

**(Letter from the Prelate: January 2014)**

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

There still resound in our souls and in our world the angels' words to the shepherds at Bethlehem, which we meditated on at Christmas: *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased.*<sup>1</sup> The glorification of God through the incarnation and birth of his only begotten Son is indissolubly linked to peace and fraternity among human beings. If we can and should call ourselves brothers and sisters, this is due specifically to the reality that we are all children of the same Father, God, who created us in his image and likeness. The divine Word, in becoming incarnate as the Head of all mankind, has rescued us from sin, granting us the gift of adoptive divine filiation. This is the great news that the angel announced in Bethlehem not only to the children of Israel, but to all men and women: *behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people.*<sup>2</sup>

Contemplation of Jesus in the arms of Mary, under the attentive watch of Joseph, has completely filled our thoughts during these holy feast days. On looking attentively at that helpless child, the Creator of heaven and earth, the eternal Word of God who has made himself equal to us in everything except sin,<sup>3</sup> we have made many acts of adoration and thanksgiving, realizing that we can never pay him back for how much he loves us. Let us continue doing so in the new year and always, welcoming St. Josemaría's insistent invitation: *ut in gratiarum semper actione maneamus*. Let us constantly give thanks, for all the gifts that God has granted and will grant us: those that we know about and those that we don't know, the great and the small, the spiritual and the material, those that have caused us joy and those that perhaps have left behind a trace of sadness. With our Father I insist, and I tell myself as well: let us give thanks "for everything, because everything is good."<sup>4</sup>

We are beginning the second part of Christmas time with the solemnity of Mary's Divine Motherhood. Our eyes are now turned more attentively to that matchless creature who with such great simplicity—*ecce ancilla Domini*<sup>5</sup>—opened the way to the incarnation of the Word and made us children of God in Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters with a fraternity stronger than that of our common origin in Adam and Eve. "O Mother, Mother! With that word of yours—*fiat*—you have made us brothers of God and heirs to his glory. Blessed art thou."<sup>6</sup> Thus was made a reality one of the deepest aspirations of the human heart: "that irrepressible longing for fraternity which draws us to fellowship with others and enables us to see them not as enemies or rivals, but as brothers and sisters to be accepted and embraced."<sup>7</sup>

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1 Lk 2:14.

2 Lk 2:10.

3 Cf. Heb 4:15.

4 St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 512.

5 Lk 1:38.

6 St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 512.

7 Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Peace 2014, December 8, 2013, no. 1.

Loving our fellow men and women with true fraternal love is one of the essential characteristics of the Christian message. Jesus himself emphasized this to his apostles: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*<sup>8</sup> And as our Father insisted: “We must rekindle the sense of brotherliness which was so deeply felt by the early Christians.”<sup>9</sup> You and I, are we truly doing so? How intently are we praying for all men and women? How interested are we in their lives?

Our Lord’s *new commandment* helps us to understand that Christian fraternity cannot be reduced to merely solidarity; it is not simply a question of similarities of character, of common interests, of a merely human liking. It spurs us to find Christ in others; even more, it leads us to become more and more like him, until we can say that we are *alter Christus*, other Christs; *ipse Christus*, Christ himself. This aspiration is shown in loving and serving our fellow men and women as our Lord serves and loves them.

These two aspects—seeing Christ in others and letting Christ be seen in us—complement one another. Thus we avoid any risk of loving those around us principally for their human worth, for their good qualities, for the benefits we might obtain, and of setting them aside when we discover their defects and limitations, the less agreeable aspects of their personality. If that temptation should ever arise, we need to look intently at Jesus, meek and humble, who gives his life at every moment and on any occasion for us, who rejects no one, who goes out in search of sinners in order to bring them back to God.

This fraternity stems from faith and from the exercise of our personal freedom. “Christian freedom comes from within, from the heart, from faith. But it is not something merely personal; it expresses itself externally. One of the clearest marks of the life of the first Christians was fraternity. Faith, which brings with it the immense gift of God’s love, has reduced and overcome all differences, all barriers: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28)*. Knowing that we are truly brothers, and loving one another as such, over and above any differences of race, social condition, culture or ideology, belongs to the essence of Christianity.”<sup>10</sup>

In the first evangelization carried out after our Lord’s ascension into heaven, fraternal charity (in a special way with the most needy, physically or spiritually, and even with the persecutors) was one of the key elements in the rapid expansion of Christianity. “See how they love one another,” Tertullian places on the lips of those pagans, amazed at Christ’s message. And he added: “See how Christians are ready to die for one another, while they, in contrast, are ready to kill one another.”<sup>11</sup>

Never has communication among people been as easy and rapid as in our day and age. This reality should also foster a sense of unity among all mankind. Nevertheless, as Pope Benedict XVI wrote: “As society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbors but does not make us brothers. Reason, by itself, is capable of grasping the equality among men and of giving stability to their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity. This originates in a

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8 *Jn* 13:34-35.

9 St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 61.

10 St. Josemaría, “The Riches of the Faith,” published in *Los Domingos de ABC*, November 2, 1969.

11 Tertullian, *Apologetica*, 39, 7 (CCL 1, 151).

transcendent vocation from God the Father, who loved us first, teaching us through the Son what fraternal charity is.”<sup>12</sup>

St. Josemaría preached tirelessly, as I already remarked, on the great importance of the *mandatum novum*, which he had engraved on a plaque in the first apostolic work of Opus Dei, the DYA Academy, eighty years ago. But already in his family’s home, he had learned to serve others while forgetting about himself. The deeply Christian example of his parents helped engrave in his heart—first as a child and later as an adolescent and young man—a fraternal spirit towards all men and women, shown in specific deeds: giving alms to the needy, helping his companions in their studies, making himself available for the spiritual needs of others....

These and many other lessons from his life can help us to prepare better for the feast on January 9, the anniversary of his birth. That date reminds us that our Lord chose St. Josemaría to be the father and patriarch of this spiritual family of Opus Dei (a family without boundaries of race, language or nationality) that was to be born in the bosom of the Church. Through his fatherhood, imbued with affection and self-giving, our Father showed us a ray of God’s fatherhood towards all mankind, while also teaching us to be good children of God by living a refined fraternity within the Work and with all men and women.

Pope Francis dedicated his message for the World Day of Peace precisely to this topic. Its opening statement is very important, as I pointed out to you when recalling the life of our Founder. “Fraternity,” says the Pope, “is generally first learned in the family, thanks above all to the responsible and complementary roles of each of its members, particularly the father and the mother. The family is the wellspring of all fraternity, and as such it is the foundation and the first pathway to peace.”<sup>13</sup>

Everything done in favor of the family—defending its nature founded on the divine plan, its unity and openness to life, its core vocation to service—has a positive repercussion on the configuration of society and on the laws that regulate it. Let us pray every day for the families of the world and for legislators, at the same time that each and every one of us strives, within our possibilities, to defend and safeguard this natural institution that is so necessary for the well-being of society. And let us pray especially during the coming months for the Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that the Pope has convoked for October to study how to best undertake the new evangelization in the field of family life.

During the past few days, meditating once again on our Father’s homilies (I recommended that you go back again and again to these texts, which will enrich your interior life), my attention has been drawn to some words that express with great clarity the reason for Christ’s birth. “Our Lord has come to bring peace, good news, and life to all men. Not only to the rich, nor only to the poor. Not only to the wise nor only to the simple. To everyone, to our brothers, for brothers we are, children of the same Father, God.”<sup>14</sup>

To sense we are brothers and sisters of one another, and to behave as such, is a divine gift. “The basis of fraternity is found in God’s fatherhood. We are not speaking of a generic

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12 Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009, no. 19.

13 Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Peace 2014, December 8, 2013, no. 1.

14 St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 106.

fatherhood, indistinct and historically ineffectual, but rather of the specific and extraordinarily concrete personal love of God for each man and woman (cf. *Mt* 6:25-30). It is a fatherhood, then, which effectively generates fraternity, because the love of God, once welcomed, becomes the most formidable means of transforming our lives and relationships with others, opening us to solidarity and to genuine sharing.

“In a particular way,” the Pope continues, “human fraternity is regenerated in and by Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. The Cross is the definitive foundational locus of that fraternity which human beings are not capable of generating themselves. Jesus Christ, who assumed human nature in order to redeem it, loving the Father unto death on the Cross (cf. *Phil* 2:8), has through his resurrection made of us a ‘new humanity,’ in full communion with the will of God, with his plan, which includes the full realization of our vocation to fraternity.”<sup>15</sup>

Because it is God’s gift, fostering fraternity also brings with it a task that our Lord is entrusting to each of us, and which we cannot shirk. With a healthy realism, far removed from any pessimism, our Founder wrote that “life is not like a romantic novel. Christian fraternity is not something that comes down from heaven once and for all for everyone, but rather a reality that has to be built up each day, amid all the hardships life presents, with its conflicts of interest, tensions and struggles, in daily contact with people who seem narrow-minded to us, and with our own narrow-mindedness.”<sup>16</sup>

I cannot fail to mention here our beloved Don Alvaro. In a certain sense we can consider the year 2014 as *the year of Don Alvaro*, since in March we will commemorate the centennial of his birth and later we hope to be present, filled with joy, at his beatification. Here we are offered, my daughters and sons, a new reason to give thanks to God and an invitation to prepare ourselves as well as possible for these great events. Let us live more deeply a spirit of filiation and fraternity.

You know that the Pope received me in audience on December 23. In addition to imparting the apostolic blessing to all the faithful of the Prelature—laity and priests, and especially the sick—he encouraged us to continue our apostolic work in all the countries where faithful of the Prelature are living. In a special way he encouraged us to carry out a fruitful *apostolate of Confession*, which is the sacrament of God’s mercy.

Right after Christmas, I made a brief trip to the country where Jesus, Mary and Joseph lived. Besides encouraging your sisters and brothers who are working there, I visited the site of *Saxum*, the future conference center for retreats and other activities that is being built in memory of Don Alvaro, as the elective General Congress in 1994 agreed upon. Let us pray with eagerness and perseverance that this project may go ahead at a good rhythm, and let us try to help out, in accord with our personal circumstances, in seeking the necessary funds. How eagerly I look forward to the spiritual good that will be brought about by this apostolic instrument!

As always, I would have liked (ever more so!) to have spent these feast days by your side. I have spent them bringing each and every one of you to the Tabernacle and to the nativity scene in these centers. Don’t fail to present all my intentions to the Child God. I have left all of yours at his feet.

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15 Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Peace 2014, December 8, 2013, no. 3.

16 St. Josemaría, “The Riches of the Faith,” published in *Los Domingos de ABC*, November 2, 1969.

With all my affection, I send you my blessing for the new year,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, January 1, 2014