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Letter from the Prelate (March 2016)

The Prelate speaks about some of the spiritual works of mercy, especially spreading peace to others, and points to the example of Blessed Alvaro.

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

Several days ago, I conferred the sacrament of the diaconate on six

brothers of yours, Associates of the Prelature, who will eventually be ordained priests. Join me in giving thanks for this gift from Heaven. And let us beseech God that there never be lacking, in the Church and in the Work, faithful ministers, whose only and exclusive concern is the good of souls. Let us take advantage of this Year of Mercy to intensify our petition for the Church and the world, closely united to the Pope.

“God’s mercy transforms human hearts; it enables us, through the experience of a faithful love, to become merciful in turn. In an ever new miracle, divine mercy shines forth in our lives, inspiring each of us to love our neighbor and to devote ourselves to what the Church’s tradition calls the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.”[1]

In the course of these months, let us reflect on how our love for God leads

us to be concerned about others, about their spiritual and material welfare. The works of charity show the truth of our love for God, as Saint John teaches: *If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.*[2]

On the upcoming 11th of March, the anniversary of Don Alvaro's birth, we will joyfully remember this good and faithful servant of God. If the Church declared him blessed and raised him to the altars, it was because he incarnated, with an unbroken fidelity, the spirit of Opus Dei that he had learned from Saint Josemaría. Don Alvaro never tried to shine with his own light, nor to put himself at our Father's level. How often he told us, with his deep and

sincere humility, that he was nothing but his shadow, an instrument our Founder made use of—because it was God’s will—to continue directing the Work from Heaven!

A small point can help us to grasp this deep disposition of Don Alvaro. When he arrived at a get-together with Saint Josemaría, if anyone placed himself at his side to accompany him, his immediate reaction was to tell that person: with the Father, with the Father! This was always his concern: to direct his sisters and brothers—later, his daughters and sons—towards our Founder, who is the “prescribed channel,” as he liked to say, for getting to know, incarnate and live the spirit of Opus Dei. He never wanted to be put on our Father’s level, because he was aware that God had disposed everything so that Saint Josemaría would be the first and only

figure who fully incarnated the spirit of the Work.

With regard to our Father's practical humility, which was a constant clear teaching for us and, naturally, for Don Alvaro as well, I would like to mention a small incident. After one of the Pontifical approvals of the Work, our Founder listened to the news account on Vatican Radio.

When the speaker began to speak about him, it was striking how Saint Josemaría seemed to shrink up, as though embarrassed. This was a graphic expression of the way he referred to himself, with words of the liturgy taken from one of the hymns recited on a Eucharistic feast: *servus pauper et humilis*,^[3] I am nothing but a poor and humble servant.

I was speaking to you about practicing charity with your neighbor, and now I want to focus on

some of the spiritual works of mercy. When we face God's judgment, we will be asked how we were concerned to alleviate the material needs of our neighbor; but we will also have to answer other questions: "if we have helped others to escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live . . . ; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer."^[4] —

In this list of spiritual works of mercy enumerated by the Pope, we can discover, as a common denominator, the eagerness to

spread peace in hearts. I recall when Saint Josemaría was once asked about the meaning of the greeting that the early Christians used among themselves, and that we also follow in the Work. And this was his answer: “*Pax!* We don’t proclaim it aloud, but we strive to bring peace with us, wherever we are. So when the waves begin to rear up, we pour over our passions and those of others a bit of understanding, a bit of fellowship, in a word, a bit of love. We bring peace with us and leave peace behind.

“*Pax vobis!* Do you remember? *Clausis ianuis*, all the doors were closed and Jesus came in and said: Peace be with you (*Jn 20:26*). At times we too find all doors shut here on earth. But not only shouldn’t we lose our peace: we need to spread it to others: *pax vobis.*”^[5]
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And he added: “Faced with misunderstandings, organized slander, lies and defamation, always preserve an unwavering peace. I would like Christ to teach it to you. My teachers were, first of all, the Christian warmth in my parents’ home. And afterwards—I’m not ashamed to say it, because it’s not pride—the Holy Spirit.”^[6] —

His first successor learned this lesson well, and therefore he strove to attend to the material and spiritual needs of those he encountered on his path. Many of us recall the goodness with which he welcomed those who confided their worries to him, and the peace with which they returned to their usual activities, after a conversation that was perhaps quite brief. Truly, he sowed peace and joy around him, clearly striving to transmit what he had heard from our Father, as countless witnesses confirm.

Saint Josemaría referred to his daughters and sons with precisely these words: “sowers of peace and joy”—the same words used by an old document of the Holy See speaking about the members of Opus Dei. I advise all those who want to benefit from this spirit, whether or not they are faithful of the Work, to strive to remedy the spiritual needs of the people they are habitually in contact with, or whom for whatever reason they spend time with. Be welcoming, ready at every moment to listen to their worries, offering opportune advice if they ask for it; console those who are suffering because they themselves are sick or someone they know is, because of the death of someone they love, or because of other reasons, such as being out of work in the current economic crisis in many countries. Sometimes it will not be possible to suggest a specific solution, but we should always offer them our friendly words, our prayer

and our solidarity, sharing with them in their sorrows and difficulties.

Saint Paul wrote: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*^[7]—

Saint Josemaría said that “everyone needs affection, and we need it in the Work as well. Strive so that, without sentimentality, your affection for your brothers grows. Help them to have God’s life; always try to make sure that they can count on your help, on your affection, on your fraternal correction.”^[8]— This is how we have to behave with everyone, but in a special way—because charity is ordered—with those who are children of God in Opus Dei or with those who take part in our

apostolates, and at the same time with everyone, because we are interested in each and every one.

Blessed Alvaro, following the teachings of Saint Josemaría, remarked that, in order to be sowers of peace and joy on all the earth's pathways, "you have to build up a big storehouse of peace in your heart. Then, from your abundance, you can give it to others, beginning with those closest to you: your relatives, your friends, your companions, your acquaintances."^[9]

In the second part of this month, the liturgy invites us to rejoice with various feasts. In chronological order, the first is March 19, solemnity of Saint Joseph, patron of the Church and the Work, the date on which we renew our commitment of love that unites us to God in Opus Dei. It is a wonderful day to ask for an increase, in number and quality,

of vocations of self-giving to God in the priesthood, in the religious life, and in the middle of the world.

Immediately thereafter, on March 20, Holy Week begins, which will culminate on the 27th with Resurrection Sunday. Let us try to live with renewed effort the final days of Lent; thus we will participate more deeply in the rejoicing at Easter.

March 28 is the anniversary of Saint Josemaría's priestly ordination, which coincides this year with Easter Monday: another reason for joy and thanksgiving to God, for having given the Church a saint of the stature of our Founder, who has opened up to untold men and women, through his most faithful correspondence, "the divine pathways of the earth." And on the last day of the month we will recall the date on which, for the first time, the Holy Eucharist was

reserved in a Center of the Work—in the Ferraz Residence, in 1935. Since then, how many graces has our Lord poured out on Opus Dei and its apostolic works! Let us give thanks, my daughters and sons, for how near Jesus is to us, by putting great care into our Eucharistic piety.

Let us continue praying for the Pope, for those who assist him in governing the Church, for the bishops and priests of the entire world, so that, with one heart and one soul,^[10] they may put all their energies at the service of the whole world, for the glory of God.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, March 1, 2016

[1] Pope Francis, Message for Lent 2016, October 4, 2015.

[2] *1 Jn* 4:20-21.

[3] Liturgy of the Hours, Office of Readings for the solemnity of Corpus Christi, Hymn *Sacris solemniis*, composed by Saint Thomas Aquinas.

[4] Pope Francis, Bull *Misericordiae vultus*, April 11, 2015, no. 15.

[5] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, January 1, 1971.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *2 Cor* 1:3-4.

[8] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, October 6, 1968.

[9] Blessed Alvaro, Homily, March 30, 1985 (*Rezar con Alvaro del Portillo*, “Praying with Alvaro del Portillo,” Ed. Cobel, 2014, p. 44).

[10] See *Acts* 4:32.

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