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Letter from the Prelate (October 2011)

Reflecting on a new anniversary of the founding of Opus Dei, the Prelate speaks about the gratitude that filled the heart of St. Josemaría on October 2nd, 1928, feast of the Holy Guardian Angels.

10/09/2011

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

Tomorrow we celebrate a new anniversary of the moment when God's light took on noonday clarity in the soul of our Founder. *Domine, ut videam! Domina, ut sit!* , he had cried out insistently since his adolescence. And the answer of our Lord, through our Lady's intercession, reached him on October 2, 1928. I invite you to recall the scene, as St. Josemaria recorded it in his spiritual notes, in order to draw out teachings applicable to our daily life. And I also invite you to give thanks every day to the Most Blessed Trinity for having wanted Opus Dei.

Our Father, as we all know, was doing a retreat over several days. On the morning of the third day, after celebrating Mass, he continued his prayer as he looked over the notes he had been taking in the previous months and years: lights that our Lord had been giving him with a view to what he was going to ask of

him. Up until then, he had only had some disconnected ideas of what God wanted from his life, flashes of light that he wasn't sure how to interpret. In his heart he fostered an unconditional availability to fulfill God's will, without knowing what it was. And, suddenly, those partial lights, those hints of God's will, took on a great clarity. "I received an illumination about the entire Work, while I was reading those papers. Deeply moved, I knelt down—I was alone in my room, at a time between one talk and the next—and gave thanks to our Lord, and I remember with a heart full of emotion the ringing of the bells of the church of Our Lady of the Angels." [1]

St. Josemaría's first reaction, as the words just cited tell us, was to be deeply moved in his whole being, with a very specific external manifestation: he fell on his knees in adoration before God's plan. As

Benedict XVI said, “prayer has one of its typical expressions in the gesture of kneeling.” [2] By doing so, we recognize our absolute need of God, without whom we are nothing and can do nothing. The person who recognizes what he owes God “turns with his whole being to the One before whom he stands, directs his soul to that Mystery from which he expects the fulfillment of his deepest desires and help to overcome the neediness of his own life.” [3]

That act of submissive acceptance, with which our Father began his path in Opus Dei, was imbued with humility. How often, in recalling those moments, he expressed his deep conviction that our Lord made use of him as an inadequate instrument, so it would be clear that the Work came from God, and was not the result of human ingenuity. “It is as though someone had taken the leg of a table and written—with

beautiful calligraphy—a precious illuminated manuscript,” [4] he once said. Recalling that divine intervention in his soul, he remarked: “Jesus didn’t ask me for permission to get involved in my life. He came and placed himself there: you do this and that for me. And I ... like a little donkey. He is the Lord of all creatures.

“You have the right to get involved in the souls of everyone, to help them to be better, respecting each one’s freedom. Perhaps at times they won’t receive you well, but at other times they will seek you out. It’s very clear: it’s not only a Christian’s right, but also a duty: *Go...and teach all nations* (*Mt 28:19*). [5]

It’s not at all surprising that we who are Jesus’ disciples, on considering the greatness of the divine mission and the littleness of our own strength, should sometimes ask

ourselves: How is it possible that God chose me, to carry out all this work? How is it possible that he addressed his call to me, when I am so insignificant, when I lack the virtues and means needed? When thoughts like these arise, St. Josemaría advised us to open St. John's gospel and meditate on "the passage that narrates the cure of the man born blind. See how Jesus makes use of mud, made from the dust of the earth and saliva, to restore sight to blind eyes (cf. *Jn* 9:6). Our Lord uses a bit of mud as eye salve." [6] And addressing his daughters and sons in Opus Dei, he continued with words that can be applied perfectly well to all Christians: "While always aware of our own weakness and little worth, with God's grace and our own good will, we become salve to give light. Knowing full well our own human littleness, we are divine strength for others." [7]

Especially in the Mass and in the times of prayer, when placing ourselves before God without hiding our misery, but also with the conviction that we are his beloved children, the mud of our personal weakness is converted into salve for the health of so many people. Placed in the burning furnace of charity that is Christ's Heart, our soul becomes identified more and more closely with Jesus through the action of the Holy Spirit. "Prayer, which is the opening and raising of our heart to God, thus becomes a personal relationship with him. And even if man forgets his Creator, the living and true God does not cease to take the initiative, calling us to the mysterious encounter of prayer." [8]

Do we go punctually to those half hours of prayer to speak face to face with our God? What effort are we making so as not to waste even a minute of that time.

In recent months, I have been reminding you of the importance of taking good care of those daily periods of meditation. I will not tire of insisting on this, because (following our Father's teachings, well anchored in the tradition of the Church) I am convinced, as you all are, that this is the only "weapon" we Christians have, to conquer in the big and small battles, for the glory of God, that we fight each day.

Benedict XVI develops this topic at length in an address that is part of a series on prayer in his general audiences. In considering the mysterious episode of the nocturnal struggle by the patriarch Jacob with an unknown adversary, before crossing the ford that would bring him to a meeting with his brother Esau, [9] the Pope reminds us (citing words from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*) that "the spiritual tradition of the Church has retained

the symbol of prayer as a battle of faith and as the triumph of perseverance.” [10] And he adds: “the Scripture text speaks to us about a long night of seeking God, of the struggle to learn his name and see his face; it is the night of prayer that, with tenacity and perseverance, asks God for a blessing and a new name, a new reality that is the fruit of conversion and forgiveness.” [11]

Allow me to insist: let us persevere in the “battle of prayer,” without neglecting or letting up in our effort, for any reason, in those conversations with our Father God; let us dialogue with Jesus, our elder Brother, who teaches us to draw close to his heavenly Father; let us give entrance in our soul to the Paraclete, who wants to enkindle our hearts with God’s love. And let us take as our intercessor the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God and our Mother, who is the teacher of prayer;

and also go to St. Joseph, the angels and the saints, especially to St. Josemaria, who by his teaching and example has shown us how to be contemplatives in the middle of the world.

We can turn to the words with which our Father described what happened in his soul on October 2, 1928. After saying that he fell on his knees, adoring God at seeing the divine plan revealed to him, he adds that his soul was filled with a deep gratitude: “I gave thanks to our Lord, and I remember with a heart full of emotion the ringing of the bells of the church of Our Lady of the Angels.” [12]

For a person who knows that everything good comes from God, and that nothing of value is possessed by oneself, gratitude is the reverse side of adoration: the two sides of the same coin. Therefore our

Father wanted October 2nd as well as February 14th (the anniversary of other decisive interventions by our Lord in the history of the Work) to be days of deep and unceasing acts of thanksgiving in Opus Dei. And do you know how he expressed his gratitude? With abundant acts of contrition.

Let us raise our heart to God, then, filled with gratitude. October 6 is also a very fitting day to express these sentiments, for the canonization of St. Josemaria, which reminds us that it is possible to reach true holiness, as did our Father, who traveled faithfully, one day and the next, along this path to sanctity amid the normal circumstances of daily life.

Certainly this effort requires a constant struggle against everything that could separate us from God's love—a struggle that draws new strength and energy from the

moments dedicated to conversing personally with God. Jacob's nocturnal struggle "becomes a reference point for understanding our relationship with God ... Prayer requires trust, nearness, almost a hand-to-hand contact that is symbolic not of a God who is an enemy, an adversary, but a Lord of blessing who always remains mysterious ... Therefore the author of the Sacred text uses the symbol of the struggle, which implies a strength of spirit, perseverance, tenacity in obtaining what is desired. And if the object of one's desire is a relationship with God, his blessing and love, then the struggle will culminate in self-giving to God, in recognition of one's own weakness, which is overcome only by giving oneself over into God's merciful hands." [13]

At the very moment when St. Josemaría "saw" the Work, on October 2, 1928, he heard the sound

of the bells of the church of Our Lady of the Angels, which were ringing in honor of their patron. “They have never stopped resounding in my ears,” [14] our Father often said. Almost at the end of his life, in one of the letters that he called “campanadas” (a ringing of the bell to alert us), he exhorted us to be vigilant in our love for God: “I would like this ringing of the bell to forever awaken in your hearts the same joy and vigilant spirit left in my soul by the bells of Our Lady of the Angels, now almost a half century ago.” [15]

In August I had to return to Pamplona to finish my medical check-up, interrupted before traveling to Africa; and on the 23rd of that month I “escaped” to Torreciudad. Preserved there is the only bell from the church of Our Lady of the Angels that was saved from the destruction of the war. I wanted to take full advantage of my

stay there, and I made the afternoon prayer in the chapel of *El Santo Cristo*. Bringing with me each and every one of you, I asked our Lord (as our Father advised us) to teach us to look at his self-giving on the Cross in order to grow in our own generosity. Be absolutely certain that with his help we can!

Our Lady has been present on all the crossroads of Opus Dei's path. Therefore it is only logical that our acts of thanksgiving should reach God through her. Let us go to Mary's intercession at every moment, but especially on her feast days. This month we have the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, on October 7; and on the 12th, Our Lady of the Pillar, to whom our Founder had so much devotion right from his childhood, and to whom he went every day while preparing for the priesthood, asking her (*Domina, ut sit!* , Lady, may it become a reality!) for the

accomplishment of what he had premonitions of in his soul. And let us not forget either that it was on October 11, 1943 (then a Marian feast commemorating the divine Motherhood of Mary) that the Work received its first written approval from the Holy See.

With the memory of Blessed John Paul II in our hearts (this year we can celebrate his liturgical memorial on October 22), let us tell our Lady with great trust: *totus tuus* ; I want to be entirely yours, as was this holy Pontiff, as was our beloved Father. We can take advantage of that commemoration to go to the intercession of John Paul II for the Church and for Opus Dei, and to pray for the Pope. Also entrust to him my intentions.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, October 1, 2011

Footnotes:

1. St. Josemaría, *Apuntes Íntimos*, no. 306 (October 2, 1931), in Andres Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 1, p. 220.
2. Benedict XVI, Address in a general audience, May 11, 2011.
3. Ibid.
4. St. Josemaría, Notes taken during a family get-together, December 31, 1973.
5. St. Josemaría, Notes taken during a family get-together, May 18, 1970.
6. St. Josemaría, *Letter*, September 29, 1947, no. 16.
7. Ibid.

8. Benedict XVI, Address in a general audience, May 11, 2011.
 9. See *Gen* 32:22-32.
 10. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2573.
 11. Benedict XVI, Address in a general audience, May 25, 2011.
 12. St. Josemaría, *Apuntes Íntimos*, no. 306 (October 2, 1931), in Andres Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 1, p. 220.
 13. Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, May 25, 2011.
 14. St. Josemaría, *Instruction* , March 19, 1934 , note 9.
 15. St. Josemaria, *Letter* , February 14, 1974,no. 1.
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