

(Letter from the Prelate: September 2011)

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

As I write to you I still retain vivid memories of the scenes of Benedict XVI and so many thousands of young people who, accepting the invitation of St. Peter's successor, were present at World Youth Day. All of us helped prepare that event by our prayer, convinced that many people would in one way or another hear our Lord's voice inviting them to follow him. Now that those days are over, let us continue praying so that the resolutions for a stronger and more apostolic Christian life may come to fruition in those of us who heard and meditated on the Holy Father's words.

I invite you to consider this month some remarks made by the Roman Pontiff in a general audience about the patriarch Abraham (*our father in the faith*, as the liturgy calls him¹), stressing his constant fidelity in fulfilling the Lord's commands.

What stands out in Abraham's life is his attentive listening to the divine word. From the moment he left his family and native land, leaving behind the false divinities to serve the living God, his life is deeply marked by a trusting surrender to the God who had revealed himself to him. We too have to approach Sacred Scripture with an eagerness to discover God's voice. As the Roman Pontiff said a few months ago: "I would also like to ask you . . . to become more familiar with the Bible, which I hope you have in your homes, in order to know the marvelous history of the relationship between God and man, between God who communicates with us and man who responds, who prays."²

Our Founder gave the same advice: to read each day a passage from the New Testament, trying to make this a meditative, contemplative reading, in the first person, in order to take advantage of the Paraclete's lights. "Read Holy Scripture. Meditate one by one on the scenes depicting our Lord's life and teachings. Consider especially the counsels and warning with which he prepared the handful of men who were to become his apostles, his messengers from one end of the earth to the other."³ As you well know, he wrote down in his notebook some texts from Sacred Scripture, which he reread and pondered on frequently. His personal experience led to that consideration in *Furrow*: "I advised you to read the New Testament and to enter into each scene . . . The minutes you spend in this way each day enable you to incarnate the Gospel, reflect it in your life and help others to reflect it."⁴

But let us return to the story of Abraham. Faith led him to listen attentively to the Lord's word and to put it into practice. He came to know God so well over time that Holy Scripture, when giving his eulogy, says he was *a friend of God*.⁵ Jesus too gives that title to his apostles: *I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you*.⁶ And he repeats this to each and every one of us throughout the day—not just once, but many times!

A friend opens his heart to his friend; he tells him what is bothering him, what he hopes to accomplish and what brings him joy. And this intimacy with God becomes stronger and stronger in one's prayer. The story of Abraham is very relevant here. Remember how, when the Lord decides to punish the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorra for their many sins, he lets his friend know about it first. *Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him?*⁷ The Holy Father remarks: "It is here that

1 Roman Missal, First Eucharistic Prayer.

2 Benedict XVI, Address in a general audience, May 18, 2011.

3 St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 172.

4 St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 672.

5 See 2 *Chron* 20:7; *Is* 41:8; *Deut* 3:35.

6 *Jn* 15:15

7 *Gen* 18:17-18.

Abraham comes in, with his prayer of intercession . . . The Lord wishes to bring humanity back to faith, obedience, and justice through Abraham. And now this friend of God, seeing the reality and neediness of the world, prays for those who are about to be punished and begs that they be saved.”⁸

It is very moving, and also consoling, to read that passage from Scripture in which a man, resting firmly on the knowledge that he is God’s friend, dares to challenge in a certain sense the Most High, pleading for the conversion of sinners with his trusting prayer. *Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be that from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee!*⁹

The Lord heeded Abraham’s petition. However, the patriarch, fearing that perhaps not even fifty just men might be found in the city, went on reducing the number until he reached ten: *Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.* And the Lord answered: *For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.*¹⁰ We know that in the end (and it is painful to see how closed their hearts were) Sodom and Gomorra were destroyed. Not even the small number of just men that would have freed them from punishment could be found there.

How important is our prayer for one another! Over and above the actual outcome of this passage, we see revealed here the greatness of divine mercy. The Pope said: “With his prayer, Abraham does not invoke a merely compensatory form of justice but rather an intervention of salvation which, taking into account the innocent, also frees the wicked from guilt by forgiving them.”¹¹ Today as well, as in other moments of history, God is ready to convert hearts, listening to his friends’ petitions. But each and every one of us needs to pray more, so that souls return to friendship with God, and so that we too do not distance ourselves from him. As St. Josemaria used to say, the problem is that “few pray, and those of us who pray, pray little.”

We need to pray always and to pray with greater intensity for the needs of the Church, of souls, of the whole world. Let us do so with faith, humility and perseverance. We should recall God’s promise to David, a descendent of Abraham: *fui tecum in omnibus, ubicumque ambulasti*,¹² I have been with you, wherever you went. These words moved our Father deeply, because he saw in them the certainty that God is always close to his children.

The messianic prophecy addressed to David continues with these other words: *When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom . . . Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.*¹³ This promise was made a reality in Jesus Christ and continues to hold true for the Church. On one occasion (eighty years ago now) St. Josemaria understood this as referring also to the Work, a living part of the Mystical Body. He was doing his prayer before the Tabernacle, with effort, when God put on his lips those words from the liturgy back then. Our Founder recorded in his spiritual notes. “The words of Scripture that I found on my lips were, *Et fui tecum in omnibus ubicumque ambulasti, firmans regnum tuum in aeternum.* ‘And I have been with you everywhere, wherever you went; your throne shall be established forever’ (2 Sam 7:9, 16). Repeating them slowly, I applied my mind to their meaning. And later, yesterday evening and again today, when I read them again . . . I well understood that Christ Jesus was telling me, for our consolation, ‘The Work of God will be with Him everywhere, affirming the reign of Jesus Christ forever.’”¹⁴

8 Benedict XVI, Address in a general audience, May 18, 2011.

9 Gen 18: 23-25.

10 Ibid., 32.

11 Benedict XVI, Address in a general audience, May 18, 2011.

12 2 Sam 7:9.

13 Ibid., 7:12, 16.

14 St. Josemaría, *Apuntes íntimos*, no. 273 (September 8, 1931). See Andres Vazquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 1, p. 292.

Let us realize more deeply, then, that you and I have to be with our Lord, corresponding to the calls of grace. Although each of us may be and know ourselves to be of very little worth, our Father God wants to count on our cooperation—together with that of the other faithful in the Church—to bring his mercy to all mankind. He wants to save us from our sins (the true cause of all evils), but he respects the freedom of his creatures. As with those cities for which Abraham interceded, a minimum of response on the part of men is required: “to change evil into good, hatred into love, revenge into forgiveness . . . there must be righteous people in the city, and Abraham continuously repeats: *suppose one can find there....*”¹⁵ The Pope emphasizes that it is “*there*, within the sick reality, that there must be that seed of goodness which can heal and restore life. It is a word that is also addressed to us: so that in our cities the seed of goodness may be found; that we may do our utmost to ensure that there are not only ten upright people, to make our cities truly live and survive and to save ourselves from the inner bitterness which is the absence of God.”¹⁶

Do we realize that our trusting conversation with God plays an important role in making the divine plans of salvation a reality? God is counting on our personal struggle, on your prayer and on mine, to send abundant graces to souls. Let us not be discouraged by the apparently great power of evil! The prophet Jeremiah sought on God’s behalf a single just man in Jerusalem, to save the city: *Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth; that I may pardon her.*¹⁷ The situation has changed radically after the Incarnation of the Word. Now it is not the lack of a just man that can impede the effect of divine mercy, because that Just One exists: it is Jesus, the victor over sin and death, who in heaven retains the human nature he assumed and *always lives to make intercession for [us]*.¹⁸ Thus there should never be lacking those who, in the middle of the world, constantly raise their prayers to heaven, closely united to Jesus Christ. And then, as the Holy Father says, “the prayer of each one will find its answer, our every intercession will be fully heard.”¹⁹

How often I heard from our Father’s lips that cry: “faith my children, faith!” For everything has a remedy, if we unite our prayers to the petition Christ raises to his Father in the Holy Mass, a sacrifice of infinite impetratory efficacy. Christians have always acted in this way, above all in times of special difficulty. Let us reread a page from the Acts of the Apostles that recounts the imprisonment of Peter in Jerusalem.²⁰ St. Josemaría considered this scene in one of his meditations given during the months of religious persecution in Spain in 1937. His words, addressed then to the small group of people who were taking refuge with him, are very timely, because rising above changing historical circumstances they point to what is permanent. In meditating on that scene, St. Josemaría asked: “What could the first Christians do to defend their first Pope? Most of them had no social influence, and those who had any couldn’t use it. But St. Luke doesn’t fail to record of our first brothers and sisters in the faith: *oratio autem fiebat sine intermissione (Acts 12:5)*. They prayed without ceasing. The entire Church, with arms upraised in prayer, cried out to God. And what were the results? At night, an angel appears in Peter’s cell, awakens him and says: *surge, velociter (Acts 12:7)*; get up quickly, get dressed and put on your shoes. The chains fall off, the prison doors open, and the Prince of the Apostles walks away free.”²¹

How I would like these words of our Founder to urge us on in our prayer for the Church, for the Pope, for all souls, filled with trust! In our times of meditation before the Tabernacle, let us speak to our Lord about our friends, our relatives, our acquaintances, asking for all that they need. Let us make our apostolic plans *with Jesus* and *close to Jesus*, for then they will be fruitful: from daily initiatives, perhaps

15 Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, May 18, 2011.

16 Ibid.

17 *Jer* 5:1.

18 *Heb* 7:25.

19 Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, May 18, 2011.

20 See *Acts* 12: 1-19.

21 St. Josemaría, Notes taken during a meditation, June 24, 1937.

apparently small (and nothing is small when it involves the spiritual good of a soul), to more far reaching plans that look towards restoring a deep Christian meaning to society. Let us once again put into effect St. Josemaría's advice: "before talking to souls about God, let us talk to God about souls." Do you pray every day for the people you meet? Do you make an effort to form new friendships, and to deal more frequently with those who are already your friends? Let us pray especially for the Pope's trip to Germany from the 22nd to the 25th of this month.

Returning to the considerations at the beginning of this letter, I insist on the need to entrust to our Lord the fruit of all the activities carried out during these months throughout the world. I insist: let us pray especially for continuity in the apostolic work with young people, after the days in Madrid, so that many young men and women everywhere may decide to follow Jesus Christ closely. Let us entrust these desires to our Lady, taking advantage of the various Marian feasts that adorn the month of September. And let us not forget to be, with her, close to the Cross of Jesus, at Mass and during the whole day. Thus the zeal for holiness and apostolate that we want to sow in hearts will become a reality.

Let us go also to the intercession of our beloved Don Alvaro, who so faithfully carried out the "changing of the guard." You can't imagine how many people, some of them quite high up, have spoken to me about our Father's words: "when I am gone, there won't be any earthquake in the Work." And, thanks be to God, this is what happened, due to the complete dedication of his first successor, with the unalterable peace that characterized him.

To make my trips to Africa, I went to France, where one of the two airlines with direct flights to Ivory Coast and Congo is located, and I stayed there for several weeks. As you can well imagine, in Paris—expressly remembering our Father and our beloved Don Alvaro—we went to pray at the shrine of the Miraculous Medal, accompanied as always by each and every one of you, thanks be to God. And also, as always, I felt the joy of being "en Casa"—at home. I spent some weeks in Couvrelles, recalling there the visits of St. Josemaría and his first successor to that conference center. I united myself to their intentions, so that our Lord will continue blessing the apostolic work in that Region and in all of them, for we need to multiply ourselves by 500, since many new countries are asking forcefully that we come. I give a lot of thanks to God for having been able to spend time with your French sisters and brothers, and I tell him that we need many new hands everywhere.

We will soon begin the work in Sri Lanka: don't you feel the hunger to collaborate, each of you from your own place, in this sowing of peace and joy throughout the whole world?

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Pamplona, September 1, 2011