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Letter from the Prelate (May 2008)

In his letter, Bishop Javier Echevarría advises us to draw close to the Mother of God in our prayer and ask her to teach us how to speak with her Son.

05/07/2008

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

Today the universal Church is celebrating the solemnity of our Lord's Ascension. In some places, for pastoral reasons, this feast is

transferred to the following Sunday. As our Father suggested, let us place ourselves among the apostles and the holy women, who are witnesses to that final mystery of Christ's life here on earth.

"It is fitting that the Sacred Humanity of Christ should receive the homage, the praise and adoration of all the hierarchies of the Angels and of all the legions of the blessed in Heaven."[1] We want to unite our whole heart to the exaltation of our Jesus. Let us feel the urgency of firmly grasping hold of the grace of salvation that he has won for us. And with the awareness that he can also reproach us, as he did the Eleven, for our weak faith,[2] let us beseech him to infuse into every corner of our being the marvel of a new life, a supernatural life.

Our Lord has left us. He has left us for Heaven to prepare for us a

definitive home. From there, as the liturgy prays, at the right hand of the Father, the *gratia Capitis*, the grace of the Head reaches all the members of the Mystical Body. Before leaving us, he commanded us to go out into the whole world to spread his teachings fearlessly, without human respect, with faith and optimism.[3]

The disproportion between the mission we have received and our own strength is obvious. We are poor instruments for such a great enterprise! But what assurance we are given by his promise that he will not leave us alone, that he will send the Holy Spirit to make us his witnesses to the furthest corner of the world.[4] Our Lord's Ascension is, for each and every one of us, an extraordinary challenge and a sign of complete confidence on the part of Heaven.

"But you and I feel like orphans: we are sad, and we go to Mary for consolation." [5] St. Josemaría ends his commentary on the second glorious mystery with these words. Let us go, then, to seek consolation from our Mother, so that Mary will keep us faithful, firmly faithful, in our commitment to give witness to Christ and his teachings.

In many places, May is known as "Mary's month." I recall how eagerly St. Josemaría prepared himself each year, in order to give these days a special Marian tone. Let us consider now what "flowers" we plan to offer our Lady in the coming weeks: flowers of refined piety towards Jesus, her beloved Son, and towards his Mother; mortifications in our work, in our relations with others, in the fulfillment of our family, professional and social duties. Although these usually seem to us small things, if we carry them out

with love and for love, they will spread the *bonus odor Christi*,^[6] the good aroma of Christ that every Christian is called to spread by his behavior, so that others may also come to know and love Jesus. Have you already decided on your personal plan to honor our Lady during these days?

The month of May comes filled with feasts of our Lady and with Marian remembrances from the history of Opus Dei. These can help stir up filial sentiments in our hearts throughout the course of this month. I would like this letter to help you in this effort.

Tomorrow, the 2nd, is the anniversary of the pilgrimage with which St. Josemaría began the custom of the May pilgrimages. Seventy-three years have now gone by. Since then, how many thousands upon thousands of visits our Lady has received from her daughters and

sons all over the world, following in our Father's footsteps!

Let us keep alive the family tone that St. Josemaría gave to this Marian custom of Opus Dei, right from the beginning. Referring to the pilgrimage on May 2, 1935, he wrote years later: "It wasn't a pilgrimage in the normal sense: nothing noisy or elaborate, just three of us. I respect and love public demonstrations of devotion, but I must admit I prefer to offer Mary the same affection, the same enthusiasm, in private visits or with very few people—a more intimate sort of thing."[7]

So many interventions by our Lady in favor of her children have taken place! Most of the time, these actions pass unnoticed in the history of mankind. But they bring light into the life of those who receive them. They give strength to improve, to aspire to the arduous—but accessible

—goal of union with God, of sanctity. The effectiveness of these interventions, and the generous responses they bring forth, will be fully revealed on the last day. Let us strive to see every event and circumstance as our Father did: with "eyes of eternity."

But, in addition, our Lady—in accord with God's will—does not curtail her clear interventions in favor of men, especially in epochs when mankind is most in need. Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fatima, and other Marian apparitions recognized by the Church, are only a small sample of Mary's solicitude, poured out on her needy children. Our Lady is a good Mother who employs all her resources to move us to repentance, to lead us once more to Christ, to draw us more closely into God's intimacy.

On May 13 we recall one of these manifestations: the first apparition of the Blessed Virgin at Fatima. May that message of prayer, of conversion, of reparation for sins resound in our ears, a message that has spread so powerfully from that Marian shrine. As is only logical, we especially give thanks for the protection that our Lady gave to Pope John Paul II, saving his life in the assassination attempt on May 13, 1981. And we also remember with gratitude the many times that St. Josemaría knelt before her in the *capelinha*, beseeching her maternal assistance for the Church, for the Work, for all souls. He often said that that place was his "refuge."

I have mentioned Lourdes (this year marks the 150th anniversary of the apparitions), and there comes to my memory the times when our Founder went to our Mother in that corner of the Pyrenees. I ask her that all the

faithful of Opus Dei, and those who take part in our apostolates, may foster, like St. Josemaría, an eagerness to grow daily in our love and devotion to the Most Holy Virgin.

The advocacy of Our Lady of Guadalupe, so closely united to the evangelization of the New World, is also very present in the Marian history of Opus Dei. In the upcoming days we will recall St. Josemaría's novena to our Lady in the Basilica in Mexico City, from May 16 to 24, 1970, which was the principal reason for his first visit to the Americas. I had the good fortune (I see it as a very special grace from God) to accompany our Father in his prayer for the Church and for the Work. Years later, at the end of April 1983, I returned to Guadalupe, this time accompanying our beloved Don Alvaro, to give thanks to our Lady for having heard our Father's ardent petition.

We can draw so many lessons from those days back in 1970. Now I invite you to consider how big our Founder's heart was. I recall very well the last day of the novena, May 24th. As on each of those days, we recited the three parts of the Rosary. Before praying the glorious mysteries, St. Josemaría urged us to pray for the needs of the whole world. Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas and Oceania passed before our eyes through our Father's words, as we placed in our Lady's blessed hands the needs, concerns and anxieties of the millions of people living on the earth. Let us imitate him in his eagerness to extend the fruits of Christ's Redemption to all places and among all peoples.

May 31 is also a feast of our Mother. As soon as the Archangel Gabriel communicated to her the coming birth of the Baptist, *Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country,*

to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.[8] This scene, which we contemplate each day in the second joyful mystery of the Rosary, is firmly etched in your imagination: the arrival of Mary, the words of Elizabeth, the joyful response of the yet-unborn Baptist. Mary remained in the home of her cousin for three months, helping out in all her needs. How much our Lady's presence can accomplish! Commenting on this scene, St. Ambrose writes: "If just her entrance [into that house] was so effective that, upon Mary's greeting, the child leapt with joy in his mother's womb and his mother was filled with the Holy Spirit, how great must have been the effects of Mary's presence over such a long time!"[9]

We can apply the words of this Father and Doctor of the Church to our response to our Lord. If we strive to stay very close to our Lady, during

the month of May and always, how many graces will be poured out upon our souls! Among others, the great joy of knowing we are friends and children of God.

Our Lady's presence in each of our days is the best school of prayer. As Pope Benedict XVI told us a few months ago: "St. Luke says twice that the Virgin Mary *kept all these things, pondering them in her heart* (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51). Mary was a person in conversation with God, with the Word of God and also with the events through which God spoke to her. The *Magnificat* is a 'fabric' woven of words from Sacred Scripture. It shows us how Mary lived in a permanent conversation with the Word of God, and thus, with God himself....Therefore, let us learn from Mary and speak personally with the Lord, pondering and preserving God's words in our lives and hearts so that they may become

true food for each one of us. Thus, Mary guides us at a school of prayer in personal and profound contact with God."[10]

Before finishing, I would like to ask you to pray for the faithful of Opus Dei who will receive priestly ordination in Rome, on the 24th of this month. May our Lord, through the intercession of his Most Holy Mother, make them holy, learned and joyful for us.

In the month just gone by, I made two brief trips, one to England and the other to Austria, to encourage the faithful and the cooperators of the Prelature in their apostolic work in the service of the Church. With the vivid memory of our Father and of Don Alvaro, I went to pray before Our Lady of Willesden, in London, and before Maria Pötsch, in Vienna. Also at these places, as at Aparecida, Lujan, Lo Vázquez, etc., St. Josemaría

put the entire Work under the protection of our Lady's mantle. Let us learn to follow this path of sure help.

In Vienna, continuing the prayer of St. Josemaría in 1955, I called upon the one who is *Stella Orientis*, asking her assistance in the apostolic tasks we are carrying out in many countries of central and eastern Europe, formerly under the sway of Communism, and in the other countries that are awaiting us: Romania, Bulgaria, the Ukraine, Belarus.... Are you planning to accompany all those who are making pilgrimages to our Mother throughout the world? What will you tell those around you about our Lady's greatness and her all-powerful supplication? Have you considered ways to glance at her images with greater affection? Are you going to try to say each Hail Mary of the Rosary with more piety?

Ordinarily on May 1st we celebrate the memorial of St. Joseph the Worker. I ask the Holy Patriarch to teach us to show many signs of affection towards his virginal Spouse during the upcoming weeks, and always.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, May 1, 2008

1. St. Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*, Second Glorious Mystery.

2. Cf. *Mk* 16:14.

3. Cf. *Mt* 28:19-20; *Mk* 16:15.

4. Cf. *Jn* 14:15-18; *Mt* 28:20.

5. St. Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*, Second Glorious Mystery.

6.2 *Cor* 2:15.

7. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*,
no. 139.

8. *Lk* 1:39.

9. St. Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii
secundum Lucam*, 2, 29.

10. Benedict XVI, Meeting with
priests in Rome, February 22, 2007.

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