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Letter from the Prelate (December 2014)

The Prelate points to Christ's second coming at the end of time as a source of hope for Christians, and urges us to prepare well for his first coming, at Christmas.

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

We are beginning a new liturgical year, in which we hope for so many graces from God, continuing all the graces he has granted us in recent months—and always! The centennial of Don Alvaro's birth and his beatification have deeply marked this year 2014 that is about to end. Let us increase every day our desire to be very faithful to the path leading to happiness, and also our eagerness to strive each day for a personal conversion, in order to identify ourselves more closely with Christ. What a good moment this is to repeat frequently and with deep conviction those words: *Thank you, forgive me, help me more.* In the upcoming weeks let us increase our acts of thanksgiving, while also going with greater trust to divine mercy, asking for pardon for our sins and for those of all mankind. And let us not cease begging for the protection of Heaven for the Church and for this "small portion" of the Church that is the

Work, for each one of us, and for the whole world.

During the first weeks of Advent, the liturgy invites us to consider Christ's coming at the end of time. St. Paul gives us a brief summary of the final realities that will take place with the glorious coming of our Lord. *As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power . . . When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.*^[1]

Meditating on this truth of our faith will fill us with hope, strength, and consolation, especially when we

experience the limits of our present human condition, including sickness and death itself, as well as the setbacks on our earthly pilgrimage, or our personal miseries and those of all men and women. There is no lack of apparent victories of evil on this earth—only apparent ones! But these cannot discourage us if we are anchored firmly in theological hope. God, who is just and merciful, never forgets his children, although he may delay the rewards and punishments.

A few weeks ago, in the Divine Office, we priests read some words of St. Augustine. Commenting on this truth of our faith, he wrote: "the Lord will come at a future time when all the nations of the earth will be striking their breasts in grief. Previously he came through his preachers, and he filled the whole world. Let us not resist his first coming, so that we may not dread the second."[2] The advice of the holy bishop of Hippo is

always timely. Christians, he says, have "to use the world, not become its slave. And what does this mean? It means having, as though not having. So says the Apostle: He who is without anxiety waits without fear until his Lord comes. For what sort of love of Christ is it to fear his coming? Brothers, do we not have to blush for shame? We love him, yet we fear his coming. Are we really certain that we love him? Or do we love our sins more? Therefore let us hate our sins and love him who will exact punishment for them. He will come whether we wish it or not. Do not think that because he is not coming just now, he will not come at all. He will come, you know not when; and provided he finds you prepared, your ignorance of the time of his coming will not be held against you."[3]

Christ's return should not cause fear or worry to a man or woman with faith. On the contrary, it has to be an

incentive to carry out good works, ordinarily without attracting attention. It is enough to be and behave as Christians at all times, in order to assist Christ in the spread of his kingdom, which now is growing in a hidden way, until it is manifested in its fullness at the end of time. St. Josemaría frequently reminded us of this truth. "A great task awaits us. We cannot remain inactive, because our Lord has told us clearly, *trade, until I come* (Lk 19:13). While we are awaiting the Lord's return . . . 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. *Vos autem estis Corpus Christi* (1 Cor 12:27), you too are the body of Christ, says the Apostle, with a specific command to fulfill."[4]

Perhaps the thought that we have few "talents" or qualities passes

through our head, or that the task we are carrying out is monotonous, with little impact on souls and the world. This was a reflection our Father formulated when he found himself a refugee in a diplomatic mission during the religious persecution in Spain. Deprived of the possibility of freely exercising his priestly ministry, reduced—one might say—to an almost absolute lack of exterior activity, in the company of a small group of faithful of the Work, he encouraged them with these words: "my life now is so monotonous! How can I make God's gifts bear fruit in this forced retirement, in this obscurity in which I find myself? Don't forget that you can be like those volcanoes covered with snow, whose ice on the outside conceals the fire raging inside. On the outside, yes, you may be covered with the ice of monotony, of obscurity; outwardly you seem to be tied down. But on the inside the fire has not ceased to burn,

nor are you tired of compensating for the lack of external action by a very intense interior activity.

Thinking of all of our brothers, how fruitful our inactivity becomes! From our apparently meager apostolic work, there will arise, in centuries to come, a marvelous edifice."[5]

We were also reminded of this by Pope Francis a few days ago: "It is precisely in living with love and offering one's own Christian witness in everyday affairs that we are called to become saints . . . In your home, on the street, at work, at church, in that moment and in your state of life, the path to sainthood has been opened. Don't be discouraged to pursue this path. It is God alone who gives us the grace. The Lord asks only this: that we be in communion with Him and at the service of our brothers and sisters."[6]

My daughters and sons, let us too draw out personal consequences from this reality. From the hospital bed, in domestic tasks at home, in the midst of the most absorbing work, in the silence of the laboratory or the fields, in any place, with the spirit of Opus Dei, if we offer all this to our Lord, we are actively assisting him in the spread of his kingdom on earth, and preparing for his glorious coming that will fill us with happiness.

In the last few months, I have reminded you frequently that we already have in Heaven an immense multitude of blessed of the Work, who are dwelling in glory. We are intimately united with all of them through the Communion of Saints. They strengthen our weakness, echo our petitions, and help us in so many ways. Pope Benedict XVI recalled a truth of revelation: "We have been told with regard to Christ's definitive

return . . . that he will not come alone but with all his saints."[7]

What joy it gives to realize that among that multitude of saints who are accompanying Christ in Heaven and who will descend with him in his glorious retinue, so many of the people we knew on earth will be found! Through God's mercy, each of us will also be there, if we are faithful to our call. "Thus, every saint who enters history," continues Benedict XVI, "already constitutes a tiny portion of Christ's Second Coming, his new entry into time which shows us his image in a new dimension and assures us of his presence. Jesus Christ does not belong to the past, nor is he confined to a distant future whose coming we do not even have the courage to seek. He arrives with a great procession of saints. Together with his saints he is already on his way towards us, towards our present."[8]

Advent also prepares us to receive Jesus spiritually at Christmas, when we recall his birth according to the flesh. The liturgy invites us to prepare for this, especially from December 17th on. It is always the time to encounter Jesus, who comes frequently to our soul, above all in daily Communion and spiritually at so many other moments. This encounter takes place very especially in the spiritual climate of Advent, which grows in intensity as we approach his Nativity.

Pope Francis invites us to reflect on Christ's birth, "the feast of trust and of hope which overcomes uncertainty and pessimism. And the reason for our hope is this: God is with us and God still trusts us! Consider this carefully . . . He comes to abide with mankind, he chooses earth as his dwelling place to remain with people and to be found where man passes his days in joy or in

sorrow. Therefore, earth is no longer only 'a valley of tears'; rather, it is the place where God himself has pitched his tent, it is the meeting place of God with man, of God's solidarity with men."[9]

The liturgical time that we have just begun, in preparation for Christmas, places us before the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, the "loving plan"[10] by which God the Father wants to draw us to himself, in his Son, through the Holy Spirit, so that we might attain the full communion of joy and peace with him. Let us set aside any pessimism, if it were ever to arise on seeing that, at times, evil seems to triumph over good, both within ourselves and in society. "Advent invites us once again, in the midst of so many difficulties, to renew the certainty that God is present: he entered the world, making himself man, a man like us, to fulfill his plan of love. And

God asks that we too become a sign of his action in the world. Through our faith, our hope and our charity, he wants to enter the world ever anew and wants ever anew to make his light shine out in our dark night."[11]

Christ's glorious coming will put an end to all injustice and sin. But let us consider seriously that our Lord is calling us now to help him transmit to other souls the fruits of the redemption. Millions of people, without knowing it, are waiting for the manifestation of the children of God;[12] of you, of me, of so many men and women of good will. With our deeds and our words we have to show them that the world in which we live, with all its problems and setbacks, cannot be reduced to an inhospitable place into which we have been "thrown" by an impersonal and blind destiny; rather it is the site of a joyful encounter

with the all-merciful God, who has sent his Son into the world, and who assists the Church through the never failing presence of the Holy Spirit.

In the upcoming days, people in almost every country will be seeking peace and happiness. Let us take up once again the song that resounded on the first Christmas: *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!* [13] Then it was sung by angels; now it is we Christians who need to sing it with our good example and our words of mercy and forgiveness, our constant apostolate.

Let us ask God that violence may be overcome with the power of love, in every sphere of life. That the desires for goodness and love that people exchange during these days may truly penetrate into all the environments of daily life. We raise our petition to Heaven through the

motherly mediation of Mary Most Holy, going also to the intercession of St. Joseph, of St. Josemaría, and of all the saints. I ask them and all of you to unite yourselves to my incessant prayer for the Church and the Pope, for the Work and each one of its faithful and cooperators, for the whole world.

I would like you to share in my joy, when in the cathedral of Moscow I celebrated a solemn Mass in honor of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. It was another manifestation of thanksgiving to the Trinity, united to the many Masses of thanksgiving that took place in cities throughout the world.

I want to end by encouraging you to savor the *Christus natus est nobis* of the liturgy: Christ was born *for* us. How much we are loved by God, who wants us to live continuously in him!

Pray to the Holy Family for my intentions.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, December 1, 2014

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[1] *1 Cor 15:22-28.*

[2] St. Augustine, *Commentaries on the Psalms*, 95, 14-15 (CCL 39, 1351-1353).

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 121.

[5] St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, July 6, 1937.

[6] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, November 19, 2014.

[7] Pope Benedict XVI, Address, December 21, 2007.

[8] *Ibid*,

[9] Pope Francis, Address in a general audience, December 18, 2013.

[10] See *Eph* 1:9.

[11] Benedict XVI, Address in a general audience, December 5, 2012.

[12] See *Rom* 8:19.

[13] *Lk* 2:14.