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Letter of the Prelate (August 2007)

Letter of Bishop Javier Echevarría to the faithful of Opus Dei. In this month's letter he reminds them that all Catholics ought to help their friends and relatives discover the faith. Quoting Pope Benedict XVI, he stresses that to do apostolate "is truly a service to joy, to God's joy which longs to break into the world." (Homily, April 24, 2005)

08/06/2007

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

I reminded you last month, with the example of the early Christians, that the apostolate of God's children should be optimistic, filled with the assurance of its effectiveness. The Master told us: *euntes docete omnes gentes* (Mt 28:19)—go throughout the whole world, teaching the Gospel to every creature. And he did not leave us alone: *I am with you always, to the close of the age* (Mt 28:20).

One can understand why, for St. Josemaría, the world seemed small. I recall (I heard him recount it) something that happened in April 1936. He had gone to Valencia to prepare the ground for the first apostolic expansion of Opus Dei outside of Madrid. While there he spoke to a university student about the possibility of joining the Work. As they were walking along, they

reached the shore of the Mediterranean. The fellow remarked: “Father, how big the sea is!” St. Josemaría immediately replied: ***But to me it seems small.*** He was thinking of other seas and other lands, where his daughters and sons were to go as soon as possible, carrying with them the spirit received from God. And his heart was filled with zeal for souls right to the last moment.

In those years, due to the hazards of the Spanish Civil War, the desired apostolic expansion could not be carried out. He was not discouraged, not even when in August 1936 he was forced to leave the house where he lived with his mother and brother and sister, fleeing from the religious persecution that had been unleashed.

Several very difficult months followed, during which our Founder

found himself at least twice on the verge of martyrdom. In those circumstances, as you know, he took refuge in various places that offered a modicum of safety. Nevertheless, he continued exercising his priestly ministry to the extent possible and provided spiritual care to the first members of the Work. When on August 31, 1937—seventy years ago now—he was able to leave the precarious refuge where he had remained for several months, he dedicated himself with renewed intensity to his spiritual work (which he had also carried out in the Honduran Consulate), even risking his life. The fruit of that sowing was not lost. Apart from the fact that it was plentiful even then, it was gathered abundantly later on, thanks to the splendid flourishing of people chosen by God to serve him in Opus Dei.

St. Josemaría felt himself to be a citizen of the world. He didn't consider himself a foreigner anywhere. He discovered right away the positive side of each country and tried to learn from the people there. He was concerned about every human being, also those he didn't yet know. During his apostolic trips, he prayed generously for everyone. He could truly state that he had carried out the "prehistory" of the Work—the preparation for its future apostolic work—in many countries where the faithful of Opus Dei would later carry out their apostolate. I would say in all of them, because in his periods of prayer before the tabernacle and in his long hours of work in his office, he would go again and again throughout the whole world, putting at our Lord's feet the future work of his daughters and sons. He liked to have a map of the world on his table; it helped him to travel around the world in his imagination, with a

hunger to Christianize or re-Christianize it.

We too, like our Father, have to go out in search of everyone. We can't be indifferent about anyone: ***out of a hundred souls we are interested in a hundred*** (St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 183). Consider these words of Benedict XVI addressed to all Catholics: **we cannot keep to ourselves the joy of the faith. We must spread it and pass it on, and thereby also strengthen it in our own hearts. If faith is truly the joy of having discovered truth and love, we inevitably feel the desire to transmit it, to communicate it to others. The new evangelization to which our beloved Pope John Paul II called us passes mainly through this process.**

With delicacy and respect we must address a special but clear and courageous invitation to follow

Jesus to those young men and women who appear to be the most attracted and fascinated by friendship with him (Address at the inauguration of the diocesan assembly of Rome, June 11, 2007).

We have to place before many young girls and boys the possibility of serving the Church and souls in Opus Dei, in celibacy or in marriage. Our Lord is determined to send a great number of apostles to all parts of the world to spread the joyful announcement of the Gospel, with the example of their lives and the force of their words. Let us not be held back by difficulties raised by the culture or environment, even if these are objective. Because God's grace is also very "objective." It is the principal factor on which we always have to count. Therefore, with words of our Father, I repeat: ***it's a matter of faith!***

Let's be convinced that God, from before the creation of the world (Cf. *Eph* 1:4), has chosen many women and men to be *fishers of men* (*Lk* 5:10), serving him *indiviso corde* (Cf. *1 Cor* 7:25-30), with undivided heart, without the mediation of a human love. Let us consider then, as addressed us, those words from the prophet Jeremiah that our Father applied to the specific circumstances of each person. **Behold, I am sending many fishermen, says the Lord, and I will catch those fishes (*Jer* 16:16). That is his way of explaining the great task we have before us: we must become fishermen. The world is often compared, in conversation or in books, with the sea. It is a good comparison, for in our lives, just as in the sea, there are quiet times and stormy seasons, periods of calm and gusts of strong wind. One often finds souls swimming in difficult waters, in the midst of**

*heavy waves. They travel through stormy weather, their journey a sad rushing around, despite their apparently cheerful expressions and their boisterousness. Their bursts of laughter are a cover for their discouragement and ill-temper. Their lives are bereft of charity and understanding. Men, like fish, devour each other. Our task as children of God is to get all men to enter, freely, into the divine net; to get them to love each other. If we are Christians, we must seek to become fishermen like those described by the prophet Jeremiah with a metaphor which Jesus also often used: 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men,' (Mt 4:19), he says to Peter and Andrew (St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 259).*

Benedict XVI, in the Mass inaugurating his pontificate, insisted: **as we follow Christ in this mission**

to be fishers of men, we must bring men and women out of the sea that is salted with so many forms of alienation and onto the land of life, into the light of God...There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him. The task of the shepherd, the task of the fisher of men, can often seem wearisome. But it is beautiful and wonderful, because it is truly a service to joy, to God's joy which longs to break into the world
(Homily, April 24, 2005).

It should not surprise us that some people put up resistance to this marvelous invitation. Including men or women with excellent human qualities, people who could give a lot of glory to God and be effective instruments in his hands, and who

nevertheless do not respond, or at least not as quickly as one would like. As St. Josemaría said: ***What compassion you feel for them! You would like to cry out to them that they are wasting their time. Why are they so blind, and why can't they perceive what you—a miserable creature—have seen? Why don't they go for the best?***

Pray and mortify yourself. Then you have the duty to wake them up, one by one, explaining to them—also one by one—that they, like you, can find a divine way, without leaving the place they occupy in society (St. Josemaría, Furrow, no. 182).

Look at what St. Augustine says regarding those who did not seem disposed to listen to him when he urged them to change their behavior, to be good Christians. Speaking of the duties of the good shepherd—and all of us in the Church have to be at the

same time both *sheep and shepherd*—the Holy Doctor wrote: “There are obstinate sheep. When you seek them, because they are astray, they say in their error and for their perdition that they have nothing to do with us. ‘Why do you want us? Why are you seeking us?’ As though the reason we are concerned about them and are seeking them were not that they are in error and are lost. They answer: ‘If I am in error, if I am lost, why do you want me? Why are you looking for me?’ Because you are in error and I want to call you back, because you are lost and I want to find you. ‘But I want to be in error, I want to be lost.’ You want to be in error and be lost? Then how much greater is my desire to prevent it! I dare to be even inopportune. Listen to the Apostle’s advice: “Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season” (2 *Tim* 4:2). To whom in season? To whom out of season? In season to those who want it; out of

season to those who do not want it” (St. Augustine, *Sermon 46, On Shepherds*, no. 14).

My daughter, my son, are you doing apostolate every day? Do you take advantage of all the opportunities, without human respect? Do you remember those words from the Gospel—*hominem non habeo* (Jn 5:7)—so that no one may say of us, of you, that he did not have anyone to help him?

As we do every year around this time, we are preparing for the great solemnity of the Assumption of our Lady, when we renew the consecration of Opus Dei to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. When asking her, echoing our Father and our beloved Don Alvaro, to prepare and preserve a safe way for us—*iter para tutum, iter serva tutum!*—let us especially place in her hands the apostolic expansion in so many

countries: those in which we are beginning, those others to which we hope to go as soon as possible, and those in which we have been working for years, so that the spirit of the Work may arrive as soon as possible to many other places.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Pamplona, August 1, 2007

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