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Letter from the Prelate (May 2014)

"Our Lady guides us to the shortest and surest path to always obtain God's mercy," the Prelate assures us, echoing the advice of Saint Josemaria and Bishop Alvaro del Portillo.

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

In an atmosphere of great joy proper to the Easter season, the canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II has taken place. This event, of such great importance for the lives of countless Christians, speaks to us of being faithful and prompts us to return once and again, in our memory and our prayer, to the roots of our Christian vocation.

Commenting on the Gospel of the Easter Vigil, the Pope pointed out that it was in Galilee that our Lord called his first disciples. Thus the invitation of the Risen Lord to *return to Galilee*, where they would be able to see and spend time with him, was an invitation “to return to the place where they were originally called.” And the Holy Father continued: “For each of us, too, there is a ‘Galilee’ at the origin of our journey with Jesus. ‘To go to Galilee’ means something beautiful, it means rediscovering our baptism as a living fountainhead,

drawing new energy from the sources of our faith and our Christian experience. To return to Galilee means above all to return to that blazing light with which God's grace touched me at the start of the journey. From that flame I can light a fire for today and every day, and bring heat and light to my brothers and sisters.”[1]

These words can serve us admirably at the beginning of the month of May, when our apostolic zeal takes on a new impulse through the intercession of our Lady. This was how St. Josemaría encouraged us to take advantage of this month, especially since the custom of the May pilgrimage began in 1935. Many of you know, and have experienced personally, the custom of Catholics in many places during May to bring flowers to our Lady: “the little flowers of our resolutions, the

humble and hidden violets that we gather during the day.”[2]

This was our Father’s constant teaching. From very early on he assured us that “we can compare our life, although we are strong and hardened adults, to that of a small child, taken for a walk in the country (a scene you must have often witnessed), who picks one small flower and then another and another. They are tiny, lowly flowers that the grown-ups don’t notice. But he, since he is a child, does see them and he gathers them into a little bouquet, to offer to his mother, who gives him a loving look.”[3]

St. Josemaría, who never wanted to put himself forward as a model in anything, allowed for a single exception: “if I want you to imitate me in anything, it is in the love that I have for our Lady.”[4] With a son’s piety and trust, he addressed our

Lady each day with prayers he had learned as a small child: “simple, ardent phrases addressed to God and to his Mother, who is our Mother as well. I still renew, morning and evening, and not just occasionally but habitually, the offering I learned from my parents: ‘O my Lady, my Mother! I offer myself entirely to you, and in proof of my filial love, I consecrate to you this day my eyes, my ears, my tongue, my heart...’ Is this not, in some way, a beginning of contemplation, an evident expression of trusting self-abandonment?”[5]

As in so many Catholic homes, Don Alvaro also learned from his parents to go to our Lady with filial affection. Each day he devoutly recited a prayer he had learned from his mother: *Sweet Mother, don't leave me, / don't turn your eyes from me, / come with me everywhere / and never leave me alone. / Since you protect me*

so much / as a real Mother, / see to it that I am blessed by the Father, / Son, and Holy Spirit. In its apparent simplicity, this prayer that the people of Mexico know so well teaches us something very important. Our Lady, as intercessor before the Blessed Trinity, is a sure path who always leads us to God.

What a great work Christian fathers and mothers, and grandmothers and grandfathers, carry out when they pass on to their children or grandchildren these morning and night prayers! Children never forget these prayers, even after many years go by. Moreover when at times, in the course of life, the external signs of Christian life seem to grow dim, often devotion to our Lady remains in the depths of that soul, like an ember beneath the ashes, ready to be re-enkindled in moments of spiritual need, of sadness or discouragement.

Don Alvaro fostered in his soul a strong Marian devotion with great theological depth, thanks to St. Josemaría's teaching and example. In recalling his response to the divine call to Opus Dei, during a day of recollection, he remarked: "In that recollection, the Father gave a meditation on love for God and our Lady, and I was left dumbstruck." [6] He immediately asked for admission to Opus Dei. It was undoubtedly a very special grace from God, granted through our Lady's intercession, to which Don Alvaro responded with a quick and definitive decision.

All graces reach us through the motherly mediation of Mary Most Holy, *omnipotencia suplicante*, all-powerful in her petition. Therefore we should strive to foster a more intimate dialogue with our Mother in the coming weeks, and also in the other months of the year as well. Thus our union with Jesus and our

apostolic spirit will be strengthened. Let us take advantage of this month to put greater care into praying and contemplating the mysteries of the Rosary, both during the pilgrimage that we will make and on the other days. By doing so, Don Alvaro told us, “the habit of *going to* and *returning to* Jesus constantly through Mary will take deeper root in us.”[7]

In one of the points of *The Way* St. Josemaría recommends this way of acting. Don Alvaro, in the first years of his life in Opus Dei, asked him about the meaning of the phrase: “to go and to return” to Jesus through Mary. Our Founder’s reply helped strengthen even more his Marian piety. He himself frequently recalled that episode and our Father’s explanation: our Lady guides us to the shortest and surest path to always obtain God’s mercy; especially if, unfortunately, we have separated ourselves from him: not

only through serious offenses, but also with small or not so small lacks of refinement that we can fall into throughout the day.

These reflections take on special relevance for the coming weeks. Recalling St. Josemaría's novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe, Don Alvaro said: "What flowers will we bring to our Mother in this month of May? I pass on to you our Founder's advice, which he always taught us to practice, when he recommended that we offer our Lady "small roses, those of our ordinary, everyday life, but filled with the fragrance of sacrifice and love." Let us strive, then, to put more effort, more love, into our daily duties: in fidelity to the divine commitments that unite us to God and to the Work; in our holy concern for our brothers and sisters and for all souls; in the fulfillment of the duties proper to each one's state; in

carrying out a demanding and orderly professional work.”[8]

Like so many other men and women, Don Alvaro strove to incorporate into his life the details of affection for our Lady that he learned from our Father: placing in his notebook or wallet a picture of our Lady; greeting Holy Mary on entering or leaving a room or on passing by places with her picture or statue; praying slowly and with devotion three Hail Mary's before retiring at night.... For the golden anniversary of the founding of Opus Dei, he declared 1978 a *Marian Year* in the Work, which he later extended to 1979 and 1980, as preparation and thanksgiving for the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the apostolic work with women. “We won't do anything out of the ordinary or ostentatious. We will simply, as good children, be more diligent in going to our Lady *in everything and for everything.*”[9]

During that Marian time, in many visits to images of our Lady, in Rome and outside of Rome, he prayed the Rosary asking our Mother for the Church and for the Pope, for the Work, for all souls. His recourse to our Lady was a lesson of faith in the intercession of Mary. I can assure you, because I was an eyewitness, that the example of this good and faithful servant, enamored of Jesus Christ and his Mother, encouraged others to turn with great confidence to the Blessed Virgin.

Love is diligent; it seeks ways to keep the beloved person present. This is what Don Alvaro did in his Marian devotion, in accord with so many suggestions of the founder of Opus Dei. “At the hour of working,” taught St. Josemaría, “make use of human devices that can serve as ‘alarm clocks’ to remember God’s presence. I do so and it works quite well.”[10] He advised us to put a small crucifix

in our pocket, and to kiss it at times during the day; to place on our desk an image of our Lord or our Lady. “From time to time I look at it,” he said. “I remember our Lord and I offer him everything. It is as if I had a photograph of my father or my mother within sight. More, much more, because he is my Father, my God, my Friend, and the Love of my loves.”[11]

Right to the end of his earthly journey, Don Alvaro made use of those “human devices”: reminders to refine his signs of love for our Lady. For example, during the Marian Years we just mentioned, each day he would place a different image of the Mother of God in the place where he worked, in order to direct more glances of affection and aspirations to her.

During those Marian Years, many faithful of the Work incorporated in

their lives a suggestion of our Father, which Don Alvaro lived with ardent piety: a Marian “password,” a few brief words used as an aspiration, to keep God present during the day, with our Lady’s help.

During these weeks, we find many reasons to honor and grow in this deeply Christian devotion. The feast of Our Lady of Fatima on the 13th calls to mind her motherly care. From the 16th to the 24th we will recall St. Josemaría’s novena at the *Villa* of Guadalupe, in Mexico, to pray for the Church, for the Pope, and for Opus Dei. On the 24th we will celebrate the liturgical memorial of Our Lady *Help of Christians*. And the month ends with the feast of Mary’s Visitation to her cousin St. Elizabeth, besides many other Marian advocations that are celebrated in various countries.

I suggest anew that you reread the homilies and other writings in which our Father refers to our Lady. They will prompt us to rejuvenate our Marian piety, to draw closer to Mary, and to show to many people this sure path that leads to intimacy with Jesus and, through him, to God the Father and the Holy Spirit. “Many conversions, many decisions to give oneself to the service of God have been preceded by an encounter with Mary. Our Lady has encouraged us to look for God, to desire to change, to lead a new life.”[12]

“Fill yourselves then with trust and certainty in our Lady’s motherly intercession, and be daring in your invitation to many people to honor our Lady with these pilgrimages. You will be doing them a great good, because in considering the mysteries of the Rosary, in praying without hurry, savoring them, those marvelous vocal prayers the Church

has transmitted to us, in offering joyfully a small mortification in honor of our Mother, they will learn the lesson of complete availability in service to God and souls that the Handmaid of the Lord gives us, the most perfect creature who has come forth from God's hands.”[13]

Before finishing, I would like to renew my request that you pray for my intentions. In the next few days, I hope you will accompany me in praying for the thirty new priests of the Prelature I will ordain on May 10th, in Rome. And continue praying, with our Mother's encouragement and protection, for the Pope and those who assist him in governing the Church, for bishops, priests and religious, and for the entire Christian people. May the light of the Risen Christ find entry into people's minds and hearts. If we entrust this prayer to our Lady, Mary will help us to prepare ourselves very well for the

solemnity of Pentecost. What resolutions have we made to grow in our Marian piety? What special gifts will we offer her each day?

I will not stop to consider so many other feasts this month that reveal to us the great role our Lady has in our own lives and in the history of the Work.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, May 1, 2014

[1] Pope Francis, Homily at the Easter Vigil, April 19, 2014.

[2] St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, March 19, 1958.

- [3] St. Josemaría, *Letter*, March 24, 1930, no. 13.
- [4] St. Josemaría, Words spoken in January 1954, at the beginning of a Marian Year for the universal Church.
- [5] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 296.
- [6] Don Alvaro, Notes taken at a family gathering, October 3, 1975.
- [7] Don Alvaro, *Letter*, May 2, 1985.
- [8] Don Alvaro, *Letter*, May 1, 1984. St. Josemaría's words are from his personal prayer at the *Villa* of Guadalupe, on May 20, 1970.
- [9] Don Alvaro, *Letter*, January 9, 1978, no. 20.
- [10] St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, March 30, 1974.
- [11] *Ibid.*

[12] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no 149.

[13] Don Alvaro, *Letter*, May 1, 1984.

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