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Letter from the Prelate (November 2016)

Writing about the close of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, the Prelate urges us "to personally welcome into our heart God's mercy, and thus to welcome others: to 'bend down' towards them."

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

Almost a year has gone by since the Holy Father opened the Holy Door, first in the heart of Africa and then in the basilica of Saint Peter. As the close of this Jubilee Year draws near (which will end on the solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, on the 20th of this month), we look back at the events that have taken place throughout the world. Undoubtedly, the most important ones have occurred in the intimacy of each one's heart with God. Only God knows how many people have once again been reconciled with him, perhaps after many years of separation or lukewarmness.

Over the course of these months, we have tried to rediscover the mystery of God's Love, hidden in the heart of the Church. Truly, divine mercy fills the whole earth, as the waters cover the immensity of the oceans. We have once again found God's mercy in Sacred Scripture (in the prophets

and the psalms, and especially in the Gospel), in the liturgy, in popular piety... We have also recognized his mercy in our own life: a quick glance is enough to rediscover, with amazement, how close God has been to us and continues being, since he incorporated us into the Church through baptism, and even beforehand.

Jesus has left a clear teaching for us in chapter 15 of the gospel of Saint Luke. There we find three parables about divine mercy: the lost sheep, the silver coin that was misplaced, and the prodigal son. Saint Ambrose comments: "Who is this father, this shepherd and this woman? Isn't it true that they represent God the Father, Christ and the Church? Christ carries you on his shoulders, the Church seeks for you and the Father receives you. One, because he is Shepherd, does not cease upholding you; the other, as Mother, welcomes

you, seeking you without ceasing; and then the Father once again dresses you. The first, out of a work of mercy; the second, caring for you; and the third, reconciling you with Him.”[1]

These months have helped us to rejuvenate our love for God and others, precisely where it may have become a bit weak. Perhaps we may discover that many corners in our soul are still lacking in this quality; but we shouldn't be surprised by this, since the call to be “merciful like the Father” is an invitation for our whole life.

The conclusion of the Holy Year, then, does not mean reaching a destination point and turning to other things, but rather a departure point to undertake with renewed eagerness the path of our Christian progress. From baptism, all Christians possess the common

priesthood, which leads us to exercise mercy with a deep sense of divine filiation. Saint Josemaría insisted that “we have to see in everyone brothers and sisters to whom we owe sincere love and a disinterested service.”[2] This is the Pope’s message, a few weeks before concluding this year of special graces. “It is not enough to experience God’s mercy in one’s life; whoever receives it must also become a sign and instrument for others. Mercy, therefore, is not only reserved for particular moments, but it embraces our entire daily existence.”[3]

Therefore I ask myself, and I encourage you to ask yourselves: What has stayed with us from these months of the Holy Year? Have we become more imbued with the conviction that God looks upon us as a Father “filled with tenderness, with infinite love”?[4] In our daily life

alongside others, in family life, in our professional work, in our apostolate, in our visits to the poor and our assistance to those who suffer, are we striving to make God's Love, manifested in Christ, more present? Do we keep alive the hope that, despite our mistakes, our Lord wants us to act as better transmitters of his mercy? It would be very opportune for us, like our Mother Mary, to reflect on these ideas and ponder them in our heart.

To continue advancing, with an ever more determined step, in this direction along which the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church, I dare to suggest two guidelines that, in a certain sense, sum up the path we have traveled during these months, and that can help us to keep enkindled in our souls the lights of this Holy Year: to personally welcome into our heart God's mercy,

and thus to welcome others: to “bend down” towards them.

In first place, welcoming in ourselves God’s mercy: everything depends on this. When we realize that God is using daily circumstances and tasks to lead us to himself, our piety and apostolic zeal grow. We take refuge more easily in Christ’s hands, with a sporting spirit in our interior struggle, with a renewed desire to bring many souls to him, with a joy that nothing and no one can disturb.

God’s love is both demanding and serene at the same time. Demanding, because Jesus carried the Cross on his shoulders and wants us to follow him along that path, to assist him in making the fruits of the redemption reach everyone. Serene, because Jesus knows our limitations, and guides us better than the most understanding of mothers. We are not the ones who are going to change

the world with our effort. God is the one who will do so, capable of transforming hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

Our Lord does not demand that we never make mistakes, but rather that we always get up, without remaining attached to our mistakes, and that we journey through this world with the serenity and trust of children. Let us meditate frequently on these tender words of Saint John: *By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.*^[5] Interior peace does not belong to those who think they do everything well, nor to those uninterested in loving: it arises in the person who always, even after falling, returns to God's hands. Christ did not come to seek the healthy but the sick,^[6] and he is happy with a love that is renewed each day,

despite our stumbles, when we have recourse to the sacraments as an inexhaustible fount of forgiveness.

Mercy also urges us to welcome others, to bend down towards them; we are able to transmit mercy to others when we have received it from God. Thus, “after having received mercy and an abundance of justice, Christians are ready to have compassion on the unhappy and to pray for other sinners. They show mercy even towards their enemies.”[7] Only God’s magnanimous understanding “is capable of recuperating the lost good, of paying back evil with good, and of generating new powers of justice and holiness.”[8]

At times the weight of our work or difficulties can “anesthetize” our heart a bit, like thorns that choke the good seed. God makes our heart responsive and sensitive, so that we

bend down towards others, not only when faced with problems or tragedies, but also in the multitude of small everyday things, which require an attentive heart that doesn't give importance to what is unimportant, and that strives to give importance to what really matters. God not only asks us to *live alongside* others, but to *live for* others. He asks of us an "affectionate charity that knows how to welcome everyone with a sincere smile."[9]

Therefore let us always have recourse to prayer, especially when we think that a situation or a person is too much for us to bear, entrusting to our Lord the obstacles we find on our path. Let us ask him to help us to overcome them, and not to give them too much importance. And let us beseech him to grant us a love to the measure of his own, through the intercession of Holy Mary, *Mater Misericordiae*.

In his apostolic trip to Poland, the Pope spoke of the Gospel as “the living book of God’s mercy.” This book, he said, “still has many blank pages left. It remains an open book that we are called to write in the same style, by the works of mercy we practice.”[10] And he concluded: “each of us holds in his or her heart a very personal page of the book of God’s mercy.”[11] Let us eagerly fill the pages that God has entrusted to each one of us, without being discouraged by the smudges and stains caused by our clumsy writing. By the mercy of God, the Spirit makes himself present in our miseries, because *when I am weak, then I am strong.*[12] We are strengthened with Christ’s grace and thus can pass on what we have received.

In our attentive service to others, let us not forget (especially on the 2nd, and throughout the whole month) the discreet work of mercy that is so

pleasing in God's eyes: prayer for the deceased. I ask our Lord to grant each of us the grace of living the Communion of Saints with everyone: with those in need of our suffrages, with those who already enjoy happiness in heaven, and with those still journeying here below, beginning with the Pope and those who assist him, including in our prayer all men and women, especially those most in need of this help.

I can't end without thanking God for the recent ordination of deacons of the Prelature: let us pray for them and for the sacred ministers throughout the whole world. At the same time, I renew my gratitude for the fruit of the pastoral trip I made two weeks ago to the new circumscription of Finland and Estonia. Let us pray for the Church in these countries and in the other countries of northern Europe. I

would like to tell you in detail about Saint Josemaria's eagerness—and also that of our beloved Don Alvaro—to see the Work implanted in those lands. I invite you to reflect on this in your times of prayer before the Tabernacle. And may we raise up to Heaven our most sincere gratitude for the anniversary of the Work being erected as a personal Prelature.

With all my affection, I bless you.

You Father,

+ Javier

Rome, November 1, 2016

[1] Saint Ambrose, *Treatise on the Gospel of Saint Luke* VII, 208 (PL 15, 1755).

[2] Saint Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 29.

[3] Pope Francis, Address in a General Audience, October 12, 2016.

[4] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 331.

[5] *1 Jn* 3:19-20.

[6] See *Mt* 9:13.

[7] Saint Chromatius of Aquileia, Sermon 41, 5, on the beatitudes (CCL IX A, 177).

[8] Blessed Paul VI, unedited manuscript, Istituto Paolo VI, *Notiziario* 71 [2016], 7-8 (also published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 2016).

[9] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 282.

[10] Pope Francis, Homily, July 30, 2016.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] 2 *Cor* 12:10

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