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Letter from the Prelate (January 2009)

As the new year begins, the Prelate invites us to consider the wonder of our divine filiation, especially as it is described in St. Paul's letters.

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

During the Christmas season, we also turn our eyes to our Lady, completely immersed in caring for her newborn

Son. How lovingly she takes him in her arms at Bethlehem and looks after all his needs! Later, during the years spent in Nazareth, Mary tried to never leave his side. She helped St. Joseph in the human growth of the Son of God, providing her affection, and she learned from his conduct and words as the first and best disciple of the Master. Now our Lady looks after us—each and every one of us—with the affection and dedication with which she cared for her Son, because on the Cross Jesus confirmed her in her true spiritual maternity over the men and women of all times.^[1] From that moment, Mary has not ceased to care for all mankind, and especially for her most needy children. Therefore as we begin the new year, on the Solemnity of Mary's divine Motherhood, the Church invites us to meditate on our Lady's loving concern for us and to thank her for all her signs of affection.

The Incarnation of the Word, as we profess in the Creed, was carried out through the action of the Holy Spirit, with the free and full cooperation of the Virgin Mary. By this Mystery, which culminated in the Cross and Resurrection, God saved us from our sins and granted us the gift of divine filiation. During the past few days we have read in St. Paul, the great herald of Christ and the Gospel, some words addressed to the Galatians that contain a treasure of doctrine. The Apostle writes: *when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*[2]

In this Pauline year, let us put our hearts into considering some of the principal points that the Apostle to the Gentiles has passed on to us. **We have before us**, the Pope said a few months ago, **a giant, not only in**

terms of his actual apostolate but also of his extraordinarily profound and stimulating theological teaching.^[3] It is he, together with St. John, who has spoken to us the most about the Holy Spirit, about his action in the Church and in Christians. I would like to touch on some aspects of that teaching in this letter, so that we may enter more deeply into the central role of the Paraclete in the intense development of Christian life, the goal to which we must aspire.

Reading the Acts of the Apostles shows us how the Holy Spirit has guided the Church from its first moments. His action, as we read in this book, is clearly manifest in the life of St. Paul. Everything in the Apostle's life, from his conversion to his martyrdom, is marked by the Paraclete's action. Through grace, God chooses and consecrates him, together with Barnabas, for the

expansion of Christianity among the gentiles. The Holy Spirit guides him during his apostolic trips, and spurs him to evangelize Europe; he tells him that he has to give witness to Christ in Jerusalem and even in Rome itself.[4] ***In a word, his presence and his action are everywhere.***[5] The intervention of the Sanctifier in early Christianity is so obvious that the Acts of the Apostles has come to be called *the Gospel of the Holy Spirit*.

Let us never doubt it: we will grow greatly in our contemplative spirit, in our apostolic efficacy, if we invoke him more each day, if we ask him to guide us with his grace. How intent are you to give a supernatural tone to your actions? How devoutly do you pray the *Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto*? Do you feel the need to put yourself in his hands, each time you mention his Name?

St. Paul, in his epistles, **did not limit himself to describing the dynamic and active dimension of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, but also analyzed his presence in the lives of Christians.**^[6] Jesus had announced that the Father and he himself would dwell in the souls of those who accepted his word and loved him. And he added: *These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*^[7] Inspired by God, St. Paul, in reflecting on the Spirit, **not only explained his influence on the action of Christians, but also on their being.** Indeed, it is he who said that the Spirit of God dwells in us (cf. *Rom 8: 9; I Cor 3: 16*) and that "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (*Gal 4: 6*).^[8]

We know that the entire Trinity dwells in the soul of the just person through grace. But his presence in the men and women who walk in God's friendship is attributed in a special way to the Sanctifier. The traditional reason is quite easy to understand: since sanctification is the effect of God's love, it is only natural to attribute that operation to the Person who, in the intimacy of the Trinity, is subsistent Love, the Holy Spirit—just as analogically we attribute creation to the Father and redemption to the Word, although all that God works in relation to the world is done inseparably by the three divine Persons. The Blessed Trinity penetrates us to the very depths of our being, not only as creatures but also by letting us share through grace in the intimate divine life, as children of the Father, in the Son through the Holy Spirit.[9]

As the Second Vatican Council teaches: “Such is the nature and the greatness of the mystery of man as enlightened for the faithful by Christian revelation. It is therefore through Christ, and in Christ, that light is thrown on the riddle of suffering and death which, apart from his Gospel, overwhelms us. Christ has risen, destroying death by his death, and has given life abundantly to us so that, becoming sons in the Son, we may cry out in the Spirit: *Abba, Father!*”[10]

The gift of divine filiation is the greatest gift we could receive from God. **This is our greatest dignity: to be not merely images but also children of God. And it is an invitation to live our sonship, to be increasingly aware that we are adoptive sons in God's great family. It is an invitation, the Holy Father urges us, to transform this objective gift into a subjective**

reality, decisive for our way of thinking, acting and being.[11]

How grateful we should be to St. Paul, God's chosen instrument to make known to us with new splendor this foundational truth of our Christian faith. In his epistle to the Galatians, after recalling that the Word became man in the womb of the Blessed Virgin so that we might become children of God, he adds: *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.* [12] As St. Thomas Aquinas writes: "Just as the effect of the mission of the Son was to lead us to the Father, so also the effect of the sending of the Holy Spirit is to lead the faithful to the Son." [13]

Acknowledging this gift and behaving in a way that is consistent

with it is, as St. Josemaría taught, ***the greatest rebellion of men, who refuse to live like animals, who are dissatisfied and restless until they know their Creator and are on intimate terms with him.***^[14] And he added: ***Slavery or divine sonship, this is the dilemma we face. Children of God or slaves to pride, to sensuality, to the fretful selfishness which seems to afflict so many souls.***^[15]

God wanted to make the real and lively awareness of our divine filiation the foundation of the spirit of Opus Dei. This is what our Founder always told us. He even recalled, as he often said, the exact moment when our Lord engraved this truth with fire in his soul. ***This characteristic feature of our spirit was born with the Work, and took shape in 1931. During some difficult moments humanly speaking, when I was nonetheless***

certain of what seemed impossible (which you now see made a reality), I felt God acting within me, implanting in my heart and on my lips with imperative force the tender invocation, Abba! Pater! I was in the street, on a tram. For the street doesn't hinder our contemplative dialogue. The hubbub of the world is, for us, a place of prayer. I probably prayed those words out loud, and people must have thought I was crazy: Abba! Pater! What trust, what peace and optimism it will give you, in the midst of difficulties, to feel yourselves children of a Father, who knows everything, and can do everything.[16]

St. Josemaría recommended that all of us consider this truth frequently each day. He encouraged us to meditate on St. Paul's teaching: *it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*

and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.[17]

It is always the right time to go more deeply into our divine filiation, but during these days this reality is even more accessible. It is enough to look at the Christ Child lying in the manger, in the arms of his Mother or in those of St. Joseph. Our God made himself a helpless and defenseless child so that we might be, and feel ourselves deeply to be, children of God, and draw close to him without any fear. If ever, for any reason, this is difficult for us, let us go to our Lady and to St. Joseph, asking them to teach us how to draw close to God with the trust and intimacy that they showed him. Let us beseech the Paraclete, who dwells in our soul, to put into our hearts that cry—*Abba! Pater!*—so that, with the gift of piety,

he will make us savor deeply the reality of our divine filiation.

In his catechesis Benedict XVI stressed **another typical aspect of the Spirit which St Paul teaches us: his connection with love. Thus, the Apostle wrote: “Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5: 5). . . The Spirit immerses us in the very rhythm of divine life, which is a life of love, enabling us to share personally in relations between the Father and the Son.**[18]

Let us consider carefully the significance of these words. Thanks to the Paraclete, who makes us children of God in Christ, we have been “introduced” into the beatific and beatifying Life of the Holy Trinity. We, poor creatures, created from the dust of the earth, can beat

with the rhythm of the Heart of God. “The Spirit makes us Christ-like by his sanctifying power. He is truly the form or structure, as it were, of Christ our Savior, and he imprints upon us the image of God.”[19]

The solemnity of Epiphany and the feast of our Lord’s Baptism speak to us of the constant action of the Holy Spirit. He guided the three wise men to Bethlehem, and descended visibly on our Lord in the Jordan, showing that Jesus was the longed-for Messiah. Let us learn to open our hearts to his sanctifying grace. Let us ponder more frequently the invitation that resounded while Jesus was being baptized by John: *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*[20] And at the moment of the Transfiguration, with renewed insistence: *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.*[21] To enter into that dialogue, to draw practical consequences from

the teachings of the Master, from his gestures and words, we have to respond with exquisite docility to the action of the Holy Spirit. He will lead us to discover, with greater fullness, the possibility and the need of sanctifying ordinary life, with the awareness that all of our conduct has to be summed up in speaking with God and speaking to souls about God.

The anniversary of St. Josemaría's birth, on the 9th of January, and of his baptism, on the 13th, also speak to us of the Paraclete's nearness. Let us take advantage of our Father's intercession to strive for a complete faithfulness, like that which St. Josemaría sought all through his life, by welcoming all the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

I know you also will have very much in mind that on January 21 we celebrate another anniversary of the first St. Raphael Circle: all of us were

among those ***three, three thousand, three hundred thousand, three million....*** May we never forget that, if we want it, our Lord will also make it possible for each of us to be apostolically effective, if we are “essentially” Eucharistic.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, January 1, 2009

Notes

[1] Cf. *Jn* 19: 25-27.

[2] Gal:4:4-5.

[3] Pope Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 15, 2006.

[4] Cf. Acts 13:2-4; 16:6-10; 20:22-23; 23:11; 27:24.

[5] *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 127.

[6] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 15, 2006.

[7] Jn 14:25-26.

[8] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 15, 2006.

[9] Cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*, nos. 32 and 52.

[10] Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

[11] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 15, 2006.

[12] *Gal* 4:6-7.

[13] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 14, 26.

[14] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 38.

[15] *Ibid.* [16] St. Josemaría, *Letter*, January 9, 1959, no. 60.

[17] *Rom* 8:16-17.

[18] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 15, 2006.

[19] St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Easter Sermon*. [20] *Mt* 3:17.

[21] *Mt* 17:5.