

Letter from the Prelate (August 2015)

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Pamplona, 1 August 2015

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

In the middle of the month of August there shines out the solemnity of the Assumption of our Lady. As well as celebrating the glory our Mother merited by her total response to

God's grace, it is also an image of the blessedness that awaits us, if we respond faithfully to our Christian vocation.

The Second Vatican Council recalls that "While in the most holy Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she is without spot or wrinkle (cf. *Eph* 5:27), the followers of Christ still strive to increase in holiness by conquering sin. And so they turn their eyes to Mary, who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues."[1]

In the month we are now beginning there are other commemorations of Mary that fill us with joy. Tomorrow, 2nd August, is the memorial of Our Lady of the Angels. On 5th August, the anniversary of the dedication of the Basilica of St Mary Major, we remember the Blessed Virgin's divine Motherhood. Finally, on 22nd August,

we celebrate the crowning of our Lady as Queen and Lady of all creation. The following day, 23rd August, is the anniversary of the day when St Josemaría heard in his soul the exhortation *Adeamus cum fiducia ad thronum gloriæ, ut misericordiam consequamur*: let us go with confidence to the throne of glory, to Mary most holy, to obtain mercy.

These feast-days also invite us to consider that God has prepared an eternal dwelling-place in heaven, where we will live, glorified in body and soul, after following loyally whatever path God has marked out for each of us, realising that there are many, in fact countless, ways of travelling the road that leads to glory.

God our Lord calls most men and women to sanctify themselves in the state of matrimony. Many others receive the gift of celibacy, to serve the Church and souls *indiviso corde*,

[2] with an undivided heart. In either case, whether in matrimony or celibacy, it is always a divine vocation, a calling made by God to each person.

As far back as the 1930s, St Josemaría was already preaching this with full conviction. In those days the vocation to sanctity was understood to refer almost exclusively to priests and those who chose the religious life. However, our Father insisted, in his preaching and in giving spiritual direction to young people: ***Do you laugh because I tell you that you have a “vocation to marriage”? Well, you have just that – a vocation.*** [3]

To bring children up well, they must be given appropriate preparation to be able to choose freely whichever path will lead them to God, and this task too falls to their parents. The Church has always stressed that

fathers and mothers cannot delegate this duty to others. Pope Pius XI denounced the evils of “that naturalism which (...) invades the field of education in that most delicate matter of purity of morals.”[4] And St John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, reaffirmed that “Education in love as self-giving is also the indispensable premise for parents (...). Faced with a culture that largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure,”[5] heads of families should consider very seriously, in their task, the dignity of the person, created in the image and likeness of God.

In this context education for chastity is absolutely essential, for it is a virtue that develops the genuine

maturity of each man and each woman and makes them capable of respecting and fostering the fact that the body belongs to God. Therefore heads of families need to devote special attention and care, discerning the signs of God's call, to education for virginity, as the supreme form of that self-giving that constitutes the very meaning of human sexuality.[6]

It is true that fathers and mothers can and in some cases should ask for advice from people with good formation, but the initiative and responsibility always belong to the parents themselves. They should not be reluctant or afraid to approach these topics. I am addressing in particular the Opus Dei faithful and Co-operators who are called by God to the married state. With supernatural sense and human affection, with warmth and style, you will notice the questions that arise in your children's minds, and you will

then act sensitively, relying on prayer.

St Josemaría advised parents, seriously and lovingly, to be the ones who talked to their children about the origin of life, using examples they could understand. ***Before any nasty boy or twisted girl gets to tell them about life, you should speak to them: your husband and you. In the presence of God, with such refinement that they will give you a hug and say: “Mum, how good you are. And how good Dad is! And how good God our Lord is, to have given you this power to bring us into the world! How beautiful this is!” But no storks, please!***

They need the truth, the truth at the right time, heard from the lips of mother or father. Not in primary school, nor in secondary school. The Church never wanted it that way. It's not good for them!

Your children cannot be treated like animals. They're children of God! And they're your children also. Each one of them is worth more than the most precious gem; and you have to treat them differently, according to the stage of their mental and physiological development.[7] Wide horizons, also, are opened up to married couples to whom God has not granted children, to help, by their example and words, in defending the marvellous virtue of chastity.

I was reminding you that God calls most men and women to the married state. In preparation for that step, the time of their engagement plays an important role. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that young people have the right and the duty to choose their profession and state in life, and it also adds: "They should assume their new responsibilities within a trusting relationship with

their parents, willingly asking and receiving their advice and counsel. Parents should be careful not to exert pressure on their children either in the choice of a profession or in that of a spouse. This necessary restraint does not prevent them – quite the contrary – from giving their children judicious advice, particularly when they are planning to start a family.”[8]

Our Founder recommended that engagements should not be unduly long, but long enough for the couple to attain sufficient knowledge of one another, and to ensure the existence of love, which afterwards will continue to grow. Meanwhile, they have to obey the demands of God’s law, with temperance and self-mastery. ***Morality cannot change, just as the faith cannot change. Morality belongs to the deposit of truth Christ left in the Church’s hands. (...) No one is allowed to***

touch it! Centuries from now, the deposit will be the same as it has been from the beginning.[9]

Unfortunately, in this area too, wrongful ideas and ways of behaving have spread, which are in direct opposition to the natural law and divine positive law. In an audience some months ago, Pope Francis explained some points of the traditional teaching of the Church. Among other things, he recalled that **The covenant of love between a man and a woman – a covenant for life – cannot be improvised. It isn't made up between one day and the next. There is no high-speed marriage: one needs to work on love, one needs to travel. The covenant of love between a man and a woman is something to be learned and refined.**[10] And he added, with realism, **Those who claim to want everything right away, afterwards back out of**

everything right away – at the first difficulty (or at the first opportunity).[11]

If parents are attentive to their children's physical and spiritual development, it will be easier for them to notice when they need opportune advice or guidance. At the same time they need to recognise the possibility of some of their children receiving the magnificent calling to dedicate themselves to the service of God and souls in apostolic celibacy. When parents are frightened by that calling, and oppose that choice unduly, they are showing, at the very least, that the spirit of Jesus Christ has not sunk deeply into their souls, and that their Christianity is fairly superficial. It is clear that they should consider the matter in God's presence and, if they are being intransigent, they should change their attitude. I think that only people who love the path of celibacy

are able to understand the greatness of a clean marriage more deeply.

I will return to what I was saying at the start of this letter. St Josemaría was, by God's will, a decisive herald of the call to holiness in all states of life. He would often repeat that he blessed the love of married people with both his priestly hands, because ***the spouses are both the ministers and the matter of the Sacrament of Marriage (...). But, also, I always say that people who follow a vocation to apostolic celibacy are not bachelors or old maids who do not understand or value love; on the contrary, their lives can only be explained in terms of this divine Love (I like to write it with a capital letter) which is the very essence of every Christian vocation.***

There is nothing contradictory about being fully aware of the

value of the vocation to marriage and understanding the greater excellence of the vocation to celibacy propter regnum caelorum, “for love of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt19:12). I am convinced that any Christian who tries to know, accept and love the teaching of the Church, will understand perfectly how the two are compatible if he tries also to know, accept and love his own personal vocation. That is to say, if he has faith and lives by it (...).

And so Christians who seek to sanctify themselves in the married state and are conscious of the greatness of their own vocation, spontaneously feel a special veneration and deep affection towards those who are called to apostolic celibacy. When one of their children, by God’s grace, sets out on this path, they truly rejoice and come to love their own

vocation to marriage even more because it has permitted them to offer the fruits of human love to Jesus Christ, who is the great Love of all men and women, married or celibate.[12]

On 15th August, as we do every year, we will renew the consecration of Opus Dei to the most sweet Heart of Mary, which our Father made for the first time in the Holy House of Loreto in 1951. I encourage you to repeat often the aspiration he recommended to us then – *Cor Mariæ dulcissimum, iter para tutum!* – also asking our Lady to prepare a safe way for all of us: those who have received the vocation to marriage, and those who follow Jesus Christ by the path of apostolic celibacy.

A few days ago I had the opportunity to go to Lourdes, and, in my imagination, to all the shrines dedicated to our Mother,

accompanying you to all the places you may visit. Don't stop uniting yourselves to my prayer for the Pope, his intentions, and the forthcoming Synod on the family. Some time ago, various people, not in the Work said to me: "In Opus Dei people love our Lady very much." They are quite right, and we each have to do all we can to love her more.

A very affectionate blessing from
your Father

X Javier

[1] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 65.

[2] Cf. 1 *Cor* 7:32-34.

[3] St Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 27.

[4] Pius XI, Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*, 31 December 1929, no. 49 (no. 65 in English version).

[5] St John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 22 November 1981, no. 37.

[6] Cf. *ibid.*

[7] St Josemaría, notes from a family gathering, 5 July 1974.

[8] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2230.

[9] St Josemaría, notes from a family gathering, 28 November 1972.

[10] Pope Francis, General audience, 27 May 2015.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Cf. St Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 92.

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