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Letter from the Prelate (August 2008)

Following the Holy Father, the Prelate invites us to consider St. Paul's teachings and draw practical consequences for our lives: "Who is Paul? What does he say to me?"

08/07/2008

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

I send you these lines from Manila, one of the stops on the trip I am making through countries of Asia

and Oceania. In every place, I have been able to see the evidence of my daughters' and sons' love of God and apostolic vibration. While not putting myself at his level, I understand and make my own St. Paul's words: *We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*[1]

Unite yourselves to my thanksgiving and repeat many times that *gratias tibi, Deus, gratias tibi!* that came so naturally to our Father's lips, when he looked at this *little piece* of the Church which is the Prelature of Opus Dei.

While we are in this year especially dedicated to the Apostle of the Gentiles, we remember well that at its inauguration the Roman Pontiff suggested: "Let us not ask ourselves only: *who was Paul?* Let us ask

ourselves above all: who is Paul? What does he say to me?"[2] Taking the well-known text to the Galatians, *the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*, [3] the Holy Father added: "All Paul's actions begin from this center. His faith is the experience of being loved by Jesus Christ in a very personal way. It is awareness of the fact that Christ did not face death for something anonymous but rather for love of him—of Paul—and that, as the Risen One, he still loves him." [4] Yes, with this very love he has sought us out.

After the meeting on the road to Damascus, a meeting which completely revolutionized Paul's life, Christ became the focal point of Paul's life and work, and to such an extent that the apostle could affirm in all truth, *mihi vivere Christus est*, [5] for me to live is Christ. He explains this graphically to the

Christians at Philippi: *Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.*[6]

This teaching is valid for all Christians and always timely. "It is important to realize what a deep effect Jesus Christ can have on a person's life, hence, also on our own lives,"[7] the Pope emphasized. Let us nourish in our hearts this one desire: to live in Christ, from Christ, and for Christ; to speak to him in prayer and in the Eucharist in order to identify ourselves with him more and more; to bring him to the persons we meet

along our path. Let us reflect that whatever can separate us from God, we should consider as *trash*--as St. Paul did--and with the grace of our Lord cast it far from us.

To reach this identification with Jesus that is the Christian's aspiration and goal, we must, first of all, believe firmly in him, adhering completely to the plans that he has for each of us. St. Paul helps us to understand that faith should not only inform our intellect, but also our will and our heart, our entire being. He taught that justification—the gift of God whereby we are freed from our sins and incorporated into communion of life with the Most Blessed Trinity—precedes any human work or merit. It comes from a pure and gratuitous choice of divine Love. In his letter to the Romans, for example, St. Paul writes: *We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.*[8] And to the Galatians: *[we] know that*

a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.[9]

To be justified means knowing that one has been taken up by the merciful justice of God. It means entering into communion with him and hence participating in his holiness in a way that is real and true. This justification truly makes us his sons, in Jesus Christ, through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Commenting on this passage, the Pope explains that "St. Paul expressed the fundamental content of his conversion, the new direction his life took as a result of his encounter with the Risen Christ. Before his conversion, Paul had not been a man distant from God and from his Law. . . . In the light of the encounter

with Christ, however, he understood that with this he had sought to build up himself and his own justice, and that with all this justice he had lived for himself. He realized that a new approach in his life was absolutely essential. And we find this new approach expressed in his words: *The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20).*"[10]

We have to follow a path of faith, to be able to live in Christ. "It is Saint Paul who tells you, apostolic soul: 'Justus ex fide vivit.' The just man lives by faith.

—How is it that you are letting your fire die out? "[11]

Precisely because we receive this virtue as a gratuitous gift, we have to ask God for it with humility. This first step, which is constantly renewed, becomes more and more necessary

for advancing along the path of the Christian vocation. Do we ask our Lord for it every day? *Adauge nobis fidem!*[12] the apostles cried out to the master, as they realized their limits and imperfections. And we should do the same. What a good aspiration to repeat frequently! Moreover, since we say it in the first person plural, we open ourselves up to others: we recognize that we are children of the same heavenly Father, brothers and sisters in Christ. Our prayer is more easily heard, because we are struggling not to close ourselves in the circle of our own "I" which is the great enemy of identification with Jesus Christ, but to revolve around God and to think of others for God.

St. Josemaría was firmly convinced of this point. By struggling to behave like this, he said, we clear the way to being "contemplatives in the middle of the world." This conviction, he

added, "will lead us always to concern ourselves with others for love of God, and not to think of ourselves. And so, at the end of the day, a day lived in the midst of ordinary affairs in our home, in our profession or job, we will be able to say as we do our examination of conscience, "Lord, I don't know what to tell you about myself; I have only thought about others, for you! Using the words of St. Paul, we could translate this as: *vivo autem, iam non ego; vivit vero in me Christus!* (It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; Gal 2:20). Is not this to be contemplatives?"[13]

In his epistles, the apostle writes innumerable times that the Christian is *in Christ*, or what is the same, that *Christ is in you*. "This mutual interpenetration between Christ and the Christian, characteristic of Paul's teaching, completes his discourse on faith," explains Benedict XVI. "In fact,

although faith unites us closely to Christ, it emphasizes the distinction between us and him; but according to Paul, Christian life also has an element that we might describe as 'mystical,' since it entails an identification of ourselves with Christ and of Christ with us." [14] Thus the apostle can exhort us: *Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus.* [15] Do you understand now that insistence of our Father, who repeated: *Vultum tuum, Domine, requiram?* [16]

My daughters and sons, all of this wonderful teaching is not some pipe dream; it is not just a simple theory, but rather something we feel palpitating and that we have to struggle to translate into practice. With God's grace, moreover, this is within the reach of everyone, just as it occurred with the Apostle of the Gentiles.

The Holy Father invites us to draw two conclusions from this. "Besides, faith must constantly express humility before God, indeed, adoration and praise. . . . It is necessary that we pay homage to nothing and no one else but him. No idol should pollute our spiritual universe or, otherwise, instead of enjoying the freedom acquired, we will relapse into a humiliating form of slavery.

"Moreover, our radical belonging to Christ and the fact that 'we are in him' must imbue in us an attitude of total trust and immense joy."[17]

How our life changes when these lights are kept permanently lit in our soul! Let us push ourselves to make this *good news* resound in the ears of many men and women. We can be sure that the Pauline Year will bring with it a special grace to spread these truths.

In the Virgin Mary, the attitude of faith and the identification with Christ reached the highest summits that a creature can attain. This month, as we celebrate her glorious Assumption in body and soul into heaven, we will be amazed once again as we contemplate the prodigies that divine grace can work when persons correspond to it. Surely in the Virgin Mary, chosen from eternity to be the Mother of the Incarnate Word, the plenitude of divine favor has been manifested. We, her children, brothers and sisters of Jesus, want to be like our Mother. Therefore, when we renew the consecration of the Work to her most sweet and immaculate heart, let us ask that the supplications we direct to her become a reality in each one of us.

August brings with it other commemorations. The 23rd is the anniversary of John Paul II's

announcing his decision to establish Opus Dei as a personal prelature. On August 7, 1931, St. Josemaria understood with new clarity that the faithful of the Work, both women and men, were called to place the Cross of Christ at the peak of all human activities.

Precisely on this date, the anniversary of my priestly ordination, I will have the joy of closing the sessions of the instructional process in the Tribunal of the Prelature for the Cause of canonization of our beloved don Alvaro. I have already asked you on various occasions to pray for the successive stages. The official recognition of the holiness of our Father's first successor will result in great good for the Church and for souls.

I return now to the words with which I began this letter. I travel

through the different places of the Orient with each one of you. This thought fills me with strength and encourages me to repeat what our Father had inscribed above the door of the Tabernacle of the Oratory of Pentecost, in the Villa Vecchia: *consummati in unum!*[18] We have to support one another, so that our personal struggle for sanctity be constant, firm, and joyful. We must begin and begin again each day to learn to love God in everything.

With all affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Manila, August 1, 2008

[1] *1 Thess* 1:2-3.

[2] Benedict XVI, Homily at the inauguration of the Pauline year, June 28, 2008.

[3] *Gal* 2:20.

[4] Benedict XVI, Homily at the inauguration of the Pauline year, June 28, 2008.

[5] *Phil* 1:21.

[6] *Phil* 3:7-9.

[7] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 8, 2006.

[8] *Rom* 3:28.

[9] *Gal* 2:16.

[10] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 8, 2006.

[11] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 578.

[12] *Lk* 17:5.

[13] St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, May 1935/September 14, 1950, note 72.

[14] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 8, 2006.

[15] *Phil* 2:5.

[16] Cf. *Ps* 26:8 (Vulgate).

[17] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 8, 2006.

[18] *Jn* 17:23.

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