Romana is the bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei. These pages reprint documents of the Holy See directed to the entire Church, as well as those referring specifically to Opus Dei. It also provides news about the activities of the Prelate and the Prelature in the service of the Church and the local dioceses. Brief articles are included about some of the apostolic initiatives fostered by faithful of the Prelature within their profession and in society at large in their endeavor to infuse a Christian spirit into the secular sphere.

The contents of the bulletin do not provide an entire picture of Opus Dei’s activities, since the Prelature’s fundamental apostolate is that which its faithful carry out personally, guided by the Christian formation and spiritual assistance they receive from the Prelature. This apostolate takes place in the context of each person’s professional, social, and family setting, and its variety and creativity naturally cannot be reduced to a set of statistics.

Romana’s publication fulfills an express desire of St. Josemaría Escrivá. In choosing the title Romana for the future bulletin, St. Josemaría wished to emphasize the catholic and universal character of Opus Dei’s pastoral mission.
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EDITORIAL
The Year of Mercy

In convoking a Jubilee, the Holy Father Francis invites us to consider that the Church knows herself to be the bearer of the Lord’s overpowering yearning: salvation is today. *Utinam hodie vocem eius audiat: nolite obdurare corda vestra.* “O that today you would hearken to his voice! Harden not your hearts” (Ps 95:8). In the Old Testament, the jubilee year that took place every 50 years was a foreshadowing of the salvation God bestows. On fulfilling seven weeks of years (*Lev* 25:8)—seven times seven years—a year was begun in which slaves were freed, and each returned to their own property and family (see *Lev* 25:10,39), since people do not belong to anyone, but only to God (see *Lev* 25:55). If we wanted to sum up in one word what a jubilee meant for the people of Israel, it might be “freedom” (see *Lev* 25:10).

Freedom: isn’t this a word that is so often voiced by people today? And nevertheless, we often forget that freedom, in its deepest sense, comes from God. Through his saving passion and resurrection, Christ freed us from the worst slavery: sin. “Through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (*Lk* 1:78-79).

The source of true freedom is found in God’s mercy. From a purely human viewpoint, such a statement could seem ingenuous; we might admit that a bit of mercy would be good to smooth over human relationships, but only after having resolved many more urgent problems. In a general audience this past December, Pope Francis said that putting mercy in first place “humanly speaking is absurd, but ‘the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men’ (*1 Cor* 1:25).” The world needs mercy to escape from so many spirals of resentment, envy and frustration; families need it, as does society.

To a world that longs for freedom without being able to find it, the Church untiringly offers God’s mercy, which brings with it “the freedom of the children of God” (St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 267; see *Gal* 5:1). “The Church needs this extraordinary occasion. In this era of profound changes, the Church is called to offer her particular contribution, rendering
visible the signs of the presence and closeness of God. The Jubilee is a favorable time for all of us, because by contemplating Divine Mercy, which overcomes all human limitations and shines in the darkness of sin, we are able to become more certain and effective witnesses,” Pope Francis said on the day following the opening of the holy door in St. Peter’s.

The holy door is a vivid reminder of where salvation comes from: from the sheepfold of God, from the space of God, which he invites us to enter. “God goes to meet those who are not seeking him,” the Founder of Opus Dei tells us (In Love with the Church, no. 39), and he invites us to open a door of hope. The Jubilee is “a Holy Year to experience strongly within ourselves the joy of having been found by Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who has come in search of us because we were lost,” the Holy Father said in a homily (April 11, 2015).

We have before us, therefore, a special opportunity to experience the liberating power of divine mercy. God pardons our sins and opens our hearts to those around us. “This Jubilee, in other words, is a privileged moment for the Church to learn to choose only ‘what pleases God most.’ What is it that ‘pleases God most?’ Forgiving his children, having mercy on them, so that they may in turn forgive their brothers and sisters, shining as a flame of God’s mercy in the world. This is what pleases God most” (Pope Francis, Audience, December 9, 2015).

Reconciliation with God—which we receive in Confession, the sacrament at the center of the Jubilee Year (see Bull Misericordiae Vultus, no. 17)—opens a door to allow those around us to enter into our life. For God’s mercy is not a mere mantle that covers over our miseries, without changing anything in our life. On the contrary, his mercy changes us radically; it makes us men and women who are “merciful like the Father” (see Lk 6:36). We are such when we forgive someone who has offended us, when we carry out, perhaps going against the grain, some work of charity, or bring the saving message of the Gospel to someone who is living far from God. Drawing close to God’s mercy, St. Josemaría assures us, necessarily involves becoming instruments of his compassion towards those around us: “God’s heart is a heart of mercy, which has compassion on men and draws close to them. Our self-giving in the service of souls is a
manifestation of God’s mercy, not only towards us but also towards all mankind” (*Letter*, March 24, 1930, no. 1).
HOLY SEE

- The Roman Pontiff
- The Roman Curia
Dear Brothers and Sisters:

In a few moments I will have the joy of opening the Holy Door of Mercy. We carry out this act—as I did in Bangui—so simple yet so highly symbolic, in the light of the word of God which we have just heard. That word highlights the primacy of grace. Again and again these readings make us think of the words by which the angel Gabriel told an astonished young girl of the mystery which was about to enfold her: “Hail, full of grace” (Lk 1:28).

The Virgin Mary was called to rejoice above all because of what the Lord accomplished in her. God’s grace enfolded her and made her worthy of becoming the Mother of Christ. When Gabriel entered her home, even the most profound and impenetrable of mysteries became for her a cause for joy, a cause for faith, a cause for abandonment to the message revealed to her. The fullness of grace can transform the human heart and enable it to do something so great as to change the course of human history.

The feast of the Immaculate Conception expresses the grandeur of God’s love. Not only does he forgive sin, but in Mary he even averts the original sin present in every man and woman who comes into this world. This is the love of God which precedes, anticipates and saves. The beginning of the history of sin in the Garden of Eden yields to a plan of saving love. The words of Genesis reflect our own daily experience: we are constantly tempted to disobedience, a disobedience expressed in wanting to go about our lives without regard for God’s will. This is the enmity which keeps striking at people’s lives, setting them in opposition to God’s plan. Yet the history of sin can only be understood in the light of God’s love and forgiveness. Sin can only be understood in this light. Were sin the only thing that mattered, we would be the most desperate of creatures. But the promised triumph of Christ’s love enfolds everything in the Father’s mercy. The word of God which we have just heard leaves no doubt about this.
The Immaculate Virgin stands before us as a privileged witness of this promise and its fulfilment.

This Extraordinary Year is itself a gift of grace. To pass through the Holy Door means to rediscover the infinite mercy of the Father who welcomes everyone and goes out personally to encounter each of them. It is he who seeks us! It is he who comes to encounter us! This will be a year in which we grow ever more convinced of God’s mercy. How much wrong we do to God and his grace when we speak of sins being punished by his judgment before we speak of their being forgiven by his mercy! But that is the truth. We have to put mercy before judgment, and in any event God’s judgment will always be in the light of his mercy. In passing through the Holy Door, then, may we feel that we ourselves are part of this mystery of love, of tenderness. Let us set aside all fear and dread, for these do not befit men and women who are loved. Instead, let us experience the joy of encountering that grace which transforms all things.

Today, here in Rome and in all the dioceses of the world, as we pass through the Holy Door, we also want to remember another door, which fifty years ago the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council opened to the world. This anniversary cannot be remembered only for the legacy of the Council’s documents, which testify to a great advance in faith. Before all else, the Council was an encounter. A genuine encounter between the Church and the men and women of our time. An encounter marked by the power of the Spirit, who impelled the Church to emerge from the shoals which for years had kept her self-enclosed so as to set out once again, with enthusiasm, on her missionary journey. It was the resumption of a journey of encountering people where they live: in their cities and homes, in their workplaces. Wherever there are people, the Church is called to reach out to them and to bring the joy of the Gospel, and the mercy and forgiveness of God. After these decades, we again take up this missionary drive with the same power and enthusiasm. The Jubilee challenges us to this openness, and demands that we not neglect the spirit which emerged from Vatican II, the spirit of the Samaritan, as Blessed Paul VI expressed it at the conclusion of the Council. May our passing through the Holy Door today commit us to making our own the mercy of the Good Samaritan.

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Dear Young People,

We have come to the last stretch of our pilgrimage to Krakow, the place where we will celebrate the 31st World Youth Day next year in the month of July. We are being guided on this long and challenging path by Jesus’ words taken from the Sermon on the Mount. We began this journey in 2014 by meditating together on the first Beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3). The theme for 2015 was: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). During the year ahead, let us allow ourselves to be inspired by the words: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7).

1. The Jubilee of Mercy

With this theme, the Krakow 2016 WYD forms part of the Holy Year of Mercy and so becomes a Youth Jubilee at world level. It is not the first time that an international youth gathering has coincided with a Jubilee Year. Indeed, it was during the Holy Year of the Redemption (1983/1984) that Saint John Paul II first called on young people from around the world to come together on Palm Sunday. Then, during the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, over two million young people from around 165 countries gathered in Rome for the 15th World Youth Day. I am sure that the Youth Jubilee in Krakow will be, as on those two previous occasions, one of the high points of this Holy Year!

Perhaps some of you are asking: what is this Jubilee Year that is celebrated in the Church? The scriptural text of Leviticus 5 can help us to understand the meaning of a “jubilee” for the people of Israel. Every fifty years they heard the sounding of a trumpet (jobel) calling them (jobil) to celebrate a holy year as a time of reconciliation (jobal) for everyone. During that time they had to renew their good relations with God, with their
neighbors and with creation, all in a spirit of gratuitousness. This fostered, among other things, debt forgiveness, special help for those who had fallen into poverty, an improvement in interpersonal relations and the freeing of slaves.

Jesus Christ came to proclaim and bring about the Lord’s everlasting time of grace. He brought good news to the poor, freedom to prisoners, sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed (see Lk 4:18-19). In Jesus, and particularly in his Paschal Mystery, the deeper meaning of the jubilee is fully realized. When the Church proclaims a jubilee in the name of Christ, we are all invited to experience a wonderful time of grace. The Church must offer abundant signs of God’s presence and closeness, and reawaken in people’s hearts the ability to look to the essentials. In particular, this Holy Year of Mercy is “a time for the Church to rediscover the meaning of the mission entrusted to her by the Lord on the day of Easter: to be a sign and an instrument of the Father’s mercy.”[1]

2. Merciful like the Father

The motto for this Extraordinary Jubilee is “Merciful like the Father.”[2] This fits in with the theme of the next WYD, so let us try to better understand the meaning of divine mercy.

The Old Testament uses various terms when it speaks about mercy. The most meaningful of these are hesed and rahamim. The first, when applied to God, expresses God’s unfailing fidelity to the Covenant with his people whom he loves and forgives for ever. The second, rahamim, which literally means “entrails,” can be translated as “heartfelt mercy.” This particularly brings to mind the maternal womb and helps us understand that God’s love for his people is like that of a mother for her child. That is how it is presented by the prophet Isaiah: “Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you” (Is 49:15). Love of this kind involves making space for others within ourselves and being able to sympathize, suffer and rejoice with our neighbors.

The biblical concept of mercy also includes the tangible presence of love that is faithful, freely given and able to forgive. In the following passage from Hosea, we have a beautiful example of God’s love, which the
prophet compares to that of a father for his child: “When Israel was a child I loved him; out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the farther they went from me... Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks... I stooped to feed my child” (Hos 11:1-4). Despite the child’s wrong attitude that deserves punishment, a father’s love is faithful. He always forgives his repentant children. We see here how forgiveness is always included in mercy. It is “not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as of that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child.... It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy.”[3]

The New Testament speaks to us of divine mercy (eleos) as a synthesis of the work that Jesus came to accomplish in the world in the name of the Father (see Mt 9:13). Our Lord’s mercy can be seen especially when he bends down to human misery and shows his compassion for those in need of understanding, healing and forgiveness. Everything in Jesus speaks of mercy. Indeed, he himself is mercy.

In Chapter 15 of Luke’s Gospel we find the three parables of mercy: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the parable of the prodigal son. In these three parables we are struck by God’s joy, the joy that God feels when he finds and forgives a sinner. Yes, it is God’s joy to forgive! This sums up the whole of the Gospel. “Each of us, each one of us, is that little lost lamb, the coin that was mislaid; each one of us is that son who has squandered his freedom on false idols, illusions of happiness, and has lost everything. But God does not forget us; the Father never abandons us. He is a patient Father, always waiting for us! He respects our freedom, but he remains faithful forever. And when we come back to him, he welcomes us like children into his house, for he never ceases, not for one instant, to wait for us with love. And his heart rejoices over every child who returns. He is celebrating because he is joy. God has this joy, when one of us sinners goes to him and asks his forgiveness.”[4]

God’s mercy is very real and we are all called to experience it firsthand. When I was seventeen years old, it happened one day that, as I was about to go out with friends, I decided to stop into a church first. I met a priest
there who inspired great confidence, and I felt the desire to open my heart in Confession. That meeting changed my life! I discovered that when we open our hearts with humility and transparency, we can contemplate God’s mercy in a very concrete way. I felt certain that, in the person of that priest, God was already waiting for me even before I took the step of entering that church. We keep looking for God, but God is there before us, always looking for us, and he finds us first. Maybe one of you feels something weighing on your heart. You are thinking: I did this, I did that.... Do not be afraid! God is waiting for you! God is a Father and he is always waiting for us! It is so wonderful to feel the merciful embrace of the Father in the sacrament of Reconciliation, to discover that the confessional is a place of mercy, and to allow ourselves to be touched by the merciful love of the Lord who always forgives us!

You, dear young man, dear young woman, have you ever felt the gaze of everlasting love upon you, a gaze that looks beyond your sins, limitations and failings, and continues to have faith in you and to look upon your life with hope? Do you realize how precious you are to God, who has given you everything out of love? Saint Paul tells us that “God proves his love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Do we really understand the power of these words?

I know how much the WYD cross means to all of you. It was a gift from Saint John Paul II and has been with you at all your World Meetings since 1984. So many changes and real conversions have taken place in the lives of young people who have encountered this simple bare cross! Perhaps you have asked yourselves the question: what is the origin of the extraordinary power of the cross? Here is the answer: the cross is the most eloquent sign of God’s mercy! It tells us that the measure of God’s love for humanity is to love without measure! Through the cross we can touch God’s mercy and be touched by that mercy! Here I would recall the episode of the two thieves crucified beside Jesus. One of them is arrogant and does not admit that he is a sinner. He mocks the Lord. The other acknowledges that he has done wrong; he turns to the Lord saying: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus looks at him with infinite mercy and replies: “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (cf. Lk 23:32, 39-43). With which of the two do we identify? Is it with the arrogant one who does
not acknowledge his own mistakes? Or is it with the other, who accepts that he is in need of divine mercy and begs for it with all his heart? It is in the Lord, who gave his life for us on the cross, that we will always find that unconditional love which sees our lives as something good and always gives us the chance to start again.

3. The amazing joy of being instruments of God’s mercy

The Word of God teaches us that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (*Acts* 20:35). That is why the fifth Beatitude declares that the merciful are blessed. We know that the Lord loved us first. But we will be truly blessed and happy only when we enter into the divine “logic” of gift and gracious love, when we discover that God has loved us infinitely in order to make us capable of loving like Him, without measure. Saint John says: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love... In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another” (*1 Jn* 4:7-11).

After this very brief summary of how the Lord bestows his mercy upon us, I would like to give you some suggestions on how we can be instruments of this mercy for others.

I think of the example of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. He said, “Jesus pays me a visit every morning in Holy Communion, and I return the visit in the meager way I know how, visiting the poor.” Pier Giorgio was a young man who understood what it means to have a merciful heart that responds to those most in need. He gave them far more than material goods. He gave himself by giving his time, his words and his capacity to listen. He served the poor very quietly and unassumingly. He truly did what the Gospel tells us: “When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret” (*Mt* 6:3-4). Imagine that, on the day before his death when he was gravely ill, he was giving directions on how his friends in need should be helped. At his funeral, his family and friends were stunned by the presence of so many poor people unknown to them. They had been befriended and helped by the young Pier Giorgio.
I always like to link the Gospel Beatitudes with Matthew 25, where Jesus presents us with the works of mercy and tells us that we will be judged on them. I ask you, then, to rediscover the corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, assist the sick, visit the imprisoned and bury the dead. Nor should we over-look the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, teach the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the sorrowful, forgive offenses, patiently bear with troublesome people and pray to God for the living and the dead. As you can see, mercy does not just imply being a “good person” nor is it mere sentimentality. It is the measure of our authenticity as disciples of Jesus, and of our credibility as Christians in today’s world.

If you want me to be very specific, I would suggest that for the first seven months of 2016 you choose a corporal and a spiritual work of mercy to practice each month. Find inspiration in the prayer of Saint Faustina, a humble apostle of Divine Mercy in our times:

“Help me, O Lord,...that my eyes may be merciful, so that I will never be suspicious or judge by appearances, but always look for what is beautiful in my neighbors’ souls and be of help to them;... that my ears may be merciful, so that I will be attentive to my neighbors’ needs, and not indifferent to their pains and complaints;... that my tongue may be merciful, so that I will never speak badly of others, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all;... that my hands may be merciful and full of good deeds;... that my feet may be merciful, so that I will hasten to help my neighbors, despite my own fatigue and weariness; ... that my heart may be merciful, so that I myself will share in all the sufferings of my neighbor.”[5]

The Divine Mercy message is a very specific life plan because it involves action. One of the most obvious works of mercy, and perhaps the most difficult to put into practice, is to forgive those who have offended us, who have done us wrong or whom we consider to be enemies. “At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully.”[6]
I meet so many young people who say that they are tired of this world being so divided, with clashes between supporters of different factions and so many wars, in some of which religion is being used as justification for violence. We must ask the Lord to give us the grace to be merciful to those who do us wrong. Jesus on the cross prayed for those who had crucified him: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). Mercy is the only way to overcome evil. Justice is necessary, very much so, but by itself it is not enough. Justice and mercy must go together. How I wish that we could join together in a chorus of prayer, from the depths of our hearts, to implore the Lord to have mercy on us and on the whole world!

4. Krakow is expecting us!

Only a few months are left before we meet in Poland. Krakow, the city of Saint John Paul II and Saint Faustina Kowalska, is waiting for us with open arms and hearts. I believe that Divine Providence led us to the decision to celebrate the Youth Jubilee in that city which was home to those two great apostles of mercy in our times. John Paul II realized that this is the time of mercy. At the start of his pontificate, he wrote the encyclical Dives in Misericordia. In the Holy Year 2000 he canonized Sister Faustina and instituted the Feast of Divine Mercy, which now takes place on the Second Sunday of Easter. In 2002 he personally inaugurated the Divine Mercy Shrine in Krakow and entrusted the world to Divine Mercy, in the desire that this message would reach all the peoples of the earth and fill their hearts with hope: “This spark needs to be lighted by the grace of God. This fire of mercy needs to be passed on to the world. In the mercy of God the world will find peace and mankind will find happiness!”[7]

Dear young people, at the Shrine in Krakow dedicated to the merciful Jesus, where he is depicted in the image venerated by the people of God, Jesus is waiting for you. He has confidence in you and is counting on you! He has so many things to say to each of you... Do not be afraid to look into his eyes, full of infinite love for you. Open yourselves to his merciful gaze, so ready to forgive all your sins. A look from him can change your lives and heal the wounds of your souls. His eyes can quench the thirst that dwells deep in your young hearts, a thirst for love, for peace, for joy and for true
happiness. Come to Him and do not be afraid! Come to him and say from the depths of your hearts: “Jesus, I trust in You! Let yourselves be touched by his boundless mercy, so that in turn you may become apostles of mercy by your actions, words and prayers in our world, wounded by selfishness, hatred and so much despair.

Carry with you the flame of Christ’s merciful love — as Saint John Paul II said — in every sphere of your daily life and to the very ends of the earth. In this mission, I am with you with my encouragement and prayers. I entrust all of you to Mary, Mother of Mercy, for this last stretch of the journey of spiritual preparation for the next WYD in Krakow. I bless all of you from my heart.

From the Vatican, August 15, 2015
Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Francis

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[1] Pope Francis, Homily at the first vespers of the Sunday of Divine Mercy
[3] Ibid., no. 6.

Christmas greeting from the Holy Father to Bishop Echevarría

*The Vatican, December 23, 2015*
Bishop Javier Echevarría

Dear Brother:

Many thanks for your greetings and good wishes. I wish you too a happy and holy Christmas.

I am praying for your full recovery from the operation. And you, please, do not forget to pray for me.

May Jesus bless you and the Blessed Virgin care for you.

Fraternally,

Francis

Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations (September 25, 2015)

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good day. Once again, following a tradition by which I feel honored, the Secretary General of the United Nations has invited the Pope to address this distinguished assembly of nations. In my own name, and that of the entire Catholic community, I wish to express to you, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, my heartfelt gratitude. I greet the Heads of State and Heads of Government present, as well as the ambassadors, diplomats and political and technical officials accompanying them, the personnel of the United Nations engaged in this 70th Session of the General Assembly, the personnel of the various programs and agencies of the United Nations family, and all those who, in one way or another, take part in this meeting. Through you, I also greet the citizens of all the nations represented in this hall. I thank you, each and all, for your efforts in the service of mankind.

This is the fifth time that a Pope has visited the United Nations. I follow in the footsteps of my predecessors Paul VI, in 1965, John Paul II, in 1979 and 1995, and my most recent predecessor, now Pope Emeritus
Benedict XVI, in 2008. All of them expressed their great esteem for the Organization, which they considered the appropriate juridical and political response to this present moment of history, marked by our technical ability to overcome distances and frontiers and, apparently, to overcome all natural limits to the exercise of power. An essential response, inasmuch as technological power, in the hands of nationalistic or falsely universalist ideologies, is capable of perpetrating tremendous atrocities. I can only reiterate the appreciation expressed by my predecessors, in reaffirming the importance which the Catholic Church attaches to this Institution and the hope which she places in its activities.

The United Nations is presently celebrating its seventieth anniversary. The history of this organized community of states is one of important common achievements over a period of unusually fast-paced changes. Without claiming to be exhaustive, we can mention the codification and development of international law, the establishment of international norms regarding human rights, advances in humanitarian law, the resolution of numerous conflicts, operations of peace-keeping and reconciliation, and any number of other accomplishments in every area of international activity and endeavor. All these achievements are lights which help to dispel the darkness of the disorder caused by unrestrained ambitions and collective forms of selfishness. Certainly, many grave problems remain to be resolved, yet it is also clear that, without all this international activity, mankind would not have been able to survive the unchecked use of its own possibilities. Every one of these political, juridical and technical advances is a path towards attaining the ideal of human fraternity and a means for its greater realization.

I also pay homage to all those men and women whose loyalty and self-sacrifice have benefitted humanity as a whole in these past seventy years. In particular, I would recall today those who gave their lives for peace and reconciliation among peoples, from Dag Hammarskjöld to the many United Nations officials at every level who have been killed in the course of humanitarian missions, and missions of peace and reconciliation.

Beyond these achievements, the experience of the past seventy years has made it clear that reform and adaptation to the times is always necessary in the pursuit of the ultimate goal of granting all countries, without exception,
a share in, and a genuine and equitable influence on, decision-making processes. The need for greater equity is especially true in the case of those bodies with effective executive capability, such as the Security Council, the Financial Agencies and the groups or mechanisms specifically created to deal with economic crises. This will help limit every kind of abuse or usury, especially where developing countries are concerned. The International Financial Agencies should care for the sustainable development of countries and should ensure that they are not subjected to oppressive lending systems which, far from promoting progress, subject people to mechanisms which generate greater poverty, exclusion and dependence.

The work of the United Nations, according to the principles set forth in the Preamble and the first Articles of its founding Charter, can be seen as the development and promotion of the rule of law, based on the realization that justice is an essential condition for achieving the ideal of universal fraternity. In this context, it is helpful to recall that the limitation of power is an idea implicit in the concept of law itself. To give to each his own, to cite the classic definition of justice, means that no human individual or group can consider itself absolute, permitted to bypass the dignity and the rights of other individuals or their social groupings. The effective distribution of power (political, economic, defense-related, technological, etc.) among a plurality of subjects, and the creation of a juridical system for regulating claims and interests, are one concrete way of limiting power. Yet today’s world presents us with many false rights and—at the same time—broad sectors which are vulnerable, victims of power badly exercised: for example, the natural environment and the vast ranks of the excluded. These sectors are closely interconnected and made increasingly fragile by dominant political and economic relationships. That is why their rights must be forcefully affirmed, by working to protect the environment and by putting an end to exclusion.

First, it must be stated that a true “right of the environment” does exist, for two reasons. First, because we human beings are part of the environment. We live in communion with it, since the environment itself entails ethical limits which human activity must acknowledge and respect. Man, for all his remarkable gifts, which “are signs of a uniqueness which transcends the spheres of physics and biology,”[1] is at the same time a part
of these spheres. He possesses a body shaped by physical, chemical and biological elements, and can only survive and develop if the ecological environment is favorable. Any harm done to the environment, therefore, is harm done to humanity. Second, because every creature, particularly a living creature, has an intrinsic value, in its existence, its life, its beauty and its interdependence with other creatures. We Christians, together with the other monotheistic religions, believe that the universe is the fruit of a loving decision by the Creator, who permits man respectfully to use creation for the good of his fellow men and for the glory of the Creator; he is not authorized to abuse it, much less to destroy it. In all religions, the environment is a fundamental good. \[2\]

The misuse and destruction of the environment are also accompanied by a relentless process of exclusion. In effect, a selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged, either because they are differently abled (handicapped), or because they lack adequate information and technical expertise, or are incapable of decisive political action. Economic and social exclusion is a complete denial of human fraternity and a grave offense against human rights and the environment. The poorest are those who suffer most from such offenses, for three serious reasons: they are cast off by society, forced to live off what is discarded and suffer unjustly from the abuse of the environment. They are part of today’s widespread and quietly growing “culture of waste.”

The dramatic reality this whole situation of exclusion and inequality, with its evident effects, has led me, in union with the entire Christian people and many others, to take stock of my grave responsibility in this regard and to speak out, together with all those who are seeking urgently-needed and effective solutions. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the World Summit, which opens today, is an important sign of hope. I am similarly confident that the Paris Conference on Climatic Change will secure fundamental and effective agreements.

Solemn commitments, however, are not enough, although they are certainly a necessary step toward solutions. The classic definition of justice which I mentioned earlier contains as one of its essential elements a constant and perpetual will: *Iustitia est constans et perpetua voluntas ius sum*
Our world demands of all government leaders a will which is effective, practical and constant, concrete steps and immediate measures for preserving and improving the natural environment and thus putting an end as quickly as possible to the phenomenon of social and economic exclusion, with its baneful consequences: human trafficking, the marketing of human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labor, including prostitution, the drug and weapons trade, terrorism and international organized crime. Such is the magnitude of these situations and their toll in innocent lives, that we must avoid every temptation to fall into a declarationist nominalism which would assuage our consciences. We need to ensure that our institutions are truly effective in the struggle against all these scourges.

The number and complexity of the problems requires that we possess technical instruments of verification. But this involves two risks. We can rest content with the bureaucratic exercise of drawing up long lists of good proposals—goals, objectives and statistics—or we can think that a single theoretical and aprioristic solution will provide an answer to all the challenges. It must never be forgotten that political and economic activity is only effective when it is understood as a prudential activity guided by a perennial concept of justice and constantly conscious of the fact that, above and beyond our plans and programs, we are dealing with real men and women who live, suffer, and struggle, and are often forced to live in great poverty, deprived of all rights.

To enable these real men and women to escape from extreme poverty, we must allow them to be dignified agents of their own destiny. Integral human development and the full exercise of human dignity cannot be imposed. They must be built up and allowed to unfold for each individual, for every family, in communion with others, and in a right relationship with all those areas in which human social life develops — friends, communities, towns and cities, schools, businesses and unions, provinces, nations, etc. This presupposes and requires the right to education — also for girls (excluded in certain places) — which is ensured first and foremost by respecting and reinforcing the primary right of the family to educate its children, as well as the right of churches and social groups to support and assist families in the education of their children. Education conceived in
this way is the basis for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for reclaiming the environment.

At the same time, government leaders must do everything possible to ensure that all can have the minimum spiritual and material means needed to live in dignity and to create and support a family, which is the primary cell of any social development. In practical terms, this absolute minimum has three names: lodging, labor, and land; and one spiritual name: spiritual freedom, which includes religious freedom, the right to education and all other civil rights.

For all this, the simplest and best measure and indicator of the implementation of the new Agenda for Development will be effective, practical and immediate access, on the part of all, to essential material and spiritual goods: housing, dignified and properly remunerated employment, adequate food and drinking water; religious freedom and, more generally, spiritual freedom and education. These pillars of integral human development have a common foundation, which is the right to life and, more generally, what we could call the right to existence of human nature itself.

The ecological crisis, and the large-scale destruction of biodiversity, can threaten the very existence of the human species. The baneful consequences of an irresponsible mismanagement of the global economy, guided only by ambition for wealth and power, must serve as a summons to a forthright reflection on man: “man is not only a freedom which he creates for himself. Man does not create himself. He is spirit and will, but also nature.”[3] Creation is compromised “where we ourselves have the final word… The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any instance above ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves.”[4] Consequently, the defense of the environment and the fight against exclusion demand that we recognize a moral law written into human nature itself, one which includes the natural difference between man and woman,[5] and absolute respect for life in all its stages and dimensions.[6]

Without the recognition of certain incontestable natural ethical limits and without the immediate implementation of those pillars of integral human development, the ideal of “saving succeeding generations from the
scourge of war,”[^7] and “promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,”[^8] risks becoming an unattainable illusion, or, even worse, idle chatter which serves as a cover for all kinds of abuse and corruption, or for carrying out an ideological colonization by the imposition of anomalous models and lifestyles which are alien to people’s identity and, in the end, irresponsible.

War is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment. If we want true integral human development for all, we must work tirelessly to avoid war between nations and peoples.

To this end, there is a need to ensure the uncontested rule of law and tireless recourse to negotiation, mediation and arbitration, as proposed by the Charter of the United Nations, which constitutes truly a fundamental juridical norm. The experience of these seventy years since the founding of the United Nations in general, and in particular the experience of these first fifteen years of the third millennium, reveal both the effectiveness of the full application of international norms and the ineffectiveness of their lack of enforcement. When the Charter of the United Nations is respected and applied with transparency and sincerity, and without ulterior motives, as an obligatory reference point of justice and not as a means of masking spurious intentions, peaceful results will be obtained. When, on the other hand, the norm is considered simply as an instrument to be used whenever it proves favorable, and to be avoided when it is not, a true Pandora’s box is opened, releasing uncontrollable forces which gravely harm defenceless populations, the cultural milieu and even the biological environment.

The Preamble and the first Article of the Charter of the United Nations set forth the foundations of the international juridical framework: peace, the pacific solution of disputes and the development of friendly relations between the nations. Strongly opposed to such statements, and in practice denying them, is the constant tendency to the proliferation of arms, especially weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear weapons. An ethics and a law based on the threat of mutual destruction — and possibly the destruction of all mankind — are self-contradictory and an affront to the entire framework of the United Nations, which would end up as “nations united by fear and distrust.” There is urgent need to work for a world free of nuclear weapons, in full application of the non-proliferation
Treaty, in letter and spirit, with the goal of a complete prohibition of these weapons.

The recent agreement reached on the nuclear question in a sensitive region of Asia and the Middle East is proof of the potential of political good will and of law, exercised with sincerity, patience, and constancy. I express my hope that this agreement will be lasting and efficacious, and bring forth the desired fruits with the cooperation of all the parties involved.

In this sense, hard evidence is not lacking of the negative effects of military and political interventions which are not coordinated between members of the international community. For this reason, while regretting to have to do so, I must renew my repeated appeals regarding the painful situation of the entire Middle East, North Africa and other African countries, where Christians, together with other cultural or ethnic groups, and even members of the majority religion who have no desire to be caught up in hatred and folly, have been forced to witness the destruction of their places of worship, their cultural and religious heritage, their houses and property, and have faced the alternative either of fleeing or of paying for their adhesion to good and to peace by their own lives, or by enslavement.

These realities should serve as a grave summons to an examination of conscience on the part of those charged with the conduct of international affairs. Not only in cases of religious or cultural persecution, but in every situation of conflict, as in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Libya, South Sudan and the Great Lakes region, real human beings take precedence over partisan interests, however legitimate the latter may be. In wars and conflicts there are individual persons, our brothers and sisters, men and women, young and old, boys and girls who weep, suffer and die. Human beings who are easily discarded when our response is simply to draw up lists of problems, strategies and disagreements.

As I wrote in my letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on August 9, 2014, “the most basic understanding of human dignity compels the international community, particularly through the norms and mechanisms of international law, to do all that it can to stop and to prevent
further systematic violence against ethnic and religious minorities” and to protect innocent peoples.

Along the same lines I would mention another kind of conflict which is not always so open, yet is silently killing millions of people. Another kind of war experienced by many of our societies as a result of the narcotics trade. A war which is taken for granted and poorly fought. Drug trafficking is by its very nature accompanied by trafficking in persons, money laundering, the arms trade, child exploitation and other forms of corruption. A corruption which has penetrated to different levels of social, political, military, artistic and religious life, and, in many cases, has given rise to a parallel structure which threatens the credibility of our institutions.

I began this speech recalling the visits of my predecessors. I would hope that my words will be taken above all as a continuation of the final words of the address of Pope Paul VI; although spoken almost exactly fifty years ago, they remain ever timely. I quote: “The hour has come when a pause, a moment of recollection, reflection, even of prayer, is absolutely needed so that we may think back over our common origin, our history, our common destiny. The appeal to the moral conscience of man has never been as necessary as it is today... For the danger comes neither from progress nor from science; if these are used well, they can help to solve a great number of the serious problems besetting mankind.”[9] Among other things, human genius, well applied, will surely help to meet the grave challenges of ecological deterioration and of exclusion. As Paul VI said: “The real danger comes from man, who has at his disposal ever more powerful instruments that are as well fitted to bring about ruin as they are to achieve lofty conquests.”[10]

The common home of all men and women must continue to rise on the foundations of a right understanding of universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable because they are only considered as part of a statistic. This common home of all men and women must also be built on the understanding of a certain sacredness of created nature.
Such understanding and respect call for a higher degree of wisdom, one which accepts transcendence, self-transcendence, rejects the creation of an all-powerful élite, and recognizes that the full meaning of individual and collective life is found in selfless service to others and in the sage and respectful use of creation for the common good. To repeat the words of Paul VI, “the edifice of modern civilization has to be built on spiritual principles, for they are the only ones capable not only of supporting it, but of shedding light on it” (ibid.).

_El Gaucho Martín Fierro_, a classic of literature in my native land, says: “Brothers should stand by each other, because this is the first law; keep a true bond between you always, at every time — because if you fight among yourselves, you’ll be devoured by those outside”[11]

The contemporary world, so apparently connected, is experiencing a growing and steady social fragmentation, which places at risk “the foundations of social life” and consequently leads to “battles over conflicting interests.”[12]

The present time invites us to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society, so as to bear fruit in significant and positive historical events (see _Evangelii Gaudium_, 223).[13] We cannot permit ourselves to postpone “certain agendas” for the future. The future demands of us critical and global decisions in the face of world-wide conflicts which increase the number of the excluded and those in need.

The praiseworthy international juridical framework of the United Nations Organization and of all its activities, like any other human endeavor, can be improved, yet it remains necessary; at the same time it can be the pledge of a secure and happy future for future generations.

And so it will, if the representatives of the States can set aside partisan and ideological interests, and sincerely strive to serve the common good. I pray to Almighty God that this will be the case, and I assure you of my support and my prayers, and the support and prayers of all the faithful of the Catholic Church, that this Institution, all its member States, and each of its officials, will always render an effective service to mankind, a service respectful of diversity and capable of bringing out, for sake of the common
good, the best in each people and in every individual. God bless you all. Thank you.

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[10] Ibid.


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**Homily at the Mass for the Opening of the Holy Door, Bangui, Central African Republic (November 29, 2015)**

Today Bangui becomes the spiritual capital of the world. The Holy Year of Mercy starts early in this land of Africa. A land which has suffered for years from war and hatred, lack of understanding, lack of
peace; in this land of sufferings there are many countries bearing the cross of war. Bangui now becomes the spiritual capital of prayer for the Father’s mercy. Let us all implore peace, mercy, reconciliation, forgiveness and love. For Bangui, for the entire Central African Republic, for the whole world, for those countries experiencing war, let us ask for peace! Now, all together, let us ask for love and peace. All together: *Doyé Siriri!*

And with this prayer we now inaugurate the Holy Year, here, today, in this spiritual capital of the world!

On this first Sunday of Advent, the liturgical season of joyful expectation of the Savior and a symbol of Christian hope, God has brought me here among you, in this land, while the universal Church is preparing for the opening of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, which we inaugurated here today. I am especially pleased that my pastoral visit coincides with the opening of this Jubilee Year in your country. From this cathedral I reach out, in mind and heart, and with great affection, to all the priests, consecrated men and women, and pastoral workers of the nation, who are spiritually united with us at this moment. Through you, I would greet all the people of the Central African Republic: the sick, the elderly, those who have experienced life’s hurts. Some of them are perhaps despairing and listless, asking only for alms, the alms of bread, the alms of justice, the alms of attention and goodness. All of us are looking for God’s grace, for the alms of peace.

But like the Apostles Peter and John on their way to the Temple, who had neither gold nor silver to give to the paralytic in need, I have come to offer God’s strength and power; for these bring us healing, set us on our feet and enable us to embark on a new life, to “go across to the other side” (see *Lk* 8:22).

Jesus does not make us cross to the other side alone; instead, he asks us to make the crossing with him, as each of us responds to his or her own specific vocation. We need to realize that making this crossing can only be done with him, by freeing ourselves of divisive notions of family and blood in order to build a Church which is God’s family, open to everyone,
concerned for those most in need. This presupposes closeness to our brothers and sisters; it implies a spirit of communion. It is not primarily a question of financial means; it is enough just to share in the life of God’s people, in accounting for the hope which is in us (cf. 1 Pet 3:15), in testifying to the infinite mercy of God who, as the Responsorial Psalm of this Sunday’s liturgy makes clear, is “good [and] instructs sinners in the way” (Ps 24:8). Jesus teaches us that our heavenly Father “makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good” (Mt 5:45). Having experienced forgiveness ourselves, we must forgive others in turn. This is our fundamental vocation: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48).

One of the essential characteristics of this vocation to perfection is the love of our enemies, which protects us from the temptation to seek revenge and from the spiral of endless retaliation. Jesus placed special emphasis on this aspect of the Christian testimony (cf. Mt 5:46-47). Those who evangelize must therefore be first and foremost practitioners of forgiveness, specialists in reconciliation, experts in mercy. This is how we can help our brothers and sisters to “cross to the other side” — by showing them the secret of our strength, our hope, and our joy, all of which have their source in God, for they are grounded in the certainty that he is in the boat with us. As he did with the apostles at the multiplication of the loaves, so too the Lord entrusts his gifts to us, so that we can go out and distribute them everywhere, proclaiming his reassuring words: “Behold, the days are coming when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer 33:14).

In the readings of this Sunday’s liturgy, we can see different aspects of this salvation proclaimed by God; they appear as signposts to guide us on our mission. First of all, the happiness promised by God is presented as justice. Advent is a time when we strive to open our hearts to receive the Savior, who alone is just and the sole Judge able to give to each his or her due. Here as elsewhere, countless men and women thirst for respect, for justice, for equality, yet see no positive signs on the horizon. These are the ones to whom he comes to bring the gift of his justice (see Jer 33:15). He comes to enrich our personal and collective histories, our dashed hopes and our sterile yearnings. And he sends us to proclaim, especially to those
oppressed by the powerful of this world or weighed down by the burden of their sins, that “Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it shall be called, ‘The Lord is our righteousness’” (Jer 33:16). Yes, God is righteousness; God is justice. This, then, is why we Christians are called in the world to work for a peace founded on justice.

The salvation of God which we await is also flavored with love. In preparing for the mystery of Christmas, we relive the pilgrimage which prepared God’s people to receive the Son, who came to reveal that God is not only righteousness, but also and above all love (see 1 Jn 4:8). In every place, even and especially in those places where violence, hatred, injustice and persecution hold sway, Christians are called to give witness to this God who is love. In encouraging the priests, consecrated men and woman, and committed laity who, in this country live, at times heroically, the Christian virtues, I realize that the distance between this demanding ideal and our Christian witness is at times great. For this reason I echo the prayer of Saint Paul: “Brothers and sisters, may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men and women” (1 Thess 3:12). Thus what the pagans said of the early Christians will always remain before us like a beacon: “See how they love one another, how they truly love one another” (Tertullian, Apology, 39, 7).

Finally, the salvation proclaimed by God has an invincible power which will make it ultimately prevail. After announcing to his disciples the terrible signs that will precede his coming, Jesus concludes: “When these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Lk 21:28). If Saint Paul can speak of a love which “grows and overflows,” it is because Christian witness reflects that irresistible power spoken of in the Gospel. It is amid unprecedented devastation that Jesus wishes to show his great power, his incomparable glory (see Lk 21:27) and the power of that love which stops at nothing, even before the falling of the heavens, the conflagration of the world or the tumult of the seas. God is stronger, more powerful, than all else. This conviction gives to the believer serenity, courage and the strength to persevere in good amid the greatest hardships. Even when the powers of Hell are unleashed, Christians must rise to the summons, their heads held high, and be ready to brave
blows in this battle over which God will have the last word. And that word will be one of love and peace!

To all those who make unjust use of the weapons of this world, I make this appeal: lay down these instruments of death! Arm yourselves instead with righteousness, with love and mercy, the authentic guarantors of peace. As followers of Christ, dear priests, religious and lay pastoral workers, here in this country, with its suggestive name, situated in the heart of Africa and called to discover the Lord as the true center of all that is good, your vocation is to incarnate the very heart of God in the midst of your fellow citizens. May the Lord deign to “strengthen your hearts in holiness, that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (1 Thess 3:13). Reconciliation, forgiveness, love and peace! Amen.

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Torna ai contenuti

Address at the Prayer Vigil for the Synod on the Family (October 3, 2015)

Dear families, good evening:

What good is it to light a little candle in the darkness? Isn't there a better way to dispel the darkness? Can the darkness even be overcome?

At some points in life — this life so full of amazing resources — such questions have to be asked. When life proves difficult and demanding, we can be tempted to step back, turn away and withdraw, perhaps even in the name of prudence and realism, and thus flee the responsibility of doing our part as best we can.

Do you remember what happened to Elijah? From a human point of view, the prophet was afraid and tried to run away. Afraid. “Elijah was afraid; he got up and fled for his life… He walked for forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. At that place he came to a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying:
‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ (1 Kg 19:3,8-9). On Horeb, he would get his answer not in the great wind which shatters the rocks, not in the earthquake nor even in the fire. God’s grace does not shout out; it is a whisper which reaches all those who are ready to hear the gentle breeze—that still, small voice. It urges them to go forth, to return to the world, to be witnesses to God’s love for mankind, so that the world may believe…

In this vein, just a year ago, in this same Square, we invoked the Holy Spirit and asked that—in discussing the theme of the family—the Synod Fathers might listen attentively to one another, with their gaze fixed on Jesus, the definitive Word of the Father and the criterion by which everything is to be measured.

This evening, our prayer cannot be otherwise. For as Metropolitan Ignatius IV Hazim reminded us, without the Holy Spirit God is far off, Christ remains in the past, the Church becomes a mere organization, authority becomes domination, mission becomes propaganda, worship becomes mystique, Christian life the morality of slaves (see Address to the Ecumenical Conference of Uppsala, 1968).

So let us pray that the Synod which opens tomorrow will show how the experience of marriage and family is rich and humanly fulfilling. May the Synod acknowledge, esteem, and proclaim all that is beautiful, good and holy about that experience. May it embrace situations of vulnerability and hardship: war, illness, grief, wounded relationships and brokenness, which create distress, resentment and separation. May it remind these families, and every family, that the Gospel is always “good news” which once again enables us to start over. From the treasury of the Church’s living tradition may the Fathers draw words of comfort and hope for families called in our own day to build the future of the ecclesial community and the city of man.

Every family is always a light, however faint, amid the darkness of this world.
Jesus’ own human experience took shape in the heart of a family, where he lived for thirty years. His family was like any number of others, living in an obscure village on the outskirts of the Empire.

Charles de Foucauld, perhaps like few others, grasped the import of the spirituality which radiates from Nazareth. This great explorer hastily abandoned his military career, attracted by the mystery of the Holy Family, the mystery of Jesus’ daily relationship with his parents and neighbors, his quiet labor, his humble prayer. Contemplating the Family of Nazareth, Brother Charles realized how empty the desire for wealth and power really is. Through his apostolate of charity, he became everything to everyone. Attracted by the life of a hermit, he came to understand that we do not grow in the love of God by avoiding the entanglement of human relations. For in loving others, we learn to love God, in stooping down to help our neighbor, we are lifted up to God. Through his fraternal closeness and his solidarity with the poor and the abandoned, he came to understand that it is they who evangelize us, they who help us to grow in humanity.

To understand the family today, we too need to enter—like Charles de Foucauld—into the mystery of the family of Nazareth, into its quiet daily life, not unlike that of most families, with their problems and their simple joys, a life marked by serene patience amid adversity, respect for others, a humility which is freeing and which flowers in service, a life of fraternity rooted in the sense that we are all members of one body.

The family is a place where evangelical holiness is lived out in the most ordinary conditions. There we are formed by the memory of past generations and we put down roots which enable us to go far. The family is a place of discernment, where we learn to recognize God’s plan for our lives and to embrace it with trust. It is a place of gratuitousness, of discreet fraternal presence and solidarity, a place where we learn to step out of ourselves and accept others, to forgive and to be feel forgiven.

Let us set out once more from Nazareth for a Synod which, more than speaking about the family, can learn from the family, readily acknowledging its dignity, its strength and its value, despite all its problems
and difficulties.

In the “Galilee of the nations” of our own time, we will rediscover the richness and strength of a Church which is a mother, ever capable of giving and nourishing life, accompanying it with devotion, tenderness, and moral strength. For unless we can unite compassion with justice, we will end up being needlessly severe and deeply unjust.

A Church which is family is also able to show the closeness and love of a father, a responsible guardian who protects without confining, who corrects without demeaning, who trains by example and patience, sometimes simply by a silence which bespeaks prayerful and trusting expectation.

Above all, a Church of children who see themselves as brothers and sisters, will never end up considering anyone simply as a burden, a problem, an expense, a concern or a risk. Other persons are essentially a gift, and always remain so, even when they walk different paths.

The Church is an open house, far from outward pomp, hospitable in the simplicity of her members. That is why she can appeal to the longing for peace present in every man and woman, including those who — amid life’s trials — have wounded and suffering hearts.

This Church can light up the darkness felt by so many men and women. She can credibly point them towards the goal and walk at their side, precisely because she herself first experienced what it is to be endlessly reborn in the merciful heart of the Father.

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Letter about Indulgences on the occasion of the Jubilee of Mercy (September 1, 2015)

To my venerable brother
Archbishop Rino Fisichella
President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization

With the approach of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy I would like to focus on several points which I believe require attention to enable the celebration of the Holy Year to be for all believers a true moment of encounter with the mercy of God. It is indeed my wish that the Jubilee be a living experience of the closeness of the Father, whose tenderness is almost tangible, so that the faith of every believer may be strengthened and thus testimony to it be ever more effective.

My thought first of all goes to all the faithful who, whether in individual Dioceses or as pilgrims to Rome, will experience the grace of the Jubilee. I wish that the Jubilee Indulgence may reach each one as a genuine experience of God’s mercy, which comes to meet each person in the Face of the Father who welcomes and forgives, forgetting completely the sin committed. To experience and obtain the Indulgence, the faithful are called to make a brief pilgrimage to the Holy Door, open in every Cathedral or in the churches designated by the Diocesan Bishop, and in the four Papal Basilicas in Rome, as a sign of the deep desire for true conversion. Likewise, I dispose that the Indulgence may be obtained in the Shrines in which the Door of Mercy is open and in the churches which traditionally are identified as Jubilee Churches. It is important that this moment be linked, first and foremost, to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist with a reflection on mercy. It will be necessary to accompany these celebrations with the profession of faith and with prayer for me and for the intentions that I bear in my heart for the good of the Church and of the entire world.

Additionally, I am thinking of those for whom, for various reasons, it will be impossible to enter the Holy Door, particularly the sick and people who are elderly and alone, often confined to the home. For them it will be of great help to live their sickness and suffering as an experience of closeness to the Lord who in the mystery of his Passion, death and Resurrection indicates the royal road which gives meaning to pain and loneliness. Living with faith and joyful hope this moment of trial, receiving Communion or attending Holy Mass and community prayer, even through...
the various means of communication, will be for them the means of obtaining the Jubilee Indulgence. My thoughts also turn to those incarcerated, whose freedom is limited. The Jubilee Year has always constituted an opportunity for great amnesty, which is intended to include the many people who, despite deserving punishment, have become conscious of the injustice they worked and sincerely wish to re-enter society and make their honest contribution to it. May they all be touched in a tangible way by the mercy of the Father who wants to be close to those who have the greatest need of his forgiveness. They may obtain the Indulgence in the chapels of the prisons. May the gesture of directing their thought and prayer to the Father each time they cross the threshold of their cell signify for them their passage through the Holy Door, because the mercy of God is able to transform hearts, and is also able to transform bars into an experience of freedom.

I have asked the Church in this Jubilee Year to rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The experience of mercy, indeed, becomes visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus himself taught us. Each time that one of the faithful personally performs one or more of these actions, he or she shall surely obtain the Jubilee Indulgence. Hence the commitment to live by mercy so as to obtain the grace of complete and exhaustive forgiveness by the power of the love of the Father who excludes no one. The Jubilee Indulgence is thus full, the fruit of the very event which is to be celebrated and experienced with faith, hope and charity.

Furthermore, the Jubilee Indulgence can also be obtained for the deceased. We are bound to them by the witness of faith and charity that they have left us. Thus, as we remember them in the Eucharistic celebration, thus we can, in the great mystery of the Communion of Saints, pray for them, that the merciful Face of the Father free them of every remnant of fault and strongly embrace them in the unending beatitude.

One of the serious problems of our time is clearly the changed relationship with respect to life. A widespread and insensitive mentality has led to the loss of the proper personal and social sensitivity to welcome new life. The tragedy of abortion is experienced by some with a superficial awareness, as if not realizing the extreme harm that such an act entails.
Many others, on the other hand, although experiencing this moment as a defeat, believe they have no other option. I think in particular of all the women who have resorted to abortion. I am well aware of the pressure that has led them to this decision. I know that it is an existential and moral ordeal. I have met so many women who bear in their heart the scar of this agonizing and painful decision. What has happened is profoundly unjust; yet only understanding the truth of it can enable one not to lose hope. The forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented, especially when that person approaches the Sacrament of Confession with a sincere heart in order to obtain reconciliation with the Father. For this reason too, I have decided, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, to concede to all priests for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and who, with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it. May priests fulfill this great task by expressing words of genuine welcome combined with a reflection that explains the gravity of the sin committed, besides indicating a path of authentic conversion by which to obtain the true and generous forgiveness of the Father who renews all with his presence.

A final consideration concerns those faithful who for various reasons choose to attend churches officiated by priests of the Fraternity of St Pius X. This Jubilee Year of Mercy excludes no one. From various quarters, several Brother Bishops have told me of their good faith and sacramental practice, combined however with an uneasy situation from the pastoral standpoint. I trust that in the near future solutions may be found to recover full communion with the priests and superiors of the Fraternity. In the meantime, motivated by the need to respond to the good of these faithful, through my own disposition, I establish that those who during the Holy Year of Mercy approach these priests of the Fraternity of St. Pius X to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation shall validly and licitly receive the absolution of their sins.

Trusting in the intercession of the Mother of Mercy, I entrust the preparations for this Extraordinary Jubilee Year to her protection.

From the Vatican, September 1, 2015

Francis
Address at the commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops (October 17, 2015)

Your Beatitudes,
Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Brothers and Sisters,

As the Ordinary General Assembly is in full session, this commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops is, for all of us, a cause for joy, praise, and thanksgiving to the Lord. From the time of the Second Vatican Council until the present Assembly, we have experienced ever more intensely the necessity and beauty of “journeying together.”

On this happy occasion I offer cordial greetings to Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, the Secretary General, the Undersecretary, Archbishop Fabio Fabene, the Officials, the Consultors and the other collaborators in the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, those who are behind the scenes and work late each evening. I also greet and thank the Synod Fathers and the other participants in the current Assembly, as well as all those present.

At this time we also wish to remember those who, in the course of the last fifty years, have offered their services to the Synod, beginning with the successive General Secretaries: Cardinal Władysław Rubin, Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Cardinal Jan Pieter Schotte and Archbishop Nikola Eterović. I also take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to those — both living and deceased — who contributed so generously and competently to the Synod’s work.

From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I sought to enhance the Synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the
Second Vatican Council. For Blessed Paul VI, the Synod of Bishops was meant to reproduce the image of the Ecumenical Council and reflect its spirit and method. Pope Paul foresaw that the organization of the Synod could “be improved upon with the passing of time.” Twenty years later, Saint John Paul II echoed that thought when he stated that “this instrument might be further improved. Perhaps collegial pastoral responsibility could be more fully expressed in the Synod.” In 2006, Benedict XVI approved several changes to the Ordo Synodi Episcoporum, especially in light of the provisions of the Code of Canon Law and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, which had been promulgated in the meantime.

We must continue along this path. The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.

What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word “synod.” Journeying together — laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome — is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice.

After stating that the people of God is comprised of all the baptized who are called to “be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood,” the Second Vatican Council went on to say that “the whole body of the faithful, who have an anointing which comes from the holy one” (cf. 1 Jn 2:20, 27), cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural sense of the faith (sensus fidei) of the whole people of God, when ‘from the bishops to the last of the faithful’ it manifests a universal consensus in matters of faith and morals.” These are the famous words infallible “in credendo.”

In the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, I emphasized that “the people of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible in credendo,” and added that “all the baptized, whatever their
position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients.”[9] The *sensus fidei* prevents a rigid separation between an Ecclesia *docens* and an Ecclesia *discerns*, since the flock likewise has an instinctive ability to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church.[10]

Such was the conviction underlying my desire that the people of God should be consulted in the preparation of the two phases of the Synod on the family, as is ordinarily done with each *Lineamenta*. Certainly, a consultation of this sort would never be sufficient to perceive the *sensus fidei*. But how could we speak about the family without engaging families themselves, listening to their joys and their hopes, their sorrows and their anguish?[11] Through the answers given to the two questionnaires sent to the particular Churches, we had the opportunity at least to hear some of those families speak to issues which closely affect them and about which they have much to say.

A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening “is more than simply hearing.”[12] It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (*Jn* 14:17), in order to know what he “says to the Churches” (*Rev* 2:7).

The Synod of Bishops is the point of convergence of this listening process conducted at every level of the Church’s life. The Synod process begins by listening to the people of God, which “shares also in Christ’s prophetic office,”[13] according to a principle dear to the Church of the first millennium: “*Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet*.” The Synod process then continues by listening to the pastors. Through the Synod Fathers, the bishops act as authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church, which they need to discern carefully from the changing currents of public opinion. On the eve of last year’s Synod I stated: “For the Synod Fathers we ask the Holy Spirit first of all for the gift of listening: to listen to God, so that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to
which God calls us.”[14] The Synod process culminates in listening to the Bishop of Rome, who is called to speak as “pastor and teacher of all Christians,”[15] not on the basis of his personal convictions but as the supreme witness to the fides totius Ecclesiae, “the guarantor of the obedience and the conformity of the Church to the will of God, to the Gospel of Christ, and to the Tradition of the Church.”[16]

The fact that the Synod always acts cum Petro et sub Petro — indeed, not only cum Petro, but also sub Petro — is not a limitation of freedom, but a guarantee of unity. For the Pope is, by will of the Lord, “the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful.”[17] Closely related to this is the concept of “hierarchica communion” as employed by the Second Vatican Council: the Bishops are linked to the Bishop of Rome by the bond of episcopal communion (cum Petro) while, at the same time, hierarchically subject to him as head of the college (sub Petro).[18]

Synodality, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretive framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself. If we understand, as Saint John Chrysostom says, that “Church and Synod are synonymous,”[19] inasmuch as the Church is nothing other than the “journeying together” of God’s flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord, then we understand too that, within the Church, no one can be “raised up” higher than others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person “lower” himself or herself, so as to serve our brothers and sisters along the way.

Jesus founded the Church by setting at her head the Apostolic College, in which the Apostle Peter is the “rock” (cf. Mt 16:18, the one who must confirm his brethren in the faith (cf. Lk 22:32). But in this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located beneath the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called “ministers,” because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all. It is in serving the people of God that each bishop becomes, for that portion of the flock entrusted to him, vicarius Christi,[20] the vicar of that Jesus who at the Last Supper bent
down to wash the feet of the Apostles (cf. Jn 13:1-15). And in a similar perspective, the Successor of Peter is nothing else if not the Servus Servorum Dei.[21]

Let us never forget this! For the disciples of Jesus, yesterday, today and always, the only authority is the authority of service, the only power is the power of the cross. As the Master tells us: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave” (Mt 20:25-27). It shall not be so among you: in this expression we touch the heart of the mystery of the Church, and we receive the enlightenment necessary to understand our hierarchical service.

In a synodal Church, the Synod of Bishops is only the most evident manifestation of a dynamism of communion which inspires all ecclesial decisions.

The first level of the exercise of synodality is had in the particular Churches. After mentioning the noble institution of the Diocesan Synod, in which priests and laity are called to cooperate with the bishop for the good of the whole ecclesial community, the Code of Canon Law devotes ample space to what are usually called “organs of communion” in the local Church: the presbyteral council, the college of consultors, chapters of canons and the pastoral council. Only to the extent that these organizations keep connected to the “base” and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape: these means, even when they prove wearisome, must be valued as an opportunity for listening and sharing.

The second level is that of Ecclesiastical Provinces and Ecclesiastical Regions, Particular Councils and, in a special way, Conferences of Bishops. We need to reflect on how better to bring about, through these bodies, intermediary instances of collegiality, perhaps by integrating and updating certain aspects of the ancient ecclesiastical organization. The hope expressed by the Council that such bodies would help increase the spirit of
episcopal collegiality has not yet been fully realized. We are still on the way, part-way there. In a synodal Church, as I have said, “it is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound ‘decentralization.’”[25]

The last level is that of the universal Church. Here the Synod of Bishops, representing the Catholic episcopate, becomes an expression of episcopal collegiality within an entirely synodal Church.[26] This level manifests the collegialitas affective, which can also become in certain circumstances “effective,” joining the Bishops among themselves and with the Pope in solicitude for the People of God.[27]

The commitment to build a synodal Church — a mission to which we are all called, each with the role entrusted him by the Lord — has significant ecumenical implications. For this reason, speaking recently to a delegation from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, I reaffirmed my conviction that “a careful examination of how, in the Church’s life, the principle of synodality and the service of the one who presides are articulated, will make a significant contribution to the progress of relations between our Churches.”[28]

I am persuaded that in a synodal Church, greater light can be shed on the exercise of the Petrine primacy. The Pope is not, by himself, above the Church; but within it as one of the baptized, and within the College of Bishops as a Bishop among Bishops, called at the same time — as Successor of Peter — to lead the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches.[29]

While reaffirming the urgent need to think about “a conversion of the papacy,”[30] I willingly repeat the words of my predecessor Pope John Paul II: “As Bishop of Rome I am fully aware […] that Christ ardently desires the full and visible communion of all those Communities in which, by virtue of God’s faithfulness, his Spirit dwells. I am convinced that I have a particular responsibility in this regard, above all in acknowledging the ecumenical aspirations of the majority of the Christian Communities and
in heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation.\[^{31}\]

Our gaze also extends to humanity as a whole. A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations (cf. Is 11:12) in a world which — while calling for participation, solidarity, and transparency in public administration — often consigns the fate of entire peoples to the grasp of small but powerful groups. As a Church which “journeys together” with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.\[^{32}\] Thank you.

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\[^{1}\] See Pope Francis, Letter to the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, on the elevation of the Undersecretary, Msgr. Fabio Fabene, to the episcopal dignity, April 1, 2014.

\[^{2}\] See Blessed Paul VI, Address for the Opening of the first Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, September 3, 1967.

\[^{3}\] Blessed Paul VI, Motu proprio Apostolica Sollicitudo (September 15, 1965), Proemium.

\[^{4}\] Saint John Paul II, Address for the Conclusion of the Sixth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, October 29, 1983.

\[^{5}\] See AAS 98 (2006), 755-779.


\[^{7}\] Ibid., 12.

\[^{8}\] Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (November 24, 2013), 119.

\[^{9}\] Ibid., 120.
[10] See Pope Francis, Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 28 July 2013, 5,4; ID., Address on the occasion of a meeting with Clergy, Consecrated Persons and members of Pastoral Councils, Assisi, 4 October 2013.


[16] Pope Francis, Address to the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, October 18, 2014.


[23] See *ibid.*, cann. 495-514.

Address at the meeting with the American Bishops (September 23, 2015)

Dear Brother Bishops,

First of all, I wish to send a greeting to the Jewish community, our Jewish brothers and sisters, who today are celebrating Yom Kippur. May the Lord bless them with peace and help them to advance on the path of holiness, as we heard today in his word: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 19:2).

I am pleased that we can meet at this point in the apostolic mission which has brought me to your country. I thank Cardinal Wuerl and Archbishop Kurtz for their kind words in your name. I am very appreciative of your welcome and the generous efforts made to help plan and organize my stay.
As I look out with affection at you, their pastors, I would like to embrace all the local Churches over which you exercise loving responsibility. I would ask you to share my affection and spiritual closeness with the People of God throughout this vast land.

The heart of the Pope expands to include everyone. To testify to the immensity of God’s love is the heart of the mission entrusted to the Successor of Peter, the Vicar of the One who on the cross embraced the whole of mankind. May no member of Christ’s Body and the American people feel excluded from the Pope’s embrace.

Wherever the name of Jesus is spoken, may the Pope’s voice also be heard to affirm that: “He is the Savior”! From your great coastal cities to the plains of the Midwest, from the deep South to the far reaches of the West, wherever your people gather in the Eucharistic assembly, may the Pope be not simply a name but a felt presence, sustaining the fervent plea of the Bride: “Come, Lord!”

Whenever a hand reaches out to do good or to show the love of Christ, to dry a tear or bring comfort to the lonely, to show the way to one who is lost or to console a broken heart, to help the fallen or to teach those thirsting for truth, to forgive or to offer a new start in God… know that the Pope is at your side, the Pope supports you. He puts his hand on your own, a hand wrinkled with age, but by God’s grace still able to support and encourage.

My first word to you is one of thanksgiving to God for the power of the Gospel which has brought about remarkable growth of Christ’s Church in these lands and enabled its generous contribution, past and present, to American society and to the world. I thank you most heartily for your generous solidarity with the Apostolic See and the support you give to the spread of the Gospel in many suffering areas of our world. I appreciate the unfailing commitment of the Church in America to the cause of life and that of the family, which is the primary reason for my present visit. I am well aware of the immense efforts you have made to welcome and integrate those immigrants who continue to look to America, like so many others before them, in the hope of enjoying its blessings of freedom and prosperity. I also appreciate the efforts which you are making to fulfill the
Church’s mission of education in schools at every level and in the charitable services offered by your numerous institutions. These works are often carried out without appreciation or support, often with heroic sacrifice, out of obedience to a divine mandate which we may not disobey.

I am also conscious of the courage with which you have faced difficult moments in the recent history of the Church in this country without fear of self-criticism and at the cost of mortification and great sacrifice. Nor have you been afraid to divest whatever is unessential in order to regain the authority and trust which is demanded of ministers of Christ and rightly expected by the faithful. I realize how much the pain of recent years has weighed upon you and I have supported your generous commitment to bring healing to victims — in the knowledge that in healing we too are healed — and to work to ensure that such crimes will never be repeated.

I speak to you as the Bishop of Rome, called by God in old age, and from a land which is also American, to watch over the unity of the universal Church and to encourage in charity the journey of all the particular Churches toward ever greater knowledge, faith and love of Christ. Reading over your names, looking at your faces, knowing the extent of your churchmanship and conscious of the devotion which you have always shown for the Successor of Peter, I must tell you that I do not feel a stranger in your midst. I am a native of a land which is also vast, with great open ranges, a land which, like your own, received the faith from itinerant missionaries. I too know how hard it is to sow the Gospel among people from different worlds, with hearts often hardened by the trials of a lengthy journey. Nor am I unaware of the efforts made over the years to build up the Church amid the prairies, mountains, cities and suburbs of a frequently inhospitable land, where frontiers are always provisional and easy answers do not always work. What does work is the combination of the epic struggle of the pioneers and the homely wisdom and endurance of the settlers. As one of your poets has put it, “strong and tireless wings” combined with the wisdom of one who “knows the mountains.”[1]

I do not speak to you with my voice alone, but in continuity with the words of my predecessors. From the birth of this nation, when, following the American Revolution, the first diocese was erected in Baltimore, the Church of Rome has always been close to you; you have never lacked its
constant assistance and encouragement. In recent decades, three Popes have visited you and left behind a remarkable legacy of teaching. Their words remain timely and have helped to inspire the long-term goals which you have set for the Church in this country.

It is not my intention to offer a plan or to devise a strategy. I have not come to judge you or to lecture you. I trust completely in the voice of the One who “teaches all things” (Jn 14:26). Allow me only, in the freedom of love, to speak to you as a brother among brothers. I have no wish to tell you what to do, because we all know what it is that the Lord asks of us. Instead, I would turn once again to the demanding task — ancient yet never new — of seeking out the paths we need to take and the spirit with which we need to work. Without claiming to be exhaustive, I would share with you some reflections which I consider helpful for our mission.

We are bishops of the Church, shepherds appointed by God to feed his flock. Our greatest joy is to be shepherds, and only shepherds, pastors with undivided hearts and selfless devotion. We need to preserve this joy and never let ourselves be robbed of it. The evil one roars like a lion, anxious to devour it, wearing us down in our resolve to be all that we are called to be, not for ourselves but in gift and service to the “Shepherd of our souls” (1 Pet 2:25).

The heart of our identity is to be sought in constant prayer, in preaching (Acts 6:4) and in shepherding the flock entrusted to our care (Jn 21:15-17; Acts 20:28-31).

Ours must not be just any kind of prayer, but familiar union with Christ, in which we daily encounter his gaze and sense that he is asking us the question: “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” (Mk 3:31-34). One in which we can calmly reply: “Lord, here is your mother, here are your brothers! I hand them over to you; they are the ones whom you entrusted to me.” Such trusting union with Christ is what nourishes the life of a pastor.

It is not about preaching complicated doctrines, but joyfully proclaiming Christ who died and rose for our sake. The “style” of our mission should make our hearers feel that the message we preach is meant “for us.” May the word of God grant meaning and fullness to every aspect
of their lives; may the sacraments nourish them with that food which they cannot procure for themselves; may the closeness of the shepherd make them long once again for the Father’s embrace. Be vigilant that the flock may always encounter in the heart of their pastor that “taste of eternity” which they seek in vain in the things of this world. May they always hear from you a word of appreciation for their efforts to confirm in liberty and justice the prosperity in which this land abounds. At the same time, may you never lack the serene courage to proclaim that “we must work not for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures for eternal life” (Jn 6:27).

Shepherds who do not pasture themselves but are able to step back, away from the center, to “decrease,” in order to feed God’s family with Christ. Who keep constant watch, standing on the heights to look out with God’s eyes on the flock which is his alone. Who ascend to the height of the cross of God’s Son, the sole standpoint which opens to the shepherd the heart of his flock.

Shepherds who do not lower our gaze, concerned only with our concerns, but raise it constantly toward the horizons which God opens before us and which surpass all that we ourselves can foresee or plan. Who also watch over ourselves, so as to flee the temptation of narcissism, which blinds the eyes of the shepherd, makes his voice unrecognizable and his actions fruitless. In the countless paths which lie open to your pastoral concern, remember to keep focused on the core which unifies everything: “You did it unto me” (Mt 25:31-45).

Certainly it is helpful for a bishop to have the farsightedness of a leader and the shrewdness of an administrator, but we fall into hopeless decline whenever we confuse the power of strength with the strength of that powerlessness with which God has redeemed us. Bishops need to be lucidly aware of the battle between light and darkness being fought in this world. Woe to us, however, if we make of the cross a banner of worldly struggles and fail to realize that the price of lasting victory is allowing ourselves to be wounded and consumed (Phil 2:1-11).

We all know the anguish felt by the first Eleven, huddled together, assailed and overwhelmed by the fear of sheep scattered because the
shepherd had been struck. But we also know that we have been given a spirit of courage and not of timidity. So we cannot let ourselves be paralyzed by fear.

I know that you face many challenges, and that the field in which you sow is unyielding and that there is always the temptation to give in to fear, to lick one’s wounds, to think back on bygone times and to devise harsh responses to fierce opposition.

And yet we are promoters of the culture of encounter. We are living sacraments of the embrace between God’s riches and our poverty. We are witnesses of the abasement and the condescension of God who anticipates in love our every response.

Dialogue is our method, not as a shrewd strategy but out of fidelity to the One who never wearies of visiting the marketplace, even at the eleventh hour, to propose his offer of love (Mt 20:1-16).

The path ahead, then, is dialogue among yourselves, dialogue in your presbyterates, dialogue with lay persons, dialogue with families, dialogue with society. I cannot ever tire of encouraging you to dialogue fearlessly. The richer the heritage which you are called to share with parrhesia, the more eloquent should be the humility with which you should offer it. Do not be afraid to set out on that “exodus” which is necessary for all authentic dialogue. Otherwise, we fail to understand the thinking of others, or to realize deep down that the brother or sister we wish to reach and redeem, with the power and the closeness of love, counts more than their positions, distant as they may be from what we hold as true and certain. Harsh and divisive language does not befit the tongue of a pastor, it has no place in his heart; although it may momentarily seem to win the day, only the enduring allure of goodness and love remains truly convincing.

We need to let the Lord’s words echo constantly in our hearts: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, who am meek and humble of heart, and you will find refreshment for your souls” (Mt 11:28-30). Jesus’ yoke is a yoke of love and thus a pledge of refreshment. At times in our work we can be burdened by a sense of loneliness, and so feel the heaviness of the yoke that we forget that we have received it from the Lord. It seems to be ours alone, and so we drag it like weary oxen working a dry field, troubled
by the thought that we are laboring in vain. We can forget the profound refreshment which is indissolubly linked to the One who has made us the promise.

We need to learn from Jesus, or better to learn Jesus, meek and humble; to enter into his meekness and his humility by contemplating his way of acting; to lead our Churches and our people — not infrequently burdened by the stress of everyday life — to the ease of the Lord’s yoke. And to remember that Jesus’ Church is kept whole not by “consuming fire from heaven” (Lk 9:54), but by the secret warmth of the Spirit, who “heals what is wounded, bends what is rigid, straightens what is crooked.

The great mission which the Lord gives us is one which we carry out in communion, collegially. The world is already so torn and divided, brokenness is now everywhere. Consequently, the Church, “the seamless garment of the Lord” cannot allow herself to be rent, broken, or fought over.

Our mission as bishops is first and foremost to solidify unity, a unity whose content is defined by the Word of God and the one Bread of Heaven. With these two realities each of the Churches entrusted to us remains Catholic, because open to, and in communion with, all the particular Churches and with the Church of Rome which “presides in charity.” It is imperative, therefore, to watch over that unity, to safeguard it, to promote it and to bear witness to it as a sign and instrument which, beyond every barrier, unites nations, races, classes and generations.

May the forthcoming Holy Year of Mercy, by drawing us into the fathomless depths of God’s heart in which no division dwells, be for all of you a privileged moment for strengthening communion, perfecting unity, reconciling differences, forgiving one another and healing every rift, that your light may shine forth like “a city built on a hill” (Mt 5:14).

This service to unity is particularly important for this nation, whose vast material and spiritual, cultural and political, historical and human, scientific and technological resources impose significant moral responsibilities in a world which is seeking, confusedly and laboriously, new balances of peace, prosperity and integration. It is an essential part of your mission to offer to the United States of America the humble yet
powerful leaven of communion. May all mankind know that the presence in its midst of the “sacrament of unity” (Lumen Gentium, 1) is a guarantee that its fate is not decay and dispersion.

This kind of witness is a beacon whose light can reassure men and women sailing through the dark clouds of life that a sure haven awaits them, that they will not crash on the reefs or be overwhelmed by the waves. I encourage you then, my brothers, to confront the challenging issues of our time. Ever present within each of them is life as gift and responsibility. The future freedom and dignity of our societies depends on how we face these challenges.

The innocent victim of abortion, children who die of hunger or from bombings, immigrants who drown in the search for a better tomorrow, the elderly or the sick who are considered a burden, the victims of terrorism, wars, violence and drug trafficking, the environment devastated by man’s predatory relationship with nature — at stake in all of this is the gift of God, of which we are noble stewards but not masters. It is wrong, then, to look the other way or to remain silent. No less important is the Gospel of the Family, which in the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia I will emphatically proclaim together with you and the entire Church.

These essential aspects of the Church’s mission belong to the core of what we have received from the Lord. It is our duty to preserve and communicate them, even when the tenor of the times becomes resistant and even hostile to that message (Evangelii Gaudium, 34-39). I urge you to offer this witness, with the means and creativity born of love, and with the humility of truth. It needs to be preached and proclaimed to those without, but also to find room in people’s hearts and in the conscience of society.

To this end, it is important that the Church in the United States also be a humble home, a family fire which attracts men and women through the attractive light and warmth of love. As pastors, we know well how much darkness and cold there is in this world; we know the loneliness and the neglect experienced by many people, even amid great resources of communication and material wealth. We also know their fear in the face of life, their despair and the many forms of escapism to which it gives rise.
Consequently, only a Church which can gather around the family fire remains able to attract others. And not any fire, but the one which blazed forth on Easter morn. The risen Lord continues to challenge the Church’s pastors through the quiet plea of so many of our brothers and sisters: “Have you something to eat?” We need to recognize the Lord’s voice, as the apostles did on the shore of the lake of Tiberius (Jn 21:4-12). It becomes even more urgent to grow in the certainty that the embers of his presence, kindled in the fire of his passion, precede us and will never die out. Whenever this certainty weakens, we end up being caretakers of ash, and not guardians and dispensers of the true light and the warmth which causes our hearts to burn within us (Lk 24:32).

Before concluding, allow me to offer two recommendations which are close to my heart. The first refers to your fatherhood as bishops. Be pastors close to people, pastors who are neighbors and servants. Let this closeness be expressed in a special way towards your priests. Support them, so that they can continue to serve Christ with an undivided heart, for this alone can bring fulfillment to ministers of Christ. I urge you, then, not to let them be content with half-measures. Find ways to encourage their spiritual growth, lest they yield to the temptation to become notaries and bureaucrats, but instead reflect the motherhood of the Church, which gives birth to and raises her sons and daughters. Be vigilant lest they tire of getting up to answer those who knock on their door by night, just when they feel entitled to rest (Lk 11:5-8). Train them to be ready to stop, care for, soothe, lift up and assist those who, “by chance” find themselves stripped of all they thought they had (Lk 10:29-37).

My second recommendation has to do with immigrants. I ask you to excuse me if in some way I am pleading my own case. The Church in the United States knows like few others the hopes present in the hearts of these “pilgrims.” From the beginning you have learned their languages, promoted their cause, made their contributions your own, defended their rights, helped them to prosper, and kept alive the flame of their faith. Even today, no American institution does more for immigrants than your Christian communities. Now you are facing this stream of Latin immigration which affects many of your dioceses. Not only as the Bishop of Rome, but also as a pastor from the South, I feel the need to thank and encourage you.
Perhaps it will not be easy for you to look into their soul; perhaps you will be challenged by their diversity. But know that they also possess resources meant to be shared. So do not be afraid to welcome them. Offer them the warmth of the love of Christ and you will unlock the mystery of their heart. I am certain that, as so often in the past, these people will enrich America and its Church.

May God bless you and Our Lady watch over you! Thank you!

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[1] “In youth my wings were strong and tireless, / But I did not know the mountains. / In age I know the mountains / But my weary wings could not follow my vision — / Genius is wisdom and youth.” (Edgar Lee Masters, Spoon River Anthology).”

Torna ai contenuti

The Roman Curia

Apostolic Letter on the Beatification of Alvaro del Portillo.

Litterae Apostolicae

Venerabili Dei Servo Alvaro del Portillo y Diez de Sollano, Episcopo tit. Vitensi, Praelato Praelaturae Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei, Beatorum honores decernuntur.

FRANCISCUS PP.

Ad perpetuam rei memoriam.

“Regnare Christum volumus!”. Brevis haec sententia, quam Venerabilis Dei Servus Alvarus del Portillo ex ore Sancti Iosephmariae acceperat quamque lemma voluit episcopalis sui stemmatis fieri, desiderium eius ardentissimum patefacit: percupiebat enim ipse ut Dominus noster in
summitate collocaretur cunctarum humanarum navitatum per sanctificationem laboris operisque cuiusque diei.

Ecclesia germen et initium constituit Regni Christi in terris (cfr Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia Lumen Gentium, n. 5), cuius plenitudo effecta erit solummodo cum dies Domini advenerit. Propterea, verba repetens “regnare Christum volumus!” Venerabilis Dei Servus Alvarus del Portillo suam declarat voluntatem enixe contendendi ad Ecclesiam aedificandam super firmam petram Romani Pontificis, Petri Successoris, qui est “supremus omnium christifidelium pastor et doctor” (ibid., n. 25), quaerens in vita sua ad effectum deducere verba quae ab Operis Dei Conditore didicerat: “Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!”

Alvarus del Portillo, tertius ex octo filiis, natus est Matriti in Hispania ab honestis vereque christianis coniugibus Raimundo et Clementina die XI mensis Martii anno MCMXIV. Titulum obtinuit academicum Adiutoris Operum Publicorum necnon gradum doctoris in Re Machinaria Civili, in Philosophia (sectione historica) et in Iure Canonico. Die VII mensis Iulii anno MCMXXXV Operi Dei sese adscripsit, cupiens plane vivere christianam vocationem per sanctificationem sui laboris professionalis suorumque quotidianorum officiorum, simul quaerens collegas et alios multos ad Deum attrahere.

Alvarum del Portillo, primum huius ecclesiasticae circumscriptionis Praelatum nominavit. Die VII mensis Decembris anno MCMXC constitutus Episcopus titulo Vitensis, die VI mensis Ianuari anno MCMXCI episcopalem ordinationem accepit in Basilica Vaticana Sancti Petri per eiusdem Sancti Pontificis manuum impositionem.

Hic Servus Dei bonus ac fidelis pie obiit diluculo die XXIII mensis Martii anno MCMXCIV, paucis horis post reatum suum a peregrinatione in Terram Sanctam, ubi visitaverat loca in quibus Dominus Iesus his in terris moratus est. Illo ipso die Sanctus Ioannes Paulus II ante eius corpus oravit, in ecclesia praelatitia Sanctae Mariae de Pace positum.

Sanctitatis fama Venerabilis Dei Servi Alvari del Portillo, iam late diffusa eo adhuc vivente, post mortem omnes per orbis terras dilata est. Anno MMIV, Venerabiles Fratres Nostri Camillus S.R.E. Cardinalis Ruini, Urbis Vicarius, atque Xaverius Echevarría, Episcopus titularis Cilibiensis, Operis Dei Praelatus, duos inchoaverunt processus, utrumque principalem, apud Tribunalia Vicariatus Urbis et Praelatureae Operis Dei super vita, virtutibus et fama sanctitatis Servi Dei. Approbata utriusque processus iuridica validitate per Decretum Congregationis de Causis Sanctorum, Congressus Peculiaris Consultorum Theologorum prospero cum exitu factus est die X mensis Februarii anno MMXII de Venerabilis Servi Dei exercitio heroico virtutum de eiusque fama sanctitatis, de quibus sententiam protulerunt faventem etiam Purpurati Patres et Episcopi, in Sessione Ordinaria die V mensis Iunii anno MMXII congregati. Praedecessor Noster Benedictus XVI Decretum de his rebus promulgari iussit die XXVIII mensis Iunii anno MMXII.

Annis vero MMVIII et MMIX instructus est processus apud Curiam archidioecesanam Sancti Iacobi in Chile circa miram, ut dicitur, pueri sanationem, intercessioni Servi Dei tributam annoque MMIII factam. Rite peractis omnibus iure statutis, Coetus medicorum Dicasterii, in congressione die XVIII mensis Octobris anno MMXII habita, hanc sanationem inexplicabilem declaravit secundum hodiernam scientiam medicam. Die XV mensis Decembris anno MMXII Congressus Peculiaris Consulorum Theologorum hanc declaravit sanationem divinitus patratam adque Servi Dei intercessionem attribuendum; quod responsum affirmativum et Patres Cardinales et Episcopi protulerunt in Sessione
Ordinaria die IV mensis Iunii anno MMXIII habita. Quamobrem Nos die
V mensis Iulii anno MMXIII mandavimus ut Congregatio de Causis
Sanctorum Decretum de miraculo evulgaret atque statuimus ut
beatificationis ritus die XXVII mensis Septembris anno MMXIV Matriti
celebretur.

Hodie igitur, in praedicta urbe, de mandato Nostro Venerabilis Frater
Noster Angelus S.R.E. Cardinalis Amato, Praefectus Congregationis de
Causis Sanctorum, textum Litterarum Apostolicarum legit, quibus Nos
Venerabilem Dei Servum Alvarum del Portillo y Diez de Sollano in
Beatorum numerum adscribimus:

Nos, vota Fratrum Nostrorum Augustini S.R.E. Cardinalis Vallini,
Nostri Vicarii Generalis pro Romana dioecesi, Xaverii Echevarría
Rodríguez, Episcopi titulo Cilibiensis, Praelaturaepersonalis Sanctae
Crucis et Operis Dei Praelati, necnon plurimorum aliorum Fratrum in
Episcopatu multorumque christifidelium explentes, de Congregationis de
Causis Sanctorum consulto, auctoritate Nostra Apostolica facultatem
facimus ut Venerabilis Servus Dei Alvarus del Portillo y Diez de Sollano,
episcopus, Praelaturaep sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei Praelatus, Pastor
secundum cor Iesu, Ecclesiae assiduus minister, Beati nomine in posterum
appelletur, eiusque festum die duodecima Maii in locis et modis iure
statutis quotannis celebrari possit. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus
Sancti.

Quae vero per has Litteras statuimus, ea firma sint in perpetuum,
contrariis quibuslibet non obstantibus. Magni aestimantes Beati
amorem et humilem assiduumque ministerium maxime erga suos in Opere
Dei sodales, iisdem et cunctis fidelibus exemplum eius commendamus.

Datum Romae, apud Sanctum Petrum, sub anulo Piscatoris,
die XXVII mensis Septembris, anno Domini MMXIV, Pontificatus
Nostri secundo.

Petrus Card. Parolin
Secretarius Status
Loco + Plumbi
Below is a translation from the Latin of the Pontifical Brief:

**Apostolic Brief**

The honors proper to the Blessed are granted to the Venerable Servant of God Alvaro del Portillo y Diez de Sollano, titular bishop of Vita, prelate of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei.

POPE FRANCIS

*Ad perpetuam rei memoriam*

“*Regnare Christum volumus!*”, “We want Christ to reign!” The deepest yearning of Venerable Alvaro del Portillo is expressed in this aspiration that he heard from the lips of Saint Josemaría Escrivá and chose as the motto for his episcopal coat of arms. He sought to place Christ at the summit of all human activities, through the sanctification of work and ordinary activities.

The Church is the seed and beginning of the Kingdom of Christ on earth (see Vatican II, Dogmatic const. on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, no. 5), which will attain its fullness only when the day of the Lord arrives. Therefore in repeating “*regnare Christum volumus!*” the venerable servant of God Alvaro del Portillo manifested his desire to contribute with all his strength to the building up of the Church on the solid rock of the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, “supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful” (*ibid.*, no. 25). Thus throughout his life he strove to incarnate the teaching he had received from the founder of Opus Dei: “*Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!*”

Alvaro del Portillo was born in Madrid (Spain) on March 11, 1914, the third of eight children of Ramón and Clementina, fervent Christians and an exemplary couple. He obtained the academic degrees of Assistant of Public Works, doctor in Civil Engineering, in History, and in Canon Law. On July 7, 1935 he joined Opus Dei, eager to live his Christian vocation.
fully, by sanctifying his professional work and ordinary duties, and bringing his work companions and many other souls to God.

Soon he became Saint Josemaría’s strongest support, and remained at his side for almost forty years, assisting in the government and apostolic development of Opus Dei. On June 25, 1944, he was ordained a priest. In 1946 he took up residence in Rome. His service to the Church was also shown in his generous dedication to the tasks entrusted to him by the Holy See, as a consultor for various organisms of the Roman Curia, and especially in his active participation in the work of the Second Vatican Council. On September 15, 1975, he was named the first successor of Saint Josemaría. On November 28, 1982, Saint John Paul II erected Opus Dei as a personal prelature, made up of lay faithful and secular priests, and named the venerable servant of God Alvaro del Portillo as first prelate of that ecclesiastical circumscription. On December 7, 1990 he was named titular bishop of Vita, and on January 6, 1991 he received episcopal ordination at the hands of the same Holy Pontiff in Saint Peter’s Basilica.

Our Lord called this good and faithful servant of his into his presence on the morning of March 23, 1994, a few hours after returning from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where he had visited the places that our Lord Jesus had walked with his footsteps on earth. That same day, Saint John Paul II went to pray before his mortal remains, in the prelatic church of Our Lady of Peace.

Venerable Alvaro del Portillo’s reputation for sanctity, already widespread in his lifetime, reached universal extension after his death. In the year 2004, our venerable brothers Camillo Ruini, Cardinal Vicar of Rome, and Javier Echevarría, titular bishop of Cilibia, and prelate of Opus Dei, began, before the Tribunal of the Vicariate of Rome and the Tribunal of the prelature of Opus Dei, two exploratory processes—both equally principal—on the life, virtues, and reputation for holiness of the servant of God. The Congregation for the Causes of the Saints having declared the validity of those processes, on February 10, 2012, the Congress of Theological Consultiors responded affirmatively to the question of the exercise of heroic virtues and the reputation for sanctity of the servant of God. The cardinals and bishops, gathered in the Ordinary Session of June 5, 2012, gave the same pronouncement. On June 2 of that same year our
predecessor, Benedict XVI, ordered the publication of the corresponding decree.

During the years 2008 and 2009, the Curia of the Archdiocese of Santiago de Chile investigated the process of the presumably miraculous cure of a boy in the year 2003, which was attributed to the intercession of the servant of God. Having fulfilled the requirements required by law, on October 18, 2012 the Medical Consultors of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints determined that the cure was inexplicable for current medical science; the Special Congress of Theological Consultors—on December 15, 2012—declared that this cure was a work of God and was due to the intercession of his servant; and the Ordinary Session of cardinals and bishop—on June 4, 2013—gave the same affirmative opinion. For these reasons, on July 5, 2013 we ordered that the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints promulgate the decree on the miracle and we established that the rite of beatification would take place in Madrid, on September 27, 2014.

Today, in the cited city, our venerable brother Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, reads by our mandate the text of the Apostolic Letter, with which we inscribed among the blessed the venerable servant of God Alvaro del Portillo y Diez de Sollano:

We, welcoming the desire of our brothers Agostino Vallini, Cardinal Vicar for Rome, and Javier Echevarría Rodríguez, titular bishop of Cilibia, prelate of Opus Dei, as well as of many other brothers in the episcopate, and of numerous faithful, after having listened to the opinion of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, with our apostolic authority grant the faculty that the venerable servant of God Alvaro del Portillo y Diez de Sollano, bishop, prelate of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, a pastor to the measure of Christ’s Heart and diligent servant of the Church, henceforth is to be called blessed, and his feast celebrated each year, on the 12th of May, in the places and in the way established by law. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

What we have decreed with the present letter we wish to remain firmly established now and in the future, notwithstanding anything to the
contrary. With great appreciation for the Blessed’s loving, humble and constant ministry, above all with members of Opus Dei, for these and all the faithful we set forth his example.

Given in Rome, close to Saint Peter, and sealed with the ring of the Fisherman, September 27, 2014, the second year of Our Pontificate.

By order of the Supreme Pontiff
Pietro Card. Parolin
Secretary of State
L. + S. Prot. Secret. of State, no. 19.900
PRELATE

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Appointments

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Torna ai contenuti

Activities of the Prelate

Pastoral Trips

*Dominican Republic, from August 5 to 8*

Bishop Javier Echevarría traveled to the Dominican Republic at the beginning of August to give a push to the apostolic work of Opus Dei in this country, which began in 1988 under the impulse of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo.

The Prelate of Opus Dei arrived in Santo Domingo on Wednesday, August 5, and on the 6th was received by Cardinal Nicolas de Jesús López Rodríguez, Archbishop of Santo Domingo and primate of the Americas. On the same day he held a get-together with 800 people in the auditorium of the Dominican Sports Hall of Fame, encouraging everyone to live out their Christian faith in their work and daily lives.

On August 7, the 60th anniversary of his priestly ordination, he traveled to Jarabacoa, La Vega, to visit the Buenavista Conference Center and the Serranía School of Hotel Management, two social initiatives begun by some faithful of the Prelature. He had a chance to meet with students at the school and also with some faithful of Opus Dei who were attending during those days an activity of Christian formation in the Conference Center.
**Trinidad and Tobago, from August 8 to 10**

During his pastoral visit to Trinidad and Tobago—from August 8 to 10—Bishop Echevarría had the opportunity to see the development of the apostolic work of Opus Dei during the 14 years since his last trip there, in 2001.

On Sunday the 9th, in the Conference and Events area of the Hyatt Hotel, a large number of families met with the Prelate, who spoke about the value of work, family life, and friendship with God amid the ordinary circumstances of their life, especially in the exercise of their profession. Bishop Echevarria encouraged all of those present to do a wider apostolate among their relatives and friends.

In the afternoon the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Nicola Girasoli, received him. On the same day he visited the Arbor and Trimont high schools, two educational centers started by faithful and cooperators of Opus Dei. The teaching personnel and a group of married couples spoke with him about focusing their educational programs on fostering freedom and personal responsibility.

During his stay in the country, the Prelate blessed a future student residence now under construction. He also had an opportunity to get to know various centers of the Prelature and speak with many people who take part in the apostolic work there.

**Colombia, from August 10 to 16**

The Prelate of Opus Dei arrived in Bogotá on Monday, August 10. His last pastoral visit there had been in 2001.

On the 11th he had a get-together with several bishops and more than a hundred diocesan priests in Los Cerros School in Bogotá. Among other topics he spoke about the need to show great care in celebrating the Holy Mass and in the formation of seminarians. On finishing, he greeted the bishops present and spoke with them at some length. In the evening he had a get-together with 6,000 people at La Sabana University.

On Wednesday the 12th he traveled to Medellin, where he met with more than 4,000 people in the Plaza Mayo Convention Center. Bishop Echevarría spoke about forgiveness, reconciliation and the desire for peace
on the part of all Colombians. He also insisted that they pray especially for the Ordinary Synod on the Family that would be taking place in October.

On Friday the 14th, after his return to Bogotá, he met with more than 400 young students in the library of Los Cerros High School. He advised them not to be afraid to launch out to speak about God and to carry out a wide-ranging mission of catechesis.

On the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady on August 15, in a gathering with more than 700 faithful of Opus Dei, Bishop Echevarría recalled St. Josemaría's great love for our Lady. “Ask our Lady to give you the zeal to be very close to Christ, so that you can speak about him as she did,” the Prelate said.

On Sunday the 16th, just hours before leaving the country, he asked the more than 7,000 people taking part in the gathering at the University of La Sabana not to skimp in their efforts to transmit God’s love to everyone in Colombia. Love for the Church, for the Pope, for our Lady; love in marriage and in the family: “In Colombia you have a great heart, and therefore I tell you: love one another a lot; may you love each other with the love of Christ Jesus, as St. Josemaría used to say, because nothing is difficult for the one who truly loves,” he stressed.

Diaconal Ordinations (October 31, 2015)

On Saturday, October 31, twenty-seven faithful of Opus Dei received ordination as deacons from the hands of Bishop Javier Echevarría. The ceremony was celebrated in the Roman Basilica of St. Eugene. The new deacons come from 13 different countries. Their ordination as priests will take place on April 23, 2016.

“Our Lord (because he is the one who has chosen you) will imprint on you a new seal, the diaconal character, with the mission of serving the Church and all souls,” the Prelate told the new deacons. The full text of his homily can be read in this issue of Romana.
Priestly Ordinations (September 6, 2015)

On September 6, Bishop Echevarría ordained three associate members of the Prelature as priests. The ceremony took place in the Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain.

The new priests are Ruben Mestre, a 46-year-old lawyer born in El Prat de Llobregat near Barcelona; Juan José Muñoz, university professor and film critic, born in Segovia 48 years ago; and Sidnei Fresneda, 51 years old, a mathematician and teacher born in São Paulo.

In the homily for this ceremony—published below—the Prelate encouraged them to spread the word of God with “depth and in an attractive way,” and to exercise their ministry with “mercy and understanding,” never rejecting anyone, as Pope Francis has asked.

Opening of the Holy Door of Mercy in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace (December 13, 2015)

In his Bull Misericordiae Vultus, Pope Francis expresses his desire that many people will rediscover divine mercy during the Jubilee Year. Among other suggestions, he encouraged many basilicas and churches to open a door of mercy “through which anyone who enters can experience the love of God who consoles, who forgives, and who offers hope.”[1]

The door of mercy in the prelatic church of Our Lady of Peace, the church that contains the remains of St. Josemaría and of Blessed Alvaro, was opened on December 13. Anyone who comes to this church can thus obtain the plenary indulgence offered for the Jubilee of Mercy, if the requirements foreseen by the Bull are fulfilled. This indulgence affects the
temporal punishment for one’s own sins and is applicable in suffrage for the souls of the faithful departed.

In accord with the habitual practice for receiving an indulgence, and following the dispositions prescribed with respect to the door of mercy in the various churches and shrines during the Jubilee Year, the indulgence can be obtained by the faithful who: a) visit in pilgrimage the prelatic church of Our Lady of Peace and there, after passing through the holy door or the door of mercy, take part in a sacred celebration or at least remain for a certain time in prayer, with a reflection on mercy; b) recite the profession of faith and some prayer for the Pope and for his intentions, especially the Our Father. It is advised that the prayer be closed with an invocation to the Merciful Lord Jesus (for example, “Merciful Jesus, I trust in you”); c) fulfill the other general dispositions foreseen by the Church: sacramental confession and Eucharistic communion, in addition to rejecting any attachment to sin, including venial sin.


Pastoral Letters

Pastoral Letter of October 1, 2015

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

Tomorrow is a day of special thanksgiving, because it is another anniversary of the founding of the Work. We know that St. Josemaría received this illumination from God while praying and arranging some notes about what our Lord had let him see in his prayer, since first sensing those “inklings” from God. He had spent many years begging God to show him his will: Domine, ut videam! Lord, let me see! And asking our Lady: Domina, ut sit! My Lady, may what your Son wants of me become a reality.
Therefore, when he finally saw God’s will clearly, his reaction was to fall to his knees, adoring and giving thanks to our Thrice Holy God, while there resounded in his ears the pealing of the bells of the church of Our Lady of the Angels in honor of the Queen of Heaven, on the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels. For each and every one of us, his falling to his knees should mean for us adoring God for his goodness, and keeping alive the readiness to serve unconditionally.

Our Founder would never forget that pealing of the bells. In a letter written to his children a year before he went to heaven, he said: “I would like this tolling of the bell to forever awaken in your hearts the same joy and vigilant spirit left in my soul by the bells of Our Lady of the Angels, now almost a half century ago. A peal of divine joy, a whistle-call from the Good Shepherd that... should awaken in you contrition and, if necessary, a desire for deep interior conversion, a new upraising of the soul: more prayer, more mortification, more spirit of penance, more effort, if possible, to be good children of the Church.”[1]

I want to remind myself and all of you of these recommendations of our Founder, so that we always strive to put them into practice—in a special way during the month that is now beginning, the month of the Rosary, in which the Synod of Bishops on the family will also be held (for which we have been praying so much, closely united to the Pope’s petition), and in the midst of a Marian Year in the Work. Regarding the value of your prayer and mine, I would like to tell you an anecdote. I went to visit a bishop in Australia, and a few minutes after beginning our conversation he asked me the following question: the Founder, to carry out the Work, prayed a lot, right? I responded affirmatively, adding a few details. Let us ask ourselves: to carry out the Work each day, do we pray a lot?

“Pause for a moment, my children, and consider your own life. Perhaps we have already sensed the tolling of the bell, heaven’s grace, in the depths of our soul. God, with his unconditional self-giving, shows us that authentic Christian conduct is woven of both divine and human threads: man’s will intertwined with God’s will.”[2]

He tells us with St. Matthew: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”[3] And St. Paul insists: This is the will of God: your
sanctification.”[4] From October 2nd, 1928, realizing that God was
determined that Opus Dei become a “small portion” of the People of God
at the service of the whole Church, St. Josemaría gave himself
unwaveringly to this task; and therefore he wrote with full assurance: “the
Work of God comes to fulfil the Will of God. Therefore have the firm
conviction that heaven is determined to see it carried out.”[5]

Opus Dei was then like a seed that had barely broken through the
ground. Therefore those first men and women who faithfully followed our
Father—although they wouldn’t arrive for some time—showed great faith
in God and in our founder, on seeing his constant self-giving. To them too
we direct our gratitude on this anniversary. Now, on seeing how the spirit
of the Work has taken root in souls and countries all over the world, I dare
to say that we almost don’t need faith, since the development of the Work is
so clear to us. We can touch it with our hands, and we can see how God
our Lord is faithful to his promises.

Yes, my daughters and sons: “have the firm conviction that heaven is
determined to see” Opus Dei carried out all over the world.[6] And he calls
us to this great adventure in our place of work, in the broad circle of our
social relationships, and also in our families. We unite ourselves to the
grateful cry of so many souls in heaven and on earth, who praise the
Blessed Trinity unceasingly for this gift of his to the Church and the world.
Holy, Holy, Holy, we proclaim, knowing that words fall short in expressing
God’s greatness and making known his mercy.

Let us also recall these words of our Father, addressed to God: “You are
who you are: the Supreme Goodness. I am who I am: the least dirty rag in
this rotten world. And nevertheless, you look at me, and you seek me out,
and you love me. Lord: may my children look at you, and seek you, and
love you. Lord: may I seek you, and look at you, and love you.”[7]

October 6, anniversary of our Father’s canonization, is a good
opportunity to redouble our thanksgiving to God and our prayer for the
Church, for the Work, for all souls. Let us open our heart wide to people
both near and far away, because the impetus of our apostolic zeal has to
reach everyone. Christian families have a special responsibility here that we
should try to stir up especially in families where the spirit of Opus Dei has
taken root. As St. John Paul II wrote: “To the extent in which the Christian family accepts the Gospel and matures in faith, it becomes an evangelizing community... This apostolic mission of the family is rooted in Baptism and receives from the grace of the sacrament of marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God’s plan.”[8]

In the new evangelization that we need to strive to carry out each day, let us ask the Blessed Trinity to grant us the eagerness to bring the light and salt of Christ’s disciples to every environment. “In this regard everyone, beginning with the Christian family, must feel the responsibility to foster the birth and growth of vocations, both priestly and religious as well as in the lay state, specifically directed to the missions. This should be done by relying on every appropriate means, but without ever neglecting the privileged means of prayer.”[9]

Today we are witnessing the suffering of countless families who are forced to leave their home country for many different reasons: lack of work, poverty, war, persecution for their faith…. And often these people find enormous difficulties in integrating themselves in the place where they hope to live. The Church, called to be the Mother of all men and women, is not indifferent to these situations. Pope Francis is constantly calling us to human and Christian solidarity with these people. As he recently reminded us: “Faced with the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees who flee death from war and hunger, and who have begun a journey moved by hope for survival, the Gospel calls us to be ‘neighbors’ of the smallest and the abandoned, and to give them concrete hope. It’s not enough to say, ‘Take heart. Be patient.’ Christian hope has a fighting spirit, with the tenacity of one who goes towards a sure goal.”[10]

The Pope has also asked for “a specific gesture in preparation for the Holy Year”[11] that begins in December. The migration of thousands of citizens, particularly grave now in Europe, is also found in other parts of the world. The Pope is asking everyone to help support this call, remembering “that Mercy is the second name for Love.”[12]

What can each of us do in this regard, with personal initiative and responsibility? The first thing is not to let these happenings slide passively
off our heart; and therefore to pray and ask ourselves what specific means are within our reach to alleviate in some way the needs of these people. In many cases it would be opportune, in accord with each one’s possibilities, to collaborate with the diocese and the parishes, to whom the Pope is directing his call most immediately, or with organizations trying to offer that help. No one should turn their back on these grave needs of so many men and women, neighbors in whom we have to see Christ himself. Let us beseech the Holy Spirit to grant us his light and spur us to action, while asking others for the opportune advice.

In this way, family and social bonds, strengthened by the experience of faith and God’s love, can “counteract the community desertification of the modern city... The smile of a family can overcome this desertification of our cities. This is the victory of family love... The Babel project builds lifeless skyscrapers. The Spirit of God instead makes the desert fruitful (cf. Is 32:15).”[13]

I end by renewing my desire that we intensify this month our prayer for the Pope and for the Synod that begins on the 3rd. Let us go to the intercession of our Lady, Mother of the Church and Queen of the family. Thus our prayers, united to those of so many thousands of people who are praying with us for the same intention, will reach the throne of God more effectively.

I insist: let us put special care into our personal piety, in praying the Holy Rosary and in contemplating each mystery. By immersing ourselves more deeply in the life of Jesus and Mary, our eagerness to be more of a brother or sister to all humanity will increase, with the desire to reach each woman, each man.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, October 1, 2015


[2] Ibid., no. 3.
Letter of the Prelate on the Occasion of the Jubilee of Mercy, November 4, 2015

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

1. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort (2 Cor 1:3), who, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (…) and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:4-6).

These words of St Paul help us to focus, right from the start, on what I would like to transmit to you in this letter. My reason for writing to you is the desire that we may prepare ourselves as well as possible for the Year of Mercy convoked by Pope Francis, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. It will begin, as
you know, on the coming 8 December, and conclude on the solemnity of Christ the King, on 20 November 2016.

When the Holy Father made public his intention to convocate this extraordinary Holy Year, we felt the Christian joy of knowing it coincided with the final part of the Marian year for the family that we have been observing in the Prelature. We have seen this as another sign of protection from our Lady, whom we invoke as Regína famíliæ and Mater misericórdiae.

With our Mother's intercession we have recourse to the goodness of God, who is a sure refuge, always ready to accede to our requests and provide a remedy for our personal needs. From divine mercy we can obtain an increase in charity, understanding, fraternity and concern for souls, since — as members of the Church — we want to contribute to giving a more authentically human meaning to mankind and its history.[1] Let us walk day by day with solid hope: Heaven unceasingly offers us the means we need so that we may be filled with peace, certain that the Blessed Trinity is always taking care of all creation. As Pope Francis reminds us, let us ascend from created things to contemplate God's fatherly and loving hand.[2]

Let us show our gratitude to our Holy Father with our deeds and prayer for convoking this special jubilee, a true time of grace for the Church and the world. We are all filled with joy in welcoming the call of our common Father to draw closer to our Lord, in piety and in the celebration of the Sacraments, above all Penance and the Eucharist, and also in specific manifestations of fraternal charity towards our neighbor. If we are docile to the Holy Spirit, we will become more identified with Jesus Christ and come to be more like our heavenly Father, whose merciful face is revealed to us in Christ Jesus.

2. Deus, cui próprium est miseréri semper et párcere: súscipe deprecatiónem nostram.[3] “O God, to whom it belongs always to forgive and to be merciful: receive our prayer,” we say every day. Mercy! It is always necessary to go more deeply, as the Church invites us, into this consoling divine attribute which is a compendium of all God’s attributes. We do so with filial trust. In convoking this extraordinary jubilee, the Roman Pontiff writes that mercy “is the word that reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to
meet us (...), the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.

Thirty-five years have gone by since St John Paul II published the encyclical *Dives in misericórdia*. There he stressed that it is good to meditate frequently on this wonderful expression of divine Love. “It is called for,” he wrote, “by the varied experiences of the Church and of contemporary man. It is also demanded by the pleas of many human hearts, their sufferings and hopes, their anxieties and expectations.”

St John Paul’s words are not only fully applicable today, but become more pressing daily. We are always in need of divine mercy, but in our times we can say that this need has become more urgent. When Pope Francis opens the holy door in the various papal basilicas, and each Bishop does so in his respective circumscription, “we will entrust the life of the Church, all humanity, and the entire cosmos to the Lordship of Christ, asking him to pour out his mercy upon us like the morning dew, so that everyone may work together to build a brighter future.” St Josemaría, as a result of his personal experience, urged us expressly, from the beginnings of the Work, to have recourse to this immense love of God, who doesn’t abandon his children, all men and women. Our Founder suggested to us in countless ways that we knock at the doors of the Heart of Jesus.

3. **St Josemaría taught us to imbue the paths of the earth with the mercy that Jesus brought to the world. And he made the point that “our dedication to the service of souls is a manifestation of the Lord’s mercy, not only towards us, but towards the whole of humanity.”** Guided by St Josemaría’s hand, let us step forward together with our Lord so that there may be an overflow, in every Christian and in all people of good will, of that current of merciful love which pours forth continually upon humanity from the pierced Heart of Jesus.

With these sentiments and yearnings I invite you, my daughters and sons, to begin the Year of Mercy with earnest devotion and joy. We will find inspiration in the teachings of Sacred Scripture, whose pages make up a marvelous song to divine mercy. And we will pay special attention to
Christ’s example, to his life and teachings, striving to model our behavior intimately on that of the Redeemer and thus follow in the footsteps of St Josemaría, who constantly turned his eyes to the figure of the Good Shepherd giving his entire life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:1-18). St Josemaría suggested to us and to very many other men and women that we set our sights ever more firmly on the Lord of Heaven and earth.

God’s mercy towards mankind

4. Many pages in the Old Testament already make clear God’s unfathomable mercy towards his creatures. “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made” (Ps 144 [145]:8-9). And the prophets never tire of warning: “Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and repents of evil” (Joel 2:13).

At the Last Supper, in accord with Jewish tradition, our Lord prayed the Great Hallel, the great song of praise. This psalm sets forth the wonders carried out by God in creation and in history, and, at the end of each verse, the following words are repeated as a refrain: “for his mercy is everlasting” (Ps 135 [136]).

“By virtue of mercy, all the events of the Old Testament are replete with profound salvific import.”[8] This quality is manifested in its fullness in the New Testament, through the redemptive incarnation of the Son of God. Jesus himself, in offering his life in the bloody sacrifice of the Cross, in instituting the Eucharist and the other sacraments, made this supreme act of Love the fundamental sign of divine mercy.

Let us often reread the Gospel passages that show Christ’s compassion and understanding for humanity; from his birth in Bethlehem right up to his holocaust on Calvary. Let us stop to consider carefully so many examples of his compassionate mercy: when he cured the sick and healed the possessed; when he fed the hungry crowds; when he lavishly distributed the bread of doctrine; when he went out to meet repentant sinners and forgave them; when he chose his disciples; when he rebuked them with a glance or word; when he called his Apostles and sent them out to the whole world; when he gave us his Mother to be our Mother; when he sent
us the promised Holy Spirit, etc. In each of his deeds and words, our Lord shows us clearly the merciful face of God the Father.

The same is true throughout the Church’s history, after Jesus ascended into Heaven. Amid the lights and shadows that have marked the path of Christians, interventions of divine indulgence have never been lacking. Through the Holy Spirit who dwells in the Church, and with the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, along with our Lady’s constant intercession, the torrents of mercy constantly being poured out on the world are revealed to us. Let us not cease to thank our heavenly Father for this. Let us open wide the doors of our own heart and try to help other people to let themselves be steeped in divine grace.

A history of God’s mercies

5. In his encyclical Dives in misericórdia, St John Paul II places mercy at the center of the Church’s life, in the history of mankind. “In the eschatological fulfil¬ment mercy will be revealed as love, while in the temporal phase, in human history, which is at the same time the history of sin and death, love must be revealed above all as mercy and must also be actualized as mercy. Christ’s messianic program, the program of mercy, becomes the program of His people, the program of the Church. At its very center there is always the Cross, for it is in the Cross that the revelation of merciful love attains its culmination.”[9]

We cannot separate the Cross from the Resurrection, since both reveal divine Love: God’s mercy is made manifest in the whole of the paschal mystery. Blessed Paul VI said that “the whole history of salvation is guided by divine mercy, which goes forth to meet human misery.”[10]

Christ took upon himself our sins, “having been offered once to bear the sins of many” (Heb 9:28). Our Lady accepted with full freedom the self-surrender of the One who, having taken on our human condition in everything except sin (cf. Heb 4:15), was able to show true compassion. In her Magníficat our Lady proclaimed: “his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation” (Lk 1:50).

6. My daughters and sons: we rejoice in being part of those generations that sing the mercies of God! In his personal life and in that of Opus Dei, St Josemaría constantly discovered God’s preferential love. He often said
that “the entire history of the Work is the history of God’s mercies. Neither in this letter,” he wrote in the 1960s, “nor in the many documents I might write for you, could I finish telling of the providential care of God’s goodness, which has always preceded and accompanied the Work’s steps.”[11] He had no hesitation in saying that “the history of Opus Dei will have to be written kneeling down.”[12] With this graphic image, he emphasized that God has always taken the initiative in the founding and development of the Work: St Josemaría’s role was simply to be a faithful instrument of the divine will.

Truly, the life of St Josemaría and that of Opus Dei are closely intertwined, and from 1928 onwards it was impossible to distinguish between them or separate them. “In the Work, God has done everything,” he exclaimed in a meditation. “Humanly speaking, what did I have? Only good humor, a great love for Christ and his Church, and a desire to persevere when faced with the impossible. God has dealt with me as I, when a child, dealt with my little lead soldiers: I placed them wherever I wanted, and at times even decapitated them… That’s what God has done with me: he has led me along the paths he wished, and allowed people to give me some really hard knocks, because it was good for me.”[13]

Each of those circumstances helped our Founder to refine his fidelity and abandonment in God’s hands. As Pope Francis has written: “We can know quite well that our lives will be fruitful, without claiming to know how, or where, or when. We may be sure that none of our acts of love will be lost, nor any of our acts of sincere concern for others. No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted.”[14] Thus St Josemaría never lost his peace: “my children, with contrition comes Love. None of these efforts, no sorrow has made me lose gáudium cum pace, because God has taught me to love, and nullo enim modo sunt onerósi labóres amántium (St Augustine, De bono viduitátis, 21, 26); for the one who loves, work is never a heavy burden. Therefore the important thing is to learn to love, because in eo quod amátur, aut non laborátur, aut et labor amátur (Ibid.): where there is love, all is happiness. God’s greatest mercy has been to lead me like a small child and teach me how to love. When I was barely an adolescent, our Lord sowed in
my heart a seed ablaze with love. And today, my daughters and sons, that seed is a leafy tree that gives shade to a legion of souls.”[15]

7. This is how St Josemaría always acted. His devotion to this sure divine refuge that we are contemplating went back to his earliest years. He learned it from his parents in their home; it was strengthened during his preparation for the priesthood in the Seminary of Logroño and in that of San Carlos in Saragossa, which had a representation of the Heart of Jesus inflamed with love and crowned with thorns, an image that deeply moved him. Later, during the Spanish Civil War, it took on new force for him, as he described in a time of prayer, on the eve of the solemnity of the Sacred Heart:

“I want to see myself now, my God, close to the Wound in your side; and I want to call to mind all my children, those who now are living members of this living Body of your Work. I will mention each one by name and consider their qualities, virtues and defects. And then I will beseech you, as I urge them towards you one by one and say, ‘Enter inside!’ I will place them in your Heart. I would like to do so with each one, and with all who will come afterwards and form part of this supernatural family, throughout the centuries until the end of the world. All of us united in the Heart of Christ, all made one through love for Him, and all of us detached from earthly things by the strength of this love and by mortification. We want to be like the first Christians, making present once again their spirit in the world. Let’s begin, then, by making this phrase a reality within the Work: congregávit nos in unum Christi amor.”[16]

In the Holy Mass, after the Consecration, St Josemaría used to recite in silence, interiorly, the prayer to merciful Love that he had learned in his youth. The most lovable Heart of Jesus strengthened, at its source, his fatherhood in Opus Dei, which extended to his daughters and sons of all times; and in the Holy Sacrifice his heart was filled with Christ’s redemptive longings for all of humanity. These considerations will also help us to be sure and optimistic in the difficult moments that may arise in the history of the world or in our personal life. God is the same as always: all-powerful, all-wise, and merciful. And at every moment he is able to draw good out of evil and great victories out of defeats, for those who trust in him.
8. In the 1970s, when a grave crisis of faith and discipline was doing great damage to souls, St Josemaría received new lights from Heaven that confirmed him in his unshakeable trust in God’s constant help. On 23 August 1971, after he had celebrated Holy Mass, our Lord engraved with fire on his heart some words that, with a slight variation, come from the Epistle to the Hebrews: adeámus cum fidúcia ad thronum grátiæ, ut misericórdiam consequámur (Heb 4:16). He made this known right away to those of us who were near him at the time. A few weeks later he once again made reference to it in the intimacy of a family get-together with his children in Rome:

   “I’m going to tell you something that God our Lord wants you to know. We, God’s children in Opus Dei, adeámus cum fidúcia, should go with great faith ad thronum glóriæ, to the throne of glory, our Blessed Lady, Mother of God and our Mother, whom we invoke so often as Sedes Sapiéntiae, ut misericórdiam consequámur, to obtain mercy (…).

   “Let us go, through the most Sweet Heart of Mary, to the most Sacred and Merciful Heart of Jesus, to ask him, through his mercy, to show forth his power in the Church and fill us with strength to continue along our path, drawing many souls to him.”[17]

   This certainty forcefully impelled him to seek in the Word of God the most relevant texts on God’s compassion and protection, in order to meditate on them in his personal prayer. Thus, a year later, he once again made reference to a “discovery” that infused great optimism and confidence in his soul, helping him to overcome the great pain and sorrow in his heart brought about by his love for the Church.

   “Recently,” he said, “I have been meditating a lot on some texts in Sacred Scripture that speak about divine mercy. I realize that Scripture scholars give different meanings to this word, and understand by it not only what it signifies in ordinary language — compassion, pity —, but also the loyalty God has towards his creatures.

   “Isn’t this beautiful! God our Lord has such compassion on mankind — because his mercy also means compassion — that his loyalty leads him to be merciful towards each of us, to look on us with the love of a father and a mother.”[18]
He continued striving to fathom more fully the words of Sacred Scripture that he had already meditated on in his youth: God “delights” in the children of men (cf. Prov 8:31). And therefore he went forward with a sure step, in getting Opus Dei going. When he found himself without any human resource, this “delight” of God strengthened his assurance that the Work would go forward.

Justice and mercy

9. Among the parables the Master used to explain to his disciples the characteristics of the kingdom of heaven, St Luke (described by one of the great Christian poets as “the recorder of Christ’s meekness”[19]) gives us three teachings explicitly aimed at highlighting God’s divine watchfulness over his people: the lost sheep, the missing coin, and the prodigal son. In all three, “Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy.”[20]

That loving heart is manifest especially in the parable of the father who waits patiently day after day for his ungrateful son to return, so he can forgive him as soon as he arrives. St John Paul II commented on it incisively in his encyclical Dives in misericórdia, explaining how this teaching applies to each and every human being. “The parable indirectly touches upon every breach of the covenant of love, every loss of grace, every sin (…) The inheritance that the son had received from his father was a quantity of material goods, but more important than these goods was ‘his dignity as a son in his father’s house.’”[21]

St Josemaría commented on it similarly: “The mercy God shows us has to lead us back to him always. My sons, it’s better not to leave him at all, never to abandon him. But if ever out of human weakness you stray, run straight back again. He always receives us, like the father of the prodigal son, with more intense love.”[22]

Although, as St John Paul II points out, the original text doesn’t mention either justice or mercy, “nevertheless, the relationship between justice and love, that is manifested as mercy, is inscribed with great exactness in the content of the Gospel parable. It becomes more evident that love is
transformed into mercy when it is necessary to go beyond the precise norm of justice — precise and often too narrow.”[23]

St Josemaría saw this practical union of justice and love in the behavior of mothers.[24] For him God’s justice contained “depths of mercy.”[25] “We can’t approach God on the basis of rights. What we have to do is to ask him to have mercy on us, as it says in one of the psalms: Miserére mei, Deus, secúndum magnam misericórdiam tuam. Lord, have compassion on me according to your great mercy. We don’t appeal to him on the basis of justice.”[26]

10. Plenty of people see some kind of opposition between justice and mercy. In convoking the jubilee, the Holy Father warned us about this error: “These are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a single reality that unfolds progressively until it culminates in the fullness of love (…).

"Faced with a vision of justice as the mere observance of the law that judges people simply by dividing them into two groups — the just and sinners — Jesus is bent on revealing the great gift of mercy that searches out sinners and offers them pardon and salvation. One can see why, on the basis of such a liberating vision of mercy as a source of new life, Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees and the other teachers of the law."[27]

11. Thanks to a special grace from God, as I mentioned earlier, our Founder gained deep insights into the wonderful flashes of divine clemency contained in Holy Scripture. Commenting, for example, on the miracle of the raising of the son of the widow of Naim, he considered how “our Lord loved us for holy reasons which perhaps wouldn’t have occurred to us. St Luke says: misericórdia motus super eam, he was moved by compassion, by mercy for that woman, when he could instead have been moved by more logical reasons: she was poor, she was a widow, and she didn’t have any other children.”[28]

There was a large crowd of people in the funeral procession, and more again accompanying Jesus; but only he enters into that mother’s pain and steps forward to meet her. Isn’t it admirable, the way the Master allows himself to be overcome by the merciful impulses of his Heart, without
waiting for us to tell him our needs? Our Redeemer’s divine and human behavior urges us vigorously to appeal to him at every moment. “You and I,” St Josemaría says, “also have to have recourse to God’s mercy. Before God we don’t have any rights at all. At least, I personally see, with noonday clarity, that I can’t say, ‘Lord, I demand that you do this,’ even though I know I am his son, and feel it. I go to him with groans of contrition, asking him for mercy,”[29] appealing for pity.

In the last years of his life, feeling the need to ask God for pardon with greater confidence and diligence, St Josemaría completed the aspiration he had composed to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1952, on consecrating the Work, its apostolates, and the needs of the Church and of mankind to him: 

\textit{Cor Iesu Sacratissimum et Miséricors, dona nobis pacem!} From then on, recourse to Heaven’s protection for the world, the Church, and souls, became ever more central in St Josemaría’s life, day and night.

Here we discover the principal fruit we ask God for in the year dedicated to his mercy: that society may return to the path of the commandments, that souls may allow themselves to be inflamed with the fire of God’s love, that everywhere in the Church there may be a resurgence of clear doctrine and genuine piety. I make my own the words of the Holy Father: “How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst!”[30]

\textit{Be merciful as the heavenly Father is merciful}

12. The Church constantly seeks to offer God’s love to mankind, without excluding anybody. Nevertheless, as Pope Francis observes, “perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal.”[31]

It’s not enough to ask God for pardon for our own sins and the sins of the world. That prayer, essential though it is, must be accompanied by the
concrete practice of mercy towards our neighbor. Because “if any one says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also” (1 Jn 4:20-21).

The works of mercy, so repeatedly preached and practiced in the Church, offer us a fitting way of expressing our good intentions with concrete deeds. “The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities,” explains the Catechism of the Catholic Church. And one of the things the Holy Father asks us to do this year is to practice them assiduously. “Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples.”

Jesus describes this quite clearly in the Gospel, laying it down as an unequivocal requirement: “As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:31-36).

The corporal works of mercy

13. Catholic teaching sums up the corporal works of mercy as follows: “feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God.” All of them are expressions of the mandátum novum (Jn 13:34), the new commandment of charity given to us by Christ. In keeping with our Savior’s instruction, the Church has always shown a special love for the poor, the sick, the helpless, the destitute... And she is always conscious of our Lord’s words at the Last Judgment:
“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). And in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus shows us that our charity extends to the whole human race.

14. In Opus Dei, a living part of the Church, we are reminded never to abandon the corporal works of mercy. St Josemaría practiced them in the early years of the Work, visiting the sick in the hospitals of Madrid, and looking after down-and-outs, as well as the genteel poor who concealed their poverty under the veil of an apparently normal life. And he taught the people who took part in his apostolate to do the same. He entrusted those activities to our Lady. That was the beginning in Opus Dei of the visits to “our Lady’s poor,” which still take place wherever the faithful of the Prelature live. On Saturday, our Lady’s day, the young people are invited to give alms which are used to help the needy. When they help the poor, “our Lady is honored and they practice charity.”[35] These visits have a formative role, because they foster the young people’s generosity, and so their love grows.

Our Founder, who always learned from seeing how God cares for his creation, was very upset at the sight of “the goods of the earth, distributed among a few; the goods of culture, confined to cliques. And, out there, hunger for bread and knowledge; human lives, holy, because they come from God, treated as mere things, as statistics. I understand and share this impatience. It stirs me to look at Christ, who is continually inviting us to put his “new commandment” of love into practice (…).

“We must learn to recognize Christ when he comes out to meet us in our brothers, the people around us. No human life is ever isolated. It is bound up with other lives. Nobody is a loose line of a poem; we all form part of one divine poem which God writes with the cooperation of our freedom.”[36]

How many young people, both boys and girls, and how many adults too, on discovering and contemplating their neighbor’s most pressing needs, have discovered the impoverished Christ in those brothers or sisters and have improved their readiness to serve others! Our Lord, who is infinitely more generous, has inundated their souls with special graces: only he knows the profound conversions many of them have experienced, the
decisions of total self-giving to the service of God and the Church, begotten in those visits to the needy, the elderly, the sick, the imprisoned…

15. With the growth of the Work of God, through the apostolic spontaneity of the faithful and Cooperators of Opus Dei, the activities of material service to others have acquired new dimensions, in accordance with the different circumstances of time and place. There are vocational training schools for people from very diverse backgrounds, in both rural and urban districts; medical dispensaries and hospitals serving the needy in deprived areas; more and more assistance programs, like NGOs that help in under-developed countries, or food banks in First World nations, to mention just a few examples, which in times of financial crisis like these, enable many men and women to cope with their own material needs and those of their families.

I give thanks to God for the growth of the solidarity programs run by the faithful and Cooperators of the Prelature. But we can’t be content with that. With God’s grace, and with the help of many good-hearted people (Catholics and non-Catholics), we should aim to increase their scope even more.

16. Allow me to ask you once again to make every effort to care for the sick: at home, in hospital, and wherever there is an individual suffering in body or soul; and naturally, in the Centers of the Work and the homes of the Associates and Supernumeraries. Christ becomes present to us in a special way in every suffering person.

As well as ensuring that they have proper medical attention, we have to take special care of their spiritual welfare. The priests can do this by ensuring they can receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. The laity, by their example and advice, can help the sick, as appropriate, to have a spirit of prayer, which means contemplation, thanksgiving, praise and petition. For instance, they can help them to say the Rosary or practice other Christian devotions, which fill people with joy even in suffering. The sick are very grateful when they discover that by offering God their illness, with the suffering and limitations it involves, in their flesh they “complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake
of his body, that is, the Church” (Col 1:24), as St Paul wrote, pointing out the salvific value of suffering.[37]

When they become gravely ill, we should make every effort to prepare them to receive the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick as fruitfully as possible. The Church says that this sacrament of mercy has the power to forgive sins; and it can also lead to the improvement of bodily health and even to being cured, if that will benefit the soul.[38] The Church’s long tradition demonstrates that this sacrament confers great peace and serenity on those who receive it with the right dispositions, without waiting until the very last moment of life. What a wonderful catechesis can be carried out with families, who very often (through ignorance or through a misplaced fear of upsetting the patient) fail to summon the priest, or ask him to come only when their loved ones have already lost consciousness!

17. With the passage of time, some of the corporal works of mercy have changed their form of expression or application. That of caring for travelers is generally expressed nowadays as “to shelter the homeless.” At the present time it includes helping migrants who leave their native land to find work, better living conditions etc. No disciple of the Master can fail to be concerned for these men and women, and sometimes entire families. I’m thinking especially of those Christians persecuted for religious reasons: their exile should make us very aware of the Communion of Saints.

Pope Francis has called upon public authorities, and all men of good will, to find specific solutions to this problem. In the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii gaudium he challenged us: “It is essential to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognize the suffering Christ, even if this appears to bring us no tangible and immediate benefits. I think of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others. Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the Pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all.”[39] More recently, in preparation for the Year of Mercy, he has intensified this urgent appeal.[40]

Let us echo the Holy Father’s exhortations and invite relatives, friends and colleagues to put them into practice in accordance with their
circumstances and possibilities. As well as praying, we should get them to see how they could be personally involved: perhaps by influencing public opinion on the issue, or providing lodging, a job, a donation or grant, etc. Acting always with a sense of personal responsibility, another good way of supporting this objective is to help the programs sponsored by the dioceses and parishes, which the Holy Father has charged directly with this mission. I am aware that many of you, as well as Cooperator and friends, are already involved in projects for the service of migrants. I thank you for it in our Lord’s name, because the help we offer these brothers and sisters, we offer to Christ himself.

*The spiritual works of mercy*

18. St Josemaría confided to us: “I would make so bold as to say that, when social conditions seem to have put an end to wretchedness, poverty and suffering in a given place, that is precisely when there is the greatest need for this incisive Christian charity, which can sense who is in need of consolation amidst the apparently general well-being.”[41]

Let us consider the fact that acts of love for our neighbor are not confined to material donations, however necessary such donations may be. The Pope laments that “the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care.”[42] Down through her history the Church has been characterized by concern to practice the spiritual works of mercy, which are always so real and so applicable: “to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.”[43]

How delicate this spiritual charity is! And how indispensable it is in these times, when so many men and women are suffering from loneliness, misunderstanding, persecution, spite and slander; or are mired in doubt, not knowing the path that leads to Heaven! Because “there are widespread social remedies for the scourges of suffering and want, enabling people today to achieve humanitarian results undreamt of in times gone by. But such remedies, being on a different plane, will never do away with the need for practical, human and supernatural tenderness, shown in direct personal contact with our neighbor. Our neighbor is the poor person
in a nearby district, the sick person who is suffering alone in a huge hospital, or the other person who may be rich, but who needs time spent in affectionate conversation, Christian friendship to ease their loneliness, and a spiritual refuge that will remedy their doubts and skepticism."

Let’s remember the event of the beggar-woman to whom St Josemaría was only able to offer his spiritual care and human affection as a priest. In return, the woman decided to offer her life for the Work. When he met her again later, in hospital, and learned about the offering that this beggar-woman had made to our Lord, he called her the first vocation of his future daughters.

19. Out of the numerous acts of Christian solidarity or fraternity, I am only going to dwell on a few: instructing the ignorant, counselling the doubtful, and forgiving offences. These are proofs of the caring charity we have to show to everyone, and especially to those who are closest to us: our family members, friends and colleagues, acquaintances…

Instructing those who are ignorant of the truths of our faith is a sign of mercy that has fundamental importance. St Josemaría summed it up in a few words: “our great mission is to spread doctrine.” He often underlined the fact that the great enemy of God and souls is religious ignorance, and he said that the apostolate of Opus Dei is a “great catechesis,” bringing the Church’s saving message within everyone’s reach and teaching them to practice it. “Be convinced of this: your apostolate consists in spreading goodness, light, enthusiasm, generosity, a spirit of sacrifice, constancy in work, deep study, complete self-surrender, being up-to-date, cheerful and complete obedience to the Church, and perfect charity.” That whole approach demands generous efforts to provide doctrinal, spiritual and apostolic formation to the people we are in contact with. How happy it makes us when the truth of the Gospel lights up our various fields of activity — professional, social and cultural!

In this Year of Mercy let us try to increase our commitment to bring many souls to the warmth of the Church, the Spouse of Jesus Christ and our Mother. We will manage this, with God’s help, if each and every one of us works personally to bring more friends, colleagues and acquaintances to the means of formation.
There are also many different ways of counselling the doubtful. The first way is by the witness of our own behavior. That was what Christ did when he lived here on earth, as St Josemaría told us repeatedly. St Josemaría loved to dwell on that example, in the phrase from the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles: “Jesus began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1). Following on from the witness of our behavior there is the opportunity for the right words, clear, affectionate, and never wounding, spoken in the ears of our friends or acquaintances: the “apostolate of friendship and trust,” on which St Josemaría laid so much stress.

When what we do matches what we say, how fruitful it is! It will sometimes take the form of fraternal correction, as the Gospel teaches (cf. Mt 18:15-17): a work of mercy that is unselfish, courageous and fertile, born of charity and our concern for our friend.

In this regard, Benedict XVI said: “Today, in general, we are very sensitive to the idea of charity and caring about the physical and material well-being of others, but almost completely silent about our spiritual responsibility towards our brothers and sisters. This was not the case in the early Church or in those communities that are truly mature in faith, those which are concerned not only for the physical health of their brothers and sisters, but also for their spiritual health and ultimate destiny. (…) It is important to recover this dimension of Christian charity.” And he added, “We must not remain silent before evil. I am thinking of all those Christians who, out of human regard or purely personal convenience, adapt to the prevailing mentality, rather than warning their brothers and sisters against ways of thinking and acting that are contrary to the truth and that do not follow the path of goodness.”

Let us show our gratitude to St Josemaría for highlighting the effectiveness of this Gospel practice as an excellent, kind, habitual way of helping our neighbor; a way that is born of charity and that must be exercised with real humility and supernatural charity.

Because “Christian admonishment, for its part, is never motivated by a spirit of accusation or recrimination. It is always moved by love and mercy, and springs from genuine concern for the good of the other. As the Apostle Paul says: ‘If one of you is caught doing something wrong, those of you
who are spiritual should set that person right in a spirit of gentleness; and
watch yourselves that you are not put to the test in the same way’ (Gal 6:1).

“In a world pervaded by individualism, it is essential to rediscover the
importance of fraternal correction, so that together we may journey towards
holiness.”[^48]

21. Forgiving offences is another marvelous way of practicing charity.
“Forgive and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good
measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into
your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (Lk
6:37-38). Let us meditate on the parable of the man who refused to forgive
a fellow-worker a tiny debt, after his master had forgiven him an enormous
sum. And what was his master’s response? “You wicked servant! I forgave
you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had
mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in his anger his
lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my
heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your
brother from your heart” (Mt 18:32-35).

Forgiving offences is a clear sign that we are children of God and
behave as such. “Far be it from us, therefore, to remember who has
offended us or the humiliations we have endured — no matter how unjust,
uncivil or unmannerly they may have been — because it would not be right
for a son of God to be preparing some kind of dossier, from which to read
off a list of grievances. We must never forget Christ’s example.”[^49] St Luke,
when actually relating our Lord’s Passion, writes that “when they came to
the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the
criminals, one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, ‘Father,
forgive them; for they know not what they do’” (Lk 23:33-34).

Obviously this way of acting may not be easy, but God’s grace makes it
a viable path, as is proved by the many Christians who, from the earliest
history of the Church to the present, have shown not only mercy but
sincere love for their persecutors. Similarly, St Josemaría took the upright,
permanent decision to forgive always, all the time, and confirmed it with
his example and his words.
“Not to hate one’s enemies, not to return evil for evil, to refrain from vengeance and to forgive ungrudgingly were all considered at that time unusual behavior, too heroic for normal men. The same thing, let’s be honest about it, is true today. Such is the small-mindedness of men. But Christ, who came to save all mankind and who wishes Christians to be associated with him in the work of redemption, wanted to teach his disciples — you and me — to have a great and sincere charity, one which is more noble and more precious: that of loving one another in the same way as Christ loves each one of us. Only then, by imitating the divine pattern he has left us, and notwithstanding our own rough ways, will we be able to open our hearts to all men and love in a higher and totally new way”.[50]

We will be judged on our works of mercy: “whether we have fed the hungry and given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger and clothed the naked, or spent time with the sick and those in prison (cf. Mt 25:31-45). Moreover, we will be asked if we have helped others to escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer. In each of these ‘little ones,’ Christ himself is present. His flesh becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished, and the exiled…, to be acknowledged, touched, and cared for by us. Let us not forget the words of Saint John of the Cross: ‘as we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love.’”[51]

Apostolate of Confession

22. Another particularly important spiritual work of mercy is to help people recover their friendship with God when it has been lost through sin. How much St Josemaría, and Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, emphasized the importance of the “apostolate of Confession”! I too have often spoken to you on this point, because it is not possible for anyone to advance in the
knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, without careful attention to the state of their soul, without frequent recourse to the sacrament of Penance.

The Pope often talks about this sacrament. In the Bull convoking the Year of Mercy, he notes: “Let us place the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the center once more in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God’s mercy with their own hands. For every penitent, it will be a source of true interior peace.”[52]

At the same time, let us meditate on the advice which St Josemaría, following the prompting of his soul, gave to his sons who were priests, and which applies to all priests: “the ruling passion of the priests of Opus Dei (...) is to spread doctrine and direct souls: to preach and hear confessions. You have to spend yourselves in this task, without fearing to wear yourselves out or suffer setbacks: qui séminant in lácrimis, in exsultatióne metent (Ps 125:5); those who sow with tears will reap with joy. The mission of the laity, of my lay daughters and sons, is to give their priest-brothers a lot of work, and therefore joy, by bringing many people to their ministry.”[53]

23. Confessors themselves are “authentic signs of the Father’s mercy,” writes the Pope. “We do not become good confessors automatically. We become good confessors when, above all, we allow ourselves to be penitents in search of his mercy. Let us never forget that to be confessors means to participate in the very mission of Jesus and to be a concrete sign of the constancy of divine love that pardons and saves.

“None of us wields power over this Sacrament,” the Pope goes on; “rather, we are faithful servants of God’s mercy through it. Every confessor must accept the faithful as the father in the parable of the prodigal son: a father who runs out to meet his son despite the fact that he has squandered away his inheritance. Confessors are called to embrace the repentant son who comes back home and to express the joy of having him back again. Let us never tire of also going out to the other son who stands outside, incapable of rejoicing, in order to explain to him that his judgment is severe and unjust and meaningless in light of the Father’s boundless mercy.”[54]

My daughters and sons, let us beg our Lord to make us into faithful instruments of his mercy: the priests, by dedicating many hours — as many
as they can — to forgiving in God’s name; and the lay people, by a constant
effort to prepare the souls of their friends and acquaintances, through
sincere, disinterested charity, to help them draw a lot of fruit from the
sacrament of joy and peace.

24. I do not want to write much more. I recommend you to read and
meditate deeply on the Bull Misericórdiae vultus, and draw your own
conclusions. It also talks about going on pilgrimage to certain shrines to
obtain the gift of the indulgence granted by the Church, and thus
abundantly favour tender, filial devotion to our Mother the Blessed Virgin
in the coming months. “May the sweetness of her countenance watch over
us in this Holy Year, so that all of us may rediscover the joy of God’s
tenderness. No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation
like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made
flesh. The Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has entered the
sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery
of his love.”[55]

A very affectionate blessing from
your Father

+ Javier


[13] Ibid.


[26] St Josemaría, Notes from a get-together, 11 September 1971; Ps 50:2.


[29] St Josemaría, Notes from a get-together, 9 September 1971.


[31] Ibid., 10.

[32] Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2447.


[34] Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2447.

[36] St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 111.


[38] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1520.


[51] Pope Francis, Bull *Misericórdiae vultus*, 11 April 2015, 15. The quotation from St John of the Cross is from *Words of Light and Love*, 57.


Homilies

At the Parish of St. Josemaría in Burgos, Spain (July 1, 2015)

Most excellent and reverend and dear archbishop: And I say with all sincerity that these three adjectives for me are equally important. Most excellent, because of my affection for you. Most reverend, because you have the burden of the episcopate to govern this beloved archdiocese. Most dear, because we all accompany you with our prayer and our thanksgiving for the work you have carried out, and also ask our Lord to continue assisting you along the paths of God to proclaim Jesus Christ with your life.

My dear brothers in the priesthood, and dear sisters and brothers:

I cannot deny that I am moved by celebrating here, in this archdiocese and specifically in this church, the Mass in memory of a saint who came many times, and sometimes for months on end, to this city of Burgos: serving God, serving souls, and loving—ever more and more—the whole Church.

It is true that the Blessed Trinity wishes to work through his saints. And it is also true that the saints attained intimacy with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit by letting the three divine Persons work in them, although frequently they were asked for generosity, for love. God relies, for his plans, on each of his saints. St. Josemaría was always prompt to listen to God’s voice: our Lord had barely entered his life when he announced that he wanted something from him. He took so many words from the Gospel, which nourished his life and gave direction to his apostolate!

The texts that we have listened to were suggested to the Holy See, to the Congregation for Divine Worship, so that they might be used in this Mass. They are texts that always moved St. Josemaría (as did all of the Old and the New Testament), because he saw how close God wants to be to each and every one of us. Therefore he wants all of us, each and every one of us, to draw from these texts the desire to sanctify our ordinary life. The
work in which we are engaged should be a sign of trust in God, of love for God. Our work is not only an opportunity to praise God, but also to give witness to so many people—to colleagues, friends, acquaintances, relatives—that ordinary life can be a marvelous dialogue with God that leads us to elevate all that we do to his presence, and to offer it, not only so that we sanctify it, but also so that we help in the sanctification of all souls.

The same thing is true of Psalm 2, which is the Responsorial Psalm for this Mass. My sisters and brothers, let us be sure that God has entrusted the world to us as our inheritance (see Ps 2:8). Let us not distance ourselves from the world, for we have to be placed in the heart of society in order to serve God and to provide very direct services to all men and women. They are waiting for you, they are waiting for us. Therefore we must not be remiss in the service we need to provide to all souls. Also to those who do not understand us, realizing that we too, if it had not been for God’s loving intervention in our lives, would be in the same situation. Therefore, realizing that our Lord has given you, has given us, this world as an inheritance, we have to go out in search of people. And let us not be upset if at times people fail to understand us. Let us persevere in speaking with love because, as St. John of the Cross said: “Love is repaid with love!”[1]

Therefore let us correspond to this God who is so generous and loves us infinitely, by our own dedication, and also, as he did, by serving all people. Don’t pass through Burgos, or wherever you go, anonymously. You have to be a protagonist, entrusting to our Lord everyone that you encounter. That is what St. Josemaría did, who so often asked us: “Are you praying for the people around us, for those traveling in the other cars?” So your prayer should be imbued with the marvelous reality of the Communion of Saints.

Have the certainty that we are daughters and sons of God, children of the All-Powerful, children of infinite love, of the Father who understands us. And who not only understands us, but who when at times we make a mistake, awaits us (as the parable of the prodigal son tells us) with his arms wide open to cover us with kisses, to fill us with joy, with optimism—to begin again! (see Lk 15:11-32). Never be discouraged, even if we experience the depths of our misery. God is with us, God wants to live with us, God wants to walk with us.
And, finally, that marvelous Gospel passage where our Lord himself wants to get into our poor boat. St. Josemaría, seeing the generosity of God, who wants to reach the whole world making use of that boat—so poor, a few old boards!—would reflect: when we see that we have such poor conditions, if our Lord invites us to be close to him, let us follow him. Let us have the conviction that we too can “put out into the deep,” duc in altum (Lk 5:4), into the depths of the oceans of our society. It is our society and we have to go to bring God everywhere, as St. Josemaría used to say, speaking with God more and more, getting to know him ever better, and making him known. We can understand perfectly why Peter, seeing the miracle that our Lord had worked when he said, “lower your nets for a catch” (see Lk 5:3—they couldn’t lift the nets because of the weight of so many fish. How wonderful! He, who was an expert fisherman, saw that the sterility of the past night had been changed, thanks to God’s action, into abundant fruit. May you have the same conviction. Never be discouraged, never! When at times we don’t receive the response that we wanted, because we sought to make people happier. Don’t be discouraged. Persevere with the conviction that God is with us, helping us to love him and also to assist so many people we meet throughout our life to love him more.

I also ask you, of course, to pray for Pope Francis. I had the opportunity, on the 29th, to greet him. He sends his blessing, and he has a great esteem for the work of each and every one of you and is relying on your life. Therefore, if you ever meet with resistance, or we ourselves resist, remember that the Pope is saying to you: Help me! It was one of the questions that he put to me in one of the audiences (don’t think that I am with the Pope all day), but he told me: “Tell people to help me, because the burden is very heavy.” Let us be generous, knowing we are children of our common father and helping him with our prayer, our sacrifice and our nearness.

I could tell you many wonderful anecdotes of St. Josemaría’s stay in Burgos. For he was a man who knew how to love, who knew how to show gratitude, also when our Lord allowed him to suffer setbacks and trials.

In ending, how can I fail to turn to our Mother in Heaven, Holy Mary, who was always so close to God. And don’t think: but she was such an
extraordinary person! She was! But our Lady was extraordinary precisely because in that tiny village of Nazareth she attained a sanctity to the level of her fullness of grace. Therefore we don't have any excuse. If only I could be in this or that place, if only I could do this… No! Realize that our Lady sanctified herself precisely in the place where she was. Who would have said that a woman, a young maiden filled with all virtue, who saw and spoke to God in her daily circumstances, would have the transcendent mission of bringing God to us? Each one of us can do the same. We can bring God with us everywhere.

We turn to you, Holy Mother, asking you to enlighten us, to make us each day more refined, with a greater desire to be better children of God, brothers and sisters of God, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit. May God bless you.


**25th Marian Family Day at the Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain (September 5, 2015)**

My dear brothers and sisters;

most dear families:

1. It gives me great joy to look out on the great number of you taking part in this Marian Day for the Family. Saint Josemaría asked our Lady to shine forth here, obtaining from God many spiritual graces in this place: conversions, vocations of self-giving to God, peace and harmony in families, faithful married love... “Therefore I would like there to be many confessinals,” he said, “so that people can purify themselves in the holy sacrament of Penance and—with their souls renewed—strengthen or renew their Christian life, learning to sanctify and love their work, and bringing into to their homes the peace and joy of Christ.”[1] Almost 50 years later we give thanks to God and our Lady of Torreciudad that those desires have become a happy reality.
Other circumstances have led to making this liturgical celebration especially solemn. First of all, because this Marian Day is now celebrating its 25th anniversary. Also it is taking place in the course of the Marian Year for the Family in the Prelature of Opus Dei, and on the eve of the World Meeting of Families, that the Pope will be presiding over within a few days in Philadelphia.

These coincidences move us to pray with greater intensity for the Synod of Bishops that will be held in Rome this coming October and to accompany all homes with our prayer. Since Pope Francis convoked the Synodal assembly, he has not ceased asking for special prayers from everyone for the results of this Synod. Let us echo this petition by passing it on to many other people. Years ago, St. John Paul II exhorted all Christians: “Family, become what you are.” [2] Let us echo these words, because all of us, individually and collectively, are involved with the Church in the apostolic task of evangelizing. My sisters and brothers, no one should abstain from taking part in this effort: we are the family of God.

2. The present pressure being exerted against the divine plan for the institution of the family is not hidden from anyone. “The family is experiencing,” the Roman Pontiff wrote, “a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children.” [3]

The attacks on the family are nothing new; we can’t let this discourage us, since God’s enemy has always tried to raise obstacles to the divine plan of creation and redemption. But Christ has promised his unfailing assistance to the Church: “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20). He has sent the Holy Spirit to the Church, and Jesus himself has remained in the Holy Eucharist under the Sacramental Species. Moreover, he has raised marriage between Christians to the dignity of a Sacrament, granting it special graces. Therefore we have no need to fear secular aggression. What we need to do is to pray with optimism and trust, backing up our prayer with the effort to be loyal to the demands of our Christian vocation day after day, each in the state to which God has called
us. And to affirm with strength and cordiality the true teaching about
marriage, offering parents and children our daily example, fully consistent
with the Church’s teachings.

Saint Josemaría gave thanks to God for so many Christian homes that
“are a shining witness of the great divine mystery of Christ’s loving union
with His Church which St. Paul calls sacramentum magnum, a great
sacrament (Eph 5:32).” And he added: “We must strive so that these cells
of Christianity may be born and may develop with a desire for holiness,
conscious of the fact that the Sacrament of Initiation—Baptism—confers
on all Christians a divine mission that each must fulfil in his own walk of
life.”[4] Let us unite ourselves to his prayer in heaven, and go to his
intercession as well as that of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, in our constant
prayer for the families of the whole world. The happiness of these married
couples with their children is very contagious and greatly helps people who
come to know this reality; and many conversions and changes of life result:
it is the effective apostolate of example.

3. As is evident, the readings of the Mass assure us that the divine
plans are always fulfilled, in spite of ourselves. We men can place obstacles
due to our lack of correspondence, but our Lord always triumphs. Who
would have imagined that the Messiah, born in a small out of the way
village like Bethlehem, and living in another practically unknown one, like
Nazareth, where he lived for 30 years sanctifying family life, was setting the
foundations for the joy of holy homes (see Micah 5:1-4; Mt 1:18-23). God
does not view events with our poor human vision; rather, in his infinite
wisdom and goodness, he draws good out of evil. But he counts on
Christians to spread the fruits of the redemption. Therefore I insist that, in
the authentic conduct of those who know they are God’s children, there is
no room for omissions or indifference. God and the world are awaiting us
each day.

What security is given to us by St. Paul’s words in the second reading:
“We know that in everything God works for good with those who love
him, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). As St. Josemaría
said, summing up this teaching of the Apostle: omnia in
bonum!—everything, even what might seem most negative, is the seed of a
good that God, in his providence, has prepared for those who love him.
Thus everything in the life of the home overflows with love and is an opportunity for holiness.

Millions of families all over the world, Christians and non-Christians, live in accord with the divine plan of creation. This doesn't make the “news,” since the good usually doesn’t create any noise, while contrary behavior unfortunately creates a lot of noise, and even scandal. Nevertheless, as the founder of Opus Dei said, “the normal thing is for the family to be united. There may be friction and differences, but that’s quite normal. In a certain sense it even adds flavor to our daily life. These problems are insignificant; time always takes care of them. What remains firm is love, a true and sincere love which comes from being generous and which brings with it a concern for one another, and which enables the members of the family to sense each other’s difficulties and offer tactful solutions.”

4. What can each one of us do? The Holy Father reminds us that “every Christian family above all can welcome Jesus, listen to him, speak with him, guard him, protect him, grow with him; and thus improve the world. Let us make room in our heart and in our day for the Lord. As Mary and Joseph did … They were not an artificial family, an unreal family. The family of Nazareth urges us to rediscover the vocation and mission of the family, of every family.” That is to say, it challenges us to be people who act normally, and who respect, love and serve others.

In a few minutes, our Lord will make himself present among us under the Sacramental Species. Let us foster the desire that the Eucharist, as Pope Benedict XVI wrote, will influence daily life ever more and more profoundly. “I encourage families in particular,” he said, “to draw inspiration and strength from this sacrament. The love between man and woman, openness to life, and the raising of children are privileged spheres in which the Eucharist can reveal its power to transform life and give it its full meaning.”

My dear sisters and brothers, the Marian feasts during this month are a good opportunity to entrust our petitions to our Lady, above all on the 8th, when we will celebrate liturgically Mary’s birth. Like small children with their mothers on the date of her birthday, let us also ask for a present for
ourselves: that she listen to our petitions; that she grant to the Church and the world the joy and peace they so much need. Over the past 25 years, whose anniversary we are celebrating today, so many thousands of happily married couples with their children have passed through this place, through the esplanade of this shrine, who have zealously and joyfully spread, with their daily life, the marvelous reality that what God has joined together man should not separate, because it is the sure path to reach heaven. Amen.


At the Inauguration of the Academic Year, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (October 5, 2015)

The Holy Mass that we celebrate today marks the beginning of a new academic year and also a new stage in our encounter with God. In this Marian time that we are celebrating in Opus Dei, I invite you to contemplate the example of our Lady, who from the moment of the Annunciation, and throughout her whole life, found in every activity an opportunity to be ever more intimately united with God.
The events in our life too, when we live them in accord with God’s plan, enable us to stay close to Him. St. Josemaría described this way of acting in clear words: “Many great things depend—don’t forget it—on whether you and I live our lives as God wants.”[1] And he invited us to “live every moment of our lives with a lively awareness of eternity.”[2] Our words can become instruments of God to bring souls to him; our actions, in union with Christ, can reflect God’s action on earth. Therefore, as Pope Francis invites us, “let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope!”[3]

This Eucharistic celebration is a privileged occasion for a new meeting with God in the course of the new academic year. If we wish, with the help of grace, we can weave a personal relationship with the Most Blessed Trinity that will give greater depth and strength to each moment of our work. Our celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice today is a prayer of petition for graces for the year that is beginning, and at the same time, a prayer of thanksgiving, because we are called to live with greater intensity this new trajectory of our earthly path.

The Eucharistic presence of our Lord is made more evident in the moments of adoration on Thursdays and in the celebrations of the Masses that take place in this Church. The sacrament of the Eucharist leads us to acts of thanksgiving and petition, as Blessed Alvaro del Portillo liked to pray: Thank you, forgive me, help me more!

We are all called to place Jesus—in the Sacred Host—at the center and root of our own spiritual life. The devotion with which we try to make daily visits to the Tabernacle, as well as the love with which many of you greet our Lord when offering up your day, should be a reminder of the presence of God with us in our ordinary life.

Eucharistic devotion leads us to offer our work and our study to our Lord, offering it for the intentions of the Roman Pontiff, especially in this time dedicated to reflection on the Christian family. Christ, Mary, the Pope, these are our great loves on earth. “Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam! All with Peter to Jesus through Mary!”[4] — as St. Josemaría liked to pray. Ask our Lord, who accompanies us with his real presence in the Tabernacle, to assist the Pope and the Synod Fathers during these days of the Synodal gathering on the family.
The votive Mass of the Holy Spirit that we are celebrating marks the opening of the academic year, but it also reminds us in a specific way of what it means to be a Christian. We Christians need to always seek to serve others better—our study or work companions, our families, the whole world—each one according to the specific vocation received from God, within the common universal call to holiness and apostolate.

Eucharistic adoration, study or work, prayer, are not unconnected moments in our daily activities, but are links in a chain that unites us to our Lord. They are actions through which we seek to be in constant conversation with God throughout the whole day, with the unity of life characteristic of the children of God.

We are living through moments of great hope for the future of the world and the Church. It depends on us, through our work well done in the presence of God, to see to it that the light of Christ’s teachings shines even amid the darkness, that the splendor of the truth once more shines forth in all social environments.

I don’t want to end without recalling that we are about to close the year of thanksgiving for the beatification of our beloved Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, first chancellor of this university and successor of St. Josemaría. From the first moment, mindful of the wishes of the founder of Opus Dei and of St. John Paul’s blessing on the birth of this university, Don Alvaro worked with great supernatural spirit to overcome many difficulties and bring about the reality that we contemplate today. This same spirit has to be kept alive now, since the University of the Holy Cross has to continue welcoming many people—priests, seminarians, laity, and religious—for the service of the Church.

His supernatural spirit led Blessed Alvaro to ask for help and advice from so many academics, friends and benefactors, some of whom are present at this Eucharist. We are well aware of the prayer, the material help and the support of so many people, and we extend our deepest thanks to you.

Christ’s presence in our daily life is the fruit of Mary’s intercession. Let us invoke her with faith in the rosary that the students, professors and non-teaching personnel pray in the chapel each day. To Mary, Mother of the
Church and Queen of the Family, we entrust all the families in the world. May our Lady, with her motherly help, teach us to abandon ourselves in the loving hands of our Father God. Amen.


Torna ai contenuti

At the priestly ordination of faithful of the Prelature at the Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain (September 6, 2015)

My dear sons who are about to be ordained,

my dear sisters and brothers:

Today is a day of deep and special gratitude to heaven for the priestly ordination of these three deacons, incardinated in the Prelature of Opus Dei. From the first moment of the celebration we have been accompanied by the sincere joy of the Entrance Antiphon, for the great gift that the Trinity is making to the Church today. Thanks be to God, as St. Josemaría wished, this ordination is part of an uninterrupted line going back to 1944. This reality invites us to pray for the new priests and for all the priests in the world, so that each of them identifies himself with the “good shepherd” Jesus speaks to us about with such great affection in the Gospel.

Good shepherds: that is what our Lord calls them and wishes them to be; and it is a call that brings with it the demand to behave with full and joyful fidelity to our Lord’s plans, based on prayer, on piety, on self-sacrifice, imitating Jesus. By his conduct, Jesus has shown us how a priest
should live, and also all Christians since, in receiving baptism, we have all been made sharers in his royal priesthood. That is, since each of us, each man and woman has been joined to the one priesthood of Christ, we should feel the need to accompany very closely the divine Word, the beloved Son of the Heavenly Father, sent to this world of ours to save us, to speak with each of us in the different circumstances of our ordinary life, as the founder of Opus Dei so often and with such great gratitude told us.

Let us all—and very especially the three being ordained—make the resolution to be very prayerful. Remember that our Lord, to fulfill the mission received from his heavenly Father, spent time (we could even say continued) in prayer, even pernoctans in oratione (Lk 6:12), spending the night in prayer, because it’s very certain that our life, that of each one of us, is worth what our prayer life is worth.[1]

And you three, my beloved sons, I ask particularly that you may love this spirit of prayer, both mental and vocal; and that you make a daily effort to attain on your part the response, the generosity that our Lord wants from his priests. St. Josemaría, referring to Jesus in the Tabernacle, urged us not to leave him alone, an invitation that we can also apply in all its depth to our daily piety. It is useful to meditate slowly on the words of the first reading: God chose us from all eternity, from before we were born, and we have to respond with refinement and loyalty, even though we are of such little worth.

The priesthood you are about to receive asks us, in following the Master’s footsteps, to learn to love sacrifice as generously as he did, who gave himself up to death, and death on the Cross, St. Paul tells us clearly. This has been brought home to us today with other words (words that moved our Father so deeply): “the love of Christ urges us on!” (2 Cor 5:14), Let us make Christ known with total faith, and also with generous mortification, with self-denial.

Today, many people seem frightened by the word “mortification,” as though it meant something sad and unattractive. Perhaps they forget that there is no true love, also in the exclusively human terrain, without sacrifice, without the decision to renounce one’s own ego in order to serve others with generosity and joy. They identify this word with great sacrifices
or penances, which we also should not fear if our Lord asks them of us. And they fail to appreciate the little daily details of yielding to and serving others, of making the life of those around us more pleasant, and also of not imposing our likes or foibles of temperament on those we live with, etc. I ask you—and everyone else as well—that, like St. Josemaría, you may fall in love with the word “service,” so as to always be available for the needs of others.

And above all, my dear ordinands, remember that from now on you are going to be Christ himself, especially in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance. Let us marvel at this great mercy of God, who wishes to make use of us to make present such great mysteries. Take loving care of the Holy Mass, day after day, and consider seriously that you are acting in persona Christi. He places himself at the disposition of your will, of your piety, of your love, of your words at the moment of the Eucharistic celebration and especially at the transubstantiation. Be deeply in love with the Sacrifice of the Altar, striving to understand ever better, although we will never fully comprehend it, the love of Christ in giving himself to all humanity and to each person. Let us consider what the Gospel text has reminded us of: “I have called you friends... and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” (Jn 15:9-17).

Also love very much sacramental Confession, going yourself to seek God’s forgiveness, to wash away your faults in the confessional. And always be prompt to provide that help whenever a soul asks you for it, at any time. It has been said—and it’s true—that the crisis this sacrament is now undergoing is due in good part to a crisis of the absence of confessors. Therefore, go every day to diligently impart God’s forgiveness. In doing so, show others mercy, understanding, giving encouragement and hope to the penitent, as Pope Francis recently said. Let us not reject anyone, guiding each person with sound doctrine, and giving the necessary formation. Be convinced that we are not wasting our time if we await souls with joy in the confessional.

Spread the word of God with depth and in an attractive way, drawing souls, each soul, towards sincere friendship with God the Father, with God the Son, and with God the Holy Spirit. Let us pray now and always for the Holy Father and his intentions, for all bishops and priests so that, fully
dedicated to our ministry, we will know how to give Christian life to the society in which we live, in which we have to be deeply immersed. Let us pray for my brother the Bishop of Barbastro, asking our Lord that there be an abundant harvest of holiness in this beloved diocese.

And always place yourselves under the protection of our Lady, of our Lady of the Angels of Torreciudad, in memory of this day. Mary is the mother of the Eternal Priest and of all priests who share in the one priesthood of Christ. Lady of ours, so venerated in this shrine, help all of us to learn to love the Blessed Trinity as you did.

I wish to congratulate the parents, brothers and sisters, and relatives of the three people being ordained, with the petition that you pray for them every day.

I ask all of you to commend to our Lord the apostolic work of the faithful of the prelature of Opus Dei throughout the world, and to also sustain me with your prayers and affection.

*Laus Deo Virginique Matri.* May God bless us and his blessed Mother accompany us.


Dialconal Ordination of Faithful of the Prelature, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (October 31, 2015)

My dear sons who are about to be ordained as deacons;

Dear brothers and sisters:

1. With deep and sincere joy, we are going to celebrate a “feast of the Church,” which in this case is the diaconal ordination of 27 faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei. The fact that it coincides with the solemnity of All Saints fills us with additional joy, and helps us to remember that all of us are called to holiness. The liturgy invites us to turn our eyes to Heaven, our
definite home, where we can unite ourselves to the multitude of saints. The Virgin Mary, our mother, will help us in our daily battle to serve God better.

St. John refers with moving words to “a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne... and crying out with a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!’” ([Revelation 7:9-10]).

Let us also remember the many people we have known who have already left this world in God’s grace, and who help us to thank our Lord for his marvelous call to rejoice in his presence forever. They carry in their hands palm branches, symbols of victory. So let us stir up our hope that God is waiting for us, and loves us with his infinite providence while we are journeying here below, in order to unite us to his love for all eternity.

Our Lord himself, in the Gospel of today’s Mass, shows us the demands incumbent on a Christian: the beatitudes, treasures that each of us should put into practice in accord with the call received from him. They represent a very attractive program that all the baptized should follow, precisely because they are Christians.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted... Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” ([Matthew 5:3-9]). Let us not think that this requires a gigantic effort or leads to a sad life. Although it’s true that the struggle for sanctity surpasses our natural capacities, it’s also true that divine grace gives us the possibility and the strength to go forward. So we need to have recourse to the sources of supernatural life: taking part in the Holy Mass with the nourishment of the Eucharist, sacramental Confession, prayer.

Beyond any doubt the happiest men and women in the world, who aspire to attain the joy of being always with God, have been and continue to be Christians loyal to Jesus Christ.

2. Now I would like to address the new deacons. Just as the apostles chose seven men to assist them in their ministry,[1] so now through the laying on of the bishop’s hands and the invocation of the Paraclete, our
Lord (because he is the one who has chosen you) will imprint on you a new seal, the diaconal character, with the mission of serving the Church and all souls, like Christ himself who, being Lord of all mankind, freely made himself a servant of all (see Jn 13, 13-17). You who within a short time will be ordained deacons, and who later will become priests, are consecrated “to serve.” You “are not being ordained to give orders or to attract attention,” wrote St. Josemaría, “but rather to give yourselves to the service of all souls in a divine and continuous silence.”[2]

The sacrament of Holy Orders confers on those who receive it, in different ways, the responsibility of being “the custodians and authoritative witnesses of the deposit of truth consigned to the Church, and likewise the ministers of charity. These are two aspects that go together. They must always be mindful of the inseparable nature of this twofold service, which in fact is only one: truth and love, revealed and given by the Lord Jesus. In this regard, their service is first and foremost a service of love: and the charity they live and foster is inseparable from the truth they preserve and pass on. Truth and love are the two faces of the same gift that comes from God and, thanks to the apostolic ministry, is safeguarded in the Church and handed down to us, to our present time!”[3] Consider how marvelous are Christ’s words, which St. Josemaría so liked to savor: *Euge serve bone et fidelis* (Mt 25:23); well done, good and faithful servant. Here we see how lovingly God himself looks upon us every day, moment after moment.

With the Year of Mercy about to begin, I would like to remind you of this reality, both you who are being ordained and all of those present. “Mercy is the second name of Love,”[4] it is the way in which the merciful face of God the Father has been manifested visibly to us in Jesus Christ. For there is no greater proof of love then giving one’s life for one’s brothers and sisters. And this is what our Lord has done on the wood of the Cross, and we have to follow in his footsteps.

In a few months time, you will be consecrated as priests. Then you will be ministers of divine mercy, strengthening souls with the Eucharist and the other sacraments—in a special way through the administration of the sacrament of Penance. And you will fortify them with the preaching of the divine word, working with the same sentiments as Jesus who, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be
grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (see Phil 2:5-8). But starting right now, try to fulfill your duties with an abundance of mercy. By treating with supernatural and human refinement the people you meet on your path, you will come to see humanity as an inheritance that our Lord has placed in your hands.

The invitation to service, valid for all Christians, means “to a great extent caring for the vulnerable... Theirs are the suffering, fragile and downcast faces which Jesus tells us specifically to look at and which he asks us to love. With a love that takes shape in our actions and decisions.”[5]

We are all invited to examine how we can serve our neighbors better, above all those who are closest to us, with specific deeds: always, and in a special way in the upcoming Year of Mercy.

3. I accompany with all my heart the families and friends of the new deacons. I remind all of you of the duty to pray for these brothers of ours and for all the Church’s ministers; above all, for our Holy Father Francis. Let us also pray that there be many priestly ordinations in the Church. I thank Cardinal Vallini, vicar of the Pope for the diocese of Rome, who has told me that he is praying for you and who expresses his gratitude for your decision to follow Christ so closely.

Before finishing, I recommend that you continue keeping very present the needs of families. A few days after the conclusion of the Synod, our prayer has to become more constant, more trusting, more persevering, so that the conclusions of this assembly may serve as a guide for a greater fidelity to the divine plan of salvation, which passes through this institution founded by God in creation.

Let us listen to the Pope’s suggestions, going better prepared to the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. May all of us, like our Lady, on receiving Jesus bring him with us and make him known to those around us.

Praised be Jesus Christ.

[1] See the Prayer for diaconal ordination.


At the Inauguration of the Academic Year, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (October 5, 2015)

Most reverend eminences, your excellencies, professors, technical assistants, students, ladies and gentlemen:

The Ordinary Synod on the Family has begun, and this new academic year has also begun. To our prayers for an event so important for the life of the whole Church, we would like to add and offer the academic work that (although never completely absent from the horizon of a student or professor during the summer) today once again takes on a special importance, on the occasion of this solemn inauguration.

What better way is there to help the Church during this academic year then with our persevering personal effort in this university work? Study is not merely an arduous task or an academic formality that needs to be carried out rapidly in order to afterwards go on to other things, to “real” life. We have to look at study with gratitude because it is an opportunity that God our Lord offers us, although it entails effort and tiredness. Study offers us, above all, the opportunity to make new discoveries in our intellectual life and to advance in our spiritual life. How joyful we are to find ourselves once more at the beginning of a path on which, as we already know, we will encounter our Lord! He is always ready to enlighten us, to help us, to sustain us. So we want to be attentive to his presence in our lives in order to receive his light, and therefore to deepen in our knowledge of
the truth, of the only Truth, which comes from Him. Yes, we also want to
persevere in the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42), not only for our
personal benefit but also for the growth of the whole of society.

In study we encounter God and we encounter others. These years of
study in Rome do not separate us from the immediate and specific concerns
of our world, of our place of origin. On the contrary, this period of
intellectual deepening helps us to understand better and to concern
ourselves more fully with the challenges of our time, a time exposed to the
danger of ignorance, of an obscuring of the truth. It is in the lack of truth
that we encounter the real poverty of mankind, from which stem so many
other kinds of poverty. Study does not isolate us in a theoretical world, far
from humanity; we do not enclose ourselves in an ivory tower.

On the contrary! As Pope Benedict XVI often emphasized: “Faith has
a specific content. It is not a vague spirituality, a feeling that is indefinable
because of its transcendence. God has acted and precisely he is the one who
has spoken. He has really done something and really said something.
Certainly faith is, in first place, trust in God, a living relationship with him.
But the God in whom we trust has a face and has given us his Word.”[1]

We need to listen to this Word and understand its fruitfulness: it is the
only thing capable of truly nourishing this world of ours today. We find the
same idea in the first encyclical of Pope Francis, when he speaks of the
relationship between science and faith: “Nor is the light of faith, joined to
the truth of love, extraneous to the material world, for love is always lived
out in body and spirit; the light of faith is an incarnate light radiating from
the luminous life of Jesus. It also illumines the material world, trusts its
inherent order and knows that it calls us to an ever-widening path of
harmony and understanding... By stimulating wonder before the profound
mystery of creation, faith broadens the horizons of reason to shed greater
light on the world which discloses itself to scientific investigation.”[2]

If we want to “broaden horizons” and bring the light of truth to today’s
world, we have to begin with ourselves and apply these lights of God to our
own life, with small but constant personal conversions that little by little
will build up in us a unity of life, which St. Josemaría saw as central to a
truly Christian life. Thus study will lead us to God if it becomes an
opportunity to strive for sanctity and “to cooperate with God in the sanctification of the people with whom we work.... To work in this way is to pray. To study thus is likewise prayer. Research done with this spirit is prayer too. We are always doing the same thing, for everything can be prayer, all activity can and should lead us to God, nourish our intimate dealings with him, from morning to night. Any honorable work can be prayer and all prayerful work is apostolate. In this way the soul develops a unity of life, which is both simple and strong.”[3]

Pope Francis’ recent encyclical contains a recurring expression that offers a key for all who want to live their faith consistently: “everything is connected.”[4] Pointing specifically to some errors of those who make man the center of everything today, he states: “When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves.”[5] To know God, to understand ourselves, to convert in order to help others: here is the responsibility to which study spurs us. Having given me the opportunity to study in Rome, God has made me a “responsible administrator” called to care for others and all created realities. Our responsibility is clearly reflected in the Pope’s invitation: “Work should be the setting for this rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God.”[6]

Once again, this is not just a theoretical concern. This responsibility should influence our daily life, striving, as the Holy Father says, to take on another “lifestyle,” accepting “the duty to care for creation through little daily actions.”[7] “We must not think,” stresses Pope Francis, “that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread.”[8] “Everything is connected”: our perseverance in our study, our ascetical struggle, our concern for the other students and professors, our care for creation and, I would like to add, our respect for the work of the others, especially for the hidden work of all those in the technical and secretarial offices, who contribute to making our life easier and more pleasant.
Responsibility in everything and for everyone: neither study nor academic research should isolate us from the others—on the contrary! There is no university if there is not a constant dialogue with others, and openness towards the other disciplines, a reciprocal help in the search for the one Truth and, at the same time, if one is not ready to listen to those who think differently, for example, because they come from different cultures. The Holy Father invites us to “regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.”[9] The university is perhaps the best place to follow the example of “Saint Therese of Lisieux [who] invites us to practice the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile, or any small gesture that sows peace and friendship.”[10]

I would like to focus here on an important event, which involves all of us, not only because of the fact of living in Rome, but also as students and professors: the opening of the Jubilee Year of Mercy. There is no sector of life that is free from tensions and misunderstandings, and the university community is not exempt from difficulties. I am not referring only to the examinations. The university world has its own demands, which are logical consequence of the high goal that we are striving for: to know the truth that comes from the Word of God and to live in a way that accords with it. God himself, precisely because he loves us, is demanding with his children—both demanding and merciful. Truth and mercy are intimately united in him.

Pope Benedict XVI asked himself this question: “The truth, at least as it is presented by the faith of the Church, isn’t it perhaps a goal that is too high or too difficult for man?... Certainly the path that leads to the truth and to the good is a high and arduous one,” the Pope emeritus said, “and not a comfortable path. It challenges man.”[11]

This challenge can frighten us, as it frightens so many people of our epoch who prefer to flee from the demands of the truth and to isolate themselves in the comfort of their own ego. Nevertheless, God never abandons us to a disincarnate and cold truth, which would be an insupportable yoke for mankind. In Jesus Christ, said Pope Benedict, “the Logos, the Truth in person, is at the same time also the reconciliation, the forgiveness that transforms us beyond all of our personal capacities and
incapacities.”[12] Thus, with our Lord beside us, “the yoke of the truth is easy to bear (see Mt 11:30).”

The opening of the Year of Mercy will help us understand that “everything is connected”: that truth and mercy are rooted in the same fountain of love. Our study will lead us to realize the demands of charity; it will help us see the need to live in accord with those demands, in our work, in the little things of our ordinary life, and in our relationships with others.

While we accompany the Ordinary Synod on the Family with our prayer, let us entrust to our Lady of the Rosary these intentions and the new academic year 2015-2016, which I declare inaugurated.


[2] Pope Francis, Encyclical Lumen Fidei (June 29, 2013,) no. 34.


[5] Ibid. no. 115.

[6] Ibid., no. 127.

[7] Ibid., no. 211.

[8] Ibid., no. 212.

[9] Ibid., no. 229.

[10] Ibid., no. 230.


[12] Ibid.
Words on the Occasion of the Blessing of the Reconstruction Work of the Old Rectory of Pallerols, Spain (September 3, 2015)

My dear brothers and sisters, my dear sons and daughters:

I cannot hide the fact that I am moved on being here. Seventy-eight years have gone by since our Father passed through this region, with his heart oppressed by the tragedy that was ravaging the country, and also by the thought of the people of the Work who had remained in places where they were in danger. Part of the inner turmoil he suffered here was the thought that: “I can’t abandon those who, in following the path of the Work, have put themselves in God’s hands.” And therefore he had doubts and a deep unrest, because he did not want to flee from his marvelous duty to help his daughters and sons.

The life of the saints, as we very well know, has a very great significance. Their passage on earth is a “passage of God,” because God illumines their souls and their lives. And this was true of St. Josemaría. Therefore, when we were praying, my thoughts went out to the whole world. Pallerols is not only a specific place located in this region. Pallerols forms part of the life of many women and men living on various continents, and who want to follow the footsteps of daily faithfulness that St. Josemaría always undertook. Therefore they are not far away: I am sure that, knowing we are celebrating this ceremony, they have united themselves to us so that all of us have the desire to follow God’s will. We should be truly joyful, realizing our little value, and knowing that our merciful and omnipotent God, who has no limitations, nevertheless wants to count for his divine plans on many women and men. Let us say Yes to him!

Later we will read the Gospel passage where Christ accompanies the two disciples, Cleophas and his companion, on the road to Emmaus.

Our Father, with those very apt phrases that he employed and also lived, used to say that now, after the Resurrection, Emmaus is the whole world: Emmaus is the place where we can encounter God and meet with
God. Let us ask our Lord truly—each and every one of us—that if our vision is blinded by any scales, we may come to see Christ, realizing that he is our great companion. I suggest that you read the homily in which our Father describes this scene. Apart from the fact that it is so beautiful from the spiritual point of view, which is what matters in the end, it is also very beautiful for its literary style.

Let us ask our Lord, as Cleophas and his companion did: “Stay with us” (Lk 24:29). I heard St. Josemaría comment on this many times. It was always a response of love to the encounter that results from Christ coming to seek us. And we have to tell him as the disciples did: “stay with us.” Our Father used to say that our Lord will stay if each of us strives to have a life of intense and continuous piety. He will stay if we are capable, as he was, of putting ourselves at the service of those we live with. He will stay, moreover, if we know how to say No to all the wiles with which the devil wants to trick us. We can be very certain that God wants to remain with us. Let us do all we can, each and every one of us, to remain with our Lord. Then we will be very happy and share in God’s happiness and also human happiness.

Let us learn from our Father: wherever he went, he sowed the joy of God and the joy of divine filiation. Each and every one of us is in the same circumstances: with God’s help, with the help of our Lord who never leaves us, who comes to meet us, we are capable of carrying out an intense apostolate, forgetting about ourselves. Let us pour ourselves out, as St. Josemaría did, who ended his life physically exhausted, but so happy that he had spent his life for God, for the Work, for all mankind.

I also ask you that, in this ceremony, we pray ardently for the Pope, so that he feels the company and the affection of all Catholics. At the same time, I ask that you pray with great strength and perseverance for the upcoming Synod. Specifically that the family not be denatured and that what Christ instituted as marriage be reaffirmed, and that many families throughout the whole world may give witness to the love they have received from God in living their married life and living their family life with the greatest possible generosity.
We put ourselves in the hands of our Lady and tell her: on the one hand, give us “the rose” that you want us to present to your Son, to the Father and to the Holy Spirit; and at the same time, tell us what “rose” we can offer you today and every day. Let it be small, but so full of love as when our Father, from time to time, would give us a rose and tell us to “bring this to our Lord, bring it to our Lady.” Let us consider what we are going to bring to our Lady today, what we are going to bring, with our Lady, to our Lord.

May God bless you!

(The Gospel passage of Emmaus was read here: Lk 24:13–16, 28:35)

I would like to add, to the words I just said to you, that you should not fail to pray for and commend to God the archbishop of this diocese, praying for him and his intentions. At the same time, do not fail to pray for and raise your petitions to God for the vicar general, for all the authorities of the diocese, and also for all the priests, asking that the seminarians be multiplied, but geometrically, so that we can count on many ministers of God in this diocese and in the whole world.

Articles and Interviews

Prologue to “The Christmas Crèche, its Figures and Symbols,” an Exposition Organized by the Santa Clara Royal Monastery of Carrión de los Condes, Spain

Once again this year the Santa Clara Royal Monastery of Carrión de los Condes has organized a large exposition of Nativity scenes for the great feast of Christmas. This is a very worthwhile initiative that I am happy to
bless, since it meets an especially pressing need: that of reminding the world of the fundamental fact that has united heaven and earth—the birth of the Son of God, made flesh for us and for our salvation, as we profess in the Creed.

Faithful to this tradition, the Claretian mothers are continuing in our day and age the enthusiasm that led St. Francis of Assisi to express this holy event in a dramatic scene for the first time, marking out a before and after in the history of humanity. This took place in a forest near Greccio, a town in Umbria, Italy, in the 13th century. Francis had just made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which likely led to his devotion to the Most Holy Humanity of Christ becoming even more ardent. In Rome, he asked Pope Honorius III for permission to set up a living Nativity scene, which would remind people of the night of the first Christmas. With the help of a loyal friend, he was able to carry out his desire: “To vividly evoke the memory of the heavenly Child who had been born in Bethlehem, and to bring to the attention of the people and to my heart the discomfort of his needs as a baby, seeing him lying on a bit of hay, reclining in a manger, warmed by the breath of an ox and a mule.”[1]

On that Christmas night in 1223, the “poor man” of Assisi crowned his dream, experiencing visually the greatness and novelty of the mystery of the Incarnation and enabling the people from the surrounding towns to share in his joy. According to Thomas of Celano, St. Francis’ first biographer, the local people gathered in the forest of Greccio, carrying lighted torches and candles to illuminate the night. Francis, dressed in the vestments of a deacon, sang the Gospel of the Nativity in the Mass celebrated by a priest who was also deeply moved. Francis gave a sermon in which he called Jesus the “Child of Bethlehem.” He stood alongside the Nativity scene, and—according to his biographer—was filled with piety and an ineffable joy “whenever he named the Child of Bethlehem or simply said ‘Jesus,’ and seemed to be tasting the sweetness of that name.”[2]

Pope Benedict XVI referred to this event a few years ago in a general audience on the meaning of Christmas. “Celano narrates that, on that Christmas night, Francis was given a marvellous vision. He saw a little child lying still in a manger; the child woke up because Francis approached. And he adds: “This vision was not different than real life, since through the
work of his grace acting by way of his holy servant Francis, the Child Jesus was resurrected in the hearts of many people who had forgotten him, and this was deeply impressed on his loving memory’ (*Vita prima* no. 86).”[3] The Pope added that that first representation of the Nativity was, for the life of the faithful, “the discovery that God reveals himself in the tender limbs of the Child Jesus. Thanks to St. Francis, the Christian people have been able to perceive that, at Christmas, God truly has become ‘Emmanuel,’ God-with-us, from whom no barrier or distance can separate us.”[4]

Also in our day it is very necessary to “resurrect” in the hearts of believers the conviction that the eternal Son of God, moved by his mercy (by his condescension, as the early Fathers of the Church said), truly became one of us. He has taken upon himself our weaknesses, except for sin, to redeem us from our faults. The holy and eternal God, who cannot die, became man in order to suffer death like us, and thus free us from the devil’s tyranny and make us children of God.

The liturgical celebration of Jesus’ birth, with all the many manifestations of popular piety that accompany it, is a moment of great importance for enabling this truth to shine forth before the eyes and in the hearts of the Christian people, and also for so many men and women who, throughout the world, celebrate Christmas in some way even without realizing its full meaning. Therefore setting up the Nativity scene in homes and in cities is a strong sign of faith, capable of awakening a world that is running the risk of forgetting the eternal realities and focusing only on what is passing.

Let us try to revive in ourselves the same wonder and enthusiasm that St. Francis had on that Christmas night in Umbria. The Greek root of the word “enthusiasm” contains a reference to the divine inspiration stirred up in those who receive it: passion, joy, wonder, rapture, fervor of spirit... And this really happens when we consider the meaning of the birth of the Child in Bethlehem. His lessons of humility, poverty, abandonment, are always timely, and perhaps more so in our day and age, marred by tensions that lead to forgetting about God and rejecting our neighbor.
In the Child Jesus the God who is Love is made manifest: a defenseless God, who renounces the use of force, because he wants to be accepted freely by mankind. His birth amid the poverty of Bethlehem, unnoticed by anyone, except Mary and Joseph, speaks to us of the urgent need to get out of ourselves in order to place ourselves joyfully at the service of others, especially those in most need. “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” our Lord said (Mt 18:3). In order to truly understand the mystery of the Nativity, we need to foster the attitude of a small child, who puts his trust entirely in his father and mother, and strive to become like the eternal Son of God, made the son of man.

But let us not view what happened at Christmas as something distant in time, which only on these special occasions becomes relevant again. As St. Josemaría de Balaguer, founder of Opus Dei, wrote when he was he was still a young priest: “The humility of Jesus: in Bethlehem, in Nazareth, on Calvary. But more humiliation and more self-abasement still in the Sacred Host: more than in the stable, more than in Nazareth, more than on the Cross.”[5] He stressed over and over again, always with new accents, that the crib of the Infant God is a teaching chair for all the virtues. And this holy priest taught us that, just as in those first moments of Jesus’ earthly life, we also find our Lord defenseless in the holy Mass and in the Tabernacle. There Jesus awaits our gratitude, our company, our enthusiasm before the reality of a hidden God, who deigns to remain with us to the end of time, hidden under the veil of bread and wine.

Let us ask God the Father, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that on this great feast of Christmas we may learn to recognize Jesus in our neighbor—in the sick, in the poor, in those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness—and that we may accompany him in the Tabernacles where he really dwells out of love for us. Let us visit him often in the “perennial Bethlehem of the Tabernacle,”[6] as St. Josemaría called it, and let us make his real presence known to many other people. “Then there may happen to us too what Thomas of Celano, referring to the experience of the shepherds on the Holy Night (see Lk 2:20), recounts with regard to those who were present at the event in Greccio: ‘each one went home filled with ineffable joy’ (Vita Prima, no. 86).”[7]
The Year of Mercy convoked by the Holy Father Francis is very timely in this regard, to help us place our trust firmly in our Lord, for in Bethlehem we contemplate a marvelous manifestation of divine Mercy.

This is the desire and the prayer that I raise up to heaven, asking God for abundant grace for all Christians, in a special way for those who decide to honor the birth of the Son of God by setting up a Nativity scene in their homes, or by piously visiting such a scene in any corner of the world.

+ Javier Echevarría
Prelate of Opus Dei


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Monthly Meditations on the Works of Mercy: December 2015

The Extraordinary Jubilee convoked by Pope Francis places mercy at the center of attention on our Christian path. The Holy Father writes that mercy is “a key word that indicates God’s action towards us. He does not
limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible.”[1]

Each of God’s children can be a witness to his love in our own life, and also to the fact that we are called to respond to this love with love. The Pope invites everyone to be bearers of God’s mercy, which we have personally experienced so many times. We need only remember how often God forgives us—always!—in the sacrament of Penance. Therefore the upcoming months should be “a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.”[2]

Our Lord’s closeness should never be for us something abstract; it has to be shown each day in specific deeds, in the “intentions, attitudes, and behaviors that are shown in daily living.”[3] The successor of Peter writes: “The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. He feels responsible; that is, he desires our well-being and he wants to see us happy, full of joy, and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other.”[4]

Thus the works of mercy that our Lord passed on to his Church take on great importance. Jesus Christ, “the face of the Father’s mercy,” invites Christians to turn their eyes to Him constantly and attentively, with the desire to unite ourselves to his life, to imitate Him just as little children imitate their parents or older siblings.

St. Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, had a passionate concern for the corporal and spiritual works of mercy during his earthly journey, following Jesus’ example. As he wrote in one of his homilies: “It is easy to understand the impatience, anxiety and uneasiness of people whose naturally Christian soul stimulates them to fight the personal and social injustice which the human heart can create. So many centuries of men living side by side and still so much hate, so much destruction, so much fanaticism stored up in eyes that do not want to see and in hearts that do not want to love!”[5]

St. Josemaría continues by describing some of the evils that afflict the world: “The good things of the earth, monopolized by a handful of people; the culture of the world, confined to cliques. And, on the outside, hunger
for bread and education. Human lives—holy, because they come from God—treated as mere things, as statistics.”[6]

Seeing the absence of mercy and authentic fraternity, we can’t let ourselves become discouraged. Rather we should heed the advice of St. John of the Cross: “Where there is no love, put love—and you will find love.”[7] We are called—each and every one of us!—to be other Christs, Christ himself; and so to act in his name, spreading charity everywhere. St. Josemaría also said that Jesus is “continually inviting us to put his new commandment of love—the mandatum novum—into practice... We must learn to recognize Christ when he comes out to meet us in our brothers, the people around us. No human life is ever isolated. It is bound up with other lives. No man or woman is a single verse; we all make up one divine poem which God writes with the cooperation of our freedom.”[8]

Perhaps someone could think, especially in the more developed countries, that advances in social and health care, labor agreements, etc., make the traditional works of mercy unnecessary, or even superfluous. But this isn’t so! Even in the most fully developed countries, many people still fall sway to poverty, and lack the most basic needs or suffer from loneliness and abandonment, despite having material means at their disposal. Years ago, the founder of Opus Dei accurately observed that, when historical circumstances seem to have overcome misery and pain, precisely then will the acute need for true Christian fraternity become even more urgent, a fraternity that can detect where someone is in need of consolation, including amidst apparent overall well-being.

With God’s help, throughout these months I plan to offer some considerations on each of the fourteen works of mercy, spiritual and corporal, with the hope that they will leave a deeper impression on our daily lives. Amid the ups and downs of each day—in our work, family life, and relationships with others—the Master is inviting us to identify ourselves with Him.

In this way, our earthly journey alongside Christ can become a “school of mercy.”


[2] Ibid., no. 3.
[3] Ibid., no. 9.

[4] Ibid.


[6] Ibid.


Torna ai contenuti
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Novenas to St. Josemaría in Chinese
(Taiwan and Hong Kong)

Five novenas to St. Josemaría are now available in Chinese: for the sick, for marriage, for the family, for work, and for asking for forgiveness. In Hong Kong, Spring Publications has published the five novenas separately. They were presented at the city’s Book Fair in July.

In Taiwan, a single volume containing three of the novenas was published: those for the sick, for the family, and for finding work. They are being distributed in Kaohsiung, Taichung, and Taipei, as well as other cities of the island.

Torna ai contenuti

Devotion Throughout the World

A bust in Sicily

The Santonoceto High School in Acireale, Sicily now has, since the past July 4, a bronze bust of St. Josemaría presiding over the central patio of the building. After the inauguration ceremony, Bishop Antonino Raspanti of Acierale celebrated Holy Mass in honor of St. Josemaría. The bust is the work of Mauro Gelardi, a Sicilian sculptor.

At the Geneva Book Exhibition, Switzerland

A special stand presented the books of St. Josemaría at the Geneva Book Exhibition, during its 29th annual literary fair. In an effort to make the writings of St. Josemaría better known, those manning the stand distributed to visitors sheets inscribed with various points from The Way.

On Italian television

On Sunday, November 1, Solemnity of All Saints, the program “In his Image” on the Italian public television channel Rai 1 broadcast brief summaries of the lives of St. Josemaría, St. John Bosco, and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, to show that the call to holiness is a vocation common to all Christians.
Hundredth Anniversary of St. Josemaría in Logroño

The exposition hall of the city council of Logroño, Spain, held an exposition in October presenting the life of St. Josemaría Escrivá on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his arrival in the city (1915-2015).

The head of the diocesan press office, Justo García Turzal, together with the delegate for the University of Navarra in La Rioja, Mery Juarros, and the speaker for the centennial of the founder of Opus Dei in Logroño, Gaspar Perez, presided over the commemorative ceremonies in the Riojan capital. Among the activities, one of special interest was a photographic gallery of the places in the city connected with the life of the founder of Opus Dei in the years of his youth. Manuscripts of his works and some audiovisuals on his life were also shown. On October 23, the priest and historian Jaume Toldrá gave a conference on “St. Josemaría Escrivá: the Footsteps of a Saint.”

In connection with the centennial, a free application for mobile phones was created to show the parts of Logroño that were important in the life of the saint, among them, the parish of St. James, the Sagasta Institute, and the city’s seminary.

Josemaría Escrivá was born in Barbastro, Huesca, in 1902, and moved with his family to Logroño in 1915. It was in this city that his vocation was awakened, on seeing the footprints in the snow of the bare feet of a discalced Carmelite. He did his high school studies in what is now the Sagasta Institute. In 1917 he entered the seminary as a non-resident student, since he continued to live with his family. In 1920 he transferred to the seminary of Saragossa, where he was ordained a priest in 1925.

Route of St. Josemaría Escrivá in Barbastro
The Businessmen’s Association of Barbastro, Spain, has inaugurated the *Route of St. Josemaría*, an itinerary aimed at making known the most important places in the infancy and early childhood of the founder of Opus Dei in the Somontano region. The route begins at the site of St. Josemaría’s birth, fronting the market square. It also visits the textile business where his father worked, his mother’s home, and the school of the *Escuelas Pías* (Piarist order), where he attended school before his family moved to Logroño.

The cathedral and the diocesan museum are other stops on this route, as well as the museum of the Claretian Martyrs, the monastery of Our Lady of El Pueyo, and the Shrine of Torreciudad.

The itinerary also includes the City Hall of Barbastro, which named St. Josemaría a “favorite son” in 1947 and awarded him the city’s golden medal in 1975. The project is backed by the diocese of Barbastro and the city of Barbastro. The Businessmen’s Association plans to include this initiative in the religion tourism routes and specifically the Marian routes.

The Way: Five Million Copies

*The Way*, the first book written by St. Josemaría, has passed the five million mark in number of copies printed. Since its first printing in 1939, it has been translated into 51 languages with a total of 512 different editions and reprintings.

In 1966, during an interview in *Le Figaro*, the author explained how *The Way* had been written: “I wrote a good part of that book in 1934, summarizing my priestly experience for the benefit of all the souls with whom I was in contact—whether they were in Opus Dei or not. I never suspected that thirty years later it would be spread so widely—millions of copies in so many languages.” He advised people to read it “with at least some supernatural spirit, interior life, and apostolic feeling. It is not a code for the man of action. The books aim is to help one to become God’s friend, to love him, and to serve everyone.”
The book contains 999 points for personal meditation, born of the priestly work and prayer life of St. Josemaría. It covers a wide variety of topics in Christian life: love of God, character, apostolate, prayer, work, and virtues.

Seventh St. Josemaría Escrivá Conference on the Arts

On November 11, the poet Carlos Murciano, recipient of the Spanish national prize for poetry and for children’s and young people’s literature, gave the Seventh Annual St. Josemaría Conference on the Arts, in the Moncloa Student Residence in Madrid. This academic act honors each year artists who have stood out for the quality of their work and for its strongly Christian meaning. St. Josemaría began the Moncloa Residence with the desire that university students could pursue their studies in an environment of freedom, academic excellence, and work well done, in order to serve society better by cultivating a greater sensitivity towards all that is truly human, as the basis for a trusting relationship with God. Since its start, many artists, writers and poets have lived in and been associated with this student residence.

Other New Publications

Books of St. Josemaría:

Camino, Mexico City, Minos, 2015, 65th Mexican edition.

Santo Rosario, Mexico City, Minos, 2015, 30th and 31st Mexican editions.

Amis de Dieu, Yaoundé, Editions Masseu, 2015, First Cameroon edition of Friends of God.


Amici di Dio, Milan, Ares, 2015, 11th Italian printing of Friends of God.

É Gesù che passa, Milan, Ares, 2015, 10th Italian printing of Christ Is Passing By.


In addition the following individual homilies have been published:


With the Strength of Love, Mexico City, Minos, 2015, 1st Mexican edition.

Books about St. Josemaría

Escriva de Balaguer a Catalunya, 1913-1974. Petjades de sant Josepmaria; Masbeu, Josep; published by the Abbey of Montserrat, [“Scripta et Documenta,”no. 103], 2015, 1st edition.


Josemaría Escrivá y Alvaro del Portillo en el Puente de Vallecas, García Heras, José Luis; Madrid, 2015, 1st edition.

Historia de un burro. En los enseñanzas de san Josemaría, de Azeveda, Hugo; Madrid, Palabra, 2015, 1st edition.


Torna ai contenuti
News
Some Diocesan Assignments Received by Priests of the Prelature

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.

New Centers of the Prelature

The vicars of the respective circumscriptions have established new centers of the Prelature in the following cities: two in Villa María, Córdoba, Argentina; one in Frankfurt/Main, Germany; one in Santa Ana, El Salvador; one in Trieste, Italy; and one in Pasig, the Philippines.

Twenty-fifth Marian Family Day at Torreciudad

On September 5th, the shrine of Torreciudad celebrated its 25th Marian Family Day. Since 1990 the shrine has hosted a yearly Marian pilgrimage of families, a festive congress of prayer to Our Lady of Torreciudad.

The 25th Family Day brought together some 18,000 people. The Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, presided at Mass on the esplanade of the shrine. In his homily, he urged people to pray for the families of refugees seeking asylum in Europe, and also for the Synod of Bishops on the Family that was soon to take place in Rome. “Since Pope Francis convoked the Synodal assembly,” Bishop Echevarría said, “he has not ceased asking for special prayers from everyone for the results of this Synod. Let us echo this petition by passing it on to many people.” The Prelate also urged, citing words of Pope Francis, that the family might
“rediscover its vocation and mission,” through an evangelization that includes everyone.
Pontifical Appointment

On May 4, 2015, Rev. Josep Ignasi Saranyana Closa, ordinary professor emeritus of History of Theology at the University of Navarra in Spain, was named a member of the Pontifical Committee of Historical Sciences.

The Holy Father Receives the Auxiliary Vicar and Vicar General of Opus Dei in Audience

On October 30, 2015, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Auxiliary Vicar of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, and the Vicar General, Msgr. Mariano Fazio. By a decree dated December 9, 2014, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, had shared with Msgr. Ocáriz his executive power and the matters the statutes reserve to the Prelate. On the same date, he named Msgr. Fazio as Vicar General.

During the audience with Pope Francis, Msgr. Ocáriz explained to the Holy Father the developments in the government of the Prelature, after the recent appointments.

The Holy Father expressed his thanks for the work that the Prelature is carrying out and imparted his apostolic blessing.

Other Publications of Interest


Fiftieth Anniversary of Opus Dei’s Apostolic Work with Women in Australia

November 6 marked the 50th anniversary of the arrival in Australia of the first women to establish the apostolic work of Opus Dei there. In commemoration of this date, faithful of the Prelature, cooperators, and friends took part in Masses of thanksgiving celebrated in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and New Zealand.

Young women taking part in the means of Christian formation gathered in several centers of Opus Dei to celebrate the event and recall the first steps in their country. A news presentation for the occasion offered
information on the beginning and development of some apostolic initiatives, both in Australia and New Zealand.

The Prelate of Opus Dei wrote a letter from Rome, thanking God for the apostolic work during this half-century and encouraging them to undertake “a daring apostolate” based on “interior life, unity and fraternity,” following “the legacy of St. Josemaría,” which will assure “the supernatural effectiveness of their apostolic efforts.”
INITIATIVES

• In Brief
Some Apostolic Activities Organized by the Faithful of the Prelature

The initiatives described in this section are educational, social, and cultural activities brought forward by faithful of the Prelature and cooperators together with many other people, both Catholics and non-Catholics. Those who undertake and direct these activities (taking on full responsibility for them, including their financial aspects) are trying to respond to specific local needs without any discrimination regarding race, religion, or social condition.

The Prelature of Opus Dei, through agreements with the organizers, or through the guidelines established by the statutes of each entity, contributes to the development of these social initiatives by providing Christian doctrinal and moral orientation, and priestly service, always with full respect for the freedom of people’s consciences.

The Alvaro del Portillo Social Project, Madrid

The “Alvaro del Portillo Social Project” is an initiative at the parish of St. Raymond Nonnatus, in the Madrid district of Vallecas, which arose in connection with the beatification of the first successor of St. Josemaría. Aimed at the poorest and most vulnerable people in the neighborhood (children, the aged, the abandoned, the indigent), it seeks to meet their basic needs and integrate them into the parochial community. In its first year of operation, 30 separate projects were begun, benefiting more than 1,500 people. Following the example of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, who gave catechism classes in the parish in 1934, many parishioners at St. Raymond Nonnatus dedicate time to assisting those who have been overlooked by society.

One of the most important services of this social work is the St. Joseph family dining room, where some 250 hot meals are served each day.
same facilities are used for classes in cooking and other professional
training courses. In addition, from Monday to Friday, volunteers distribute
non-perishable food to 200 needy families.

Project Simeon is another initiative underway. This involves visiting
elderly people who live alone, and providing whatever assistance is possible.

Project Lazarus seeks to provide assistance for about 20 homeless
people. It offers them facilities for bathing and washing their clothes, while
also helping them to reintegrate into society. This service is complemented
by the Martha and Mary initiative, which seeks to encourage them to be
useful and responsible in caring for the parish and the facilities used for
these social initiatives. Finally, the Nazareth Residence provides housing
for 15 of the homeless.

Attention to families is another priority at St. Raymond Nonnatus.
Specific projects include a school for parents, teams trained to help resolve
family conflicts, and programs for accompanying single women during
pregnancy and the first years of being a mother. The Gate of Bethlehem
nursery provides day care for the young children whose mothers have to
work and can’t pay for a private service. In addition, the Center for
Childhood Education offers 80 children specialized attention in their
studies.

All of these programs are possible thanks to a group of some two
hundred volunteers. Encouraged by the teachings of Pope Francis, those
involved know what it means to “touch Christ in the flesh of those who
suffer.” The parish also offers spiritual help to the persons who benefit
from the activities of the Alvaro del Portillo Social Project. Besides helping
meet people’s material needs, it seeks to provide the family affection that is
a mark of the Church’s charity.

Torna ai contenuti

In Brief
Rome -- Jewish Delegation Visits the Campus Bio-medico

On Monday November 16, a delegation from the Jewish community of Rome, headed by Chief Rabbi Ricardo Di Segni and its president Ruth Dureghello, visited the Campus Bio-medico and the University Hospital. During the visit, the need was stressed to help young people see the importance of respect and dialogue, which are the foundation for interreligious harmony.

Nuevo León, Mexico -- Business Managers in the Year of Mercy

On Friday, December 4, Archbishop Rogelio Cabrera of Monterrey closed a cycle of conferences for business managers in Nuevo León, held at the Pan-American Institute of Advanced Business Studies (IPADE). Archbishop Cabrera encouraged the participants to serve others through their work, both their employees and society at large, in the special context of the Year of Mercy. He reminded them of the need to fight to eradicate any trace of corruption. At the end, the business people invited the Archbishop to hold a yearly meeting with them.

Lisbon and Oporto, Portugal -- A Culture of Caring

During November, a seminar entitled “A Culture of Caring” was held in the Portuguese cities of Lisbon and Oporto. More than 100 people, mostly mothers, took part in conferences and workshops dealing with Pope Francis’ encyclical Laudato si’, and his Bull convoking the Year of Mercy. The focus was on the need to foster an integral ecology, and specific ways
to practice mercy in one’s family and at work. In Oporto, one session included testimony from a volunteer from the Platform of Assistance to the Refugees in Portugal.

Santiago de Chile -- International Conference on the Family and Society

From August 13-14, the Third International Conference on the Family and Society was held at the University of the Andes. The stress was on the role of the family in human ecology and in fostering sustainable social development, in accord with the goals of the World Family Map Project. Among those giving talks were Bradford Wilcox, Javier Escrivá, Carolina Dell'Oro, Laurie Fields, Daniel Mansuy, Paz Valverde, Viviana Salinas, Beatriz Fernández, María Paz Lagos, Alvaro Pezoa, María José Bosch, and Beatriz Zegers.

Bogotá, Colombia -- University of La Sabana Grants First Honorary Doctorate

On November 10, the University of La Sabana gave its first honorary doctorate to Prof. Jorge Reynolds Pombo, known worldwide for having invented the first external artificial pacemaker in 1958 and for research over more than 55 years on the electrical functioning of the heart. The ceremony was presided over by the vice-Grand Chancellor of the University, Fr. Hernan Salcedo Plazas. The event included the academic procession with all the professors at La Sabana and the presentation by Professor Alvaro Mendoza of the accomplishments of the new doctor honoris causa.
San José, Costa Rica -- Laudato si’ in Miravalles University Center

Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato si’* was the topic of a round table held on July 13 in the auditorium of Miravalles University Center. Msgr. Luis Baura de la Peña, a physician and theologian, stressed that the Pope wanted to highlight that God is truly the Creator, and that as his creatures we need to be respectful and responsible in following the laws of nature, his “operating instructions” for attaining happiness. Dr. Eduardo Lizano, ex-president of the Central Bank, focused on the encyclical’s teaching in light of the principles of the Church’s social doctrine. Dr. Alejandra Leal, a geneticist, discussed scientific implications of the Pope’s encyclical. Dr. Fernando Sanchez, a political scientist and former ambassador of Costa Rica to the Holy See, spoke about the Pope’s main concerns as reflected in *Laudato si’:* fostering peace, assisting the poor, and caring for nature. Finally Dr. Miguel Cantillo, an economist, called attention to the economic background of the encyclical.

Torna ai contenuti

Nuoro, Italy -- The Family: Antidote for the Crisis

On October 9, the city of Nuoro hosted a conference entitled “The Family: Overcoming the Crisis.” The importance of the family for society and its role as an antidote for the current financial crisis and the crisis in values was stressed. The event was organized by the Centro Culturale Delle Fontane, which is run by faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei, in collaboration with the city council of Nuoro and local commercial groups.

The journalist Ms. Gianni Garrucciu moderated the round table debate that included Bishop Mosè Marcia, bishop of Nuoro; Giulio Sapelli, professor at the State University of Milan; Mariolina Ceriotti Migliarese, a pediatric psychotherapist; Agostino Cicalò, president of Confcommercio di Nuoro and the mayor of the city.
Piura and Lima, Peru -- Integral Ecology and a Culture of Encounter

In October, the University of Piura organized a conference on “Integral ecology and a culture of encounter.” In the light of Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato si’*, a dialogue was held on the need to foster an inclusive economy and social responsibility, confronting the challenges of poverty. Also highlighted was the need for spiritual formation and an integral ecology. During the days of the conference representatives took part from the academic world, the government, institutions that promote human development, and the business sector. Various ways to help further the suggestions in the pontifical document were specified.

Guadalajara, Mexico -- Family Engagement: Commitment to the Family

In connection with the Synod on the Family and in support of Pope Francis’ intentions, a group of concerned people created Family Engagement, a marriage consulting institute staffed by 15 specialized professionals, with the aim of assisting families who are going through difficult situations. The institute offers courses of formation for couples, marriage “coaching” and the help of medical specialists. To make the project better known in Guadalajara, Dr. Enrique Rojas gave a conference to families from the five high schools in the Colmenares educational group. About 1500 people attended.

Madrid -- Work Camp in Jerusalem
Seventy students from Retamar School took part in a work camp in Jerusalem. For 15 days they lent a hand in projects at the Polis Institute and the Hospital of the Holy Family in Nazareth. The Retamar students take up a collection each year for various social and welfare projects. This past year they had the opportunity to travel to the site of the project and assist it directly with their own work. The school encourages the students to be generous and to make small sacrifices and avoid excess expenses so they can assist financially various social works in dioceses around the world.

São Paulo, Brazil -- Christian Roots of Europe

On June 8, 2015, the Sumaré Center of University Studies was the site for a lecture given by Franco Cardini, professor of Medieval History at the University of Florence. His topic was “The Christian Roots of Europe.” In the audience were university students and young professionals who attend activities at Sumaré. The Italian consul in São Paulo and representatives from the Italian Cultural Institute were also present. The address stressed the deep Christian roots of the culture, customs and institutions of Europe.

São Paulo, Brazil -- Family Expedition

Marriage seen as an expedition—as a long trip that requires careful preparation and knowledge of where one is going and with whom. This was the focus of Family Expedition, an educational activity for young professionals looking forward to marrying soon. Held at the Sitio de Aroeira conference center, the program included classes in anthropology and practical case studies given by Henrique Elfes, philosopher and well-known writer, and by Dr. Valdir Reginato, a family therapy practitioner at the Federal University of São Paulo. Those taking part were given texts to read and study that included Pope Francis’ weekly audiences on courtship
and the family. The concluding round table was presided over by Flavio Carvalho, an engineer and father of six children. The activity took place between August 28 and 30.

Valencia, Spain -- Volunteering for Repairs

A group of teachers from the Xabec Center for Professional Formation organized a volunteer activity to carry out domestic repairs in homes of poor people and homeless shelters. Teachers and alumni first visited the installations to see what work needed to be done, and then drew up a plan. Accompanied by their teachers and other professionals, the students at Xabec volunteer their time, putting into practice skills they have learned in the classroom: electronics, automation and robotics, air conditioning, heating, etc. The volunteers thus are helped to see the social dimension of their work, which can be exercised with Christian charity for the service of others.

Santiago de Chile -- Laudato si’: Business and the Environment

The Business School at the University of the Andes (ESE Business School), in collaboration with the Social Union of Christian Executives, organized this past August a seminar entitled “Laudato si’: Business and the Environment.” Its aim was to provide a deeper grasp of the Church’s social doctrine. The speakers reflected on the globalization of indifference and the causes of environmental problems. Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati, archbishop of Santiago, opened the seminar. Those taking part included the Minister for the Environment, a former Minister for Social Development, the president of the Food Network, and the director of the Center for Business and Humanism at ESE.
Montevideo, Uruguay -- Challenges to the Family

Within the series Uruguayan Thought Today, on Wednesday August 19 a day of reflection was held at Montevideo University on “Family Environment and Social Development.” University researchers, representatives from the national government and public policy makers discussed ways that active family participation can benefit Uruguayan society. One of the sessions, entitled “Protecting the Family in Vulnerable Contexts,” brought together lawyers, journalists and social experts. Bishop Jaime Fuentes, president of the Family and Life Commission of the Bishops Conference, along with representatives from the Jewish community spoke about the mission of parents in educating their children, the importance of the mother’s role in the family, and models for making professional and family life compatible.

Rome -- Cardinal Parolin Inaugurates the Academic Year at the Campus Bio-medico

The Secretary of State of the Holy See, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, celebrated Holy Mass in the chapel of Rome’s Campus Bio-medico during the inauguration of the 2015-2016 academic year. In his homily, he encouraged the university community to “make the Campus Bio-medico a place where a culture of encounter is fostered and solidarity is strengthened.” Directing himself first of all to the students, the cardinal said that “young people at a university need a permanent program for attaining the truth,” a program that “requires study and perseverance, and demands generosity and self-denial.” He stressed that, along with personal effort, we Christians have to remain open to the action of the Holy Spirit, who leads us to knowledge of the truth. He pointed to some words of Pope
Francis from his homily in St. Martha’s chapel on September 2, 2014, spoken “with his simple and expressive language.” “It may be that a person has five university degrees, but does not possess the Spirit of God. What gives us authority, what gives us identity, is the Holy Spirit,” the Holy Father said.

After referring to the example of docility to the Paraclete transmitted to us by saints in the Church, with special mention of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, the cardinal concluded by encouraging everyone to strengthen their union with God, in order to put into practice each day the motto of the Campus Bio-medico: Science at the service of the person. “From an intimate encounter with God we attain the strength needed for generous and joyful service of our neighbor.”

Sydney, Australia -- The Big Picture Program

Warrane College, a university residence, organizes each year the Big Picture program. This year it brought together 45 high school students from around the country, seeking to widen their horizons regarding life at the university and their future professional work. Among those giving talks were Corey Payne, a well-known Australian athlete who has set up a foundation to help poor students get a university education. Other speakers at the conference spoke about the virtues required for leadership and ways to overcome situations of adversity they might encounter at the beginning of their professional life.

Bogotá, Colombia -- Seminar for Journalists about the Synod on the Family
On September 30, La Sabana University organized an information seminar for journalists, with the aim of offering context and background for the Ordinary Synod on the Family. Professor Hernan Olano spoke about “Technical Aspects of the Synod on the Family,” while Professor Faridy Jiménez gave her conference on “Ecclesiastical Processes of Matrimonial Nullity and Civil Processes of Matrimonial Dissolution.” The seminar ended with a video-conference from Rome organized by Antonio Olivié from Rome Reports. Taking part in the seminar were professionals from the country’s largest communication outlets and representatives from the Bishops Conference, including the director of the Department for the Family and the executive secretary of the Latin American Bishops Conference.

Rome -- Questions about the Beginning of Life

The Department of Moral Theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross organized a course in bioethics under the title “Questions about the Beginning of Life.” Professors from various pontifical universities as well as teachers from the Bambino Gesù Pediatric Hospital and the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart shared reflections on important ethical questions regarding the beginning of life from a Christian perspective. Also highlighted were significant recent publications in the field of moral theology and bioethics. The course, which took place on September 22-25, was inaugurated by the President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, Bishop Ignacio Carrasco de Paula.
Suffrages for the Deceased

In the second half of 2015, 474 faithful of the Prelature passed away and, besides the priests incardinated in it, 23 members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. Suffrages have been offered for these deceased. As we continue to pray for them, let us thank God for the example they left us through their fidelity in striving to transform their professional work—their pastoral ministry in the case of the priests—their family life and their social relationships into an occasion for loving God and serving the Church and all souls. Their love for God and neighbor constitutes the meaning and value of their lives, whether outstanding in the eyes of others, or whether quite ordinary, as was true in most cases.

In addition to the names of all who have died during this period, we have gathered a few biographical details about some of the deceased, which give an idea of the variety of circumstances and situations in which the faithful of Opus Dei live. For reasons of space, we are not including this data in the other cases, but we must not forget that we have a debt of gratitude towards all of them for the example of fidelity they have left us. These few brief sketches will help us live the Communion of Saints better with those who have preceded us to heaven.

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.

Torna ai contenuti
A study
Conjugal Love and Marriage in the Homily
Marriage: a Christian Vocation by Saint
Josemaría Escrivá

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The anthropological and cultural changes taking place in many countries have led to modifications in civil laws on marriage and the family that, among other things, legalize unions between persons of the same sex and make divorce an increasingly simpler procedure. These changes have resulted in a redefinition of marriage,\(^1\) brought about through a deep deconstruction that has stripped from marriage the categories of conjugality, fatherhood-motherhood, and filiation—fraternity.\(^2\)

Since the early 20th century, a deep renewal has been taking place in the Church’s teachings on marriage and the family, based on faithfulness to God’s plan for the human person. If up to that time theological reflection had focused mainly on the objective and juridical aspects of marriage, an important input was added from philosophical currents inspired by personalism. This led to rightfully stressing the supremacy of the person over the institution of marriage, the primacy of communion in love over the community established by a legal bond, and respect for personal freedom in the face of all external coercion. This renewal was reflected in such magisterial documents as the Encyclical Casti Connubii of Pius XI in 1930, the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes of Vatican II, the Encyclical Humanae Vitae of Blessed Paul VI in 1968, and the Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio of Saint John Paul II in 1981.

Nevertheless, in this ongoing renewal the Church herself has not been exempt from a few tentative attempts to redefine marriage. Some of these authors lobbying for a more personalist approach, in stressing that marriage is a path for personal fulfilment through mutual self-giving in conjugal love, have defended a partial and problematic position: that procreation and the raising of children should not be considered an essential end of marriage.\(^3\) On its part, the recent Magisterium, while stressing the personal elements of the conjugal union and above all the primacy of
conjugal love, has emphasized its intrinsic connection with the institutional aspects of marriage found in the Church’s traditional teaching. For example, Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* teaches that conjugal love “is indissolubly faithful” and “excludes both adultery and divorce,” and by nature is “ordered to the procreation and education of children.”[4]

Coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis convoked in 2015 the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, to continue the Church’s reflections, in the light of the Gospel, on the reality of the family in the face of contemporary anthropological and cultural changes.

It is in this context that the Christian understanding of marriage presented by St. Josemaría in his homily *Marriage: a Christian Vocation* [5] is especially timely. Its origin was a request in 1970 by the director of the supplement of the Spanish newspaper *ABC*, Luís María Ansón, who wanted to give readers orientation on the role of marriage and the family in the face of some deep changes taking place in society. After receiving St. Josemaría’s text, the journalist remarked that the topic of marriage “needed to be tackled as Father Escrivá has done: with clear doctrine, with common sense, with fidelity to the Church’s principles, and with a modern outlook on reality.”[6]

The title of the homily shows the personalist perspective with which the teachings about marriage are focused. The central topic is conjugal love. Starting from an understanding of the authentic love between the spouses, the homily goes on to discuss some important elements of the institution of marriage, including its divine origin, its indissolubility, and its purpose of procreation and education of the offspring. Drawing also on other writings of St. Josemaría, we want to present here an overview of his teachings about these elements that configure the institution of matrimony.[7]

1. The Divine Origin of Marriage

St. Josemaría begins his homily, given during Christmas time in 1970, by reminding us of a key element of his message: the universal call to holiness.[8] The mystery of Jesus’ birth signifies “the moment God chose to show the extent of his love for mankind, by giving us his own Son.”[9] God’s Love becomes present “in the simplest, most ordinary of
circumstances: a woman who gives birth, a family, a home.”\[10\] Hence lay people too, and not only religious or priests, can and should aspire to Christian perfection: “Since that moment Christians have known that, with God’s grace, they can and should sanctify everything that is good in their human lives. There is no human situation, no matter how trivial and ordinary it may seem, which cannot be a meeting place with Christ and a step forward on our journey toward the kingdom of heaven.”\[11\]

For the Founder of Opus Dei, all the earthly realities in which Christians are immersed spell out the content of their baptismal vocation. As he teaches in his homily Passionately Loving the World, “any kind of evasion of the honest realities of daily life is for you, men and women of the world, something opposed to the will of God.

“On the contrary, you must understand now, more clearly, that God is calling you to serve Him in and from the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life. He waits for us every day, in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all the immense panorama of work. Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.”\[12\]

Marriage is thus seen as vested with a great dignity, since it “marks out the existential framework, conjugal and family life, in which and by which the spouses have to live out their own Christian vocation, that is to say, the call to holiness to which they have been convoked in a radical way in Baptism.”\[13\] Referring specifically to marriage, St. Josemaría insists that it is “an authentic supernatural vocation.”\[14\] So we can ask ourselves: what is the specific nature of the married state with respect to other ordinary situations by which it merits such a high qualification? We find the answer in the following words from the homily we are discussing: marriage is “a great sacrament in Christ and in the Church, says St. Paul (see Eph 5:32). At the same time and inseparably, it is a contract that a man and a woman make forever. Whether we like it or not, the sacrament of matrimony, instituted by Christ, cannot be dissolved. It is a sacred sign that sanctifies.”\[15\]
St. Josemaría highlights the simultaneous and inseparable tie between the contract and the sacrament. He thus employs traditional terminology that was still in use in the Code of Canon Law. The term “contract” emphasizes that the conjugal bond stems from the spouses’ free will.[16]

The same homily explains the meaning of “inseparable” in this context when, once again using traditional theological terminology, he says that “marriage is a sacrament that makes one flesh of two bodies. Theology expresses this fact in a striking way when it teaches us that the matter of the sacrament is the bodies of husband and wife. Our Lord sanctifies and blesses the mutual love of husband and wife. He foresees, not only a union of souls, but a union of bodies as well.”[17]

In harmony with the meaning of the Biblical expression “basār” (flesh),[18] the meaning of the term “body” or “flesh” denotes the whole person—soul and body.[19] Therefore, as St. Josemaría says in another place, “the spouses are both the ministers and the matter of the sacrament of Marriage, as the bread and wine are the matter of the Eucharist.”[20]

In traditional terminology, the sacramental sign is made up of both matter and form. These texts make no explicit mention of the form, but by stressing that the couples are the ministers of the sacrament of matrimony we can conclude that the form is specified by the human act carried out by the spouses.[21] Thus the sacramental sign that sanctifies, the sacrament, is not seen as something accidental or juxtaposed to the conjugal union. And so for St. Josemaría the inseparable tie between the contract and the sacrament means that the sacrament of matrimony, through Christ’s institution, is the conjugal covenant itself between the Christian spouses.

This inseparability shows clearly that Christian marriage possesses a special dignity among all earthly realities because it is a sacrament instituted by Christ, and because its celebration is an action of Christ, as is true of every sacrament. Below we will look more closely at this second aspect, which sheds important light on the divine origin of marriage.

The Christian spouses mutually give themselves to each other, giving rise to the conjugal bond by which they are husband and wife. But at the same time it is Christ who has instituted the sacrament of marriage, and thus its celebration between baptized persons is also an “action of Jesus. He
fills the souls of husband and wife and invites them to follow him. He transforms their whole married life into a divine path on earth."[22]

Jesus’ call to the spouses cannot be understood in a vague way. The inseparability between the contract and the sacrament means that Jesus’ action in the celebration of marriage is not something external or accidental to the matrimonial consent that gives rise to the bond, but rather that it is He who unites the Christian spouses. The Book of Genesis tells us that God formed the man and the woman, and that it was He who gave Eve to Adam as his wife.[23] Jesus refers to this passage from the Bible to teach us that it is not licit for a man to repudiate his wife, since the two were united by God.[24]

Christ’s reference to the marriage of our first parents makes clear that it was not an institution established by human society that he elevated to the dignity of a sacrament, but rather a reality instituted by God. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, “the intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by his laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one. For the good of the spouses and their offspring as well as of society, the existence of the sacred bond no longer depends on human decisions alone. For God himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes.”[25]

But we should add here that, in accord with the divine plan for our first parents referred to by Christ, the one who unites the spouses is God. For he “created the two sexes, each made for the other. If God himself unites two people in a conjugal union, it would be impious and vain for anyone to seek to dissolve the knot that God has tied and guaranteed, usurping the divine rights and performing a vivisection to try to separate two beings God has united.”[26] Therefore “when a man and a woman marry, although their union is produced by their free will, that is, by the reciprocal gift of self; nevertheless it is God who unites them strictly speaking; the spouses have simply inserted themselves in the original divine plan for marriage.”[27]
In accord with the divine salvific plan by which all things were created through Christ and for Christ, marriage is not simply part of the order of creation; it has been inserted into the plan of redemption. Thus marriage between baptized persons, by the institution of Christ, has been raised to the dignity of a sacrament of the New Law. And therefore the sacramental celebration of matrimony is an action of Jesus: “it is Christ, the Son of God incarnate, as head of the body to which they belong, who unites them. Each of the spouses belongs to Christ by baptism and, when they give themselves to one another, they also become a gift of Christ who gives the man to the woman and the woman to the man. This once again makes clear that the sacrament is an act of Christ, without detracting in any way from the full human meaning of mutual self-giving.”

Christ’s presence entails, for St. Josemaría, a specific divine call to “transform their whole married life into a divine path on earth.” For the fulfillment of their mission, the Christian spouses “have the grace of the married state—the grace they receive in the sacrament of marriage—which enables them to live all the human and Christian virtues in their married life: understanding, good humor, patience, forgiveness, refinement and consideration in their mutual relations. The important thing is not to give up the effort, not to give in to nerves, pride or personal fads or obsessions. In order to achieve this, husbands and wives must grow in interior life and learn from the Holy Family to live with refinement, for supernatural and at the same time human reasons, the virtues of a Christian home. I repeat again that the grace of God will not be lacking.”

The sacramental reality of marriage, therefore, is not limited to the moment of celebration. Jesus not only “comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. He abides with them in order that by their mutual self-giving spouses will love each other with enduring fidelity, as he loved the Church and delivered himself for her.”

2. Self-giving and Freedom: the Indissolubility of Marriage

St. Josemaría tells us that indissolubility is a law of marriage that does not depend on the spouses, since it is of divine institution. As in Jesus’ time, this law could seem an insupportable yoke that suffocates the freedom of the spouses. However, any possible dilemma between freedom and self-
giving is resolved in the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, to which St. Josemaría refers at the beginning of his homily.\[33\]

For the Founder of Opus Dei, the birth of Jesus is “the moment God chose to show the extent of his love for mankind, by giving us his own Son.”\[34\] Out of love for his Father and mankind, the Son embraces the will of his Father, and gives his life on the Cross with full freedom. “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord, I have power to lay it down it, and I have power to take it again.”\[35\] Seeing Christ’s self-giving, St. Josemaría exclaims: “we will never fully understand Jesus’ freedom. It is immense, infinite, as is his love.”\[36\]

If love isn’t free it isn’t love. And the highest expression of love is giving one’s life for one’s friends.\[37\] “It is utterly false to oppose freedom and self-giving, because self-giving is a consequence of freedom. Look, when a mother sacrifices herself for love of her children, she has made a choice, and the more she loves the greater will be her freedom. If her love is great, her freedom will bear much fruit. Her children’s good derives from her blessed freedom, which presupposes self-surrender, and from her blessed self-surrender, which is precisely freedom.”\[38\] “I insist, and I would like to engrave this deep in your hearts, that freedom and self-surrender are not contradictory. They sustain one another. Freedom can only be given up for love; I cannot conceive any other reason for surrendering it. And I am not just playing with words or phrases. When people give themselves freely, at every moment of their self-giving, freedom renews their love; to be renewed in that way is to be always young, generous, capable of high ideals and great sacrifices.”\[39\]

The manifestation of God’s love in the Incarnation teaches us two important truths.\[40\] It reveals to us that the deepest and most radical meaning of our life is sincere self-giving to others.\[41\] And it tells us that Christ gives us his grace to overcome the wounds of sin and to give ourselves with “the full freedom of love.”\[42\]

The conjugal covenant is a “great sacrament in Christ and in the Church,”\[43\] by which “our Lord sanctifies and blesses the love of the husband for his wife and that of the wife for her husband.”\[44\] The union of Christian spouses is a real sign of the union between Christ and the
Church, for the husband and wife share in this mystery as spouses. From Him they receive the graces needed to manifest it through their lives, and they are called to give expression to Christ’s ever faithful love unto death for his Church. In words of Pope Francis, “Christian spouses share as spouses in the Church’s mission... The route is well marked forever; it is the route of love: to love as God loves, forever. Christ does not cease to care for the Church: he loves her always, he guards her always... Christ does not cease to remove stains and lines of every kind from the human face. Moving and very beautiful to see is this radiation of God’s power and tenderness which is transmitted from couple to couple, family to family. St. Paul is right: this truly is a ‘great mystery’! Men and women, brave enough to carry this treasure in the ‘earthen vessels’ of our humanity, are (these men and these women who are so brave) an essential resource for the Church, as well as for the world.” [45]

Therefore the indissolubility of marriage is not “a caprice of the Church nor is it merely a positive ecclesiastical law. It is a precept of natural law, of divine law, and responds perfectly to our nature and to the supernatural order of grace. For these reasons, in the great majority of cases, indissolubility is an indispensable condition for the happiness of married couples and for the spiritual security of their children... The humble acceptance of God’s will always brings with it a profound sense of satisfaction that nothing can substitute. It is not merely a refuge, or a consolation: it is the very essence of Christian life.” [46] Once again we cite Pope Francis, “The sacrament of marriage is a great act of faith and love: a witness to the courage to believe in the beauty of the creative act of God and to live that love that is always urging us to go on, beyond ourselves and even beyond our own family. The Christian vocation to love unconditionally and without limit is what, by the grace of Christ, is also at the foundation of the free consent that constitutes marriage.” [47]

The greatest enemy of conjugal love is pride. [48] “People who are constantly concerned with themselves, who act above all for their own satisfaction, endanger their eternal salvation and cannot avoid being unhappy even in this life. Only if a person forgets himself and gives himself to God and to others, in marriage as well as in any other aspect of life, can
he be happy on this earth, with a happiness that is a preparation for, and a foretaste of, the joy of heaven."[49]

Renewed by the gift of the Holy Spirit, spouses should “love each other ‘as though newly engaged,’ recapturing the ardent love of their engagement and first days of marriage.”[50] This is not a naïve invitation, but one firmly based on Christian hope: “As long as we walk on this earth, suffering will always be the touchstone of love. If we were to describe what occurs in the married state, we could say that there are two sides to the coin. On the one hand, there is the joy of knowing that one is loved, the desire and enthusiasm involved in starting a family and taking care of it, the love of husband and wife, the happiness of seeing the children grow up. On the other hand, there are also sorrows and difficulties—the passing of time that consumes the body and threatens the character with the temptation to bitterness, the seemingly monotonous succession of days that are apparently always the same.

“We would have a poor idea of marriage and of human affection if we were to think that love and joy come to an end when faced with such difficulties. It is precisely then that our true sentiments come to the surface. Then the tenderness of a person’s gift of himself takes root and shows itself in a true and profound affection that is stronger than death (cf. Song 8:6).”[51]

St. Josemaría was well aware of the difficult situation of some people who find themselves separated, at times without any fault on their own part, and who have to carry on with the obligations stemming from their union. His response was always that the free self-giving in accepting God’s will, following Christ’s example, is the sure path to happiness. This is how he responded, for example, to someone who asked him about the situation of abandoned women with children:[52] “If women who are separated from their husbands have children in their care, they should understand that their children continue to need their loving motherly devotion, and especially now, to make up for the deficiencies of a divided home. They should make a generous effort to understand that indissolubility, which for them means sacrifice, is a safeguard for the integrity and unity of the great majority of families and ennobles the parent’s love and prevents the abandonment of the children.
“Surprise at the apparent hardness of the Christian precept of indissolubility is nothing new. The apostles were surprised when Jesus confirmed it. It can seem a burden, a yoke, but Christ himself said that his yoke was sweet and his burden light.

“On the other hand, although recognizing the inevitable hardship of a good many situations, which often could and should have been avoided, we should be careful not to overdramatize. Is the life of a woman in these circumstances really harder than that of other maltreated women, or of people who suffer any of the other great physical or moral sorrows that life brings with it?

“What really makes a person unhappy and even destroys a whole society is the frenzied search for well-being and the attempt to eliminate, at all costs, all difficulties and hardships. Life has many facets, and very different situations. Some are harsh, while others may seem easy. Each situation brings its own grace. Each one is a special call from God, a new opportunity to work and to give the divine testimony of charity. I would advise those who feel oppressed by a difficult situation to try to forget about their own problems a bit and concern themselves with the problems of others. If they do this they will have more peace and, above all, they will sanctify themselves.”

The significant increase in marriage breakdowns in recent decades has resulted in the need for the Church to approach with pastoral concern the situation of many divorced Catholics, some of whom have contracted a civil marriage. Recently the Pope reminded us: “There are, thanks be to God, those who, sustained by faith and by love for their children, bear witness to their fidelity to a bond they believed in, although it may seem impossible to revive it.” And seeing the situation of those who have contracted a new union after the failure of their marriage, “the Church is fully aware that such a situation is contrary to the Christian Sacrament.”

The Pope invites spouses who have broken their conjugal harmony to set aside their selfishness and concern themselves above all with their children’s welfare, who are the primary victims. “When adults lose their head, when each one thinks only of him or herself, when a dad and mom hurt one another, the souls of their children suffer terribly, they experience
a sense of despair. And these wounds leave a mark that lasts their whole lives.”[56]

Protecting the weakest members of the family is a goal that helps make many other problems seem much less important. “Think what a society would be like if it decided, once and for all, to establish this principle: ‘It’s true, we are not perfect and we make many mistakes. But when it comes to the children who come into the world, no sacrifice on the part of adults is too costly or too great, to ensure that no child believe he or she was a mistake, is worthless or is abandoned to a life of wounds and to the arrogance of men.”[57]

3. Marriage: A Vocation to Share in God’s Creative Love

The third aspect of the institution of marriage that St. Josemaría stresses is its ordering to the procreation and raising of children.

“Husband and wife are called to sanctify their married life and to sanctify themselves in it... It would be a serious mistake if they were to exclude family life from their spiritual development.”[58] St. Josemaría goes on to specify the content of the vocation to marriage in the task of lovingly creating a true family atmosphere.[59] And he continues: “Many Christian virtues are necessary in order to sanctify each day of one’s life. First, the theological virtues, and then all the others: prudence, loyalty, sincerity, humility, industriousness, cheerfulness.... But when we talk about marriage and married life, we must begin by speaking clearly about the mutual love of husband and wife.”[60]

The special nature of married love in respect to other noble and clean human loves is due to its intrinsic ordering to procreation, such that “the love of the spouses cannot be called conjugal if one prevents its openness to life in an artificial way.”[61] In St. Josemaría’s words, “we have been created by God and endowed with an intelligence, which is like a spark of the divine intellect. Together with our free will, another gift of God, it allows us to know and to love. And God has also placed in our body the power to generate, which is a participation in his own creative power. He has wanted to use love to bring new human beings into the world and to increase the body of the Church. Thus sex is not a shameful thing; it is a divine gift, ordained to life, to love, to fruitfulness.”[62]
Thus the ordering of conjugal love, and therefore of marriage, to procreation and education of the offspring involves two key elements: a) generation as a participation in God’s creative love; and b) procreation as a task that falls to the spouses. The first is the most important because it determines the precise meaning of the second.

As we have just seen, St. Josemaría sees the capacity for generation as a share in God’s creative power. The parents are truly “pro-creators.” As St. John Paul II teaches, “a creative act of God underlies the origin of every human person. No human being is born by chance; he or she is always the result of God’s creative love.”

In accord with this love, God loves each person for him or herself. St. Josemaría insists that the measure of this love is shown in an eminent manner in the mystery of the Incarnation. On the cross God revealed that each person is worth all the blood of his beloved Son. Therefore we can begin to understand why, in wanting to let man share in his creative power, God has also created the human grammar that corresponds to the language of divine love. This grammar, in God’s infinite wisdom, is conjugal love between a man and a woman. God instituted matrimony so that each human person would be generated as the result of an act of personal love that is always faithful and exclusive, in the image and likeness of divine love.

As a result, St. Josemaría invites us not to lower the Christian vision of marriage; it is “not just a social institution, much less a mere remedy for human weakness.” Thus “it is important for married people to acquire a clear sense of the dignity of their vocation. They must know that they have been called by God not only to human love but also to a divine love, through their human love. It is important for them to realize that they have been chosen from all eternity to cooperate with the creative power of God by having and then bringing up children. Our Lord asks them to make their home and their entire family life a testimony of all the Christian virtues.”

The second element is the procreation and education of their children, seen as a mission entrusted to the spouses. After instituting marriage, God gave the first couple a clear command: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the
earth and subdue it.” St. Josemaría saw this essential end of marriage as an intrinsic demand of conjugal love, and stressed that contraception is a selfish way of acting, and therefore that it seriously undermines fidelity to the vocation to marriage. The Founder of Opus Dei encouraged spouses to “not be afraid of showing affection for each other,” since “this inclination is at the root of their family life.” But he also insisted that “to stop up the sources of life is a crime against the gifts that God has granted to mankind. It proves that a person is moved by selfishness, not love.”

Moreover, based on Christ’s call to the spouses to follow Him in and through conjugal love (which He himself has healed, perfected and raised up in the sacrament of Marriage), St. Josemaría points to the deepest reason why Christian spouses should be open to life: “No Christian married couple can want to block the well-springs of life. For their love is based on Christ’s love, which entails self-giving and sacrifice.”

Therefore he encouraged spouses to “build their life together on the foundation of a sincere and pure affection for each other, and on the joy that comes from having brought into the world the children God has enabled them to have. They should be capable of renouncing their personal comfort; and they should put their trust in the providence of God. To have a large family—if such is the will of God—is a guarantee of happiness and of effectiveness, in spite of everything that the mistaken proponents of a life based on selfish pleasure may say to the contrary.”

This teaching was recalled recently by Pope Francis in his catechesis on the family: “having many children cannot automatically be an irresponsible choice. Not to have children is a selfish choice. Life is rejuvenated and acquires energy by multiplying; it is enriched, not impoverished! Children learn to assume responsibility for their family. They mature in sharing its hardship. They grow in the appreciation of its gifts. The happy experience of fraternity inspires respect and care for parents, to whom our recognition is due.”

Above we stressed that procreation acquires its true meaning precisely insofar as generation is a participation in God’s creative power. It is not enough to bring children into the world for the spouses to be faithful to their matrimonial vocation; procreation separated from a true relationship
of conjugal love is not in accord with the dignity and holiness of the parents’ calling. St. Josemaría did not hesitate to compare such behavior to that of animals: “Some people bring children into the world for their own benefit, to serve their own purposes, out of selfishness. They forget children are a wonderful gift from God for which they will have to render a very special account. Do not be offended if I say that having offspring just to continue the species, is something that... animals can do too.” Hence “the number is not in itself the decisive factor. The fact of having few or many children does not, on its own, make a family more or less Christian. What matters is the integrity and honesty with which married life is lived.”

God’s creative love not only gives existence but also conserves all created things with providential care. Sacred Scripture reveals the special care with which God provides for each person, inviting us to seek first the Kingdom of God. St. Josemaría stresses that “being a father or a mother is not simply a matter of bringing children into the world. The capacity for generation, which is a share in the creative power of God, is meant to have a continuation. Parents are called to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the development of their children into men and women who will be authentic Christians.”

Since the task of raising children is a participation in God’s creative power, the parents are “the first persons responsible for the education of their children, in human as well as in spiritual matters. They should be conscious of the extent of their responsibility.” Carrying out this mission well requires great love and respect for children’s freedom: “Imposing things by force, in an authoritarian manner, is not the right way to teach. The ideal attitude of parents lies more in becoming their children’s friends—friends who will be willing to share their anxieties, who will listen to their problems, who will help them in an effective and agreeable way.” This mission can never be usurped by the State nor delegated to outside organisms, which are incapable of fostering the children’s harmonious human and emotional development, since their efforts are not inspired by love.

Finally we can ask: What meaning does the marriage vocation have for couples who don’t have children? In the homily in Christ is Passing By, we
find only a brief remark in this regard: “It is a sign that he is asking them to go on loving each other with the same affection and to put their efforts, if they can, into serving and working for the good of other souls.”[84] Elsewhere he discusses this at greater length: “Often God does not give children because He is asking more. God asks them to put the same effort and the same kind and gentle dedication into helping their neighbors as they would have put into raising their children, without the human joy that comes from having children. There is, then, no reason for feeling they are failures or for giving way to sadness... If they give themselves generously to others and forget themselves, if they put their hearts into their work, they will be wonderfully fruitful and will experience a spiritual parenthood that will fill their souls with true peace.”[85]

4. Epilogue

In his homily *Marriage: a Christian Vocation*, St. Josemaría presents the truth about conjugal love as a path for following Christ in the mutual self-giving of the spouses. The institution of marriage, with its properties and ends, is thus seen not as an external or arbitrary imposition, but as an internal demand of conjugal love itself. As St. John Paul II would later say, marriage is the only “place” that makes possible the mutual love between a man and a woman, who give themselves to one another in the totality of their person as sexually complementary.[86]

In virtue of the elevation of marriage to a sacrament, this path for following Christ becomes a true supernatural vocation. It is a gift not only for the spouses, but also for the Church and the whole world, since “every truly Christian family reproduces in some way the mystery of the Church, chosen by God and sent to be the guide of the world.”[87]

The Christian family is meant to play a key role in the evangelization of culture and society, as the Pope recently stressed: “The family that responds to the call of Jesus consigns the stewardship of the world back to the covenant of man and woman with God. Imagine developing this testimony today. Let us imagine that the helm of history (of society, of the economy, of politics) is entrusted—finally!—to the covenant of man and woman, in order that they tend to it with their gaze directed at the
generations to come. The themes of earth and home, of the economy and of work, would sing a very different tune.”[88]

As St. Josemaría insisted, “it is very important that the idea of marriage as a real call from God never be absent, either from the pulpit and the religion class or from the conscience of those whom God wishes to follow this way. Couples should be convinced that they are really and truly called to take part in the fulfillment of God’s plan for the salvation of all men.

“For this reason, there is perhaps no better model for a Christian couple than that of the Christian families of apostolic times: the centurion Cornelius, who obeyed the will of God and in whose home the Church was made accessible to the gentiles (see Acts 10:24-48); Aquila and Priscilla, who spread Christianity in Corinth and Ephesus and who cooperated in the apostolate of St Paul (see Acts 18:1-26); Tabitha, who out of charity attended to the needs of the Christians in Joppa (see Acts 9:36). And so many other homes and families of Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Romans, in which the preaching of our Lord’s first disciples began to bear fruit.

“Families who lived in union with Christ and who made him known to others. Small Christian communities which were centers for the spreading of the Gospel and its message. Families no different from other families of those times, but living with a new spirit, which spread to all those who were in contact with them. This is what the first Christians were, and this is what we have to be: sowers of peace and joy, the peace and joy that Jesus has brought to us.”[89]

The present day culture of the provisional, in which it seems that nothing is definitive, has caused a loss of confidence in marriage. Given this scenario, Pope Francisco offers the same solution as St. Josemaría: “The most persuasive testimony of the blessing of Christian marriage is the good life of Christian spouses and of the family. There is no better way to speak of the beauty of the sacrament! A marriage consecrated by God safeguards that bond between man and woman that God has blessed from the very creation of the world; and it is the source of peace and goodness for the entire lifetime of the marriage and family. For example, in the first ages of Christianity, this great dignity of the bond between man and woman overcame an abuse then held normal, namely the husbands’ right to
repudiate their wives, even for reasons based on pretext or to humiliate. The Gospel of the family, the Gospel which proclaims this very Sacrament overcame this culture of customary repudiation.

“The Christian seed at the root of equality between spouses must bear new fruit today. The witness of the social dignity of marriage shall become persuasive precisely in this way, the way of a testimony which attracts, the way of reciprocity between them, of complementarity between them.”[90]


[3] The first author to defend this thesis was Herbert Doms in 1935, in his book Vom Sinn und Zweck der Ehe. For a fuller discussion of the open debate between this author and other Catholic writers in the first half of the 20th century, see: Rolando B. Arjunillo, Sobre el amor conyugal y los fines del matrimonio. El pensamiento de algunos autores católicos y la doctrina del Concilio Vaticano II (1930-1965), Instituto de ciencias para la familia, Pamplona 1999.


[7] A theological study of this homily can be found in Augusto Sarmiento “El matrimonio, vocación cristiana. A propósito de la homilía sobre el mismo título del beato Josemaría Escrivá,” in José Luis Illanes, José Ramon Villar, Rodrigo Muñoz, Tomás Trigo, Eduardo Flandes (coord.), El Cristiano en el mundo. En el centenario del nacimiento del Beato Josemaría Escrivá(1902-2002), Servicio de publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 2003, pp. 347-365. Sarmiento seeks to “highlight the main points of the theology of the vocation to marriage.” Our objective, on the other hand, is to better understand the harmony between the primacy
of conjugal love and the institution of marriage in the teachings contained in this homily.

[8] As he says explicitly towards the end of this homily: “To every Christian, whatever their state in life—priest or layman, married or single—we can apply fully the words of the apostle, which we read precisely on the feast of the Holy Family: chosen by God, holy and beloved.” In Marriage: a Christian Vocation, no. 30.

[9] Ibid., no. 22.

[10] Ibid.


[15] Ibid.


[21] For St. Thomas Aquinas, the form is the interior consent of the couple expressed externally: see Super Sent., IV, d. 26, q. 2, a.1, ad 1. See


[28] See Col 1, 16.


[34] *Marriage: a Christian Vocation*, no. 22.


[38] “Freedom, a Gift from God,” no. 30.


“Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.” 

St. Josemaría used this expression to refer to the self-giving of Christ on the Cross: “When our Lord arrives at Calvary, he is given some wine to drink mixed with gall, as a narcotic to lessen in some way the pain of the crucifixion. But Jesus, after tasting it to show his gratitude for that kind service, has not wanted to drink (see *Mt* 27:34). He gives himself up to death with the full freedom of love.” *The Way of the Cross*, Tenth Station.


Pope Francis, General Audience, May 6, 2015.

*Conversations with Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá*, no. 97.


*Ibid*, no. 24


In recent years, it has become more frequent to also find men who have been abandoned by their wives. St. Josemaría’s words are valid for these people as well.

*Conversations with St. Josemaría Escrivá*, no. 97.


“The aim is this: to sanctify family life, while creating at the same time a true family atmosphere.”


Augusto Sarmiento, Matrimonio, in José Luis Illanes (coord.), Diccionario de San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Monte Carmelo—Instituto histórico San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Burgos 2013, p. 820.


Cf. Ibid, no. 27.

Among the homilies collected in Friends of God, he insists on the same reality twice: “the faculty of generating new life—a great and noble faculty, a participation in God’s creative power” (no. 84); “sex is something noble and holy—a participation in God’s creative power—which was made for marriage” (no. 185). And in The Forge, no. 691, he states: “You share in the creative power of God: that is why human love is holy, good and noble.”

St. John Paul II, Address to the priests taking part in a study seminar on “Responsible Procreation,” September 17, 1983, no. 1.

See Pastoral const. Gaudium et Spes, no. 24.

St. Paul stresses the universality of Christ’s redemptive work when he writes that “he died for us” (Rom 5:8), and “he died for everyone” (2 Cor 5:14); at the same time he emphasizes that Christ died not for an abstract humanity but for each person in the singular: “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20). In harmony with these teachings, St. Josemaría said: “Every soul is a wonderful treasure; every man is unique and irreplaceable. Every single person is worth all the blood of Christ”: “Interior Struggle” in Christ Is Passing By, no. 80.
“The theories that make birth control an ideal, or a universal or general duty, are criminal, anti-Christian, and humanly degrading. To appeal to a presumed post-conciliar spirit opposed to large families would be to adulterate and pervert Christian doctrine. The Second Vatican Council has proclaimed that ‘especially worthy of mention among the married people who fulfill the mission entrusted to them by God, are those who, with prudent mutual agreement, generously accept a more numerous offspring to educate worthily’ (Pastoral constitution Gaudium et Spes, 50). Moreover, Pope Paul VI, in an address on 12 February 1966, said ‘that the recently concluded Second Vatican Council should spread among Christian couples a spirit of generosity in order to increase the new People of God... they should always remember that this expansion of God’s kingdom and the possibilities of the Church’s penetration among mankind in order to bring about eternal salvation and the salvation of the world are also entrusted to their generosity’.”

Pope Francis, General audience, February 11, 2015

See Mt 6:25-34. See also Is 49:15; Mt 10:29-31; Lk 12:6-7.

Marriage: a Christian Vocation, no. 27. Articles on St. Josemaría’s teachings on raising children include: Michele Dolz, “Una pedagogía de la fe en familia: a propósito de algunas enseñanzas del beato Josemaría Escrivá de...”


[82] Ibid.


[86] See Apostolic Exhort. Familiaris Consortio, no. 11.


[88] Pope Francis, General audience, September 2, 2015.


[90] Pope Francis, General audience, April 29, 2015.