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Letter from the Prelate (May 2016)

"The Marian month par excellence has just begun, when we try to put devotion to our Lady at the center of each day."

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Rome, 1 May 2016

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

We are beginning the month that belongs especially to Mary, when we try to put devotion to Our Lady at the centre of each day. Many of us will remember the practices we learnt as children: prayers addressed to our Mother – perhaps saying the rosary together as a family –; offering her little sacrifices, or leaving flowers by pictures and statues of Mary. Because of this, I suggest that those of you who are fathers and mothers could take your small children with you as you do some of those things. It will help you if you read and meditate on what the Holy Father writes on family relationships, in his recent Apostolic Exhortation.[1]

Let us also act in that way, following our Father's suggestions and advice, so that every single one of us feels the responsibility to "make the Work a home", realising that with that kind of family care, Opus Dei is an image of Heaven.

St Josemaría put a lot of effort into nurturing devotion to Mary in the Work, since without it, it is impossible – or very difficult – to follow Jesus Christ. A specific example of this is the May pilgrimage, a custom which has now spread throughout the world. As well as that, he urged us to put more affection and care into our conversation with Our Lady: saying the rosary slowly, contemplating the mysteries of her Son's life and her own; saying the Angelus at mid-day, etc. Our Marian norms of piety, if we look after them well, help us to maintain our presence of God all day long.

Praying to Our Lady is something that has love at its heart, and is a sign of total trust in her. It is not merely a matter of feelings, though we may find that we put plenty of feeling into our prayers to her. ***But we shouldn't worry if, to begin with, all we can***

do is make an effort to say, perhaps mechanically, a short prayer to Our Lady. When that sincere prayer springs from a heart that, in spite of everything, has not forgotten his or her mother's care, Mary blows that feeble coal into a flame and leads the soul to desire to be shaped by her Son's teachings. That short prayer – the dim glow lying hidden under the ashes – is transformed into a fire that burns up our personal wretchedness, and is able to attract other people to the light of Christ.[2]

Perhaps we have sometimes considered how the Gospels contain very few of Our Lady's words and none of St Joseph's. However, what Sacred Scripture gives us is enough to help us understand how Our Lady is *the Mother of Jesus, following her Son step by step, playing a part in his redemptive mission,*

rejoicing and suffering with him, loving those whom Jesus loves, looking after all those around her with maternal care.^[3] Let's stop and think, for instance, about the account of the wedding feast at Cana. The Evangelist tells how *she turned to the waiters and said: "Do whatever he tells you"* (Jn2:5). *That's what it's all about – getting people to face Jesus and ask him: "Domine, quid me vis facere? Lord, what do you want me to do?"*(Acts9:6).^[4]

Relying on these words, the Church invokes Our Lady in the Litany as *Mater Boni Consilii*, Mother of Good Counsel, because there is indeed no more important counsel than this: to direct souls towards Jesus, our Teacher and Redeemer, so that each individual can get to know him, talk to him, and fall in love with him. That is how St Josemaría acted from the beginning of the Work. And those

of us who had the opportunity to go with him on his visits to shrines of Our Lady, saw how he unpacked each Hail Mary, in order to come still closer to the Trinity. Let's not forget, either, that *many conversions, many decisions to give oneself to the service of God have been preceded by an encounter with Mary.*^[5] We have experienced this frequently in our own lives and in our apostolate.

Our Mother's advice to the servants at Cana is addressed today to every single one of us, because we are all called to bring other people to Jesus Christ. One of the spiritual works of mercy which is recommended especially in this Jubilee Year is to "counsel the doubtful". The Teacher wishes to make use of us as he did of the first disciples, whom he sent to all the towns where he himself was to come, to prepare the way for him. Because **the Lord does not only**

speak to us in the intimacy of the heart; yes, he speaks to us, explains Pope Francis, but not only there; he also speaks to us through the voice and witness of the brethren. It is truly a great gift to be able to meet men and women of faith who, especially in the most complicated and important stages of our lives, help us to bring light to our heart and to recognize the Lord's will! [6]

St Josemaría wanted us to realise that we are Christ's instruments in this work of enlightening people's hearts and minds. ***You cannot just be passive***, he wrote. ***You have to become a real friend of your friends – by helping them. First, with the example of your behaviour and then with your advice and with the influence that a close friendship provides.*** [7] This kind of close friendship opens the way to advice and defines the personal apostolate of friendship and

trust that our Father taught us to do from the start. *Those well-timed words, whispered into the ear of your wavering friend; the helpful conversation that you managed to start at the right moment; the ready professional advice that improves his university work; the discreet indiscretion by which you open up unexpected horizons for his zeal. This all forms part of the 'apostolate of friendship.'* [8]

If we are to help other people effectively, by giving the advice best suited to their needs, it is indispensable to talk it over first with Our Lord in our meditation. It is there, in filial conversation with God, that we will receive light to pass on to our friends and companions. It is there that **the Spirit makes us grow interiorly (...), and he helps us not to fall prey to self-centredness and our own way of seeing things. (...)**

The essential condition for preserving this gift is prayer.[9]

Prayer is the most important “weapon” we have. The Church has gone forward through the centuries by means of prayer, and by means of prayer she will continue journeying in spite of the obstacles she meets on her way. This is also the case with Opus Dei, a “little part” of the Church. Hence St Josemaría said, and repeated insistently, that prayer is a very effective remedy for all our needs. So let’s prepare our apostolic conversations in our times of dialogue with Our Lord, and appeal to Our Lady’s intercession.

On 12th May we will celebrate, with great joy, the liturgical memorial of Blessed Alvaro. I remember some of his visits to the shrine of Our Lady of Good Counsel, near Rome; he prayed before her the day before the conclave that elected St John Paul II

as successor of St Peter. And in one of the Marian years that he convoked in Opus Dei, Don Alvaro referred to this invocation: “If we want our thanksgiving to be specified concretely in a reality of more self-giving to God, which is not reduced to a superficial gesture or to some nice words, we will have to turn to the most Holy Virgin, *Mater boni consilii*, each day with more intensity.”[10]

Taking up these words of my beloved predecessor, I ask you that, on your May pilgrimage and whatever other visits to shrines of Our Lady your personal devotion may inspire in each of you, we may pray to our holy Mother Mary for the good of families, world peace, the Pope and his intentions, the needs of the Church and of the Work, vocations, and the effectiveness of the apostolates. Let's leave these petitions in her hands, for her to present them to the Holy

Spirit on the forthcoming solemnity of Pentecost. “May she lead us to Jesus, to God one and triune, in a homage of thanksgiving and in petition for forgiveness.”[11]

I’m not going to talk about this month’s other anniversaries, and I would like to think that, for each and every one of us, every day will be an encounter with Our Lord, hand-in-hand with Our Lady.

A very affectionate blessing from
your Father

+ Javier

P.S. When I was about to send this letter to be printed, I received the news that the Pope has issued a declaration of the heroic virtues of Montse Grases. We thank Our Lord for this, and Our Lady too, under the advocacy of Our Lady of Montserrat, on whose liturgical

memorial we received this good news. Let us have recourse to the intercession of this young woman in our needs.

[1] Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Lætitia*, 19 March 2016, Chapters Three and Seven.

[2] St Josemaría, “La Virgen del Pilar”, published posthumously in *Por las sendas de la fe*, Madrid: Editorial Cristiandad, 1976, p. 172.

[3] St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 141.

[4] *Ibid.*, no. 149.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Pope Francis, Audience, 7 May 2014.

[7] St Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 731.

[8] St Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 973.

[9] Pope Francis, Audience, 7 May 2014.

[10] Blessed Alvaro, Letter, 9 January 1978, no. 8 (*Family Letters* (2), no. 135).

[11] *Ibid.*

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