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Letter from the Prelate (August 2014)

The Prelate invites us to struggle to win out in all the battles of the interior life, in order to ensure that we win the "last battle."

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

I am writing to you from Central America, during the pastoral visit I

am making to the six countries where the apostolic work of Opus Dei has taken root. And I well understand our Father's words: "I think of the Work and I am 'dumbfounded.'"

Therefore the first thing that comes to my heart is a deep act of thanksgiving to God for the apostolic fruit in these beloved countries. From Guatemala to Panama I have seen with all of you who are accompanying me a marvelous flowering of spiritual life in people of all races and many different languages. For besides Spanish, various indigenous languages are also spoken here. On contemplating this panorama, I have also recalled St. Josemaría's frequently repeated words: "There is only one race in the world: the race of the children of God. We should all speak the same language . . . the language Jesus spoke with his Father. It is the

language of heart and mind, which you are using now, in your prayer—the language of contemplation.”[1] As our Father said in another homily, Jesus “has come to bring peace, good news and life to all men. Not only to the rich, nor only to the poor. Not only to the wise nor only to the simple. To everyone, to our brothers, for brothers we are, children of the same Father, God.”[2]

I will be in this beautiful part of the world for another week. Continue to accompany me with your prayer and sacrifices, with the offering of your professional work and the moments of rest that many of you are taking advantage of during these days. Thus the spiritual fruit will be abundant. Pray always for the Holy Father. This month be especially united to him during his trip to Korea, where he is awaited by so many Catholics and many other people of good will.

As I often remind you at this time of the year, the days of August are rich in Marian feasts. Between the 2nd, commemoration of Our Lady of the Angels, and the 22nd, feast of the Coronation of our Lady, we will celebrate the dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major (Our Lady of the Snows) on August 5th, and above all the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary in body and soul into Heaven. On that day, closely united to St. Josemaría, to Don Alvaro, and to all the faithful of the Work who are already rejoicing in God's presence, we will renew the consecration of Opus Dei to the Most Sweet and Immaculate Heart of Mary, which our Founder did for the first time in Loreto, on August 15, 1951.

In the liturgy for that day, the reading from the Apocalypse shows us a Woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and

crowned with twelve stars, in battle against the infernal dragon who wants to devour the son about to be born from her womb.[3] This figure represents first of all the Church, “on the one hand, glorious and triumphant and yet, on the other, still in travail. And the Church is like that,” said Pope Francis in a homily. “If in heaven she is already associated in some way with the glory of her Lord, in history she continually lives through the trials and challenges which the conflict between God and the evil one, the perennial enemy, brings.”[4] Let us draw from this scene a first teaching that is very clear: the need to struggle without truce to be faithful to God in our daily life, the path of sanctity for us. Almost at the end of his earthly pilgrimage, as a summary of his response to God, St. Josemaría wrote: “this is our destiny on earth: to struggle, out of love, right to the last moment. *Deo gratias!*”[5]

Without this daily struggle (in which there are victories, and also defeats, from which we rise up by going to the sacrament of Penance), we would be acting as proud people. To win out in this struggle, or to recover right away if at some moment we are defeated, we can rely on God's grace and the help of so many intercessors—first of all, our Lady.

“Auxilium Christianorum!—Help of Christians, says the litany of Loreto with confidence. Have you tried to repeat that aspiration in time of difficulty? If you do it with faith, with the tenderness of a daughter or a son, you will discover the power of the intercession of your Holy Mother Mary, who will lead you to victory.”[6]

Our Lady too, during her life on earth, experienced difficult moments and hard trials. But always keeping alive in her heart the *fiat!* she had

pronounced in Nazareth, Mary was faithful to God at every moment. “From one clear light to another,” wrote Don Alvaro, “from one grace to another greater one, and without any kind of hesitation, Mary advanced constantly in her union with God, until the singular and wonderful event that the Church celebrates on the 15th of this month.”[7]

The woman in the Apocalypse is also a figure of our Lady. Like the Church, “Mary too somehow shares in this dual condition. She has of course already entered, once and for all, into heavenly glory. But this does not mean that she is distant or detached from us. Rather Mary accompanies us, struggles with us, sustains Christians in their fight against the forces of evil. Prayer with Mary, especially the Rosary . . . has this dimension of ‘suffering,’ that is, of struggle: a sustaining prayer in the

battle against the evil one and his accomplices.”[8]

Let us listen to some other recommendations from Don Alvaro born of his great love for Mary, following our Founder’s example. “We have to struggle, my children, if we don’t want to be defeated by the enemy of God and of our souls. We can count on all the help of grace and on the most powerful intercession of the Mother of God. We shouldn’t have any fear. What we have to do is to go to our Lord and make use of all the means the Church offers us: prayer, mortification, frequent reception of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Let us tell Jesus that we want to be faithful. And let us tell the Blessed Virgin: my Mother, I want to be faithful to your Son, and therefore I count on your intercession for me. God cannot fail to hear you.”[9]

The great feast of the Assumption offers us the possibility of presenting a wonderful gift to our Lady: the resolution of our renewed loyalty to the Christian vocation each of us has received, made specific in a more determined, more demanding conversion, fighting against whatever separates us or could distance us from God. Therefore, let us put great care into the examination of conscience, especially before Confession. We should ask our Lady to help us “make our life God’s and for God, so that we answer him with a *fiat!* that will be the distinctive feature of our life.”[10]

I was a witness to how Don Alvaro, in his conversations with large or small groups of people, encouraged them to strive to win out, with God’s help, in their daily skirmishes. Although normally this effort is in small things (small points of charity with our

neighbor, the good use of time, finishing each task well...), we have to make a greater effort in these battles as training to win the “final battle,” which will open to us the gates of eternal joy.

Don Alvaro kept very much in mind a teaching that St. Josemaría always stressed, with special insistence in his final years. “In war,” our Founder said, “one can lose a battle, or two or three... In the end this doesn’t matter, as long as we win the final one, which determines the outcome. In the interior life (which is also a war and a battle, as we have just said), it is better not to lose any of them, since we don’t know when we will have to die. Young children, adolescents, very robust persons all depart from this world. And often the old folk keep going for years and years. But no one knows when they will have to give God an account of their life.

“Therefore, since the one who loses the final battle loses the war, when we find ourselves in the midst of these struggles that only God our Lord and each one of us knows . . . when we are engaged in one of these battles we need to remember: this could be the last one, and I don’t want to be so foolish that, by losing one battle, I make my whole life useless.

“So keep fighting, my children, keep fighting! And teach others to do so, because then they will be happy: that is the way.”[11]

Don Alvaro never tired of repeating that God can do everything, and what he asks of us is to work without fear of failure. *Si Deus pro nobis, quis contra nos?* [12] If God is for us, who is against us?, he asked frequently using the words of St. Paul. And he often made reference to the battle of David against Goliath related in

Scripture.[13] He pointed to the disproportion between the weapons of the two contenders: Goliath was armed with a lance, shield and armor, while David had only his shepherd's sling and some stones taken from the river bed.

Nevertheless, fully trusting in the power of God and not in his own strength, David emerged victorious in that contest.

The Gospel for the solemnity of the Assumption contains the canticle of the *Magnificat*, which speaks to us of hope. "It is the virtue of those who, experiencing conflict in the daily struggle between life and death, good and evil, believe in the Resurrection of Christ, in the victory of love . . .

The song of Mary, the *Magnificat*, is the song of hope, the song of the People of God walking through history . . .

“This song is particularly strong in places today where the Body of Christ is suffering the Passion. For us Christians, wherever the Cross is, there is hope, always. If there is no hope, we are not Christian. That is why I like to say: do not allow yourselves to be robbed of hope. May we not be robbed of hope, because this strength is a grace, a gift from God which carries us forward with our eyes fixed on heaven. And Mary is always there, near those communities, our brothers and sisters; she accompanies them, suffers with them, and sings the *Magnificat* of hope with them.”[14]

These words impel us to pray for the men and women who, in various parts of the world, are suffering or are persecuted because of their faith. Let us not leave them alone! With our prayer and sacrifices, although we find ourselves physically distant, we can help them and comfort them

in their suffering, thanks to the Communion of Saints that unites us in the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.

I don't want to overlook the other Marian feast we will celebrate this month, on the 22nd: Holy Mary Queen and Lady of all Creation. "I imagine that coronation," said Don Alvaro, "as if the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Blessed Trinity, were taking possession—even more fully—of the Queen of Angels and Saints: so much so that it must have been like an explosion of light. Our Lady, with her holiness, beauty and loveliness, was raised above all creatures, so that they might honor her, venerate her, and love her with greater strength." [15]

We will reach this happy goal, if we remain loyal to our Christian vocation. With errors and mistakes (as I've already said), but determined

to get up as often as necessary, going to Confession, uniting ourselves to Christ in the Eucharist and having trusting recourse to our Mother in heaven. “Our earthly lives too will end in the glory of heaven, if we learn to travel along this path, struggling for holiness in daily life, a path our Lord Jesus and his blessed Mother opened up for us through the years they spent in Nazareth, and that our beloved and holy Founder so generously imitated.”[16]

On the 31st, in Torreciudad, I will confer the priesthood on two of your Associate brothers. It will be another opportunity to reinforce the unity of the whole Work in the service of our Holy Mother the Church.

Less than two months remain before the beatification of our beloved Don Alvaro. I encourage you to go over the suggestions I’ve been giving you, with the generosity and freedom that

your soul dictates to each one of you: we all have to strive to prepare very well for this time of grace.

I know that many of you will not be able to be physically present in Madrid, for many different reasons: sickness, advanced age, a professional work it isn't possible to set aside for a few days, a lack of financial means for the trip...

Nevertheless each and every one will be very present at that ceremony, and also at those that will take place afterwards in Rome. Your prayer, the offering of your difficulties, your spiritual union with the faithful, cooperators and friends of the Work who will attend the beatification, will be a very effective contribution so that God will pour out his grace abundantly on souls.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

San José, Costa Rica, August 1, 2014

[1] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no.13.

[2] *Ibid.*, no. 106.

[3] See *Rev* 12:1-6.

[4] Pope Francis, Homily, August 15, 2013.

[5] St. Josemaría, handwritten note, December 31, 1971.

[6] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 180.

[7] Don Alvaro, Letter, August 1, 1993.

[8] Pope Francis, Homily, August 15, 2013.

[9] Don Alvaro, Homily on the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary, August 15, 1989.

[10] Don Alvaro, Homily, September 8, 1976.

[11] St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, April 8, 1972.

[12] *Rom* 8:31.

[13] See *1 Sam* 17:39-51.

[14] Pope Francis, Homily, August 15, 2013.

[15] Don Alvaro, Homily, September 8, 1976.

[16] Don Alvaro, Letter, August 1, 1993.

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