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Letter from the Prelate (October 2008)

In his October letter, the Prelate stresses the importance of humility. Only by relying on God's help can we yield fruit that will last.

10/06/2008

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

The 80th anniversary tomorrow of the founding of Opus Dei, feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, invites us to

raise to heaven a heartfelt and ardent act of thanksgiving. We have been preparing for this day by striving to draw closer to our Lady. Now we especially thank Mary for her maternal presence in each step of this family of her children. Closely united to St. Josemaría and all the faithful of the Work who have already traveled this path—remembering in a special way Don Alvaro—each of us expresses our gratitude to our Mother for her constant help and for always accompanying us along our path. We also ask her to obtain for us from heaven the gift of following to the end the path that God showed our beloved Father on October 2, 1928.

For over ten years, St. Josemaría begged God for light to know what he was asking of him. He made use of an aspiration taken from the Gospel: *Domine, ut videam*,^[1] Lord that I might see! His constant prayer—also

directed to our Lady—was preparing him for the decisive moment, as Cardinal Ratzinger expressly pointed out in a homily he gave at the time of our Father's beatification.

"Josemaría Escrivá realized very early on that God had a plan for him, that he wanted something from him. But he didn't know what it was. How could he find the answer, where should he seek it? He set out to search, above all, by listening to the Word of God, Sacred Scripture. He read the Bible not as a book of the past, nor as a book of problems to be argued about, but as a word for the present, that speaks to us today: a word in which we are each the protagonist, and need to seek our place in it, to find our path."[2]

When St. Josemaría received the decisive illumination about what God wanted from his life, he immediately prepared to carry it out. He could

well say: "for me—on a small scale—like Paul in Damascus, in Madrid the scales fell from my eyes, and in Madrid I received my mission." [3] His divine task was to spread the universal call to holiness and, at the same time, to open up in the heart of the Church a specific path—Opus Dei—to help many people correspond to their vocation to sanctity and apostolate, through their work and daily circumstances.

Our Father was very aware of his nothingness before God. With deep conviction, he said and wrote that he had been "an inept and deaf instrument," [4] to whom God had entrusted that mission—so totally beyond his capability—to make it absolutely clear that "all that" was from God, and not the invention of a creature. "I was twenty-six years old . . . and had God's grace and good humor: nothing else. But just as we men write with a pen, our Lord

writes with the leg of a table, so it can be seen that it is he who is writing: that is what is so incredible, so marvelous." [5] This was his deepest conviction right to the end of his life here on earth. "Once again," he exclaimed a few weeks before leaving for heaven, "what Scripture says has been fulfilled: that which is foolish, that which is worthless, that which—one could say—hardly even exists.... All that, God has taken and placed at his service. Thus he took that creature as his instrument." [6]

We see here a fundamental teaching that this anniversary presents to us: the need to be humble, so that God can make use of us as instruments for his salvific plans. Pride, being tied to our own ego, rises up as the great enemy of our holiness and apostolic effectiveness. In contrast, when a creature sincerely considers itself a zero, when we recognize that all our qualities come from God, and

not from ourselves, then we are ready to become an effective instrument in God's hands.

At this point, we can formulate some very personal questions. How do I see myself in God's presence? Do I think that I have something of worth by myself, or do I recognize that everything is God's gift? Do I sincerely ask him to let me know myself as I am before him? At the same time, the recognition of our nothingness should not lead to pessimism or frustration, but to a greater trust and abandonment in God. Let us meditate on that consideration of St. Josemaría: "Forget that despair produced by the realization of your weakness. True: financially you are a zero, in social standing another zero, and another in virtues, and another in talent.

"But to the left of these zeros, stands Christ. And what an incalculable figure we get!"[7]

On realizing our misery, let us grasp hold of God's hand more tightly, with the certainty that, since he has sought us out, he will grant us all his help to clear away the obstacles. Grounded on this deep humility, we will be in a position to tackle the apostolic challenges we are called to by our Christian vocation, which by its very nature is a vocation to apostolate. We see this clearly in the Gospel, when our Lord calls the first Twelve to be with him and sends them out to preach.[8] In those first disciples, all of us have been called by Jesus to bring his name to those around us. "In short, it is the Lord who appoints one to be an apostle, and not one's own presumption. The apostle," the Pope insists, "is not made by himself but is made such by the Lord; consequently the apostle

needs to relate constantly to the Lord."[9]

An apostle does not speak in his own name, but communicates what he has received. That is what those first disciples did, and Christians today have to do likewise. Commenting on St. Paul's vocation, Benedict XVI said recently: "Once again the idea of someone else's initiative comes to the fore, the initiative of God in Jesus Christ, to whom Paul is fully indebted; but special emphasis is placed on the fact that Paul has received from him a mission to carry out in his name, making every personal interest absolutely secondary."[10]

Let us never forget that God—without taking away our freedom—wants us to be completely faithful, at every hour, in any circumstance. Therefore, we have to be very aware that we are never alone. He watches

over us, listens to us and—without needing anything or anyone—he wants to need us continually. Faced with this daily reality, our Father invited us to think more about the *ecce ego, quia vocasti me*, [11] here I am, because you called me. Yes, God keeps up a persevering dialogue with us, and wants us to respond more fully to his special love for us.

Benedict XVI lists another requisite that marks a disciple of the Master, besides having been called and sent: carrying out the apostolic mission effectively by one's example and teaching, by the witness of one's deeds and words. He stresses this by pointing to the example of St. Paul: "the title of 'apostle' is not and cannot be honorary. It involves concretely and even dramatically the entire life of the person concerned." [12]

Caritas Christi urget nos,[13] the charity of Christ impels us, St. Paul writes to the Corinthians. Paul was impelled by zeal for the salvation of souls, following our Lord's example, who died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised...Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.[14]

This newness of life that the Gospel brings has to be passed on to other hearts, until each is enkindled with the same fire of charity. One who has come to know God's love feels the need to do everything possible to help others know Jesus Christ, follow him and love him. "In this small world of ours, with so much turmoil and confusion of ideas, how can souls ask to be baptized if no one explains Christian doctrine to them? *Fides ex auditu*. Faith comes from

hearing, says St. Paul. *How can they believe in God without having heard of him? And how are they to hear, if no one preaches to them?* (Rom 10:14). Jesus did not act that way. Our Lord gave us example, but he also taught: *coepit facere et docere* (Acts 1:1)."[15]

Seeing the excuses that are sometimes used to disguise comfort-seeking and bourgeois spirit, our Father said: "Why am I going to involve myself in the lives of others? Because I have a duty to do so, as a Christian! Because Christ has gotten involved in your life and in mine, as he got into the lives of Peter and of Paul, and the lives of John and of Andrew . . . And the apostles learned to do the same. If not, if after receiving the Master's express command, go and preach, they hadn't moved, and had remained just the Twelve: there would be no Church."[16]

In a few days, an ordinary assembly of the Synod of Bishops will begin, dedicated to reflecting on the Word of God in the Church's life and mission. You already know that I will be participating as a member by pontifical appointment. Seconding the directives of the Pope, I ask that you pray and get others to pray for the fruit of this meeting with St. Peter's Successor.

Let us strive to get to know the Word of God better each day, approaching Sacred Scripture with love and reverence—with the light of the Church's Tradition and the guidance of the Magisterium—and especially the Holy Gospels, to learn about our Lord and put his teachings into practice. Let us spread his doctrine *opportune et importune*,^[17] with occasion and without it, as St. Paul did. Then we will be able to exclaim with St. Paul at the end of our life: *I have fought the good fight, I have*

finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.[18]

This month also has several feasts of our Lady. Let us go more frequently to our Mother's intercession, with a hunger to be very Marian. Let us put more piety into praying the Holy Rosary, a "powerful weapon"[19] in the great battle for sanctity. On Saturday the 20th of September, I was in Saragossa for an appointment, and I prayed before Our Lady of the Pillar, uniting myself to the prayers of St. Josemaría in that Marian shrine. I was also in Torreciudad, where I placed at our Lady's feet so many needs, closely united to our Father's petition. I returned to Rome on the following day, Sunday, sorry not to have been able to kneel before

Our Lady of Ransom, in her basilica in Barcelona.

Every day I pray that the canonization of St. Josemaría—the 6th will be the sixth anniversary—might be for each of us a strong jolt, since if we truly want to consider ourselves very much sons and daughters of our Father, we have to foster in our soul true daily longings for conversion, for sanctity, joyfully living the *nunc coepi*, now I begin.

[20] Without the effort to convert personally each day, our personal apostolate will not be effective. I have repeated this idea since February 26, 2002, on learning the date of the canonization, while we were preparing for that proclamation. This suggestion that St. Josemaría is now directing to us each day from heaven, as he did when here on earth, has not lost any of its force.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, October 1, 2008

1. *Lk* 18:41.

2. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, homily at the Mass of thanksgiving for the beatification of the Founder of Opus Dei, May 19, 1992.

3. St. Josemaría, Letter, October 2, 1965.

4. St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, March 19, 1934, no. 7.

5. St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a meditation, October 2, 1962.

6. St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a meditation, March 19, 1975.

7. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 473.

8. Cf. *Mk* 3:13-14.

9. Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, September 10, 2008.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *1 Sam* 3:6.

12. Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, September 10, 2008.

13. *2 Cor* 5:14.

14. *2 Cor* 5:15 & 17.

15. St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a get-together, January 5, 1968.

16. St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a get-together, February 14, 1960.

17. Cf. *2 Tim* 4:2.

18. *2 Tim* 4:7-8.

19. St. Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*, Prologue.

20. Cf. *Ps* 76:11 (Vulgate).

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