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Letter from the Prelate (November 2006)

Letter of Bishop Javier Echevarría to the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei. Among other topics, the Prelate speaks of the communion of the saints.

11/07/2006

The month of November takes its spiritual tone from the two days with which it begins: the Solemnity of All Saints and the commemoration of the faithful departed. **The mystery**

**of the communion of saints
illuminates this month and the
whole of the last part of the
liturgical year in particular,
directing our meditation to the
earthly destiny of man in the light
of Christ's Pasch.[1]**

The Church is growing not only in this world, but above all in the next. Thus it presents us today's great feast, when we recall the immense multitude of souls who, after having passed through this world, now enjoy the eternal happiness of contemplating God face to face in heaven. Tomorrow, on the second, we will commemorate the dead who are still being purified in purgatory, preparing themselves for the moment when Jesus will say to them: *enter into the joy of your master.* [2] All of us together form the Mystical Body of Christ, whose Head is the incarnate Word: with him and under him we present to God the Father an

unending song of glory, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The consideration of this mystery of our faith has to move us to thank God for his goodness and for the constant company of the saints, striving to draw greater benefit from this very consoling truth.

Finding strength in this reality, our founder always sought—besides the protection of the saints in heaven and his ***good friends the souls in purgatory*** [3] —the prayer and mortification of those he was in contact with. Especially in the first years of Opus Dei, faced with the immense mission our Lord had entrusted to him, he confidently “begged” for prayers and sacrifices from the poor and sick in Madrid, convinced that ***after the prayer of priests and of consecrated virgins, the prayer most pleasing to God is that of children and of the sick.***[4]

These reflections come to mind because this month we will celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the moment when St. Josemaría began to visit the poor and sick in the company of the first young people who took part in his priestly work. Already a few years earlier, as chaplain of the Foundation for the Sick, he had dedicated himself personally to this activity, by which he was also firmly laying the foundations for the Work. But in October 1931, on ceasing to work for that social service institution in order to dedicate his efforts to the Foundation of St. Elizabeth, he felt the need for the intense work with the needy and sick that he had carried out during the previous years. He tells us so in one of his notes, when mentioning his change of pastoral activity: ***yesterday I had to definitively leave the Foundation, and therefore the sick. But my Jesus does not want***

me to leave him and reminded me that he is nailed to a bed in the hospital.

His zeal to serve all souls was shown right from the start. Soon after being ordained he began to organize catechism classes and provide material care for needy families in Saragossa. He visited impoverished areas in the city, asking university students to accompany him; many of them later became part of Opus Dei, moved by the apostolic zeal of that young priest.

As soon as he began to work for the Foundation of St. Elizabeth, he sought a way to continue caring for that apostolate, in which (as he pointed out elsewhere) ***our Lord wanted me to discover my priestly heart.***[5] He knew of the existence of a charitable association, made up of priests and lay people, which looked after the sick in the General Hospital,

near the Church of St. Elizabeth. He contacted that institution and, on November 8, 1931, formalized his way of assisting. On Sunday afternoons he would go to the hospital to provide whatever services the patients needed. There he met some of the first people who later saw that their path as faithful in the Church was to be found in the Work.

I mention these details because nothing that refers to St. Josemaría is without significance for the faithful of the Prelature. We see faithfully reflected in even the smallest circumstances of his life the spirit of the Work, which each of us must take up, conserve, and transmit with veneration to succeeding generations. Are we charitable men and women? How much do we pray for the needy throughout the world? Do we offer mortifications, specific acts of detachment in accord with each one's real possibilities, in order

to help these brothers and sisters of ours?

I want to return now to the theme of this letter: the importance of living the Communion of Saints, not only through prayer, but also through the offering of suffering and sacrifices. Let us be generous, my daughters and sons, in offering our Lord with a smile everything we find annoying; let us ask the sick to joyfully offer to Jesus their sufferings and infirmities, knowing that thus, besides accumulating merit for eternal life, they will collaborate decisively in the establishment of God's kingdom on earth and assist the apostolate. We have a great treasure in those who are afflicted by some infirmity. Treat each of them as you would our Lord. See in them Jesus himself.

The consideration of this reality will also nourish our hope when the forces of evil present themselves

with greater virulence in the world, perhaps opening a door to pessimism. Let us not give way to this temptation, my daughters and sons! Never forget **the great reality of the communion of the universal Church, of all peoples, the network of Eucharistic communion, which transcends the frontiers of cultures, of civilizations, of peoples, of times. This communion, these “islands of peace” exist in the Body of Christ. They truly exist. And they are forces for peace in the world. If we look at history, the Pope said recently, we can see that the great saints of charity have created “an oasis” of God’s peace in the world; they have enkindled anew its light and been a force for reconciliation and peace. There have been martyrs who have suffered with Christ, who have given this witness of peace, of a love that sets a limit to violence.**[6]

During my recent trip to Lebanon , I saw once again the strength of this communion in Christ of prayer and sacrifice. People there told me that, during the recent war, they could “feel” that many people were praying for them. Thus was fulfilled, once more, what our Father wrote in *The Way: Live a special Communion of Saints: and, in the moments of interior struggle just as in the hours of professional work, each of you will feel the joy and the strength of not being alone.*[7]

We also commemorate this month the announcement of Opus Dei’s being erected as a personal Prelature by our beloved John Paul II. I am a witness to how Saint Josemaría prayed for this intention, and how Don Alvaro “took up the baton,” also in this matter. I recall very vividly Don Alvaro’s visit to the Altar of the Miraculous Medal, here in Rome, to give thanks for this step. Now it is

our turn to give our lives, for this long-hoped for recognition: unite yourselves, please, to my intention. And also pray for the faithful of the Prelature who will be ordained as deacons on the 25th.

[1] Benedict XVI, *Homily*, November 11, 2005.

[2] *Mt 25:21*.

[3] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 571.

[4] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 98.

[5] *Ibid.*, no. 731.

[6] Benedict XVI, *Homily*, July 23, 2006.

[7] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 545.

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november-2006/ (04/04/2025)