

(Letter from the Prelate: August 2012)

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

The solemnity of our Lady's Assumption, which the Church celebrates on August 15, attracts our heart and gaze this month. In contemplating the beauty of our Mother, taken up by God body and soul to the glory of Heaven, our filial love is enkindled even more at such exalted greatness; and aware of our indigence and littleness, we beseech her with the Church: *da manum lapsis, fer opem caducis*,¹ help the fallen, assist us for we are subject to decay and limitation. And then, with the gratitude of daughters and sons, let us say forcefully, as did St. Josemaría, meditating on what we are saying: "Mother! Our Mother! My Mother!"

The first reading of the Mass puts before us the scene described by St. John in the Apocalypse: *God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple. A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.*² Commenting on this passage from Sacred Scripture, Benedict XVI (let us pray more for him and for his intentions) asked: "What is the meaning of the ark? What appears? For the Old Testament, it is the symbol of God's presence in the midst of his people. However, the symbol has given way to reality. Thus the New Testament tells us that the true ark of the covenant is a living, real person: it is the Virgin Mary. God does not dwell in a piece of furniture, he dwells in a person, in a heart: Mary, the One who carried in her womb the eternal Son of God made man, Jesus our Lord and Savior."³

In Mary, through the incarnation of the Word in her most pure womb, the divine promises to the ancient people of Israel were fulfilled completely. God has established a new and definitive pact no longer with one nation, but with all humanity; not on Mount Sinai, but in the immaculate womb of Mary, where the Word took on flesh to dwell among us. Let us give thanks to our Lady for having so perfectly seconded the divine plan through her humility, obedience, and purity. And let us ask her that her daughters and sons—the men and women of all times—may follow her example, striving to live, with divine help, the virtues that shone forth in our Mother.

On the occasion of this solemnity, I invite you to meditate on and put into practice—following the teachings of the Holy Father and the light of St. Josemaría's example—some consequences that we can discover in contemplating this scene.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us that the most important room in the ancient temple of Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies, contained *the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, which contained a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant.*⁴ Let us pause to consider the figure of the Ark, a symbol of Mary. The fact that it was found in the most sacred place in the temple speaks to us of our Lady's special closeness and intimacy with God. And we feel the need to exclaim joyfully, united to St. Josemaría: "greater than you—no one but God!"⁵ The tablets of

1 Liturgy of the Hours, Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady, *Hymn for the First Vespers*.

2 *Roman Missal*, Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady, First Reading (*Rev* 11:19–12:1).

3 Benedict XVI, Homily on the Solemnity of the Assumption, August 15, 2011.

4 *Heb* 9:4.

5 St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 496.

the Law entrusted to Moses by God showed the divine will to preserve the covenant with his people, if they remained faithful to his pact. Sacred Scripture recounts how, despite all of God's care, Israel was repeatedly unfaithful. But not so the Blessed Virgin, for, as the Pope stresses, "Mary is the Ark of the Covenant because she welcomed Jesus within her; she welcomed within her the living Word, the whole content of God's will, of God's truth; she welcomed within her the One who is the new and eternal Covenant, which culminated in the offering of his Body and his Blood: a body and blood received through Mary."⁶

Here we discover a first lesson from our Mother, a lesson we want to assimilate more deeply in order to put it into practice: the invitation to seek each day the fullest possible union with the holy will of God, in pleasant moments and especially in other moments that are trying for us and require sacrifice. Being faithful to God's will in difficult circumstances will be the clearest sign of the rectitude of our intention and the firmness of our desire to follow Jesus closely. Don't you find yourself recalling here those words of St. Josemaría in a prayer to the Holy Spirit? "I want what you want, I want it because you want it, I want it as you want it, I want it when you want it..."⁷

And he insisted on the same decision to be faithful when he wrote: "You might have thought occasionally, with holy envy, about the adolescent Apostle, John, *quem diligebat Iesus*—whom Jesus loved.

"Wouldn't you like to deserve to be called 'the one who loves the Will of God'? Then take the necessary steps, day after day."⁸

This aspiration will become a reality if we seek with determination to identify ourselves with our Lord in all the events of each day, beginning with the smallest ones. "For those who love," our Father said, "there are no unimportant details. Love ennobles our acts to such an extent that even the smallest can attain the category of heroism. Fidelity in these points, small constant mortifications—how pleasing they are in God's eyes! How they transform the will! How they ennoble your soul! And how much you help, by being faithful in these small duties, to make the life of others more pleasant!"⁹

This is how our Lady always acted, as we see very clearly in the moment of the Incarnation and when standing at the foot of the Cross, watching her Son suffer and die. And she loved him just as greatly in the other circumstances of her life: when taking care of the domestic tasks in the home at Nazareth; when welcoming those who came to her in search of advice or a word of consolation; in conversations with Jesus and with his relatives on the most diverse topics: at every moment. Then as well, the fullness of grace with which Mary was endowed from the first instant of her Immaculate Conception, was growing unceasingly, in the measure of the fullness of her response to the motions of the Holy Spirit.

The ark of the covenant, in addition to the tablets of the law, contained a portion of the manna with which God had nourished the people during their pilgrimage through the desert. That food (as Jesus himself taught in his discourse on the Bread of Life, in Capharnaum¹⁰) was a symbol of the Eucharist, the true Body and Blood of Christ that, beneath the veil of the

6 Benedict XVI, Homily on the Solemnity of the Assumption, August 15, 2011.

7 St. Josemaría, Handwritten manuscript, April 1934.

8 St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 422.

9 St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation preached in 1945.

10 See *Jn* 6:26-59.

sacrament, we reserve in our tabernacles to adore our Lord and to receive nourishment from that great Treasure. He has made himself into new manna for us who are journeying towards our eternal dwelling place.

Let us focus on the reality that our Lady is a model for our behavior. Who on this earth treated Jesus with greater care and affection than she did? Who was more attentive to his needs during the many years of his hidden life and during his public life? Who received him with greater devotion in Holy Communion, after our Lord went to heaven and left the incomparable gift of his Sacrifice and sacramental Presence in the hands of the apostles and their successors in the priesthood? Truly, as Blessed John Paul II said, Mary is the “Woman of the Eucharist” *par excellence*.

Let us consider another lesson that we can learn by contemplating our Lady, *foederis arca*, the true Ark of the Covenant, as the liturgy for this feast suggests. Let us learn from her to take more and better care of how we treat Jesus in the Word and in the Eucharist, in reading and meditating on Scripture, in attending or celebrating Mass and in Holy Communion. “‘Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,’ said our Lord. Bread and word! Host and prayer. Otherwise, you will not live a supernatural life.”¹¹

The solemnity of August 15 recalls for us who are daughters and sons of God in his Work that date in 1951 when St. Josemaría, moved by a supernatural unease that God had placed in his soul, went to the Holy House of Loreto to consecrate Opus Dei to the most sweet and immaculate Heart of Mary.

Our Father often referred to those circumstances, in which our Lady’s motherly care was especially present. He recalled, among other things, the deep impression made on him by the inscription above the altar—*hic Verbum caro factum est*, here the Word became flesh—and, at the same time, the certainty of being heard by God that those words left in his heart. He described it vividly years later: “Here, on a bit of the earth on which we live, in a house built by men, God dwelt . . . I was and am moved. I should like to go back to Loreto. I go there now in thought and desire, to relive those years of Jesus’ childhood and consider once more those words: ‘Here the Word was made flesh.’”¹²

His devotion to our Lady had always been strong, but we can well imagine that from that moment it increased greatly and did not stop growing until he left for his permanent home in heaven. Now I would like to bring to your consideration another manifestation of that growth in our Father’s filial piety for our Lady under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I am referring to the words that he heard in the depths of his soul on August 23, 1971, the day following the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which at that time was celebrated on the 22nd: *adeamus cum fiducia ad Thronum gloriae, ut misericordiam consequamur*.

Our Father was at that time in northern Italy, working and resting. Those were years in which his prayer for the Church, for the Pope, for the Work, for all souls, was being raised to heaven with special intensity. “Before I wasn’t asking,” he confided to us in April of 1970. “I acted in this way because I understood it was better to abandon myself trustingly in God. That was good in those first moments, because thus one could see that everything was from Him. Now I think, however, that I should ask, and I understand better all the power of those words of our Lord: *ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you*

11 St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 87.

12 St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 12-13.

(Mt 7:7). I am convinced that we have to pray a lot, and I want to place my prayer in the thousand times blessed hands of our Lady.”¹³

A few weeks later, on August 6, 1970, our Lord confirmed him in that thought, urging him to pray without ceasing: “Clama, ne cesses!” resounded in the soul of St. Josemaría, like an echo of the prophet Isaiah’s words.¹⁴ And after that divine locution he began a series of visits to various Marian shrines in Europe and America. As I just mentioned, on August 23, 1971 he received confirmation that, for his prayer to be heard, it was and is necessary to go to Mary.

That same day, opening his soul to Don Alvaro and myself, as he always did, he told us: “This morning, as I was having breakfast, our Lord put into my head these words. They are like an answer to the collective clamor that yesterday, the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, was raised up to Heaven, because we all prayed a lot. We have to ask, taking refuge in God’s Mercy—we cannot ask out of justice! If we could glimpse the Justice of God we would be crushed, unable to raise our head: such is his infinite perfection! We have to go to his Mercy, to his Love. The poor human heart is quick to ask as if it had a right—and we don’t have a right to anything! But we can be filled with confidence through the intercession of Mary, because his Mercy is so infinite that he cannot fail to listen to his children, if they go to him through his Mother.”¹⁵

I have transcribed for you these confidences of our Father so that we make them very much our own. I speak to you a lot about prayer (as you will have noticed) because it is the surest way to obtain all the graces that the Church, the Pope, the Work, souls, and each and every one of us need. Let us make a real effort each morning and evening, not only in doing the times of prayer as well as possible, but also in our prayer of petition for so many intentions: doing so with faith, with humility, with perseverance, with continual peace and joy, for we are children of God and children of Holy Mary and we will always be able to call ourselves victors.

Last month, on the 11th, I was able to go to Fatima, to the *capelinha*, with each and every one of you. We prayed closely united to your intentions, asking for the Church, for the Pope and those who assist him, for the Work, for all humanity; and it was easy to remember the times that our Father went to that “refuge,” as he used to say, to accompany each of his daughters and sons of that time and of the future: how good it is to be with our Lady!

I have many tasks in hand, also in these days of August: help me to carry my work forward with your constant union. I suggest that you reread and meditate on what our Father said about the moment when he raised the Sacred Host in his Mass on August 7, 1931,¹⁶ because among those men and women who have to place Christ at the summit of all human activities are you, my daughter, my son: consider carefully how you are doing so.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

13 St. Josemaría, Notes from a pilgrimage to Fatima, April 14, 1970.

14 See *Is* 58:1 (Vulgate)

15 Cited in Javier Echevarría, *Memoria del Beato Josemaría*, p. 185.

16 See St. Josemaría, *Apuntes íntimos*, August 7, 1931, no. 217 (in Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 1, pp. 287-288).

Pamplona, August 1, 2012