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Letter from the Prelate (November 2016)

Writing about the close of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, the Prelate urges us "to personally welcome into our heart God's mercy, and thus to welcome others: to 'bend down' towards them."

02/11/2016

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

Nearly a year has gone by since the Holy Father opened the Holy Door, first in the heart of Africa and afterwards in St Peter's Basilica. As we approach the end of this Jubilee Year on the solemnity of Christ the King, 20 November, we recall the events that have taken place throughout the world. The most important ones have undoubtedly been those that are known only to our Lord and the person concerned. Only God knows how many people have been reconciled with him once more, perhaps after many years of estrangement or lukewarmness.

During these past months we have tried to rediscover the mystery of God's Love, contained in the heart of the Church. Truly, God's mercy fills the whole of the earth as the waters

cover the immensity of the oceans; and we have seen this afresh in Sacred Scripture – the Prophets and Psalms, and especially the Gospels –, in the liturgy, and in popular piety. We have also seen it in our own lives: we only need to give one look at them to rediscover, with a sense of amazement, what a close relationship God has maintained with us ever since he incorporated us into the Church through Baptism, and even before.

Jesus Christ left us a clear lesson in Chapter 15 of St Luke's Gospel. There we find three parables about divine mercy: the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son. St Ambrose commented: "Who are these three persons: the shepherd, the woman, the father? Is not Christ the shepherd, the Church the woman, and God the father? Christ Who took upon Himself your sins bears you upon His own Body; the Church

searches for you; the Father receives you back. As a shepherd He brings us back, as a mother He looks for us, as a father He clothes us. First, mercy, second, intercession, third, reconciliation.”[1]

These months have helped us revitalise our love for God and other people, at the precise point where it may have become a little weak. We may perhaps discover that there are still many wrinkles in our soul where that feature is still missing, and this should not shock us, because the call to be “merciful like the Father” is an invitation that lasts our whole life long.

The close of the Holy Year is not the end-point of a journey, after which we will turn to something else. It is a starting-point from which we can walk with renewed vigour along the path of our Christian life. From our Baptism, all Christians possess the

common priesthood, which leads us to exercise mercy with a deep sense of our divine filiation. St Josemaría stressed that each Christian *has to see in every man a brother to whom he owes sincere love and disinterested service.*^[2] This is the message given by the Pope just a few weeks before closing this year of special graces. It is not enough to experience God's mercy in one's life; whoever receives it must also become a sign and instrument for others. Mercy, therefore, is not only reserved for particular moments, but it embraces our entire daily existence.^[3]

And so I ask myself, and encourage you to ask yourselves: what has this Holy Year left in us? Have we immersed ourselves still more deeply in the conviction that God looks at us with the eyes of a Father who is *full of warmth and infinite love?*^[4] In the daily life we share with others, in family life, in our professional life, in

our apostolate, in our visits to the poor and our help for those who suffer, is the Love of God, made manifest in Christ, more apparent? Do we keep alive the hope that in spite of our mistakes, God our Lord wants us to act as the best transmitters of his mercy? It is very appropriate for us, like our Mother the Blessed Virgin Mary, to meditate on these things and ponder them in our hearts.

In order to follow with growing determination the route along which the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church, I will be so bold as to suggest two lines of conduct which are like a summary of the path we have travelled during these past months, and which can help us to keep the lights of this Holy Year burning in our souls: to take refuge personally in God's mercy, and to provide a refuge for others: to live facing them.

In the first place, take refuge in God's mercy: everything else depends on that. When we realise that God arranges circumstances and tasks so as to impel us towards himself, our piety and apostolic zeal grow. We find it easier to take refuge in Jesus Christ's hands, with a sporting approach to our interior struggle, with a renewed desire to bring many souls to him, and with the sort of joy that nothing and nobody can upset.

We find that God's Love is demanding and at the same time serene. Demanding, because Jesus Christ carried the Cross and wants us to follow him along the same way, to help him bring the fruits of the Redemption to the whole world. Serene, because Jesus knows all about our limitations, and guides us better than the most understanding of mothers. It is not we, with our own efforts, who are going to change the world: that will be done by God,

who is able to transform hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

Our Lord does not ask us never to make any mistakes, but to get up again every time, without getting entangled in our failures. He asks us to journey through this earth with the serenity and trust of children. Let's often meditate on the tender words with which St John invites us to *reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.*^[5] Inner peace does not come from getting everything right, nor is it the result of giving up our efforts to love; it comes from always returning to God's hands, even when we fall. Jesus Christ did not come to seek out the healthy but the sick,^[6] and is happy with a love that is renewed every day, in spite of our human stumbling, because we turn to the

sacraments as a never-failing source of forgiveness.

Mercy also urges us to be a refuge for others, to turn towards them. We are able to pass on mercy if we have received it from God. In that way, “after obtaining mercy and an abundance of justice, Christians are ready to have compassion on the unfortunate and to pray for other sinners. They become merciful even towards their enemies.”[7] Only God, in his magnanimity and understanding, “is able to restore the wealth that has been wasted, repay with good the evil that has been committed, and bring forth new strengths of righteousness and holiness.”[8]

There are plenty of occasions when the weight of work or difficulties could deaden our hearts a little, like the thorns that choke the good seed. God makes our hearts ultra-sensitive

so that we can turn towards others, not only in their problems and tragedies, but also in the multitude of little daily things that require an attentive heart which doesn't make mountains out of molehills, but makes the effort to give importance to what really matters, though perhaps it goes unnoticed. God does not summon us only to *live together* with others, but to *live for* others. He asks us to have *affectionate charity, knowing how to welcome everyone with a sincere and habitual smile.*[9]

For this reason we always have recourse to prayer, especially when we think that a situation or person is too much for us, and entrust to our Lord the obstacles that we find along our way. Let's beg him to help us overcome them, and not give them too much importance. Let us ask him to grant us love to the measure of his Love, through the intercession of

Mary most holy, *Mater Misericordiæ*,
Mother of Mercy.

On his apostolic journey to Poland the Pope referred to the Gospel as the living book of God's mercy. This book, he said, still has many blank pages left. It remains an open book that we are called to write in the same style, by the works of mercy we practise.[10] And he concluded, each of us holds in his or her heart a very personal page of the book of God's mercy.[11] Let's fill up, joyfully, the pages that God has entrusted to each of us, without getting discouraged by all the crossings-out and blots that our clumsy writing has caused. Through God's mercy, the Spirit becomes present in our failings, because *when I am weak, then I am strong*. [12] We are fortified by Christ's grace, and so can pass on what we have received.

In our attentive service to others, let's not forget, especially on 2nd November, and for the whole of this month, the discreet work of mercy that is so pleasing in God's eyes: praying for the dead. I pray that God will grant each of us the grace to practise the Communion of Saints towards everyone: those who need our prayers, those who are already enjoying the bliss of Heaven, and those who are still on pilgrimage here below, beginning with the Pope and his aides, and widening our prayer to include all men and women, especially the people who need this support most.

I cannot end this letter without thanking God for the recent ordination of deacons of the Prelature. Let's pray for them and for all sacred ministers throughout the world. At the same time, I renew my gratitude for the fruits of the pastoral journey I made two weeks ago to the

new region of Finland and Estonia. Let us pray for the Church in those countries and the rest of northern Europe. I would love to tell you in detail about St Josemaría's – and our beloved Don Alvaro's – joy over the planting of the Work in those countries. I invite you to consider it in your times of prayer before the Tabernacle. And may our most sincere gratitude rise up to Heaven for the anniversary of the establishing of the Work as a personal prelature.

A very affectionate blessing from

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, 1 November 2016

[1] St Ambrose, *Exposition on the Gospel of St Luke* VII, 208.

[2] St Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 29.

[3] Pope Francis, General audience, 12 October 2016.

[4] St Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 331.

[5] *1 Jn* 3:19-20.

[6] Cf. *Mt* 9:12-13.

[7] St Chromatius of Aquileia, Sermon 41, 5, on the Beatitudes (CCL IX A, 177).

[8] Blessed Paul VI, quoted in Istituto Paolo VI, *Notiziario* 71 [2016], 7-8 (also published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 2016).

[9] St Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 282.

[10] Pope Francis, homily, 30 July 2016.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] 2 *Cor* 12:10.

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