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Letter from the Prelate (January 2011)

Echoing the Pope's message for the new year, the Prelate reflects on the importance of freedom in our endeavor to love God and all mankind.

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

Since Christmas Eve, and repeatedly throughout the following days, the liturgy places on our lips the words

from a Psalm: *Sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his Name: tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples . [1]*

This insistent invitation to joy has a clear source: the birth of the Son of God, who has become man without ceasing to be God, to attain for us true freedom. “But God the Father, in the fullness of time, sent his only-begotten Son to take flesh in Mary ever Virgin, through the Holy Spirit, and re-establish peace. In this way, by redeeming man from sin, *we receive adoption as sons (Gal 4:5)* and become capable of sharing the intimacy of God. In this way the new man, the new line of the children of God (cf. *Rom 6:45*), is enabled to free the whole universe from disorder, restoring all things in Christ (cf. *Eph*

1:9-10), as they have been reconciled with God (cf. *Col* 1:20).” [2]

The Redeemer has brought us, besides countless other gifts, the great gift of freedom, to be able to serve God through love, moved interiorly by the Holy Spirit, who has made us “sons in the Son.” [3] By our incorporation in Christ’s Mystical Body, the fear that had kept us subject to slavery has been cast off completely. As St. Paul reminds us: *you were called to freedom . . . For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery* . [4]

As St. Josemaría said, commenting on some words from the Gospel, *veritas liberabit vos* , [5] the truth will set you free: “What is this great truth, which opens the way to freedom and gives it meaning throughout our lives? I will sum it up for you, with the joy and certainty which flow

from knowing there is a close relationship between God and his creatures. It is the knowledge that we have come from the hands of God, that the Blessed Trinity looks upon us with predilection, that we are children of so wonderful a Father. I ask my Lord to help us decide to take this truth to heart, to dwell upon it day by day; only then will we be acting as free men. Do not forget: anyone who does not realize that he is a child of God is unaware of the deepest truth about himself. When he acts he lacks the dominion and self-mastery we find in those who love our Lord above all else.” [6]

I like to dwell on so many considerations from our Father because they are “gold coins” that God has placed in our hands. Let us draw all the meaning that is contained in words written by a person who sought only to foster the following of Jesus Christ and service

to the Holy Church and souls. Once again I advise you: have more frequent recourse to this treasure, which will unite us closely to the wishes of heaven.

Freedom to love God, and, through him, all mankind, is one of the principal consequences of divine filiation. Therefore we have to defend it, respect it and foster it in all areas of life. This is the theme for the World Day of Peace that is celebrated today, on the 1st of January. Benedict XVI, in his message entitled *Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace*, directed an urgent call to statesmen, religious leaders, and all men and women of good will, urging them to promote and defend this great good, proper to those who have been created in God's image and likeness. Together with the good of life, it forms the deepest foundation of all human rights. "In short," wrote the Pope, "openness to truth and perfect

goodness, openness to God, is rooted in human nature; it confers full dignity on each individual, and is the guarantee of full mutual respect between persons. Religious freedom should be understood, then, not merely as immunity from coercion, but even more fundamentally as an ability to order one's own choices in accordance with truth." [7]

We recall here the passionate defense of the divine gift of freedom that St. Josemaría waged his whole life. As our Founder said so clearly in his answer to a journalist's question: "From its foundation Opus Dei has never practiced discrimination of any kind. It works and lives with everyone because it sees in each person a soul that must be respected and loved. These are not mere words. Our Work is the first Catholic organization which, with the authorization of the Holy See, admits non-Catholics, whether Christian or

not, as cooperators. I have always defended the freedom of individual consciences. I do not understand violence. I do not consider it a proper way either to persuade or to win over. Error is overcome by prayer, by God's grace, and by study; never by force, always with charity." [8]

Unfortunately, the civil right to honor and serve God in accord with the dictates of one's conscience is today encountering great obstacles in many countries. As the Roman Pontiff lamented, in not a few places "at present, Christians are the religious group which suffers most from persecution on account of its faith" [9] —a persecution that frequently (and we have recently, once again, been witnesses to this reality) results in martyrdom. "In other places," the Holy Father continued, "we see more subtle and sophisticated forms of prejudice, of hostility towards believers and religious symbols." [10]

This also happens in countries with a Christian majority and a centuries-old Christian tradition. Faced with these abuses of power, no honorable man or woman should remain unconcerned. “ This situation is unacceptable, since it represents an insult to God and to human dignity; furthermore, it is a threat to security and peace, and an obstacle to the achievement of authentic and integral human development.” [11]

Don't think that the current situation is new in the world. Perhaps in our days it is more widespread and takes on new forms, in part because communication is easier and more rapid, although public opinion does not always give the importance that it merits to religious intolerance. But this is not something new in history, as Jesus himself warned: *If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you . . . The servant is not greater than his master. If they have*

persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they had kept my teaching, they would also keep yours .
[12]

The Old Testament had already foretold that this would happen. Let us listen once again to St. Josemaría: “Do you remember the second psalm? *Why do the nations conspire, and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves up and the rulers take council together, against the Lord and his anointed .* You see: nothing new. People opposed Christ, the anointed, even before he was born. They opposed him as he went his peaceable way along the roads of Palestine; they persecuted him and continue to do so by attacking the members of his real and mystical Body. Why so much hatred, why are people so easily taken in, why this universal smothering of the freedom of every conscience?” [13] This is a question that many people have

asked down through the centuries. The answer is found in Sacred Scripture, especially the Book of Revelation, which—in language filled with images and symbols—describes the Church’s struggle throughout the course of history, until Christ comes in glory to take definitive possession of his kingdom.

“True, many people are bent on injustice. But the Lord insists: *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel* (Ps 2:8-9). That is a strong promise, and it’s God who makes it. We cannot tone it down. Not for nothing is Christ the Redeemer of the world; he rules as sovereign, at the right hand of the Father.” [14] In his Message, the Pope urges us, first of all, to pray: “I ask all Catholics for their prayers for their brothers and sisters in the faith who

are victims of violence and intolerance.” [15]

Let us go to our Lord each day with true faith and trust, with a sincere petition for all who are suffering persecution—whether hidden or open—because of their religious convictions. In inviting you to do so, I remind you of those words of our Lord that were often on our Father’s lips, and that we recite in the Work every day: *ut omnes unum sint!* ! [16]—that all may be united as one, out of love for God and respect for those who are made in God’s image. Thus we can help to “build a world in which all are free to profess their religion or their faith, and to express their love of God with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their mind (cf. *Mt 22:37*).” [17]

To prevent this yearning for universal fraternity from remaining an ineffective desire, let us strive to

treat other Catholics, each one, with the greatest possible understanding and refinement, loving all the paths that lead to God in the heart of the Church. Let us recall that passage from the Gospel about the intolerance of some of Jesus' apostles (the Holy Spirit had not yet descended upon them) when faced with the actions of persons who were not counted among the disciples.

'Teacher we saw a man casting out demons in your name and we forbade him, because he was not following us.' But Jesus said: *'Do not forbid him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us, is for us.'* [18]

As our Father used to say regarding this passage: "My children, never place obstacles to the apostolic work of those who are working for Jesus Christ ... We aren't bothered by anyone. We are very happy to see

everyone working apostolically. The world of souls is an immense sea! May you love the apostolic work of others. No one gets in our way.” [19]

Today, and always, it is very important to teach everyone (especially the young generations) to act in this way. For example, what a great work can be done by the father or mother of a family with their children at home, through their example and timely teaching. And a teacher with Christian criteria can do the same at school, and a friend with his or her friends, in the apostolate of friendship and confidence that St. Josemaría taught us to carry out. This is a very effective way to combat “religious fundamentalism and secularism,” which are, as the Pope points out, “alike in that both represent extreme forms of a rejection of legitimate pluralism and the principle of secularity.” [20] With a constant capillary action, although

it may not seem of great importance, the result will be that of the stone thrown in the lake which produces larger and larger circles, each at a greater distance. [21] Do you shun gossip, which unfortunately is so common? Do you truly try to understand others and, when necessary, make a fraternal correction? Do you respect and not coerce the personalities of the others?

Moreover each one, in the use of his or her legitimate civil freedom, should try to exert an influence on society's customs and laws, with the honorable means available, inviting other people of good will to assist you, even if they do not have faith. For, as Benedict XVI insisted, "religious freedom is not the exclusive patrimony of believers, but of the whole family of the earth's peoples. It is an essential element of a constitutional state; it cannot be

denied without at the same time encroaching on all fundamental rights and freedoms, since it is their synthesis and keystone.” [22]

We are approaching a new anniversary of our Father’s birth. On this date, we can offer him the present of being very faithful to his teachings and spreading them, so that many more people get to know his life and writings better. Those of us who have lived at his side and have known him personally can testify to the truth of these words of his: “I have spent my whole life preaching personal freedom, with personal responsibility. I have sought freedom throughout the world and I’m still looking for it, just like Diogenes trying to find an honest man. And every day I love it more. Of all the things on earth, I love it most. It is a treasure which we do not appreciate nearly enough.” [23] In the life and teachings of this priest

enamored of God—and therefore of freedom—we find answers for the longings of so many friends and colleagues who are seeking the good and happiness, and who fail to find them, because no one has shown them where to look.

Before finishing, I would like to share with you my joy from my trip to Bucharest, in Romania, before Christmas. The people of the Work there are joyfully confronting the difficulties that come from the lack of space and the minimum of comfort needed, as our Father stressed, basing himself on the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas. And this has resulted in a lot of fruit for souls. I was there only two days, very intense ones, during which I could touch with my hands, once more, how the spirit of Opus Dei is taking root in places of very diverse cultures and traditions. Help me to give thanks to God, and continue

praying for the Church and for the Pope, closely united to all my intentions, which are many!

With all my affection, I bless you and wish you a 2011 filled with spiritual fruit.

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, January 1, 2011

Footnotes:

[1] *Ps* 95(96):1-3.

[2] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 183.

[3] Vatican II, Pastoral Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

[4] *Gal* 5:13 and 1.

[5] *Jn* 8:32.

[6] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 26.

[7] Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2011, December 8, 2010, no. 3.

[8] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 44.

[9] Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2011, December 8, 2010, no. 1.

[10] *Ibid.* [11] *Ibid.* [12] *Jn* 15:18-20.

[13] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 185.

[14] *Ibid.*, no. 186.

[15] Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2011, December 8, 2010, no. 1.

[16] *Jn* 17:21.

[17] Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2011, December 8, 2010, no. 1.

[18] *Mt 9:38-40*.

[19] St. Josemaría, *Notes taken from a meditation*, April 16, 1954.

[20] Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2011, December 8, 2010, no. 8.

[21] Cf. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 831.

[22] Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2011, December 8, 2010, no. 5.

[23] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 184.

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