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Letter from the Prelate (December 2006)

A letter from Bishop Javier Echevarría to the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei, focusing on the Advent season, "a time of joy and hope."

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In two days Advent begins. During this liturgical time, the Church urges us to consider the end of time, when Christ will come in the splendor of his glory to judge all men, and to

prepare ourselves to remember his temporal birth, now twenty centuries ago.

The two comings are intimately related. In the first, divine mercy is especially evident; in the final one, his justice will be clearly seen. But both are a manifestation of God's love for man, as St. Paul teaches: "For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:11-14).

Let us take advantage of the opportunity which the liturgy now

offers us, to meditate personally and to remind others of the splendid truths of our faith regarding the last things. People frequently experience a certain fear when thinking about these realities. We children of God, Christ's apostles (without being "alarmists," but also without being naive) have to help others (without considering ourselves superior to them) to face these realities which, in many cases, can be the impetus for a deep conversion or for drawing closer to God.

A few weeks ago, Benedict XVI invited us to consider the Judgment of God, who comes to fulfill the longing for justice that dwells in human hearts. "Does not everyone want to see justice eventually rendered to all those who were unjustly condemned, to all those who suffered in life, who died after lives full of pain? Don't we, all of us, want the outrageous injustice and

suffering which we see in human history to be finally undone, so that in the end everyone will find happiness, and everything will be shown to have meaning?

“This triumph of justice, this joining together of the many fragments of history which seem meaningless and giving them their place in a bigger picture in which truth and love prevail: this is what is meant by the concept of universal judgment. Faith is not meant to instill fear; rather it is meant to call us to accountability. We are not meant to waste our lives, misuse them, or spend them simply for ourselves. In the face of injustice we must not remain indifferent and thus end up as silent collaborators or outright accomplices. We need to recognize our mission in history and to strive to carry it out. What is needed is not fear, but responsibility—responsibility and concern for our own salvation, and for the salvation

of the whole world. Everyone needs to make his or her own contribution to this end” (Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, September 12, 2006).

Let us ask the Holy Spirit, my daughters and sons, to place on our lips the opportune words to effectively move souls. The holy fear of God, a gift of the Paraclete, means above all that his children do not want to sadden their heavenly Father. But the consideration of death and faith in the particular judgment, in the universal judgment and in the other final realities, can help convince many people to uproot sin from their lives. This is not merely a question of fear, but of the certainty that doing so brings with it all the advantages of a happy life, both in this world and the next. Saint Josemaría Escrivá wrote: “‘He shall come to judge the living and the dead.’ So we pray in the Creed. God grant that you never lose sight of that

judgment and of that justice and...of that Judge” (*The Way*, no. 745). “Does your soul not burn with the desire to make your Father God happy when he has to judge you?” (*Ibid.*, no. 746).

Advent is a time of joy and hope. “We might say that Advent is the season in which Christians must rekindle in their hearts the hope that they will be able with God’s help to renew the world” (Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus Allocution, November 27, 2005). The Church highlighted this reality in the recent Solemnity of Christ the King, reminding us that we have to play an active role in establishing God’s kingdom on earth. And we need to do so day after day, in the incidents of our daily life, preparing for the constant coming of our Lord to souls. Let us not forget that Jesus did not come only in the first Nativity, nor will he present himself only at the end of time. Our Lord constantly wants to be present in our souls, and

he counts on us to sanctify all noble human realities. He acts through the grace of the sacraments, especially Confession and the Eucharist, and also through the example and word of his disciples, of his friends.

While in the first part of Advent, as we noted at the beginning of this letter, the liturgy points us towards the second coming of Christ, from December 17 on its focus is on the immediate preparation for Christmas. Let us make our way towards Bethlehem, then, closely united to Mary and Joseph. They will teach us to show Jesus affection and refinement, to follow him, to fall in love with him. The fruit of this greater intimacy will be the aspiration Saint Josemaría expressed seventy-five years ago: “I want my mere presence to be enough to set the world on fire, for many miles around, with an inextinguishable flame. I want to know that I am

yours. Then, let the Cross come: never will I be afraid of expiation. To suffer and to love. To love and to suffer. What a magnificent path! To suffer, to love and to believe: faith and love. The faith of Peter, the love of John, the zeal of Paul.”

Let us continue to pray for the Holy Father, each day more insistently. I have no doubt that, through your prayer and joyful sacrifice, you have been accompanying him on his recent trip to Turkey. Let us try to get many people to pray for him and for his intentions. And don't forget my intentions: never let this become a routine request.