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Letter from the Prelate (June 2008)

“To know, to experience, to live, to give witness: these four expressions sum up the response Christians are called to make to God’s Love.” God’s fatherly and loving heart is the central concern of the Prelate’s letter this month.

06/05/2008

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

In writing to you as June begins, my heart overflows once again with the need to give thanks to God for all his gifts. On the vigil of the solemnity of Corpus Christi, I ordained to the priesthood thirty-six deacons of the Prelature of Opus Dei. Two days ago we celebrated the solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and yesterday was the feast of the Visitation of our Lady. All these feasts are an invitation to increase our gratitude to our Redeemer, from whose Heart, open on the Cross, all gifts flow to us. Our gratitude is also directed to our Lady, the “marvelous and fertile channel,” as St. Josemaría said, through whom all of heaven’s graces reach us. I go to her immaculate Heart (yesterday was its liturgical memorial, although it was not celebrated this year), asking her to grant us her refined love so we may learn better each day how to draw close to the three Divine Persons. How do you address personally God

the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?

Haurietis aquas in gaudio de fontibus salutis,[1] you will draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation. Pius XII used these words from the prophet Isaiah as the title for his encyclical commemorating the first centenary of the extension of the Feast of the Sacred Heart to the universal Church. Recalling that document, Benedict XVI wrote: “the pierced side of the Redeemer is the spring to which we are invited to go by the encyclical *Haurietis aquas*. We should have recourse to this spring to attain a true knowledge of Jesus Christ and experience more deeply his love.”[2]

I was a witness to how St. Josemaría always nourished a deep devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It took root in his soul during his childhood, and over the years acquired deeper roots

in his interior life and his great doctrinal preparation. In moments of difficulty for the life of the Church (and also of this “small portion” of the Church, the Work), he consecrated Opus Dei to the Most Sacred Heart of the Redeemer. Later, when some people were belittling this sound devotion, he defended it with passionate love and theological depth, as we see in one of the homilies in *Christ Is Passing By*.^[3] He had recourse to the mercy of that Heart and thus, despite all the difficulties that arose, he possessed the peace and joy that the world cannot give.^[4]

He pointed to the enormous riches “hidden in the words ‘the Sacred Heart of Jesus.’ When we speak of a person’s heart,” he said, “we refer not just to his sentiments, but to the whole person in his loving dealings with others. In order to help us understand divine things, Scripture

uses the expression 'heart' in its full human meaning, as the summary and source, expression and ultimate basis, of one's thoughts, words, and actions." [5]

Deus caritas est, [6] God is Love. Through his infinite love, God the Father sent into the world his only begotten Son, so that *whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*. [7] Through an equally infinite love, Jesus Christ became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He lived in an obscure corner of our earth, worked as we do, suffered and rejoiced like us, and finally died on the wood of the Cross, offering his life voluntarily to redeem us from our sins. Through that love he gave his mother to us as our mother, during his agony on Golgotha. After his resurrection and ascension to heaven, through love, in union with the Father, he sent us the Holy Spirit, besides remaining with

us in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist: with his Body and his Blood, with his Soul and his Divinity, made into the Bread of life, food for our souls and our bodies, the pledge and seed of the glorious resurrection that we too await. The Paraclete, Love of the Father and the Son, teaches us through the action of his grace to constantly advance on the path to sanctity.

Devotion to the Heart of Jesus presents us with a pressing invitation to reflect on and be grateful for the central mysteries of our faith: “we stress the certainty of God’s love and the truth of his commitment to us. When we recommend devotion to the Sacred Heart, we are recommending that we give our whole self to Jesus, to the whole Jesus—our soul, our feelings and thoughts, our words and actions, our joys.”

"That is what true devotion to the Heart of Jesus means. It is knowing God and ourselves. It is looking at Jesus and turning to him, letting him encourage and teach and guide us. The greatest superficiality that can beset this devotion would be a lack of humanity, a failure to understand the reality of an incarnate God." [8] Do we foster in our soul this examination, striving to see ourselves each day in Him?

Devotion to the Sacred Heart is the Church's response to the Blessed Trinity's infinite love. The Holy Father explains that this devotion is "the content of all true spirituality and Christian devotion. It is thus important to stress that the basis of the devotion is as old as Christianity itself." [9] Therefore he invites Catholics "to open themselves to the mystery of God and his love and to allow themselves to be transformed by it." [10] And he advises us to draw

close to “this font to attain true knowledge of Jesus Christ and a deeper experience of his love. Thus, we will be able to understand better what it means *to know* God’s love in Jesus Christ, *to experience* him, keeping our gaze fixed on him to the point that we *live* entirely on the experience of his love, so that we can then *give witness* to it to others.”[11]

To know, to experience, to live, to give witness: these four expressions sum up the response Christians are called to make to God’s Love. There come to mind those other four “stages” of Christian life that St. Josemaría stressed right from the beginning of his foundational mission and that he always recommended. “I have distinguished as it were four stages in our effort to identify ourselves with Christ: seeking him, finding him, getting to know him, loving him. It may seem clear to you that you are only at the

first stage. Seek him then, hungrily; seek him within yourselves with all your strength. If you act with determination, I am ready to guarantee that you have already found him, and have begun to get to know him and to love him, and to hold your conversation in heaven (cf. *Phil 3:20*).”[12]

First, then, let us seek Christ, day after day, with hunger and thirst for his company: *as a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God*. [13] That is why we put care into the practices of Christian piety with which we try to intertwine each of our days, especially the Holy Mass and prayer, both mental and vocal. We go to the intercession of our Blessed Mother, the guardian angels, the saints who are already rejoicing in God’s presence. We have special recourse to St. Josemaría, who taught us (and so many millions of other people), by his word and

example, the paths for drawing close to God in our daily life.

This persevering effort to draw close to our Lord, even when we feel dry and apathetic, will lead us to *experience* his presence close beside us. I am not speaking here about feelings, but rather about the certainty, born of faith and infused into our soul by the Holy Spirit, that we are truly, by grace, a living temple of the Most Holy Trinity. As St. Paul so often said, our life unfolds *in Christ Jesus*. And thus, *rooted and grounded in love*, we have the *power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*[14]

The Pope tells us that “experience and knowledge cannot be separated: the one refers to the other.

Moreover, it is essential to emphasize that true knowledge of God's love is only possible in the context of an attitude of humble prayer and generous availability.”[15] Thus we come *to live* in Christ; that is, to refer all our jobs and concerns to him, to do everything with the sole purpose of pleasing him, emptying ourselves so that our Lord can live in us. This is St. Paul's experience of faith: *it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*[16]

How forcefully St. Josemaría echoed these inspired words! “If we are faithful to him, Jesus' own life will somehow be repeated in the life of each one of us, both in its internal development (the process of sanctification) and in our outward behavior.”[17] And on another occasion. “You looked at me very

seriously. But at last you understood, when I told you: ‘I want to reproduce the life of Christ in the children of God, by getting them to meditate on it, so that they may act like him and speak only of him.’ ”[18]

If we strive each day to remain in Christ and to nourish ourselves from Christ, our faith will necessarily become apostolate: we will *give witness* to our Lord with our actions and our words, with our whole life. And many people will feel drawn to Jesus, in spite of—or better, through—our personal struggle, made up of victories and defeats, which we can turn into triumphs if we go with contrition to God’s mercy, in order to begin again. “If we love God and are humble, if we persevere tenaciously in our struggle, the defeats will never be very important. There will also be abundant victories which bring joy to God’s eyes. There is no such thing as failure if we act with a right

intention, wanting to fulfill God's will and counting always on his grace and our own nothingness.”[19] How abundant are our daily desires for apostolate?

Let us be generous in our struggle to stay close to Christ and try to bring many souls to him. Let us go to the intercession of St. Josemaría, who is so powerful before God, starting to prepare right now for his feast on June 26th. Let us make him known to many people, holding up our Founder's example and teaching to their eyes.

Two weeks ago I went to Barcelona; before returning, I did my prayer in the Basilica of Our Lady of Ransom, accompanied by all of you. I asked our Lady that each and every one of us might make our own the words of St. Peter that our Father meditated on deeply here before his first trip to Rome, when seeking to open up a

universal canonical path for Opus Dei: *ecce nos reliquimus omnia et secuti sumus te*;^[20] we have left everything and followed you. This phrase has been included in the Gospel so that we Christians can put it into practice in our own behavior and tell it to our friends, for one cannot serve two masters.^[21] It was easy to pray there, before the statue of Our Lady of Ransom, accompanied by the whole Work, as St. Josemaría did in 1946 and at other times.

Before finishing, I would like to remind you that on the upcoming 29th, the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, the *Pauline Year* will begin, which Benedict XVI has proclaimed to commemorate the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of the Apostle to the Gentiles. In order to follow the Holy Father's indications regarding the celebration of this bimillennium, I suggest that you get to know better the life and work of this

great Apostle, a Patron of the Work, reading and meditating in depth on the *Acts of the Apostles* and the Pauline writings. St. Paul is, for all Christians, a wonderful model of love for Christ, of fidelity to one's vocation, of burning zeal for souls. Let us entrust to him in a special way the spiritual and apostolic fruit of this year dedicated to him.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, June 1, 2008

1. *Is* 12:3.

2. Benedict XVI, Letter on the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical *Haurietis aquas*, May 15, 2006.

3. Cf. St. Josemaría, Homily "Finding Peace in the Heart of Christ," June 17,

1966, in *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 162-170.

4. Cf. *Jn* 14:27.

5. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 164.

6.1 *Jn* 4:8.

7. *Jn* 3:16.

8. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 164.

9. Benedict XVI, Letter on the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical *Haurietis aquas*, May 15, 2006.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 300.

13. *Ps* 42:1.

14. *Eph* 3:17-19.

15. Benedict XVI, Letter on the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical *Haurietis aquas*, May 15, 2006.

16. *Gal* 2:20.

17. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 418.

18. *Ibid.*, no. 886.

19. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 76.

20. *Mt* 19:27.

21. Cf. *Mt* 6:24.