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Letter from the Prelate (May 2014)

"Our Lady guides us to the shortest and surest path to always obtain God's mercy," the Prelate assures us, echoing the advice of Saint Josemaria and Bishop Alvaro del Portillo.

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

The canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II has taken place, amidst an atmosphere of great joy, characteristic of the season of Easter. This event, which has had such great significance in the lives of countless Christians, speaks to us of faithfulness and impels us to return again and again, with our memories and our prayer, to the roots of our Christian vocation.

Referring to the gospel of the Easter Vigil, the Pope recalled how it was in Galilee that our Lord had called the first disciples, and therefore the invitation of the Risen Christ to *go back to Galilee*, where they would be able to see him and spend time with him, was an invitation **to return there, to return to the place where they were originally called.** And, the Holy Father explained, **for each of us, too, there is a “Galilee” at the origin of our journey with Jesus. “To go to Galilee” means something**

beautiful, it means rediscovering our baptism as a living fountainhead, drawing new energy from the sources of our faith and our Christian experience. To return to Galilee means above all to return to that blazing light with which God's grace touched me at the start of the journey. From that flame I can light a fire for today and every day, and bring heat and light to my brothers and sisters.[1]

These words are especially appropriate for us at the beginning of May, when our apostolic zeal takes on new vigour through our Blessed Lady's intercession. That is how St Josemaría encouraged us to make the most of this month, especially from the time when, in 1935, he began the custom of the May pilgrimage. Many of you know, and have even followed yourselves, the widespread Christian custom of taking flowers to our Lady throughout this month: ***those little***

flowers that are our resolutions, those humble and hidden violets that we gather during the day.[2]

This is the lesson our Father taught us constantly. From the earliest times he assured us that *although we are hard, strong men, our lives can be compared to the life of a little child – you’ll have seen this so often – who is taken for a walk in the country, and picks a little flower, and another, and another. Little, humble flowers that go unnoticed by grown-ups, but that he sees because he’s so small; and he picks them until he has a bunch to offer to his mother, who gives him a loving look.*[3]

St Josemaría, who never wanted to offer himself as a model of anything, made just one exception: *if there is one thing I would like you to imitate me in, it’s in the love I have for our Lady.*[4] With childlike

devotion and trust he said to our Lady, every day, the prayers he had learnt when he was little: ***simple, ardent phrases addressed to God and to his Mother, who is our Mother as well. I still renew, morning, and evening, and not just occasionally but habitually, the offering I learnt from my parents: “O my Lady, O my Mother! I offer myself entirely to you, and in proof of my filial love, I consecrate to you this day my eyes, my ears, my tongue, my heart...” Is this not, in some way, a beginning of contemplation, an evident expression of trusting self-abandonment?***[5]

Don Álvaro too learnt from his parents, as happens in so many Christian homes, to treat our Lady with a son's affection. Every day he used to recite devoutly a prayer he had learnt from his mother: *Dulce Madre, no te alejes, / tu vista de mí no*

*apartes, / ven conmigo a todas partes /
y solo nunca me dejes. / Ya que me
proteges tanto / como verdadera
Madre, / haz que me bendiga el Padre,
/ el Hijo y el Espíritu Santo [Sweet
Mother, do not go away; do not turn
your gaze from me; come with me
everywhere and never leave me alone.
Because you protect me so much, like
a true Mother, obtain for me the
blessing of the Father, the Son and the
Holy Spirit].* This apparently simple
prayer, which is so familiar to
Mexicans, contains a deep meaning:
our Lady, as our intercessor before
the Blessed Trinity, is the sure path
that always leads us to God.

What a great apostolate is done by
Christian mothers and fathers,
grandfathers and grandmothers,
when they teach morning and night
prayers to their children or
grandchildren! Those prayers are not
forgotten, even though years go by.
What is more, when in the course of

someone's life the practice of the faith seems to die out, it often happens that devotion to our Lady remains in the depths of their soul like an ember under the ashes, ready to burst into flame again in times of spiritual need, sadness or discouragement.

Don Álvaro nurtured devotion to Mary in great depth and with solid theology, thanks to St Josemaría's preaching and example. Recalling his response to God's call to Opus Dei during some hours spent in spiritual recollection, he said: "In that recollection the Father gave a meditation about love for God and love for our Lady, and I was simply bowled over." [6] He asked for admission to Opus Dei straight away. It was undoubtedly a very special grace from God, granted through our Lady's intercession, and Don Álvaro responded to it decisively, promptly and permanently.

All graces reach us through the motherly mediation of our Lady, *omnipotent in her supplication*.

Therefore we should foster a more intimate dialogue with our Mother over the next few weeks and, obviously, during the other months of the year. That will make our union with Jesus and our apostolic spirit grow. Let's put this month to good use by taking more care of the way we pray and contemplate the mysteries of the Rosary, both in our May pilgrimage and on the other days. If we do, then as Don Álvaro said, we will acquire “an ever deeper habit of *going* and *returning* to Jesus constantly through Mary”.[7]

In one of the considerations in *The Way*, St Josemaría recommends this approach. Don Álvaro, in the early years of his life in the Work, asked him about the meaning of the phrase “to go and to return” to Jesus through Mary. Our Founder's reply helped to

strengthen his devotion to our Lady still more. He himself often recalled the episode, and our Father's explanation, which was that our Lady traces out the shortest and safest path for us to take refuge in God's mercy at all times, and especially if we have had the misfortune to separate ourselves from him – not only through serious offences, but also through little or not so little acts of insensitivity which a Christian may commit in the course of the day.

These reflections take on special importance over the coming weeks. Recalling St Josemaría's novena to our Lady of Guadalupe, Don Álvaro asked: "What 'flowers' will we take to our Mother this month of May? I will pass on to you our Father's advice: what he always taught us to practise, when he recommended us to offer our Lady *little roses, those of ordinary life, ordinary ones, but*

full of the scent of sacrifice and love. Let's try, then, to put more effort – more love – into the duties of every moment: into our faithful fulfilment of the divine commitments that unite us to God and the Work; into our holy concern for our brothers or sisters and all souls; into the fulfilment of our duties of state; into making demands on ourselves in our daily work and putting order into it.”[8]

Like so many Christian men and women, for the whole of his life Don Álvaro kept refining the ways of showing his love for the Blessed Virgin that he had learnt from our Father. These are things such as putting a picture of our Lady into our wallet or bag; greeting our Lady on entering or leaving rooms and on going past places where we see a picture or statue of her; praying three Hail Marys with recollection and devotion before going to bed at

night... For the golden jubilee of the founding of Opus Dei, he declared 1978 a *Marian Year* in the Work; and then prolonged this time to 1979 and 1980 in preparation and gratitude for the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the apostolate with women. “We won’t do anything strange or noisy,” he explained at the time; “we are simply going, like good children, to bring our Lady more *into everything and for everything.*”[9]

During that marian time, on many visits to shrines of our Lady both in Rome and outside it, he said the Rosary, petitioning our Mother for the Church and the Pope, for the Work and all souls. This recourse to the Blessed Virgin Mary was a lesson in faith in Mary’s intercession; as an eyewitness on those occasions I can state that his attitude, as a good and faithful servant who was in love with Jesus Christ and his Mother, was

something that moved one to turn to our Lady with great confidence.

Love is ingenious, and thinks of ways of keeping the beloved ever present. That is what Don Álvaro did in his marian devotion, following the many suggestions of the founder of Opus Dei. ***When you are working, taught St Josemaría, use human devices, things you can use as alarm-clocks for your presence of God. I do that, and it works very well.***^[10]

He advised us to put a small crucifix in our pocket so we could kiss it occasionally during the day; and to put a picture of our Lord or our Blessed Lady on our desk. ***I look at it from time to time, he used to say, and I remember our Lord and offer everything to him. It's as if I had a picture of my father or my mother before my eyes. More, much more: because he is my Father, my God, my Friend and the Love of my loves.***^[11]

Right up until the end of his journey on earth, Don Álvaro made use of those *human devices*: reminders to put more care into his manifestations of love for our Lady. For example, in the marian years I have just referred to, he would put a different picture of the Mother of God on his desk every day, to give her loving glances more often and say more aspirations to her.

In those marian years many of the faithful of the Work incorporated into their lives what our Father suggested and Don Álvaro practised with steadfast devotion: the *marian password*, a few short words used as an aspiration, to keep presence of God during the day, with our Lady's help.

In these weeks we find many reasons for honouring and growing in this important aspect of Christian life. On 13 May, the feast of our Lady of

Fatima reminds us of all her motherly care. From 16 to 24 May, there comes to mind St Josemaría's novena at the *Villa* of Guadalupe in Mexico, to pray for the Church, the Pope and Opus Dei. On 24 May is the liturgical memorial of Our Lady Help of Christians. And the month ends with the feast of our Lady's Visitation to her cousin St Elizabeth, – apart from the many other advocations of our Lady which are celebrated in different countries.

I suggest to you once again that you re-read the homilies and other writings in which our Father refers to our Lady. They will impel us to rejuvenate our marian piety, increase our conversation with Mary, and show many people this sure way that leads to intimacy with Jesus Christ and, through him, to God the Father and the Holy Spirit. ***Many conversions, many decisions to give oneself to the service of God***

have been preceded by an encounter with Mary. Our Lady has encouraged us to look for God, to desire to change, to lead a new life.[12]

“So fill yourselves with trust and assurance in our Lady’s motherly intercession, and be daring in inviting many people to honour our Lady with these pilgrimages. You will be doing them a lot of good, because as they consider the mysteries of the Holy Rosary, as they pray unhurriedly, savouring them, those marvellous vocal prayers that the Church has handed on to us, as they cheerfully offer up some little mortification in honour of our Mother, they will be learning the lessons of the most absolute availability in the service of God and souls that are taught by the Handmaid of the Lord, the most perfect creature to have come forth from God’s hands.” [13]

Before I finish I wish to renew my plea for you to pray for my intentions. In the coming days I am hoping for your company in praying for the thirty new priests of the Prelature whom I will ordain on 10 May in Rome. And keep praying, with our Mother's encouragement and protection, for the Pope and his collaborators in the government of the Church, for the bishops, priests and religious, and the whole of the Christian people. May the light of the Risen Christ penetrate people's minds and hearts. Let us entrust this prayer to our Blessed Lady, and she will lead us to prepare for the solemnity of Pentecost. What resolutions have we made to improve our marian devotion? What special offerings will we make to her each day?

I am not going to pause here on the many other dates this month that reveal to us the magnificent role our

Lady plays in our lives and in the history of the Work.

A very affectionate blessing from
your Father

+ Javier

[1] Pope Francis, Homily at the Easter Vigil, 19 April 2014.

[2] St Josemaría, notes taken in a meditation, 19 March 1958.

[3] St Josemaría, *Letter*, 24 March 1930, no. 13.

[4] St Josemaría, words noted in January 1954, at the beginning of a Marian Year in the Universal Church.

[5] St Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 296.

[6] Bishop Alvaro, notes taken in a family gathering, 3 October 1975.

[7] Bishop Alvaro, Letter, 2 May 1985.

[8] Bishop Alvaro, *Letter*, 1 May 1984. The quotation from our Father is from his personal prayer in the Basilica of Guadalupe, 20 May 1970.

[9] Bishop Alvaro, Letter, 9 January 1978, no. 20.

[10] St Josemaría, notes taken in a family gathering, 30 March 1974.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 149.

[13] Bishop Alvaro, *Letter*, 1 May 1984.

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