

(Letter from the Prelate: July 2012)

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

We have all been filled with joy and gratitude to God for the recognition of the heroic virtues of our beloved Don Alvaro, made public by the Holy See on June 28. Our joy is even greater because, by this act, the Church confirms once again that the spirit of Opus Dei, which our Father's first successor lived with such exquisite fidelity, is fully faithful to the Gospel, and therefore a path to turn "all the circumstances and events of my life into opportunities to love You and serve the kingdom of Jesus Christ," as we say in the prayer for devotion to the Venerable Servant of God.

Gratias tibi, Deus, gratias tibi!, I invite you to say yet again. Let us give thanks to the Most Blessed Trinity for this gift, the spirit of Opus Dei: "as old as the Gospel, and like the Gospel new."¹ It is a gift that many other people share in who, without having a vocation to the Work, in some way form part of our supernatural family: many of our relatives and friends, and so many others who try to incarnate in their daily life the spirit our Father received from God.

During the last few days, on reading your letters of congratulations for my birthday, my heart has overflowed with gratitude to God, who has wanted Opus Dei (like the Church, of which the Work forms part) to be a supernatural family closely united by the bonds of paternity, filiation and fraternity. My thoughts have gone immediately to our beloved Father, whose liturgical feast we just celebrated. It is to St. Josemaría's heroic fidelity to God's will that we owe this atmosphere of a home so proper to the Work, which, as is only natural, is shown with special force on each of the feast days that mark out our path. I want to thank all of you, and everyone who has prayed for me during these days, for your prayers, and I will try to repay them by praying more for everyone.

A special reason for filial gratitude and joy has been the affectionate words of Pope Benedict XVI. In the handwritten message he sent me on the occasion of my birthday, the Holy Father assured me of his prayer for the Prelate and gave a special apostolic blessing that he extended to all those entrusted to his pastoral care. These signs of affection from the Pope have to spur us to be even more united, with a deep sense of responsibility, to his Person and intentions, praying insistently for the fruit of his ministry as Supreme Shepherd.

I understand very well the words that I so often heard from our Founder's lips, regarding the Vicar of Christ: "Love the Holy Father a lot. Pray a lot for the Pope. Love him very much, very much! For he needs all his children's affection. This is something that I understand very well by experience. I'm not a stone, I'm a man of flesh and blood. Therefore I want the Pope to know that we love him, and will always do so, since he is the sweet Christ on earth."² How often do we pray each day for St. Peter's Successor? Can he count on our faithfulness?

Love for the Pope always beat strongly in our Father's heart. In one of his earliest letters he recounts how, when Opus Dei was still a tiny seed almost hidden in the furrow, he liked to imagine himself next to the Holy Father while praying the Rosary and, when making a spiritual

1 St. Josemaría, *Letter of January 9, 1932*, no. 91.

2 St. Josemaría, Notes taken during a family gathering, May 11, 1965.

communion, he would see himself receiving it sacramentally from his hands. Thus, by “materializing” his union with the Roman Pontiff in small details, a strong and theological piety towards the Vicar of Christ on earth, the common Father of all Christians, took ever stronger root in his heart.

Another reason these recollections come to mind is that during the month of July we will celebrate a new anniversary of the first time our Father was received by the Pope. This took place on July 16, 1946, three weeks after his first trip to Rome. A few days earlier, Pius XII had sent him, through Msgr. Montini (who years later would become Pope Paul VI), his photo with a handwritten dedication blessing our Founder and the Work. What filial joy this gave him! And he immediately wrote to his daughters and sons: “I have a handwritten blessing from the Holy Father for ‘the Founder of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross and of Opus Dei.’ What a great joy! I’ve kissed it a thousand times.” And in a postscript he added: “May you never neglect prayer, and may you be very happy.”³

Praying for the Pope, for his August Person and his intentions, was a legacy from our Founder that Don Alvaro, his first successor, also transmitted with exemplary fidelity. Now it is personally my task to confirm you in this point of Catholic spirit. I do this very frequently, but in these difficult moments, when from so many places voices are raised criticizing the Church and the Holy Father, I feel urged to be even more insistent. The recent solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, who planted the Church of Rome with their blood and are pillars of the universal Church, moves us to intensify our union with the Holy Father: Love him a lot, and try to help many other men and women grow in their love for Peter!

In his recent general audiences, Benedict XVI highlighted the effectiveness of prayer. Referring to specific moments of the life of the early Church, he pointed to the reaction of the faithful in the face of the attacks and persecution they suffered. We all recall the imprisonment of Peter and John by the Sanhedrin, with the demand that they cease preaching in the name of Jesus.⁴ After being set free, the apostles met with the first faithful and told them of the threats they had received. The Pope stressed that “not only was the community neither frightened nor divided but it was also deeply united in prayer, as one person, to invoke the Lord . . . What does the Christian community ask at this moment of trial? It does not ask for safety of life in the face of persecution, nor that the Lord get even with those who imprisoned Peter and John; it asks only that it be granted ‘to speak [his] word with all boldness’ (*Acts* 4:29). In other words, it prays that it may not lose the courage of faith, the courage to proclaim faith.”⁵ And in doing so they devoutly pray Psalm 2, which foretells the Messiah’s acclamation, despite the attacks by his enemies.

Those first faithful offer us a good norm of conduct for the situation today, when we too witness the sad attempt of those who are trying to expel God from civil society, or at least to put him in parentheses, confining him to private life. In the months that remain before the beginning of the Year of Faith, next October 11, I suggest that you keep very much in mind the example of early Christianity, praying with optimism and trust for the needs of the Church, for the intentions of the Pope, for the unity of the entire people of God around their pastors. Let us not forget, as our Father assured us, that “God is the same as always. It is men of faith that are needed: and

3 St. Josemaría, *Letter* to his sons on the General Council, June 30, 1946, in Vazquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. III, pp. 35-36.

4 See *Acts* 4:1-31.

5 Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, April 18, 2012.

then there will be a renewal of the wonders we read of in the Gospel. —*Ecce non est abbreviata manus Domini*, God's arm, his power, has not grown weaker!”⁶

Spurred on by this assurance, let us launch out in an unwavering apostolate, convinced (it is no exaggeration) that millions of souls are waiting for us. But, as St. Josemaría insisted, words are not enough, although they are necessary; they also require deeds, daily correspondence to the faith, the joy of knowing we are sons and daughters of God.

Another episode recalled by Benedict XVI is the freeing of Peter when he was on the point of being condemned. On this occasion too the first faithful were closely united in prayer. The Sacred Text says that *Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the Church.*⁷ St. Josemaría often meditated on how the united prayer of the Church freed Simon Peter *from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.*⁸ As he writes in *The Way*: “Drink at the clear fountain of the Acts of the Apostles. In the twelfth chapter, Peter, freed from prison by the ministry of Angels, comes to the house of the mother of Mark. Those inside will not believe the girl, who says that Peter is at the door. ‘*Angelus ejus est!* It must be his Angel!’ they said.

“See on what intimate terms the early Christians were with their Guardian Angels. And you?”⁹

Do you and I invoke the holy guardian angels with faith? Do we have recourse to their assistance in our personal needs and in those of the Church, which have to be very much our own? Do we ask for their help in the apostolate?

In commenting on those scenes, the Holy Father says that, like those faithful, we too “must be able to ponder the events of our daily life in prayer, in order to seek their deep meaning. And like the first Christian community let us too let ourselves be illuminated by the word of God, through meditation on Sacred Scripture; we too can learn to see that God is present in our life, present also and especially in difficult moments and that all things—even those that are incomprehensible—are part of a superior plan of love in which the final victory over evil, over sin and over death is truly that of goodness, of grace, of life, of God.”¹⁰

And on another occasion, the Pope invited us to make a personal examination: “how do I pray? How do we pray? How much time do I give to my relationship with God?”¹¹

We should consider these very timely reflections frequently in our daily periods of mental prayer: without those conversations with our Lord, with his Blessed Mother, with the angels and the saints, we would not be able—nor do we want!—to live. “The theme of my prayer is the theme of my life,”¹² St. Josemaría assured us; and the same has to be true of us. We have to ponder in our personal prayer all that “occupies” us and all that “preoccupies” us, although—as our Father said—we children of God should never have “preoccupations,” but only “occupations,” since we trust in the goodness of our Father God, who orders everything for our good.

I have already referred to some of these “preoccupations” that are of importance now and

6 St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 586.

7 *Acts* 12:5.

8 *Ibid.*, 11.

9 St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 570.

10 Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, April 18, 2012.

11 Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 30, 2011.

12 St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 174.

always: the life of the Church and of the world, the salvation of souls, the daily apostolate, concerns that should be found in all of God's children. Others, perhaps more immediate, are related to the crisis that is affecting many countries all over the world, although with varying intensity. I have very much in mind their consequences and the fact that, because of these problems, some may now feel especially overwhelmed: unemployment, the need to renounce the necessary minimum of comfort, carefully cutting back on expenses so that the family budget reaches the end of the month, if it makes it that far. I assure you that I feel very close to each and every one of you, and pray especially for those who find themselves in greater difficulties. While continuing to carry out—those in government and everyone else—the steps needed to get out of this situation as quickly as possible, my advice is that we trust in our Lord and offer him joyfully the difficulties we have to put up with.

At the same time, don't be adverse to accepting work that is below your professional level, while waiting for a more favorable moment to arrive. Try to draw fruit from the bad times: confronted with a supernatural outlook, they will help us to mature humanly and to grow in union with God and in solidarity with others.

This situation is another opportunity for us to help one another overcome the difficulties gracefully. In recent days there have often come to mind some words of our Lord at the Last Supper, which our Founder so frequently repeated: *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.*¹³ And I recall the emotion with which St. Josemaría evoked the last moments on earth of the apostle *whom Jesus loved.*¹⁴ For there is an ancient tradition that St. John, perhaps with his voice weakened by old age (that's how our Father imagined it), kept repeating: *filioli, diligite alterútrum!* My little children, may you love one another!¹⁵

May no one feel alone. May each one feel supported, protected by the prayer and fraternal affection of the others. Let us outdo ourselves in serving, so that our life alongside others is made amiable and pleasant, through small specific deeds of service. Often just a smile is enough, a look of affection, an effort to listen with true interest to the troubles of others, so as to alleviate the situation of someone who is going through a trying moment. How timely are those words from *The Way!* "Charity does not consist so much in 'giving' as in 'understanding.'"¹⁶

Before ending, I would like to urge you to pass these recommendations on to your relatives, friends and colleagues. Help them to discover the provident hand of our Father God in all circumstances. As our Father wrote, echoing St. Paul's words: *in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.*¹⁷ And all of us are called by our Lord to bring his teaching to all the paths of the world. "*Omnia in bonum!*"

You already know that, on June 18, I named the tribunal of the Prelature in charge of investigating the Cause of beatification and canonization of Dora del Hoyo, the first Numerary Assistant in Opus Dei. Unite yourselves to my thanksgiving to the Most Blessed Trinity for this step and continue praying for my intentions.

I cannot, nor do I want to, fail to recall once again our beloved Don Alvaro who, on July 7,

¹³ *Jn* 13:34-35.

¹⁴ *Jn* 13:23.

¹⁵ See St. Jerome, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, III, 6, 10 (PL 26, 462).

¹⁶ St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 463.

¹⁷ *Rom* 8:28.

1935, began his path as a good and faithful servant, living the spirit of Opus Dei: how many memories of his correspondence, filled with joy and constant struggle!

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Barcelona, July 1, 2012