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Letter from the Prelate (July 2013)

"I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church." The Prelate stresses the supernatural foundation of the Church in his letter this month.

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

Two days ago we celebrated the solemnity of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, pillars of the faith, who shed their blood for Christ in Rome.

It was in that city that St. Peter established his See, and crowned his earthly life with martyrdom. And thus the Church of Rome became the *Mother and head of all the churches of the City and of the World* . Let us give thanks to God for this plan of his, by which he has wanted to give Christians security in the revealed doctrine and a visible guarantee of unity; and let us learn to give our lives, by dying each day to our own ego.

God prepared the foundation of the Church throughout salvation history. First in the Old Testament, by choosing Israel as his people; then in the fullness of time he sent his dearly beloved Son into the world, with his preaching and miracles, who called the Apostles and sent out the Twelve to continue his redeeming mission. “The Church is born primarily of Christ’s total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the

institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross.” [1] And “when the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth (cf. *Jn* 17:4) was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church.” [2] As our Father wanted, let us be filled with wonder at these two mysteries and ask heaven for a great faith.

The Church depends completely on the Incarnate Word, whom it makes present in the world until the end of time; and it is governed by the Holy Spirit, who lives in its bosom as in his temple. Let us give thanks and marvel at this deep bond between the Church and the Blessed Trinity: it is and we are the Holy People of God, the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the dwelling place of the Paraclete. So it's only logical that, after professing our faith in Jesus Christ and in the divinity of the Holy Spirit in the

Creed, we proclaim the mystery of the Church, into which we are incorporated by Baptism and in which—as the universal sacrament of salvation—the work of our sanctification is accomplished.

I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church . [3] This profession of faith, with the listing of the four notes that intrinsically define the Church and, at the same time, manifest it externally, is the distinctive sign of Catholic doctrine. “These are the essential properties of the Church, which are derived from its nature as Christ intended it. And, being essential, they are also marks, signs, which distinguish it from any other human gathering, even though in the others the name of Christ may be pronounced.” [4]

“Let us strengthen our faith in the supernatural character of the Church. Let us profess it with shouts,

if necessary, for there are many . . . who have forgotten these capital truths. They try to propose an image of the Church, which is neither holy nor one. Neither would it be apostolic since it is not founded on the rock of Peter. Their substitute is not catholic, because it is riddled with unwarranted irregularities that are mere human caprices.” [5]

As will always be the case, these strong and clear words of St. Josemaría are very timely. As Pope Francis recently lamented, “Still today some say: ‘Christ yes, the Church no.’ Like those who say ‘I believe in God but not in priests.’ But it is the Church herself which brings Christ to us and which brings us to God. The Church is the great family of God’s children. Of course, she also has human aspects. In those who make up the Church, pastors and faithful, there are shortcomings, imperfections and sins . . . but what

is beautiful is that when we realize we are sinners we encounter the mercy of God who always forgives.” [6] And God grants us his forgiveness through the Church, which is the depository of the saving word and of the sacraments that sanctify us.

“In the Church we Catholics find our faith, our norms of conduct, our prayer, our sense of fraternity. Through it we are united with all our brothers who have already left this life and are being cleansed in Purgatory—the Church suffering—and with those who already enjoy the beatific vision and love forever the thrice holy God—the Church triumphant. The Church is in our midst and at the same time transcends history. It was born under the mantle of our Lady and continues to praise her on earth and in heaven as its Mother.” [7]

St. Josemaría, who day by day loved the Holy Church madly, taught us to behave in the same way. Right from the founding of Opus Dei, he saw clearly that in order to give God all the glory, to put Christ at the summit of human activities, the path was found in that aspiration: *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!* All united, we have to reach Jesus through Mary, in a unity of intentions and desires with the Roman Pontiff, Christ's Vicar on earth. In *The Way* he addressed words to all Catholics: “*Et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam!* —I can understand why you pause to relish your prayer: ‘I believe in the Church, one, holy, Catholic and apostolic....’” [8]

The Church is one because it is “a people united by the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” [9] and this unity is made up of the triple bond of faith, worship—

especially the Eucharist—and hierarchical communion. At the same time, the Church is catholic, open to all peoples, all races, all cultures. The abundant variety of liturgical rites, of theological and spiritual traditions, of discipline, not only does not prejudice that unity in the slightest, but rather manifests it. Therefore, while “recognizing also the existence, outside the organism of the Church of Christ of numerous elements of truth and sanctification which belong to her as her own and tend to Catholic unity (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8), and believing in the action of the Holy Spirit who stirs up in the heart of the disciples of Christ love of this unity,” [10] one needs to affirm that salvation is communicated to men through the Church. “We believe that the Church is necessary for salvation, because Christ, who is the sole mediator and way of salvation, renders Himself present for us in his Body which is

the Church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 14). But the divine design of salvation embraces all men.” [11]

Do you truly appreciate how beautiful our Catholic faith is? As our Father said, it provides an answer to all the longings of the human heart, by making known to us the Holy Will of God, who desires all men and women *to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth* . [12]

Therefore he offers the Church’s faithful the means of salvation. And also as a result, apostolic zeal, the desire to proclaim the knowledge and love of Christ to all men and women, is connatural to the Christian vocation. Nothing can dispense us from this responsibility; and we should consider: How does this affect me personally? How ardently am I asking for this for all mankind?

Certainly, “those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation.” [13]

Nevertheless, God has wished to count on our cooperation in the work of evangelization. Each in his or her own setting has to strive daily to make this saving message known and to assist in the application of the work of redemption. For as St. Josemaría stressed, we should not forget that “conscience can be culpably deformed and harden itself in sin, resisting the saving action of God. That is why it is necessary to spread Christ’s doctrine, the truths of faith and the norms of Christian morality. That is also why we need the sacraments, all of which were instituted by Jesus Christ as

instrumental causes of his grace and remedies for the weaknesses that ensue from our fallen nature.” [14]

“Thus the Church prays and likewise labors so that into the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, may pass the fullness of the whole world, and that in Christ, the Head of all things, all honor and glory may be rendered to the Creator, the Father of the universe.” [15]

It has fallen to us to live in a time when the need to help build up the Church is more pressing. Let us not become discouraged or give way to the slightest pessimism, when confronting the climate of relativism and indifference—even more, of rejection of God—that is spreading like a stain of oil through so many lands. We who want to take our faith seriously have to joyfully redouble our efforts to bring souls to God, to

the Church. Don't think that this is a mammoth task; we only have to do what is within our reach, determined to direct our life completely to God. The Paraclete is always acting within hearts, stirring up in each one—perhaps at the most unexpected moments—an ardent thirst for eternity, for supernatural life. And we—each and every one of us—have to be ready to second his motions. “Being the Church, to be the People of God, in accordance with the Father's great design of love, means to be the leaven of God in this humanity of ours. It means to proclaim and to bring God's salvation to this world of ours, so often led astray, in need of answers that give courage, hope, and new vigor for the journey.” [16]

I insist, let us be filled with confidence, and not leave any opening for discouragement. Our era presents us with many marvelous

possibilities to learn and disseminate the good. Every day offers us opportunities to show our love for our Lord by speaking about him to those we meet on our path. Let us redouble our trust in him. “God is stronger,” the Holy Father exclaims. “And do you know why he is stronger? Because he is Lord, the only Lord. And I would like to add that reality, at times dark and marked by evil, can change, if we first bring the light of the Gospel especially through our lives. If in a stadium . . . on a dark night, if someone turns on a light, you can barely see it but if the other 70,000 spectators turn on their own light, the whole stadium shines. Let our lives together be the one light of Christ; together we will carry the light of the Gospel to the whole of reality.” [17]

Let us echo these words of the Roman Pontiff, making an effort

every day so that in our work, in our family life, in our social relationships, in our sporting activities—at every moment!—there shines forth the light of Christ’s followers, nourished by prayer and by frequent reception of the sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist.

For the feast of St. Josemaría, throughout the world many prayers have been raised up to heaven, especially in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Be certain that, as our beloved Don Alvaro used to say, they have been “round trip prayers”: our Lord returns them to us so that they produce fruit in ourselves and in our friends.

In the coming weeks I will go to Brazil to accompany the Holy Father at World Youth Day, which will be celebrated in Rio de Janeiro at the end of July. Later, God willing, I hope

to go briefly to Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, to tell my daughters and sons personally, and other people who benefit from the apostolic work of the Prelature, that the Church is expecting a lot from all of us; that Pope Francis, like the previous Roman Pontiffs, is relying on each and every one of us to spread Christ's message throughout the whole world. He told me this in the audience he granted me on June 10. Continue praying for him and for his intentions. As on other occasions, I am relying on all of you so that our Lord will grant abundant spiritual fruit during those days in Brazil and in the other places where I hope to go later. All of these circumstances are an invitation to unite ourselves more closely to the Successor of Peter. We should accompany him as his daughters and sons, united to him and to his service to the Church and souls.

July 7 is the anniversary of the day on which Don Alvaro asked for admission to the Work. I entrust to his intercession the fidelity of all of us to our Christian vocation. Later, on the 16th, we will celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. I ask her that, through her maternal mediation, she may fill us with desires for sanctity and with apostolic zeal.

I am signing this letter in Saragossa. I came here, invited by the Archbishop, to bless the statues of St. Josemaría and of Blessed John Paul II that will be placed for the veneration of the faithful in a church in this city. Then I will go to Pamplona, where I will remain a few days before undertaking the trip to South America. Continue praying for my intentions.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Saragossa, July 1, 2013

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Footnotes: [1] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 766.

[2] Vatican II, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4.

[3] Roman Missal, *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* .

[4] St. Josemaría, Homily *Loyalty to the Church*, June 4, 1972.

[5] St. Josemaría, Homily *The Supernatural Aim of the Church*, May 28, 1972.

[6] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, May 29, 2013.

[7] St. Josemaría, Homily *The Supernatural Aim of the Church*, May 28, 1972.

[8] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 517.

[9] St. Cyprian, *The Lord's Prayer* 23 (PL 4, 553).

[10] Paul VI, *Creed of the People of God*, June 30, 1967, no. 22.

[11] *Ibid.*, no. 23.

[12] *1 Tim* 2:4.

[13] Vatican II, Dogmatic const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 16.

[14] St. Josemaría, Homily *The Supernatural Aim of the Church*, May 28, 1972. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.* . q. 62 a. 1 and q. 61, a. 2.

[15] Vatican II, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 17.

[16] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, June 12, 2013

[17] Ibid.

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