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Letter from the Prelate (February 2016)

The Prelate urges us to make these words of Saint Josemaría a reality in our life during Lent: “each day is not just one conversion: it is many conversions.”

02/02/2016

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

In a few days, at the beginning of Lent, we will once again hear the cry of the prophet, who speaks to us on the Lord's behalf: *Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.*[1]

The invitation to a deep change is especially timely in the Year of Mercy, a special time of grace for all mankind. What trust and security it gives us to know that “God is always ready to give us his grace, and especially in these times; the grace for a new conversion, for rising higher on the supernatural plane: a greater self-giving, an advance in perfection, becoming more on fire.”[2]

Throughout these months, let us struggle to progress along the path of conversion, a summary as it were of Christian life. As Saint John Paul II tells us in his encyclical *Dives in misericordia*: “Authentic knowledge of the God of mercy, the God of tender love, is a constant and inexhaustible source of conversion, not only as a momentary interior act but also as a permanent attitude, as a state of mind. Those who come to know God in this way, who ‘see’ him in this way, can live only in a state of being continually converted to him. They live, therefore, in *statu conversionis*; and it is this state of conversion which marks out the most profound element of the pilgrimage of every man and woman on earth *in statu viatoris*.”[3]

Saint Josemaría insisted that “each day is not just one conversion: it is many conversions. Each time that you rectify and, seeing something

that is not going right (even though it may not be a sin), you try to divinize your life more, you have made a conversion.”[4]

Each of us needs to rectify our course, to orient our mind, heart and deeds to our Lord, separating ourselves from whatever could lead us off the path or distance us from Him. For we all experience the inclination to sin, as Saint John teaches: *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*[5]

Lent—a special time for prayer, for penance, for practicing works of charity—should leave a deep impact on our soul. The fact that now it coincides with a year destined to

especially proclaiming divine mercy, is a new spur to strive more diligently to behave as better daughters and sons of our heavenly Father, who looks with mercy on each of us. Perhaps this could be a good moment to stop to consider how each of us personally is following the Pope's recommendations for this Holy Year, in union with the whole Church.

I would like to pause here to consider, among the various Lenten practices, one of the spiritual works of mercy: praying for the living and the dead. Prayer for those closest to us and, in general, for those we encounter during our day, is so necessary. In first place, because that prayer expands our heart, seeking to become more like Jesus; and also because it prevents, or at least makes more difficult, falling into an excessive concern for personal things.

It was striking to see how Saint Josemaría strove to pray more for the people he came across; and likewise his constant prayer for the dead caught one's attention, also when he saw a cemetery or a funeral: a disposition he kept up day after day.

He has passed on to us a marvelous example. Whenever he spoke with someone, he would begin the dialogue by going to their guardian angel. If he was going from one place to another, on foot or in a means of transport, he would pray to our Lord for the people he came across on the way, even though he didn't know them and perhaps would never see them again. Each prayer for others meant for him progress on the constant conversion that he aspired to, in order to identify himself more closely with Christ. In his soul he felt deeply that "we cannot think we are already fully oriented towards God;

successive conversions are needed that bring us closer to holiness.”[6]

This disposition makes clear and reinforces the response to the call to seriously seek holiness that we have all received. Pope Francis reminds us of our Lord’s encounter with Matthew. “Passing by the tax collector’s booth, Jesus looked intently at Matthew. It was a look full of mercy that forgave the sins of that man, a sinner and a tax collector, whom Jesus chose—against the hesitation of the disciples—to become one of the Twelve.”[7]

The forgiveness of sins is always joined to an invitation to follow Christ. God does not limit himself to erasing our faults, when we sincerely ask his forgiveness, or when we go to sacramental Confession; he also infuses in us the grace of the Holy Spirit, which consolidates the presence of the Holy Trinity in our

soul. “Each vocation in the Church has its origin in the compassionate gaze of Jesus. Conversion and vocation are two sides of the same coin, and continually remain interconnected throughout the whole of the missionary disciple’s life.”[8]

We are approaching the 14th of February, anniversary of the day on which our Lord showed St. Josemaría that women (in 1930), and later also Numerary priests (in 1943), could be part of Opus Dei. Later, in 1950, he also saw that other diocesan priests could belong to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. Therefore this anniversary should be a day of thanksgiving in the life of the members of Opus Dei, accompanied by the gratitude of so many women and men who are nourished by the spirit of the Work.

An eagerness to bring Christ’s light and life to others is connatural with

the Christian vocation, and a perennial source of joy. Pope Benedict XVI said: “We cannot keep to ourselves the joy of the faith. We must spread it and pass it on, and thereby also strengthen it in our own hearts. If faith is truly the joy of having discovered truth and love, we inevitably feel the desire to transmit it, to communicate it to others.”[9]

Saint Josemaría’s entire life, and specifically his intense focus on God during the days we are now commemorating, is for us a clear manifestation of that reality. His effort to develop Opus Dei was inseparable from his zeal to spread the Catholic faith.

At the same time, this attitude is also reflected in his joy at the variety of vocations within the common Christian vocation. Pope Francis recently expressed his desire that “during the course of this

Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, all the baptized may experience the joy of belonging to the Church and rediscover that the Christian vocation, just like every particular vocation, is born from within the People of God, and is a gift of divine mercy. The Church is the house of mercy, and it is the ‘soil’ where vocations take root, mature and bear fruit.”[10]

Let us ask the Mother of God and our Mother, the Mother of Fair Love, for this grace, accompanying spiritually the Holy Father on his upcoming trip to Mexico, from February 12 to 18. Let us beseech our Lady of Guadalupe that, through her intercession, much spiritual fruit, many conversions, will result from these days, and also before and afterwards, in Mexico and in the whole world.

Years ago, in preparation for the golden anniversary of the foundation of the Work, our beloved Don Alvaro wrote to us: “Ask our Lady to revive in men and women the desire to be faithful to Christ, Head of the Mystical Body, through a deep conversion to the supernatural meaning of the Christian vocation; a conversion that will lead them to the practice of the sacraments, to an interior life of union with God, to fraternal charity, to a docile obedience to their Shepherds, to the fortitude needed to safeguard and spread the faith and sound doctrine, without disloyal compromises.”^[11] _____

Let us prolong this prayer of Don Alvaro; and continue praying for my other intentions, without failing to pray for the sick. Recently our Lord has been calling many sisters and brothers of yours; it’s hard—very hard! But we have to accept *ex toto corde*, with our whole heart, the most

just and lovable Will of God, which besides has the happy reverse side that they are going to enjoy the definitive contemplation of the Most Blessed Trinity.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, February 1, 2016

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[1] *Roman Missal*, Ash Wednesday, First Reading (*Joel* 2:12-13).

[2] St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, March 2, 1952.

[3] St. John Paul II, Encyclical *Dives in misericordia*, November 30, 1980, no. 13.

- [4] St. Josemaría, Notes from a family conversation, October 1, 1970.
- [5] *1 Jn* 1:8-10.
- [6] St. Josemaría, Notes from a family conversation, year 1971.
- [7] Pope Francis, Bull, *Misericordiae vultus*, April 11, 2015, no. 8.
- [8] Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Prayer for vocations, November 29, 2015.
- [9] Pope Benedict XVI, Address at the Inauguration of the Diocesan Assembly of Rome, June 11, 2007.
- [10] Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, November 29, 2015.
- [11] Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, *Letter*, January 9, 1978, no. 13.
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february-2016/](https://opusdei.org/en-lk/article/letter-from-the-prelate-february-2016/) (04/01/2026)