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Letter of the Prelate of Opus Dei on the occasion of the Conclave

A letter sent by Bishop Javier Echevarría to the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei, cooperators and friends.

04/11/2005

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

I feel the need to write you once again, just a week after my last letter, because of the events we have witnessed during these days, which are a grace from God for his Church. Together with the other shepherds of the People of God, I ask that all of us may deeply assimilate the marvelous unity of the Catholic Church that has been so clearly seen in the spontaneous manifestations of prayer and filiation on the death of John Paul II. I ask God that the experiences of these days not be just passing sensations, but that they remain in our souls and bring about a conversion, an eagerness to serve God and others, renewed resolutions of generous Christian conduct, of faithful love.

The death of John Paul II has been a new catechesis. The Pope began his fruitful pontificate with an encyclical on Our Lord Jesus Christ, Redeemer of Man. And he ended it, even after

the physical loss of the use of his voice, with the same eloquent teaching. Christ is our Savior; whoever follows Christ loves life and does not fear sickness or death, because the dignity of God's children extends from the beginning to the end of our earthly existence.

A page in the history of the Church and the world has just closed, marked by the singular figure of the one who during this period has been the Father and Supreme Shepherd of the People of God. Our Lord wanted us to be witnesses of these moments, during which we received, I repeat, a grace and a responsibility: that of continuing to proclaim Jesus Christ in accord with the example of Peter's successor. With the election of the next Pope, in the conclave that begins on the 18th, a new chapter in the firm continuity of the Church's history will begin. All of us Catholics can participate actively in this event,

by uniting ourselves through our prayer to the cardinals and to the whole Church.

During these days I have frequently recalled the two conclaves that I experienced in Rome together with our founder, in 1958 and 1963. I can never forget the insistence with which he urged us to pray and to offer everything for the next Pope. I recall how moved he was on seeing the *fumata bianca*, the white smoke, and the faith with which he immediately knelt and said the prayer *oremus pro beatissimo Papa nostro*, even before knowing, through the Cardinal Protodeacon's announcement, who had been elected. And our beloved Don Alvaro did likewise.

Like St. Josemaría in those moments, we already love with our whole soul the successor of John Paul II, whoever he may be. We love him

with filial affection, and we pray that God grant him abundant graces, and that his ministry be filled with fruits of holiness for the Church and of peace for civil society.

Let us renew our desire to serve the Pope, for it was only to serve the Church that God wanted Opus Dei. And already now, during this period of *sede vacante*, we can serve the Pontiff who within a few days will occupy the Chair of St. Peter. United to all Catholics, let us pray and offer sacrifices for the one the Holy Spirit will place at the head of the Church, doing so with supernatural peace, filled with hope.

Let us also pray that all Catholics may know how to see this new period with eyes of faith, without paying attention to considerations foreign to supernatural logic. There comes to mind the memory of the first audience that Paul VI granted to

our founder, in January 1964. At the end, Don Alvaro also came in, and the Pope said to him: we have known each other for so many years, and “sono diventato vecchio,” I have become old. Don Alvaro immediately replied: “No, Santita, lei è diventato Pietro,” you have become Peter. Since the beginning of this year, I have been asking everyone to pray the aspiration *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam*: all with Peter, to Jesus, through Mary. These words that I heard from St. Josemaría take on special meaning during these days. We don’t know who the next Pope will be, but whoever he is, he will be Peter. And we are already accompanying him with our prayer, going to the intercession of Holy Mary, Mother of the Church.

The worldwide respect and affection that we have seen in recent days for John Paul II make clear for us the “impact” of sanctity, the power of

attraction of Christ, the glory of God that shines in those who struggle to be faithful.

At the same time, this unity (which we could describe as “impetuous,” like the affection accompanying it) shows us that the Church is closely gathered around Peter. These outpourings of love are a tribute filled with gratitude to John Paul II, and an affectionate welcome to his successor.

I insist: as always, this is a moment for unity. The Pope is always the visible source and foundation of this unity. And just as John Paul II has been so until his death, so will be the one who is elected to succeed him. Our soul overflows with the need to express, out of justice, profound gratitude to John Paul II, so merited by his total dedication to the mission that God entrusted to him. I am sure that you are also already offering the

new Pope, whoever he may be, your affection and gratitude for his efforts in the exercise of his universal ministry.

With all my affection I bless you.

Your Father,

+ Javier

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