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Letter from the Prelate (April 2015)

The Prelate stresses the irreplaceable role of parents in the upbringing of children, in the context of the Marian year for the family.

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

I am writing you in the midst of Holy Week. I turn to our Lady and ask her

that the Marian Year we are celebrating in her honor may spur us to “put ourselves” deeply into the scenes of our Lord's passion, death and resurrection, during the upcoming Paschal triduum.

On March 28, we celebrated the ninetieth anniversary of St. Josemaría's priestly ordination; and tomorrow, Holy Thursday, the liturgy places clearly before us the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood in the Cenacle at Jerusalem. Later, the Paschal Vigil will speak to us of Christ's victory over sin and death and, in him, the victory of those who, through baptism, have been incorporated into his death and resurrection.

The Church administers the sacraments of Christian initiation—Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist—in the course of the Paschal Vigil. In most cases, we have

received these in childhood, in accord with the immemorial practice that has its origin in the Gospel teachings. And in the glorious night of the Vigil, we are invited to renew the commitments that, in our name, our parents and godparents professed, or perhaps we ourselves.

Following my practice during these Marian months, I want to consider now the importance of these sacraments in the life of Christian families. May our gratitude to the Most Blessed Trinity rise up every day for these salvific mysteries that enable us to participate in the divine riches.

All of us can and should help out in the task of the evangelization of the family, in the way best suited to our personal circumstances. My thoughts go out to those who work in schools, public or private, in direct contact with fathers and mothers, with so

many young people in the classrooms, and with teachers with whom they share their educational responsibility. I remind you all that your work, of primordial importance, should not be limited to transmitting a specific body of knowledge that prepares students for the future. Be concerned (I know that you already are) to foster the integral formation of the children and adolescents in the various aspects—human, spiritual, religious—so integral to Christian education.

In first place, fathers and mothers have a primordial role here, as do, in a certain way, the other family members: brothers and sisters, grandparents, etc. It is the parents, or those who take their place, who are primarily responsible for the education of their children.

Speaking of the various family members, the Roman Pontiff said:

“You, children and young people, are the fruit of the tree that is the family: you are good fruit when the tree has deep roots—your grandparents—and a strong trunk—your parents. Jesus said that every sound tree bears good fruit but every bad tree bears evil fruit (cf. *Mt 7:17*). The great human family is like a forest, where sound trees bear solidarity, communion, trust, support, security, joyful temperance, friendship. The presence of large families is a hope for society. And this is why the presence of grandparents is very important: a precious presence both for practical help, and above all for their educational contribution.

Grandparents preserve in themselves the values of a people, of a family, and they help parents pass them on to the children.”[1] I insist that couples to whom God does not grant children can also play an important and enriching role in the Christian formation of other homes.

How much good parents do when they take this mission seriously! So the first need is that parents and children be present at home, convinced that their home can and should be the “anteroom” of heaven and a school of charity, because the joys and sorrows of each one are the joys and sorrows of the other members of the family.

St. Josemaría passed on to us this very clear teaching, the fruit also of his personal experience. On one occasion, remembering how our Lord had been preparing him for his mission of founding the Work, he remarked: “He caused me to be born in a Catholic family, like most people in my country, with exemplary parents who practiced their faith in daily life, and who gave me great freedom right from my youth while also carefully watching over me. They tried to give me a Christian education, which I acquired from

them at home more than at school, even though from the age of three I went to a school run by nuns, and from the age of seven to one run by priests."[2]

In the Grandparents' home, he learned to lead an authentically Christian life, suited at each moment to the circumstances of his age; and he was deeply grateful to God at the end of his life, when he called to mind events, great and small, from those early years of childhood and adolescence. From his own situation, and from his ample priestly experience, there came the advice that he offered to fathers and mothers of families.

I would like to stress here his insistence on the importance of good example. "From the very start, children are relentless witnesses of their parents' lives. You don't realize it, but they judge everything, and at

times they judge you in a bad light. So what happens at home influences your children for good or for evil. Try to give them good example, try not to hide your piety, try to behave uprightly: then they will learn, and they will be the crown of your mature years and your old age. You are like an open book to them."[3]

It's very important that parents—also the dads, not just the moms—teach children their first prayers. “Don't force them to say long prayers: short ones, but every day. When they're very small, you take their little hand and help them make the sign of the Cross. That's something one never forgets. Your gentleness and your piety, and the piety of your husbands, of our fathers, remain deep in the soul.”[4]

With good humor, he remarked on another occasion: “Your children shouldn't go to bed like little puppies.

I like to put it that way because it's very clear and I can make myself understood. Little puppies lie down in a corner, and that's all. Not so with your children. They should make the sign of the cross before going to bed, and say some words to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to God our Lord, even when their soul is not totally clean."[5]

He acknowledged with a holy pride that he never abandoned, either in the morning or at night, the vocal prayers he learned in infancy: "they are few, short, pious. And thus the memory of my parents takes me to God and, while making me feel very close to my natural family, it also unites me to the family in Nazareth—Jesus, Mary and Joseph—and to that family in Heaven, the one God who is three in persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit."[6]

As children get older, they can learn other prayers: the Our Father and Hail Mary, the blessings at meals, the rosary... And when they are old enough, it is very good for them to attend Sunday Mass, even though they might not understand much of what is happening. Thus the seed of Christian life, sown in Baptism, develops in an harmonious way. And they are prepared for First Holy Communion, which the Church advises should be preceded by sacramental Confession.[7]

Our Father always advised bringing children to the sacraments as soon as their age permits it. Listen to the advice he gave to a mother: “You should take them to Confession soon, very soon, as soon as they reach the age of reason. And if you can prepare them yourself, do so; if not, go to a priest you can trust. It's not true that children are traumatized by it! It's not true that it does them harm! It

did me a lot of good, and my mother took me to confession when I was six years old." [8]

On the 23rd we will celebrate another anniversary of St.

Josemaría's First Holy Communion: a day particularly apt for thanking Jesus for the moment when he came to dwell sacramentally, for the first time, in our founder's heart, and in the heart of each of us.

The above considerations are of use to all of us: to fathers and mothers, to teachers in primary and secondary schools, to those who help out in the formative work of the Prelature with older people, and to those who are younger who, with their friends, provide great assistance in youth clubs and other similar initiatives.

I am very grateful to the instructors and tutors who provide this assistance, in close union with the families, doing so with professional

outlook and apostolic concern. Keep in mind that, without the parents' cooperation, without good example at home, your efforts, often involving great sacrifice, can easily come to naught. Therefore I never tire of reminding you to invite the fathers and mothers to the activities of the clubs and to ask them to assist in the efforts of the schools. Remind them that they should take very seriously their educational duties, offering their time generously, their material help, their initiatives, in the marvelous work of preparing exemplary citizens and good Christians, in the "extension" of the home that schools and youth clubs should be.

In the past month I made a visit to our Lady at her Fatima shrine. All of you were very present in my prayer; our Lord also granted me the joy of spending time with various groups of my children in Portugal: men and

women, young and old, priests and laity. Continue being closely united to my intentions, especially on the upcoming 20th, the anniversary of my appointment as Prelate of the Work And let us increase our prayer for the Pope and those who assist him.

Before ending, I insist that we should strive to take part very diligently in the liturgical rites of the Holy Triduum and later in the time of Easter. Encourage your friends, relatives and colleagues to draw a lot of fruit from these holy days. And let us try to fill the streets and our homes with acts of thanksgiving, with acts of reparation, with spiritual communions, showing our Lord and his Blessed Mother the deepest feelings of our heart.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, April 1, 2015

[1] Pope Francis, Address to the Italian National Association of Large Families, December 28, 2014.

[2] St. Josemaría, Notes taken from a meditation, February 14, 1964.

[3] St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, November 12, 1972.

[4] St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, June 4, 1974.

[5] St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, October 18, 1972.

[6] St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, October 28, 1972.

[7] See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1457.

[8] St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, July 14, 1974.

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