

(Letter from the Prelate: December 2013)

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

The Roman Pontiff has concluded the Year of Faith. During these months, with God's help, we have tried to grow in this theological virtue, the root of Christian life, asking our Lord insistently, *adauge nobis fidem*,¹ increase our faith—and with it our hope, love and piety. Now, with the impetus we have received during these months of grace, let us strive to continue walking day after day along this path that leads us to heaven. Let us have recourse to our Lady, Teacher of faith and of intimacy with God, so that she make effective our desires to be faithful to her Son and to the Church.

The documents of the Church's magisterium (and also recently the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*) have emphasized two essential characteristics that lie at the origin of faith, as presented to us in the New Testament. St. Paul stresses that *fides ex auditu*,² that faith comes from hearing the Word of God read and welcomed in the Church. While St. John tells us that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is *the true light which enlightens every man that comes into the world*,³ granting us the capacity to know the mysteries hidden in God. Light and word, word and light, mark out for us inseparable aspects of the faith we profess. "There is an urgent need, then, to see once again that faith is a light, for once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim."⁴ Let us thank God with all our heart, my daughters and sons, for the bright lights that the Holy Spirit, making use of the magisterium of the Church and the life of the saints, constantly enkindles in us. Let us be eager to receive them and to let ourselves be guided by the Paraclete in our daily life.

In the middle of last month, a conference on "St. Josemaría and Theological Thought" was held in Rome. Those attending analyzed how the preaching and testimony of the saints brings new lights for delving more deeply into the faith and, as a consequence, for deepening the theological exposition of doctrine. This symposium has provided a new opportunity to make more widely known, in the sphere of theology, the special nuances of the message our Father received from God on October 2, 1928, with the mission of transmitting it to Christians, especially those immersed in the family, professional, social, etc. activities of daily life.

During the past months, I have focused on the truths of faith contained in the articles of the Creed. Now I would like to help you, and to help myself, draw out consequences that will imbue our life with this virtue in the coming months; that is to say, to focus on how the faith has to be shown in our daily behavior, so that it will really illuminate our mind, strengthen our will, and enkindle our heart, in order to express the knowledge and love of God in our own conduct and bring it to all souls.

The starting point is a complete trust that in the Church we possess the fullness of the means of sanctification that Jesus left us. These include especially the reception of the sacraments, the fulfillment of the commandments of God and of the Church, and prayer, as the encyclical *Lumen*

¹ *Lk* 17:5.

² *Rom* 10:17.

³ *Jn* 1:9.

⁴ Pope Francis, Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, June 29, 2013, no. 4.

Fidei makes clear.

The sacraments are actions of Christ through which his Most Holy Humanity, glorious in Heaven, comes into immediate and direct contact with souls, in order to sanctify them. The Holy Spirit also follows other paths, unknown to us, to draw people to God. But as the Pope says: “Our culture has lost its sense of God’s tangible presence and activity in our world. We think that God is to be found in the beyond, on another level of reality, far removed from our everyday relationships. But if this were the case, if God could not act in the world, his love would not be truly powerful, truly real.”⁵

Let us consider once again St. Josemaría’s teaching, already clearly formulated when quite young: “It’s necessary to be convinced that God is always near us. Too often we live as though he were somewhere far off—where the stars shine. And we forget that he is also continually by our side.

“For he is a loving Father. He loves each one of us more than all the mothers in the world can love their children—helping us, inspiring us, blessing... and forgiving . . . We have to be completely convinced, realizing it to the full, that God, who is close to us and in heaven, is a Father, and very much our Father.”⁶

This is especially so when we receive sacramental absolution and the Eucharist. Moved by this truth of faith, what security we find in our Lord’s forgiveness and closeness, what peace is poured into our soul, and how eager we are to spread this serenity to those around us! Therefore I will never tire of insisting that, each time we have recourse to these sacraments, we should do so with the full certainty that it is the Holy Spirit who draws us, through Christ, to the love of the Father.

Let us apply these considerations to the battles of our own interior struggle. We can be saints, we must be saints, in spite of our defects and our falls, since God is calling us to enter into the intimacy of his divine life as his children in Christ, and he offers us all the remedies needed. With the grace of the sacraments and with prayer, it becomes easier to fulfill the commandments of the divine law and to be faithful to the particular duties of each one’s state in life. “The Decalogue is not a set of negative commands, but concrete directions for emerging from the desert of the selfish and self-enclosed ego in order to enter into dialogue with God, to be embraced by his mercy and then to bring that mercy to others.”⁷

Let us ask our Lord to grant us a strong faith, a faith that will enliven all our actions. Certainly we believe in God’s word, we read and meditate on the Gospel with admiration; but perhaps it does not sink deeply into our souls, to the point of transforming each and every one of our actions. And when difficulties arise, when we feel arid or encounter resistance from our environment, we may become discouraged. Couldn’t it be that our faith, as it were, has fallen asleep? Don’t we have to rely more on the action of the Paraclete, who dwells in our soul through grace? Doesn’t it happen that sometimes we trust too much in our own strength? Let us meditate on the transformation the apostles undergo at Pentecost and try to live in accord with the divine guidelines we find there, which are communicated to us also through the practices of Christian piety that the Church has always recommended: mental prayer, aspirations and vocal

⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 17.

⁶ St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 267.

⁷ Pope Francis, Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, June 29, 2013, no. 46.

prayers (principally the Rosary), the offering of small mortifications, caring for the examination of conscience, and work well finished in God's presence.

“The interior life,” our Father taught, “is not about feelings. When we see clearly that it's worthwhile sacrificing ourselves day in and day out, month after month, year after year, for our whole life, because of the Love that awaits us in heaven: how much light we receive! We have to store up all of this light, my children. We need to make in our souls a reservoir to catch all these graces from God: the clarity, the light, the joy of our dedication. Then when night comes, the darkness and bitter trials, we can draw strength from our reserves, from the clean water of God's grace. Though in this moment I may be blind, I can see; though I may be dry, I am quenched by the water that flows from the Heart of Christ unto life everlasting. Then, my children, we will persevere in the struggle.”⁸

And then we will be able to help other people so that they too can travel safely along the paths of faith. For “faith does not merely gaze at Jesus, but sees things as Jesus himself sees them, with his own eyes: it is a participation in his way of seeing.”⁹ Our Lord's look falls on each person singly and on the multitude. He came down to this world of ours for each and every one of us, and for each and every one he continues his salvific work. Our mission is to bring into contact with Jesus all the people we encounter on the path of our life, beginning with those closest to us. That is how the first Christians acted, who brought about the conversion of the pagan world.

In an early meditation, St. Josemaría spoke about the example of those first brothers and sisters of ours in the faith: “Unlearned people, knowing they face martyrdom and a violent death. Nevertheless, they accept their role as Christ's co-workers in the salvation of the world, and they set out to topple paganism and to spread Christ's lineage throughout the world. Very soon they will be joined by their former persecutor, Saul, who had been ‘kicking against the goad’ (cf. *Acts* 9:5), and who now accompanies them in their preaching and in their glorious venture whereby they seal the faith they preach with their blood. All of them, by their purity, set out to cleanse the murky and unclean waters of the pagan world. They strive to combat—by the small virtues that they practice, by their modesty and decency—that society's tendency towards pleasure . . . They reach the very heart of the ancient world: Rome. But what could they do there? History gives us the answer: the emperor's throne is overturned and today, after two thousand years, Peter continues to be the Bishop of Rome.”¹⁰

Today, too, in the face of the challenges of the new evangelization, we have to keep our hope enkindled. *Non est abbreviata manus Domini*,¹¹ God's arm has not been shortened. But men and women of faith are needed to renew the wonders that Scripture recounts. A few days ago, the Pope issued the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, with the conclusions from the Ordinary Assembly of the recent Synod of Bishops, specifically about the new evangelization. I encourage you to get to know that text which offers new lights to give greater impulse to this great endeavor.

I don't want to overlook the fact that the upcoming December 12th, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, is another anniversary of the divine locution that St. Josemaría—through words from

⁸ St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, February 17, 1974.

⁹ Pope Francis, Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, June 29, 2013, no. 18.

¹⁰ St. Josemaría, Notes taken from a meditation, July 26, 1937.

¹¹ *Is* 59:1.

Scripture—heard in the year 1931. It resounded in the depths of his soul in moments of great obstacles to the development of the Work: *inter medium montium pertransibunt aquae*,¹² the waters of grace will pass through the mountains, overcoming every obstacle, all that is opposed to the kingdom of God in souls and in the life of the Church and humanity. For this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.¹³ Thus we will help make our Father’s aspiration a reality, which was found on his lips and in what he wrote right from the founding of Opus Dei: *regnare Christum volumus!* We want Christ to reign.

Today begins the time of Advent, weeks of preparation for the Birth of our Lord. These days can be a good occasion—marveling once more at the goodness and mercy of our Father God, who sent his Son into the world—to renew our desires to remain open at every moment to the lights and words of God, especially in our reading and meditation on Sacred Scripture.

The gateway to these celebrations is the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary: teacher of faith, our hope and marvelous example of how to love God and neighbor for God, with our heart, our mind and our senses fully immersed in him. Let us put great care into preparing for this solemnity, now so close, going with great filial affection to our Mother in Heaven.

In our prayer let us give ample space to petition for the Church and for the Pope, for his co-workers, for my intentions, for all the spiritual and material needs of the women and men of our time. Let us never be unmoved (thank God, I am sure this doesn’t happen) on seeing the material and spiritual problems—at times real tragedies—that are affecting so many people throughout the whole world.

A number of anniversaries of the Work take place this month; among others, the establishment of the Roman College of Our Lady, in 1953. Let us give thanks to God for all the milestones in the history of the Work.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, December 1, 2013

¹² *Ps* 103(104):10 (Vulg.).

¹³ *1 Jn* 5:4.