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Letter from the Prelate (July 2015)

The Prelate reminds us that the first responsibility for educating children in the faith always lies with the parents and asks for our redoubled prayer for the upcoming Synod on the Family.

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

As the Marian year continues, let us try to intensify our prayer for the upcoming Synod of Bishops on the Family. Pope Francis is constantly asking for our “prayer full of love for the family and for life. Prayer that can rejoice with the rejoicing and suffer with the suffering . . . Thus, sustained and animated by God's grace, the Church can be ever more committed, and ever more united, in giving witness to the truth of God's love and mercy for the world's families, none excluded, both within the fold and without.”[1]

The intercession of our Lady is decisive. Let us go to her with great trust, as we prepare for the feast on July 16. The liturgical memorial of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is a renewed invitation to redouble our petitions to heaven. Through this advocacy, the Church encourages us to have recourse to the Woman who, with her motherly help and

care, makes us worthy to *reach the mountain which is Christ.*[2]

St. John Paul II stressed the urgent need for catechesis given at home, especially now when in many places “anti-religious legislation endeavors even to prevent education in the faith, and widespread unbelief or invasive secularism makes real religious growth practically impossible.”[3]

We are all joyfully committed to this effort, with our trust placed in God and with optimism, without letting ourselves be influenced by the adverse environment or objective difficulties that might be present. *Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear,*[4] the prophet Isaiah tells us. “God is the same as always. It is men of faith that are needed: and then, there will be a

renewal of the wonders we read of in the Gospel." [5]

This effort in the heart of the home falls first of all to the parents. In accord with the age and characteristics of each of their children, they have to teach them the deep meaning of the faith and Christ's love. "Through the witness of their lives, [they are] the first heralds of the Gospel for their children. Furthermore, by praying with their children, by reading the word of God with them and by introducing them deeply through Christian initiation into the Body of Christ—both the Eucharistic and the ecclesial Body—they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of bodily life but also of the life that through the Spirit's renewal flows from the Cross and Resurrection of Christ." [6]

So many people all over the world have expressed their gratitude to St.

Josemaría for his words of encouragement to spouses and families. With a phrase taken from Holy Scripture he once said: “*Dicite iusto quoniam bene*, tell the just man that he is doing well (see *Is 3:10*). You are doing everything very well, because you haven't brought your children into the world in the way animals do theirs. You know that they have souls, and that there is a life after death—a life of eternal happiness or eternal condemnation—and you want your children to be happy in this life and in the next. God bless you!”^[7]

The other members of the family, especially the older brothers and sisters, the grandparents, etc., also have a special responsibility to help those who are younger to grow in the faith and in their Christian life. And wherever we are trying to implant the atmosphere of Nazareth, we have to do likewise, striving—through the

witness of our example and apt words—to carry out this fraternal service, which is the most important one that we can provide.

Nevertheless, we should never forget that in some families and in other places responsible for teaching young people Christian doctrine, at times seeds that weaken or even extinguish believers' faith can enter in. With a sense of responsibility, without getting upset or discouraged, mothers and fathers have to carry out with special care their joyful obligation as educators in the faith. It is not enough to entrust one's children to a school with sound doctrinal criteria, or to be content with seeing that they frequent places where Catholic formation in accord with each child's age is offered. All of that is a help, a wonderful help. But the first responsibility always lies with the parents.

When he was asked about this topic, our Founder often gave this advice: “You need to defend your children's faith in two ways. First, with your Christian way of life, with your example. And then, with doctrine, making an effort to go over the catechism . . . Thus, without pestering your children, you will be instilling good doctrine in them. That way you will save their faith.”[8]

From their earliest years, children are witnesses to what happens in their home. They quickly realize whether their parents are behaving in accord with what they teach, whether they sacrifice themselves joyfully for the others, whether they put up with others' defects with patience and understanding, whether they are ready to pardon and forgive and, when necessary, to correct in an affectionate but clear way. As our Founder said, “what happens at home influences your

children for good or for evil. Try to give them good example, try not to hide your piety, try to behave uprightly. Then they will learn, and they will be the crown of your mature years and your old age. You are like an open book to them. Therefore, you need to have interior life, to strive to be good Christians. If not, what you are trying to do for your children or for the children of other friends of yours will be useless."[9]

To carry out this first and greatest responsibility effectively, parents and other educators need to strive personally to grasp more deeply the contents of the faith, through study and advice from those with a solid preparation, so that the light of doctrine will illumine their understanding and enkindle their heart. All of this will be reflected in their daily conduct, and then they can make their own words that the

Holy Spirit puts on the lips of parents, when their children—through their own example and advice—seek the paths of God: *My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad. My soul will rejoice when your lips speak what is right.*^[10] —

Commenting on these words, Pope Francis said: “One could not better express the pride and emotion of a father who acknowledges that he has transmitted to his son what truly counts in life, a wise heart . . . A father knows well how to transmit this legacy: with closeness, gentleness and firmness. However, what consolation and compensation he receives, when his children honor his legacy! It is a joy that repays every hardship, that overcomes every misunderstanding and heals every wound.”^[11] —

Despite all this care, not infrequently—especially in some countries—the

entrance into adolescence or youth is accompanied by an apparent loss of faith. Rather than rejection, it is usually a matter of lukewarmness or neglect in religious practice, which is seen as an external imposition that contrasts with the atmosphere at school, in the university, or among their friends. The first reaction of Christian parents or friends is always to pray more for these people, treating them with affection, trying to be understanding. "Christian mother that you are," Saint Josemaria told a worried mother, "you have already hit on the first and most effective way to help them: prayer. Invoke the Blessed Virgin Mary, who understands mothers very well, because she is the Mother of God, your Mother and your children's Mother, and my Mother.

"Then try to find good friends for your children . . . It's often better for you mothers not to do the pushing

yourselves because they might complain that you're taking away their freedom. Instead, through those friends, little by little, they will come round . . . And, protected by your prayer, others will assist your children, so that they return to the Church, with love."^[12] —

Besides praying and asking for advice, and trying to put their sons or daughters in contact with people of the same age who can help them, St. Josemaría also advised parents to speak peacefully and calmly with them, especially as they grow older, so that they become aware of their duties as children of God. “Without getting angry, speak to them calmly and sincerely, heart to heart. Not with all of them together, but one by one. Mom should talk with the girls, although at times it may be better the other way around. You know them very well and their way of thinking: you have to treat each one

differently, in order to be fair and just. Talk, be friends with them. They will understand you very well, because the same faith that you have still beats in their hearts. Perhaps on top they're carrying a heap of filth that has been thrown on them. Let them go to confession, and you'll see how well things go."^[13] —

This morning I will celebrate Holy Mass in a parish church dedicated to St. Josemaría in Burgos. This is the city where our Father began once again the apostolic activity of the Work after leaving Madrid during the Spanish civil war. Let us pray every day for spiritual fruit all over the world, for the preparation for expansion to new countries, and for all the activities with young people that are being carried out in so many countries, in service to the Church and to souls. In our prayer for them let us also include their families.

And tell our beloved Don Alvaro to help us to be very faithful, more so each day.

With all my affection I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Burgos, July 1, 2015

[1] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, March 25, 2015.

[2] Roman Missal, Memorial of our Lady of Mount Carmel, *Collect*.

[3] John Paul II, Apostolic Exhort. *Catechesis Tradendae*, October 16, 1979, no. 68.

[4] *Is* 59:1.

[5] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 586.

[6] St. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhort. *Familiaris Consortio*, November 22, 1981, no. 39.

[7] St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, October 18, 1972.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] St. Josemaría, Notes taken at family a gathering, November 12, 1972.

[10] *Prov* 23:15-16.

[11] Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, February 4, 2015.

[12] St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, October 22, 1972.

[13] St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, November 28, 1972.

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