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Letter from the Prelate (April 2010)

"With his humiliation and his subsequent exaltation, our Lord has traced out for us the path we should follow in our daily life," Bishop Echevarría tells us in his April letter.

22/04/2010

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

Yesterday, March 31, was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the day St. Josemaría first celebrated Mass in

the Ferraz Residence and left the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle. And tomorrow, April 2, it will be five years since the death of John Paul II. Two very different anniversaries that nevertheless awaken a special echo in our hearts. The two dates fall this year in the middle of Holy Week. They invite us to walk the path of our Christian vocation in close union with Jesus Christ, truly present in the Holy Eucharist, accompanying him closely in his redemptive Passion.

St. Josemaría often thought about the fact that, after leaving our Lord in the tabernacle of the center, the apostolic work experienced a great growth. Very soon afterwards, without seeing an end to the difficulties (which we will always encounter, since that is the path our Lord took), the harvest began to be more abundant. He put this in writing in a letter to the Vicar

General of the diocese of Madrid-Alcalá: “Since we have had Jesus in the tabernacle of this house, it’s been greatly noticeable. He came, and our work increased in both range and intensity.”[1]

All of us recall how the death of John Paul II produced a spiritual “earthquake” in so many people and brought about immense fruit. This was preceded by years, months and weeks during which that great Pontiff offered—through his preaching and example, through his long illness, through his dedicated life and his death—a marvelous testimony of how to follow Christ. Surely we remember the determination with which he grasped the Holy Cross, while he followed by television the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, in which he could not be present.

These and other recollections can help us to “put ourselves” more deeply into the scenes of Holy Week. The liturgy of the Sacred Triduum, which begins this evening with the Mass *in Cena Domini* and concludes with the Easter Vigil, eloquently recalls the way that God chose to redeem us. Let us ask our Lord for abundant grace to understand more fully the immense gift, truly inestimable, that he has given mankind through his sacrifice on the Cross. What resolutions have you made to not abandon Jesus? Are you asking him to make you a generously penitent soul? Are you using the means so as never to flee as the Apostles did?

Commenting on St. Paul’s hymn in his letter to the Philippians that describes the self-lowering of God to save us,[2] Benedict XVI said: “the Apostle concisely and effectively retraces the mystery of the history of

salvation, mentioning the arrogance of Adam who, although he was not God, wanted to be like God. And he compares the arrogance of the first man, which we all tend to feel in our being, with the humility of the true Son of God who, in becoming man does not hesitate to take upon himself all human weaknesses, save sin, and going even as far as the depths of death. This descent to the ultimate depths of the Passion and death is followed by his exaltation, the true glory, the glory of love which went to the very end. And it is therefore right, as St Paul says, that *at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue profess that Jesus Christ is Lord* (Phil 2:10-11).”[3]

Let us pause to meditate on these words of St. Paul, which we will hear once again on Good Friday before reading the passion according to St.

John. They are, as it were, a door that allows us to enter into the divine plans, often far removed from merely human plans. Let us embrace the setbacks that God permits or sends us, with the sure knowledge that they are a proof of his love, as was the passion and death of his Son. “All this,” said Benedict XVI, “was not the fruit of an obscure mechanism or blind fate: rather, it was his own free choice, through generous adherence to the Father’s saving plan. And the death he went to meet, Paul adds, was that of crucifixion, the most humiliating and degrading death imaginable. The Lord of the universe did all this out of love for us: out of love he chose ‘to empty himself’ and make himself our brother; out of love he shared our condition, that of every man and every woman.”[4]

With his humiliation and his subsequent exaltation, our Lord has

traced out for us the path we should follow in our daily life. “If we are faithful to him, Jesus’ own life,” wrote St. Josemaría, “will somehow be repeated in the life of each one of us, both in its internal development (the process of sanctification) and in our outward behavior.”[5] Thus, under the action of the Holy Spirit, with our personal collaboration, Christ’s features will steadily become more visible in us. Also when doing the *Via Crucis* , we can deeply meditate on what our Father wrote: “Lord, help me decide to tear off, through penance, this pitiful mask I have fashioned with my wretched doings... Then, and only then, by following the path of contemplation and atonement, will my life begin to copy faithfully the features of your life. We will find ourselves becoming more and more like You. We will be other Christs, Christ himself, *ipse Christus* .”[6]

My daughters and sons, I am asking God that we may understand very well that the greatest manifestation of love, of happiness, is in our self-lowering, because then God fills our soul to the brim. Let us not forget the great truth contained in those verses—poor ones, our Father said—that came to the lips of St. Josemaría:
Heart of Jesus, enlighten me, / today I say that you are my Love and my Good, / today you have given me your Cross and your thorns, / today I say that you love me.

Our Lord treats us in this way—union with the Cross—to sanctify us, and also allows the Church herself to suffer many attacks. “This is nothing new,” said St. Josemaría. “Since Jesus Christ our Lord founded the Church, this Mother of ours has suffered constant persecution. In times past the attacks were delivered openly. Now, in many cases, persecution is disguised. But today, as yesterday, the

Church continues to be buffeted from many sides.”[7]

None of this should surprise us. Our Lord already announced it to the Apostles: *If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also .*[8]

Certainly at times these attacks on Catholic doctrine, on the Pope and on the bishops are intensified. Priests are ridiculed along with anyone trying to live a morally upright life. Lay Catholics who, using their freedom, try to illumine civil laws and structures with the light of the

Gospel are ostracized. I am sure all of you feel sorry for these poor people who have room only for bitterness in their minds and souls. Let us bring them to our Lord through our prayer.

Faced with these situations, we should not lose heart or be intimidated. We should feel fraternal sadness for those who are in error, and pray for them. Let us return good for bad, and decide to be more joyfully faithful and more apostolic. Let us call to mind St. Josemaría's expression "God and daring" in the early years of the Work, when the difficulties in the life of the Church were no less great than now. Let us consider the words of our Lord that I just quoted: *If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also.* God does not lose battles. With his infinite love and omnipotence, he can draw good out of evil.

Those who thought they had definitively finished off the Church have often shouted in victory, and the Spouse of Christ has always arisen more beautiful, more pure, to continue being an instrument of salvation among the nations. St. Augustine already pointed this out in his time, in words our Father used in one of his homilies. “If by chance you hear offensive words or shouts hurled against the Church, show their loveless authors, with humanity and charity, that they cannot mistreat a mother in that way. They attack her now with impunity, because her kingdom, which is that of her Master and Founder, is not of this world. ‘As long as the wheat groans among the straw, as long as the spikes of wheat sigh among the cockle, as long as the vessels of mercy lament among those of ire, as long as the lily sobs among the thorns, there will always be enemies who say: when will she die and her

name perish? They think: there will come a time in which the Church will disappear and there will be no more Christians... But, when they say this, they of necessity die. And the Church remains' (St. Augustine, *En. In Ps ., 70, II, 12*)."[9]

Sometimes we might wish that God would show forth his power by freeing the Church definitively from those who persecute her. And perhaps we would like to ask: Why do you permit them to humiliate the people that you have redeemed in this way? This is the complaint that St. John, in the Apocalypse, puts on the lips of those who have given witness to Christ by their death: *I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell*

*upon the earth?” [10] The answer is not long in coming: *They were...told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been* .[11]*

This is how God acts. Those who witnessed Christ's arrest, his impious trial, his unjust condemnation, his ignominious death, mistakenly concluded that all had ended. And, nevertheless, the Redemption of mankind was never closer than when Jesus voluntarily suffered for us. “How marvelous and at the same time surprising this mystery is! We can never sufficiently meditate on this reality. In spite of being God, Jesus does not want to make his divine prerogative an exclusive possession; he does not want to use his being as God, his glorious dignity and his power, as an instrument of triumph.”[12]

Our Lord wants the members of his Mystical Body to share in the mystery of abasement and exaltation by which he carried out the Redemption. “If Good Friday is a day full of sorrow, it is therefore at the same time a particularly propitious day to reawaken our faith, to consolidate our hope and courage so that each one of us may carry our cross with humility, trust and abandonment in God, certain of his support and his victory. The liturgy of this day sings: *O Crux, ave, spes unica* Hail, O Cross, our only hope!”[13] I suggest to you something that I saw our Father do: savoring, meditating on, making very much his own those words that are repeated in a special way during Holy Week: *Adoramus te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi. Quia per sanctam Crucem tuam redemisti mundum!* We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world!

In the light of his glorious Resurrection, which followed Christ's death and burial, the events that cause us pain or suffering acquire their true meaning. So let us strive to understand them in this way, loving at every moment the will of God, who, although he does not want evil, permits it in order to respect our freedom and make his mercy shine forth more strongly. And let us try to help many other people, who perhaps are confused or disoriented, to understand this.

“No matter what happens, Christ will not abandon his Spouse.”[14] Our Lord continues dwelling in the Church, to whom he has sent the Holy Spirit to accompany her forever. “That was what God planned: Jesus, dying on the cross, gave us the Spirit of truth and life. Christ stays in his Church, its sacraments, its liturgy, its preaching—in all that it does.”[15] And our

Father added: “Only when a man is faithful to grace and decides to place the cross in the center of his soul, denying himself for the love of God, detaching himself in a real way from all selfishness and false human security, only then—when a man lives by faith in a real way—will he receive the fullness of the great fire, the great light, the great comfort of the Holy Spirit.”[16]

On the 23rd of this month we will celebrate once more the First Holy Communion of our Father. I don't know how to explain to you his joy, his adoration, his Eucharistic fervor on Holy Thursday. But I can tell you that his thanksgiving and his adoration of Jesus Christ in the Sacred Host were exemplary: everything seemed little to him, and he asked our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament to teach him how to love, to teach us to love.

There are other anniversaries of the history of the Work during this month: I leave them to your healthy curiosity, so that, as good daughters and sons, we may know how to thank the Blessed Trinity for all his goodness towards us. Now, among other things, for the spiritual fruit of the trip that I made to Palermo, last weekend.

Continue praying for the Pope and those who assist him, and for all my intentions. The “password” that I suggest to you is the same as that of St. Josemaría in the beginnings of Opus Dei: “God and daring, ” faith and courage, with an optimism grounded in hope. Let us intensify the apostolate of friendship and confidence that is proper to the Work, without worrying what others may think, based on a life of prayer and sacrifice, on professional work done as well as possible. And God will do everything “sooner, more,

and better ” than we could possibly have imagined.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, April 1, 2010

Footnotes:

1. St. Josemaría, *Letter to Don Francisco Moran*, May 15, 1935 . (Cf. Andrés Vázquez de Prada , *The Founder of Opus Dei*. Vol. I, p. 421).

2. Cf. *Phil* 2:6-11.

3. Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, April 8, 2009.

4. *Ibid.*

5. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 418.

6. St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Sixth Station.

7. St. Josemaría, Homily *The Supernatural Aim of the Church*, May 28, 1972. (*In Love with the Church*, no. 18).
8. *Jn* 15:18-20.
9. St. Josemaría, Homily *Loyalty to the Church*, June 4, 1972. (*In Love with the Church*, no. 16).
10. *Rev* 6:9-10.
11. *Ibid.*, 11.
12. Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, April 8, 2009
13. *Ibid.*
14. St. Josemaría, Homily *Loyalty to the Church*, June 4, 1972. (*In Love with the Church*, no. 16).
15. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 102.
16. *Ibid.*, no. 137.

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