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Letter from the Prelate (February 2007)

A letter from Bishop Javier Echevarría to the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei, about accepting the will of God.

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Let us contemplate the scene that St. Luke describes. “And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of

the Lord, ‘every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons’” (*Lk* 2:22-24).

In these brief verses, with a reverent reiteration, St. Luke insists that Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem with the express purpose of fulfilling God’s will, as the Mosaic Law requires. They don’t question anything, even though they would have been justified in thinking that this precept didn’t apply to them. They obey with simplicity and joy, giving men and women of all epochs, and especially Christians, a refined model of fidelity to God and obedience to his laws. You will surely recall here St. Josemaría’s incisive words, when commenting on the fourth joyful mystery of the Rosary:

“Just think: she—Mary Immaculate!—submits to the Law as if she were defiled.

"Through this example, foolish child, won’t you learn to fulfill the holy Law of God, regardless of any personal sacrifice?” (*Holy Rosary*, Fourth Joyful Mystery).

The fulfillment of God’s law is the compendium of all Christian wisdom. It is impossible to follow Christ outside this path of complete identification with the divine will. This is how our Lady and St. Joseph always acted, at every moment of their lives. The epistle to the Hebrews, when speaking about the entrance of the Son of God into the world, places on his lips the words of a psalm: “Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Lo, I

have come to do thy will, O God,' as it is written of me in the roll of the book" (*Heb* 10:5-7; *cf. Ps* 40:7-9).

It is quite significant that, at the very moment she gives her assent to the Incarnation, Mary responds to the archangel Gabriel: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38). Our Lady's *fiat!* is fully identified with the *ecce venio*, "I have come to do thy will," of the Son of God, who becomes man for our salvation. The Holy Father comments: "Before the mystery of these two 'Here I am' statements, the 'Here I am' of the Son and the 'Here I am' of the Mother, each of which is reflected in the other, forming a single Amen to God's loving will, we are filled with wonder and thanksgiving, and we bow down in adoration" (Homily, March 25, 2006).

But our wonder and gratitude have to be shown in specific deeds. For we recall Jesus' words: "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (*Mt* 7:21). Our Lord's great reproach to the men and women of his time, which he could also address to us today, is precisely this: that often we are content to proclaim our love for God in words, but our deeds fall short. As St. Mark says in a Gospel passage that we will read at Mass in a few days time: "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (*Mk* 7:6). Let us meditate on St. Josemaría's words:

"Your prayer should be that of a child of God, and not that of the hypocrites who will hear from Jesus' lips: 'Not every one who says to me, Lord,

Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'

"Your prayer, your clamor of 'Lord, Lord' should be linked in a thousand different ways throughout the day to a desire and an effective effort to fulfill the Will of God" (*The Forge*, no. 358).

Let us ask ourselves frequently: Do I fulfill the will of God faithfully? Do I strive to accept all its requirements, without placing any restrictions? It is easy to voice these words of St. Josemaría, but in practice (as we have to admit with sincerity) we find or invent many difficulties for accepting and loving the Will of our heavenly Father. An illness, a physical or moral setback, an unexpected obstacle in our work, the frictions that arise from living alongside other people, something that does not work out as we had planned, all these details are specific

manifestations of the divine will that our Lord addresses to us through the most ordinary circumstances and that require a loyal response. Generously accepting these requirements, perhaps after an initial moment of resistance or dismay, marks out the sure path for following Jesus closely, fulfilling to the letter the recommendation to take up each day his Cross on our shoulders and thus attain full identification with him (*cf. Lk* 9:23).

How do we respond to these divine invitations? Do we see the loving Will of our Father God in daily annoyances, even the smallest ones? Do we realize that in all these things we find the blows of the chisel with which the Holy Spirit, the divine Artist, sculpts the image of Christ in our soul?

Let us be generous, my daughters and sons, in our serviam! Remember St. Josemaría's advice:

"Don't fall into a vicious circle. You are thinking: when this is settled one way or another, I'll be very generous with my God.

"Can't you see that Jesus is waiting for you to be generous without reserve, so that he can settle things far better than you imagine?

"A firm resolution, as logical consequence: in each moment of each day I will try generously to carry out the will of God" (*The Way*, no. 776).

These words are, as it were, a prolongation of those other words from *The Way*, engraved with fire in the soul of St. Josemaría:

"There is a story of a soul who, on saying to our Lord in prayer, 'Jesus, I

love you,' heard this reply from heaven: 'Love means deeds, not sweet words.'

"Think if you also could deserve this gentle reproach" (*Ibid.*, no. 933).

During this month we will mark the 75th anniversary of this divine locution. St. Josemaría often referred to this event, which took place on February 16, 1932, but always in a way that kept the protagonist hidden. Only after he left us for heaven did we come to know the details regarding this event.

Our Founder had been suffering from a bad cold for several days and, as he tells us in his personal notes, "it has been an occasion for my lack of generosity towards my God to show itself. I slacked off in my prayer and in the thousand little things that a child…can offer his Lord each day. I started noticing this, and that I was postponing the fulfillment of certain

resolutions about putting more time and effort into devotional practices, but I calmed myself with the thought, 'Later, when you're well, when your family's financial situation is in better shape…then!'" (St. Josemaría, *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 606, February 16, 1932; *cf.* A. Vazquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. I, p. 318).

How human is the figure of St. Josemaría! He too had to fight, as do we, in so many small things. He too was affected, as we are, by trials in our health, economic difficulties, lack of time and energy. How can he fail to understand us, when we ask him to help us overcome our limitations? Let us go trustingly to his intercession, for he understands very well our needs. But let us strive at every moment to recognize God's will in the most varied circumstances, and let us accept it without hiding behind the excuses we so easily

manufacture to justify our lack of generosity.

I continue with the episode from St. Josemaría's life. On that 16th of February, while giving Holy Communion to the nuns at Santa Isabel, he addressed Jesus in his heart and, without external words, told Jesus what he so often said to him, both day and night: "'I love you more than these.' And immediately I understood, without the need for words: 'Love is deeds, not sweet words and excuses.' I saw clearly at that moment how little generosity I have, and suddenly recalled many unnoticed details I hadn't been paying attention to, which brought home to me with crystal clarity my lack of generosity. O Jesus, help me, so that your donkey will be fully generous. Deeds, deeds!" (*Ibid.*).

Don Alvaro told us that this intervention by our Lord deeply

moved St. Josemaría, not because he was slacking off in his prayer, but because God was asking more of him. Through this locution, our Lord illumined his intellect and strengthened his heart to help him discover “many unnoticed details” in which he could be more refined. Our Founder reacted with generosity, and the memory of that “gentle reproach” by Jesus spurred him on throughout his life to a greater self-giving in serving God and souls.

We too can and should assimilate this teaching. The unwavering fulfillment of God’s will, as revealed to us in our daily life, marks out for us the royal road for following our Lord closely and being effective in our apostolate. As the Holy Father recalled in a homily: “Following the divine Teacher with docility makes Christians witnesses and apostles of peace. We might say that this inner attitude also helps us to highlight

more clearly what response Christians should give to the violence that is threatening peace in the world. It should certainly not be revenge, nor hatred, nor even flight into a false spiritualism. The response of those who follow Christ is rather to take the path chosen by the One who, in the face of the evils of his time and of all times, embraced the Cross with determination, taking up the longer but more effective path of love. Following in his footsteps and united to him, we must all strive to oppose evil with good, falsehood with truth and hatred with love" (Homily, March 1, 2006).

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