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Letter from the Prelate (October 2009)

The Prelate reflects on the sanctifying value of our work and, in the context of the current global crisis, urges us "to purify our faith, foster hope, and grow in charity."

10/02/2009

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

Tomorrow, the 2nd of October, we will raise up our thanks to God for

another anniversary of the foundation of Opus Dei. Four days later, October 6th will be the seventh anniversary of the canonization of our Founder. With these two dates so near, I think it would be good to meditate on what John Paul II called our Founder's "supernatural intuition"[1]—the sanctifying value of ordinary work in the middle of the world, the need to take advantage of daily events, in order to respond to the permanent encounter that God wants to have with each one of us. We can perfectly understand how our Father became "crazy with love" as he meditated deeply on the words that God spoke through the prophet: *meus es tu*, you are mine.[2] We know that work, the universal and necessary reality which accompanies the life of men and women on earth, is a means to provide for our own personal and family needs, a bond of communion with others, and an opportunity for perfecting ourselves

personally. "For a Christian these horizons extend and grow wider. For work is a participation in the creative work of God. When he created man and blessed him, he said: 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth' (*Gen 1:28*). And, moreover, since Christ took it into his hands, work has become for us a redeemed and redemptive reality. Not only is it the background of man's life, it is a means and path of holiness. It is something to be sanctified and something which sanctifies." [3] John Paul II gave vivid expression to this teaching during our Founder's canonization through the account of the creation of man: *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.* [4] "The book of Genesis," said the Holy Father, "reminds us that the Creator has entrusted the earth to man, to

‘till’ it and ‘keep’ it. Believers acting in the various realities of this world contribute to making this divine universal plan a reality. Work and any other activity, carried out with the help of grace, is converted into a means of daily sanctification.”[5]

In the beatification ceremony, on May 17, 1992, the Roman Pontiff said that St. Josemaría "untiringly preached the universal call to holiness and the apostolate. Christ calls everyone to become holy in the realities of everyday life. Hence, work too is a means of personal holiness and apostolate when it is lived in union with Jesus Christ, for the Son of God, in the Incarnation, has united himself in a certain way with the whole reality of man and with the whole of creation.”[6]

Setting forth once again this capital point of the spirit of Opus Dei is not repetitive, since we can always go

more deeply into its inexhaustible spiritual richness and put it into practice with greater fidelity, counting on God's help and the intercession of our Father. As St. Josemaría frequently stressed, since there will always be men and women who carry out a professional work, there will be people who, impelled by this spirit, show their friends and colleagues that it is possible to attain Christian perfection, holiness, through sanctifying their professional occupation, collaborating with God in the perfecting of creation and cooperating with Christ in bringing his redemptive work to fruition.

Let us listen to what St. Josemaría tells us: "It is we, ordinary Christians immersed in the blood-stream of society, whom our Lord wants to be saints and apostles, in the very midst of our professional work; that is, sanctifying our job in life, sanctifying

ourselves in it and, through it, helping others to sanctify themselves as well. Be convinced that it is there that God awaits you, with all the love of a Father and Friend. Consider too that, by doing your daily work well and responsibly, not only will you be supporting yourselves financially; you will also be contributing in a very direct way to the development of society, you will be relieving the burdens of others and maintaining countless welfare projects, both local and international, on behalf of less privileged individuals and countries." [7] Are we truly concerned about the people around us? Does our heart harbor a strong apostolic zeal? Professional work and the relationships it entails constitute a privileged field for the exercise of the common priesthood received in Baptism. Let us keep this very much in mind during the year of the priesthood.

Our Father's words resound forcefully at the present moment, marked by a deep financial and employment crisis in many countries. At the same time, they remind us of the instrumental nature of work in all its manifestations. As he also taught us, "earthly goods are not bad, but they are debased when man sets them up as idols, when he adores them. They are ennobled when they are converted into instruments for good, for just and charitable Christian undertakings. We cannot seek after material goods as if they were a treasure. Our treasure is here, in a manger. Our treasure is Christ and all our love and desire must be centered on him, 'for where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also' (*Mt 6:21*)."[8]

If professional work is considered as an end in itself, and not as a means to attain the ultimate goal of human life—communion with God and, in

God, with other men and women—its nature would be degraded and it would lose its highest value. It would be converted into an activity closed to transcendence, where a creature would rapidly take the place of God. Work carried out in this way could also not be a means for assisting Christ in his redemptive work, which began with his years as a craftsman in Nazareth and was consummated on the Cross, where he gave his life for mankind's salvation.

Benedict XVI spoke about these ideas recently in his encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, where he presents the Church's social doctrine in the current context of the globalization of society. By stressing, in today's circumstances, that "the primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity,"[9] the Pope emphasizes, as Vatican II had already done, that "man is the source, the

focus and the aim of all economic and social life." [10] Thus, by situating at the core of the current debate the human person, created in the image and likeness of God and elevated by Christ to the dignity of divine filiation, the Holy Father declares his strong opposition to the determinism that underlies many conceptions of political, economic and social life.

At the same time, the Pope highlights the transforming energy unleashed in a society that permits the exercise of a rightly understood freedom, that is, a freedom firmly anchored in the truth. Referring to the development of peoples, he writes: "In reality, institutions by themselves are not enough, because integral human development is primarily a vocation, and therefore it involves a free assumption of responsibility in solidarity on the part of everyone. Moreover, such development requires a transcendent vision of the

person, it needs God: without him, development is either denied, or entrusted exclusively to man, who falls into the trap of thinking he can bring about his own salvation, and ends up promoting a dehumanized form of development." [11]

In a time of crisis like the present one, with repercussions that directly affect so many people, a double danger could present itself: on one hand, a naïve trust that technical solutions alone will resolve all the problems; and on the other hand, letting oneself be overcome by pessimism or resignation, as though everything happening were inevitable, the consequence of economic laws impossible to evade.

Both of these attitudes are false and dangerous. A man or woman of faith has to take advantage of this situation to personally grow in the practice of virtue, living with great

refinement a spirit of detachment, a right intention, doing without superfluous goods, and so many other small aspects. We know, moreover, that we are always in the hands of our Father God; and that if divine Providence permits these difficulties, it is so that we might draw good out of evil: God writes straight with crooked lines. We are going through a time that is propitious for purifying our faith, for fostering hope, for growing in charity, and for carrying out our job, whatever it may be, with professional rigor, with a right intention, offering up everything so that a true sense of responsibility and solidarity may be found in society. Are we praying for a solution to the grave problem of unemployment?

In addition, adverse circumstances can call forth resources hidden inside each person. One of the most

important recommendations of the recent encyclical is the call to purify the relationships of strict justice with charity, without separating the exercise of these two virtues. The great challenge of these moments, says the Pope, "is to demonstrate, in thinking and behavior, not only that traditional principles of social ethics like transparency, honesty, and responsibility cannot be ignored or attenuated, but also that *incommercial relationships* the *principle of gratuitousness* and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must *find their place within normal economic activity*. This is a human demand at the present time, but it is also demanded by economic logic. It is a demand both of charity and of truth." [12]

There comes to mind a teaching that St. Josemaría spread in his writings and in his meetings with very diverse

people. In a homily, he directed these words to everyone listening: "Be convinced that justice alone is never enough to solve the great problems of mankind. When justice alone is done, don't be surprised if people are hurt. The dignity of man, who is a son of God, requires much more. Charity must penetrate and accompany justice because it sweetens and deifies everything: 'God is love' (1 Jn 4:16). Our motive in everything we do should be the Love of God, which makes it easier for us to love our neighbor and which purifies and raises all earthly loves to a higher level." [13] And on another occasion, when answering a question about the first virtue a businessman should cultivate, he immediately replied: "charity, because justice alone is not enough . . . Always treat people with justice and let yourself be led a bit by your heart . . . Do what you can for others, through your work. And, along with

justice, practise charity. Justice alone is too dry; it leaves many spaces unfilled."[14]

A great love for justice, informed at every moment by charity, together with the professional preparation suited to each person, is the Christian weapon needed to contribute effectively to the solution of society's problems. "You have to do *supernaturally* what you do *naturally*," advised St. Josemaría; "and then bring this eagerness for charity, for fraternity, for understanding, for love, for a Christian spirit, to all the peoples of the earth."[15] Be on guard against doctrines that offer false solutions, materialistic ones, to social problems: "to resolve all of mankind's conflicts, all we need are Christian justice and charity."[16]

These considerations do not exempt Christians (especially those with

tasks of responsibility in public life or society) from the effort to know very well the laws that govern the economy. "Charity does not exclude knowledge," says Benedict XVI, "but rather requires, promotes, and animates it from within. Knowledge is never purely the work of the intellect. It can certainly be reduced to calculation and experiment, but if it aspires to be wisdom capable of directing man in the light of his first beginnings and his final ends, it must be 'seasoned' with the 'salt' of charity. Deeds without knowledge are blind, and knowledge without love is sterile. Indeed, 'the individual who is animated by true charity labors skillfully to discover the causes of misery, to find the means to combat it, to overcome it resolutely' (Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, no. 75)."[17]

Let us strive to understand more deeply these teachings of the

Magisterium, and to spread them and make them part of our way of thinking and our daily activity.

As always, I ask you to remain closely united to my intentions. And, naturally, in first place comes prayer for the Pope and those who assist him. This month, in addition, there is a special session of the Synod of Bishops in Rome dedicated to the African continent. Let us go to the Holy Spirit and to the intercession of St. Josemaría, asking that God may enlighten the bishops who will be with the Pope and grant great spiritual fruit to that assembly.

There are other anniversaries in the history of the Work that I will pass over here. But I feel the urgent need that all of us grow in our eagerness to know the different steps in the life of St. Josemaría. His diligence in caring for what heaven had placed in his hands led him to be a loyal

servant of God, of the Church (including this small part of it, the Work), of his daughters and sons and of all people, even those who didn't understand him. It is very important that we follow in his footsteps.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, October 1, 2009

Footnotes:

1. Cf. John Paul II, Homily at the beatification of the Founder of Opus Dei, May 17, 1992.

2. *Is* 43:1.

3. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 47.

4. *Gen* 2:15.

5. John Paul II, Homily at the canonization of the Founder of Opus Dei, October 6, 2002.

6. John Paul II, Homily at the beatification of the Founder of Opus Dei, May 17, 1992.

7. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 120.

8. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 35.

9. Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, June 29, 2009, no. 25.

10. *Ibid.* Cf. Pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*, no.63.

11. Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, June 29, 2009, no. 11.

12. *Ibid.*, no. 36.

13. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 172.

14. St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, November 27, 1972.
 15. St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, June 2, 1974.
 16. St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, April 14, 1974.
 17. Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, June 29, 2009, no.30.
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