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Letter from the Prelate (April 2012)

In the context of Holy Week, the hundredth anniversary of St. Josemaría's First Holy Communion, on April 23, leads the Prelate to reflect on the meaning of the Eucharist.

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

I am writing to you at the beginning of Holy Week. From Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which we

celebrate today, to his resurrection on Easter morning, the Church relives the great mysteries of our redemption in the liturgy—to which we all unite ourselves. Let us begin then with a deep act of thanksgiving to God for the great wonders he has carried out for mankind. And let us prepare ourselves with growing intensity to accompany our Lord in the Holy Triduum, drawing close to him in those sad hours of his self-giving for us, in order to take part also in his glorious exaltation.

“In thinking about Christ’s death,” said St. Josemaría, “we find ourselves invited to take a good hard look at our everyday activities and to be serious about the faith we profess. Holy Week cannot be a kind of ‘religious interlude’—time taken out from a life completely caught up in human affairs. It must be an opportunity to understand more profoundly the love of God, so that

we'll be able to show that love to other people through what we do and say." [1] Our active and loving participation in the liturgical ceremonies during these days, offers us the best way of staying close to Jesus in those long moments of his anguish and suffering. Thus Holy Week will not be reduced to "a kind of commemoration. It means contemplating the mystery of Jesus Christ as something which continues to work in our souls." [2]

Let us foster in our heart a deep communion with the whole Church, which from one end of the globe to the other celebrates these divine mysteries with piety and recollection. Let us pray especially for those who will receive baptism at the Easter Vigil, and for everyone else, so that moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit we may all draw closer to God during these days, with determination to follow Christ with

full self-giving. “Let us put aside the more superficial aspects of the question and go right to the core, to what is really important. Look: what we have to try to do is to get to heaven. If we don’t, nothing is worthwhile. Faithfulness to Christ’s doctrine is absolutely essential to our getting to heaven. To be faithful it is absolutely essential to strive doggedly against anything that blocks our way to eternal happiness.”

[3]

Jesus began the Holy Triduum by gathering with his apostles in the Cenacle at Jerusalem. *Desiderio desideravi hoc Pascha manducare vobiscum, antequam patiar* ; [4] I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. These words from St. Luke’s narrative of the Last Supper make abundantly clear the infinite love in Christ’s Heart for mankind, his vivid awareness that his “hour” had

arrived, the moment of the salvation of the human race, so long awaited. “Jesus approached that hour with eager desire,” says Benedict XVI. “In his heart he awaited the moment when he would give himself to his own under the appearance of bread and wine. He awaited that moment which would in some sense be the true messianic wedding feast: when he would transform the gifts of this world and become one with his own, so as to transform them and thus inaugurate the transformation of the world. In this eager desire of Jesus we can recognize the desire of God himself—his expectant love for mankind, for his creation. A love which awaits the moment of union, a love which wants to draw mankind to itself and thereby fulfill the desire of all creation, for creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the children of God (cf. *Rom* 8:19).” [5]

How can we fail also to consider our Lord's great desire to find a loving response on our part? However, those alongside him were not aware of the transcendence of those events, as we see in the fact that it was precisely then that they argued over who should be considered the greatest among them. [6] Although undoubtedly deeply moved by Jesus' words and actions (as St. John suggests in his detailed account of the farewell discourse of our Lord, at the end of that family gathering), they as yet did not fully understand the meaning of all that was taking place before their eyes. That mission was reserved to the Holy Spirit, who would be sent at Pentecost. What does Christ's Passion say to us, my daughters and sons? With what devotion do we look at the Cross?

We who are Christians in the 21st century, with a two thousand year history of faith and Eucharistic piety,

who have received the Paraclete at Baptism, are not in the same situation as those first disciples. We know that, at the Last Supper, Christ “anticipated his death and resurrection by giving his disciples, in the bread and wine, his very self, his body and blood as the new manna (cf. *Jn* 6:31-33). The ancient world had dimly perceived that man's real food—what truly nourishes him—is ultimately the *Logos* , eternal wisdom. This same *Logos* now truly becomes food for us—as love. The Eucharist draws us into Jesus’ act of self-oblation.” [7]

It should be easy to fill ourselves with wonder and gratitude in the face of God’s self-lowering in the Eucharist. But often this does not happen. Why this lack of love, on seeing Christ’s love? Why this coldness in our heart, when the Heart of the Master is enkindled with flames of love? “Jesus desires us, he

awaits us. But what about ourselves? Do we really desire him? Are we anxious to meet him? Do we desire to encounter him, to become one with him, to receive the gifts he offers us in the Holy Eucharist? Or are we indifferent, distracted, busy about other things?” [8]

These are questions that the Vicar of Christ addresses to all Catholics—questions that await a personal answer, a commitment, from each and every one of us. Let us sincerely ask the Holy Spirit to draw forth that response from the depths of our heart and to teach us how to welcome his grace generously, with a complete self-giving to our Lord: *love is repaid with love* .

In just three weeks, on April 23, we will commemorate the centennial of St. Josemaria’s First Holy Communion. This date should be a spur to his daughters and sons in

Opus Dei to be more attentive and have greater piety in our participation at Mass, and especially in receiving Holy Communion.

It would be impossible to mention here all the advice that our beloved Father gave us for receiving our Lord with greater benefit each day. Those of us who had the good fortune of contemplating from close up how he prepared for the Holy Sacrifice, how he celebrated it, how he received Communion and gave thanks afterward, cannot find words to express the love that, without any showy manifestations, overpowered him at those moments. I will limit myself, then, to sketching out a few broad brush strokes that will help us to go more deeply into some aspects of our holy Founder's Eucharistic piety, and thus to improve in how we approach Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

On April 23, 1963, he told us: “for me today is a very big feast.” He suggested that we help him give thanks to God for that great gift from Heaven: “because He wanted to come and make himself the owner of my heart.” [9] He was very grateful to the Holy Pontiff Pius X, who in the first years of the twentieth century had issued new norms on First Holy Communion, establishing the minimum requirements for children to approach the Holy Table. [10] He always recalled that he received our Lord for the first time at the age of ten. “In those years,” he remarked, “despite the indications of Pius X, it was unheard of to make one’s First Holy Communion at that age. Now it is usual to do it earlier. An elderly Piarist priest, a pious, simple and good man, prepared me. He taught me the prayer for spiritual communion.” [11]

That first encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist left a deep mark on his soul. Every year he prepared for that much-loved anniversary in advance. And often he recalled those moments with great gratitude, marveling at God's goodness, who wants to draw so close to his creatures.

But he did not do this only when he was old, although naturally, with the passage of the years, after having considered those favors of our Lord a thousand and one times, his expressions of gratitude became more and more refined. At times he made a remark that is quite striking, especially when we remember that he began to formulate these reflections when still very young.

“Even as a child I understood perfectly the reason for the Eucharist. It's an emotion that we've all experienced, wanting to stay forever with those we love. It's like a mother's love for her child: I could

eat you up with kisses, she says. I could eat you up: I could transform you into my own being.” [12]

Only Christ’s love for each of us, greater than that of all fathers and mothers for their children, is powerful enough to be the supreme way to make a reality of this aspiration for definitive union between people who love one another. “Our Lord has said the same to us: take me, eat me! It couldn’t be more human. But we don’t ‘humanize’ God our Lord when we receive him. It is he who divinizes us, who exalts us, who raises us up. Jesus Christ does what it is impossible for us to do: he ‘supernaturalizes’ our lives, our actions, our sacrifices. We are divinized. There you have the reason for my life.” [13]

My daughters and sons, let us prepare ourselves as well as possible

to receive Communion. Our efforts will always fall short, but this shouldn't cause us to become upset. Truly we are unworthy to receive our Lord in our soul and body, but he said that it is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. [14] He is the one who, by coming to us frequently (daily if possible), makes each of us worthy of his love.

“Therefore, when a soul is in the state of grace—and it is a soul in love with God—one shouldn't think that one isn't prepared to go to Communion. Because as we work to open other fronts in this war of peace and goodness in the world, we are preparing ourselves wonderfully.” [15]

At the beginning of the year I suggested that, if you like, you should frequently recite the aspiration that our Father took from the Gospel, from the lips of the apostle St. Thomas, and that he repeated daily

in his heart at Mass: *Dominus meus et Deus meus!* [16] My Lord and my God! This marvelous act of faith in Christ's real presence under the sacramental species can spur us to prepare ourselves better to receive Communion. We have to love our Lord a lot, and be very pious; we need to treat him as well as possible on the altar and in the tabernacle, and love him also for those who do not love him, and make reparation for those who offend him. "God our Lord wants us to tell him, as we receive him each morning: Lord, I believe that it is You. I believe that you are really hidden in the sacramental species! I adore you, I love you! And when you visit him in the oratory, repeat it to him again: Lord, I believe that you are really present! I adore you, I love you! This is what it means to have affection for our Lord. Thus we will come to love him more each day.

“Then, continue loving him throughout the day, thinking about and acting on this consideration: I am going to finish things well out of love for Jesus, who is presiding over us from the tabernacle. Love Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament very much, and try to bring many souls to love him. Only if you foster this concern in your souls, will you know how to teach others, because you will be giving what you live, what you have, what you are.” [17]

That day is also the anniversary of our Father’s Confirmation. He received it in 1902, a few months after his birth. It wasn’t unusual in Spain back then for bishops to impart this sacrament during their pastoral visits to parishes, both to children and to adults who hadn’t received it. Thus, from a very early age, the Holy Spirit was carrying out his work in our Father’s soul with greater intensity, preparing him to

receive very fruitfully the graces he was going to grant him later on.

In one of his meetings with people from all walks of life, St. Josemaría was asked about the difference between receiving Christ in Communion and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the soul through grace. Right away, as something deep in his soul, he gave the following answer: “You will realize that difference at once, if you consider that in the Holy Eucharist ... the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity is truly present, who has become Man for us: Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. We receive him in this way, but our nature quickly destroys the sacramental species and, from that moment, the Eucharistic presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament disappears.

“But afterwards God remains with us, if we do not expel him by mortal sin. Through grace, the Holy Spirit

comes to dwell within us, and therefore the entire Trinity, because there is only one God in three distinct Persons. Where one Person is acting, the Blessed Trinity, the one God, is present.” [18]

Let us strive throughout the day, my daughters and sons, not to lose our awareness of God’s indwelling in our soul; moreover, we can constantly increase it by acts of faith and love, by spiritual communions and invocations of our Lady, which will help us give thanks to Jesus for having come sacramentally to our soul and to prepare for Communion the following day.

Let us not stop praying for the Pope, especially on the 19th, the seventh anniversary of his election, and also on the 16th, his 85th birthday. Let us repeat with faith the prayer from the *Preces* that our Father took from the Church’s liturgical heritage: *Dominus*

conservet eum, et vivificet eum, et beatum faciat eum in terra, et non tradat eum in animam inimicorum eius . [19]

I also entrust myself to your prayers, especially on the coming anniversary of my election and appointment as Prelate, on the 20th. Thus we will remain *consummati in unum* , [20] in a union of hearts and intentions with St. Josemaría, who blesses all of us from Heaven. And pray for the trip to Cameroon that I hope to make during Easter week.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, April 1, 2012

Footnotes:

[1] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 97.

[2] *Ibid.*, no. 96.

[3] *Ibid.*, no. 76.

[4] *Lk* 22:15.

[5] Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass
In Cena Domini, April 21, 2011.

[6] Cf. *Lk* 22:24.

[7] Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus
Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, no.
13.

[8] Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass
In Cena Domini, April 21, 2011

[9] St. Josemaría, Notes from a family
gathering, April 23, 1963.

[10] Cf. St. Pius X, decree *Quam
Singulari*, August 8, 1910, norm I.

[11] St. Josemaría, Notes from a
family gathering, in the year 1966.

[12] St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, April 14, 1960.

[13] *Ibid.* [14] Cf. *Mt* 9:12.

[15] St. Josemaría, notes taken from a meditation, May 28, 1964.

[16] *Jn* 20:28.

[17] St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, April 4, 1970.

[18] St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, April 13, 1972.

[19] Cf. *Ps* 40 [41]:3.

[20] *Jn* 17:23.

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