

(Letter from the Prelate: December 2010)

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

It makes me very happy to recall the joy with which St. Josemaría repeated, during the time of Advent, the words from the liturgy: *Dominus prope est!*¹ He looked forward, with eagerness and gratitude, to the solemnity that commemorates the Savior's arrival on earth.

We have begun the time that helps us to prepare for Christmas and the other feasts connected with the birth of our Lord. I think that there will come to our lips the words of the prophet Isaiah, which are found in the Mass for the first Sunday: *It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it.*² And we will be amazed at the goodness of Heaven, in seeing how this prophecy was fulfilled when the divine Word took flesh in the virginal womb of Mary Most Holy, by the working of the Holy Spirit. With his redemptive incarnation, and especially by the Paschal mystery of his death and resurrection, God has brought his peace to the world, as the angels announced at the first Christmas. And although this peace is not yet fully a reality (since in God's plans it is only at the end of time that he will be *everything to every one*³), he has already made the wall disappear that was raised between mankind and God as the result of original sin and our personal sins.⁴ Besides, Jesus wants us Christians to assist him every day in implanting his peace in the hearts of men and women, reaching the furthest corner of society.

The Pope pointed out, several years ago, that “the Fathers of the Church, in their Greek translation of the Old Testament, found a passage from the prophet Isaiah that Paul also quotes in order to show how God's new ways had already been foretold in the Old Testament. There we read: ‘God made his Word short, he abbreviated it’ (*Is* 10:23; *Rom* 9:28) . . . The Son himself is the Word, the *Logos*. The eternal Word became small—small enough to fit into a manger. He became a child, so that the Word could be grasped by us.”⁵ And in his recent Apostolic Exhortation the Holy Father added: “Now the Word is not simply audible; not only does it have a voice, now the Word has a face, one which we can see: that of Jesus of Nazareth.”⁶

Let us continue, then, on our Christian path with confidence and great joy. “Christmas reminds us that our Lord is the beginning and the end and the center of creation: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (*Jn* 1:1). It is Christ, my daughters and sons, who draws all creatures to himself: *all things were made through him, and without him was made nothing that has been made* (*Jn* 1:3). On becoming flesh, and coming to live among us (cf. *Jn* 1:14), He has shown us that we are not in this life to seek a temporal, passing happiness. We are here to reach eternal happiness, following in his footsteps. And we will only attain this by learning from Him.”⁷

1 The Roman Missal, Third Sunday of Advent, Entrance antiphon (*Phil* 4:5).

2 The Roman Missal, First Sunday of Advent, First reading (A) (*Is* 2:2).

3 *1 Cor* 15:28.

4 Cf. *Eph* 2:14.

5 Benedict XVI, Homily at Midnight Mass, December 24, 2006.

6 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, September 30, 2010, no. 12.

7 St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, December 25, 1972.

We have been re-clothed in Christ at Baptism. In order to conform ourselves ever more closely to him, our Lord left us the other sacraments, especially Penance and the Eucharist. By receiving them frequently and with the required dispositions, our resemblance to Jesus is strengthened; we are made better children of God. The Holy Spirit carries out this work in souls, counting on our personal cooperation. And part of this cooperation involves the assiduous reading of the Word of God, which *is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*⁸ Hence the advice of our Father: “In our own life we must reproduce Christ’s life. We need to come to know him by reading and meditating on Scripture, and by praying.”⁹ Let us make an effort during the upcoming feast days “to learn the lessons which Jesus teaches us, even when he is just a newly born Child, from the very moment he opens his eyes on this blessed land of men.”¹⁰ Let us consider frequently: Do I have recourse to the sources of grace with a real zeal for holiness? Am I striving to be punctual in the reception of the sacraments, with an eagerness to acquire the purity of soul and supernatural tone that God expects of me?

The recent Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father, *Verbum Domini*, stresses the importance of Holy Scripture in the Church’s life and mission, and in the personal life of every Christian. There Benedict XVI reminds students of Sacred Scripture, and everyone, of a fundamental point: “the primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church.”¹¹ Only in the heart of the Church, in continuity with the living Tradition and under the guidance of the Magisterium instituted by Christ, can we adequately understand what the Holy Spirit wishes to communicate to us for our salvation, by means of the inspired writers, making use of human words. In other words, it is only in the faith and from the faith that we can understand with depth and exactitude, without danger of error, what God has revealed to us, in order to let us share in the divine Life. The scientific study of Sacred Scripture is necessary for a sound exegesis; but equally necessary—and to a greater degree—is full identification with the faith set forth by the Magisterium of the Church. Therefore “an authentic interpretation of the Bible must always be in harmony with the faith of the Catholic Church.”¹²

To understand the Word of God well, besides stirring up our faith, we have to strive to read and meditate on the Bible in the spiritual climate in which it was written. Therefore in reading the Gospel and the other inspired books carefully, we need to foster an attitude of listening. Sacred Scripture, above all when it is proclaimed within the liturgical celebration, is always timely, and transmits the newness of God’s truth to the specific person who is listening to it attentively and who wants to assimilate it. Its words, as St. Josemaría wrote, are “light from the Holy Spirit, who speaks through human voices so as to make our intellect come to know and contemplate, to strengthen our will and make our desire for action effective. And because we are one people, ‘gathered together in the unity of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,’ we recite the Creed, affirming the unity of our faith.”¹³

In an analogous way, also in our personal reading of the Bible—above all, of the Gospels—we hear God’s voice, which we have to strive to apply to our specific situation. If we make an

8 *Heb* 4:12.

9 St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 14.

10 *Ibid.*

11 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, September 30, 2010, no. 29.

12 *Ibid.*, no. 30.

13 St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 89; citing St. Cyprian, *De Dominica Oratione*, 23 (PL 4, 553).

effort to be attentive—with a filial attention—in reading the sacred texts, our efforts will truly become prayer. “When you open the Holy Gospel,” our Founder wrote, “think that what is written there—the words and deeds of Christ—is something that you should not only know, but live. Everything, every point that is told there, has been gathered, detail-by-detail, for you to make it come alive in the individual circumstances of your life.

“God has called us Catholics to follow him closely. In that holy Writing you will find the Life of Jesus, but you should also find your own life there.

“You too, like the Apostle, will learn to ask, full of love, ‘Lord, what would you have me do?’ And in your soul you will hear the conclusive answer, ‘The Will of God!’

“Take up the Gospel every day, then, and read it and live it as a definite rule. This is what the saints have done.”¹⁴

In the document that I mentioned, Benedict XVI dedicates various paragraphs to explaining how the lives of the saints offer a great help in penetrating more deeply into the meaning of Scripture. St. Gregory the Great (the Pope cites these words in his Apostolic Exhortation) assures us that *viva lectio est vita bonorum*,¹⁵ the lives of the saints present us with a vibrant and deep reading of Scripture. “The most profound interpretation of Scripture comes precisely from those who let themselves be shaped by the word of God through listening, reading and assiduous meditation . . . It is certainly not by chance,” continues the Holy Father, “that the great currents of spirituality in the Church’s history originated with an explicit reference to Scripture.”¹⁶

After stating that “every saint is like a ray of light streaming forth from the word of God,”¹⁷ the Holy Father mentions various saints who have brought new lights, taken from the Gospel, to the life of the Church; and he says that one of those rays of light is seen in “Saint Josemaría Escrivá in his preaching of the universal call to holiness.”¹⁸ These words have filled us, as is only natural, with great happiness, while at the same time they are a call to our sense of responsibility, to take better advantage of our Father’s teachings and spread his message even more widely, and thus love God and the Church more.

Let us follow, then, St. Josemaría’s advice to make frequent use of the texts of the Bible to nourish our periods of prayer and to contemplate the scenes of Christ’s life, putting ourselves into the Gospel “as one more person there.” The liturgical texts of the Mass, both in Advent and at Christmas, strongly urge us to grow in familiarity with the Word of God and to increase our intimacy with Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Let us enter resolutely into their lives, accompanying the three of them with our whole heart.

“Our Lord’s whole life fills me with love for him,” St. Josemaría wrote, “but I have a special weakness for his thirty hidden years spent in Bethlehem, Egypt and Nazareth. That period, so long in comparison with his public life and which the Gospels hardly mention, might seem empty of any special meaning to a person who views it superficially. And yet, I have always maintained that this silence about our Lord’s early life speaks eloquently for itself, and contains a wonderful lesson for us Christians. They were years of intense work and prayer, years during which Jesus led an ordinary life, a life like ours, we might say, which was both divine and human at the same time. In

14 St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 754.

15 St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job XXIV*, 8, 16 (PL 76, 295).

16 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, September 30, 2010, no. 48.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

his simple workshop, unnoticed, he did everything to perfection, just as he was later to do before the multitudes.”¹⁹

There is one suggestion I would like to give you, taking advantage of the Pope’s words about St. Josemaría: let us all increase our eagerness to get to know deeply our Father’s commentaries on Sacred Scripture. Thus we will learn to sail more securely on the deep sea of Revelation, and we will discover the spiritual meaning that is hidden in the words of the sacred text: what the Holy Spirit wants to tell us, here and now, each and every one of us. From this perspective I invite you to reread a point from *The Forge*: “*Aquae multae non potuerunt extinguere caritatem!*—The great turmoil of waters could not quench the fire of charity. I offer you two interpretations of these words of Holy Scripture. First: the multitude of your past sins, now that you have fully repented of them, will not take you away from the Love of our God; and a second one: the waters of misunderstanding, the difficulties that you are perhaps encountering, should not interrupt your apostolic work.”²⁰

In recent days I made a rapid trip to Fatima and to Santiago de Compostela, following in our Founder’s footsteps. You know that the Shrine of Fatima had a special attraction for him; there, as I have mentioned on other occasions, St. Josemaría went frequently to entrust his intentions to our Lady, convinced that the prayer of Mary is always heard by our Lord. I also went to Santiago de Compostela, recalling the pilgrimage that our Founder made to the Apostle’s tomb in 1938, which was also a jubilee year, and uniting myself to the prayer of Benedict XVI when he was there a few days earlier. In both places I felt everyone supporting me—as I asked your sisters and brothers in Rome to do before leaving—so that our Lord will grant us all that we are asking of him. I prayed for the Church, for the Pope, for the faithful—each woman and man—of Opus Dei. Let us always go to Jesus through Mary, with faith and perseverance, united in our prayer to the Church and to all mankind.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, December 1, 2010

19 St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 56.

20 St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 655.