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Letter from the Prelate (April 2016)

"Forgiving offenses is, in a certain sense, the most divine thing we can do," the Prelate tells us, stressing the mercy God has shown in redeeming us.

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Rome, 1 April 2016

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

In Holy Week we were moved once again by God's love for mankind. *God so loved the world, writes St John, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*[1]

How much we should thank the Blessed Trinity for this outpouring of goodness and mercy! And still more, if we consider that *While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*[2] Our Lord's passion and death are the culmination of the commitment that God freely chose to make to mankind. **His first commitment was that of creating the world, and despite our attempts to ruin it – and there are many – he is committed to keeping it alive. But his greatest commitment was that of giving us Jesus. This is God's great**

commitment! Yes, Jesus is really the supreme commitment that God has assumed for us.[3]

In fulfilment of this promise, repeatedly renewed throughout the history of salvation, the Incarnate Son of God did not limit himself to gaining us forgiveness for our sins by living and working among us, even though his slightest act had more than enough value to redeem us. Nor did he content himself with interceding for us, although he well knew that God the Father always heard his prayer. He chose to go to extremes, because *Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*[4]

The words of Jesus Christ the Redeemer during his agony on the Cross are moving. The first is this: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*[5] He is not thinking about the humiliations and

sufferings he was undergoing, nor about the cruelty of those who were crucifying him, but about the offence against God. He came to obtain forgiveness for our sins for us, and his first utterance is a petition for mercy. The second, addressed to the Good Thief, is along the same lines. Seeing that man's sincere repentance, he promises him remission of his sins and eternal life: *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.*^[6] One can understand why our Father used to kiss the crucifix with such profound devotion, which, for those who saw him, was an occasion of conversion and an invitation to talk about Christ and the example he set.

St Josemaría assimilated our Lord's lessons deeply and preached about them with his example and words. ***Forgiveness. To forgive with one's whole heart and with no trace of a grudge will always be a***

wonderfully fruitful disposition to have!

That was Christ's attitude on being nailed to the Cross: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they are doing." From this came your salvation and mine.[\[7\]](#) What a good example for us! Let us ask God that we may learn to be indulgent and forgive whoever has offended us straight away, without any resentment.

Forgiving offences is, in a way, the most divine thing we humans can do. It is not simply a work of mercy; it is also a condition for God to forgive our sins, and a petition to him to do so, as the Teacher shows us in the Our Father: *forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*[\[8\]](#)

One of the great deficiencies of present-day society is the difficulty people have in forgiving. Individuals and whole nations revert again and

again to offences received, wallowing in such memories as in a dirty puddle, and do not want to make an effort to forgive and forget. Our Lord's teaching is different, and very clear. He sums up the story of God's clemency towards mankind in the words *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*[9]

We carry engraved within us many scenes from the Gospel that show Jesus' attitude: his forgiveness of the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, the parable of the prodigal son or the lost sheep, his mildness towards the woman taken in adultery... This is the path we Christians need to follow in order to become more like the Teacher.

Christ's way can be summed up in one word: love. If we are to love, we must have a big heart and share the concerns of those around us. We must be able to forgive and understand; we must

sacrifice ourselves, with Jesus Christ, for all souls. If we love with Christ's heart, we shall learn to serve others and we shall defend the truth clearly, lovingly.[10]

However, as St Josemaría said repeatedly, *If we are to love in this way, we need to root out of our individual lives everything which is an obstacle to Christ's life in us: attachment to our own comfort, the temptation to selfishness, the tendency to be the centre of everything. Only by reproducing in ourselves the word of Christ can we transmit it to others. Only by experiencing the death of the grain of wheat can we work in the heart of the world, transforming it from within, making it fruitful.*[11]

The scenes of our Lord's passion and death which we have recently relived pose us some searching questions that we need to answer

truthfully. Do we forgive offences from the very first moment – which, very often, are not really offences but merely our imagination, exaggerated by our touchiness? Do we make the effort to clear them out of our hearts, and not to go back over the same topics again and again? Do we ask our Lord and our Blessed Lady for help when we realise we are finding it hard to forgive?

That should be our constant attitude, because it is not enough to forgive once, or twice, or three times... We should remember the answer our Lord gave to Peter's question: "*Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?*" Jesus said to him, "*I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven*"[12] – in other words, always. And straight afterwards, to engrave the lesson on our hearts, he told the parable of the cruel servant who was stupidly

unmerciful over a tiny debt that a fellow-servant owed him, when his master had just forgiven him an enormous sum.[13] Let us make every effort, in this Year of Mercy and always, to assimilate in depth these demands on Christ's true disciples.

It is not enough for us to avoid offending externally: we also need to make the effort to stifle thoughts and judgements that go against charity. Our earthly journey is really a pilgrimage to the glory of Heaven, and Jesus Christ shows us the stages on the way to this goal. In the Papal Bull *Misericordiæ Vultus*, the Pope explains one of them with his comments on our Lord's words *Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned.*[14]

The Holy Father writes: **above all *not to judge and not to condemn.* If**

anyone wishes to avoid God's judgement, he should not make himself the judge of his brother or sister. Human beings, whenever they judge, look no farther than the surface, whereas the Father looks into the very depths of the soul. How much harm words do when they are motivated by feelings of jealousy and envy! To speak ill of others puts them in a bad light, undermines their reputation and leaves them prey to the whims of gossip. To refrain from judgement and condemnation means, in a positive sense, to know how to accept the good in every person and to spare him any suffering that might be caused by our partial judgement, our presumption to know everything about him. But this is still not sufficient to express mercy. Jesus asks us also to *forgive* and to *give*. To be instruments of mercy because it was we who first

received mercy from God. To be generous with others, knowing that God showers his goodness upon us with immense generosity. [15]

Here we see another dimension of Christian forgiveness: to ask others to forgive us as soon as we realise we have offended them. This is no humiliation, but just the opposite: it is a sign of magnanimity, a big heart and a generous soul. In this too St Josemaría set us an example. How promptly he asked for forgiveness, with real humility, if he thought that anyone had been wounded by a reprimand from him, however well-deserved! On one occasion he admitted that he had often asked our Lord for forgiveness for what he saw as the failures in his response. ***At the same time, however, he added, I can assure you that I have given you the best of myself. I have tried to pass on to you with the utmost***

fidelity all that God our Lord has given me; and when I didn't do so properly, I have acknowledged my mistake immediately, I have asked our Lord and those who were with me for forgiveness, and I have returned immediately to the fray.

[16]

On 20 April I will begin another year of my service to the Church as Prelate of Opus Dei. And on 23 April I will confer the priesthood on a large group of your brothers, deacons of the Prelature. Pray a lot for them and for me, and for all the priests in the Church. Let's always live *consummati in unum*,^[17] closely united in prayer, intentions and deeds, so that our Lord may continue to look mercifully upon us. And let us keep the Pope and all his intentions very much in mind in our prayer.

A very affectionate blessing from
your Father

+ Javier

[1] *Jn* 3:16-17.

[2] *Rom* 5:6.

[3] Pope Francis, Jubilee Audience, 20 February 2016.

[4] *Jn* 15:13.

[5] *Lk* 23:34.

[6] *Lk* 23:43.

[7] St Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 805.

[8] *Mt* 6:12.

[9] *Mt* 5:7.

[10] St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 158.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Mt* 18:21-22.

[13] Cf. *Mt* 18:23-35.

[14] *Lk* 6:37.

[15] Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 11 April 2015, no. 14.

[16] St Josemaría, notes from a meditation, 29 March 1959.

[17] *Jn* 17:23.

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