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Letter from the Prelate (May 2013)

In this month dedicated to Mary, we should be "led by the hand of our Lady, our Mother, who always brings us to her Son, and through him and with him, to the Holy Spirit and to God the Father."

05/02/2013

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

The month of May is a time rich in liturgical feasts and in anniversaries

of the Work. We want to spend it led by the hand of our Lady, our Mother, who always brings us to her Son, and through him and with him, to the Holy Spirit and to God the Father. We ask our Lady now to accompany us very closely, and to always obtain for us abundant graces to be docile to the Paraclete, as she was, and thus to resemble her Son Jesus ever more and more.

In the weeks since Pope Francis' election, we have seen an eagerness for interior renewal awoken in so many hearts, with many people manifesting publicly the need to return or go more frequently to the sacrament of Penance. Let us thank our Lord for these gifts by trying, first of all, to take full advantage of them ourselves, while also striving to help our relatives, friends, and work or study companions to decide to undertake each day—as we ourselves have to do—a Christian life that is

fully consistent with the faith we profess.

Continuing the exposition of the articles of the Creed, let us go more deeply into the mystery of the Ascension of our Lord. We believe that Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, *ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father*. [1] The solemnity that we celebrate this month—on Thursday the 9th, or Sunday the 12th in places where the feast has been transferred—should be for all of us a forceful reminder to stop and reflect on the joyful goal to which we are called. This truth reminds us, at the same time, both of an historical fact and a salvific event. As an historical fact, the Ascension “marks the definitive entrance of Jesus’ humanity into God’s heavenly domain, whence he will come again, although in the meantime it hides him from the eyes of men.” [2] Now he is found present in the Eucharist,

in a sacramental manner; but in his natural being, he is found only in heaven, whence he will come at the end of time, manifesting his glory and majesty, to judge everyone.

The Evangelist who recounts this event in the greatest detail is St. Luke. At the beginning of the book of the Acts he writes that our Lord *presented himself alive to them* [to the apostles and other disciples] *after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God* . [3] He also tells us that during one of his apparitions to the Apostles, our Lord *opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things ."* [4]

St. Josemaría often considered these scenes in the family gatherings that he used to have with large groups of people. On one occasion, for example, he invited those listening to reflect on our Lord after the Resurrection, when “he spoke about many things, about everything his disciples asked him. We are imitating that scene here, at least a little bit, since you and I are our Lord’s disciples and we want to exchange impressions.” [5] And at another moment he added: “He spoke to them as we are speaking here now. Exactly the same! That is contemplation: conversing with God. And contemplation and conversation with God lead us to have zeal for souls, to a hunger to bring to Christ those who have separated themselves from him.” [6]

But let us return to the moment of the Ascension, when Jesus *led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up*

his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven . [7]

In one of his recent audiences, reflecting on this mystery, Pope Francis asked: “What does this event mean? How does it affect our life? What does contemplating Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father mean?” [8]

Our Lord, in ascending to heaven, was acting as Head of the Church: he went to prepare for us a place, as he had promised. [9] He “precedes us into the Father’s glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him for ever.” [10] However, to enter with Christ into his glory, we have to follow in his footsteps. Speaking of Christ’s journey to Jerusalem for his final Pasch, where he was to consummate his redemptive sacrifice, the Pope said: “While he was ‘going up’ to the Holy

City, where his own 'exodus' from this life was to occur, Jesus already saw the destination, heaven, but he knew well that the way which would lead him to the glory of the Father passed through the Cross, through obedience to the divine design of love for mankind . . . We too should be clear in our Christian life that entering the glory of God demands daily fidelity to his will, even when it demands sacrifice and sometimes requires us to change our plans." [11]

Let us never forget, my daughters and sons, that there is no Christianity without the Cross, no true love without sacrifice, and let us try to conform our daily life to this joyful reality, because it means following in the footsteps of the Master, who is *the Way, the Truth and the Life* . [12]

Hence the great feast of the Ascension invites us to examine if our adhesion to God's will is as it should be: without hindrances,

without attachments to our ego, with full determination, renewed every day, to seek it, to accept it and love it with all our strength. “Our Lord does not disguise the fact that his wholehearted obedience to God’s will calls for renunciation and self-sacrifice. Love does not claim rights, it seeks to serve. Jesus has led the way. How did he obey? ‘Unto death, death on a cross’ (*Phil 2:8*). You have to get out of yourself; you have to complicate your life, losing it for love of God and souls.” [13]

Sacred Scripture says that, after the Ascension, the apostles *returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God* . [14] A few days earlier, when Jesus announced that they would lose his physical presence, they had been filled with sadness; [15] now, in contrast, they were filled with joy. How can this change be explained? Because, with the eyes of faith, even

before the visible arrival of the Holy Spirit, “they understand that although he has been removed from their sight, Jesus stays with them forever; he does not abandon them and in the glory of the Father supports them, guides them and intercedes for them.” [16]

Today too, by faith, we know that Jesus continues to be close to us and in us, through grace, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and in the Holy Eucharist. He is our support and our strength, our older brother, our most intimate friend, who will never abandon us, especially in moments of tribulation or struggle. “As St. John says in his First Letter, he is our Advocate: How beautiful it is to hear this! When someone is summoned by the judge or is involved in legal proceedings, the first thing he does is to seek a lawyer to defend him. We have One who always defends us, who defends us from the snares of

the devil, who defends us from ourselves and from our sins! . . . Let us not be afraid to turn to him to ask forgiveness, to ask for a blessing, to ask for mercy!” [17] Do we strive to keep God present, no matter what happens? Do we welcome his will for us? How intensely do we invoke him?

The certainty that the Master accompanies us is another consequence of the fact of the Ascension, which fills us with peace and joy. A peace and a joy that we need to communicate to others, to all those around us, and especially to those who are suffering (perhaps without fully realizing it) because they are distant from God. How forcefully St. Josemaría stressed this when writing about this feast: “A great task awaits us. We cannot remain inactive, because our Lord has told us clearly, ‘Trade till I come’ (*Lk 19:13*). As long as we are

awaiting the Lord's return, when he will come to take full possession of his kingdom, we cannot afford to relax. Spreading the kingdom of God isn't only an official task of those members of the Church who represent Christ because they have received sacred powers from him. 'You are also the body of Christ' (*1 Cor 12:27*), says the Apostle, with a specific command to fulfill." [18]

This month, dedicated to Mary in many countries, has always been an especially apostolic month in the Work. Our Father taught us to make a pilgrimage to a shrine or church dedicated to our Lady accompanied, if possible, by a friend or companion of ours. We all have the experience that, on returning afterwards to our daily life (to our work, to our family), we take it up with a new interior strength, which our Mother obtains for us, to direct our life or redirect it to her Son Jesus. I recall now our

Father's first pilgrimage to a Marian shrine (to Sonsoles, in Avila: tomorrow is its anniversary) and the unforgettable novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1970, during which, with so much faith, he prayed for the Church, for the Pope and for Opus Dei. I suggest that, in doing the May pilgrimage this year, we unite ourselves closely to the intentions our Founder continues to have in heaven.

In the second half of the month, on the 19th, the liturgy presents us with the solemnity of Pentecost; and on the following Sunday, the feast of the Holy Trinity. The Paraclete, now as in the apostolic era and always in the life of the Church, is the one who strengthens Christians and gives them courage to announce Jesus everywhere. Meditate on what happened after the death of Stephen, the first martyr. *On that day* (the book of Acts says succinctly) *a great*

persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles . [19] That persecution, rather than slowing down the growth of the Church, led to its spread beyond the confines of Jerusalem; the Church took root in new places, in new peoples, including those who were not part of the people of Israel, such as the Samaritans. Something similar happened to St. Paul during his apostolic trips.

In considering these events, recorded in the readings for Easter time, we should ask ourselves: Do I give testimony to my faith in Christ? Do I ask God to increase in me this theological virtue, together with hope and charity, especially in this Year of Faith? Do I decisively overcome the fear of what others may think and other impediments that hold me back in my apostolic

work? Am I helped to be daring by the realization that the risen Jesus is walking with me on all the paths of my ordinary life? Do I go frequently to the Tabernacle to ask for greater piety in dealing with Him and with his Blessed Mother? Let us listen to the questions that Pope Francis asks us: “You, I, do we worship the Lord? Do we turn to God only to ask him for things, to thank him, or do we also turn to him to worship him? . . . Worshipping the Lord means giving him the place that he must have; worshipping the Lord means stating, believing—not only by our words—that he alone truly guides our lives.”

[20]

This past month I made a quick trip to Lebanon; as always I counted on your help to spur forward the apostolic work of the faithful of the Prelature in that beloved country, a crossroads in the Middle East. Accompanied by each and every one

of you, I prayed before our Lady of Lebanon, in the shrine of Harissa, asking especially for peace in that whole region and in the rest of the world. Let us go to our Lady without ceasing for all the needs of the Church and society. This is the attitude that our Mother teaches us on the feast of the Visitation on the last day of this month: fostering at every moment the disposition to serve others in every circumstances that may arise, as Mary served her cousin Elizabeth.

Present to our Lady my intentions: there is nothing selfish about this petition, since included there—among many other concerns—is your daily faithfulness, marked by joy, by perseverance, by a hunger for personal holiness and apostolic zeal. Ask the Mother of the Church to obtain from the Blessed Trinity, for the entire Church and for this small “portion” of the Church that is the

Prelature, many priests, fully dedicated to their ministry. Entrust to her in a special way the new priests of the Work, who will receive priestly ordination on the 4th of May, so that they be (as our Father wanted) “holy, learned, cheerful, and with a sporting spirit in the spiritual field.”

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, May 1, 2013

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Footnotes: [1] Roman Missal, Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

[2] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 665.

[3] *Acts* 1:3.

[4] *Lk* 24:46:48.

[5] St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, October 29, 1972.

[6] St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, November 3, 1972.

[7] *Lk* 24:50-51.

[8] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, April 17, 2013.

[9] See *Jn* 14:2-3.

[10] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 666.

[11] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, April 17, 2013.

[12] *Jn* 14:6.

[13] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 19.

[14] *Lk* 24:52-53.

[15] See *Jn* 16:6.

[16] Pope Francis, Address in a general audience, April 17, 2013.

[17] *Ibid.* [18] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 121.

[19] *Acts* 8:1.

[20] Pope Francis, Homily in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, April 14, 2013.

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