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Letter from the Prelate (September 2008)

"How do we accept whatever goes against our own wishes: sickness, professional failures, unjust offenses, difficulties in our social or family life?", the Prelate asks in his September letter. And he finds the answer in Christ's Cross.

09/08/2008

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

Before turning to my main concern, let me mention in passing that we should give thanks to God for having let us experience, even physically, the *omnes cum Petro*, "all with Peter." By his stay in Kenthurst, living there as in his own house, we have contributed to the Holy Father's work as the successor of Peter and to his rest. Let us continue to help the Pope, praying as well for those who assist him.

Benedict XVI has often referred to the apostle Paul, and we want to be completely in tune with the Pope. Let us consider now how, from the moment of his conversion on the road to Damascus, Saul was clearly aware that his vocation and mission were intimately connected to the mystery of the Cross. As Jesus himself explained to Ananias, who was hesitant to go to baptize Saul: *he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles*

and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.[1]

St. Paul's life was a continual actualization of these words of our Lord. Responding wholeheartedly to grace, his only concern was to know Jesus Christ and to make him known, placing before the eyes of the new Christians the figure of the Son of God made man, who died and rose for our salvation. In his letter to the Galatians, when speaking about his only aspiration since his conversion, that of "living in Christ," he says that *Christo confixus sum cruci*, [2] I am nailed with Christ to the Cross. And precisely as a result of this intimate union, he was mystically identified with him, in a complete daily self-giving: *It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.* [3]

This union with Christ on the Cross was not merely a theoretical "ideal"

in the Apostle's life. In one of the autobiographical fragments included in his letters, he explains in specifics what the need to die with Christ has meant for him. *Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?*

It is impossible to read these lines from the second letter to the Corinthians without emotion and gratitude. Paul joyfully recalls his sufferings for the sake of his Lord, his being nailed to the Cross with him. *I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*[5]

When making reference to similar words of the Apostle, Benedict XVI says: "St. Paul no longer lives for himself, for the sake of his own justice. He lives from Christ and with Christ, giving himself—not seeking himself and building himself up. This is the new justice, the new direction that the Lord gives us, that the faith gives us. Faced with the Cross of Christ, the greatest expression of his

self-giving, we can no longer glory in ourselves." [6]

In St. Paul's days, and now as well, many people were seeking esoteric knowledge and showy teachings, hoping to find salvation in them. But the Apostle assures them that God's plan follows a different path. He preaches the *verbum crucis*, [7] the word of the Cross. *For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* [8]

These words are always relevant, and we would do well to meditate on them especially during these days, as we prepare to celebrate the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on

September 14. This feast has deep roots in the Church from antiquity, and specifically in this portion of the Church that is Opus Dei. The fact of living a year dedicated to St. Paul, who wrote so much about the mystery of the Cross, is an invitation to prepare ourselves better and to celebrate it more joyously. How do we seek to deny ourselves each day? How devotedly do we look at the wooden cross that contains such great significance? Do we love sacrifice?

In the life of St. Josemaría, the desire to be identified with Christ on the Cross was present since October 2, 1928. But even earlier, when he was quite young, God was preparing him through the big or small setbacks that he permitted during his infancy and adolescence. Later, once Opus Dei was founded, he clearly manifested that the Work ought to sink deep roots in the Holy Cross.

God made this clear to him on several occasions and in very distinct ways. Even though our Founder did not always understand the reason for those sufferings, he always went forward with the conviction that they were divine "caresses." In 1948, expressing himself in the third person, he referred in a meditation to some memories from those years. His words, which are autobiographical, give us a lot of light to understand his reaction when faced with repeated encounters with Jesus' Cross.

God was permitting countless difficulties to fall upon him, forging his soul through them. "I remember someone who went from one side of Madrid's poor districts to the other, alone with his suffering. He wanted to fulfill God's will, but found himself without the means needed to carry out the mission he had received. He saw no other solution, no other

remedy than the Cross; and he drank deeply from the chalice of suffering, right to the very dregs. By deciding to embrace suffering he savored, as though intoxicated by that sweet and bitter inebriation, the joy of those words of the psalmist: *et calix tuus inebrians quam praeclarus est!* (Ps 22:5 [vulg.]); your chalice that inebriates me, how happy it makes me!"[9]

We can each formulate for ourselves other questions that help us to measure how real our love for the Cross is, in deeds. How do we accept whatever goes against our own wishes: sickness, professional failures, unjust offenses, difficulties in our social or family life? How do we react when anything unpleasant crops up in our life unexpectedly? Do we try to see it with supernatural outlook? Do we rectify quickly, perhaps after an initial reaction of not understanding or even rebelling,

seeing in everything the will of God, who permits it for our own good? What a great moment to repeat lovingly that consideration from *The Way*: "Do you want it, Lord?...Then I want it too!"[10]

It's not a matter of being insensitive to physical or moral suffering but of lifting our sights above contingent realities, with God's help, which will never be lacking. What would be wrong is to try to flee from everything that goes against the grain, even more so when the cause stems from being faithful to the truth.

As Benedict XVI said when inaugurating the Pauline Year, with reference to St. Paul's mission: "The call to become the teacher of the Gentiles is, at the same time and intrinsically, a call to suffering in communion with Christ who redeemed us through his Passion. In

a world in which falsehood is powerful, the truth is paid for with suffering. The one who desires to avoid suffering, to keep it at bay, keeps life itself and its greatness at bay; he cannot be a servant of truth and thus a servant of faith.

"There is no love without suffering, without the suffering of renouncing oneself, of the transformation and purification of self for true freedom. Where there is nothing worth suffering for, even life loses its value. The Eucharist, the center of our Christian being, is founded on Jesus' sacrifice for us; it is born from the suffering of love which culminated in the Cross. We live by this love that gives itself. It gives us the courage and strength to suffer with Christ and for him in this world, knowing that in this very way our life becomes great and mature and true.

"In the light of all St Paul's letters, we see how the prophecy made to Ananias at the time of Paul's call came true in the process of teaching the Gentiles: *I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name*. His suffering made him credible as a teacher of truth who did not seek his own advantage, his own glory or his personal satisfaction but applied himself for the sake of the One who loved us and has given himself for us all." [11]

In the upcoming weeks, the liturgy provides us with a number of Marian commemorations: the Birth of our Lady, the Sweet Name of Mary, our Lady's sufferings beside the Cross, our Lady of Ransom. Let us see these feasts as invitations to turn to our Mother, to learn from her how to follow Christ closely, so as to become identified with him.

In the *Salve Regina* we pray: *show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus!* Our Lady not only shows us Jesus but brings us to him with motherly tenderness and affection. In the Gospels we see Mary "showing us" Jesus in two passages especially. One occurs at the beginning of our Lord's life, when Mary offers him to the shepherds and magi for their adoration; the other we recall on the 15th, in the holy scene at Golgotha.

With her silent presence next to the Cross, our Mother invites us to look at her Son. In directing our eyes to Christ on the Cross, we are reminded once again that "God redeemed the world not by the sword, but by the Cross," the Pope said in a homily." In dying, Jesus extends his arms. This, in the first place, is the posture of the Passion, in which he lets himself be nailed to the Cross for us, in order to give us his life. Yet outstretched arms are also the posture of one who

prays, the stance assumed by the priest when he extends his arms in prayer: Jesus transformed the Passion, his suffering and his death, into prayer, and in this way he transformed it into an act of love for God and for humanity. That, finally, is why the outstretched arms of the Crucified One are also a gesture of embracing, by which he draws us to himself, wishing to enfold us in his loving hands. In this way he is an image of the living God, he is God himself, and we can entrust ourselves to him."[12] .

How often we heard St. Josemaría say, as he opened his arms with a meaning-filled gesture, that Christ, the High Priest, extends his arms to embrace each and every one of us. Thus he stressed that to share in Christ's Cross is a sign of divine predilection, although it may be hard for us to understand. "But don't drag the Cross. Carry it squarely on your

shoulder, because your Cross, if you carry it so, will not be just any Cross: it will be the Holy Cross. Don't bear your Cross with resignation: resignation is not a generous word. Love the Cross. When you really love it, your Cross will be...a Cross, without a Cross.

"And surely you, like Him, will find Mary on the way."[13]

From September 12 to 15, Benedict will travel to France for the 150th anniversary of the Marian apparitions at Lourdes. Let us accompany him spiritually on his trip and take advantage of it to pray insistently for all those who are suffering in either body or soul, so that our Lord will assist them. Let us go to our Lady's intercession, Salus infirmorum, Consolatrix afflictorum, Health of the sick, Consoler of the afflicted, asking her also to help them understand that these sufferings,

united to those of Christ on the Cross, are very efficacious for the good of the Church and the salvation of souls.

September 15! And our thoughts also go spontaneously to our beloved Don Alvaro, who took up—with his usual peace and serenity—the holy weight of the Work. May you and I know how to correspond with the same generosity.

I don't have space to go into the trip we just made throughout the Far East. I thought a lot about our Father, and our Beloved Don Alvaro, and each and every one of you. What a rich wheat field awaits us! In India, Hong Kong, Macao, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia, the harvest can already be seen. And if we all work hard, how far we will reach!

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Solingen, September 1, 2008

1. Acts 9:15-16.

2. Gal. 2:19.

3. Ibid. 20.

4. 2 Cor 11:24-29.

5. Ibid. 12:9-10.

6. Benedict XVI, Address in a general audience, November 8, 2006.

7. 1 Cor. 1:18.

8. Ibid. 22-25.

9. St. Josemaría, Notes taken from a meditation, December 15, 1948.

10. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no.. 762.

11. Benedict XVI, Homily
inaugurating the Pauline Year, June
28, 2008.

12. Benedict XVI, Homily at
Mariazell, September 8, 2007.

13. St. Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*, Fourth
Sorrowful Mystery.

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