

(Letter from the Prelate: August 2011)

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

When you receive this letter, I will have just arrived, a few days ago, in Kinshasa, the capital of the Congo. A few weeks earlier, from July 7 to 12, I made a trip to Ivory Coast. Both in Abidjan and in Yamoussoukro I had get-togethers with your sisters and brothers, and with many other people who take part in Opus Dei's apostolic activities. In all these places, I have been filled with joy on seeing the growth of the apostolic work that the faithful of the Prelature are carrying out with the help of many other people. Let us constantly thank God for the graces he sends us through the intercession of our Lady, and also through the petitions of St. Josemaría, to whom we always have recourse. If here below he always kept each and every one of us in his heart, how much more effectively and intensely he will continue helping us from heaven.

I also go to our beloved Don Alvaro, the one who decided to begin stable apostolic work in these two countries, in 1980. With prayer and sacrifice, with quiet and persevering work (as in every place), the Work has taken root in these African countries. How many undertakings, for the glory of God and the service of the Church, have come to birth in these two nations, during the first thirty years there! Let us raise up, I insist, an unceasing prayer of thanksgiving to the Most Blessed Trinity.

I ask you to continue assisting from everywhere the apostolic expansion, just as our Father did throughout his life, right to the last day of his stay here on earth. Let us pray for the places where the Work's activity began some time ago and for the others where we are just beginning, without forgetting other countries to which we want to bring, along with Christ's teachings, the leaven of the spirit of Opus Dei: and most immediately, Sri Lanka. I ask each of you: can they truly count on your prayer? Are you praying for the people they are dealing with? What small, or not so small mortifications are you offering? Remember what St. Josemaría told us: "It is impossible to love all mankind . . . except from the Cross."¹

Let us entrust these desires for apostolic growth—within our own country and in the whole world—to our Lady's most sweet and immaculate Heart. As every year, since our Father consecrated the Work to Mary on August 15, 1951, we will renew that consecration on the feast of the Assumption. This year, besides seeking her protection and care for Opus Dei and each one of us, I invite you to unite yourselves to my gratitude to heaven after these trips. Let us also ask for spiritual fruit from the World Youth Day that will be held in Madrid during the second part of this month, with thousands of young people from all over the world taking part.

The upcoming 7th will mark the eightieth anniversary of a divine intervention in our Father's soul, which strengthened his conviction of the need to intensify his prayer—the only weapon on which he could count—to spread and make secure the path begun on October 2, 1928, and which gave new impulse to this specific and holy mission in the heart of the Church. We know very well the account he left us of what had happened on that August 7, 1931. It is worthwhile considering once again those words of our Founder, for they fill us with confidence and spur us to a greater fidelity to the divine plans for Opus Dei. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us penetrate more deeply into that event in St. Josemaría's life, which is always timely and

¹ St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a meditation, October 2, 1971.

has to find an echo, a personal response, in each one of us.

On that day in Madrid they were celebrating the feast of the Transfiguration. Our Founder had moved to the capital several years before this date to study for a doctorate in law. He records: “when entrusting my intentions at Mass, I noted the interior change that God has made in me during these years of residence in the ‘ex-Court.’ And that the change has come about in spite of myself: without my cooperation, I might say.”²

He thus placed on record the change that God had been bringing about in his soul, above all since October 2, 1928. He came to this realization precisely during the Eucharistic celebration, while making present *in persona Christi* the Holy Sacrifice of the Cross. Our Founder always stressed to us that the Holy Mass is “the center and root of a Christian’s spiritual life.”³ It is the root from which our entire life draws nourishment, the focal point around which our thoughts, words and actions converge. Putting great care, day after day, into celebrating or attending the Sacrifice of the Altar is an indispensable condition for allowing the Paraclete’s action, who wants us to improve and become more and more like Jesus Christ, to make us into good instruments.

St. Josemaría says that his interior change was due to God’s action: “in spite of myself; without my cooperation I might say.” At the same time, we know that before the foundation of the Work he was making great efforts to second the action of the Holy Spirit. His constant prayer—*Domine, ut videam! Domina, ut sit!*—in the years before October 2nd, 1928, is the practical manifestation of this reality. Let us try to imitate him, by going to the Holy Sacrifice with an attitude of listening to God’s word, striving to discover what our Lord wants to show us, both in the readings and in the various prayers of the Mass. Do we nourish our personal prayer and our presence of God with those texts, which our Lord makes use of to enkindle his Love in our souls? Are we striving to ensure that our spiritual life is guided by and “marked” by the Church’s liturgy?

“I think I then renewed my resolve to dedicate my entire life to the fulfillment of God’s will: the Work of God,” continued our Father. And he added, putting it in parenthesis: “a resolve that, right now, I again renew with all my soul.”⁴ Let us do likewise ourselves, frequently, with a sincere desire to be faithful to God and to the Church, especially when circumstances may become more trying: in sickness, in want, in setbacks, in moments of dryness or interior difficulty.... If we act in this way, God will grant us the light and strength we need to fulfill his most lovable Will at every moment.

After consecrating the Host, as our Founder raised the Sacred Host for the faithful’s adoration, some words from Scripture came forcefully to his mind, in the wording of the Vulgate used at that time in the liturgy: *si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum*;⁵ when I am raised up on high, I will draw all things to myself. As St. Josemaría recorded, at first, on hearing that divine locution without the sound of words, he was afraid. This was very fitting for a soul that, on sensing the marvelous closeness of our thrice-holy God, feels great confusion, aware of its own weakness, while also experiencing a deep interior peace. This is how our Founder expressed it: “Ordinarily, before the supernatural, I feel afraid. Later comes the ‘Do not be

2 St. Josemaría, *Apuntes íntimos*, no. 217 (August 7, 1931). Cf. Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. I, pp. 287-288.

3 St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 87.

4 St. Josemaría, *Apuntes íntimos*, no. 217 (August 7, 1931). Cf. Vázquez de Prada, *ibid.*

5 *Jn* 12:32 (Vulgate).

afraid, it is I.’ And I understood that there will be men and women of God who will lift the Cross, with the teachings of Christ, to the pinnacle of all human activities . . . And I saw our Lord triumphant, attracting to himself all things.”⁶

In this deeply supernatural experience, which God granted to St. Josemaría to enlighten and strengthen him, you and I were present, each and every one of us who would come to the Work over the course of the years. The great majority of us had not yet been born, but we already had a place in the heart of our beloved Father. Without having met us, he prayed for us and counted on us, who would be called to *be* Opus Dei and to *do* Opus Dei in the twenty-first century. This obliges us to be ever more closely united to St. Josemaría, to make his life very much our own, since, as he told us, we were the reason for his own life.

My daughters and sons, these are not merely pious considerations that I am setting forth, when I insist that the Work is in our hands. Day by day let us consider that now it is our turn to carry forward this task that heaven wants to be carried out with the same spirit and dedication that our Father had. We can count on all of God’s help here. The words of St. Thomas Aquinas are very appropriate: “When God chooses people for some special job he prepares them and endows them to be able to do it, as we read in *2 Cor 3:6: God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant.*”⁷

We have in addition so many writings of our Father, where he poured out the spiritual treasures God had entrusted to him. “In spite of feeling myself devoid of virtue and knowledge,” he tells us in his “Intimate Notes,” “I would like to write books of fire—books that will race across the world like burning flames and set people ablaze with their light and heat, turning poor hearts into red-hot coals to be offered to Jesus as rubies for his royal crown.”⁸ This longing of his has become a reality, since millions of people throughout the world now find nourishment in the texts that came from his preaching and his pen. Penetrating deeper into their meaning, making them known and spreading them in every language, is a very effective apostolic instrument for making the message of St. Josemaría and the apostolic work of Opus Dei reach and assist more and more souls: like the waves produced by the stone that falls into the lake,⁹ reaching even unsuspected shores.

In his message for the 26th World Youth Day (in which I have been invited to take part), the Pope spoke about the motto proposed for this gathering: *Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith.*¹⁰ Taking part in these activities will offer many people a special meeting with Christ, whom perhaps they have not yet experienced; or at least the possibility of getting to know him better, to grow in personal friendship with him. Let us strive to ensure that this not be just a momentary flash of light, which shines for a moment before going out. Therefore it is very important that both they and we try to make the spiritual experience of those days a lasting one. Let us do all we can to help those taking part to formulate practical conclusions, personal resolutions to grow in their Christian life. “The encounter with the Son of God gives new energy to the whole of our existence,”¹¹ the Holy Father said. Because of their gratitude, many of the young people may ask themselves about the direction of their lives. These are questions that,

6 St. Josemaría, *Apuntes íntimos*, no. 217 (August 7, 1931). Cf. Vázquez de Prada, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

7 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III, q. 27, a. 4.

8 St. Josemaría, *Apuntes íntimos*, no. 217 (August 7, 1931). Cf. Vázquez de Prada, *ibid.*

9 Cf. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 831.

10 Cf. *Col 2:7*.

11 Benedict XVI, *Message for the 26th World Youth Day 2011*, August 6, 2010.

sooner or later, young people often ask themselves, perhaps without realizing what it really means. For underlying their questions regarding the future—perhaps limited initially to the choice of a profession, finding a job, starting a family of one’s own—is something much deeper: What meaning does my life have? How can I make it bear fruit?

On considering that those days will take place in the city where divine Providence wanted Opus Dei to be born, there comes to my memory a comment that St. Josemaría made on various occasions. With gratitude to God, he was making reference to the calling of Saul of Tarsus to the apostolate: “for me—on a small scale—like Paul in Damascus, in Madrid the scales fell from my eyes, and in Madrid I received my mission,”¹² he wrote in 1965. I ask God that these acts presided over by the Pope may lead many young people to experience their own “Damascus”—that their eyes will be opened to God’s light, that they will see the vocation to which Jesus is calling them, and will decide firmly to follow it. It will be the best way of responding to the hopes of the Church, which needs many women and men seriously committed to our Lord. “Being built up in Christ,” explains Benedict XVI, “means responding positively to God’s call, trusting in him and putting his word into practice.”¹³ And addressing himself specifically to young people, he added some words that are useful for everyone: “build your own house on rock, just like the person who ‘dug deeply’ (cf. *Lk* 6:47). Try each day to follow Christ’s word. Listen to him as a true friend with whom you can share your path in life.”¹⁴

I return to what I suggested above: the need to give continuity, in ordinary life, to the discovery that many friends and acquaintances will make during those days, as a result of God’s grace. The Holy Father has marked out the path for them: “Enter into a personal dialogue with Jesus Christ and cultivate it in faith. Get to know him better by reading the Gospels and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Converse with him in prayer, and place your trust in him.”¹⁵ In our personal conversations, let us show them the need to frequent the sacraments (Penance, the Eucharist), the fountains of the supernatural life of the children of God. They also need to learn to sanctify their study, their work, and to be apostolically concerned about others, since bringing others to Christ is one of the best ways of assuring one’s own faithfulness to the Master. Tell them, with the Pope’s words, that “Christ is not a treasure meant for us alone; he is the most precious treasure we have, one that is meant to be shared with others.”¹⁶

I will finish by inviting you to consider, with the upcoming feast of the Assumption, the words with which St. Josemaría ended his homily on that solemnity of the Blessed Virgin: “*Cor Mariae Dulcissimum, iter para tutum*; Most Sweet Heart of Mary, prepare a safe way. Guide our steps on earth with strength and security. Become for us the path we are to follow, since you in your love know the way, a sure short-cut, to the love of Jesus Christ.”¹⁷ We can add to this aspiration the words of our beloved Don Alvaro: *iter para et serva tutum!*

With all my affection, I bless you,

12 St. Josemaría, *Letter*, October 2, 1965.

13 Benedict XVI, *Message for the 26th World Youth Day 2011*, August 6, 2010.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 178.

Your Father

+ Javier

Kinshasa, August 1, 2011