

Letter from the Prelate (May 2015)

Bishop Javier Echevarría advises that we "have recourse to prayer, to mend even the smallest fissure among the members in our family."

05/03/2015

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

The beginning of May, especially dedicated to our Lady in many

countries, reminds us that we have to bring everywhere the atmosphere of Nazareth, the virtues and ways of acting of the Holy Family, in a very special way through the example of our Lady.

Today we are celebrating the liturgical commemoration of St. Joseph the Worker: the man to whom God entrusted the care of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, his two greatest treasures on earth. This feast, a true gateway to the month of Mary, invites us to enter more deeply into the home of Nazareth. And let us not forget that this home continues today in the Church, the true family of God; in the homes of Christians, and in this "small family" within the Church that is the Prelature of Opus Dei.

Throughout this Marian year, let us pray and pray perseveringly in a very special way for the institution of the family, so that it may fully reflect

God's plan and be in accord with the divine model shown to us in Bethlehem, in Nazareth and in every place where Jesus rested from his fatiguing travels. How can we fail to also recall the home at Bethany, where Lazarus, Martha and Mary offered the Master a place to restore his strength, doing all they could to provide him with the best they had! Therefore, as you know very well, our Father called our Tabernacles "Bethany" and encouraged us to offer continual small acts of attention and affection to our Lord, adoring Jesus with Mary and Joseph.

Although at every moment we strive to reproduce in our homes the atmosphere of the Holy Family, we shouldn't be surprised if, at times, we don't manage to reflect the serenity and peace that always reigned there. Let us remember what happened to Mary and Joseph when they had to flee hurriedly from Herod's

persecution. And let us not forget that in the history of the early Church, along with the harmony uniting the first Christians, there are also pages that relate how at times peace was clouded over by persecutions, by misunderstanding that arose, and even by the bad behavior of some people.

Nevertheless, with the help of the Holy Spirit, they overcame those obstacles and were faithful to Jesus with a serene loyalty.

In the heart of a family sporadic conflicts can arise that disrupt, at least briefly, the atmosphere of affection so fitting to a life of faith. In these cases, as always, we have to have recourse to prayer, to mend even the smallest fissure among the various family members, and also to collaborate for the good of society, since “there is a close link between the hope of a people and the harmony among generations.”[1]

And the Pope added on another occasion: “the bond of fraternity that forms in the family between children in an atmosphere of openness to others is the great school of freedom and peace . . . Perhaps we are not always aware of it, but the family itself introduces fraternity into the world!”[2]

In the final years of his life, St. Josemaría met with many people who told him of their small and not so small problems, and who asked him for advice. Not infrequently fathers and mothers said they were suffering because some of their sons or daughters became rebellious on reaching adolescence. Our Founder tried to calm them and reminded them that, at that age, rebellion has always been a reality, although perhaps in recent times it has become more pronounced. But the remedy, together with prayer, has not changed: “I advise you to remain

calm with your children, not giving them a smack for any old reason. The children become angry, and you get all upset; you suffer because you love them a lot and, besides, you have to calm down again. Have a little patience; reprimand them when you are no longer upset, and you are alone together. Don't humiliate them in front of their brothers and sisters. Talk to them, reason a bit with them, so they realize they should behave differently, because that way they're pleasing God. Thus you are educating them and soon they will be opening up their own path in life and be good Christians and good parents too, if God leads them in that direction.

“So the first step is to avoid both extremes: neither too soft nor too strict.”[3]

St. Josemaría took this way of acting from the Gospel. In his conversations with parents, it is easy to recognize

our Lord's instructions on the charitable practice of fraternal correction, although in these cases it is not given that particular name. In Opus Dei, we all have to strive to put into practice this Christian commitment so closely tied to the teachings of Christ himself. We can understand then why our Father, among the questions he asked to "take the pulse" of a Center, gave importance to this one: "is fraternal correction being lived here?"

We know that St. Joseph received messages from heaven during his sleep; referring to this fact, the Pope said: "You can't have a family without dreams. Once a family loses the ability to dream, children do not grow, love does not grow, life shrivels up and dies."^[4] And he offered fathers and mothers the following invitation, to consider every day before going to sleep: "Today did I dream about my children's future?

Today did I dream about the love of my husband, my wife? Did I dream about my parents and grandparents who have gone before me?"[5]

These are questions that, in one way or another, we should all ask ourselves. Let us consider every day whether we pray for our brothers and sisters in the Work, for our families and for the people in our apostolic work; whether we ask God for the best for them, what they need the most; whether in the prayer we think about how we can help them, and render them services without expecting anything in return: we already have their love!

And with great power, the Acts of the Apostles tells us, the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.[6] At the prompting of the Holy Spirit they overcame with optimism the obstacles to their work;

and they were even filled with joy when they had to suffer attacks, imprisonment, scourging, for the name of Jesus.^[7] Their strength of soul, their becoming stronger in the face of setbacks, was reinforced by the care given them by the Mother of Jesus—the Mother also of each one of them. With the Paraclete's descent at Pentecost, they drew close to her with greater filial trust. "The prayer of the disciples," wrote our Father in this regard, "accompanied the prayer of Mary: it was the prayer of a united family."^[8] This is what we have to do, especially during our traditional May pilgrimage, which this year has a unique tone: placing trustingly in our Mother's hands the Church's prayer for the fruit of the Synod on the Family that will be held in October.

Moreover, tomorrow is the 80th anniversary of the day this custom in the Work of the May pilgrimage

began, which millions of people throughout the world have now made their own. In one of his last Marian visits to the Shrine of Our Lady of Sonsoles, St. Josemaría recalled that May 2, 1935, after several decades had gone by: "Pray a lot to our Lady in the month about to begin. The May pilgrimages are truly marvelous. Yesterday I was in Sonsoles and I was considering that if all the people who during the month of May do a pilgrimage, all over the world (in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in the Americas, and in Oceania); if all these people were to go to Sonsoles one after another, there would be people coming and going to this shrine of our Lady, without interruption, from the 1st of January to the 31st of December."[9]

With everyone's piety and effort, closely united to the Pope, to the bishops and to all Catholics, let us raise up an intense petition for the

Church, for the world, for families, for civil society. Thus the personal and corporative activities in the service of souls will develop more fully and be filled with effectiveness. Our Father said that “all apostolic tasks and the instruments to get them going are *onus et honor*, a burden and an honor . . . of the Numeraries, the Associates, and the Supernumeraries; and also of the Cooperators. Anyone who thought that these undertakings are only the concern of Numeraries would be mistaken and would have bad spirit and little generosity. We always have to be able to say, when speaking about our apostolic endeavors, what we read of in the *Acts*: *multitudinis autem credentium erat cor unum et anima una* (*Acts 4:32*), the multitude of believers had but one heart and soul.”[10]

In the second last week of April I was in Valencia, where—at the Cardinal

Archbishop's invitation—I celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving in the Cathedral for the beatification of Don Alvaro and gave a conference on his work in the Second Vatican Council. I also had a chance to be with many of my daughters and sons, and with people of all ages who take part in the Work's apostolic activities. Help me to thank God for the spiritual fruit he has drawn from these days. Accompany me also in giving thanks for the priestly ordination of a good group of your Numerary brothers, on the upcoming 9th, in St. Eugene's Basilica. *Deo omnis gloria!*

I will end, my daughters and sons, by reminding you of St. Josemaría's novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe, in May 1970. He went there to pray for the Church, for the Holy Father, for Opus Dei. And how much fruit resulted! It will continue to be abundant, through God's goodness and the intercession of our Lady, if

we strive each day to follow in our Father's footsteps, as Don Alvaro did so loyally. Let us go to his intercession, especially on the 12th, the day we will celebrate his liturgical memorial for the first time.

With all my affection, I bless you and once again ask for your prayers,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, May 1, 2015

[1] Pope Francis, Address in a general audience, February 11, 2015.

[2] Pope Francis, Address in a general audience, February 18, 2015.

[3] St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, November 24, 1972.

[4] Pope Francis, Meeting with families in the Philippines, January 16, 2015.

[5] Ibid.

[6] *Acts* 4:33.

[7] See *Acts* 5:41.

[8] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 141.

[9] St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, April 29, 1969.

[10] St. Josemaría, *Letter*, May 31, 1954, no. 34.
