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Letter from the Prelate (April 2007)

A letter on Holy Week and the anniversary of the Pope's election, from Bishop Javier Echevarría to the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei.

04/15/2007

Today Holy Week begins, the most important week of the whole year, because we commemorate the central events of our salvation. Would that each of us may live it—or better yet, “relive” it—personally, accompanying Jesus in the scenes

that the liturgy places before our eyes. With Saint Josemaría, I ask God for the grace that we may all be more deeply “amazed” as we contemplate these Mysteries.

During the first days, with our Lord’s triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, it is easy to walk alongside Jesus on his frequent comings and goings from Bethany to Jerusalem and from Jerusalem to Bethany. Let us take up the Holy Gospel and put ourselves into those scenes, so as to accompany him very closely and walk at his pace in everything.

Stop to contemplate the hours that he spends in the Temple, trying to win over the scribes and Pharisees who, in those moments, were scheming only to destroy him. But Jesus does not take into account the apparent “failure” of his invitations to conversion; right up to the final moment, as we see in the scenes at

Golgotha, he hopes that souls will open themselves to grace and thus receive salvation. He teaches us to be insistent in our personal apostolate, even though it may sometimes seem that we see no results. The fruit will always come.

Just before his passion, our Lord relates a parable that reflects, in a special way, the zeal for souls that consumes him: the parable of the king who “gave a marriage feast for his son and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come” (Mt 22:2-3). It is easy to imagine the longing in Christ’s most loving Heart as he spoke those words. And we are always struck by his insistence: “I have made ready my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves are killed, and everything is ready; come to the marriage feast” (Mt 22:4).

The same often happens today as well. If we truly strive to identify ourselves with Christ, to be *alter Christus, ipse Christus*, it is only logical, as Saint Josemaría used to insist, that Jesus' life be reproduced, in one way or another, in our own. "The scene of the parable is being repeated: it is the same as with those people who were invited to the wedding feast. Some are afraid, others have their own concerns, many ... make up stories or give silly excuses.

"They put up resistance. That is why they feel the way they do: fed up, all in a muddle, listless, bored, bitter. And yet how easy it is to accept the divine invitation at every moment, and live a happy life, full of joy! (Furrow, n. 67).

Our reaction, like that of Saint Josemaría, has to be to not let up but to grow in our dedication to the

apostolate, fully convinced that no effort is ever lost, despite human resistance.

Let us be diligent specifically in our “apostolate of Confession.” Last year, at this time, the Pope recalled that “for a fruitful celebration of Easter, the Church asks the faithful in these days to receive the Sacrament of Penance, which is like a sort of death and resurrection for each one of us.... Let us be reconciled by Christ,” the Holy Father added, “to enjoy more intensely the joy that he communicates with his resurrection. The forgiveness which Christ gives to us in the Sacrament of Penance is a source of interior and exterior peace and makes us apostles of peace in a world where divisions, suffering and the tragedies of injustice, hatred and violence, unfortunately continue” (General Audience, April 12, 2006).

In the second part of the week we will celebrate the Paschal Triduum, the heart of the liturgical year. Let us put ourselves fully into the liturgical ceremonies during these days. On Holy Thursday, during the Mass *In Cena Domini*, let us thank Jesus for the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood, and its perpetuation to the end of time. Let us accompany him in the Altars of Repose, where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved until Good Friday afternoon, in memory of the hours of solitude that Jesus endured, first in the Garden of Olives, and then in the farcical trial on that sad and sorrowful night. You should have the conviction that our vigil close to the Tabernacle in some way brought consolation to Jesus, true God and true man, during those bitter hours.

John Paul II, to whom the Church and the Work owe so much, was a passionate lover of Jesus in the

Blessed Sacrament: he was drawn by the Tabernacle and invited us to go there frequently. His arrival in heaven, two years ago, must have been as quick as his discovery of a Tabernacle during his apostolic visits and trips.

On Good Friday, when we commemorate the death of our Lord, besides fulfilling, in an exemplary way, the fast and abstinence prescribed for that day—reminding and assisting others to do so as well—let us generously seek out small mortifications during those hours. We can offer them in reparation for our sins and those of others, and in petition for the graces that so many souls, thousands upon thousands, need in order to decide to follow Jesus closely. Let us have no fear of the Cross, my daughters and sons, nor of the criticism of those who are pharisaically scandalized when they see Christians lovingly embrace that

holy wood, on which our Lord put to death our own death and ransomed us for eternal life. Do we truly love sacrifice? Are we worried about what others may think?

On Holy Saturday we recall Jesus' burial. Let us stay very close to our Lady, with the apostles and the holy women who accompanied him. They did not know then that, after those hours of darkness, the new day of the Resurrection was to dawn. But we now do know that this is so. Let us be filled with optimism and hope.

After the Sacred Triduum Easter time begins, which represents the future life that we look forward to receiving from God, and of which we already have a foretaste in hope, especially since in the Holy Eucharist we are offered a pledge and anticipation of our promised eternal happiness. Do we often think of heaven, especially when a setback comes, in order to

immediately recover our supernatural peace and joy? Do we frequently go to the Tabernacle, to spend time with Jesus and nourish our theological life? The early Christians represented the virtue of hope by the symbol of an anchor. This signified that beyond the changing circumstances of earthly existence, our security is based on Jesus, who has entered into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father in his Most Holy Humanity, ever living to intercede for us (cfr. Hb 4:14; 7:25).

“Christ is alive. This is the great truth which fills our faith with meaning. Jesus, who died on the cross, has risen. He has triumphed over death; he has overcome sorrow, anguish and the power of darkness,” wrote Saint Josemaría. And he continued: “Christ is alive. Jesus is the Emmanuel: God with us. His resurrection shows us that God does

not abandon his own. He promised he would not: ‘Can a woman forget her baby that is still unweaned, pity no longer the son she bore in her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you’ (Is 49:14-15). And he has kept his promise” (Christ is passing by, n. 102).

In his recent post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Benedict XVI reminds us that “especially in the liturgy of the Eucharist, we are given a real foretaste of the eschatological fulfillment for which every human being and all creation are destined (cf. Rom 8:19ff.). Man is created for that true and eternal happiness which only God’s love can give. But our wounded freedom would go astray were it not already able to experience something of that future fulfillment. Moreover, to move forward in the right direction, we all need to be guided towards our final

goal. That goal is Christ himself, the Lord who conquered sin and death, and who makes himself present to us in a special way in the Eucharistic celebration. Even though we remain ‘aliens and exiles’ in this world (1 Pet 2:11), through faith we already share in the fullness of risen life. The Eucharistic banquet, by disclosing its powerful eschatological dimension, comes to the aid of our freedom as we continue our journey” (n. 30).

Jesus is the invisible but real Companion who is always at our side and who awaits us in the Tabernacle, where he shows us how close he is to us. How our days would change if we truly had at every moment the sureness, filled with faith, hope and love, that inspired Saint Josemaría! Let us go trustingly to his intercession, so that he will spur us to be truly Eucharistic men and women. On the 23rd, the anniversary of his first Holy Communion, we will

have an excellent opportunity to do so. Let us tell Jesus each day, “Lord, I love you,” and strive to show it with deeds.

Let us pray a lot for the Pope, both for him and for his intentions. The burden that lies on his shoulders is a very heavy one. Divine providence counts on our prayers and sacrifices to give him strength and make his words effective. On the upcoming April 16th, he will turn 80, and the 19th will be the second anniversary of his election. Let us thank God for the gift he has granted the Church in the person of Benedict XVI.

We all recall how at the Mass inaugurating his pontificate, the Holy Father asked Catholics for the help of their prayer. And in 2006, when commemorating the first anniversary of his pontificate, he remarked: “I feel more and more that alone I could not carry out this task,

this mission. But I also feel that you are carrying it with me: thus, I am in a great communion and together we can go ahead with the Lord's mission...I offer very warm thanks to all those who in various ways support me from close at hand or follow me from afar in spirit with their affection and their prayers. I ask each one to continue to support me, praying to God to grant that I may be a gentle and firm Pastor of his Church (General Audience, April 19, 2006).

Let us examine in God's presence how our union with the Pope is going: a unity of prayers, of affections and of resolutions. Do we pray a lot, every day, for the intentions of the Holy Father? Do we offer up sacrifices and renunciations that cost us a lot? Do we ask other people to pray and offer up periods of work and small mortifications for the Roman Pontiff? Do we spread his

teachings, which are the doctrine of Christ, and defend them when they are attacked in the media or in private conversations?

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april-2007/](https://opusdei.org/en-sg/article/letter-from-the-prelate-april-2007/) (03/29/2025)