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Letter from the Prelate (November 2010)

The Prelate invites us to grasp more deeply the reality of the Communion of Saints, by strengthening our union with the members of the Church in heaven, in purgatory, and on earth.

11/05/2010

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

Today we remember the blessed who rejoice with God in heaven. *Behold, a great multitude*, St. John records in one of his visions in the book of Revelation, *which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!"* [1]

We see, as in a great painting, Sacred Scripture's description of the countless multitude of souls who have already reached the happy end of their earthly journey. They form the *Church Triumphant*. With our Lady and St. Joseph, with the canonized saints (among whom we venerate with special joy our Father), millions upon millions of ordinary people live forever in God and for

God, who fought the battles of the spiritual life on earth and, with the help of grace, triumphed. My heart goes out, filled with gratitude, to the women and men of the Work who have served our Lord with complete fidelity, and who are helping us from heaven by their intercession. This reality can't be just a memory for us; it has to lead us to rely on them, in close unity, in order to continue forging the path they so marvelously traveled.

I also recall with immense affection the people who raised and guided us or whom we have known here on earth: parents, brothers and sisters, relatives, friends, colleagues; and so many others who, without having known them, have helped us or whom we have helped by our personal struggle, through the Communion of Saints, to one day attain the precious goal of contemplating the Blessed Trinity. I

suggest, as I have seen our Father do, that you commend yourselves to the intercession of all your forebears, asking for their help.

We cannot forget here that beloved and great multitude who are awaiting the moment to take the definitive step into their heavenly homeland. These are the blessed souls in Purgatory, the *Church Suffering*, who are being prepared to enter into glory. “They are already in a happy place,” St. Josemaría said, “because their salvation is assured, although they still need to be purified a bit in order to see God.” [2] The Church remembers them when tomorrow, November 2nd, she dedicates a special commemoration to them, and asks every priest to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice in suffrage for the dead.

These weeks are a marvelous opportunity for us to greatly

strengthen the Communion of Saints. By our prayer and mortifications, by the offering of our work, and above all, by applying to the souls in Purgatory the fruits of the Holy Mass, we will be able to help them make reparation for their faults and thus reach heaven. How can we fail to recall here our Father's constant devotion in praying and getting others to pray for them—always, but in a special way during the month of November? He urged us to be generous in the offering of suffrages. His greatest aspiration was that, all united, we might succeed in “emptying Purgatory,” through the abundance of Masses offered and the generosity of our sacrifice and prayer. Therefore I ask myself and I ask you: How are we showing our love for the souls of the departed and also for those still living? How fully do we spend our hours and days for others?

These reflections should help us to grasp more fully the mystery of the *Church Militant*, to which we now belong. We form part not only in a passive way, receiving the salvation that Christ offers us, but also actively. For all of us are, and have to feel ourselves to be, the Church, called to contribute positively to the building up of Christ's Mystical Body on earth and to its definitive consolidation in heaven. With words of St. Josemaría, we can ask ourselves: "Do I share with Christ his zeal for souls? Do I pray for the Church of which I form part, in which I must carry out a specific mission that no one else can do for me?" [3]

The Second Vatican Council, using expressions from Sacred Scripture, teaches that the Church is "the building of God. The Lord himself compared himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the cornerstone. On this

foundation the Church is built by the apostles, and from it the Church receives solidity and unity.” [4] St. Peter, in his first letter, says that Christ is the *living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ* . [5]

This happens in Baptism, where we are incorporated into the Church as living elements for the building up of God's house on earth. [6] “To be in the Church is already much, but it is not enough. We must be the Church, because our Mother must never be a stranger to us, something external, foreign to our deepest thoughts.” [7] Full union with Christ is indispensable in order to have life in the Church now and attain eternal blessedness later.

We are not inert elements, but *living stones* that have to collaborate freely and voluntarily in the application of Christ's merits, to oneself and to others. As the Apostle to the Gentiles tells us: *According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done .* [8]

Let us build up the Church then in our life on the only foundation, Christ, with the gold of a generous dedication to God; with the silver of our sacrifice and mortification, with

the precious stones of our virtues, perhaps small, but pleasing to God, if we correspond to his continuous graces. Let us shun, with God's help, not only serious sins; let us also abhor deliberate venial sin and faults and imperfections: whatever cannot be offered to God is "straw," "chaff," brittle material we have to detach ourselves from in order to enter heaven. Hence the need for deeds of penance on our earthly path and for purification in Purgatory after death.

St. Paul adds: *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?* [9] The liturgy emphasizes this reality during the month of November when it celebrates the dedication of the basilica of St. John Lateran on the 9th and the basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul on the 18th. Let us meditate on the symbolism of these feasts, drawing practical consequences for our conduct. As the Preface of the

Mass for the dedication of a church, addressing God the Father, prays: “We thank you now for this house of prayer in which you bless your family as we come to you on pilgrimage. Here you reveal your presence by sacramental signs, and make us one with you through the unseen bond of grace. Here you build your temple of living stones, and bring the Church to its full stature as the Body of Christ throughout the world, to reach its perfection at last in the heavenly city of Jerusalem.”
[10]

Let us pause to consider this stupendous reality: we are all equally members of the Church, although each with our own function. “Every element of the Church’s structure is important,” Pope Benedict XVI stresses, “yet all of them would falter and crumble without the cornerstone who is Christ. As ‘fellow citizens’ of the ‘household of God,’ Christians

must work together to ensure that the edifice stands strong so that others will be attracted to enter and discover the abundant treasures of grace within.” [11]

Let us meditate, my daughters and sons, on this task entrusted to us by our Lord, and fulfill it with a sense of responsibility, like those servants in the parable who negotiated with the goods their master entrusted to them, so as to return them with an increment upon his return. [12] And it will come about; it will be a joyful reality if we remain united to Christ through the bonds of faith, the reception of the sacraments and communion with the Roman Pontiff and the college of Bishops.

Let us consider here an important symbol. I am referring to the altar, which, in the interior of churches, occupies a place of such relevance that it is dedicated for worship

through an especially rich ceremony. In 1958, on the solemnity of All Saints, St. Josemaría consecrated the altars of the oratory of the Holy Apostles in Villa Tevere. As always in every liturgical ceremony, his piety was quite visible. Each rubric and each word was an expression of refined love for our Lord, for having left us the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, as a sign of how much He has loved and loves us.

By this ceremony, the Church reminds us that “we too have been consecrated, set ‘apart’ for the service of God and the building up of his Kingdom. All too often, however, we find ourselves immersed in a world that would set God ‘aside.’ In the name of human freedom and autonomy, God’s name is passed over in silence, religion is reduced to private devotion, and faith is shunned in the public square. At times,” Benedict XVI said, “this

mentality, so completely at odds with the core of the Gospel, can even cloud our own understanding of the Church and her mission.” [13]

Let us always try to reject this mentality, which sometimes insinuates itself into the behavior of many Christians. I mention, in this context, what St. Josemaría said when officiating at the dedication of an altar. “You and I are like altars: we have been anointed. They anointed us with oil, first at Baptism, and later at Confirmation. And we await with joy the moment of receiving Extreme Unction . . . when they will anoint us again. So we are something holy, and therefore our body should be consecrated to God our Lord. Without any silliness, we have to care for the details of modesty, respect our body, put it at the service of God, dress appropriately. In order to do so, we also have to dress our soul with the

good habits that are called virtues, and that are so proper to a Christian.” [14]

We could draw many more consequences from these feasts for our spiritual life. I leave them to your consideration. But I do not want to end without recalling other liturgical feasts and anniversaries of the Work's history in the coming weeks. In first place, the solemnity of Christ the King, on the 21st. Let us prepare ourselves to renew the consecration of Opus Dei to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Let us give renewed meaning to the commitments that we acquired with our Lord when we received Baptism, and that were ratified upon receiving the call to Opus Dei. I suggest that you ask: How are you letting him reign in your entire day? How are you spreading his reign through your work and friendship?

Later, on November 28, anniversary of the erecting of the Prelature of Opus Dei (which this year falls on the first Sunday of Advent, as it did in 1982), let us thank God with our whole heart for this step that was so important. Let us ask especially that, as the Servant of God John Paul II wrote in the Apostolic Constitution *Ut Sit*, the Work may always and at every moment be an efficacious instrument in the service of the Church's universal mission.

A few days ago I was in Pamplona and celebrated Holy Mass on the campus of the University of Navarra. I gave thanks to God, together with thousands of people, for the fifty years since the establishment of the University and the foundation of its Association of Friends. As you can well imagine, the presence of St. Josemaría was constant, also because I renewed the Holy Sacrifice in the same place where our holy Founder

celebrated Mass in October 1967. His words from that occasion helped me to plan my homily, reminding everyone that God calls us to seek sanctity in our daily life.

May our gratitude also be shown in the intensity of our prayer for the person and intentions of the Roman Pontiff, to whom all the faithful of Opus Dei, laity and priests—as all other Catholics—want to remain closely united in all circumstances. And continue praying for my intentions, which have no other aim than to serve the Church and souls better. I feel very united to all of you, and need you to sustain me every day.

There also comes to mind the fact that, during this month, we have another anniversary of the day when our Father found the rose of Rialp. I ask our Lady to give us strength for the journey that we all have to

undertake to reach heaven. And let us remember to pray for the faithful of the Prelature who will be ordained as deacons on the 13th.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, November 1, 2010

[1] *Rev* 7:9-10.

[2] St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, April 9, 1974.

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

[4] Vatican II, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 6.

[5] *1 Pet* 2:4-5.

[6] Cf. *1 Tim* 3:15.

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

[8] *1 Cor* 3:10-13.

[9] *Ibid.*, 16.

[10] *Roman Missal*, Preface I for the dedication of a church.

[11] Benedict XVI, Address, July 18, 2008.

[12] Cf. *Mt* 25:20-23.

[13] Benedict XVI, Homily at the dedication of an altar, July 19, 2008.

[14] St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, October 27, 1974.