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Letter from the Prelate (August 2015)

In the context of the Marian year for the family in Opus Dei, the Prelate reflects on the central role of the parents in guiding their children's affective life.

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

In the middle of the month of August, the Solemnity of our Lady's Assumption shines forth. Besides celebrating the glory our Mother merited by her total response to God's grace, it is also an image of the blessedness that awaits us if we respond faithfully to our Christian vocation.

“While in the most holy Virgin,” the Second Vatican Council states, “the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she is without spot or wrinkle (see *Eph* 5:27), the followers of Christ still strive to increase in holiness by conquering sin. And so they turn their eyes to Mary, who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues.”[1]

The month we are now beginning contains other commemorations of Mary that fill us with joy. Tomorrow, the 2nd, is the memorial of Our Lady

of the Angels. On the 5th, anniversary of the dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major, we remember our Lady's divine Motherhood. Finally, on the 22nd, we celebrate her coronation as Queen and Lady of all creation. The following day, the 23rd of August, is the anniversary of the moment St. Josemaría heard in his soul the exhortation: *Adeamus cum fiducia ad thronum gloriæ, ut misericordiam consequamur*: let us go with confidence to the throne of glory, to Mary most holy, to obtain mercy.

These feasts also invite us to recall that God has prepared an eternal dwelling place in heaven for us, where we will live with glorified soul and body, after following loyally the path that God has marked out for each person, realizing that many—countless—ways exist to travel the road that leads to glory.

God calls most men and women to strive to attain sanctity in the married state. Many others receive the gift of celibacy, to serve the Church and souls *indiviso corde*,[2] with an undivided heart. In either case, whether in matrimony or in celibacy, it is always a divine vocation, a call God addresses to each person.

As far back as the 1930s, St. Josemaría was already preaching this with full conviction, at a time when the vocation to holiness was understood as referring almost exclusively to priests and those who chose the religious life. Nevertheless, our Father insisted in his preaching and spiritual direction for young people: “Do you laugh because I tell you that you have a ‘vocation to marriage’? Well, you have just that—a vocation.”[3]

To bring children up well, they need adequate preparation to choose freely the path that will lead them to God, a task that falls directly to the parents. The Church has always insisted that fathers and mothers cannot delegate this obligation to other people. Pope Pius XI denounced the evil of “the naturalism that nowadays invades the field of education in the most delicate matter of morals and purity.”[4] And St. John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, reaffirmed: “Education in love as self-giving is also the indispensable premise for parents . . . Faced with a culture that largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure,”[5] heads of families in their efforts should keep ever present the dignity of the human

person, created in the image and likeness of God.

In this context education for chastity is absolutely essential, since it is a virtue that strengthens the genuine maturity of each man and woman and enables them to respect and foster the reality that their body belongs to God. Therefore those who preside over the family, discerning the signs of God's call, have to devote special attention and care to education for virginity, as the supreme form of the gift of self that is the very meaning of human sexuality.[6]

Certainly, fathers and mothers can and in some cases should ask for advice from people with good formation, but the initiative and responsibility always belongs to the parents themselves. They should not be reluctant or afraid to confront these topics. I am addressing

especially the faithful and cooperators of the Work who are called to the married state. With supernatural sense and human affection, accompanying your children closely, you will notice the concerns that arise in their hearts, and then you will act thoughtfully, relying on prayer.

St. Josemaría strongly and affectionately advised parents that they be the ones to speak to their children about the origin of life, using examples they could understand. Wide horizons are also opened up to married couples to whom God has not granted children, to help, by their example and words, in defending the marvelous virtue of chastity.

I was reminding you that God calls most men and women to the married state. To prepare for that step, the time of their engagement plays an

important role. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that children have the right and duty to choose their profession and state in life, while adding: “They should assume their new responsibilities within a trusting relationship with their parents, willingly asking and receiving their advice and counsel. Parents should be careful not to exert pressure on their children either in the choice of a profession or in that of a spouse. This necessary restraint does not prevent them—quite the contrary—from giving their children judicious advice, particularly when they are planning to start a family.”[7]

Our Founder recommended that engagements should not be unduly long, just long enough to get to know one another well and confirm their mutual love, which afterwards should continue to grow without ceasing. Meanwhile, they have to

obey the demands of God's law, with temperance and self-mastery.

Unfortunately, in this area too, mistaken ideas and ways of behaving have spread, in direct opposition to the natural law and the divine positive law. Pope Francis, in an audience several months ago, highlighted some points of the Church's traditional teaching. Among others, he recalled that "the covenant of love between man and woman—a covenant for life—cannot be improvised. It isn't made up from one day to the next. There is no 'express' marriage: one needs to work on love, to keep moving forward. The covenant of love between a man and a woman is something to be learned and refined."[8] And he added, with realism: "Those who claim to want everything right away, afterwards back out of everything right away—

at the first difficulty (or at the first opportunity).”[9]

If parents are attentive to their children's physical and spiritual development, they will readily notice when their opportune advice or guidance is needed. At the same time, they need to recognize the possibility of some of their children receiving the marvelous calling to dedicate themselves to the service of God and souls in apostolic celibacy. When parents are frightened by this possibility and unreasonably oppose that choice, they show, at the very least, that Christ's spirit has not taken deep root in their souls, and that their Christianity is quite superficial. They need to consider this matter in God's presence and, if they are being intransigent, to change their attitude. I think that only those who love the path of celibacy can understand deeply the greatness of a clean marriage.

I return to what I was saying at the start. St. Josemaría was, by God's will, a decisive herald of the call to holiness in every state in life. He often said that he blessed the love of married couples with both his priestly hands, because "the spouses are both the ministers and the matter of the Sacrament of Marriage . . . But, also, I always say that people who follow a vocation to apostolic celibacy are not bachelors or old maids who do not understand or value love; on the contrary, their lives can only be explained in terms of this divine Love (I like to write it with a capital letter) which is the very essence of every Christian vocation.

"There is nothing contradictory about being fully aware of the value of the vocation to marriage and understanding the greater excellence of the vocation to celibacy *propter regnum caelorum*, 'for love of the

kingdom of heaven' (*Mt* 19:12). I am convinced that any Christian who tries to know, accept and love the teaching of the Church, will understand perfectly how the two are compatible if he tries also to know, accept and love his own personal vocation. That is to say, if he has faith and lives by it

“And so Christians who seek to sanctify themselves in the married state and are conscious of the greatness of their own vocation, spontaneously feel a special veneration and deep affection towards those who are called to apostolic celibacy. When one of their children, by God’s grace, sets out on this path, they truly rejoice and come to love their own vocation to marriage even more because it has permitted them to offer the fruits of human love to Jesus Christ, who is the great Love of all men and women, married or celibate.”[10]

On the 15th of this month, as we do every year, we will renew the consecration of Opus Dei to the most sweet Heart of Mary, which our Father carried out for the first time in the Holy House of Loreto in 1951. I encourage you to repeat many times the aspiration he recommended to us then, *Cor Maríæ dulcíssimum, iter para tutum!*, also asking our Lady to prepare a safe way for all men and women: those who have received the vocation to marriage and those who are following Jesus along the path of apostolic celibacy.

A few days ago, I had the opportunity to go to Lourdes and, in my imagination, to all the shrines dedicated to our Mother, accompanying you to all the places you may visit. Don't stop uniting yourselves to my prayer for the Pope, for his intentions, and for the upcoming Synod on the family. Recently, several people not in the

Work said to me: “In Opus Dei people love our Lady very much.” They are right, and we each have to do all we can to love her more.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Pamplona, August 1, 2015

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[1] Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 65.

[2] See *1 Cor* 7: 32-34.

[3] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 27.

[4] Pius XI, encyclical, *Divini illius Magistri*, December 31, 1929, no. 65.

[5] St. John Paul II, Apostolic exhort. *Familiaris consortio*, November 22, 1981, no. 37.

[6] See *Ibid.*

[7] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2230.

[8] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, May 27, 2015.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 92.