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Letter from the Prelate (September 2007)

The Prelate stresses the importance of living in close union with Jesus Christ. The norms of Christian piety practiced by persons close to Opus Dei help them to share in our Lord's Cross.

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

The Church, and the Work as a living part of the Church, is called to reflect the light it constantly receives from Christ and to spread it throughout the world. Jesus taught all Christians: *You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven* (Mt 5:14-16).

"By listening to Jesus' words," says Benedict XVI, "we members of the Church cannot but become aware of the total inadequacy of our human condition, marked by sin. The Church is holy, but made up of men and women with their limitations and errors. It is Christ, Christ alone, who in giving us the Holy Spirit is able to transform our misery and constantly renew us. He is the light

of the peoples, the *lumen gentium*, who has chosen to illumine the world through his Church (cf. *Lumen gentium*, no. 1). 'How can this come about?' we also ask ourselves with the words that the Virgin addresses to the Archangel Gabriel. And she herself, the Mother of Christ and of the Church, gives us the answer: with her example of total availability to God's will—*fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum* (Lk 1:38)—Mary teaches us to be a 'manifestation' of the Lord, opening our hearts to the power of grace and faithfully abiding by the words of her Son, light of the world and the ultimate end of history" (Benedict XVI, Homily, January 6, 2006).

An essential condition for bringing Christ's teaching and life to others (and in today's world it is urgent to do so) is that we ourselves strive more diligently to get to know, deal with, and love our Lord better each day. This is the specific goal of the

norms of Christian piety, traditional in the Church, that we live in Opus Dei. We have to fulfill them as well as possible, as the result of a choice of love, even though at times our heart is dry or fails to respond.

When a person comes to the Prelature, moved by the desire to know God better, we try to provide an adequate doctrinal, spiritual and apostolic formation, so that Christ's teachings become, right from the start, not only clarity for his intellect but also light and strength for following in Jesus' footsteps. We help people to appreciate and to frequent the sacraments (the Eucharist and confession), to pray earnestly, to deal with God as a Father and with our Lady as a mother, to offer their work to God, to be concerned about others' spiritual and material needs, to draw closer to God those who are closer to them.

Let us struggle to improve each day in our personal conversation with God our Father, with Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, with our Lady. We who are nourished with the spirit of Opus Dei strive to give our life of piety a special tone, which many other people also make their own: the sense of divine filiation. We strive to imitate Christ with special attention to his years of ordinary life and work in Nazareth. We foster devotion to the Holy Spirit, intimate guest of the soul, who encourages us to identify ourselves with Christ and to love God the Father. We venerate our Lady as Mother of God and our mother, with the piety of small children who hope for everything from her maternal goodness. We strive for a personal relationship with the guardian angels, whom we consider our allies in all our apostolic tasks. And we go with complete confidence to St. Josemaría, our beloved Father, in

whom we see perfectly realized the spirit that God wanted for Opus Dei.

In addition, we have to always strive to serve the Church *in deed and in truth* (1 Jn 3:18), not only in words.

Let us pray and get others to pray for the Pope and his intentions, "pulling the cart" in the direction indicated by the Holy Father and, in each place, by the bishops in communion with the Roman Pontiff. By carrying out faithfully the mission proper to Opus Dei, we will collaborate in a very direct way in the great mission that the Master has entrusted to the Church, so that God's will may be fulfilled: *that all men be saved and brought to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim 2:4). We have to give a clear apostolic meaning to everything we do, in the most varied situations and moments. Thus everyone, including those who by way of exception are not in a position to take care of a direct personal apostolate, will carry

out a very fruitful work. But this path requires-and I repeat this on purpose-that we put great care into our dealing with God in our practices of Christian piety; that we strive to finish our work well, offering it to God each day in the Holy Mass; that we give importance to small mortifications, which he hopes to see in our conduct with a steady rhythm, "like the beating of our heart" (St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 518).

Union with Christ on the Cross is indispensable in order to carry out this apostolic program faithfully and with optimism. One cannot follow Jesus without denying oneself (cf. Lk 9:23), without cultivating a spirit of mortification, without the habitual component of specific deeds of penance. The Holy Father pointed this out, some months ago, when he announced a year dedicated to St. Paul on the bimillennium of his birth. He stressed that the apostolic

fruit of the Apostle to the Gentiles could not "be attributed to brilliant rhetoric or refined apologetic and missionary strategies. The success of his apostolate depended above all on his personal involvement in proclaiming the Gospel with total dedication to Christ; a dedication that feared neither risk, difficulty nor persecution. 'Neither death, nor life,' he wrote to the Romans, 'nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom 8:38-39). "From this we can draw a particularly important lesson for every Christian. The Church's action is credible and effective only to the extent to which those who belong to her are prepared to pay in person for their fidelity to Christ in every circumstance. When this readiness is lacking, the crucial argument of truth

on which the Church herself depends is also absent" (Benedict XVI, Homily at the Basilica of St. Paul outside the walls, June 28, 2007).

These considerations will help us to prepare for the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on the 14th of this month. St. Josemaría held up for us the great goal of placing the Cross of Christ at the summit of all human activities-with our sanctified and sanctifying work-so that Jesus might draw all men to himself (cf. Jn12:32). Let us realize well the urgency of this task: "How many people also in our time are in search of God, in search of Jesus and of his Church, in search of divine mercy, and are waiting for a 'sign' that will touch their minds and their hearts! Today, as then, the Evangelist reminds us that the only 'sign' is Jesus raised on the Cross: Jesus who died and rose is the absolutely sufficient sign. Through him we can

understand the truth about life and obtain salvation. This is the principal proclamation of the Church, which remains unchanged down the ages. The Christian faith, therefore, is not an ideology but a personal encounter with the Crucified and Risen Christ. From this experience, both individual and communitarian, flows a new way of thinking and acting: an existence marked by love is born, as the saints testify" (Benedict XVI, *Homily*, March 26, 2006).

An important part of "showing" Christ to others in our life can be summed up (and let's not take this as obvious) in the joyful, habitual practice of mortification and penance: voluntarily renouncing comforts and pleasures which, without being bad in themselves, could cool down or hinder our union with God. The temperate use of material goods, without letting oneself be entangled in their coils,

holds a fundamental importance for our union with Christ and our apostolate.

Many years ago now, our Founder wrote that "people expect from us, God's children in his Work, the *bonus odor Christi* which, supported by our temperance, enkindles them and draws them forward" (St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, May-1935/ September 14, 1950, no. 65). In contrast, if we do not reject the contagion of worldly goods, if we think it is impossible to carry with us the demanding environment of Christ, if we don't know how to go against the current, we will not be able to help others find the great happiness of friendship with Jesus. A worldly environment, unfortunately, is found in most places. We have to invite the others, first by our own example, to breathe the clean air of God's nearness. And to attain this, temperance of the heart and the senses is indispensable: *Blessed are*

the pure of heart, for they shall see God (Mt 5:8). We need to be convinced that only thus can we love this world of ours passionately.

What a great responsibility Christians have! Let us meditate once more on those words that St. Josemaría wrote in *The Way*: "Many great things depend-don't forget it-on whether you and I live our lives as God wants" (St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 755).

Continue praying for the Holy Father and his intentions. Ask our Lord to make his service to the Church very fruitful: that all Catholics-shepherds and faithful-take his teachings to heart and put them into practice. And unite yourselves to my intentions as well: forgive me for insisting so much, but I really need you, each and every one of you. As our Father used to say: "Everything is done, and everything remains to be

done."Therefore I ask for your whole-hearted assistance, so that I don't hold back the apostolic challenge of announcing to all mankind that Christ is calling each and every person.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Pamplona, September 1, 2007

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