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Letter from the Prelate (April 2016)

"Forgiving offenses is, in a certain sense, the most divine thing we can do," the Prelate tells us, stressing the mercy God has shown in redeeming us.

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

Once again we have been moved, during Holy Week, on seeing God's love for mankind. *God so loved the world, Saint John writes, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*[1]

How ardently we should thank the Blessed Trinity for this outpouring of goodness and mercy! And even more so when we consider that *while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*[2] Our Lord's passion and death is the culmination of the commitment that God freely wanted to take on for mankind. "His first commitment was that of creating the world, and despite our attempts to ruin it—and

there are many—He is committed to keeping it alive. But his greatest commitment was that of giving us Jesus. This is God's great commitment! Yes, Jesus is really the supreme commitment that God has assumed for us.”[3]

In virtue of this promise, renewed repeatedly throughout the course of salvation history, the incarnate Son of God did not limit himself to obtaining pardon for our sins by living and working among us, even though his slightest action had superabundant value to redeem us; nor was he content to intercede for us, even though he well knew that God the Father always listened to his prayer. He decided to go to the extreme, since *greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*[4]

Christ the Redeemer's words during his agony on the Cross are very

moving. The first was this: *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*[5] He doesn't think about the humiliation and pain he is suffering, or the cruelty of those who crucified him, but rather about the offense against God. He came to win for us the forgiveness of our sins and his first words are a petition for mercy. His second statement, addressed to the good thief, reflects the same concern. Seeing the sincere repentance of that man, he promises him the forgiveness of his sins and eternal life: *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.*[6] We can readily understand the deep piety with which our Father used to kiss the crucifix, which for those who saw him was a call to conversion and an invitation to speak about Christ and his example.

Saint Josemaría deeply assimilated these teachings of our Lord, and preached them by his example and

word. “Forgiveness. To forgive with one’s whole heart and with no trace of a grudge is always wonderfully fruitful! That was Christ’s attitude on being nailed to the Cross: ‘Father, forgive them, they know not what they are doing.’ From this came your salvation and mine.”^[7] — What a good example for us! Let us ask God to teach us to be big-hearted and to forgive right away those who have offended us, without any resentment.

Forgiving offenses is, in a certain sense, the most divine thing we can do. This is not just a work of mercy, but also a condition and petition for God to pardon our sins, as the Master taught us in the Our Father: *forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*^[8] —

One of the great problems in today’s society is the difficulty people have in forgiving. Individuals and entire nations dwell over and over again on

the offenses they have received; they wallow around in these memories as in a muddy puddle, and don't want to strive to forgive and forget. Quite different, and also very clear, is our Lord's teaching. He sums up the history of divine mercy towards mankind with these words: *blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*^[9]—

Deeply engraved on our heart are many Gospel scenes that show us this attitude of Jesus: his forgiveness of the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee; the parable of the prodigal son and of the lost sheep; his mercy towards the adulterous woman.... This is the path Christians have to travel to become like the Master. "This way can be summed up in one word: love. If we are to love, we must have a big heart and share the concerns of those around us. We must be able to forgive and understand; we must

sacrifice ourselves, with Jesus Christ, for all souls. If we love with Christ's heart, we shall learn to serve others and we shall defend the truth clearly, lovingly.”^[10] —

Nevertheless, as Saint Josemaría often said, in order to love like this we need “to root out of our own lives everything that is an obstacle to Christ's life in us: attachment to our own comfort, the temptation to selfishness, the tendency to be the center of everything. Only by reproducing in ourselves Christ's life can we transmit it to others. Only by experiencing the death of the grain of wheat can we work in the heart of the world, transforming it from within, making it fruitful.”^[11] —

The scenes of our Lord's passion and death, which we have relived in recent days, raise some challenging questions that we have to answer sincerely. Do we forgive from the

first moment the offenses we have received, which often are not really such but rather the product of our imagination or exaggerated sensitivity? Do we try to erase them from our heart, without returning over and over to them? Do we ask our Lord and our Lady for help when we find it hard to forgive?

This has to be our constant attitude, for it is not enough to forgive once, or twice, or three times.... Remember how our Lord answered Peter's question: *Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.*^[12] That is to say, always. After these words, to engrave this lesson deeply on our heart, Jesus told the parable of the cruel servant who was foolishly intransigent over a ridiculously small debt owed by one of his companions, when his master had just forgiven

him an enormous sum.^[13] Let us make a serious effort, in this Year of Mercy and always, to deeply assimilate these demands on a true disciple of Christ.

We can't be content to avoid external offenses; we need to strive to drown out any thoughts or judgments that are contrary to charity. Our earthly journey is a pilgrimage towards the glory of Heaven; and to attain that goal, Jesus has shown us the steps we need to take. The Pope in his Bull *Misericordiae vultus* explains for us one of these, when commenting on some words of our Lord: *Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned.*^[14]

The Holy Father wrote: "The Lord asks us above all *not to judge* and *not to condemn*. If anyone wishes to avoid God's judgement, he should not make himself the judge of his brother or sister. Human beings, whenever

they judge, look no farther than the surface, whereas the Father looks into the very depths of the soul. How much harm words do when they are motivated by feelings of jealousy and envy! To speak ill of others puts them in a bad light, undermines their reputation and leaves them prey to the whims of gossip. To refrain from judgement and condemnation means, in a positive sense, to know how to accept the good in every person and to spare him any suffering that might be caused by our partial judgment, our presumption to know everything about him. But this is still not sufficient to express mercy. Jesus asks us also to *forgive* and to *give*. To be instruments of mercy because it was we who first received mercy from God. To be generous with others, knowing that God showers his goodness upon us with immense generosity.”^[15] —

Here we find another dimension of Christian forgiveness: asking others for pardon as soon as we realize that we have offended them. This is not a humiliation, but rather a manifestation of greatness of spirit, of a big heart, of a generous soul. In this too Saint Josemaría was an example for us. How readily he asked for forgiveness, with true humility, if he thought someone might have been wounded by a rebuke he had made, even though it had been deserved! He once acknowledged that he had often begged God for forgiveness, for what he saw as his failure to respond fully. “But at the same time,” he added, “I dare to say that I have given you the best of my soul. What God our Lord has granted me, I have tried to pass on to you with the greatest fidelity. And when I haven’t managed to do so, I have acknowledged right away my mistakes. I have asked for forgiveness from God and from those

around me, and immediately returned to the struggle.”^[16] —

On the 20th I will begin another year of my service to the Church as Prelate of Opus Dei. And on the 23rd I will administer the priesthood to a large group of your brothers, who are now deacons of the Prelature. Pray a lot for them and for me, and for all the priests of the Church. Let us always live *consummati in unum*,^[17] — closely united in prayer, in intentions, in deeds, so that our Lord continues to look upon us with mercy. And let us continue keeping very much present in our prayer the Pope and all his intentions

With all my affection I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, April 1, 2016

[1] *Jn* 3:16-17.

[2] *Rom* 5:6.

[3] Pope Francis, Address in a general audience, February 20, 2016.

[4] *Jn* 15:13

[5] *Lk* 23:34.

[6] *Lk* 23:43.

[7] Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 806.

[8] *Mt* 6:12.

[9] *Mt* 5:7.

[10] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 158

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Mt* 18:21-22.

[13] See *Mt* 18:23-35.

[14] *Lk* 6:37.

[15] Pope Francis, Bull *Misericordiae vultus*, April 11, 2015, no. 14.

[16] Saint Josemaría, Notes taken from a meditation, March 29, 1959.

[17] *Jn* 17:23.

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