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Letter from the Prelate (March 2010)

During these weeks of Lent, Bishop Echevarría tells us that "our daily effort to convert our heart to God in some specific point is very important."

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

This year, in his message for Lent, the Pope reflects on the broad topic of justice. Referring to the classical definition of this virtue—*rendering*

to each man his due —Benedict XVI says that "what man needs most cannot be guaranteed to him by law. In order to live life to the full, something more intimate is necessary that can be granted only as a gift: we could say that man lives by that love which only God can communicate since he created the human person in his image and likeness." [1]

Rendering to each one his or her due, in the sphere of human relations, is an indispensable requirement for the development of a just, truly human society. And in this regard, each of us has to strive to fulfill our duties towards others as well as possible, whether individually or as part of the community to which we belong: family, business, civil society. But we can't be satisfied with this. St. Josemaría's advice was to "practice justice and go beyond it with the grace of charity." [2]

Honesty, rectitude in the fulfillment of one's duties towards others, forms the basis of a rightly ordered community, although more is required. Our Lord was concerned about curing the sick and feeding those who were hungry, but he was also concerned, above all, about alleviating spiritual needs: ignorance of divine realities, the sickness of sin.... For as St. Augustine wrote, if "justice is the virtue which gives every one his due . . . where, then, is the justice of man, when he deserts the true God?"[3] As our Father insisted: "be convinced that justice alone is never enough to solve the great problems of mankind. When justice alone is done, don't be surprised if people are hurt. The dignity of man, who is a son of God, requires much more. Charity must penetrate and accompany justice because it sweetens and deifies everything: 'God is love' (*1 Jn* 4:16). Our motive in everything we do

should be the Love of God, which makes it easier for us to love our neighbor and which purifies and raises all earthly loves on to a higher level."[4]

These considerations, at the beginning of Lent, also help us to put into practice the liturgy's call during these weeks to conversion, to prepare for Easter. In order to contribute effectively to bringing about a more just society, we first have to put order in our own hearts.

Our Lord, when he reproached the Pharisees for their concern about "pure" and "impure" foods, said that *there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him* .[5] For it is the human heart, wounded by original sin and our personal sins, that is the source of the greatest evils; while it is also the human heart, healed and

elevated by grace, that is the source of the greatest goods.

Original sin was the cause of the break up of the communion closely uniting mankind with God and with one another in our earliest history. Personal sins make this rupture even worse, turning it into a deep separation. We see this in so many aspects of our individual and collective life. Although open by nature to others, man "finds in his being a strange force of gravity that makes him turn in and affirm himself above and against others: this is egoism, the result of original sin. Adam and Eve, seduced by Satan's lie, snatching the mysterious fruit against the divine command, replaced the logic of trusting in Love with that of suspicion and competition; the logic of receiving and trustfully expecting from the Other, with anxiously seizing and doing on one's own (cf. *Gen* 3:1-6),

experiencing, as a consequence, a sense of disquiet and uncertainty. How can man free himself from this selfish influence and open himself to love?"[6]

This question expresses the deepest aspiration of each person, because having been created by love and for love, all men and women—no matter how much at times they try to hide it—aspire to fill their heart with a great and pure love, which comes from giving themselves to God and to others for God, so that no room remains for a disordered love of self. This is possible only with the help of divine grace, which heals, strengthens and elevates our soul—grace that reaches us abundantly, above all, through the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist.

So let us foster during this Lent a desire for spiritual renewal, taking greater care in preparing for

Confession with due frequency, and putting more love into our daily preparation to receive our Lord in the Eucharist. Let us also do everything possible to help those we come in contact with each day to follow the same path. Have we decided on specific ways to live the Lenten practices that the Church recommends for these weeks? Striving to stay close to our Lord and his Blessed Mother, being more generous in our spirit of penance, setting specific goals to help others, especially in our apostolate, will help ensure that our soul is well prepared to receive the fruit of Easter.

As we travel along this path, our daily effort to convert our heart to God in some specific point is very important. These successive changes—perhaps in small things, but with the same effort as if it were something big—are moments of great importance for our

sanctification. Our Lord ardently desires that this change take place in us, but he needs our personal cooperation. Let us recall St. Augustine's words: "God, who created you without you, will not save you without you." [7]

With the urging of the Holy Spirit, these small daily steps forward have the power to open wide the door of our ego so that divine grace can purify it and enkindle it with love for God and neighbor. Therefore, as St. Josemaría wrote, "we cannot regard this Lent as just another liturgical season which has simply happened to come around again. It is a unique time: a divine aid which we should accept. Jesus is passing by and he hopes that we will take a great step forward—today, now." [8]

Let us remember that the word "justice" in Sacred Scripture has a very deep meaning, especially when

speaking about God. In this sense, it means above all the divine holiness, which God wants to freely communicate to us through faith in Jesus Christ, as St. Paul teaches in the letter to the Romans. *For there is no distinction, as all have sinned and have need of the glory of God. They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth as a propitiation by his blood through faith, to manifest his justice .[9]*

Only by being united to Christ through faith and the sacraments will we make that holiness our own, which he attained for us by dying on the Cross for our sins and resurrecting for our justification. "Here we discover divine justice, which is so profoundly different from its human counterpart. God has paid for us the price of the exchange in his Son, a price that is truly exorbitant. Faced with the justice of

the Cross, man may rebel, for this reveals that he is not a self-sufficient being, but in need of Another in order to realize himself fully.

Conversion to Christ, believing in the Gospel, ultimately means this: to exit the illusion of self-sufficiency in order to discover and accept one's own need—the need for others and for God, the need for his forgiveness and friendship." [10]

How well we understand, in this context, our Father's constant insistence—first, by his own example—that we relive each day in our own life "the role of the prodigal son"! This is a teaching that is ever timely for us, but especially during the upcoming weeks. "Human life is in some way a constant returning to our Father's house. We return through contrition, through the conversion of heart which means a desire to change, a firm decision to improve our life and which,

therefore, is expressed in sacrifice and self-giving. We return to our Father's house by means of that sacrament of pardon in which, by confessing our sins, we put on Jesus Christ again and become his brothers, members of God's family.

"God is waiting for us, like the father in the parable, with open arms, even though we don't deserve it. It doesn't matter how great our debt is. Just like the prodigal son, all we have to do is open our heart, to be homesick for our Father's house, to wonder at and rejoice in the gift which God makes us of being able to call ourselves his children, of really being his children, even though our response to him has been so poor." [11]

We will find it easier to travel this path without tiring if we remain very close to Mary our Mother, and to St. Joseph, her most chaste Spouse. Let

us go to them with great trust in this Marian year that we have begun in Opus Dei, with the pressing desire to renew our dedication in the Work on the feast of the Holy Patriarch. I have been moved once again by some other words of St. Josemaría that we should all deeply ponder on.

Referring to the beginning of Opus Dei's apostolic work with women, he told his daughters: "I thought there would only be men in Opus Dei. It's not that I didn't want women . . . but before February 14, 1930, I had no knowledge of your existence in Opus Dei, although my heart burned with the desire to fulfill God's will in everything." [12] My daughters and sons, are we striving to foster this disposition—the desire to fulfill God's will—at all times? Do we realize that it is only with this ardent desire that the behavior of a Christian woman, of a Christian man, makes sense?

During the past month I made a quick trip to Valencia, invited by the Archbishop of that diocese within the framework of the Year for Priests, and to Palma de Mallorca in the Balearic Islands, where the apostolic work of the Prelature is growing steadily. There I once again sensed the hunger for God present in so many souls, and I saw how they receive the spirit of Opus Dei gratefully, which helps them to seek and find the Blessed Trinity in their daily activities. As always when I make these trips, I leaned on the prayer of all of you. Always continue to accompany me!

On the 23rd we will commemorate once more the anniversary of the passing of our beloved Don Alvaro. In recalling the constancy with which he always encouraged us to go to our Lady, I suggest that you go privately to his intercession so that

the graces of this Marian Year will deeply permeate your souls.

At the end of the month, on the 28th, we will commemorate another anniversary of our Father's priestly ordination. Let us go to his intercession in praying for the Pope and those who assist him, for the other bishops, for the priests of the whole world, for priestly and religious vocations, for the sanctity of the entire people of God that Jesus has acquired at the price of his blood.[13]

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, March 1, 2010

Footnotes:

[1] Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2010, October 30, 2009.

- [2] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 77.
- [3] St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XIX, 21.
- [4] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 172.
- [5] *Mk* 7:15
- [6] Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2010, October 30, 2009.
- [7] St. Augustine, *Sermon* 169, 13 (PL 38, 923).
- [8] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 59.
- [9] *Rom* 3:22-25.
- [10] Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2010, October 30, 2009.
- [11] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 64,

[12] St. Josemaría, notes from a family gathering, July 11, 1974.

[13] Cf. *1 Cor* 6:20; 7:23.

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