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Letter from the Prelate (July 2008)

"Lord, what do you want me to do?" The Prelate invites us to make these words of St. Paul our own, with a readiness to always do God's will.

07/05/2008

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

As I begin my letter to you, once again my heart is filled with the need to give thanks to God for all his gifts to us. On June 26, we have again seen

how devotion to St. Josemaría is spreading throughout the whole world. In many dozens of countries our Father has been commemorated on his feast day, and Holy Mass has been celebrated in his honor in so many different cities. Thus the spirit of Opus Dei has reached more people and new surroundings, helping Christians to find and love God in the ordinary situations of their own lives.

In addition, precisely on that day we received a special caress from God: the conclusion of the investigative process for the cause of canonization of our beloved Don Álvaro, in the Tribunal of the Vicariate of Rome. When, in a few weeks, the sessions of the Tribunal of the Prelature are concluded, the corresponding documents will be presented to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. Later, after the recognition of the validity of the processes, a new

stage will begin: the drawing up of the *positio* on the life and heroic virtues of the first successor of our Father. I ask that all of us may pray insistently for the happy conclusion of these efforts, which will help us to follow very closely in St. Josemaría's footsteps, as Don Alvaro always did.

On the 28th, the vigil of the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, Benedict XVI inaugurated the Pauline Year, which he convoked to celebrate the two-thousandth anniversary of the Apostle's birth. Following the Roman Pontiff's indications, we will strive to get to know his life and teachings better, and to follow his example. I witnessed our Father's immense joy when he contemplated St. Paul's spirit of continual conversion, and this was how he personally wanted to seek Christ.

St. John Chrysostom, who deeply admired and had great devotion to

the Apostle, wrote a panegyric extolling his virtues that can help us a lot. That Father and Doctor of the Church said: “they are not mistaken who call Paul’s soul a meadow of virtues and a spiritual paradise, for he was overflowing with grace and showed the wisdom of a soul worthy of grace. Indeed, from the moment he became a chosen instrument and was suitably purified, the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out abundantly upon him. From there marvelous rivers flowed forth for us—not just four, like the springs of paradise (cf. *Gen 2:10-14*), but many more. These rivers flow forth every day; they do not water the earth but the souls of men, spurring them to produce the fruit of virtue.”[1]

Today I invite you to consider Saul’s response to his vocation. He was a zealous Jew, a faithful observer of the Law of Moses. For this reason, as he himself recalls, *I persecuted the*

Church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.[2]

Nevertheless, on the way to Damascus, *Christ Jesus made me his own.[3]* The risen Lord appeared to him, calling him by his name, and he revealed his plan to him: to make of him *a chosen instrument*—as the Lord also revealed to Ananias—to bring his Name to the Gentiles.[4] Let me ask you: have you frequently considered how he has also sought out each one of us, how Christ Jesus seeks us out each day, asking us for a sincere conversion to holiness?

“While Luke recounts the facts in abundant detail,” the Holy Father comments, “Paul in his letters goes directly to the essentials and speaks not only of a vision (cf. *1 Cor* 9:1), but of an illumination (cf. *2 Cor* 4:6), and above all of a revelation and a vocation....In fact, he will explicitly

define himself as “apostle by vocation” (cf. *Rom* 1:1; *1 Cor* 1:1) or “apostle by the will of God” (*2 Cor* 1:1; *Eph* 1:1; *Col* 1:1), as though to emphasize that his conversion was not the result of a development of thought or reflection, but the fruit of divine intervention, an unforeseeable divine grace.”[5]

Let us often give thanks for our Christian vocation, and the specific way of living it in accord with the spirit of Opus Dei. And let us show our gratitude not only with words but also with deeds. Our daily reading and meditation on the Gospel will help us a lot, since there Jesus continues carrying out a personal dialogue with men and women, as he did with the people he met during his time here on earth.

“What is written there,” St. Josemaría tells us, “is something that you should not only know, but live.

Everything, every point that is told there, has been gathered, detail by detail, for you to make it come alive in the individual circumstances of your life.

“God has called us Catholics to follow him closely. In that holy Writing you will find the Life of Jesus, but you should also find your own life there.

“You too, like the Apostle, will learn to ask, full of love, ‘Lord, what would you have me do?’ And in your soul you will hear the conclusive answer, ‘The Will of God!’

“Take up the Gospel every day, then, and read it and live it as a definite rule. This is what the saints have done.”[6]

How much love and care do you put into the reading of the Gospel? How much are you learning from it? Do you realize that those words are the ones our Lord wants you to hear? Do

you recommend to others this way of coming to know and converse with Jesus?

God's will is made known in very different ways to each person.

Besides the inspirations that he gives directly to souls, our Lord lets himself be known through liturgical celebrations, through hearing someone preach, through spiritual direction, through the normal circumstances in each one's life.

Other people's good example, the duties of one's state in life, the fulfillment of family, social and professional obligations, are also where God speaks to us each day, letting us know his will. Be convinced that through your condition as a Christian, through your situation as a woman or man of Opus Dei, the Master is telling you that you are a light meant to shine forth.[7]

St. Josemaría was once asked: how can we know what God wants from each of us? And this was his answer: “Why don’t you ask him. It’s not a lack of refinement. I assure you that he’ll answer you.” And he continued: “You have interior life, so at any moment you can place yourself in God’s presence: in a church, on the street, in your room, in class.... Wherever you want! Ask his pardon for your weaknesses and for mine, and then tell him, as St. Paul did: Lord, what do you want me to do? But I warn you that our Lord sometimes asks us for things that are difficult.”[8]

Naturally, this requires fostering in the depths of our heart the desire to listen to God’s voice, to not close our eyes to his light. St. Paul, on the road to Damascus, gave himself completely to Jesus’ call. “*Who are you Lord?*” he asked. “*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise*

and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” . . . Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.[9]

It is the docility of Paul that especially stands out here. He lets himself be led by the hand to the city. Then, with a desire to purify himself, he devotes himself to prayer and mortification. Only then, after three days of intense prayer accompanied by generous fasting, does Jesus send Ananias to him. After restoring his sight, Ananias tells him: *The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and*

wash away your sins, calling on his name.[10]

Quid moraris? Why are you waiting to do what God wants of you? I am always moved when I read these words of Ananias to Paul, urging him to begin his mission immediately. Our Lord also addresses these words to us: why are you waiting to put yourself fully into the task I have entrusted you with? St. Josemaria wrote: “Christian faith and calling affect our whole existence, not just a part of it. Our relations with God necessarily demand giving ourselves, giving ourselves completely. The man of faith sees life, in all its dimensions, from a new perspective: that which is given us by God.”[11]

In the immense majority of cases, the Christian vocation leaves each one in their place—in their workplace, in their family—giving a new, deeper vision of the meaning of life here on

earth. How simply and clearly our Founder explains this reality in *Furrow!* “You are writing to me in the kitchen, by the stove. It is early afternoon. It’s cold. By your side, your younger sister—the last one to discover the divine folly of living her Christian vocation to the full—is peeling potatoes. To all appearances—you think—her work is the same as before. And yet, what a difference there is!

“It’s true: before she only peeled potatoes. Now, she is sanctifying herself peeling potatoes.”[12]

What joy we draw from the certainty that in any place, in any honorable work, we can serve God and mankind, we can sanctify ourselves, we can help carry out the Church’s mission! We have to teach this truth to others—by putting it into practice! The Christian apostolate can be well summed up as helping people to

come into contact with Christ, specifically, through our example and our words. Every man and woman is called to have, like St. Paul, a personal encounter with our Lord. And that depends in part on you and on me, because God's grace is never lacking. It depends on whether we Christians take seriously our response to our vocation.

Pointing to St. Paul's response to the divine invitation on the road to Damascus, Benedict XVI says that "from here we draw a very important lesson: what counts is to place Jesus Christ at the center of our lives, so that our identity is marked essentially by the encounter, by communion with Christ and with his word. In his light every other value is recovered and purified from possible dross." [13]

Do we try to speak more intently with our Lord every day? Do we seek

him out in the incidents of each day? Do we prepare ourselves for this by a life of prayer and exact and joyful fulfillment of our duties? Do we say many times with St. Paul: *quid faciam, Domine*. [14] Lord, what do you want me to do? Let us ask the Apostle to obtain for us from God the deep dispositions in our soul that are the necessary preparation for hearing God's inspirations and putting them into practice. Let us savor those words of St. Josemaría: "How beautiful our Christian vocation is—to be sons of God! It brings joy and peace on earth which the world cannot give." [15]

On July 7 we celebrate once more the anniversary of when Don Alvaro told our Lord: "Here I am!" He constantly renewed this response, filled with gratitude to our God, who never ceased to make his will known to him. Don Alvaro spoke to us a lot

about fidelity: it was deep in his heart. Let us learn from him.

In a few days the Holy Father will leave for Sydney for the World Youth Day. Let us accompany him with our prayer and affection. I will be close to him physically because I too will be going to Australia during these days. I thank God for allowing me to be with my daughters and sons in that country and in New Zealand, and to greet many people who receive formation in the Prelature's centers. I will take advantage of the trip to make brief stops in other places in Asia where the Work is carrying out stable apostolic work: India, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore. As I have reminded you on other occasions, I am counting on all of you to accompany me on this trip, united in prayer and intentions.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Pamplona, July 1, 2008

1. St. John Chrysostom, *Panegyric Homilies on St. Paul*, I, 1.

2. *Gal* 1:13-14.

3. *Phil* 3:12.

4. Cf. *Acts* 9:15.

5. Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, October 25, 2006.

6. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 754.

7. Cf. *Mt* 5:14.

8. St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a get-together, April 13, 1974.

9. *Acts* 9:5-9.

10. *Acts* 22:14-16.

11. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 46.

12. St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 498.

13. Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, October 25, 2006.

14. *Acts* 22:10.

15. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 269.

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