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Letter from the Prelate (August 2014)

A reflection on the Prelate's visit to Central America and on how we can best celebrate the many marian feasts in August.

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San José de Costa Rica, 1 August 2014

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

I am writing to you from Central America, during the pastoral journey I am making through these six countries where the apostolate of Opus Dei is established. And I can understand why our Father said: ***I think about the Work and I am “stupefied”.***

On this account the first thing that comes to my heart is a wholehearted act of thanksgiving to God for the apostolic fruits in these beloved countries. From Guatemala to Panama I have been contemplating a splendid flourishing of spiritual life, in people of all races and many different languages, because in these countries various native languages are spoken as well as Spanish. On contemplating this panorama, I have also remembered what St Josemaría said so often: ***There is only one race in the world: the race of the children of God. We should all speak the same language (...): the***

language Jesus spoke with his Father. It is the language of heart and mind, which you are using now, in your prayer – the language of contemplation. Because, as our Father explained in another homily, Jesus our Lord *has come to bring peace, good news and life to all men. Not only to the rich, nor only to the poor. Not only to the wise nor only to the simple. To everyone, to the brothers, for brothers we are, children of the same Father, God.*²

I shall be spending another week in this beautiful part of the earth; continue to keep me company with your prayer and sacrifices, the offering up of your ordinary work and of the times of rest that many of you are taking during these days. If you do that, there will be abundant spiritual fruits. Always pray for the Holy Father; this month, be especially united with him during his

journey to Korea, where many Catholics are waiting for him, as are plenty of other people of good will.

As I usually remind you at about this time, the month of August is rich in marian feast-days. Between the 2nd, the commemoration of Our Lady of the Angels, and the 22nd, the feast of Our Lady Queen of Heaven, we will celebrate the dedication of the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore (Our Lady of the Snows, 5th August) and, above all, the solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven, body and soul. On that day, closely united to St Josemaría, Don Álvaro, and all the faithful of the Work who are already rejoicing in God, we will renew the consecration of Opus Dei to our Lady's most sweet and immaculate heart that our Father made for the first time in Loreto on 15th August 1951.

In the liturgy for that day the reading from the Apocalypse shows us a Woman clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet, crowned with twelve stars, in a struggle against the infernal dragon who tries to devour the son she bears. In the first place, this figure represents the Church, who **is, on the one hand, glorious and triumphant and yet, on the other, still in travail. And the Church is like that**, said Pope Francis in a homily; **if in heaven she is already associated in some way with the glory of her Lord, in history she continually lives through the trials and challenges which the conflict between God and the evil one, the perennial enemy, brings.** The first lesson we can take from this scene is very clear: we need to fight without any truces in order to stay faithful to God in our daily life, which is for us the path to holiness. When he was almost at the end of his earthly pilgrimage, St

Josemaría wrote something that was like a summary of his own response to God: ***This is our destiny on earth: to struggle, for love, until the last minute. Deo gratias!*** In that daily battle there are victories and also defeats, from which we can recover by going to the sacrament of Reconciliation; without that battle we would be proud. To conquer in the fight, or to recover straight away if we are beaten, we have God's grace and the help of very many intercessors, starting with our Blessed Lady.

Auxilium Christianorum!– Help of Christians, says the litany of Loreto with confidence. Have you tried to repeat that aspiration in time of difficulty? If you do it with faith, with the tenderness of a daughter or a son, you will discover the power of the intercession of your Holy Mother

Mary, who will lead you to victory.

During her time on earth our Lady also met with difficulties and harsh trials. But, always keeping alive in her heart the *fiat!* – be it done! – that she had said in Nazareth, she was faithful to God at every moment. “From one clear light to another, from one grace to another greater one, and without any kind of hesitation, Mary advanced constantly in her union with God, until the singular and wonderful event occurred which the Church celebrates on the 15th of this month.”⁷

The woman of the Apocalypse is also a figure of our Lady. Like the Church, **in a way, Mary shares this dual condition. She has of course already entered, once and for all, into heavenly glory. But this does not mean that she is distant or detached from us; rather Mary**

accompanies us, struggles with us, sustains Christians in their fight against the forces of evil. Prayer with Mary, especially the rosary (...), has this “suffering” dimension, that is of struggle, a sustaining prayer in the battle against the evil one and his accomplices.

Let us listen to some more recommendations by Don Álvaro, which were born of his great love for Mary, following our Founder's example. “We have to struggle, my children, if we don't want to be defeated by the enemy of God and of our souls. We have all the help of grace and the powerful intercession of the Mother of God. We cannot be afraid. What we have to do is turn to our Lord and use the means the Church offers us: prayer, mortification, frequent reception of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Let's tell our Lord that we

want to be faithful. And tell our Blessed Lady, ‘My Mother, I want to be faithful to your Son, and to be faithful I am relying on you to intercede for me. Our Lord can’t fail to hear you.’”

The great feast of the Assumption offers us the possibility of giving a really good present to our Lady: the resolution of renewed loyalty to the Christian vocation we have each received, made specific in a more determined and more demanding conversion from whatever it is that separates or could separate us from God. For this purpose let’s take special care over our examination of conscience, especially before Confession. It is worth asking our Lady, “may we learn to be of God and for God, may we respond to him with a *fiat!* – be it done! – that becomes our distinguishing mark.”

I have witnessed how Don Álvaro, in his conversations with large or small groups of people, encouraged us to try and conquer, with God's help, in our daily skirmishes. Although these normally consist of little things – details of charity for our neighbour, making good use of time, finishing each job off well – we need to put greater effort into those battles, as training to win *the last battle*, the one that will open the doors of eternal joy to us.

Don Álvaro was very mindful of a lesson that St Josemaría taught constantly, and with particular emphasis in his last years. ***In a war, our Founder said, one can lose one battle, or two, or three... Basically it doesn't matter, as long as one wins the last one, which is the one that decides the war. In the interior life, which is also a war and a battle, as we've just said, it's best not to lose any, because we***

don't know when we are going to die. Small children, adolescents, and people in their prime depart this life. And often the old people are the ones who keep going for years and years. But no-one knows when they will have to render an account to God for their lives.

Therefore, because losing the last battle means losing the war, when we find ourselves engaged on those struggles that only God and we ourselves know about (...), when we are involved in one of those struggles, we should think, "It may be my last battle, and I don't want to be so silly that by losing this one battle I render my whole life pointless."

Fight, my children, fight! Teach the others how to fight, because like that they will be happy: that is the path.

Don Álvaro never tired of saying that our Lord can do everything, and he asks us to work without fear of failure. *Si Deus pro nobis, quis contra nos?* If God¹² is with us, who can stand against us? he often asked, in St Paul's words. And he frequently referred to David's fight with Goliath,¹³ which Scripture tells us about. He described the disproportion there was between the weapons of the two opponents: Goliath was armed with lance, shield and armour, while all David had was his shepherd's sling and some stones he had picked up from the brook. Nevertheless, trusting fully in God's power and not in his own strength, David won that conflict.

The gospel for the Solemnity of the Assumption gives us the canticle of the Magnificat, which speaks to us of hope. **Hope is the virtue of those who, experiencing conflict – the struggle between life and death,**

good and evil – believe in the resurrection of Christ, in the victory of love. We heard the Song of Mary, the *Magnificat*: it is the song of hope, it is the song of the People of God walking through history. (...) This song is particularly strong in places where the Body of Christ is suffering the Passion. For us Christians, wherever the Cross is, there is hope, always. If there is no hope, we are not Christian. That is why I like to say: do not allow yourselves to be robbed of hope. May we not be robbed of hope, because this strength is a grace, a gift from God which carries us forward with our eyes fixed on heaven. And Mary is always there, near those communities, our brothers and sisters, she accompanies them, suffers with them, and sings the *Magnificat* of hope with them.

These words encourage us to pray for the men and women who, in different parts of the world, are suffering or being persecuted because of their faith. Let's not leave them alone! With our prayer and our sacrifices, although we are physically far from them, we can help them, and comfort them in their sorrows, thanks to the Communion of Saints that unites us to the Mystical Body of Christ which is the Church.

I don't want to pass over the other feast of our Lady that we will celebrate on the 22nd of this month: Mary, Queen and Lady of all creation. "I picture that coronation to myself," said Don Álvaro, "as though the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Trinity, were taking possession, in a still more special way, of the Queen of the Angels and Saints; such a great 'taking possession' that it must have been like an explosion of light, so

that our Blessed Lady, with her holiness, beauty and loveliness, was raised up on high, above everyone, for everyone to honour, venerate and love her still more strongly.”¹⁵

We will reach that happy goal if we remain loyal to our Christian vocation. With errors and mistakes – as I’ve said – but still determined to get up again as often as necessary, by going to Confession, uniting ourselves with Christ in the Eucharist, and having confident recourse to our Mother in Heaven. “Our earthly lives too will end in the glory of Heaven, if we learn to travel along this route, the sanctification of our ordinary lives, a path our Lord Jesus and his blessed Mother opened up for us through the years they spent in Nazareth, and which our beloved and holy Founder so generously imitated.”¹⁶

On 31st August in Torreciudad I will confer the priesthood on two of your Associate brothers; it will be another opportunity to strengthen the unity of the whole Work in the service of our holy Mother the Church.

It is now less than two months till the beatification of our beloved Don Álvaro. I encourage you to check up on the proposals I've been making to you throughout this time, with the generosity and freedom that your soul suggests to you. We all need to put a lot into preparing for this time of grace.

I know that many of you will not be able to be in Madrid physically, for all sorts of different reasons: sickness, old age, not being able to take the time off work, insufficient money for the journey... However, each and every one of you will be very truly present at the ceremony, and also the ceremonies to be held in

Rome afterwards. The contribution of your prayer, the offering up of your difficulties, your spiritual union with the faithful, Cooperators and friends of the Work who will be taking part in the beatification, will be very effective in bringing our Lord to pour out his grace abundantly on souls.

A very affectionate blessing from
your Father

+ Javier

1 St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 13.

2 *Christ is Passing By*, no. 106.

3 Cf. *Apocalypse* 12: 1–6.

4 Pope Francis, Homily, 15 August 2013.

5 St. Josemaría, handwritten note, 31 December 1971.

6 St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 180.

7 Bishop Alvaro, Letter, 1 August 1993 (*Family Letters* (3), no. 258).

8 Pope Francis, Homily, 15 August 2013.

9 Bishop Alvaro, Homily on the Solemnity of the Assumption of our Lady, 15 August 1989.

10 Bishop Alvaro, Homily, 8 September 1976.

11 St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a family gathering, 8 April 1972.

12 *Rom* 8:31.

13 Cf. I *Sam* 17:39–51.

14 Pope Francis, Homily, 15 August 2013.

15 Bishop Alvaro, Homily, 8 September 1976.

16 Bishop Alvaro, Letter, 1 August 1993 (*Family Letters* (3), no. 258).

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