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Letter from the Prelate (24 September 2017)

"What are you seeking?", our Lord asks young people. If we help them grow with a strong and healthy heart, they will hear Christ's call: "come and see."

22/09/2017

Rome, 24 September 2017, feast of
Our Lady of Ransom

My dearest children: May Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

After the past months, when I have had the joy of seeing many of you, I write to you with my eyes already fixed on the theme of the forthcoming Synod of Bishops, which will take place in Rome within a year: “Young people, the Faith, and vocational discernment”. As you know, apostolate with young people was very much to the fore in the recent General Congress.^[1] In this letter I would simply like to encourage you, without going into details, to consider how we can intensify this urgent aspect of our Christian vocation.

“What do you seek?” Our Lord asks John and Andrew, the first time they approach him (*Jn* 1:38). Youth is a time of seeking; it is the time when the utmost importance is given to the

question “Who do I want to be?” which for a Christian also means “Who am I *called* to be?” It is a question about one’s vocation, about how to respond to God’s love. “You, dear young man, dear young woman,” wrote Pope Francis two years ago, “have you ever felt the gaze of everlasting love upon you, a gaze that looks beyond your sins, limitations and failings, and continues to have faith in you and to look upon your life with hope? Do you realize how precious you are to God, who has given you everything out of love?”[2]

Today there are many obstacles, sometimes complex ones, in the way of this personal encounter with God’s love. But there are also signs of hope. “It is not true,” said Benedict XVI, “that young people think only of consumerism and pleasure. It is not true that they are materialistic and self-centred. Just the opposite is true:

young people want great things.”[3]
This statement corresponds to the reality of the lives of many young people who are ambitious to improve the world, even though it seems to conflict with the indolence of many others, who we see have grown old before their time because of being constantly bombarded with consumerism, entertainment, instant gratification, and frivolity. It's easy to lament about that situation; it is more demanding, however, to rise to the level of those desires for great things that dwell deep in their hearts, though sometimes covered over with apparent indifference. Are we capable of making them thrill with the beauty of the Faith, and of a life lived for others? I ask each of my younger sons and daughters: Are you able to pass on to your friends your own enthusiasm for God who is Beauty, Goodness and Truth, the only one capable of satisfying the desire for happiness in their hearts? And I

ask those of us who are no longer so young in years, but who try to keep our hearts young: Do we try to understand their difficulties and their ambitions? Do we become young with them?

St Josemaria loved the Portuguese term for young people: *os novos*, the new ones. He once said, “Be very young, all of you. Renew yourselves! (...) Renewing means being young again, being new again, having a new capacity for self-giving.”^[4] To encourage many souls to have generous dreams of self-giving to God and others, all Christians need to make an effort to be genuine witnesses of a life that sincerely aims for identification with Jesus Christ. In spite of our limitations, with God’s grace we can be sowers of peace and joy in the place where Our Lord wants us to be, whether it is a little corner of the world or a crossroads of cultures. Let’s maintain and

enhance the “youth” that God gives us.[5] Our serene witness of youthfulness of spirit always leaves an impression on others, which sooner or later helps them in their own lives.

St Josemaría used to say that parents are responsible for ninety per cent of their children’s vocation, and this applies to all those who influence the upbringing and education of young people in one way or another. I am thinking of everyone, but especially the Co-operators and Supernumeraries. I encourage you to consider whether you can increase your involvement in formational works for young people (schools, clubs, etc.) generously and creatively, but at the same time, I suggest that you look first and foremost at your own home. Think whether your children can be happy to belong to their family because they have parents who listen to them and take

them seriously, and love them as they are; who dare to ask themselves the same questions as they do; who, in the little things of daily life, help them to appreciate the value of things and the effort required to run a home; who make demands on them; who are not afraid to bring them into contact with the suffering and weakness that are so prominent in many people's lives, beginning perhaps with people in their own family; and who with their own piety, help them to "touch" God, to be souls of prayer. Help them, in short, to grow up with hearts that are healthy and strong, so that they can hear God telling each of them, as he told John and Andrew, "Come and see" (*Jn 1:39*).

A very affectionate blessing from
your Father

- [1] Pastoral letter, 14 February 2017, 17, 24-28, 31.
- [2] Francis, Message for 31st World Youth Day in Krakow, 15 August 2015.
- [3] Benedict XVI, Address, 25 April 2005.
- [4] Saint Josemaria, notes from a family get-together, 19 March 1964.
- [5] Cf. Saint Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 79.

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