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Letter from the Prelate (February 2012)

"Charity and humility are closely united; and their mature fruit is unity." The Prelate focuses on the topic of unity in his letter this month.

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

I am happy to inform you that the Holy Father received me in an audience two days ago, on January

30th. As on other occasions, I went to this meeting accompanied by your prayers. In expressing to him the desire of the faithful and Cooperators of the Prelature to be loyal to God, I assured him once again of your constant prayer for him and for his intentions. The Pope, as always, was very affectionate. He expressed his thanks for the service that the Work is providing to the Church and asked me to transmit his blessing to the faithful and their apostolic endeavors throughout the world.

Let us always strive to make known the teachings of his magisterium, with an eagerness to offer our total assistance to our Holy Mother the Church. Let us try each day to make a reality of that aspiration prayed by St. Josemaría: *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam* . Love the Roman Pontiff very much, and do all you can to help prepare for the *Year of Faith* that he will proclaim within a few

months, in order to grow in this virtue and reach many people.

The previous week, with the feast of the conversion of St. Paul, the octave for Christian unity came to an end. Let us give thanks to God for the progress that little by little is being made here, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and let us ask the Paraclete that his grace may be ever more effective in moving the hearts of those who glory in the name of Christian, so that the longing expressed by Jesus at the Last Supper may be fulfilled: *ut omnes unum sint, sicut tu, Pater, in me et ego in te!* [1] That all may be one, as you, Father, in me and I in you!

From the very beginning of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría disposed that we pray in the Work every day this petition *pro unitate apostolatus* . And over the years he insisted on the importance of this prayer, urging us to “pray it

because we live it.” Our Father ardently desired that the supplication for the unity of all who believe in Christ—even more, of all mankind—be assisted by the effort to make it a reality, first of all, in our own life.

Our brothers and sisters in the faith, the first Christians, left us a clear teaching: *they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers* . [2] We have often stopped to consider this summary of the history of the early Church. Our Father frequently went back to this text, and even had it engraved on the frieze of one of the first oratories of the Work; and he did the same thing in that of the Pensionato, in Rome, when he had those words inscribed on the wall. He always said that “the spirit of Opus Dei is the spirit of early Christianity;” [3] and he encouraged us to strive at every moment to act

with the same consistency as those who opened up the path of the Church.

Pope Benedict XVI, in commenting on the characteristics that “define the first Christian community of Jerusalem as a place of unity and love,” [4] highlighted the fact that St. Luke was not merely describing something in the past. Rather the evangelist “presents this community to us as a model, as a norm for the Church today, since these four characteristics must always constitute the Church’s life.” [5] Indeed, fidelity to the teaching of the apostles, the union of hearts and souls, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and steadfastness in prayer are the pillars of authentic Christian life, essential for the Church to fully carry out her mission in the world.

In this context of prayer for unity, I would like to refer specifically to the charity which united those women and men. As St. Luke also states, *now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul* . [6]

The union of Christians is a gift of the Holy Spirit, which we have to beseech him for with steadfast prayer. But that prayer has to be seasoned with charity. Let us be convinced, as the Holy Father says, that “our quest for unity can be realistically conducted if the change takes place within us first of all and if we let God act, if we let ourselves be transformed into the image of Christ, if we enter into new life in Christ who is the true victory. The visible unity of all Christians is always a task that comes from on high, from God, a task that demands the humility of recognizing our weakness and of receiving the gift . . . The unity that comes from God therefore demands

of us the daily commitment to open ourselves to each other in charity.”
[7]

St. Augustine taught that “pride engenders division, while charity is the mother of unity.” [8] We have to be aware of the reality that each of us bears within the risk of disunity, because we all have the sad tendency to exalt our own ego, which is the greatest enemy of unity. Therefore one could not be a good instrument if one’s thoughts were centered selfishly on oneself, if one were carried away by pride, or failed to struggle to uproot personal defects. In contrast, sincere charity, lived without any pretense, as St. Paul recommends, [9] tightens the bonds that preserve and secure fraternity among people who are very different from one another, without restricting the legitimate diversity of ideas and ways of acting. Therefore, sincere petition for the unity of Christians

has to be accompanied by a humility and charity shown in deeds.

“Attaining this unity and preserving it,” said our Founder, “is a difficult task, which is nourished by acts of humility, self-renunciation, silence, knowing how to listen and to understand, being nobly interested in the good of one’s neighbor, knowing how to always forgive when necessary: how to love truly, with deeds.” [10]

For a Christian, one’s relationship with all those encountered on one’s path is never reduced to mere courtesy or good manners, but rather is an expression of the Love, with a capital L, that God himself pours into our hearts. Therefore charity, affection, is not merely a matter of feelings, although these play an important role in our actions, since we are not just spirits but men or women of flesh and blood. Nevertheless, we all need to purify

our feelings: what perhaps begins as altruistic love runs the risk of becoming the product of one's selfishness, the search for one's own excellence, the disordered satisfaction of one's ego.

In the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI writes: “Sentiments come and go. A sentiment can be a marvelous first spark, but it is not the fullness of love.” [11] Our feelings need to be purified, brought to maturity through self-denial; only then will sentiment “become love in the full meaning of the word.” [12]

Our only model is Jesus Christ. Therefore Christian charity means loving as he loved us: even to the complete surrender of his life to the Father, out of love and for our salvation. He left us as a testament at the Last Supper: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved*

you, that you also love one another.
By this all men will know that you are
my disciples, if you have love for one
another . [13] In those first Christian
communities this new
commandment was put into practice
to such an extent that the pagans
remarked in surprise: “See how they
love one another!” [14]

True Christian charity, a
participation in the Love that filled to
overflowing the heart of the
Incarnate Word, is imbued with
sacrifice; it doesn't seek its own
affirmation, but the good of others.
And it becomes a task that we can
never view as finished: we have to
learn to love, looking at the example
of our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin,
and of the saints who have loved God
and their neighbor the most. Let us
feel the responsibility of beginning
and beginning again each day, many
times a day, with small details of
service and sacrifice for the others

(and at times, in things of greater importance), which others perhaps will not realize, but which do not pass unnoticed to our Father God. Let us recall the insistence with which St. Josemaría directed to us those words of the prophet: *discite benefacere* , [15] learn to do good. Let us learn to finish well whatever we do.

And by doing so, “love of neighbor is thus shown to be possible in the way proclaimed by the Bible, by Jesus. It consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ.” [16]

This way of behaving certainly requires (I don't mind repeating it) the effort to leave aside our own ego, to forget about ourselves. Charity and humility are closely united; and their mature fruit is unity. "When we sincerely see ourselves as nothing; when we understand that, without God's help, the weakest and most puny of creatures would be better than we are; when we see we are capable of every kind of error and every kind of abomination; when we realize we are sinners, even though we are earnestly struggling to turn our back on our many infidelities, how could we possibly think badly of others? Or how could we harbor fanaticism, intolerance or haughtiness in our hearts?"

"Humility leads us as it were by the hand to treat our neighbor in the best way possible, that is, being understanding towards everyone, living at peace with everyone,

forgiving everyone; never creating divisions or barriers; and behaving—always!—as instruments that foster unity.” [17]

Charity, as every virtue, has to be lived with order. Therefore, without discriminating against anyone, it needs to first of all be directed towards those we have around us: our own family, friends, colleagues at work, neighbors and acquaintances. Thus we help make the unity of the Church more solid and we assist—relying on prayer—in making the deeply desired union of all Christians a reality. How do we treat those whom God has placed close to us? What specific deeds of cheerful service every day do we provide to each one? Do we strive to ensure that at home, in the workplace, in our circle of friends, others sense the *good aroma of Christ* [18] of sincere friendship, of human affection imbued with God’s love?

“The principal apostolate we Christians must carry out in the world,” wrote St. Josemaría, “and the best witness we can give of our faith, is to help bring about a climate of genuine charity within the Church. For who indeed could feel attracted to the Gospel if those who say they preach the Good News do not really love one another, but spend their time attacking one another, spreading slander, and quarrelling?”
[19]

Our Lord asks us to carry out a sowing of understanding and forgiveness in every sector of society. He calls each Christian to this task, and expects it of all men and women. This sowing is possible if we are spurred by Christ’s charity, which knows how to make compatible differences of character, education and culture, in the unity of the Mystical Body, without any fissures. “The Apostle [St. Paul] is not

condemning diversity. Each person has his own gift from God, some in one thing, some in another (see *1 Cor 7:7*). These differences, however, must serve the good of the Church. I feel moved right now to ask our Lord (and if you wish you can join in my prayer) not to permit uncharitableness to sow its cockle in the Church. Charity is the salt of the Christian apostolate. If it should lose its taste, how can we come to the world and proclaim: *Here is Christ ?*”
[20]

In two weeks, on February 14th, we will commemorate in the Work the anniversary of the extension of the apostolic work to women, in 1930, and the foundation of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, in 1943. Our Father viewed that coinciding of dates, in different years, as a sign of Divine Providence, which wanted to strongly emphasize the unity of Opus Dei. Let us give thanks for this divine

gift, which each and every one of us should foster and defend, first of all in our own lives, and also in our surroundings.

Let us pray for all the pastors of the Church, so that all men and women, with Peter, the visible Head of the Mystical Body, may go to Jesus through Mary. Let us not cease to cry out to the Holy Spirit for the full incorporation of Christians and of all humanity in the unity of the Catholic Church, so that our Lord's words may be fulfilled: *I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd . [21]*

I don't want to end without an explicit remembrance of our beloved Don Alvaro, who celebrated his saint's day on the 19th. From his response to God we can learn so much, including how to take great

care of this supernatural family to which our Lord has called us—the Church, the Work—and to spend our lives happily in this effort, as did the first successor to St. Josemaría at the head of Opus Dei.

As always, accompany me in my intentions; specifically, in a special way, pray for the sons of mine, Associates of the Prelature, who will be ordained as deacons on the 18th.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, February 1, 2012

Footnotes:

[1] *Jn* 17:21.

[2] *Acts* 2:42.

[3] St. Josemaría, Notes taken from his preaching, April 23, 1963.

[4] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, January 19, 2011.

[5] Ibid.

[6] *Acts* 4:32.

[7] Benedict XVI, Angelus address, January 22, 2012.

[8] St. Augustine, *Sermon 46* , 18 (PL 28, 280).

[9] See *2 Cor* 6:6.

[10] St. Josemaría, Notes from his preaching, 1972.

[11] Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, no. 17.

[12] Ibid.

[13] *Jn* 13:34-35.

[14] Tertullian, *Apologetics* 39, 7 (CCL 1, 151).

[15] *Is* 1:17.

[16] Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, no. 18.

[17] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 233.

[18] *2 Cor* 2:15.

[19] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 226.

[20] *Ibid.*, no. 234.

[21] *Jn* 10:16.