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Letter from the Prelate (April 2008)

The presence of the risen Christ alongside us is an invitation to live our daily life with joy, wanting to improve our own lives and treat others mercifully. This is the Prelate's advice in his April pastoral letter.

04/04/2008

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

I am sending you this letter during Easter time, when our soul overflows with the joy of our Lord's resurrection. The sorrowful days of his passion and death have given way to the joy of the new immortal life that Jesus receives from the Father. He humbled himself, obedient unto death, and death on the cross; *therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*[1]

This is the message that the Church has proclaimed with special force right from the beginning, and that we Christians have to communicate to all peoples. As the Pope said in his *Urbi et Orbi* message a few days ago, Jesus' death and resurrection "is an event of invincible love; it is the

victory of the Love that has delivered us from the slavery of sin and death. It has changed the course of history, giving to human life an indestructible and renewed meaning and value."[2]

There come to mind so many Easter celebrations that I spent alongside St. Josemaría. One could sense his joy during these days, a joy he spread to those at his side. It was a joy rooted in faith, hope and charity, virtues infused by God into our souls so that we can know him, speak with him, and love him. This entire supernatural itinerary is grounded on the historical event (and, at the same time, an event that transcends history) of our Lord's glorious resurrection. "For Christ is alive. He is not someone who has gone, someone who existed for a time and then passed on, leaving us a wonderful example and a great memory.

"No, Christ is alive. Jesus is the Emmanuel: God with us. His resurrection shows us that God does not abandon his own. He promised he would not: *Can a woman forget her baby that is still unweaned, pity no longer the son she bore in her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you (Is 49:14-15).* And he has kept his promise. His delight is still to be with the sons of men (cf. *Prov 8:31*)."[3]

In his Easter message for this year, Benedict XVI chose as his theme a verse from Psalm 138 that in the old Vulgate version reads as follows: *resurrexi et adhuc tecum sum*. [4] I have risen and I am always with you. The liturgy uses it as the entrance antiphon for the Mass on Easter Sunday morning. "At the rising of the Easter sun, the Church recognizes the voice of Jesus himself who, on rising from death, turns to the Father filled with gladness and love, and

exclaims: My Father, here I am! I have risen, I am still with you, and so I shall be for ever; your Spirit never abandoned me."[5]

Throughout this Marian Year, we are striving to "put" our Lady more into our whole day. How easy it is to do this, when we consider the glorious mysteries of the Rosary! Our Father tried to fathom our Lady's happiness as she contemplated Jesus risen from the dead. Although the Gospels don't tell us anything about that apparition, the conviction of Christians is unanimous. John Paul II asks: "How could the Blessed Virgin, present in the first community of disciples (cf. *Acts* 1:14), be excluded from those who met her divine Son after he had risen from the dead?"[6] Mary assuredly was the first one to whom the glorious Christ appeared, filling the heart that had suffered so much beside the Cross with an ineffable supernatural and human

joy. How could the one who had always been so closely united to the Redeemer not be granted the joy of the triumphant Savior's presence?

Let us pause for a moment at this scene. Our Father can serve as our guide here: "He has risen! —Jesus has risen. He is not in the sepulcher. —Life has overcome death.

"He appeared to His most Holy Mother. —He appeared to Mary of Magdala, who is carried away with love. —And to Peter and the rest of the Apostles. —And to you and me, who are His disciples and more in love than Magdalen: the things we say to Him!"[7]

Guided by these teachings, we have to seek out, find and converse with Jesus, ever alive, who walks at our side amid our daily circumstances and who in his divinity dwells, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, in the depths of our heart. This

consideration should not be just a pious thought. Besides being in heaven with his Most Holy Humanity, at the right hand of the Father, as we profess in the Creed, Jesus remains in the Church and in each Christian through grace. His presence in us and at our side is real, although we don't see him with our earthly eyes. But we experience his presence in a thousand ways: in the eagerness for personal improvement—for sanctity!—that the Holy Spirit infuses in us; in the apostolic desires that spur us to go out to seek other souls, to help them come closer to God; in the merciful way that we Christians look upon all men and women, without distinctions of race, culture, social condition or religion. All this is possible because the risen Christ acts with us, accompanies us, lives in us. Do we reject everything that could distance us from others?

In recent days we have once again made present and meditated deeply on these saving events. In addition, on renewing our baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil, we have reaffirmed our desire to walk always with Christ, who has incorporated us to himself through the spiritual regeneration of baptism and who feeds us with his Body and Blood in the Eucharist, in order to strengthen our identification with him. As St. Josemaría wrote: "The presence of the living Christ in the host is the guarantee, the source, and the culmination of his presence in the world." [8]

Thanks above all to the Eucharist, Jesus' life "is our life, just as he promised his Apostles at the last supper: *If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (Jn 14:23).* That is why a Christian should live as

Christ lived, making the affections of Christ his own, so that he can exclaim with St Paul: *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me (Gal 2:20).*"[9]

Due to the intimate union existing between the risen Christ and the living members of his Mystical Body, each of us can make our own the words of the Psalm that I cited at the beginning of this letter. "In this perspective," the Pope points out in his Easter message, "we note that the words addressed by the risen Jesus to the Father on this day—*I am still with you, forever*—apply indirectly to us as well, *children of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (cf. Rom 8:17).* Through the death and resurrection of Christ, we too rise to new life today, and uniting our voice with his, we proclaim that we wish to remain

forever with God, our infinitely good and merciful Father."[10]

Our new life in Christ requires on our part the effort to put to death "the old man"—that is to say, everything in us not in accord with the Divine Life. Therefore, St. Josemaría concludes his consideration of the first glorious mystery of the Rosary with these words: "May we never die through sin; may our spiritual resurrection be eternal. —And before this decade is over, you have kissed the wounds on His feet, and I, more daring—because I am more a child—have placed my lips upon His open side."[11] Do you foster in your soul a deep abhorrence for any offense, whether grave or slight, against your Lord? Do you entrust yourself to our Lady so that she obtain for you from the Blessed Trinity the purity and humility that we all need?

We can draw another resolution from our careful contemplation of the first glorious mystery of the Rosary: the determination to make resound in the ears of those around us—who perhaps don't know Christ or behave as if they didn't know him—the urgent need to seek and follow him. For only thus will they be filled with an imperishable joy. The feast of Easter spurs us to redouble our zeal for souls, to behave as the apostles and holy women did after meeting the risen Jesus. They were not deterred by any difficulty, but gave witness to the resurrection with courage and constancy, and drew along with them a countless multitude of people.

As Christians, children of God in the Holy Church, we have to proclaim everywhere the good news of our Lord's resurrection, the foundation of our faith. With words of St. Josemaría, I remind you: "Our Lord

wants men and women of his own in all walks of life. Some he calls away from society, asking them to give up involvement in the world, so that they remind the rest of us by their example that God exists. To others he entrusts the priestly ministry. But he wants the vast majority to stay right where they are, in all earthly occupations in which they work: the factory, the laboratory, the farm, the trades, the streets of the big cities and the trails of the mountains."[12]

During the first week of March I had the joy of praying at two shrines of our Lady that our Father often visited. On the 1st, I went to Loreto, where the authorities have dedicated a walkway leading to the Holy House to St. Josemaría. Its path is flanked by the Stations of the Cross, next to which some words of our Founder have been placed. On Saturday, March 8th, I traveled to Fatima. I arrived in Lisbon the previous

evening, to spend some hours with your Portuguese sisters and brothers, as I have been trying to do through quick trips on some weekends. Many memories came to mind, specifically how in those two places, in difficult moments, St. Josemaría prayed with his daughters and sons of all times. On more than one occasion he said that he had felt the weight and the enormous joy of charity towards each and every one of us.

At both places I was accompanied by all of you, when presenting to our Lady, in this Marian Year, our thanksgiving and our firm determination to behave as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ in the Work. Both in Loreto and in Fatima, I invoked our Lady with the prayers of our Father and Don Álvaro, to thank her for her protection over us and the Marian seal on Opus Dei. I asked her, in your name, to strengthen and increase in all of us the spirit of

refined Marian piety that St. Josemaría left us as an inheritance.

Let us continue praying for the apostolic expansion of the Work throughout the world, both in places where we are already present and in others where people are still awaiting us. I have mentioned to you Romania, Indonesia and Vietnam. We are also receiving pressing calls from Bulgaria. It is an exciting adventure that confronts us, each in the place where God has put us. We will carry it all out, with our Lady's help, if we personally strive to intensify our union with the risen Christ, from whom all our strength comes. Let us ask for this through the intercession of St. Josemaría. On the 23rd we will commemorate the anniversary of his Confirmation and First Holy Communion, and his fatherly help will make us more fully Eucharistic souls.

Don't fail to accompany me with your prayer for my intentions. I am convinced, as I heard our Father say, that with your help my petition to God takes on great strength.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, April 1, 2008

[1]*Phil* 2:9-11.

[2] Benedict XVI, Easter message *Urbi et Orbi*, March 23, 2008.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 102.

[4] *Ps* 138:18 (Vulgate).

[5] Benedict XVI, Easter message *Urbi et Orbi*, March 23, 2008.

[6] John Paul II, Address at a general audience, May 21, 1997.

[7] St. Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*, First Glorious Mystery.

[8] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 102.

[9] *Ibid.*, no. 103.

[10] Benedict XVI, Easter message *Urbi et Orbi*, March 23, 2008.

[11] St. Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*, First Glorious Mystery.

[12] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 105.