

Letter from the Prelate (February 2015)

The Prelate points to the important role of women in the Church and the world, and urges us to strive "to create a family environment around us."

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

We are passing through successive months rich in especially significant anniversaries of our Work, for which we give thanks to God, and which help us to recall that all of us are the Church, that we are Opus Dei.

In a few days it will be the 85th anniversary of the moment when our Lord made St. Josemaría understand that Opus Dei was also for women, as well as for men. "I didn't think there would be women in Opus Dei," our Founder wrote in a letter addressed especially to his daughters. "But on that 14th of February in 1930, our Lord made me feel what a father experiences who was not expecting another child, when God sends one to him. And from then on, it seems to me that I am obliged to have greater affection for you. I see you as a mother sees her small child."[1] And I can add that every day a deep gratitude

poured forth from his heart for his daughters.

How much our Father thanked God for this divine light, enkindled with the presence of women in Opus Dei! As he explained elsewhere, "truly the Work, without that express will of our Lord . . . would have been half-finished, with only one arm."[2]

In his apostolic letter on the dignity and mission of women, St. John Paul II reflected on the sublime moment of the Annunciation. "'When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman.' With these words from his *Letter to the Galatians* (4:4), the Apostle Paul links together the principal moments which essentially determine the fulfillment of the mystery 'pre-determined in God' (cf. *Eph* 1:9). The Son, the Word, one in substance with the Father, becomes man, born of a woman, at 'the fullness of time.' This

event leads to the turning point of man's history on earth, understood as salvation history. It is significant that St. Paul does not call the Mother of Christ by her own name 'Mary,' but calls her 'woman': this coincides with the words of the Proto-evangelium in the *Book of Genesis* (cf. 3:15). She is that 'woman' who is present in the central salvific event which marks the 'fullness of time': this event is realized in her and through her . . . Thus the 'fullness of time' manifests the extraordinary dignity of the 'woman.'"[3]

My daughters, these reflections are not just nice phrases, but a deep invitation to consider your importance in the Church, and an encouragement to take seriously your daily fidelity.

St. Josemaría was deeply aware of this reality. In his letter written in 1965, he told us: "we could say that in

our Lady there is fulfilled, to an eminent degree, the role assigned by God to the woman in the history of Salvation: her specific contribution to the co-redemption." And he added, speaking to his daughters in Opus Dei, and to all Christian women in general: "in our Lady you have the model and the help you need to raise to the order of grace your talents and daily activities, turning your own role, in the family and in society, into a divine instrument of sanctification, into a special mission in the heart of the Church. And you share, in the measure of your personal correspondence to grace, in the excellence and priority with which God has adorned his Mother."[4]

The reality that we are a Christian family united by supernatural bonds—which affects each and every one of us—is highlighted in the Work by the indispensable role of my daughters. It was our Lord's express

will that in the Prelature of Opus Dei we would be men and women who live with a complete separation in what refers to the means of formation and apostolates, but with a full unity—spiritual, moral, and juridical—and with a visible foundation in the Prelate, the Father of this spiritual family. Since we form a single home, St. Josemaría said, in the Work we have a "single 'cooking pot,' from which each takes what they need."^[5] Therefore even though he was speaking especially about the role of women in the Church and in society, his remarks are also relevant for men, making the necessary adjustments.

We have all been called to seek the fullness of Christian life, in accord with the circumstances God has disposed for each of us. Whether in apostolic celibacy or in marriage, our response to God has to always be complete. In this Marian year in the

Work, I have invited you to go to the Holy Family of Nazareth, praying especially for all the families in the world. "The family of Nazareth," the Pope said in one of his general audiences on this topic, "urges us to rediscover the vocation and mission of the family, of every family. And what happened in those thirty years in Nazareth, can thus happen to us too: in seeking to make love and not hate normal, making mutual help commonplace, not indifference or enmity."[6]

God wants generosity, the source of harmony and peace, to always reign in every family (whether of natural or supernatural origin), thus recreating day by day the atmosphere of Nazareth in every home. "Each time there is a family that keeps this mystery, even if it were on the periphery of the world, the mystery of the Son of God, the mystery of Jesus who comes to save

us, is at work. He comes to save the world. And this is the great mission of the family: to make room for Jesus who is coming, to welcome Jesus in the family, in each member: children, husband, wife, grandparents.... Jesus is there. Welcome him there, so that he will grow spiritually in that family."[7] And in an analogous manner, in the great family of the Church.

The family based on natural bonds is grounded on marriage, a stable and definitive union between one man and one woman in order to fulfil God's command at creation.[8] For the baptized, as we well know, marriage is also a sacrament: a channel through which the specific grace of their state reaches the married couple, an image of Christ's union with the Church.[9] "That is why I always look," our Father wrote, "upon Christian homes with hope and affection, upon all the families

that are the fruit of the sacrament of Matrimony. They are a shining witness of the great divine mystery of Christ's loving union with his Church which St. Paul calls *sacramentum magnum*, a great sacrament (*Eph 5:32*). We must strive so that these cells of Christianity may be born and may develop with a desire for holiness, conscious of the fact that the Sacrament of Initiation—Baptism—confers on all Christians a divine mission that each must fulfil in their own path in life."[10]

St. Josemaría gave married couples some advice stemming from his own experience and priestly ministry. On one occasion, responding to a question he was asked in Buenos Aires, he urged: "Truly love one another! . . . Of course, never argue in front of the children. Children notice everything and are quick to form judgments. They don't know that St. Paul wrote: *qui iudicat Dominus est* (1

Cor 4:4), that it is the Lord who judges. They become grown ups, even if they're only three or four years old, and they think, "Mommy is bad, or Daddy is bad." Poor things, it's a huge mess! Don't provoke that tragedy in your children's hearts. Wait, be patient, and later you can argue, once the child is asleep. But just a little bit, knowing that you are not right.[11]

We can all take to heart these counsels, which help to safeguard our fraternal spirit with others. "We have to put our temperament in our pocket," our Father said humorously, "and out of love for Jesus smile and make the life of those around us pleasant."[12] This doesn't mean doing anything strange. We are human beings, not pure spirits, who from time to time will find ourselves falling into a brusque or bad-tempered reaction, fruit of personal pride, that can harm our relationship

with others. But the remedy is close at hand: knowing how to ask for pardon, showing in one way or another that we are sorry we have hurt someone. And if we ever think that we have been offended, let us expel forcefully from our heart, with our Lord's help, any resentment—refusing to "incubate" noxious germs that could sour our relationship with others.

Our Lord is very clear on this point, as the Gospel recounts. *You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift*

there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.[13]

The theological virtue of charity, which entails human affection, spurs us to try to think always about the others, and not about ourselves. St. Josemaría graphically expressed the ideal of a child of God: "make yourself into a rug on which the others may walk softly." And he immediately added: "I am not simply being poetic. It has to be a reality! It's hard, as sanctity is hard; but it's also easy, because, I insist, sanctity is within everyone's reach."[14]

The anniversary of 14 February 1930 makes present to us the essential contribution that women are called to make to the family atmosphere in their own home, in places where they work, in the professional and social associations they take part in. Perhaps you fail to realize it, my

daughters; but the way you present yourselves in society—your modest and elegant bearing, your good manners with others, your smile—just as the cleanliness and care of your home, are a wonderful way to show others how marvelous it is to realize we are children of God. Thus you bring everywhere the *good aroma of Christ*^[15] that is distinctive of Christians.

"See how they love one another!"^[16] the pagans remarked on noticing the affection with which the early Christians treated one another.

Today too people have to see that we love one another and that we love all those we come in contact with. Let us foster the desire to serve, to gladly spend ourselves for others. Let us take greater care, in this Marian year dedicated to the family, of the small points that build a friendly and positive atmosphere with others, beginning in our own home. It is

very important that each of us strives to create a family atmosphere around us. If we draw close to Mary and Joseph, we will learn so many ways to improve the good dispositions that our Lord has placed in our souls.

The other anniversary that we celebrate on the same day (that of the founding of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross) also speaks to us of giving ourselves joyfully to make the lives of the others peaceful and happy. In *Opus Dei*, as St. Josemaría taught us untiringly, "we are all equal. There is only one practical difference: the priests have a greater obligation than the others to put their heart on the ground as a carpet so that their brothers and sisters can walk softly . . . They have to be firm, gentle, affectionate, cheerful; serving in a special way, always with calm and joy, the children of God in his Work,"^[17] and all souls. They are, in

every situation and circumstance, instruments of unity.

I will pass over the other liturgical and family celebrations that take place this month: the beginning of Lent, the anniversary of the divine locution, *love means deeds not sweet words*, that our Father heard in the depths of his soul on February 16, 1932,[18] anniversary of the *decretum laudis* from the Holy See for the Work in 1947. Each of us can draw out personal consequences in our times of prayer. I could add many other details about how St. Josemaría cared for the home of Opus Dei. But I will cite only one.

When his daughters first went to Japan to begin the apostolic work among women, while they were sailing towards that archipelago, he accompanied them constantly with his prayer and his thoughts. And in his letters to the Vicars, when

beginning the apostolic work in the various countries, he constantly expressed his interest in preparing for the arrival of the women of the Work. He told each one: do all you can to open a path so that your sisters can soon begin; and then Opus Dei will be complete in that place too.

I don't know exactly why our Father brought me one day, once when no one else was there, to the new zone constructed for the Administration, which was the first building finished in Villa Tevere. I had the impression that he wanted to make clear to us that, for everything to go well, in the Centers—after the Tabernacle—his daughters always come first. The contrast was evident because the Administration area was perfectly finished, in comparison with the part of the residence occupied by himself and his sons.

In praying for the Holy Father and his intentions keep in mind the consistory and the appointment of new cardinals announced by Pope Francis for this month. Include in your prayer all those who assist the Roman Pontiff, closely united to my intentions.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, February 1, 2015

[1] St. Josemaría, *Letter*, July 29, 1965, no. 2.

[2] St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, in 1955.

[3] St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris dignitatem*, August 15, 1988, nos. 3-4.

[4] St. Josemaría, *Letter*, July 29, 1965, no. 3.

[5] *Ibid.*, no. 2.

[6] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, December 17, 2014.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] See *Gen* 1:26-28.

[9] See *Eph* 5:31-32.

[10] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 91.

[11] St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, June 23, 1974.

[12] St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, June 4, 1974.

[13] *Mt* 5:21-24.

[14] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 562.

[15] 2 Cor 2:15.

[16] Tertullian, *Apologetics*, 39, 7 (CCL, 1, 151).

[17] St. Josemaría, *Letter*, August 8, 1956, no. 7.

[18] See St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 933.

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