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Letter from the Prelate (January 2015)

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I be always with all three.” The Prelate advises us to use these words of St. Josemaria to pray for all families in this Marian year for the family.

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

We are in the Christmas season, and I add with our Father: ***our thoughts turn to the different events and circumstances surrounding the birth of the Son of God. As we contemplate the stable in Bethlehem or the home of the Holy Family in Nazareth, Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus occupy a special place in our hearts. What does the simple, admirable life of the Holy Family tell us? What can we learn from it?***[1]

These words can help us get into the atmosphere of these very holy days. We stop and contemplate our Lord's birth tirelessly, again and again. We would like to enter more and more deeply into this marvellous mystery, but we always fall short: God's love for mankind, for each and every one of us, really is unfathomable. Therefore, our attitude is one of constant gratitude to our Lord: he has lowered himself to the level of

our poor humanity, to set us free from our wretchedness and raise us up to the state of God's children. On Christmas Eve, we read in the Collect of the Mass, *Come quickly, we pray, Lord Jesus, and do not delay, that those who trust in your compassion may find solace and relief in your coming.*^[2] And we will very naturally hear him answering each of us, as Ananias said to St Paul: *Quid moraris?*^[3] What are you waiting for? Let us ask our Blessed Lady and St Joseph that we may have the permanent, urgent need to be with Christ, to seek him.

Today, the first of January, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Mother of God, whom our Lord has given us for our Mother. She is the path chosen by God the Father for his Only-begotten Son to become man, by the work of the Holy Spirit. Our gratitude rises up to Mary too. We thank her because by her reply at the

Annunciation and her strong, silent presence at the foot of the Cross, she opened up to us the path of divine filiation. We tell her, in St Josemaría's words, ***Mother, Oh Mother! With that word of yours – fiat, "be it done," – you have made us brothers of God and heirs to his Glory. Blessed art thou!***^[4]

I have announced a marian year in Opus Dei, to pray with the whole Church for the next Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will deal with the vocation and mission of the family in the Church and the world. We desire, and pray fervently to God, through our Lady's intercession, that people everywhere may rediscover the irreplaceable value of this basic cell of society. If Christian homes recognise and accept God's plan for them, it will be possible to remedy the evils that are affecting peoples and nations.

In the first weeks of his pontificate St John Paul II said to a group of married couples taking part in family enrichment courses, "The future of the Church and mankind is born and grows in the family." [5] Afterwards he took up the same idea in different ways on many occasions during his long and fruitful pontificate. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, the fruit of the 1980 Synod of Bishops, he wrote: "The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do. The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is; its role represents the dynamic and existential development of what it is. Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility." [6] And he concluded, "Family, *become* what you *are*!" [7]

It is always a good time to raise this plea to Heaven, and still more so during Christmas, which casts a brilliant light on God's plan for the human race. The angels announced to the shepherds *a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.*^[8]

This good news is addressed specifically to the whole of humanity. St Luke says briefly, *they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.*^[9] In the beginning, God created man and woman with equal dignity, establishing the first human family, and gave them the command to have dominion over the material universe and to people the earth.^[10] This is the root of the institution of the family. But the event in Bethlehem goes much further: God himself, in his infinite self-abasement, was incarnate in the bosom of a family, thus showing his will for the orderly

development of mankind. The family at Bethlehem is seen as the model for all homes on earth.

In the first of his catecheses on this subject, Pope Francis said that **the Incarnation of the Son of God opens a new beginning in the universal history of man and woman. And this new beginning happens within a family, in Nazareth. Jesus was born in a family. He could have come in a spectacular way, as a warrior, an emperor.... But no: he comes as the child of a family, in a family. This is why it is important to look at this beautiful scene in the crib.**[11]

As we read in holy Scripture, the birth of Jesus means the beginning of the fullness of time (cf. Gal4:4). It was the moment God chose to show the extent of his love for men, by giving us his own Son. And God's will is fulfilled in the

simplest, most ordinary of circumstances: a woman who gives birth, a family, a home. The power of God and his splendour come to us through a human reality to which they are joined. Since that moment Christians have known that, with God's grace, they can and should sanctify everything that is good in their human lives. There is no human situation, no matter how trivial and ordinary it may seem, which cannot be a meeting-place with Christ and a step forward on our journey toward the kingdom of heaven.[12]

The marriage union was established by God from the first moment man and woman were created, but unfortunately, in many places, it is now neglected. The family is treated so badly! Situations that represent a savage attack on God's creative and redemptive design are being

presented as normal. In many places, in many different spheres, not only by the people, but by the public authorities through laws and government decisions, the institution of the family is being weakened, or even changed into something very different. They do not realise – the devil is very good at blinding people's minds – that by emptying out the concept of the family, they are causing immense harm to civil society.

Last Sunday we celebrated the feast of the Holy Family. That day, like every year, we renewed the consecration of our parents, sisters and brothers to the Holy Family of Nazareth, as our Founder laid down for this feast. And we invited our relatives and friends, and all the people who take part in the apostolate of the Prelature, to join us in that consecration. As always, we have prayed for all the Christian

homes in the world, that they may live and act in accordance with the model God has shown us in Bethlehem and Nazareth.

In this marian year, let us pray especially for this intention. Perhaps we can use some aspiration to help us keep it in mind. Our Father often used to pray: ***Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I be always with all three.*** We will pray hard for all the families in the world to be well protected by the Holy Family of Nazareth at all times.

At the same time as we raise this prayer to Heaven, let us also include those in government and the leaders of international institutions, who have the responsibility of watching over the integrity of this basic cell of society. Let us beg God that the unity and indissolubility of marriage, and its openness to life, may be confirmed, as well as parents' right

to educate their children in accordance with their beliefs, so that civil laws do not only not place obstacles in the way of the family's harmonious development, but actually make it easier for the family to fulfil the goals that God established when he created it.

What is needed is a determined effort in the new evangelisation of society, beginning with each home. **Each Christian family can first of all – as Mary and Joseph did – welcome Jesus, listen to Him, speak with Him, guard Him, protect Him, grow with Him; and in this way improve the world.**[13] We need to foster in our own homes the virtues which the liturgy reminds us of, in one of the readings for the feast of the Holy Family. *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a*

complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.[14]

These recommendations are intended for all the members of a family: parents, children, brothers and sisters, and other relatives. And although the word "family" is used more specifically for the place where someone is born and grows up, we also know that the Church is God's family on earth; and this living portion of the Church which is Opus Dei is also a family. St Josemaría used to stress that a huge variety of people can belong to the Work in one way or another, with their very different characters and ways of being. ***I'm not just talking for the sake of it,*** he said once, ***when I speak of the***

Work as a divine and human family, in which, just as in any family that the Lord has blessed abundantly, there are many children. And some are taller, some shorter, some darker, some fairer (...). And additionally, there beside us are the relations whom we love so much, the Co-operators (...); and then so many friends and colleagues who share in our family in some way.[15]

We all need to make the effort to make life pleasant for those who live with us or are close to us for one reason or another. **Let us make room in our heart and in our day for the Lord. As Mary and Joseph also did, and it was not easy: how many difficulties they had to overcome! They were not a make-believe family, they were not an unreal family. The family of Nazareth urges us to rediscover**

the vocation and mission of the family, of every family.[16]

Let us beg our Lord, through the intercession of our Lady and St Joseph, that the Centres of the Work, the homes of the other faithful and Co-operators of the Prelature, the homes of our friends and relations, and all Christian homes, may reflect the Holy Family's example.

Contemplating Jesus, Mary and Joseph should stimulate us to be as attentive to others as they were. We should pray every day and concern ourselves with their spiritual and material needs, their rest, the order and material appearance of the house, which should mirror the home in Nazareth. Let's never see this as a burden, but as fantastic opportunities to serve.

In the family in Nazareth Jesus Christ witnessed so many details of attentiveness, so many signs of love

and affection. When he began his public life, people knew him by his family: *Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?*^[17]

What a good thing it would be if, seeing our behaviour as faithful followers of Christ, people could say: "You can tell that that person is imitating the example of Jesus, because they look after the atmosphere of their home, they take it with them everywhere, and they try to give others a share in that joy and peace."

The ninth of January is the anniversary of St Josemaría's birth. In Barbastro and Logroño, our Founder learned very many details of family unity, which he then passed on to us. Our gratitude goes out to his parents too, for having been God's docile instruments in St Josemaría's human and supernatural formation.

Let us unite ourselves to the Pope's intentions, also praying for women and men religious and consecrated persons, in this year that the Church is dedicating to them. And let us have recourse, with great confidence, to the Blessed Virgin Mary in this prayer of petition.

Also in our Founder's words, let us pray too that the spirit of early Christianity may always be maintained in families: ***small Christian communities which were centres for the spreading of the Gospel and its message. Families no different from other families of those times, but living with a new spirit, which spread to all those who were in contact with them. This is what the first Christians were, and this is what we have to be: sowers of peace and joy, the peace and joy that Jesus has brought to us.***[18]

Some days ago I went to Pamplona and visited women and men who were ill. In the University sports hall I also had a get-together with about two thousand five hundred people. I recalled the way St Josemaria, filled with gratitude, looked at our Lord. And there passed through my soul, through my mind, the thought that wherever we are, we find ourselves *in our own home*, closely united for the service of God and all souls.

A very affectionate blessing, asking you to persist in your prayer for my intentions, from

your Father

+ *Javier*

[1] St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 22.

[2] Roman Missal, 24 December, Collect.

[3] *Acts* 22:16.

[4] St Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 512.

[5] St John Paul II, private audience, 30 October 1978.

[6] St John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 22 November 1981, no. 17.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Lk* 2:11.

[9] *Lk* 2:16.

[10] Cf. *Gen* 1:26-28.

[11] Pope Francis, General audience, 17 December 2014.

[12] St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 22.

[13] Pope Francis, General audience, 17 December 2014.

[14] *Col* 3:12-15.

[15] St Josemaría, notes from a meditation, 5 March 1963.

[16] Pope Francis, General audience, 17 December 2014.

[17] *Mt* 13:55.

[18] St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 30.

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