

(Letter from the Prelate: September 2010)

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

As we do every year, in the middle of this month we will celebrate the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Once again we will contemplate with gratitude the marvelous truth that *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*¹

The Word of God became man and took on the condition of a servant, obedient unto death, even to death on a cross,² in order to save us. Therefore, “by raising our eyes towards the Crucified One, we adore him who came to take upon himself the sin of the world and to give us eternal life. And the Church invites us proudly to lift up this glorious Cross so that the world can see the full extent of the love of our Crucified Lord for mankind, for every man and woman. She invites us to give thanks to God because from a tree which brought death, life has burst forth anew.”³

For the children of God in Opus Dei, this feast takes on special meaning, since God granted St. Josemaría a deep understanding of the reality that we are called to raise the Cross of Christ at the summit of all noble human activities. “St. Paul gave a motto to the Christians at Ephesus (*Eph 1:10*). *Instaurare omnia in Christo*: to fill everything with the spirit of Jesus, placing Christ at the center of everything. *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself* (*Jn 12:32*). Through his incarnation, through his work at Nazareth and his preaching and miracles in the land of Judea and Galilee, through his death on the Cross, and through his resurrection, Christ is the center of the universe, the firstborn and Lord of all creation.”⁴ So that we might assist him in applying the Redemption to all souls, our Lord has also offered us professional work, which with his grace we have to carry out with human perfection, with a spirit of service and a right intention, striving to turn it into prayer.

From Christ’s sacrifice flow all the graces that God dispenses to mankind. Therefore, it is impossible to possess supernatural life, to share in Jesus’ redemptive mission, if we don’t unite ourselves, in our heart and in our deeds, with the Holy Cross. In first place, living as well as possible the Mass, where we find ourselves, in a sacramental but real way, in the presence of the divine Sacrifice of Calvary. This will also spur us to receive joyfully the setbacks and sufferings along our earthly path, and to actively seek out voluntary mortification and penance, in the little things of each day. “What joy to have the Cross,” exclaimed a Father of the Church. “To possess the Cross is to possess a treasure.”⁵ But it would be a serious mistake to confuse the Cross with sadness, with resignation, with a gloomy outlook, because the reality is just the opposite: it draws us and leads us to the happiness that is in Christ, and in Christ crucified.⁶

St. Josemaría knew a great deal about sacrifice since our Lord got into his soul very early in his life, preparing him for the mission he wanted to entrust to him: the founding of Opus Dei. He always accepted the various sufferings in his life with a thankful heart, although at times he

1 *Jn 3:16*.

2 Cf. *Phil 2:8*.

3 Benedict XVI, Homily, September 14, 2008.

4 St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 105.

5 St. Andrew of Crete, *Sermon 10, on the Exaltation of the Holy Cross* (PG 97, 1020).

6 Cf. *1 Cor 1:23*.

didn't understand them. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, he soon attained a deep grasp of the truth that the Cross brings, and will always bring, the guaranty of supernatural effectiveness in the apostolic mission.

“This supernatural acceptance of suffering was, precisely, the greatest of all conquests. By dying on the Cross Jesus overcame death. God brings life from death. The attitude of a child of God is not one of resignation to a possibly tragic fate; it is the sense of achievement of someone who has a foretaste of victory. In the name of this victorious love of Christ, we Christians should go out into the world to be sowers of peace and joy through everything we say and do. We have to fight—a fight of peace—against evil, against injustice, against sin. Thus do we serve notice that the present condition of mankind is not definitive. Only the love of God, shown in the heart of Christ, will attain the glorious spiritual triumph of men.”⁷

The joyful fruit of the Cross is once again seen in the liturgical commemoration of Our Lady of Sorrows on the 15th. The Church invites us to contemplate Mary close to her Son, who—nailed to the Wood by love—dies for our sins. Divine Providence foresaw her presence on Golgotha during those hours, also so that Jesus could entrust mankind to the care of his Mother: *Woman, behold your son*,⁸ he said. And she, in the midst of that supreme sorrow, truly opened her heart to us, for she also heard Christ's words, *behold your Mother*,⁹ when our Lord addressed John. While Jesus was dying, we were being born to the life of grace, to a new life of union with God, with our Lady's active cooperation.

Many saints and spiritual writers have emphasized that, if our Lady was spared the pains of physical maternity in Jesus' birth at Bethlehem, this didn't happen at the moment of our spiritual birth. “The universal motherhood of Mary, the ‘Woman’ of the wedding at Cana and of Calvary, recalls Eve, ‘mother of all living’ (*Gen 3:20*). However, while the latter helped to bring sin into the world, the new Eve, Mary, co-operates in the saving event of Redemption. . . .

“In view of this mission,” explained Pope John Paul II, “the Mother is asked to make the acutely painful sacrifice of accepting her only Son's death. . . . Her ‘yes’ to this plan is therefore an assent to Christ's sacrifice, which she generously accepts by complying with the divine will. Even if in God's plan Mary's motherhood was destined from the start to extend to all humanity, only on Calvary, by virtue of Christ's sacrifice, is its universal dimension revealed.”¹⁰

My daughters and sons, our work with souls will bring abundant fruit if, with joyful serenity, we are closely united to Jesus on the Cross, next to our sorrowing Mother. “The redemption was consummated when Jesus died on the cross, in shame and glory, *to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles foolishness (1 Cor 1:23)*. But the redemption, by the will of God, will be carried out continually until our Lord's time comes. It is impossible to live according to the heart of Jesus Christ and not to know that we are sent, as he was, *to save all sinners (1 Tim 1:15)*, with the clear realization that we ourselves need to trust in the mercy of God more and more every day. As a result, we will foster in ourselves a vehement desire to live as co-redeemers with Christ, to save all souls with him, because we are, we want to be, *ipse Christus*: Christ himself, and *He gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Tim 2:6)*.”¹¹

7 St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 168.

8 *Jn 19:26*.

9 *Ibid.*, 27.

10 John Paul II, Address to a general audience, April 23, 1997.

11 St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 121.

This is the path Jesus' disciples have followed right from beginning of Christianity. Supported by the strength of the Cross, they made Christ's message known to the people they met, who were often very far from God. Thus, with God's grace and the perseverance of those first followers, the miracle of the conversion of the pagan world was brought about.

On the 21st we will commemorate St. Matthew, one of the first Twelve, who according to tradition, after writing the Gospel that bears his name, suffered martyrdom in Persia. He himself had direct experience of the Redeemer's zeal for souls, having been called to follow him when he was a tax-collector, which for most Israelites was synonymous with being a public sinner. Benedict XVI said: "Jesus does not exclude anyone from his friendship. Indeed, precisely while he is at table in the home of Matthew-Levi, in response to those who expressed shock at the fact that he associated with people who had so little to recommend them, he made the important statement: *Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners (Mk 2:17)*. The good news of the Gospel consists precisely in this: offering God's grace to the sinner!"¹²

Christ's example will always be a spur to the apostolic zeal of all his disciples. We too find ourselves in a society in which, unfortunately (and I say this without making a tragedy of it), many people do not know anything about God. Others act as though they didn't know him, walking far from his commandments and teachings. We have to try to bring all of them closer to our Lord. I recall the joy with which our Founder welcomed the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, on seeing that "the Church expressed with renewed intensity its concern to bring the Truth to those who walk outside the one Way, that of Jesus; because I am consumed by a hunger that all may be saved."¹³ In the present circumstances, it seems quite clear that the frontiers of the apostolate *ad fidem*, so loved by St. Josemaría, have greatly expanded.

In our dealings with our colleagues at work, let us never allow room for any partiality. As St. Josemaría repeated untiringly, no soul is excluded from our charity. Moreover, we have to be especially affectionate towards those who are furthest from God. "Christ's enemies," he once told us, "accuse him of being a friend of sinners. Of course! And you likewise! Otherwise, how are we going to convert them? How are we going to bring them to the divine Physician?"

"Of course we are friends of sinners! You can be their friend as long as your friendship with them is not a danger for your interior life, as long as your spiritual temperature is high enough to bring them heat without losing your own.

"Yes, friends of sinners, real friends: by your prayer, by your noble, sincere and pleasant dealings; but always being careful not to place your own soul in danger."¹⁴

Everyone we meet, for whatever reason, has to stir up in our heart a true apostolic zeal, a desire to help bring them closer to Christ. We have the duty to enkindle in everyone the fire of love for God that consumes our own heart. Therefore, when we come in contact with anyone, we have to ask ourselves right away: How can I encourage that person to draw closer to God? What can I suggest to him or her? What topic can I bring up that will help that person to get to know Christ's teachings better?

As Benedict XVI said: "anyone who has discovered Christ must lead others to him. A great

12 Benedict XVI, Address to a general audience, August 30, 2006.

13 St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 226.

14 St. Josemaría, Notes taken during a meditation, April 15, 1954.

joy cannot be kept to oneself. It has to be passed on.”¹⁵ This is what the faithful followers of our Lord have always done. “When you find that something has been helpful to you,” preached St. Gregory the Great, “try to draw others to it. You have to desire that others accompany you along the paths of the Lord. If you are going to the forum or the baths, and you meet someone who is not busy, you invite him to accompany you. Apply this earthly custom to the spiritual life, and when you go to God, don’t do so alone.”¹⁶

I’ve already told you how I relived those days that St. Josemaría spent in Ecuador, giving of himself again and again, without complaining that he didn’t have the physical strength he needed. Also in Peru, where I spent a lot of time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, going to Mary and Joseph; and in Brazil, marveling at the variegated multitude of people there, who are the hope of a harvest for God.

A few days ago, invited by the Bishop of Torun, in Poland, I took part in the naming of a church there for St. Josemaría and the installation of a relic of his. It is a great joy to see how devotion to our Founder is spreading throughout the world, awakening in countless souls the desire to seek sanctity in ordinary life. Accompany me in my act of thanksgiving.

And pray for your Associate brothers whom I will ordain to the priesthood, in Torreciudad, on the upcoming 5th of September. Continue praying each day, closely united to my intentions, for the Pope, for the Bishops and for the priests of the whole world.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Solingen, September 1, 2010

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, Homily, August 21, 2005.

¹⁶ St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospels* 6:6 (PL 76, 1098).