

(Letter from the Prelate: December 2011)

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

We have begun Advent, which is a call to us to renew our hope—not an ephemeral, passing hope, but a sure confidence, because it comes from God. This joyful expectation, so characteristic of the weeks preceding Christmas, “is the fundamental attitude of the Christian who wishes to live fruitfully the renewed encounter with the One who comes to dwell among us: Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man.”¹

Last Sunday, in the first reading at Mass, we read some words from Isaiah, who was saddened by the situation of the chosen people. Those men and women had hardened their hearts and distanced themselves from God, and the prophet directed himself to God asking that he convert them: *Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage. Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you.*² This cry, in one form or another, resounds frequently throughout these weeks; and we too, attentive to the voice of the Church, repeat sincerely: *veni, Domine, et noli tardare. Relaxa facinora plebi tuae;*³ come, Lord, do not delay; loose the heavy burdens which press down on your people. The liturgy assures us: *The Lord and Ruler will be coming soon, and his name will be called Emmanuel, because he will be God-with-us.*⁴ “The Savior comes to reduce to powerlessness the work of evil and all that can still keep us distant from God, in order to restore to us the ancient splendor and primitive fatherhood.”⁵

How often have we already invoked him, with our heart or with our lips: *veni, Domine Iesu*, come, Lord Jesus?⁶ Let us savor those words from Scripture, which the liturgy applies to the expectation of Christ’s birth: *Drop down dew from above, you heavens, and let the clouds rain down the Just One; let the earth be opened and bring forth a Savior.*⁷ The heavens were rent twenty centuries ago for the Redeemer’s arrival in the world, and this happens constantly each day, when Jesus draws close to us with his sacramental presence in the Holy Eucharist. Each of us is asked to respond by opening wide our heart, so that it is saturated by the divine dew that seeks to restore our effectiveness. Therefore, the best way to prepare ourselves for the spiritual arrival of Jesus this Christmas is to prepare very well our souls and bodies to receive him with new fervor each day in Holy Communion. How much fruit are you drawing from these days? How ardently do you want humanity to receive our Lord? Are you taking advantage of the lights and decorations in the streets to pray that God receives the response he deserves from his creatures?

Our Father urged us to take advantage of these weeks “to build a crib in our hearts for our God. Do you remember what we did as children? How eager we were to build the Christmas

1 Benedict XVI, Address to a general audience, December 22, 2010.

2 Roman Missal, First Sunday of Advent, *First Reading* (B) (*Is* 63:17-19).

3 Liturgy of the Hours, First Sunday of Advent. *Ad Nonam*, Brief response.

4 Roman Missal, December 21, *Entrance Antiphon* (see *Is* 7:14; 8:10).

5 Benedict XVI, Address to a general audience, December 22, 2010.

6 *Rev* 22:20.

7 Roman Missal, Fourth Sunday of Advent, *Entrance Antiphon* (*Is* 45:8).

scene, with its mountains made of cork, with its tiny houses and all those little figures around the manger, where God chose to be born!”⁸ And he continued with words that are relevant for all the faithful: “I know very well that, as time passes, since Opus Dei is for adult Christians who know how to become children out of love for God, my daughters and sons are becoming more childlike every day. Even more eagerly than when we were children, we have prepared the stable of Bethlehem in the intimacy of our souls.”⁹

On meditating on the extraordinary event that we are commemorating, the Pope invites us to consider that “the fulfillment of the prophecy, which began that night in Bethlehem, is both infinitely greater and in worldly terms smaller than the prophecy itself might lead one to imagine.”¹⁰ Isaiah and all the prophets only glimpsed a small part of what would take place at Christmas. The fulfillment of that prophecy has a much greater force, an incommensurable one, because, with the incarnation and birth of the Word, “the infinite distance between God and man is overcome. God has not only bent down, as we read in the Psalms; he has truly ‘come down,’ he has come into the world, he has become one of us, in order to draw all of us to himself.”¹¹ On the other hand, everything was carried out with the greatest humility: our all wise, all powerful and eternal God offers himself to us as a newborn child, helpless and in need of human arms to give him shelter and hearts to love him truly. In the silence of our prayer, we have to do what Mary and Joseph did on that night in Bethlehem, with our presence of God throughout the day and in receiving him sacramentally in the Eucharist. The very fact of putting up a crèche in our homes expresses “our expectation that God is coming close to us . . . but it is also an expression of thanksgiving for the One who decided to share in our human condition, in poverty and simplicity.”¹²

We are also preparing for the feast of the Immaculate Conception, which is now imminent. Our hearts as children are filled with a special joy at this solemnity, because in our Lady we see reflected both the greatness and humility with which her Son came down to earth. The greatness of Mary, the Most Pure, the All Holy, the most exalted creature. So great is her dignity that the Christian people praise her saying: Greater than you, only God! And the immense humility of the Virgin from Nazareth, for having been chosen from all eternity to be the Mother of God, she considered and called herself the handmaid of the Lord. How many lessons, my daughters and sons, we should learn continually from our Mother, and specifically now, in the days preceding her feast! Let us ask her to help us not to forget them, and to put them into practice.

There comes to mind now that it was precisely during these days in 1931—eighty years ago now—that St. Josemaría wrote down some considerations on the mysteries of the Rosary that since then have helped so many people to enter on the pathways of contemplation. I suggest that, during these days, you try to live this devotion with greater care and attention. On one occasion, in response to a question, our Father said: “The Rosary is a prayer very pleasing to our Lady, which has been part of the life of Catholics for many centuries. At the same time, it is a meditation on the mysteries of the life of our Lord and his Mother. Therefore, I recommend it with all my heart, also as a prayer that can be done as a family, although you shouldn’t force your young children to pray it . . . if they want to join the others, fine; if not, let them be, and

8 St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a meditation, December 25, 1973.

9 Ibid.

10 Benedict XVI, Homily on the Nativity of our Lord, December 24, 2010.

11 Ibid.

12 Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, December 22, 2010.

eventually they will come. It has to be something voluntary.”¹³

Because of his great respect for the freedom of souls, our Founder insisted that in this—as in all the practices of piety—each should follow their own path. And he added: “I have suggested one way of praying it, but I don’t tell anyone that this has to be the specific way of doing it, because there are a thousand different ways of praying it. Souls, although they are similar, each has his or her own path. Follow the one that you like, in praying the Rosary and in everything else. Try, if you like, to meditate a bit on the prayers of the Rosary, which have been put there by the Church. Pray the Our Fathers and the Hail Marys calmly. If you are distracted, try to recover your attention. And if you were distracted for the whole time, you have still prayed it: you have been singing a great serenade in honor of the Mother of God.”¹⁴

During Advent, the joyful mysteries of the Rosary take on a special vividness, especially in the final week, when the liturgy intensifies its immediate preparation for the Nativity. Let us strive to contemplate them with special effort. To help me and to help you to do so, I transcribe here some words of our Father about these scenes.

“Call to mind the joyful mysteries: we marvel at the humility of Jesus, who *semetipsum exinanivit formam servi accipiens*: who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, taking flesh like ours. Without sin, but equal to ours. A humility that led him to remain, like everyone else, for the required time in his Mother’s womb.

“We contemplate the Mother, who humbled herself and went to the mountains in Judea to see her cousin, St. Elizabeth. We contemplate, and are moved by, that enchanting scene where the *Magnificat* is composed.

“Then Jesus is born: like us, only with a greater poverty: outside his home, in a corner. *Non erit eis locus in diversorio*: there was no room for them in the inn. Being of the royal line of David, our Lord wanted to be born poor and to live as the poor do. And when the Evangelists, inspired by the Holy Spirit, tell the history of Jesus’ ancestors, in the narrative some women are mentioned who are not exactly a model of virtue; one of them, especially so. So that we may learn to love and understand people and, through Jesus, to forgive them.

“Afterwards we see how our Lady goes to the Temple to be purified: when, more pure than her, only God. What a model of humility! And we, filled with pride....

“At the end, after these scenes of humility, our soul overflows in generosity, in order to carry out the concerns of God, as the Child did—when they find him in the Temple, after seeking him for three days. For this is the topic of the final mystery: don’t you realize that I have to be engaged in my heavenly Father’s concerns?”¹⁵

The novena of the Immaculate Conception is a sign of filial affection for our Lady. Nevertheless, let us not forget that “what we receive from Mary is far more important than what we offer her. In fact, she gives us a message destined for each one of us . . . And what does Mary say? She speaks to us with the Word of God who was made flesh in her womb. Her ‘message’ is

13 St. Josemaría, notes taken at a family gathering, November 17, 1972.

14 St. Josemaría, notes taken at a family gathering, October 9, 1972.

15 St. Josemaría, notes taken at a family gathering, November 16, 1967.

nothing other than Jesus, the One who is the whole of her life. It is thanks to him and for him that she is Immaculate. And just as the Son of God became a man for our sake, so too she, the Mother, was preserved from sin for our sake, for everyone, in anticipation of God's salvation for every human being."¹⁶

In this way, in living deeply and personally the novena to the Immaculate Conception, we are preparing ourselves very well for Christmas. Moreover (as experience amply proves), it offers us an opportunity to carry out a constant personal apostolate. Our Lady always attracts souls and leads them to Jesus. Let us try to unite closely these two aspects—contact with our Lady and apostolic zeal—now and throughout our whole life. Let us meditate on some words of our Father, which have a tremendous strength and challenge us in our daily response. “The world is like a huge thirsting mouth, with thirst for Christ, and we Christians are the water that has to quench their thirst. People are waiting for us. Tomorrow, where will you be to enkindle that fire and love of Christ? If you don't have now a hunger for proselytism, it's a bad sign. We are mud of the earth, but—in the hands of the Divine Master—we will give light to the eyes of men, who are blind and don't see the splendor of the truth.”¹⁷

In the month that has just ended, the stable apostolic work of the Prelature began in Sri Lanka. Let us give great thanks to God because, on the very day of your brothers' arrival, they were able to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the oratory of the new Center: one more Tabernacle in those immense lands of Asia! We entrust to the Immaculate Virgin these beginnings and the apostolic expansion that, with her intercession, we are trying to carry out in so many places.

My daughters and sons: souls are waiting for us, waiting for you. Let us live with an eagerness to love, each day, the Sacrifice of Calvary. In 1937, our Father was able to celebrate Holy Mass for the first time with all the vestments, on December 3, after months of religious persecution in Spain. I have heard him mention with immense gratitude all the help given to him by that priest in Andorra, whom he commended to our Lord every day.

Continue praying for the Pope and his intentions, for those who assist him in governing the Church, for the spiritual fruit of his recent trip to Africa. And don't forget to unite yourself to my petitions to God, which (as I have so often told you), are many, and aimed at giving all the glory to God.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,
Javier

Rome, December 1, 2011

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, Address before a statue of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 2010.

¹⁷ St. Josemaría, notes taken in a meditation, October 24, 1942.