

Letter from the Prelate (March 2016)

The Prelate speaks about some of the spiritual works of mercy, especially spreading peace to others, and points to the example of Blessed Alvaro.

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Rome, 1st March 2016

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

A few days ago I conferred the sacrament of the diaconate on six of your Associate brothers in the Prelature, who will be ordained priests in due course. Unite yourselves to my thanksgiving for this gift from Heaven, and let us pray to God that the Church and the Work may never lack faithful ministers, who will work solely and exclusively for the good of souls. Let's use this Year of Mercy to intensify our prayers for the Church and the world, closely united to the Pope's intentions.

God's mercy transforms human hearts; it enables us, through the experience of a faithful love, to become merciful in our turn. In an ever-new miracle, divine mercy shines forth in our lives, inspiring each of us to love our neighbour and to devote ourselves to what the Church's tradition calls the

spiritual and corporal works of mercy.[1]

In the course of these months let's look and see how our love for God leads us to be concerned for others, for their spiritual and material wellbeing. The works of charity show whether our love for God is true, as St John explains. *If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.[2]*

On 11th March, the anniversary of Don Alvaro's birth, we will be happy to remember this good and faithful servant of our Lord's. If the Church has declared him blessed and raised him to the altars, it is because he incarnated, with wholehearted fidelity, the spirit of Opus Dei that he

learnt from St Josemaría. Don Alvaro never aimed to shine out, or to set himself at the same level as our Father. How often he said, in deep, sincere humility, that he was nothing but our Founder's shadow, an instrument that he used, because it was God's will, to continue guiding the Work from Heaven!

There is a little detail that helps us to understand this deeply-rooted disposition of Don Alvaro's. When, on arriving for a get-together with St Josemaría, someone came and stayed beside Don Alvaro, his immediate reaction was to say, "With the Father, with the Father!" This was always his attitude: to direct his sisters and brothers – and afterwards his daughters and sons – towards our Founder, who was the *proper channel*, as he put it, for learning about, incarnating and living the spirit of Opus Dei. He never wanted anyone to equate him with our

Father, because he was aware that our Lord had arranged everything so that St Josemaría would be the first and only person who fully incarnated the spirit of the Work.

Of our Father's practical humility, which was constantly a clear lesson for us, and obviously for Don Alvaro too, I want to give one small example. At the time of one of the pontifical approvals of the Work, our Founder was listening to the news on Vatican Radio. When the announcer began to speak about him, it was noticeable how St Josemaría seemed to shrink into himself, as though ashamed; it was a graphic expression of what he used to say of himself in the words of the liturgy, taken from one of the hymns that are recited on a Eucharistic feast: *servus pauper et humilis*,^[3] I am no more than a poor and humble servant.

I was talking about practising charity towards our neighbour, and I want to focus on some of the spiritual works of mercy. At God's judgement we will be asked about how we have striven to alleviate our neighbour's material needs, but we will also have to answer other questions: **if we have helped others to escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer.** [4]

In this list of spiritual works of mercy given by the Pope, we can discover a common denominator: the desire to sow peace in people's hearts. I remember one occasion when St Josemaría was asked about the meaning of the greeting the first Christians used among themselves, which we also have in the Work. And this was his answer: ***Pax! We don't shout it aloud, but we try to take peace with us wherever we are. So when the waves become stormy, we pour out onto our passions, and other people's, a little understanding, a little fellow-feeling; in a word, a little love. We bring peace and we leave peace.***

Pax vobis! Do you remember? Clausis ianuis (Jn20:26), all the doors were closed, and he got in. And he said to them, peace be with you. That's it: we too sometimes find all doors closed against us on earth. But not only should we not

lose our peace, but we should give it to others: pax vobis.[5]

And he added, *In the face of misunderstandings, organized calumny, lies and defamation... always maintain unalterable peace. I would like Jesus Christ to teach you this. The teachers I had were, first, my parents' Christian, homely warmth; and then – I'm not embarrassed to say this, because it isn't pride – the Holy Spirit.[6]*

His first successor learnt this lesson well, and therefore did everything he could to attend to the material and spiritual needs of those he met on his way. Many of us remember how kindly he received those who confided their worries to him, and the sense of peace they felt as they went back to their ordinary work after even a brief conversation with him. He really did know how to sow

peace and joy around him, and he always said that he was trying to pass on what he had heard from our Father; countless testimonies confirm this.

St Josemaría called his daughters and sons ***sowers of peace and joy*** – the very same words used by a document of the Holy See in speaking of the members of Opus Dei. I advise everyone who wants to benefit from this spirit, whether or not they are faithful of the Work, to make an effort to remedy the spiritual needs of the people they are habitually in contact with, or meet by chance. Be welcoming; show that you are always ready to listen to their worries, offering them appropriate advice if they ask for it; console those who are suffering because of their own or someone else's illness, or the death of someone they love, or for other reasons such as unemployment in the current economic crisis in many

countries. Sometimes it won't be possible to offer any suggestions, but what should never be lacking is our friendly attitude, together with our prayer and solidarity, sharing their sorrows and difficulties.

St Paul writes: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.* [7]

St Josemaría used to say that *everyone needs affection, and we in the Work need it too. Do all you can, without sentimentality, to increase your affection for one another. Make it your concern that they have God's life, always ensure that they can rely on your help, your affection, and your fraternal correction.* [8] That is how

we have to treat everyone, but especially – because charity is orderly – those who are God’s children in Opus Dei or take part in our apostolates, and at the same time all people, because each and every one of them is our concern.

Blessed Alvaro, following St Josemaría’s teachings, said that in order to be *sowers of peace and joy* on all the paths of the earth, “you have to make a great store of peace in your own hearts. In that way, out of your abundance you will be able to give to others, starting with those who are closest to you: your relatives, friends, companions and acquaintances.”[9]

In the second part of this month the liturgy invites us to rejoice on different feast-days. In chronological order, the first is 19th March, the solemnity of St Joseph, patron of the Church and the Work, the day when

we renew the commitment of love that unites us to our Lord in Opus Dei. It is a wonderful day to pray that vocations of self-giving to God in the priesthood, in the religious life, and in the middle of the world, may increase in number and quality.

Straight after that, on 20th March, is the beginning of Holy Week, which will culminate on 27th with Easter Sunday. Let's try to live the last days of Lent with renewed effort; in that way we will share more deeply in the joy of Easter.

28th March is the anniversary of St Josemaría's ordination to the priesthood, and this year it coincides with Easter Monday: yet another reason for joy and gratitude to God, for having given the Church a saint of our Father's stature, who, by his totally faithful response, opened up ***the divine paths of the earth*** to countless men and women. And on

the last day of the month we will recall the date when the Blessed Eucharist was reserved in a Centre of the Work for the first time. It was in the Ferraz Residence in 1935. Since that time, how many graces our Lord has poured out on Opus Dei and its apostolates! Let us give thanks, my daughters and sons, for this closeness of Jesus, by putting all our efforts into the care we take of our Eucharistic piety.

Let's continue praying for the Pope, his aides in Church government, and the bishops and priests throughout the world, so that, with one single heart and one single soul,[10] they may place all their energies at the service of the whole world, for the glory of God.

A very affectionate blessing from
your Father
+ Javier

[1] Pope Francis, Message for Lent 2016, 4 October 2015.

[2] *1 Jn 4:20-21.*

[3] Liturgy of the Hours, Office of Readings on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, Hymn *Sacris Solemnis*, composed by St Thomas Aquinas.

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

[5] St Josemaría, notes from a family gathering, 1 January 1971.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *2 Cor 1:3-4.*

[8] St Josemaría, notes from a family gathering, 6 October 1968.

[9] Blessed Alvaro, Homily, 30 March 1985.

[10] Cf. *Acts* 4:32.

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