the study of doctrine had to be accompanied by a sincere spiritual life, by intimate conversation with Jesus in prayer and in the sacraments, and by filial devotion to our Lady. He taught us that **truth is always, in some sense, sacred, a gift from God, a divine light that leads us to Him, who is Light by essence. This is particularly so when we consider truth in the supernatural order. We must therefore treat it with great respect, lovingly (...). Moreover, we are convinced that the divine truth we bear within goes far beyond what we can grasp. Our words are totally inadequate to express all its richness. It is also possible that we do not fully understand its meaning and we may be merely playing the role of one who transmits a message without fully understanding it himself.**⁶²

The effort the Prelature makes to assure that all its faithful, and many other people, acquire a serious doctrinal preparation is very worthwhile – even more so in moments like the present when the need is seen to be more urgent. Our Founder’s words spoken many years ago are for us a joyful reality: **the whole Work is like a great catechesis, carried out in a living, simple and direct way in the heart of civil society.**⁶³

Fidelity to the Magisterium and freedom in matters of opinion

25. Our doctrinal formation includes all areas from philosophy to theology, to canon law, and so on. By means of this training, which in the case of Numeraries, and many Associates, covers programs that are taught at the pontifical universities, we help to ensure that at every level

⁵⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, December 30, 1988, 60.

⁵⁹ St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 10.

⁶⁰ St Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, I, 32, 45 (PL 75, 517).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² St Josemaría, *Letter October 24, 1965*, 24-25.

⁶³ St Josemaría, *Letter March 11, 1940*, 47.

of society there are people determined to give a living witness to the Gospel in word and deed, *always prepared*, as St Peter writes, *to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you (1 Pet 3:15)*.

In accordance with repeated directives from the Magisterium, in explanations of the different philosophical and theological subjects the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas, the Common Doctor of the Church, is especially relevant. This is how to follow the recommendation of the Second Vatican Council and several Popes: “to penetrate the mysteries of salvation more deeply (...) under the guidance of St Thomas, and to perceive their interconnections.”⁶⁴

St Josemaría held to this line and reminded the teachers in charge of the *Studium Generale* of the Prelature about it. At the same time, with the mentality of being ever open to the progress of theological science, he explained: **We cannot conclude from this that we ought to just limit ourselves to assimilating and repeating all of the teachings of St Thomas and only his.**

We are talking about something very different: We should certainly cultivate the doctrine of the Angelic Doctor, but the way he would do were he alive today. Sometimes it may be necessary to bring to a conclusion what he could only begin. By the same token, we will adopt the views of other authors when they correspond to the truth.⁶⁵

I have just reminded you, in our Father’s words, of an essential feature of the spirit of Opus Dei: that **corporately we have no other teaching than the teaching of the Magisterium of the Holy See. We accept everything that the Magisterium accepts and we reject whatever it rejects. We believe firmly everything it proposes as an article of faith, and we also make our own everything which is part of Catholic teaching.**⁶⁶ And **within this ample doctrine, we each form our own personal criteria.**⁶⁷ The *Statutes* of the Prelature prohibit Opus Dei, as our Founder said, from creating or adopting a philosophical or theological school of its own.⁶⁸ As well as showing our love for freedom, this expresses a fundamental ecclesiological fact: that the members of the Prelature are ordinary Christian faithful or ordinary secular priests, with the same spheres of freedom of opinion as other Catholics.

FORMATION FOR THE APOSTOLATE

26. A deep knowledge of basic religious truths, as well as the ethical and moral issues that relate more closely to the exercise of our own work, is also important if we are to do a broad apostolate in our professional environment. **The light of the followers of Jesus Christ should not be hidden in the depths of some valley, but should be placed on the mountain peak, so**

⁶⁴ Second Vatican Council, Decree *Optatam Totius*, 16; cf. Pius XII, Speech, June 24, 1939; Paul VI, Speech, March 12, 1964; John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, September 14, 1998, 43 ff.

⁶⁵ St Josemaría, *Letter January 9, 1951*, 22.

⁶⁶ St Josemaría, *Letter February 14, 1964*, 1.

⁶⁷ St Josemaría, Notes taken from a family gathering, April 30, 1961.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Codex Iuris particularis seu Statuta Praelaturae Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei*, 109.

that “they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (*Mt 5:16*).⁶⁹

Certainly there are plenty of people who have a big heart, able to fall in love with God, but who lack the light of doctrine to guide and give meaning to their lives. And Christians have the joyful duty of supplying it. A New Testament passage illustrates this clearly. Obeying the Holy Spirit’s command, the deacon Philip was making his way along the road leading to Gaza. A carriage was going by in which an important person, the minister of the queen of Ethiopia, was returning to his country after worshipping God in Jerusalem. *So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him (Acts 8:30-31).*

It is our task as Catholics to announce, peacefully and perseveringly, the good news of Jesus, and dispel religious ignorance by spreading the teaching that has been revealed to us. **The Christian apostolate – and I’m talking about ordinary Christians, living as one among equals – is a great work of teaching. Through real, personal, loyal friendship, you create in others a hunger for God and you help them to discover new horizons – naturally and simply, with the example of your faith lived to the full, with a loving word which is full of the force of divine truth.**⁷⁰

We must ardently pass on the Truth of Christ, giving others a share in the treasure we have received, so that they can experience that *there is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.*⁷¹

27. In the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, the Second Vatican Council teaches that “The apostolate can attain its maximum effectiveness only through a diversified and thorough formation. This is demanded not only by the continuous spiritual and doctrinal progress of the lay person himself but also by the accommodation of his activity to circumstances varying according to the affairs, persons, and duties involved. (...) In addition to the formation which is common for all Christians, many forms of the apostolate demand also a specific and particular formation because of the variety of persons and circumstances.”⁷²

In recent years, this zeal for souls has required greater vigor, to counter the secularism that has made great strides, to the extent of acquiring citizenship status in traditionally Christian countries. Infusing the spirit of Christ once again into the roots of these nations is the goal of the new evangelization.⁷³ In the Prelature, this work can be summed up as guiding and encouraging each individual to carry out the evangelizing mission they received at Baptism, in the spirit and

⁶⁹ St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁷¹ Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass for the Inauguration of the Pontificate, April 24, 2005.

⁷² Second Vatican Council, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 28.

⁷³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009, 29; Speeches, October 19, 2006, June 11, 2007, March 12, 2010, September 24, 2011, and others.

with the specific means of Opus Dei, through an **apostolate of friendship and trust**.

John Paul II stressed that the world “calls out for *credible evangelizers, whose lives, in communion with the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, radiate the beauty of the Gospel*. (...) All the baptized, since they are witnesses of Christ, should receive a training appropriate to their circumstances, not only so that their faith does not wither for lack of care in a hostile environment such as the secularist world, but also so that their witness to the Gospel will receive strength and inspiration.”⁷⁴

Personal apostolate of friendship and trust

28. Our Lord came to this earth so that all souls might attain eternal life, and he also wants to use his disciples: – *ut eatis*: “go!” he urges Christians, as he did the Apostles, “and bear fruit, and may your fruit abide” (cf. *Jn* 15:16). Therefore, my daughters and sons, we have to take his doctrine to the most diverse spheres, since we care about all souls for the sake of our Lord. But it makes sense to start with the ones God has placed closest to us.

In the Opus Dei Prelature, as I said, we give priority to what St Josemaría called the **apostolate of friendship and trust**: personal contact in which one heart pours into another their knowledge and love of Christ, making it easier for the other to open to the gentle promptings of grace.

Friendship is, and at the same time creates, a communion of feelings and desires. But “where communication principally takes place is in shared life (...); hence sharing life is characteristic of friendship.”⁷⁵ With that communication, we take the first step on the path of friendship. Therefore it makes us happy to seize the opportunities offered by our work and social life to make new friends, desiring to help them and also learn from them: friendship is essentially a two-way exchange. Our Father encouraged us to act as *Christ passing by* on the path of everyday life. **Our Lord wants to make use of us and of our dealings with others, of that capacity of ours which he has given us to love others and to make ourselves loved, so that he can continue making friends on earth.**⁷⁶

Among the features of this way of being useful, one that stands out is our need to learn how to adapt to other people’s capacity and mentality, so that they can understand what they hear. St Josemaría called this the **gift of tongues**: the effort to make ourselves understood that comes as a fruit of grace, prayer and personal preparation, so that the teaching of the Church resonates in people’s ears with new tones. **You must keep repeating the same things, but in different ways. It is the form that should always be new, varied; not the doctrine.**⁷⁷

⁷⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, June 28, 2003, 49.

⁷⁵ St Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, 14.

⁷⁶ St Josemaría, *Letter January 9, 1932*, 75.

⁷⁷ St Josemaría, *Letter April 30, 1946*, 71.

What we have to do is imitate Jesus, who expounded the highest teachings in parables, comparisons that everyone could understand, each at their own level. We should foster the desire to present the Christian truths in an attractive way: *let your speech be always gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone* (Col 4:6). We are not aiming to give pat answers, nor put on a show of scholarship, but to speak with meaningful content, seeking the glory of God and the good of souls.

29. In this context, knowledge of Sacred Scripture – the Old and New Testaments – as the fruit of assiduous reading and attentive meditation, is of fundamental importance. Pope Benedict XVI recently reminded us of this in his Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* on the Word of God in the mission of the Church. There, among other great saints to whom the Lord granted special lights to delve into the spiritual meaning of the Bible, the Pope says that one of these rays of light is manifest in *St Josemaría Escrivá in his preaching on the universal call to holiness*.⁷⁸

The Roman Pontiff writes that *an important aspect of the Church's pastoral work which, if used wisely, can help in rediscovering the centrality of God's word, is catechesis, which in its various forms and levels must constantly accompany the journey of the People of God*.⁷⁹ And he shows how *Luke's description (cf. Lk 24:13-35) of the disciples who meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus represents, in some sense, the model of a catechesis centered on "the explanation of the Scriptures", an explanation which Christ alone can give (cf. Lk 24:27-28), as he shows that they are fulfilled in his person. The hope which triumphs over every failure was thus reborn, and made those disciples convinced and credible witnesses of the Risen Lord*.⁸⁰ Don't these words recall our Father's joyous affirmation, when he preached that **Now the entire world has become an Emmaus, for the Lord has opened up all the divine paths of the earth**⁸¹?

Remember how he transmitted to us the teachings of this passage from St Luke. He explained that **the whole of Christ's life is a divine model which we should imitate, but what the Gospels tell us about the scene at Emmaus pertains to us in a very special way**.⁸² He also used this scene from the Gospel to talk to us about the personal apostolate of friendship and trust. He emphasized one important characteristic: we must take the initiative, go out and meet people to offer them our friendship and help them in their search for God, while respecting and defending everyone's privacy and freedom.

On the road to Emmaus, the Risen Christ comes in search of two disciples who were on their way home, discouraged by the painful events they had witnessed: the Passion and Death of the Lord. This gesture of Jesus teaches us that friendship leads us to share in our friends' joys and sorrows, to be in solidarity with them and to spend time with them. **As Jesus is walking along, he meets two men who have nearly lost all hope. They are beginning to feel that life has no**

⁷⁸ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, September 30, 2010, 48.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ St Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 314.

⁸² St Josemaría, Notes taken from a family gathering, April 1951.

meaning for them. Christ understands their sorrow; he sees into their heart and communicates to them some of the life he carries within himself.⁸³ Similarly, we need to share the concerns, hopes, and difficulties of the people we know, being one among our fellow-workers, without any barrier between us. This is a wonderful feature of the spirit of the Work, which does not take anyone out of his or her place, but invites us to be in the world without being worldly.

That is how we have to behave in the environment in which we live and work, without losing sight of the fact that, if we are faithful, Jesus Christ works in us, and wants to use our example and words to reach other people, while they enrich us with their friendship. It is totally natural for true friends to share their joys, sorrows, and concerns. And, of course, the greatest treasure that a Christian has is precisely the life of Christ. We will talk to them about God, the joy of having him in our soul in grace, and the immense value that only He can give to our human lives.

By acting like this, Christians cooperate effectively in the Church's evangelizing mission, bringing Christ into the hearts and souls of the people they know, to help set up the Cross on the summit of all human activities.

Apostolate of family and youth

30. There are many activities that help spread the kingdom of God more strongly. However, some have objectively greater significance according to the needs of each age and place. The family, the education of young people, and the world of culture, raise, to a large extent, the challenge of the new evangelization to which the Holy Father is urging us.

The family urgently needs its origin to be reaffirmed. God purposely laid the foundation of the family in creation, but unfortunately, the customs and civil laws of many countries are determined to pervert it. This task is of paramount importance, and it is one in which Catholics come together with people of other faiths, or of no religion at all, aware that supporting the family – a communion of love between a man and a woman, indissoluble, and open to life – is a central pillar that is indispensable for the right ordering of society, and a foundation that is important for people to reach maturity and happiness. In addition to what we can contribute in cooperation with others, we can, for example, personally help husbands and wives to forgive one another and understand better that their life is a gift to the other. And if it is a Christian couple, we can help them to understand that they have a share in a mystery: that of Christ's union with his Church. This fidelity on the part of both spouses, an expression of true love over time, is also their path to Heaven.

Apostolate with young people will always be a vital challenge for the world and the Church, because the years of youth forge the characters of those who will straighten out the course of

⁸³ St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 105.

society and lead it along the paths traced by our Creator and Redeemer.

In this context, the apostolate of entertainment and good use of leisure time take on special importance. I will limit myself here to reminding you of what I wrote in 2002: that we have to fill with Christian content the “customs, laws, fashion, the media, and artistic expressions. These are all aspects throbbing at the heart of the battle for the new evangelization of society, to which the Holy Father is constantly calling us Christians.”⁸⁴

Apostolate and culture

31. The wide world of thought and culture, science, literature and technology, continues to prove a crucial area that must be illuminated with the light of the Gospel. “Christians are therefore called to have a faith capable of critically confronting contemporary culture and resisting its enticements; of having a real effect on the world of culture, finance, society and politics; of demonstrating that the fellowship between Catholics and other Christians is more powerful than any ethnic bond; of joyfully passing on the faith to new generations; and of building a Christian culture ready to evangelize the larger culture in which we live.”⁸⁵

The apostolates of the Work are **a shoreless sea**. We want to open our arms wide to every single person, like Christ on the Cross. Hence our effort to reach those who are furthest away from God, as taught us by St Josemaría, who, as he always repeated, loved the *ad fidem* apostolate. Our Father encouraged us to **make a special effort in the apostolate *ad gentes*, with the Gentiles (...). First, I will repeat as always, through sincere, loyal, humanly good friendship.**⁸⁶ Taking advantage of the multiple contacts that arise in the exercise of our ordinary work in this globalized world, it is easy to dialogue with people of other faiths and beliefs, or those of no religion, wanting to arouse in them the desire to know God better. We will even help people who have a negative attitude towards the Catholic Church, if we treat them gently, patiently, understandingly and affectionately.

I consider most important, said Benedict XVI in a speech to the Roman Curia, *the fact that we, as believers, must have at heart even those people who consider themselves agnostics or atheists. When we speak of a new evangelization, these people are perhaps taken aback. They do not want to see themselves as an object of mission or to give up their freedom of thought and will. Yet the question of God remains present even for them, even if they cannot believe in the concrete nature of his concern for us.*⁸⁷

Although only a few people may take a hand directly in such initiatives, we all feel the need to support them with our prayer. Because as children of God in his holy Church, the only desire of our lives is to bring the name of the Lord to all peoples and all cultures, to the farthest corners

⁸⁴ *Letter*, November 28, 2002, 11.

⁸⁵ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, June 28, 2003, 50.

⁸⁶ St Josemaría, Notes taken from a family gathering, April 15, 1973.

⁸⁷ Benedict XVI, Speech to the Roman Curia, December 21, 2009.

of the earth (cf. *Acts* 9:15).

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND FORMATION

32. Because ordinary work, in the spirit of *Opus Dei*, is the hinge of our personal sanctification and the normal setting for our apostolate, it is understandable that the Prelature promotes good professional training. **Study, professional formation of whatever type, is a serious obligation among us.**⁸⁸

In recent times, the Church's Magisterium has addressed the issue of work (and we all thought of St Josemaría's preaching since 1928 as we read it) as the setting for the pursuit of holiness by the lay faithful. It has stressed the need "*to form a spirituality of work* which will help all people to come closer, through work, to God, the Creator and Redeemer, to participate in his salvific plan for man and the world and to deepen their friendship with Christ in their lives."⁸⁹

Work and unity of life

33. In his homily "Passionately Loving the World", St Josemaría stressed the importance of leading a unified Christian life, bringing together piety, work and apostolate. **I have taught this constantly, using words from Holy Scripture. The world is not evil, because it has come from God's hands, because it is His creation, because "Yahweh looked upon it and saw that it was good" (cf. *Gen* 1:7 ff.). We ourselves, mankind, make it evil and ugly with our sins and infidelities. Have no doubt: any kind of evasion of the honest realities of daily life is for you, men and women of the world, something opposed to the will of God.**

On the contrary, you must understand now, more clearly, that God is calling you to serve Him *in and from* the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life. He waits for us every day, in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all the immense panorama of work. Understand this well: there is *something holy, something divine*, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it. (...)

There is no other way, my children. Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find Him. That is why I can tell you that our age needs to give back to matter and to the most trivial occurrences and situations their noble and original meaning. It needs to restore them to the service of the Kingdom of God, to spiritualize them, turning them into a means and an occasion for a continuous meeting with

⁸⁸ St Josemaría, *The Way*, 334.

⁸⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, 24.

Jesus Christ.⁹⁰

The formation provided by the Prelature aims to nurture the supernatural spirit everyone needs in order to do their job with the greatest possible human perfection and zeal for service, making it into an instrument of holiness and apostolate. To do that, we must strive to achieve the necessary professional standing among our peers, which comes with commitment and dedication over the years. We each receive our specific professional training together with other citizens, at universities, training schools, studios, etc., wherever we study or learn a trade. The spirit of the Work impels us to update and improve such training constantly. We all know that we are completely free, both when choosing our job and when exercising it. The Work only teaches us how to sanctify ourselves in our work, without interfering in the decisions connected with it, which we take individually.

It does not matter what type of work we do, provided it is honest. **Which is more important, being a professor at the Sorbonne or doing housework? I'll tell you that if you are holy, because you are sanctifying yourself in your work, that's what's most important.**⁹¹ And St Josemaría added elsewhere, **When, referring to the cleaners who work at the University of Navarra, I say that I don't know if their work is equally or still more important than that of the Board of Governors, I'm not joking. I'm simply repeating what I've always thought. The task of one of those women, who comes with joy and does everything for love, can be heroic, not at all humdrum, and certainly more effective than that of a great researcher whose only ambition is to see himself in print. I'll make the point: which is better? It depends on the love and sacrifice you put into your work. But do it self-sacrificingly, happily, cheerfully, willingly – otherwise it would be better not to do it at all.**⁹²

Every Catholic has the duty to do all in their power to enable Christ to reign effectively in society, and these holy longings are also shown by trying to acquire the necessary professional standing, as a “lampstand” to let Christ's light shine forth (cf. *Mk* 4:21).

Students, for their part, must feel the duty to get good grades. Don't forget the consideration that St Josemaría wrote in *The Way*, which has guided many generations of young people throughout the world: **an hour of study for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer.**⁹³

Right intention

34. At the same time as taking care of our professional training, we must remember responsibly that our job, no matter what it is, always offers us a means for achieving holiness and doing apostolate. It is very necessary not to lose this point of view at the present time, because in today's highly competitive society it is easy to place our job in the front rank of our concerns,

⁹⁰ St Josemaría, Homily “Passionately Loving the World”, October 8, 1967 (in *Conversations*, 114).

⁹¹ St Josemaría, Notes taken from a family gathering, August 30, 1961.

⁹² St Josemaría, Notes taken from a family gathering, April 10, 1969.

⁹³ St Josemaría, *The Way*, 335.

above our duties to God, our family and other people. I repeat, with our Father: **work to please God, without seeking any human glory. Some people regard work as a means of gaining honors, or of acquiring power or wealth to satisfy their ambition, or as a source of pride in their own achievements.**

The children of God in Opus Dei never regard our daily work as something related to selfishness, vanity or pride. All we see is the possibility of serving everyone for love of God.⁹⁴ Therefore, he added, **a good measure of an upright intention in your work can be found precisely in how well you make use of the social relations or friendships it provides in order to bring those souls closer to God; and, where circumstances allow, even getting to the point of facing them with the problem of their vocation.**⁹⁵

In the context of our professional training, we must necessarily aim for a deep knowledge of those areas of Catholic doctrine most closely related to our own work, or which are particularly topical in our country. Some of these will perhaps be different in different places, but some are relevant everywhere, such as those related to marriage and the family, education, the “Gospel of Life”, bioethics, justice and charity in labor relations... Therefore, the example of uprightness in the fulfillment of our professional, family and community duties is a credible witness that we all have to give. “As a result of your human and Christian uprightness,” I wrote, “many initiatives will begin wherever you live or work, and they will be directly aimed at solving specific social problems in a noble and brotherly cooperation with other men and women of good will. At this very time I am raising up my heart in thanksgiving to our Lord because around the Prelature, with the help of so many Cooperators, both Catholic and non-Catholic, abundant examples of such solidarity are flourishing. They are contributing towards establishing justice and peace on earth and bringing to tens of thousands of people **the strong and soothing balm of love**, as our Father expressed it (*Christ is Passing By*, 183)”⁹⁶

Apostolic spontaneity

35. My daughters and sons, I wanted to bring once more before your eyes the fact that **the sole ambition and only desire of Opus Dei and of each of its children is to serve the Church as She wishes to be served within the specific vocation which the Lord has given to us.**⁹⁷ And St Josemaría often referred to Opus Dei as an *organized disorganization*, because our specific way, willed by God, of working at the Church’s mission is to provide formation to people in different aspects. Arguably, the Opus Dei Prelature devotes all its energies to this task, this catechesis. Then each of you individually, equipped with the training you have received and assimilated, freely and with personal responsibility, seek to infuse the lymph of the Christian spirit into the bloodstream of society.

⁹⁴ St Josemaría, *Letter October 15, 1948*, 18.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁶ *Letter*, June 1, 1999.

⁹⁷ St Josemaría, *Letter May 31, 1943*, 1.

Replying to a question from a reporter on this characteristic aspect of the Work, our Father explained that **we give primary and fundamental importance to the *apostolic spontaneity of the individual*, to free and responsible initiative guided by the action of the Spirit, and not to organizational structures and tactics imposed from above, from the seat of government.**⁹⁸

Before finishing, I will reiterate what is fundamental: let us put our best efforts, day after day, into our Christian commitment to God and to other people. Let us do our best to be women and men who are absolutely faithful to the Pope, praying continuously for him and his intentions. Let's live in affective and effective union with the Bishops and all the Catholic faithful. Let's be filled with optimism and gratitude to the Lord, as we take part in the new evangelization. And let's appeal to our Blessed Lady, Queen of the world and Mother of the Church, to obtain for us from Heaven the graces we need.

Naturally, as a special intercessor for all this formational work we invoke St Josemaría, whose life and teaching embodied the spirit he received from God on October 2, 1928, so that his daughters and sons, and many others, may travel all the paths of the earth, making them divine with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

A very affectionate blessing from

your Father

+ Javier

Rome, October 2, 2011

⁹⁸ St Josemaría, *Conversations*, 19.