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


You Did It to Me

In the scene of the final judgment that Jesus presents in the Gospel, both the just and the unjust ask our Lord when they have seen him hungry, naked or sick, and assisted him or failed to do so: “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). The corporal works of mercy are a response to these words of Christ. “We have to open our eyes,” says St. Josemaría, “we have to look around us and recognize how God is calling us through the people at our side. We cannot turn our backs on others, ignoring them, because we are caught up in our own little world. That wasn’t how Jesus lived. The Gospel often speaks of his mercy, his ability to feel the sorrow and share the needs of others” (Christ Is Passing By, no. 146).

The first manifestation of the works of mercy is solidarity with all those who are suffering, even though we don’t know them. “Not only are we concerned about the problems of each person, but we are in full solidarity with our fellow citizens in public calamities and misfortunes, which affect us in the same way,” said St. Josemaría back in the 1950s (Letter of February 14, 1950, no. 20). Although it is not possible for us to be aware of all the sufferings of every man and woman, nor to provide a material remedy for all their problems, Christians cannot be unconcerned about them, since they love all men and women with the heart of God: “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?” (2 Cor 11:29).

Christian solidarity is made a reality then, in first place, by praying for those who are suffering, even though we do not know them. In most cases we will not see the results of our prayers, made up also of work and sacrifice, but as the Pope said, we are convinced that “all of these encircle our world like a vital force” (Evangelii Gaudium, no. 279).

Solidarity is also shown in “simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness,” in the face of “a world of exacerbated consumption... a world which mistreats life in all its forms” (Laudato si’, no. 230). All of us, young and old, have to learn to detect the small daily needs of those who live with us. In a special way, we need to accompany closely family members and friends who are sick. Medical science has made great strides in finding ways to improve the condition of
those who are sick, but none of these technical means can replace the human closeness of someone who, rather than seeing in a sick person a burden, sees there “Christ passing by,” Christ who needs our care. “In the sick, a soul in love sees Him,” wrote St. Josemaría (The Way, no. 419). For as our Lord himself assured us, “Truly, I say to you... you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).

“When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?” Sometimes it can be difficult for us to see God in a person who is suffering. But those who are sick, precisely because of their weakness, are even more deserving of our love. A divine splendor illumines the features of the sick that makes them resemble the suffering Christ, who “had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Is 53:2).

Care for the sick, the elderly, the dying, requires a lot of patience and also generosity with our time, especially when a specific illness lasts a long time. The good Samaritan “also had his commitments and his things to do,” said the Pope in his audience at the end of April. We are asked to take this responsibility seriously, without resorting to coldhearted solutions that in the end amount to discarding those who humanly can contribute very little. Our Lord says, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (Jn 13:17). God reserves a blessing filled with tenderness for those who strive to care for the weak: “Come, O blessed of my Father” (Mt 25:34).

It is easy to detect around us many material needs: families who have emigrated fleeing from war, people who are unemployed, “those bound by new forms of slavery in modern society” (Misericordiae vultus, no. 16) such as drug addiction, hedonism, gambling…. One hardly knows where or how to begin. Experience shows that many small initiatives, aimed at solving a specific need in our immediate surroundings, and begun with whatever one has at hand and with whomever one can (most of the time with more good humor and creativity than time, financial resources, or help from public entities) end up doing a lot of good. Generosity generates a gratitude that is a springboard for new initiatives. Mercy begets mercy (see Mt 5:7), and is contagious. Thus the Gospel parable of the grain of mustard seed is fulfilled: “it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the
greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (*Mt* 13:32).

The needs of each place and the possibilities of each person are quite varied. The best plan is to choose something that is within our reach and get to work. Over time, often less that we think, doors will open that seemed permanently shut. And we can reach out to help those who are in prison, those who are captives to so many other addictions, who are abandoned on the roadside by a world that has discarded them when broken.

Recalling his first years as a priest in Madrid, Saint Josemaría spoke about going to the poor areas surrounding the city “to dry tears, to help those in need of help, to show affection to the young, the aged, the sick; and I received a lot of affection in return... along with at times stones thrown at me” (*Notes from a family gathering*, October 1, 1967, in AGP, P03, December 1967, p. 26). And he dreamed of the initiatives that today, along with many others brought forward by people of good will, are now a reality all over the world, and which need to continue growing *quasi fluvium pacis*, like a river of peace. “Today this is like a dream to me, a blessed dream that I see in so many impoverished areas of large cities, where we treat people with affection, looking in their eyes, face to face, because we are all equal” (*ibid*.).

Torna ai contenuti
HOLY SEE

• The Roman Pontiff
• The Roman Curia
Retreat on the Occasion of the Jubilee of Priests (June 2, 2016)

First Meditation: From Estrangement to Celebration

Basilica of St. John Lateran

Good morning dear priests,

Let us begin this day of spiritual retreat. I think it will benefit us to pray for one another, in communion. A retreat, but all of us in communion! I have chosen the theme of mercy. First, a short introduction for the entire retreat.

Mercy, seen in feminine terms, is the tender love of a mother who, touched by the frailty of her newborn baby, takes the child into her arms and provides everything it needs to live and grow (rahamim). In masculine terms, mercy is the steadfast fidelity of a father who constantly supports, forgives and encourages his children to grow. Mercy is the fruit of a covenant; that is why God is said to remember his covenant of mercy (hesed). At the same time, it is an utterly free act of kindness and goodness (eleos) rising up from the depths of our being and finding outward expression in charity. This all-embracing character means that everyone can appreciate what it means to be merciful, to feel compassion for those who suffer, sympathy for those in need, visceral indignation in the face of patent injustice and a desire to respond with loving respect by attempting to set things right. If we reflect on this natural feeling of mercy, we begin to see how God himself can be understood in terms of this defining attribute by which Jesus wished to reveal him to us. God’s name is mercy.

When we meditate on mercy, something special happens. The dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises takes on new power. Mercy helps us to see that the three ways of classical mysticism — the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive — are not successive stages that, once experienced, can then be put behind us. We never cease to be in need of renewed conversion, deeper contemplation and greater love. These three phases intertwine e recur.
Nothing unites us to God more than an act of mercy — and this is not an exaggeration: nothing unites us to God more than an act of mercy — for it is by mercy that the Lord forgives our sins and gives us the grace to practice acts of mercy in his name. Nothing strengthens our faith more than being cleansed of our sins. Nothing can be clearer than the teaching of Matthew 25 and the Beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Mt 5:7), for our understanding of God’s will and the mission he has entrusted to us. We can apply to mercy the Lord’s statement that “the measure you give will be the measure you receive” (Mt 7:2). If you will allow me, I am thinking of all those impatient confessors who “beat down” penitents, scolding them. But this is how God will treat them! If only for this reason, please don’t act in such a way. Mercy makes us pass from the recognition that we have received mercy to a desire to show mercy to others. We can feel within us a healthy tension between sorrow for our sins and the dignity that the Lord has bestowed on us. Without further ado, we can pass from estrangement to embrace, as in the parable of the prodigal son, and see how God uses our own sinfulness as the vessel of his mercy. I want to repeat this, which is the key to the first meditation: using our sinfulness itself as the vessel of his mercy. Mercy impels us to pass from personal to the communal. We see this in the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, a miracle born of Jesus’ compassion for his people and for others. Something similar happens when we act mercifully: the bread of mercy multiplies as it is shared.

Three Suggestions

I have three suggestions for this day of retreat. The free and joyful familiarity that comes about at every level between those who treat one another with mercy — the familiarity of the Kingdom of God as Jesus describes it in his parables — leads me to offer three suggestions for your personal prayer today.

The first has to do with two practical counsels that Saint Ignatius gives and I apologize for the “in house” advertising. He tells us that “it is not great knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but the ability to feel and savor the things of God interiorly” (Spiritual Exercises, 2). Saint Ignatius adds that whenever we encounter and savor something we desire, we should pray in peace, “without being anxious to move forward as long as I am
satisfied” (ibid., 76). So too, in these meditations on mercy we can begin with what we savor most and linger there, for surely one work of mercy will lead us to others. If we start by thanking the Lord for having wondrously created us and for even more wondrously redeemed us, surely this will lead us to a sense of sorrow for our sins. If we start by feeling compassion for the poor and the outcast, surely we will come to realize that we ourselves stand in need of mercy.

My second suggestion for your prayer has to do with the way we speak about mercy. By now you have realized that in Spanish I like to use “mercy” as a verb: We have to ‘show mercy’ [misericordiar in Spanish — to mercify: we have to stretch the language a little] in order to ‘receive mercy’ [ser misericordiados — to be mercified].” “But Father, this is not a real word!” — “True, but it is the form I have found useful to grasp this reality: to show mercy, misericordiar and receive mercy, ser misericordiados.” Mercy joins a human need to the heart of God, and this leads to immediate action. We cannot meditate on mercy without it turning into action. In prayer, it doesn’t help to intellectualize things. With the help of grace, our dialogue with the Lord has to focus straightaway on that sin for which I most need the Lord’s mercy, the one of which I am most ashamed, the one for which I most desire to make reparation. From the outset, too, we have to speak of what most moves us, of all those faces that make us want to do something to satisfy their hunger and thirst for God, for justice, for tenderness. Mercy is contemplated in action, but in a kind of action that is all-inclusive. Mercy engages our whole being — our feelings and our spirit — and all other beings as well.

My last suggestion for today’s retreat has to do with the fruit of these Exercises, namely the grace that we ask to receive. It is, in a word, the grace to become priests ever more ready to “receive mercy” (misericordiados) and to “show mercy” (misericordiosos). One of the most beautiful things, and which moves me, is a priest’s confession: it is something great, beautiful, because this man who comes to confess his own sins is the same who will listen to the heart of other penitents who come to confess their sins. We can concentrate on mercy because it is what is most essential and definitive. By the stairway of mercy (cf. Laudato Si’, 77), we can descend to the depths of our human condition — including our frailty and sin — and ascend to
the heights of divine perfection: “Be merciful (perfect) as your Father is merciful.” But always for the sake of “reaping” even greater mercy. This fruit should also be seen in a conversion of our institutional mindset: unless our structures are vibrant and aimed at making us more open to God’s mercy and more merciful to others, they can turn into something very bizarre and eventually counterproductive. This area is dealt with often in some documents of the Church and addresses of various Popes: institutional conversion, pastoral conversion.

This retreat, then, will follow the path of that “evangelical simplicity” which sees and does all things in the key of mercy. That mercy is dynamic, not so much a noun with a fixed and definite meaning, or a descriptive adjective, but rather a verb — “to show mercy” and “to receive mercy” [misericordiar and ser misericordiados]. This spurs us to action in this world. Even more, it is a mercy that is “ever greater” (magis), a mercy that grows and expands, passing from good to better and from less to more. For the model that Jesus sets before us is that of the Father, who is ever greater — Deus semper maior — and whose infinite mercy in some sense constantly “grows.” His mercy has no roof or walls, because it is born of his sovereign freedom.

First Meditation: From Estrangement to Celebration

Now we turn to the first meditation. I have entitled it “From estrangement to celebration.” If, as we said, the Gospel presents mercy as an excess of God’s love, the first thing we have to do is to see where today’s world, and every person in it, most needs this kind of overflow of love. We have to ask ourselves how such mercy is to be received. On what barren and parched land must this flood of living water surge? What are the wounds that need this precious balm? What is the sense of abandonment that cries out for loving attention? What is the sense of estrangement that so thirsts for embrace and encounter?

The parable which I would now propose for your meditation is that of the merciful Father (cf. Lk 15:11-31). We find ourselves before the mystery of the Father. I think we should begin with the moment when the prodigal son stands in the middle of the pigsty, in that inferno of selfishness where, having done everything he wanted to do, now, instead of being free, he
feels enslaved. He looks at the pigs as they eat their husks… and he envies them. He feels homesick. Homesick: a crucial word. He longs for the fresh baked bread that the servants in his house, his father’s house, eat for breakfast. Homesickness, nostalgia is a powerful emotion. Like mercy, it expands the soul. It makes us think back to our first experience of goodness — the homeland from which we went forth — and it awakens in us the hope of returning there. It is the nostos algos. Against this vast horizon of nostalgia, the young man — as the Gospel tells us — came to his senses and realized that he was miserable. Each one of us can come to, or be led to, the point of feeling greater misery. Each one of us has his or her hidden misery… we need to beg for the grace to find it.

Without dwelling on that misery of his, let us move on to the other moment, once his Father had embraced him and kissed him. He finds himself still dirty, yet dressed for a banquet. For his father does not say: “Go and have a shower and then come here.” No. He is dirty and dressed for a banquet. He fingers the ring he has been given, which is just like his father’s. He has new sandals on his feet. He is in the middle of a party, in the midst of a crowd of people. A bit like ourselves, if ever we have gone to confession before Mass and then all of a sudden found ourselves vested and in the middle of a ceremony. It is a state of embarrassed dignity.

*An Embarrassed Dignity*

Let us think for a moment about the “embarrassed dignity” of this prodigal yet beloved son. If we can serenely keep our heart balanced between those two extremes — dignity and embarrassment — without letting go of either of them, perhaps we can feel how the heart of our Father beats with love for us. It was a heart beating with worry, as he went up onto the roof to look out. What was he looking at? The possible return of his son… In that moment, in that place where dignity and embarrassment exist side by side, we can perceive how our Father’s heart beats. We can imagine that mercy wells up in it like blood. He goes out to seek us sinners. He draws us to himself; purifies us and sends us forth, new and renewed, to every periphery, to bring mercy to all. That blood is the blood of Christ, the blood of the new and eternal covenant of mercy, poured out for us and for all, for the forgiveness of sins. We contemplate that blood by going in and out of his heart and the heart of the Father.
That is our sole treasure, the only thing we have to give to the world: the blood that purifies and brings peace to every reality and all people. The blood of the Lord that forgives sins. The blood that is true drink, for it reawakens and revives what was dead from sin.

In our serene prayer, which wavers between embarrassment and dignity, dignity and embarrassment, both together, let us ask for the grace to sense that mercy as giving meaning to our entire life, the grace to feel how the heart of the Father beats as one with our own. It is not enough to think of that grace as something God offers us from time to time, whenever he forgives some big sin of ours, so that then we can go off to do the rest by ourselves, alone. It is not enough.

Saint Ignatius offers us an image drawn from the courtly culture of his time, but since loyalty among friends is a perennial value, it can also help us. He says that, in order to feel “embarrassment and shame” for our sins (but without forgetting God’s mercy), we can use the example of “a knight who finds himself before his king and his entire court, ashamed and embarrassed for having gravely wronged him, after having received from him many gifts and many favors” (Spiritual Exercises, 74). We can imagine this scene. But like the prodigal son who finds himself in the middle of a banquet, this knight, who ought to feel ashamed before everyone, suddenly sees the King take him by the hand and restore his dignity. Indeed, not only does the King ask him to follow him into battle, but he puts him at the head of his peers. With what humility and loyalty this knight will serve him henceforth! This makes me think of the last part of Chapter 16 of the Book of Ezekiel.

Whether we see ourselves as the prodigal son in the midst of the banquet, or the disloyal knight restored and promoted, the important thing is that each of us feel that fruitful tension born of the Lord’s mercy: we are at one and the same time sinners pardoned and sinners restored to dignity. The Lord not only cleanses us, but crowns us, giving us dignity.

Simon Peter represents the ministerial aspect of this healthy tension. At every step along the way, the Lord trains him to be both Simon and Peter. Simon, the ordinary man with all his faults and inconsistencies, and Peter, the bearer of the keys who leads the others. When Andrew brings
Simon, fresh from his nets, to Christ, the Lord gives him the name Peter, “Rock.” Yet immediately after praising Peter’s confession of faith, which comes from the Father, Jesus sternly reproves him for being tempted to heed the evil spirit telling him to flee the cross. Jesus will go on to invite Peter to walk on the water; he will let him sink into his own fear, only then to stretch out his hand and raise him up. No sooner does Peter confess that he is a sinner than the Lord makes him a fisher of men. He will question Peter at length about his love, instilling in him sorrow and shame for his disloyalty and cowardice, but he will also thrice entrust to him the care of his sheep. These two opposites always go together.

That is how we have to see ourselves: poised between our utter shame and our sublime dignity. What do we feel when people kiss our hands, when we are honored by the People of God, as we look at our own depths of misery? There is another circumstance which helps us understand. Contrast is always present. We must place ourselves into that context, that place wherein our most shameful misery and highest dignity exist side by side. In that same place. Dirty, impure, mean — the sin of priests, vanity — and selfish yet at the same time, with feet washed, called and chosen to distribute the Lord’s multiplied loaves, blessed by our people, loved and cared for. Only mercy makes this situation bearable. Without it, either we believe in our own righteousness like the Pharisees, or we shrink back like those who feel unworthy. In either case, our hearts grow hardened: when we feel righteous like the Pharisees or when we distance ourselves like those who feel unworthy. I do not feel worthy, but I must not distance myself: I must have an embarrassed dignity, both go together.

Let us look a little more closely at this, and ask why this tension is so fruitful between misery and dignity, between estrangement and celebration? The reason, I would say, is that it is the result of a free decision. The Lord acts mainly through our freedom, even though his help never fails us. Mercy is a matter of freedom. As a feeling, it wells up spontaneously. When we say that it is visceral, it might seem that it is synonymous with “animal.” But animals do not experience “moral” mercy, even though some of them may experience something akin to compassion, like the faithful dog keeping watch at the side of his ailing master. Mercy is a visceral emotion but it can also be the fruit of an acute intellectual insight — startling as a
bolt of lightning but no less complex for its simplicity. We intuit many things when we feel mercy. We understand, for example that another person is in a desperate state, a limit situation; something is going on that is greater than his or her sins and failings. We also realize that the other person is our peer, that we could well be standing in his or her shoes. Or that evil is such an immense and devastating thing that it can’t simply be fixed by justice… Deep down, we realize that what is needed is an infinite mercy, like that of the heart of Christ, to remedy all the evil and suffering we see in the lives of human beings… If mercy is anything less than this, it is not enough. We can understand so many things simply by seeing someone barefoot in the street on a cold morning, or by contemplating the Lord nailed to the cross — for me!

Moreover, mercy can be freely accepted and nurtured, or freely rejected. If we accept it, one thing leads to another. If we choose to ignore it, our heart grows cold. Mercy makes us experience our freedom and, as a result, the freedom of God himself, who, as he said to Moses, is “merciful with whom he is merciful” (cf. Dt 5:10). By his mercy the Lord expresses his freedom. And we, our own.

We can “do without” the Lord’s mercy for a long time. In other words, we can go through life without thinking about it consciously or explicitly asking for it. Then one day we realize that “all is mercy” and we weep bitterly for not having known it earlier, when we needed it most!

This feeling is a kind of moral misery. It is the entirely personal realization that at a certain point in my life I decided to go it alone: I made my choice and I chose badly. Such are the depths we have to reach in order to feel sorrow for our sins and true repentance. Otherwise, we lack the freedom to see that sin affects our entire life. We don’t recognize our misery, and thus we miss out on mercy, which only acts on that condition. People don’t go to a pharmacy and ask for an aspirin out of mercy. Out of mercy we ask for morphine, to administer to a person who is terminally ill and racked with pain. All or nothing. If we do not go into this deeply, we will fail to understand.

The heart that God joins to this moral misery of ours is the heart of Christ, his beloved Son, which beats as one with that of the Father and the
Spirit. I remember when Pius XII completed his Encyclical on the Sacred Heart, someone commented: “Why an Encyclical on this? This is for religious sisters….” The heart of Jesus is the center, the very center of mercy. Perhaps sisters understand this better than we do, because they are mothers in the Church, icons of the Church, of the Blessed Mother. But the center is the heart of Jesus. We would do well to read this week or tomorrow *Haurietis aquas*… “But it is preconciliar!” — true, but it helps me! Reading it can help us! The heart of Jesus is a heart that chooses the fastest route and takes it. Mercy gets its hands dirty. It touches, it gets involved, it gets caught up with others, *it gets personal*. It does not approach “cases” but persons and their pain. Let us examine our use of words. How many times, without realizing it, do we say: “I have this case….” Stop right there! Say, instead: “I have this person who….” This is very clerical: “I have this case….” “I’ve come across a case….” It happens to me often. There is some clericalism: to reduce the concreteness of God’s love, that love which God gives us and that of persons, to a “case.” In this way I distance myself and am not affected. In this way I don’t dirty my hands; I am able to carry out a pastoral work that is clean, elegant, and in which I risk nothing. And in which — don’t be scandalized — I am not able to sin shamefully. Mercy exceeds justice; it brings knowledge and compassion; it leads to involvement. By the dignity it brings — and this is crucial, not to be forgotten: mercy brings dignity — mercy raises up the one over whom another has stooped to bring help. The one who shows mercy and the one to whom mercy is shown become equals. Like the sinful woman in the Gospel (*Lk* 7:36–50), who was forgiven much, because she loved much and had sinned much.

That is why the Father needed to celebrate, so that *everything could be restored at once*, and his son could regain his lost dignity. This realization makes it possible to look to the future in a different way. It is not that mercy overlooks the objective harm brought about by evil. Rather, *it takes away evil’s power over the future*, and this is the power of mercy: it takes away the power of evil over life, which then goes on. Mercy is the genuine expression of life that counters death, the bitter fruit of sin. As such, it is completely lucid and in no way naïve. It is not that it is blind to evil; rather, it sees how short life is and all the good still to be done. That is why it is so important to forgive completely, so that others can look to the future
without wasting time on self-recrimination and self-pity over their past mistakes. In starting to care for others, we will examine our own consciences, and to the extent that we help others, we will make reparation for the wrong we ourselves have done. Mercy is always tinged with hope. Mercy is the mother of hope.

To let ourselves to be drawn to and sent by the beating heart of the Father is to remain in this healthy tension of embarrassed dignity. Letting ourselves be drawn into his heart, like blood which has been sullied on its way to give life to the extremities, so that the Lord can purify us and wash our feet. Letting ourselves be sent, full of the oxygen of the Spirit, to revive the whole body, especially those members who are most distant, frail and hurting.

A priest, and this really happened, once told me about a street person who ended up living in a hospice. He was consumed by bitterness and did not interact with others. He was an educated person, as they later found out. Sometime thereafter, this man was hospitalized for a terminal illness. He told the priest that while he was there, feeling empty and disillusioned, the man in the next bed asked him to remove his bed pan and empty it. That request from someone truly in need, someone worse off than he was, opened his eyes and his heart to a powerful sense of humanity, a desire to help another person and to let himself be helped by God. He confessed his sins. A simple act of mercy put him in touch with infinite mercy. It led him to help someone else and, in doing so, to be helped himself. He died after making a good confession, and at peace. This is the mystery of mercy.

So I leave you with the parable of the merciful Father, now that we have entered into the situation of the son who feels dirty and dressed up, a dignified sinner, ashamed of himself yet proud of his father. The sign that we have entered into it is that we ourselves now desire be merciful to all. This is the fire Jesus came to bring to the earth, a fire that lights other fires. If the spark does not take, it is because one of the poles cannot make contact. Either excessive shame, which fails to strip the wires and, instead of freely confessing “I did this or that.” stays covered; or excessive dignity, which touches things with gloves.

An Excess Of Mercy
A few words to conclude on the excesses of mercy. The only way for us to be “excessive” in responding to God’s excessive mercy is to be completely open to receiving it and to sharing it with others. The Gospel gives us many touching examples of people who went to excess in order to receive his mercy. There is the paralytic whose friends let him down from the roof into the place where the Lord was preaching — they exaggerate somewhat. Or the leper who left his nine companions to come back, glorifying and thanking God in a loud voice, to kneel at the Lord’s feet. Or the blind Bartimaeus whose outcry made Jesus halt before him — and even gets through the “priests’ custom controls” to reach the Lord. Or the woman suffering from a hemorrhage who timidly approached the Lord and touched his robe; as the Gospel tells us, Jesus felt power — *dynamis* — “go forth” from him… All these are examples of that contact that lights a fire and unleashes the positive force of mercy. Then too, we can think of the sinful woman, who washed the Lord’s feet with her tears and dried them with her hair; Jesus saw her excessive display of love as a sign of her having received great mercy. Mercy is always excessive! Ordinary people — sinners, the infirm and those possessed by demons — are immediately raised up by the Lord. He makes them pass from exclusion to full inclusion, from estrangement to celebration. And it can only be understood in the key of hope, in an apostolic key, in the key of knowing mercy and then showing mercy.

Let us conclude by praying the *Magnificat* of mercy, *Psalm 50* by King David, which we pray each Friday at Morning Prayer. It is the *Magnificat* of “a humble and contrite heart” capable of confessing its sin before the God who, in his fidelity, is greater than any of our sins. God is greater than our sins! If we put ourselves in the place of the prodigal son, at the moment when, expecting his Father’s reproof, he discovers instead that his Father has thrown a party, we can imagine him praying Psalm 50. We can pray it antiphonally with him, we and the prodigal son together. We can hear him saying: “Have mercy on me, O God, in your kindness; in your compassion blot out my offence” … And ourselves continuing: “My offences, truly I (too) know them; my sin is always before me.” And together: “Against you, Father, against you, you alone, have I sinned.”
May our prayer rise up from that interior tension which kindles mercy, that tension between the shame that says: “From my sins turn away your face, and blot out all my guilt,” and the confidence that says, “O purify me, then I shall be clean; O wash me, I shall be whiter than snow.” A confidence that becomes apostolic: “Give me again the joy of your help; with the spirit of fervor sustain me, that I may teach transgressors your ways, and sinners may return to you.”

Second Meditation: *The Vessel of Mercy*

**Basilica of St. Mary Major**

After meditating on the “embarrassed dignity” and “dignified embarrassment” that are the fruits of mercy, let us continue by considering the “vessel of mercy.” This is not something complicated. Let me simply say that the vessel of mercy is our sin. It is that simple. Our sin is usually like a sieve, or a leaky bucket, from which grace quickly drains. “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer 2:13). That is why the Lord had to teach Peter the need to “forgive seventy times seven.” God keeps forgiving; we are the ones who grow weary of forgiving. God never tires of forgiving, even when he sees how hard it is for his grace to take root in the parched and rocky soil of our hearts. In a word, God is no Pelagian: that is why he never tires of forgiving. He never stops sowing his mercy and his forgiveness. He keeps coming back to us… seventy times seven.

*Hearts Created Anew*

Let us take a closer look at this mercy of God that is always “greater” than our consciousness of our sinfulness. The Lord never tires of forgiving us; indeed, he renews the wineskins in which we receive that forgiveness. He uses a new wineskin for the new wine of his mercy, not one that is patched or old. That wineskin is mercy itself: his own mercy, which we experience and then show in helping others. A heart that has known mercy is not old and patched, but new and re-created. It is the heart for which David prayed: “A pure heart create for me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps 50:12).

That heart, created anew, is a good vessel; it is no longer battered and
leaky. The liturgy echoes the heartfelt conviction of the Church in the beautiful prayer that follows the first reading of the Easter Vigil: “O God who wonderfully created the universe, then more wonderfully re-created it in the redemption.” In this prayer, we affirm that the second creation is even more wondrous than the first. Ours is a heart conscious of having been created anew thanks to the coalescence of its own poverty and God’s forgiveness; it is a “heart which has been shown mercy and shows mercy.” It feels the balm of grace poured out upon its wounds and its sinfulness; it feels mercy assuaging its guilt, watering its aridity with love and rekindling its hope. When, with the same grace, it then forgives other sinners and treats them with compassion, this mercy takes root in good soil, where water does not drain off but sinks in and gives life.

The best practitioners of this mercy that rights wrongs are those who know that they themselves have been shown mercy with regard to the same evil. Look at yourself; think of your own story; remind yourself of your story; and you will discover so much mercy! We see this in the case of addiction counsellors: those who have overcome their own addiction are usually those who can best understand, help and challenge others. So too, the best confessors are usually themselves good penitents. We can think about the kind of penitent we ourselves are. Almost all the great saints were great sinners or, like Saint Therese, knew that it was by sheer grace that they were not.

The real vessel of mercy, then, is the mercy which each of us received and which created in us a new heart. This is the “new wineskin” to which Jesus referred (cf. Lk5:37), the “healed sore.”

Here we enter more deeply into the mystery of the Son, Jesus, who is the Father’s mercy incarnate. Here too we can find the definitive icon of the vessel of mercy in the wounds of the risen Lord. Those wounds remind us that the traces of our sins, forgiven by God, never completely heal or disappear; they remain as scars. Saint Bernard has two fine sermons on the Lord’s wounds. There, in those wounds, we find mercy. Bernard pointedly asks: “Do you feel lost? “Are you troubled? Enter into the wounds of the Lord and there you will find mercy.”
Scars, we know, are sensitive; they do not hurt, yet they remind us of our old wounds. God’s mercy is in those scars, our scars. The Lord stills bears his wounds; he wanted to carry those scars, and ours as well. When we go to the doctor and he sees a scar, he asks us how we got it, the reason why we had this or that operation. Let us look at the scars of our soul and say to the Lord: “You performed this operation, with your mercy, this is the wound that you healed…”

In the scars of the risen Christ, the marks of the wounds in his hands and feet but also in his pierced heart, we find the true meaning of sin and grace. There, in his wounded heart. As we contemplate the Lord’s wounded heart, we see ourselves reflected in him. His heart, and our own, are similar: both are wounded and risen. But we know that his heart was pure love and was wounded because it willed to be so; our heart, on the other hand, was pure wound, which was healed because it allowed itself to be loved. By doing so, it became a vessel of mercy.

*Our Saints Received Mercy*

We can benefit from contemplating others who let their hearts be re-created by mercy and by seeing the “vessel” in which they received that mercy.

*Paul* received mercy in the harsh and inflexible vessel of his judgement, shaped by the Law. His harsh judgement made him a persecutor. Mercy so changed him that he sought those who were far off, from the pagan world, and, at the same time showed great understanding and mercy to those who were as he had been. Paul was willing to be an outcast, provided he could save his own people. His approach can be summed up in this way: he did not judge even himself, but instead let himself be justified by a God who is greater than his conscience, appealing to Jesus as the faithful advocate from whose love nothing and no one could separate him. Paul’s understanding of God’s unconditional mercy was radical. His realization that God’s mercy overcomes the inner wound that subjects us to two laws, the law of the flesh and the law of the Spirit, was the fruit of a mind open to absolute truth, wounded in the very place where the Law and the Light become a trap. The famous “thorn” that the Lord did not take away from him was the vessel in which Paul received the Lord’s mercy (cf. 2 Cor 12:7).
Peter receives mercy in his presumption of being a man of good sense. He was sensible with the sound, practical wisdom of a fisherman who knows from experience when to fish and when not to. But he was also sensible when, in his excitement at walking on water and hauling in miraculous draughts of fish, he gets carried away with himself and realizes that he has to ask help from the only one who can save him. Peter was healed of the deepest wound of all, that of denying his friend. Perhaps the reproach of Paul, who confronted him with his duplicity, has to do with this; it may be that Paul felt that he had been worse “before” knowing Christ, whereas Peter had denied Christ, after knowing him... Still, once Peter was healed of that wound, he became a merciful pastor, a solid rock on which one can always build, since it is a weak rock that has been healed, not a stumbling stone. In the Gospel, Peter is the disciple whom the Lord most often corrects. He gets a “thrashing” more than the others! Jesus is constantly correcting him, even to the end: “What is that to you? Follow me!” (Jn 21:22). Tradition tells us that Jesus appeared once again to Peter as he was fleeing Rome. The image of Peter being crucified head down perhaps best expresses this vessel of a hardhead who, in order to be shown mercy, abased himself even in giving the supreme witness of his love for the Lord. Peter did not want to end his life saying, “I learned the lesson.” but rather, “Since my head is never going to get it right, I will put it on the bottom.” What he put on top were his feet, the feet that the Lord had washed. For Peter, those feet were the vessel in which he received the mercy of his Friend and Lord.

John was healed in his pride for wanting to requite evil with fire. He who was a “son of thunder” (Mk 3:17) would end up writing to his “little children” and seem like a kindly grandfather who speaks only of love.

Augustine was healed in his regret for being a latecomer. This troubled him and in his yearning to make up for lost time he was healed: “Late have I loved thee.” He would find a creative and loving way to compensate by writing his Confessions.

Francis experienced mercy at many points in his life. Perhaps the definitive vessel, which became real wounds, was not so much kissing the leper, marrying Lady Poverty or feeling himself a brother to every creature, as the experience of having to watch over in merciful silence the Order he
had founded. This is where I see the great heroism of Francis: in his having to watch over in merciful silence the Order he had founded. This was his great vessel of mercy. Francis saw his brethren divided under the very banner of poverty. The devil makes us quarrel among ourselves, defending even the most holy things “with an evil spirit.”

*Ignatius* was healed in his vanity, and if that was the vessel, we can catch a glimpse of how great must have been his yearning for vainglory, which was re-created in his strenuous efforts to seek the greater glory of God.

In his *Diary of a Country Priest*, Bernanos recounts the life of an ordinary priest, inspired by the life of the Curé of Ars. There are two beautiful paragraphs describing the reflections of the priest in the final moments of his unexpected illness: “May God grant me the grace in these last weeks to continue to take care of the parish... But I shall give less thought to the future, I shall work in the present. I feel such work is within my power. For I only succeed in small things, and when I am tried by anxiety, I am bound to say that it is the small things that release me.” Here we see a small vessel of mercy, one that has to do with the minuscule joys of our pastoral life, where we receive and bestow the infinite mercy of the Father in little gestures. Little priestly gestures.

The other paragraph says: “It is all over now. The strange mistrust I had of myself, of my own being, has flown, I believe for ever. That conflict is done. I cannot understand it any more. I am reconciled to myself, to the poor, poor shell of me. How easy it is to hate oneself. True grace is to forget. Yet if pride could die in us, the supreme grace would be to love oneself in all simplicity — as one would love any of those who themselves have suffered and loved in Christ.” This is the vessel: “to love oneself in all simplicity, as one would love any of those who themselves have suffered and loved in Christ.” It is an ordinary vessel, like an old jar we can borrow even from the poor.

*Blessed José Gabriel del Rosario Brochero*, the Argentinian priest — my countryman! — who will soon be canonized. He “let his heart be shaped by the mercy of God.” In the end, his vessel was his own leprous body. He wanted to die on horseback, crossing a mountain stream on the way to
anoint a sick person. Among the last things he said was: “There is no ultimate glory in this life.” For me these words are striking: “There is no ultimate glory in this life.” Towards the end, when leprosy had left him blind, he said: “I am quite happy with what God has done with me regarding my sight, and I thank him for that. While I could serve other people, he kept my senses whole and strong. Today, when I can no longer do so, he has taken away one of my physical senses. In this world there is no ultimate glory, and we have our more than enough misery. Often our work remains unfinished, so being at peace with that is always a grace. We are allowed to “let things go” so that the Lord can bless and perfect them. We shouldn’t be overly concerned. In this way, we can be open to the pain and joy of our brothers and sisters. Cardinal Van Thuan used to say that, in prison, the Lord taught him to distinguish between “God’s business,” to which he was devoted in his free life as priest and bishop, and God himself, to whom he was devoted during his imprisonment (Five Loaves and Two Fish, Pauline Books and Media, 2003).

We could easily go on talking about how the saints were vessels of mercy, but let us turn to Our Lady. After all, we are in her house!

Mary as Vessel and Source of Mercy

Ascending the stairway of the saints in our pursuit of vessels of mercy, we come at last to Our Lady. She is the simple yet perfect vessel that both receives and bestows mercy. Her free “yes” to grace is the very opposite of the sin that led to the downfall of the prodigal son. Her mercy is very much her own, very much our own and very much that of the Church. As she says in the Magnificat, she knows that God has looked with or upon her humility and she recognizes that his mercy is from generation to generation. Mary can see the working of this mercy and she feels “embraced.” together with all of Israel, by it. She treasures in her heart the memory and promise of God’s infinite mercy for his people. Hers is the Magnificat of a pure and overflowing heart that sees all of history and each individual person with a mother’s mercy.

During the moments I was able to spend alone with Mary during my visit to Mexico, as I gazed at Our Lady, the Virgin of Guadalupe and I let her gaze at me, I prayed for you, dear priests, to be good pastors of souls. I
have often told this story. In my address to the bishops, I mentioned that I reflected at length on the mystery of Mary’s gaze, its tenderness and its sweetness that give us the courage to open our hearts to God’s mercy. I would now like to reflect with you on a few of the ways that Our Lady “gazes” especially at priests, since through us she wants to gaze at her people.

Mary’s gaze makes us feel her maternal embrace. She shows us that “the only power capable of winning human hearts is the tenderness of God. What delights and attracts, humbles and overcomes, opens and unleashes is not the power of instruments or the force of the law, but rather the omnipotent weakness of divine love, which is the irresistible force of its gentleness and the irrevocable pledge of its mercy” (Address to the Mexican Bishops, 13 February 2016). What people seek in the eyes of Mary is “a place of rest where people, still orphans and disinherited, may find a place of refuge, a home.” And that has to do with the way she “gazes” — her eyes open up a space that is inviting, not at all like a tribunal or an office. If at times you realize that your own gaze has become hardened from hard work or weariness — this is something that happens to us all — or that you tend to look at people with annoyance or coldness, stop and look once again to her in heartfelt humility. For Our Lady can remove every “cataract” that prevents you from seeing Christ in people’s souls. She can remove the myopia that fails to see the needs of others, which are the needs of the incarnate Lord, as well as the hyperopia that cannot see the details, “the small print” where the truly important things are played out in the life of the Church and of the family. Our Lady’s gaze brings healing.

Another aspect of Mary’s gaze to do with weaving. Mary gazes “by weaving”, by finding a way to bring good out of all the things that her people lay at her feet. I told the Mexican bishops that, “in the mantle of the Mexican soul, with the thread of its mestizo features, God has woven in la Morenita the face by which he wishes to be known.” A spiritual master teaches us that “whatever is said of Mary specially is said of the Church universally and of each soul individually” (cf. Isaac of Stella, Serm. 51: PL 194, 1863). If we consider how God wove the face and figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe into Juan Diego’s cloak, we can prayerfully ponder how he is weaving our soul and the life of the whole Church.
They say that it is impossible to see how the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe was “painted”; it seems to have been somehow “imprinted.” I like to think that the miracle was not only that the image was imprinted or painted, but that the entire cloak was re-created, transformed from top to bottom. Each thread — those threads of maguey leaf that women had learned from childhood to weave for their finest garments — was transfigured in its place, and, interwoven with all the others, revealed the face of our Lady, her presence and her surroundings. God’s mercy does the same thing with us. It doesn’t “paint” us a pretty face, or airbrush the reality of who we are. Rather, with the very threads of our poverty and sinfulness, interwoven with the Father’s love, it so weaves us that our soul is renewed and recovers its true image, the image of Jesus. So be priests “capable of imitating this freedom of God, who chooses the humble in order to reveal the majesty of his countenance, priests capable of imitating God’s patience by weaving the new humanity which your country awaits with the fine thread of all those whom you encounter. Don’t give into the temptation to go elsewhere — this is one of our temptations, to ask the bishop for a transfer! — as if the love of God were not powerful enough to bring about change” (Address to the Mexican Bishops, 13 February 2016).

A third aspect of Our Lady’s gaze is that of attentive care. Her gaze is one of complete attention. She leaves everything else behind, and is concerned only with the person in front of her. Like a mother, she is all ears for the child who has something to tell her. Have you seen how mothers even imitate the voice of their babies to encourage them to speak? They become small themselves. In Mexico I said that “the wonderful Guadalupe tradition teaches us that la Morenita treasures the gaze of all those who look to her; she reflects the faces of all who come to her. There is something unique about the face of every person who comes to us looking for God. Not everyone looks at us in the same way. We need to realize this, to open our hearts and to show concern for them” (ibid.). Otherwise, a priest becomes self-centered. Only a Church capable of attentive concern for all those who knock on her door can speak to them of God. Unless you can treasure the faces of those who knock at your door, you will not be able to talk to them about God. “Unless we can see into people’s suffering and recognize their needs, we will have nothing to offer them. The riches we possess only flow forth when we truly encounter the
needs of others, and this encounter takes place precisely in our heart as pastors” (ibid.).

In Mexico, I asked the bishops to be attentive to you, their priests, and not to leave you “exposed to loneliness and abandonment, easy prey to a worldliness that devours the heart” (ibid.). The world is watching us closely, in order to “devour” us, to make us consumers… All of us need attention, a gaze of genuine concern. As I told the bishops: “Be attentive and learn to read the faces of your priests, in order to rejoice with them when they feel the joy of recounting all that they have ‘done and taught’ (Mk 6:30). Also do not step back when they are humbled and can only weep because they ‘have denied the Lord’ (cf. Lk 22:61–62). Offer your support, in communion with Christ, whenever one of them, discouraged, goes out with Judas into ‘the night’ (cf. Jn 13:30). In these situations your fatherly care for your priests must never be found wanting. Encourage communion among them; seek to bring out the best in them, and enlist them in great ventures, for the heart of an apostle was not made for small things” (ibid.).

Lastly, Mary’s gaze is “integral”, all-embracing. It brings everything together: our past, our present and our future. It is not fragmented or partial: mercy can see things as a whole and grasp what is most necessary. At Cana, Mary “empathetically” foresaw what the lack of wine in the wedding feast would mean and she asked Jesus to resolve the problem, without anyone noticing. We can see our entire priestly life as somehow “foreseen” by Mary’s mercy; she sees beforehand the things we lack and provides for them. If there is any “good wine” present in our lives, it is due not to our own merits but to her “anticipated mercy.” In the Magnificat, she proclaims how the Lord “looked with or on her loneliness” and “remembered his (covenant of) mercy”, a “mercy shown from generation to generation” to the poor and the downtrodden. For Mary, history is mercy.

We can conclude by praying the Salve Regina. The words of this prayer are vibrant with the mystery of the Magnificat. Mary is the Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. Whenever you priests have moments of darkness or distress, whenever your hearts are troubled, I would encourage you not only to “look to your Mother” — you should do that anyway — but to go to her, let her gaze at you, be still and even fall asleep in her presence. Your distress, and all those mistakes that may have
brought it about… all that muck will become a vessel of mercy. Let Our Lady gaze at you! Her eyes of mercy are surely the greatest vessel of mercy, for their gaze enables us to drink in that kindness and goodness for which we hunger with a yearning that only a look of love can satisfy. Mary’s eyes of mercy also enable us to see God’s mercy at work in human history and to find Jesus in the faces of our brothers and sisters. In Mary, we catch a glimpse of the promised land — the Kingdom of mercy established by the Lord — already present in this life beyond the exile into which sin leads us.

So let Our Lady take you by the hand, and cling to her mantle. In my office I have a lovely image of the Synkatabasis that Father Rupnik gave me. It shows Mary holding out her hands like a stairway on which Jesus descends. What I like most about it is that Jesus holds in one hand the fullness of the Law and with the other he clings to her mantle. In the Russian tradition, the old monks tell us that amid spiritual storms we need to take refuge under the mantle of Mary. The first Marian antiphon in the West says the same thing: Sub Tuum Praesidium. Our Lady’s mantle. So don’t be ashamed, don’t keep talking, just stay there and let yourself be sheltered, let yourselves be looked at. And weep. When we find a priest who can do this, who can go to Our Lady with all his sins and weep, there, I would say, is a good priest, because he is a good son. He will be a good father.

Holding Mary’s hand and beneath her gaze, we can joyfully proclaim the greatness of the Lord. We can say: My soul sings of you, Lord, for you have looked with or on the lowliness and humility of your servant. How blessed I am, to have been forgiven. Your mercy, Lord, that you showed to your saints and to all your faithful people, you have also shown to me. I was lost, seeking only myself, in the arrogance of my heart, yet I found no glory. My only glory is that your Mother has embraced me, covered me with her mantle, and drawn me to her heart. I want to be loved as one of your little ones. I want to feed with your bread all those who hunger for you. Remember, Lord, your covenant of mercy with your sons, the priests of your people. With Mary, may we be the sign and sacrament of your mercy.

Third Meditation: The Good Odor of Christ and the Light of His Mercy

Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls
Let us hope that the Lord will grant us what we sought in prayer: to imitate Jesus’ example of patience, and with that patience to overcome all our difficulties.

This, our third meditation, is entitled: The good odor of Christ and the light of his mercy.

In this third meeting, I propose that we meditate on the works of mercy, by taking whichever one we feel is most closely linked to our charism, and by looking at them as a whole. We can contemplate them through the merciful eyes of Our Lady, who helps us to find “the wine that is lacking” and encourages us to “do whatever Jesus tells us” (cf. Jn 2:1-12), so that his mercy can work the miracles that our people need.

The works of mercy are closely linked to the “spiritual senses”. In our prayer we ask for the grace so to “feel and savor” the Gospel that it can make us more “sensitive” in our lives. Moved by the Spirit and led by Jesus, we can see from afar, with the eyes of mercy, those who have fallen along the wayside. We can hear the cries of Bartimaeus and feel with Jesus the timid yet determined touch of the woman suffering from hemorrhage, as she grasps his robe. We can ask for the grace to taste with the crucified Jesus the bitter gall of all those who share in his cross, and smell the stench of misery - in field hospitals, in trains and in boats crammed with people. The balm of mercy does not disguise this stench. Rather, by anointing it, it awakens new hope.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in discussing the works of mercy, tells us that “when her mother reproached her for care for the poor and the sick at home, Saint Rose of Lima said to her: ‘When we serve the poor and the sick, we are the good odor of Christ’” (No. 2449, Latin). That good odor of Christ — the care of the poor — is, and always has been, the hallmark of the Church. Paul made it the focus of his meeting with Peter, James and John, the “columns” of the Church. He tells us that they “asked only one thing, that we remember the poor” (Gal 2:10). This reminds of a story I have already told. Just after I was just elected Pope, while the reading of the ballots continued, a brother cardinal came up to me, embraced me and said: “Don’t forget the poor!” It was the first message the Lord sent me at that moment.
The Catechism goes on to say, significantly, that “those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church, which from her origins, and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense and liberation” (No. 2448). Without ideologies, with the power of the Gospel alone.

In the Church we have, and have always had, our sins and failings. But when it comes to serving the poor by the works of mercy, as a Church we have always followed the promptings of the Spirit. Our saints did this in quite creative and effective ways. Love for the poor has been the sign, the light that draws people to give glory to the Father. Our people value this in a priest who cares for the poor and the sick, for those whose sins he forgives and for those whom he patiently teaches and corrects... Our people forgive us priests many failings, except for that of attachment to money. This they don't forgive. It is not so much about money itself, but the fact that money makes us lose the treasure of mercy. Our people can sniff out which sins are truly grave for a priest, the sins that kill his ministry because they turn him into a bureaucrat or, even worse, a mercenary. They can also recognize which sins are, I won't say secondary (I'm not sure if you can say this theologically!), but that have to be put up with, borne like a cross, until the Lord at last burns them away like the chaff. But the failure of a priest to be merciful is a glaring contradiction. It strikes at the heart of salvation, against Christ, who “became poor so that by his poverty we might become rich” (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). Because mercy heals “by losing something of itself”. We feel a pang of regret and we lose a part of our life, because rather than do what we wanted to do, we reached out to someone else in a work of mercy.

So it is not about God showing me mercy for this or that sin, as if I were otherwise self-sufficient, or about us performing some act of mercy towards this or that person in need. The grace we seek in this prayer is that of letting ourselves be shown mercy by God in every aspect of our lives and in turn to show mercy to others in all that we do. As priests and bishops, we work with the sacraments, baptizing, hearing confessions, celebrating the Eucharist... Mercy is our way of making the entire life of God’s people a sacrament. Being merciful is not only “a way of life”, but “the way of life”. There is no other way of being a priest. Father Brochero put it this way:
"The priest who has scarce pity for sinners is only half a priest. These vestments I wear are not what make me a priest; if I don't have charity in my heart, I am not even a Christian."

To see needs and to bring immediate relief, and even more, to anticipate those needs: this is the mark of a father's gaze. This priestly gaze — which takes the place of the father in the heart of Mother Church — makes us see people with the eyes of mercy. It has to be learned from seminary on, and it must enrich all our pastoral plans and projects. We desire, and we ask the Lord to give us, a gaze capable of discerning the signs of the times, to know "what works of mercy our people need today" in order to feel and savor the God of history who walks among them. For, as Aparecida says, quoting Saint Alberto Hurtado: "In our works, our people know that we understand their suffering" (No. 386).

The proof that we understand is that our works of mercy are blessed by God and meet with help and cooperation from our people. Some plans and projects do not work out well, without people ever realizing why. They rack their brains trying to come up with yet another pastoral plan, when all somebody has to say is: "It’s not working because it lacks mercy”, with no further ado. If it is not blessed, it is because it lacks mercy. It lacks the mercy found in a field hospital, not in expensive clinics; it lacks the mercy that values goodness and opens the door to an encounter with God, rather than turning someone away with sharp criticism…

I am going to propose a prayer about the woman whose sins were forgiven (Jn 8:3-11), to ask for the grace to be merciful in the confessional, and another prayer about the social dimension of the works of mercy.

I have always been struck by the passage of the Lord’s encounter with the woman caught in adultery, and how, by refusing to condemn her, he “fell short of” the Law. In response to the question they asked to test him — “should she be stoned or not?” — Jesus did not rule, he did not apply the law. He played dumb — here too the Lord has something to teach us! — and turned to something else. He thus initiated a process in the heart of the woman who needed to hear those words: “Neither do I condemn you”. He stretched out his hand and helped her to her feet, letting her see a gentle gaze that changed her heart. The Lord took the daughter of Jairus by
the hand and said: “Give her something to eat”. He raised the son of the widow of Nain and gave him back to his mother. And here he tells the sinful woman to rise. He puts us exactly where God wants us to be: standing, on our feet, never down on the ground.

Sometimes I feel a little saddened and annoyed when people go straight to the last words Jesus speaks to her: “Go and sin no more”. They use these words to “defend” Jesus from bypassing the law. I believe that Christ’s words are of a piece with his actions. He bends down to write on the ground as a prelude to what he is about to say to those who want to stone the woman, and he does so again before talking to her. This tells us something about the “time” that the Lord takes in judging and forgiving. The time he gives each person to look into his or her own heart and then to walk away. In talking to the woman, the Lord opens other spaces: one is that of non-condemnation. The Gospel clearly mentions this open space. It makes us see things through the eyes of Jesus, who tells us: “I see no one else but this woman”.

Then Jesus makes the woman herself look around. He asks her: “Where are those who condemned you?” (The word “condemn” is itself important, since it is about what we find unacceptable about those who judge or caricature us…). Once he has opened before her eyes this space freed of other people’s judgements, he tells her that neither will he throw a stone there: “Nor do I condemn you”. Then he opens up another free space before her: “Go and sin no more”. His command has to do with the future, to help her to make a new start and to “walk in love”. Such is the sensitivity of mercy: it looks with compassion on the past and offers encouragement for the future.

Those words, “Go and sin no more” are not easy. The Lord says them “with her”. He helps her put into words what she herself feels, a free “no” to sin that is like Mary’s “yes” to grace. That “no” has to be said to the deeply-rooted sin present in everyone. In that woman, it was a social sin; people approached her either to sleep with her or to throw stones at her. There was no other way to approach her. That is why the Lord does not only clear the path before her, but sets her on her way, so that she can stop being the “object” of other people’s gaze and instead take control of her life. Those words, “sin no more” refer not only to morality, but, I believe, to a kind of
sin that keeps her from living her life. Jesus also told the paralytic at Bethzatha to sin no more (Jn 5:14). But that man had justified himself with all the sad things that had “happened to him”; unlike the woman, he suffered from a victim complex. So Jesus challenged him ever so slightly by saying: “…lest something worse happen to you”. The Lord took advantage of his way of thinking, his fears, to draw him out of his paralysis. He gave him a little scare, we might say. The point is that each of us has to hear the words “sin no more” in his own deeply personal way.

This image of the Lord who sets people on their way is very typical. He is the God who walks at his people’s side, who leads them forward, who accompanies our history. Hence, the object of his mercy is quite clear: it is everything that keeps a man or a woman from walking on the right path, with their own people, at their own pace, to where God is asking them to go. What troubles him is that people get lost, or fall behind, or try to go it on their own. That they end up nowhere. That they are not there for the Lord, ready to go wherever he wants to send them. That they do not walk humbly before him (cf. Mic 6:8), that they do not walk in love (cf. Eph 5:2).

The Confessional, Where the Truth Makes Us Free

Let us now go to the confessional, where the truth sets us free. The Catechism of the Catholic Church presents the confessional as the place where the truth makes us free for an encounter. It says: “When he celebrates the sacrament of penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial Judge whose judgement is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God’s merciful love for the sinner” (No. 1465). The Catechism also reminds us that “the confessor is not the master of God’s forgiveness but its servant. The minister of this sacrament should unite himself to the intention and charity of Christ” (No. 1466).

Signs and instruments of an encounter. That is what we are. An attractive invitation to an encounter. As signs, we must be welcoming, sending a message that attracts people’s attention. Signs need to be consistent and clear, but above all understandable. Some signs are only clear
to specialists, are not of much help. Signs and instruments. Instruments have to be effective, readily available, precise and suitable for the job. Either they work or they don’t. We are instruments if people have a genuine encounter with the God of mercy. Our task is “to make that encounter possible”, face-to-face. What people do afterwards is their business. There is a prodigal son in a pigsty and a father who goes out every afternoon to await his return. There is a lost sheep and a shepherd who goes out to seek him. There is a wounded person left at the roadside and a good-hearted Samaritan. What is our ministry? It is to be signs and instruments enabling this encounter. Let us always remember that we are not the father, the shepherd or the Samaritan. Rather, inasmuch as we are sinners, we are on the side of the other three. Our ministry has to be a sign and instrument of that encounter. We are part of the mystery of the Holy Spirit, who creates the Church, builds unity, and constantly invites to encounter.

The other mark of a sign and instrument is that it is not self-referential. Put more simply, it is not an end in itself. Nobody sticks with the sign once they understand the reality. Nobody keeps looking at the screwdriver or the hammer, but at the well-hung picture. We are useless servants. Instruments and signs that help two people to join in an embrace, like the father and his son.

The third mark of a sign and instrument is its availability. An instrument has to be readily accessible; a sign must be visible. Being a sign and instrument is about being a mediator, about being available. Perhaps this is the real key to our own mission in this merciful encounter of God and man. We could even put it in negative terms. Saint Ignatius talked about “not getting in the way”. A good mediator makes things easy, rather than setting up obstacles.

In my country, there was a great confessor, Father Cullen. He would sit in the confessional and, when no one was around, he would do one of two things: he would repair worn soccer balls for the local kids, or he would thumb through a big Chinese dictionary. He had been in China for many years and he wanted to keep up the language. He used to say that when people saw him doing such completely useless things like fixing old soccer balls or working on his Chinese, they would think: “I’m going to go up and
talk to his priest, since he obviously doesn’t have much to do!” He was available for what was essential. He had his regular hours for hearing confessions, but he was always there. He got rid of the obstacle of always looking busy and serious. This is the problem: people don’t approach their priests when they see them constantly busy and running around.

Everybody has known good confessors. We have to learn from our good confessors, the ones whom people seek out, who do not make them afraid but help them to speak frankly, as Jesus did with Nicodemus. It is important to understand body language, not to ask things that are already evident from body language. If people come to confession it is because they are penitent; repentance is already there. They come to confession because they want to change. Or at least they want to want to change, if they think their situation is hopeless. *Ad impossilibia nemo tenetur*, as the old maxim goes: no one is obliged to do the impossible.

Body language. I read in the biography of one of our recent saints who, poor man, he suffered much during the war. He had to confess a soldier about to face the firing squad. The man was clearly something of a philanderer, so our saint asked him: “Are you sorry for this?” The man replied: “No, Father! It was great!” Our saint didn’t know what to do. The firing squad was waiting to execute the man, so he said: “At least tell me this, are you sorry for not being sorry?” … “Certainly!” … “Good, then!” The confessor always seeks the right way of acting, and speaking, to get to the heart of things.

We have to learn from good confessors, those who are gentle with sinners, who after a couple of words understand everything, as Jesus did with the woman suffering from a hemorrhage, and straightaway the power of forgiveness goes forth from them. I was very edified by a curial cardinal who I thought was quite strict. But when he had a penitent who was clearly embarrassed about confessing a sin, after a few words he would interrupt to say that he understood and to go on. He interrupted because he understood. That is tact. But there are those confessors — forgive me! — who probe and probe. “Tell me this, tell me that”. Do you really need all those details to absolve or are you “making a film”? That cardinal edified me greatly.
The *integrity* of confession is not a mathematics problem. How many times? How? When? Sometimes people feel less shame in confessing a sin than in having to say the number of times they committed it. We have to let ourselves be moved by people’s situation, which at times is a mixture of their own doing, human weakness, sin and insuperable conditionings. We have to be like Jesus, who was deeply moved by the sight of people and their problems, and kept healing them, even when they “didn’t ask properly”, like that leper, or seemed to beat around the bush, like the Samaritan woman. She was like a bird we have in South America: she squawked in one place but had her nest in another. Jesus was patient.

We have to learn from confessors who can enable penitents to feel *amendment* in taking a small step forwards, like Jesus, who gave a suitable penance and could appreciate the one leper who returned to thank him, on whom he bestowed yet more. Jesus had his mat taken away from the paralytic, and he made the blind man and the Syro-Phœnician woman have to ask. It didn’t matter to him if they paid no attention to him, like the paralytic at the pool of Bethzatha, or told others what he ordered them not to tell, with the result that he himself became the leper, since he could not go into the towns or his enemies found reasons to condemn him. He healed people, forgave their sins, eased their suffering, gave them rest and made them feel the consoling breath of the Spirit.

Perhaps some of you have already heard what I am about to say. In Buenos Aires I knew a Capuchin Friar. He is still alive, a little younger than myself, and a great confessor. There is always a line before his confessional, lots of people — all kinds of people, rich and poor, priests and nuns — all day long. He is really good at forgiving. He always finds a way to forgive and to bring people along. It is a real gift of the Spirit. But every once in a while he has scruples about being so forgiving. Once in conversation he told me: “Sometimes I have scruples”. So I asked him: “What do you do when you have these scruples?” He replied: “I go before the tabernacle, I look at our Lord and I tell him, ‘Lord, forgive me, today I was very forgiving. But let’s be clear, it is all your fault, because you gave me bad example!’” He added mercy to mercy.

Lastly, as far as confession is concerned, I have two bits of advice. First, never look like a bureaucrat or a judge, somebody who just sees “cases” to
be dealt with. Mercy sets us free from being the kind of priest who is so used to judging “cases” that he is no longer sensitive to persons, to faces. When I was in second theology, I would go with my classmates to hear the public examinations of the third theologians who were about to be ordained. We went to learn and we always learned something. Once, I recall, a student was asked about justice, but the question was so intricate and unreal that the student answered, very humbly: “But Father, this never happens in real life!” He was told: “But it does in books!” Book morality, unrelated to experience...

The rule of Jesus is to “judge as we would be judged”. This is the key to our judgement: that we treat others with dignity, that we don’t demean or mistreat them, that we help raise them up, and that we never forget that the Lord is using us, weak as we are, as his instruments. Not necessarily because our judgement is “the best”, but because it is sincere and can build a good relationship.

My other bit of advice is not to pry in the confessional. Saint Therese tells us that when her novices would confide in her, she was very careful not to ask how things turned out. She did not pry into people’s souls (cf. History of a Soul, Ms C, to Mother Gonzaga, c. XII, 32r.). It is characteristic of mercy to cover sin with its cloak, so as not to wound people’s dignity. We can think of that touching passage about the two sons of Noah, who covered with a cloak the nakedness of their father in his drunkenness (cf. Gen 9:23).

The Social Dimension of the Works of Mercy

Let us now say something about the social dimension of the works of mercy.

At the conclusion of the Exercises, Saint Ignatius puts “contemplation to attain love”, which connects what is experienced in prayer to daily life. He makes us reflect on how love has to be put more into works than into words. Those works are the works of mercy which the Father “prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (Eph 2:10), those which the Spirit inspires in each for the common good (cf. 1 Cor 12:7). In thanking the Lord for all the gifts we have received from his bounty, we ask for the grace to bring to all mankind that mercy which has been our own salvation.
For this social dimension, I proposed that we meditate on one of the final paragraphs of the Gospels. There, the Lord himself makes that connection between what we have received and what we are called to give. We can read these conclusions in the key of “works of mercy” which bring about the time of the Church, the time in which the risen Jesus lives, guides, sends forth and appeals to our freedom, which finds in him its concrete daily realization.

The conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel tells us that the Lord sends his Apostles to make disciples of all nations, “teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded” (28:20). “Instructing the ignorant” is itself one of the works of mercy. It spreads like light to the other works: to those listed in Matthew 25, which deal more with the so-called “corporal works of mercy”, and to all the commandments and evangelical counsels, such as “forgiving”, “fraternally correcting”, consoling the sorrowing, enduring persecution and so forth.

Mark’s Gospel ends with the image of the Lord who “collaborates” with the Apostles and “confirms the word by the signs that accompany it”. Those “signs” greatly resemble the works of mercy. Mark speaks, among other things, of healing the sick and casting out demons (cf. 16:17-18).

Luke continues his Gospel with the “Acts” — *praxeis* -- of the Apostles, relating the history of how they acted and the works they did, led by the Spirit.

John’s Gospel ends by referring to the “many other things” (21:25) or “signs” (20:30) which Jesus performed. The Lord’s actions, his works, are not mere deeds but signs by which, in a completely personal way, he shows his love and his mercy for each person.

We can contemplate the Lord who sends us on this mission, by using the image of the merciful Jesus as revealed to Sister Faustina. In that image we can see mercy as a single ray of light that comes from deep within God, passes through the heart of Christ, and emerges in a diversity of colors, each representing a work of mercy.

The works of mercy are endless, but each bears the stamp of a particular face, a personal history. They are much more than the lists of the seven corporal and seven spiritual works of mercy. Those lists are like the
raw material — the material of life itself — that, worked and shaped by the 
hands of mercy, turns into an individual artistic creation. Each work 
multiplies like the bread in the baskets; each gives abundant growth like the 
mustard seed. For mercy has these two important marks: it is fruitful and it 
is inclusive.

We usually think of the works of mercy individually and in relation to a 
specific initiative: hospitals for the sick, soup kitchens for the hungry, 
shelters for the homeless, schools

for those to be educated, the confessional and spiritual direction for 
those needing counsel and forgiveness… But if we look at the works of 
mercy as a whole, we see that the object of mercy is human life itself and 
everything it embraces. Life itself, as “flesh”, hungers and thirsts; it needs to 
be clothed, given shelter and visited, to say nothing of receiving a proper 
burial, something none of us, however rich, can do for ourselves. Even the 
wealthiest person, in death, becomes a pauper; there are no moving vans in 
a funeral cortège. Life itself, as “spiritual”, needs to be educated, corrected, 
encouraged and consoled. That last word is very important in the Bible; 
think about the Book of the Consolation of Israel, in Isaiah. We need 
others to counsel us, to forgive us, to put up with us and to pray for us. The 
family is where these works of mercy are practiced in so normal and 
unpretentious a way that we don’t even realize it. Yet once a family with 
small children loses its mother, everything begins to fall apart. The cruelest 
and most relentless form of poverty is that of street children, without 
parents and prey to the vultures.

We have asked for the grace to be signs and instruments. Now we have 
to “act”, not only with gestures, but with projects and structures, by creating 
a culture of mercy. This is not the same as a culture of philanthropy; the 
two need to be distinguished. Once we begin, we sense immediately that 
the Spirit energizes and sustains these works. He does this by using the 
signs and instruments he wants, even if at times they do not appear to be 
the most suitable ones. It could even be said that, in order to carry out the 
works of mercy, the Spirit tends to choose the poorest, humblest and most 
insignificant instruments, those who themselves most need that first ray of 
divine mercy. They are the ones who can best be shaped and readied to 
serve most effectively and well. The joy of realizing that we are “useless
servants” for others whom the Lord blesses with the fruitfulness of his grace, seats at his table and serves us the Eucharist, is a confirmation that we are engaged in his works of mercy.

Our faithful people are happy to congregate around works of mercy. Just come to a Wednesday General Audience and you can see so groups and associations engaged in works of mercy. In penitential and festive celebrations, and in educational and charitable activities, our people willingly come together and let themselves be shepherded in ways that are not always recognized or appreciated, whereas so many of our more abstract and academic pastoral plans fail to work. The massive presence of our faithful people in our shrines and on our pilgrimages is an anonymous presence, but anonymous simply because it is made up of so many faces and so great a desire simply to be gazed upon with mercy by Jesus and Mary. The same can be said about the countless ways in which our people take part in countless initiatives of solidarity; this too needs to be recognized, appreciated and promoted on our part. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that here in Italy organizations of this kind are so strong and involve so many people.

As priests, we ask two graces of the Good Shepherd, that of letting ourselves be guided by the sensus fidei of our faithful people, and to be guided by their “sense of the poor”. Both these “senses” have to do with the sensus Christi spoken of by Saint Paul, with our people’s love for, and faith in, Jesus.

Let us conclude by reciting the Anima Christi, that beautiful prayer which implores mercy from the Lord who came among us in the flesh and graciously feeds us with his body and blood. We ask him to show mercy to us and to his people. We ask his soul to “sanctify us”, his body to “save us”, his blood to “inebriate us” and to remove from us all other thirsts that are not of him. We ask the water flowing from his side “to wash us”, his passion “to strengthen us”. Comfort your people, crucified Lord! May your wounds “shelter us”… Grant that your people, Lord, may never be parted from you. Let nothing and no one separate us from your mercy, which defends us from the snares of the wicked enemy. Thus, we will sing your mercies, Lord, with all your saints when you bid us come to you.
Occasionally I hear comments from priests who say: “This Pope is always chiding us, always scolding us”. There has been a bit of that. But I must say that I have been edified by any number of good priests! From those — and I have known them — who in the days before there were answering machines, slept with the telephone on their night table. No one died without sacraments; when the phone would ring at all hours, they would get up and go. Good priests! And I thank the Lord for this blessing. All of us are sinners, but we can say that there are so many good and holy priests who work silently and unseen. Sometimes a scandal emerges, but, as we know, a tree as it falls makes more noise than a forest as it grows.

Yesterday I received a letter. I left it on my desk with my personal letters. I opened it just before coming here today and I believe that the Lord wanted me to. It is from a priest in Italy, a pastor of three small towns. I think we would do well to listen to this testimony from one of our brothers.

It was written on 29 May, just a few days ago.

“Pardon my troubling you. I am taking advantage of a priest friend who is going to Rome for the Jubilee of priests simply to send you, as an ordinary priest in charge of three small mountain parishes, a few thoughts about my own pastoral service. They are occasioned by some things you have said, that challenge me to daily conversion, and for this I thank you. I know I am not telling you anything new; surely these are things you have heard before. But I feel the need to say them myself.

I have often been struck by your call to us pastors to have the smell of the sheep. I am in the mountains, so I know very well what that means. We become priests to know that smell, which is really the perfume of the flock. It would be wonderful if our daily contact and visits to our flock, the true reason for our calling, were not replaced by administrative and bureaucratic responsibilities of our parishes, schools and so forth. I am lucky to have good and capable lay persons who take care of these things. But as the sole legal representative of the parish, with all its responsibilities, the pastor ends up always running around, sometimes leaving visits to the sick and families for last. I say this about myself. At times, it is frustrating to see
how in my priestly life I get so caught up in bureaucratic and administrative matters that my people, the small flock entrusted to my care, are almost left to fend for themselves. Believe me, Holy Father, when I say that I am driven to tears for this failure. We try to organize things, but in the end, there is only the whirlwind of daily affairs.

Another thing you have talked about is the lack of fatherhood. Today’s society is said to be lacking fathers and mothers. It strikes me that we too can renounce this spiritual paternity, allowing ourselves to be reduced to sacred bureaucrats, with the sad result that we feel abandoned and alone. Our difficulty in being fathers then has inevitable repercussions on our superiors, who have their own responsibilities and problems. Their relationship to us can also risk becoming purely formal, concerned with the management of the community, rather than with our lives as men, believers and priests.

All this — and here I will conclude — takes nothing away from my joy and excitement at being a priest for people and with people. If there are times when, as a pastor, I do not have the smell of the sheep, I am nonetheless moved to realize that my flock does not lose the smell of its pastor! Holy Father, it is a wonderful thing to realize that the sheep do not leave us alone. They can gauge how much we are there for them, and if perchance the pastor strays from the path and loses his way, they go after him and take him by the hand. I keep thanking the Lord because he always saves us through the flock, the flock entrusted to us, all those good, ordinary, humble and serene people, the flock that is the real blessing of every shepherd.

I wanted to send you these simply little thoughts because you are close to the flock. You can understand us and can continue to help and support us. I pray for you and I thank you, too, for that occasional “scolding” that I feel is necessary for my journey. Bless me, Pope Francis, and pray for me and for my parishes.”

He signed the letter and then, at the end, added, like every good pastor: “I am leaving you a little offering. Pray for my community, in particular for the gravely ill and a few families with financial troubles, and not only. Thank you!”
This is one of our brothers. There are so many others like him! Doubtless many are here in our midst. So many. He shows us the way. So let us go forward! Do not forget about prayer. Pray as best you can, and if you fall sleep in front of the tabernacle, so be it. But pray! Don’t ever lose this. Don’t fail to let yourselves be gazed upon by Our Lady, and keep her always as your Mother. Don’t ever lose your zeal, and your closeness and availability to people. And also, may I say: Don’t ever lose your sense of humor… So let’s move forward!

Homily at the Mass Celebrated in the Basilica of Guadalupe, Mexico (February 13, 2016)

We have just heard how Mary went to meet her cousin Elizabeth. She set out without delay, without doubts, without lessening her pace, to be with her relative who was in the last months of her pregnancy.

Mary’s encounter with the angel did not hold her back since she did not consider herself privileged, or make her hesitate in leaving those around her. On the contrary, it renewed and inspired an attitude for which Mary is and always will be known: she is the woman who says “yes”, a “yes” of surrender to God and, at the same time, a “yes” of surrender to her brothers and sisters. This is the “yes” which prompted her to give the best of herself, going forth to meet the others.

Listening to this Gospel passage in this place has a special significance. Mary, the woman who gave her “yes”, wished also to come to the inhabitants of these American lands through the person of the Indian St Juan Diego. Just as she went along the paths of Judea and Galilee, in the same way she walked through Tepeyac, wearing the indigenous garb and using their language so as to serve this great nation. Just as she accompanied Elizabeth in her pregnancy, so too she has and continues to accompany the development of this blessed Mexican land. Just as she made herself present to little Juan, so too she continues to reveal herself to all of
us, especially to those who feel, like him, “worthless” (cf. Nican Mopobua, 55). This specific choice, we might call it preferential, was not against anyone but rather in favour of everyone. The little Indian Juan who called himself a “leather strap, a back frame, a tail, a wing, oppressed by another’s burden” (ibid.), became “the ambassador, most worthy of trust”.

On that morning in December 1531, the first miracle occurred which would then be the living memory of all this Shrine protects. On that morning, at that meeting, God awakened the hope of his son Juan, and the hope of a People. On that morning, God roused the hope of the little ones, of the suffering, of those displaced or rejected, of all who feel they have no worthy place in these lands. On that morning, God came close and still comes close to the suffering but resilient hearts of so many mothers, fathers, grandparents who have seen their children leaving, becoming lost or even being taken by criminals.

On that morning, Juancito experienced in his own life what hope is, what the mercy of God is. He was chosen to oversee, care for, protect and promote the building of this Shrine. On many occasions he said to Our Lady that he was not the right person; on the contrary, if she wished the work to progress, she should choose others, since he was not learned or literate and did not belong to the group who could make it a reality. Mary, who was persistent — with that persistence born from the Father’s merciful heart — said to him: he would be her ambassador.

In this way, she managed to awaken something he did not know how to express, a veritable banner of love and justice: no one could be left out of the building of that other shrine, the shrine of life, the shrine of our communities, our societies and our cultures. We are all necessary, especially those who normally do not count because they are not “up to the task” or because “they do not have the necessary funds” to build all these things. God’s Shrine is the life of his children, of everyone in whatever condition, especially of young people without a future who are exposed to endless painful and risky situations, and the elderly who are unacknowledged, forgotten and out of sight. The Shrine of God is our families in need only of the essentials to develop and progress. The Shrine of God is the faces of the many people we encounter each day....
Visiting this Shrine, the same things that happened to Juan Diego can also happen to us. Look at the Blessed Mother from within our own sufferings, our own fear, hopelessness, sadness, and say to her, “What can I offer since I am not learned?” We look to our Mother with eyes that express our thoughts: there are so many situations which leave us powerless, which make us feel that there is no room for hope, for change, for transformation.

And so, I think that some silence may do us good today as we pause to look upon her and repeat to her the words of that other loving son:

Simply looking at you, O Mother, / having eyes only for you, / looking upon you without saying anything, / telling you everything, wordlessly and reverently. / Do not perturb the air before you; / only cradle my stolen solitude / in your loving Motherly eyes, / in the nest of your clear ground. / Hours tumble by, / and with much commotion, / the wastage of life and death / sinks its teeth into foolish men. Having eyes for you, O Mother, simply contemplating you / with a heart / quieted in your tenderness / that silence of yours, / chaste as the lilies.

And in the silence, and in this looking at her, we will hear what she says to us once more, “What, my most precious little one, saddens your heart?” (Nican Mopohua, 107). “Yet am I not here with you, who have the honour of being your mother?” (ibid., 119).

Mary tells us that she has “the honour” of being our mother, assuring us that those who suffer do not weep in vain. These ones are a silent prayer rising to heaven, always finding a place in Mary’s mantle. In her and with her, God has made himself our brother and companion along the journey; he carries our crosses with us so as not to leave us overwhelmed by our sufferings.

Am I not your mother? Am I not here? Do not let trials and pains overwhelm you, she tells us. Today, she sends us out anew; as she did Juancito, today, she comes to tell us again: be my ambassador, the one I send to build many new shrines, accompany many lives, wipe away many tears. Simply be my ambassador by walking along the paths of your neighborhood, of your community, of your parish; we can build shrines by sharing the joy of knowing that we are not alone, that Mary accompanies
us. Be my ambassador, she says to us, giving food to the hungry, drink to those who thirst, a refuge to those in need, clothe the naked and visit the sick. Come to the aid of those in prison, do not leave them alone, forgive whomever has offended you, console the grieving, be patient with others, and above all beseech and pray to God. And in the silence tell him what is in our heart.

Am I not your mother? Am I not here with you? Mary says this to us again. Go and build my shrine, help me to lift up the lives of my sons and daughters, who are your brothers and sisters.

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Joint Declaration of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia (February 12, 2016)

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with all of you” (2 Cor 13:13).

1. By God the Father’s will, from which all gifts come, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the help of the Holy Spirit Consolator, we, Pope Francis and Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, have met today in Havana. We give thanks to God, glorified in the Trinity, for this meeting, the first in history.

It is with joy that we have met like brothers in the Christian faith who encounter one another “to speak face to face” (2 Jn 12), from heart to heart, to discuss the mutual relations between the Churches, the crucial problems of our faithful, and the outlook for the progress of human civilization.

2. Our fraternal meeting has taken place in Cuba, at the crossroads of North and South, East and West. It is from this island, the symbol of the hopes of the “New World” and the dramatic events of the history of the twentieth century, that we address our words to all the peoples of Latin America and of the other continents.
It is a source of joy that the Christian faith is growing here in a dynamic way. The powerful religious potential of Latin America, its centuries—old Christian tradition, grounded in the personal experience of millions of people, are the pledge of a great future for this region.

3. By meeting far from the longstanding disputes of the “Old World,” we experience with a particular sense of urgency the need for the shared labor of Catholics and Orthodox, who are called, with gentleness and respect, to give an explanation to the world of the hope in us (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).

4. We thank God for the gifts received from the coming into the world of His only Son. We share the same spiritual Tradition of the first millennium of Christianity. The witnesses of this Tradition are the Most Holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, and the saints we venerate. Among them are innumerable martyrs who have given witness to their faithfulness to Christ and have become the “seed of Christians”.

5. Notwithstanding this shared Tradition of the first ten centuries, for nearly one thousand years Catholics and Orthodox have been deprived of communion in the Eucharist. We have been divided by wounds caused by old and recent conflicts, by differences inherited from our ancestors, in the understanding and expression of our faith in God, one in three Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are pained by the loss of unity, the outcome of human weakness and of sin, which has occurred despite the priestly prayer of Christ the Savior: “So that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you … so that they may be one, as we are one” (Jn 17:21).

6. Mindful of the permanence of many obstacles, it is our hope that our meeting may contribute to the re-establishment of this unity willed by God, for which Christ prayed. May our meeting inspire Christians throughout the world to pray to the Lord with renewed fervor for the full unity of all His disciples. In a world which yearns not only for our words but also for tangible gestures, may this meeting be a sign of hope for all people of goodwill!

7. In our determination to undertake all that is necessary to overcome the historical divergences we have inherited, we wish to combine our efforts
to give witness to the Gospel of Christ and to the shared heritage of the Church of the first millennium, responding together to the challenges of the contemporary world. Orthodox and Catholics must learn to give unanimously witness in those spheres in which this is possible and necessary. Human civilization has entered into a period of epochal change. Our Christian conscience and our pastoral responsibility compel us not to remain passive in the face of challenges requiring a shared response.

8. Our gaze must firstly turn to those regions of the world where Christians are victims of persecution. In many countries of the Middle East and North Africa whole families, villages and cities of our brothers and sisters in Christ are being completely exterminated. Their churches are being barbarously ravaged and looted, their sacred objects profaned, their monuments destroyed. It is with pain that we call to mind the situation in Syria, Iraq and other countries of the Middle East, and the massive exodus of Christians from the land in which our faith was first disseminated and in which they have lived since the time of the Apostles, together with other religious communities.

9. We call upon the international community to act urgently in order to prevent the further expulsion of Christians from the Middle East. In raising our voice in defense of persecuted Christians, we wish to express our compassion for the suffering experienced by the faithful of other religious traditions who have also become victims of civil war, chaos and terrorist violence.

10. Thousands of victims have already been claimed in the violence in Syria and Iraq, which has left many other millions without a home or means of sustenance. We urge the international community to seek an end to the violence and terrorism and, at the same time, to contribute through dialogue to a swift return to civil peace. Large-scale humanitarian aid must be assured to the afflicted populations and to the many refugees seeking safety in neighboring lands.

We call upon all those whose influence can be brought to bear upon the destiny of those kidnapped, including the Metropolitans of Aleppo, Paul and John Ibrahim, who were taken in April 2013, to make every effort to ensure their prompt liberation.
11. We lift our prayers to Christ, the Saviour of the world, asking for the return of peace in the Middle East, “the fruit of justice” (Is 32:17), so that fraternal co-existence among the various populations, Churches and religions may be strengthened, enabling refugees to return to their homes, wounds to be healed, and the souls of the slain innocent to rest in peace.

We address, in a fervent appeal, all the parts that may be involved in the conflicts to demonstrate good will and to take part in the negotiating table. At the same time, the international community must undertake every possible effort to end terrorism through common, joint and coordinated action. We call on all the countries involved in the struggle against terrorism to responsible and prudent action. We exhort all Christians and all believers of God to pray fervently to the providential Creator of the world to protect His creation from destruction and not permit a new world war. In order to ensure a solid and enduring peace, specific efforts must be undertaken to rediscover the common values uniting us, based on the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

12. We bow before the martyrdom of those who, at the cost of their own lives, have given witness to the truth of the Gospel, preferring death to the denial of Christ. We believe that these martyrs of our times, who belong to various Churches but who are united by their shared suffering, are a pledge of the unity of Christians. It is to you who suffer for Christ’s sake that the word of the Apostle is directed: “Beloved … rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly” (1 Pet 4:12—13).

13. Interreligious dialogue is indispensable in our disturbing times. Differences in the understanding of religious truths must not impede people of different faiths to live in peace and harmony. In our current context, religious leaders have the particular responsibility to educate their faithful in a spirit which is respectful of the convictions of those belonging to other religious traditions. Attempts to justify criminal acts with religious slogans are altogether unacceptable. No crime may be committed in God’s name, “since God is not the God of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor 14:33).

14. In affirming the foremost value of religious freedom, we give thanks to God for the current unprecedented renewal of the Christian faith in
Russia, as well as in many other countries of Eastern Europe, formerly dominated for decades by atheist regimes. Today, the chains of militant atheism have been broken and in many places Christians can now freely confess their faith. Thousands of new churches have been built over the last quarter of a century, as well as hundreds of monasteries and theological institutions. Christian communities undertake notable works in the fields of charitable aid and social development, providing diversified forms of assistance to the needy. Orthodox and Catholics often work side by side. Giving witness to the values of the Gospel they attest to the existence of the shared spiritual foundations of human coexistence.

15. At the same time, we are concerned about the situation in many countries in which Christians are increasingly confronted by restrictions to religious freedom, to the right to witness to one’s convictions and to live in conformity with them. In particular, we observe that the transformation of some countries into secularized societies, estranged from all reference to God and to His truth, constitutes a grave threat to religious freedom. It is a source of concern for us that there is a current curtailment of the rights of Christians, if not their outright discrimination, when certain political forces, guided by an often very aggressive secularist ideology, seek to relegate them to the margins of public life.

16. The process of European integration, which began after centuries of blood-soaked conflicts, was welcomed by many with hope, as a guarantee of peace and security. Nonetheless, we invite vigilance against an integration that is devoid of respect for religious identities. While remaining open to the contribution of other religions to our civilization, it is our conviction that Europe must remain faithful to its Christian roots. We call upon Christians of Eastern and Western Europe to unite in their shared witness to Christ and the Gospel, so that Europe may preserve its soul, shaped by two thousand years of Christian tradition.

17. Our gaze is also directed to those facing serious difficulties, who live in extreme need and poverty while the material wealth of humanity increases. We cannot remain indifferent to the destinies of millions of migrants and refugees knocking on the doors of wealthy nations. The unrelenting consumerism of some more developed countries is gradually depleting the resources of our planet. The growing inequality in the
distribution of material goods increases the feeling of the injustice of the international order that has emerged.

18. The Christian churches are called to defend the demands of justice, the respect for peoples’ traditions, and an authentic solidarity towards all those who suffer. We Christians cannot forget that “God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, that no human being might boast before God” (1 Cor 1:27—29).

19. The family is the natural centre of human life and society. We are concerned about the crisis in the family in many countries. Orthodox and Catholics share the same conception of the family, and are called to witness that it is a path of holiness, testifying to the faithfulness of the spouses in their mutual interaction, to their openness to the procreation and rearing of their children, to solidarity between the generations and to respect for the weakest.

20. The family is based on marriage, an act of freely given and faithful love between a man and a woman. It is love that seals their union and teaches them to accept one another as a gift. Marriage is a school of love and faithfulness. We regret that other forms of cohabitation have been placed on the same level as this union, while the concept, consecrated in the biblical tradition, of paternity and maternity as the distinct vocation of man and woman in marriage is being banished from the public conscience.

21. We call on all to respect the inalienable right to life. Millions are denied the very right to be born into the world. The blood of the unborn cries out to God (cf. Gen 4:10).

The emergence of so-called euthanasia leads elderly people and the disabled to begin to feel that they are a burden on their families and on society in general.

We are also concerned about the development of biomedical reproduction technology, as the manipulation of human life represents an attack on the foundations of human existence, created in the image of God. We believe that it is our duty to recall the immutability of Christian moral principles, based on respect for the dignity of the individual called into
being according to the Creator’s plan.

22. Today, in a particular way, we address young Christians. You, young people, have the task of not hiding your talent in the ground (cf. Mt 25:25), but of using all the abilities God has given you to confirm Christ’s truth in the world, incarnating in your own lives the evangelical commandments of the love of God and of one’s neighbor. Do not be afraid of going against the current, defending God’s truth, to which contemporary secular norms are often far from conforming.

23. God loves each of you and expects you to be His disciples and apostles. Be the light of the world so that those around you may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:14, 16). Raise your children in the Christian faith, transmitting to them the pearl of great price that is the faith (cf. Mt 13:46) you have received from your parents and forbears. Remember that “you have been purchased at a great price” (1 Cor 6:20), at the cost of the death on the cross of the Man—God Jesus Christ.

24. Orthodox and Catholics are united not only by the shared Tradition of the Church of the first millennium, but also by the mission to preach the Gospel of Christ in the world today. This mission entails mutual respect for members of the Christian communities and excludes any form of proselytism.

We are not competitors but brothers, and this concept must guide all our mutual actions as well as those directed to the outside world. We urge Catholics and Orthodox in all countries to learn to live together in peace and love, and to be “in harmony with one another” (Rm 15:5). Consequently, it cannot be accepted that disloyal means be used to incite believers to pass from one Church to another, denying them their religious freedom and their traditions. We are called upon to put into practice the precept of the apostle Paul: “Thus I aspire to proclaim the gospel not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on another's foundation” (Rm 15:20).

25. It is our hope that our meeting may also contribute to reconciliation wherever tensions exist between Greek Catholics and Orthodox. It is today clear that the past method of “uniatism,” understood as the union of one community to the other, separating it from its Church, is not the way to
re—establish unity. Nonetheless, the ecclesial communities which emerged in these historical circumstances have the right to exist and to undertake all that is necessary to meet the spiritual needs of their faithful, while seeking to live in peace with their neighbors. Orthodox and Greek Catholics are in need of reconciliation and of mutually acceptable forms of co—existence.

26. We deplore the hostility in Ukraine that has already caused many victims, inflicted innumerable wounds on peaceful inhabitants and thrown society into a deep economic and humanitarian crisis. We invite all the parts involved in the conflict to prudence, to social solidarity and to action aimed at constructing peace. We invite our Churches in Ukraine to work towards social harmony, to refrain from taking part in the confrontation, and to not support any further development of the conflict.

27. It is our hope that the schism between the Orthodox faithful in Ukraine may be overcome through existing canonical norms, that all the Orthodox Christians of Ukraine may live in peace and harmony, and that the Catholic communities in the country may contribute to this, in such a way that our Christian brotherhood may become increasingly evident.

28. In the contemporary world, which is both multiform yet united by a shared destiny, Catholics and Orthodox are called to work together fraternally in proclaiming the Good News of salvation, to testify together to the moral dignity and authentic freedom of the person, “so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). This world, in which the spiritual pillars of human existence are progressively disappearing, awaits from us a compelling Christian witness in all spheres of personal and social life. Much of the future of humanity will depend on our capacity to give shared witness to the Spirit of truth in these difficult times.

29. May our bold witness to God’s truth and to the Good News of salvation be sustained by the Man—God Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who strengthens us with the unfailing promise: “Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom” (Lk 12:32)!

Christ is the well—spring of joy and hope. Faith in Him transfigures human life, fills it with meaning. This is the conviction borne of the experience of all those to whom Peter refers in his words: “Once you were
‘no people’ but now you are God’s people; you ‘had not received mercy’ but now you have received mercy” (1 Pet 2:10).

30. With grace—filled gratitude for the gift of mutual understanding manifested during our meeting, let us with hope turn to the Most Holy Mother of God, invoking her with the words of this ancient prayer: “We seek refuge under the protection of your mercy, Holy Mother of God”. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, through her intercession, inspire fraternity in all those who venerate her, so that they may be reunited, in God’s own time, in the peace and harmony of the one people of God, for the glory of the Most Holy and indivisible Trinity!

Francis
Bishop of Rome
Pope of the Catholic Church
Kirill
Patriarch of Moscow
and all Russia

Message for the 50th World Conference of Social Communications (January 24, 2016)
Communication and Mercy: a Fruitful Encounter

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Holy Year of Mercy invites all of us to reflect on the relationship between communication and mercy. The Church, in union with Christ, the living incarnation of the Father of Mercies, is called to practice mercy as the distinctive trait of all that she is and does. What we say and how we say it, our every word and gesture, ought to express God’s compassion, tenderness and forgiveness for all. Love, by its nature, is communication; it leads to openness and sharing. If our hearts and actions are inspired by
charity, by divine love, then our communication will be touched by God’s own power.

As sons and daughters of God, we are called to communicate with everyone, without exception. In a particular way, the Church’s words and actions are all meant to convey mercy, to touch people’s hearts and to sustain them on their journey to that fullness of life which Jesus Christ was sent by the Father to bring to all. This means that we ourselves must be willing to accept the warmth of Mother Church and to share that warmth with others, so that Jesus may be known and loved. That warmth is what gives substance to the word of faith; by our preaching and witness, it ignites the “spark” which gives them life.

Communication has the power to build bridges, to enable encounter and inclusion, and thus to enrich society. How beautiful it is when people select their words and actions with care, in the effort to avoid misunderstandings, to heal wounded memories and to build peace and harmony. Words can build bridges between individuals and within families, social groups and peoples. This is possible both in the material world and the digital world. Our words and actions should be such as to help us all escape the vicious circles of condemnation and vengeance which continue to ensnare individuals and nations, encouraging expressions of hatred. The words of Christians ought to be a constant encouragement to communion and, even in those cases where they must firmly condemn evil, they should never try to rupture relationships and communication.

For this reason, I would like to invite all people of good will to rediscover the power of mercy to heal wounded relationships and to restore peace and harmony to families and communities. All of us know how many ways ancient wounds and lingering resentments can entrap individuals and stand in the way of communication and reconciliation. The same holds true for relationships between peoples. In every case, mercy is able to create a new kind of speech and dialogue. Shakespeare put it eloquently when he said: “The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed: it blesseth him that gives and him that takes” (*The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV, Scene I).
Our political and diplomatic language would do well to be inspired by mercy, which never loses hope. I ask those with institutional and political responsibility, and those charged with forming public opinion, to remain especially attentive to the way they speak of those who think or act differently or those who may have made mistakes. It is easy to yield to the temptation to exploit such situations to stoke the flames of mistrust, fear and hatred. Instead, courage is needed to guide people towards processes of reconciliation. It is precisely such positive and creative boldness which offers real solutions to ancient conflicts and the opportunity to build lasting peace. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (*Mt* 5:7-9)

How I wish that our own way of communicating, as well as our service as pastors of the Church, may never suggest a prideful and triumphant superiority over an enemy, or demean those whom the world considers lost and easily discarded. Mercy can help mitigate life’s troubles and offer warmth to those who have known only the coldness of judgment. May our way of communicating help to overcome the mindset that neatly separates sinners from the righteous. We can and we must judge situations of sin — such as violence, corruption and exploitation — but we may not judge individuals, since only God can see into the depths of their hearts. It is our task to admonish those who err and to denounce the evil and injustice of certain ways of acting, for the sake of setting victims free and raising up those who have fallen. The Gospel of John tells us that “the truth will make you free” (*Jn* 8:32). The truth is ultimately Christ himself, whose gentle mercy is the yardstick for measuring the way we proclaim the truth and condemn injustice. Our primary task is to uphold the truth with love (cf. *Eph* 4:15). Only words spoken with love and accompanied by meekness and mercy can touch our sinful hearts. Harsh and moralistic words and actions risk further alienating those whom we wish to lead to conversion and freedom, reinforcing their sense of rejection and defensiveness.

Some feel that a vision of society rooted in mercy is hopelessly idealistic or excessively indulgent. But let us try and recall our first experience of relationships, within our families. Our parents loved us and valued us for who we are more than for our abilities and achievements. Parents naturally want the best for their children, but that love is never dependent on their
meeting certain conditions. The family home is one place where we are always welcome (cf. Lk 15:11-32). I would like to encourage everyone to see society not as a forum where strangers compete and try to come out on top, but above all as a home or a family, where the door is always open and where everyone feels welcome.

For this to happen, we must first listen. Communicating means sharing, and sharing demands listening and acceptance. Listening is much more than simply hearing. Hearing is about receiving information, while listening is about communication, and calls for closeness. Listening allows us to get things right, and not simply to be passive onlookers, users or consumers. Listening also means being able to share questions and doubts, to journey side by side, to banish all claims to absolute power and to put our abilities and gifts at the service of the common good.

Listening is never easy. Many times it is easier to play deaf. Listening means paying attention, wanting to understand, to value, to respect and to ponder what the other person says. It involves a sort of martyrdom or self-sacrifice, as we try to imitate Moses before the burning bush: we have to remove our sandals when standing on the “holy ground” of our encounter with the one who speaks to me (cf. Ex 3:5). Knowing how to listen is an immense grace, it is a gift which we need to ask for and then make every effort to practice.

Emails, text messages, social networks and chats can also be fully human forms of communication. It is not technology which determines whether or not communication is authentic, but rather the human heart and our capacity to use wisely the means at our disposal. Social networks can facilitate relationships and promote the good of society, but they can also lead to further polarization and division between individuals and groups. The digital world is a public square, a meeting-place where we can either encourage or demean one another, engage in a meaningful discussion or unfair attacks. I pray that this Jubilee Year, lived in mercy, “may open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; and that it may eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination” (Misericordiae Vultus, 23). The internet can help us to be better citizens. Access to digital networks entails a responsibility for our neighbour whom
we do not see but who is nonetheless real and has a dignity which must be respected. The internet can be used wisely to build a society which is healthy and open to sharing.

Communication, wherever and however it takes place, has opened up broader horizons for many people. This is a gift of God which involves a great responsibility. I like to refer to this power of communication as “closeness”. The encounter between communication and mercy will be fruitful to the degree that it generates a closeness which cares, comforts, heals, accompanies and celebrates. In a broken, fragmented and polarized world, to communicate with mercy means to help create a healthy, free and fraternal closeness between the children of God and all our brothers and sisters in the one human family.

Torna ai contenuti

Homily at the Opening of the Holy Door,
Basilica of St. Mary Major (January 1, 2016)

Salve, Mater Misericordiae!

With this invocation we turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Roman Basilica dedicated to her under the title of Mother of God. It is the first line of an ancient hymn which we will sing at the conclusion of this Holy Eucharist. Composed by an unknown author, it has come down to us as a heartfelt prayer spontaneously rising up from the hearts of the faithful: “Hail Mother of mercy, Mother of God, Mother of forgiveness, Mother of hope, Mother of grace and Mother full of holy gladness.” In these few words we find a summary of the faith of generations of men and women who, with their eyes fixed firmly on the icon of the Blessed Virgin, have sought her intercession and consolation.

It is most fitting that on this day we invoke the Blessed Virgin Mary above all as Mother of mercy. The door we have opened is, in fact, a Door of Mercy. Those who cross its threshold are called to enter into the merciful love of the Father with complete trust and freedom from fear; they can leave this Basilica knowing — truly knowing — that Mary is ever at their
side. She is the Mother of mercy, because she bore in her womb the very Face of divine mercy, Jesus, Emmanuel, the Expectation of the nations, the “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:5). The Son of God, made incarnate for our salvation, has given us his Mother, who joins us on our pilgrimage through this life, so that we may never be left alone, especially at times of trouble and uncertainty.

Mary is the Mother of God, she is the Mother of God who forgives, who bestows forgiveness, and so we can rightly call her Mother of forgiveness. This word — “forgiveness” — so misunderstood in today’s world, points to the new and original fruit of Christian faith. A person unable to forgive has not yet known the fullness of love. Only one who truly loves is able to forgive and forget. At the foot of the Cross, Mary sees her Son offer himself totally, showing us what it means to love as God loves. At that moment she heard Jesus utter words which probably reflected what he had learned from her as a child: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:24). At that moment, Mary became for all of us the Mother of forgiveness. Following Jesus’ example and by his grace, she herself could forgive those who killed her innocent Son.

For us, Mary is an icon of how the Church must offer forgiveness to those who seek it. The Mother of forgiveness teaches the Church that the forgiveness granted on Golgotha knows no limits. Neither the law with its quibbles, nor the wisdom of this world with its distinctions, can hold it back. The Church’s forgiveness must be every bit as broad as that offered by Jesus on the Cross and by Mary at his feet. There is no other way. It is for this purpose that the Holy Spirit made the Apostles the effective ministers of forgiveness, so what was obtained by the death of Jesus may reach all men and women in every age (cf. Jn 20:19-23).

The Marian hymn continues: “Mother of hope and Mother of grace, Mother of holy gladness.” Hope, grace and holy gladness are all sisters: they are the gift of Christ; indeed, they are so many names written on his body. The gift that Mary bestows in offering us Jesus is the forgiveness which renews life, enables us once more to do God’s will and fills us with true happiness. This grace frees the heart to look to the future with the joy born of hope. This is the teaching of the Psalm: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. […] Restore to me
the joy of your salvation” (51:10,12). The power of forgiveness is the true antidote to the sadness caused by resentment and vengeance. Forgiveness leads to joy and serenity because it frees the heart from thoughts of death, whereas resentment and vengeance trouble the mind and wound the heart, robbing it of rest and peace. What horrible things are resentment and vengeance.

Let us, then, pass through the Holy Door of Mercy knowing that at our side is the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Holy Mother of God, who intercedes for us. Let us allow her to lead us to the rediscovery of the beauty of an encounter with her Son Jesus. Let us open wide the doors of our heart to the joy of forgiveness, conscious that we have been given new confidence and hope, and thus make our daily lives a humble instrument of God’s love.

And with the love and affection of children, let us cry out to Our Lady as did the faithful people of God in Ephesus during the historic Council: “Holy Mother of God!” I invite you to repeat together this acclamation three times, aloud and with all your heart and with all your love: “Holy Mother of God! Holy Mother of God! Holy Mother of God!”

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Torna ai contenuti

Amoris Laetitia, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on Love in the Family

This is a summary of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation Amoris Laetitia [The Joy of Love] (March 19, 2016), on love in the family, based on an outline prepared by the Holy See’s Press Office.

The post-Synodal apostolic exhortation Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love), on love in the family—signed, significantly, on March 19, the Solemnity of St. Joseph, which brings together the results of the two
Synods on the family convoked by Pope Francis in 2014 and 2015. It frequently cites their final Reports, documents and teachings of his predecessors, and his own numerous catecheses on the family. In addition, as in previous magisterial documents, the Pope also makes use of the contributions of various Episcopal Conferences around the world (Kenya, Australia, Argentina...) and cites significant figures such as Martin Luther King and Erich Fromm. The Pope even quotes the film *Babette's Feast* to illustrate the concept of gratuity.

**Introduction**

The Apostolic Exhortation is striking for its breadth and detail. Its 325 paragraphs are distributed over nine chapters. The seven introductory paragraphs plainly set out the complexity of a topic in urgent need of thorough study. The interventions of the Synod Fathers make up a “multifaceted gem” a precious polyhedron (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 4 [from here on referred to as AL]), whose value must be preserved. But the Pope cautions that “not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium.” Indeed, for some questions, “each country or region … can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. For ‘cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle … needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied’.” This principle of inculturation applies to how problems are formulated and addressed and, apart from the dogmatic issues that have been well defined by the Church’s magisterium, none of this approach can be “globalized.” In his address at the end of the 2015 Synod, the Pope said very clearly: “What seems normal for a bishop on one continent, is considered strange and almost scandalous — almost! — for a bishop from another; what is considered a violation of a right in one society is an evident and inviolable rule in another; what for some is freedom of conscience is for others simply confusion.”

The Pope clearly states that we need above all to avoid a sterile juxtaposition of demands for change and the general application of abstract norms. He writes: “The debates carried on in the media, in certain publications and even among the Church’s ministers, range from an immoderate desire for total change without sufficient reflection or grounding, to an attitude that would solve everything by applying general
rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations” (AL, no. 2).

Chapter One: “In the light of the Word”

Following this introduction, the Pope begins his reflections with the Holy Scriptures in the first chapter, which unfolds as a meditation on Psalm 128 (which appears in the Jewish wedding liturgy as well as that of Christian marriages). The Bible “is full of families, births, love stories and family crises” (AL, no. 8). This impels us to meditate on how the family is not an abstract ideal but rather like a practical “trade” (AL, no. 16), which is carried out with tenderness (see AL, no. 28), but which has also been confronted with sin from the beginning, when the relationship of love turned into domination (see AL, no. 19). Hence, the Word of God “is not a series of abstract ideas but rather a source of comfort and companionship for every family that experiences difficulties or suffering. For it shows them the goal of their journey” (AL, no. 22).

Chapter two: “The experiences and challenges of families”

Building on the biblical base, in the second chapter the Pope considers the current situation of families. While keeping “firmly grounded in [the] reality” of family experiences, he also draws heavily on the final Reports of the two Synods. Families face many challenges, from migration to the ideological denial of differences between the sexes (“ideology of gender”); from the culture of the provisional to the anti-birth mentality and the impact of biotechnology in the field of procreation; from the lack of housing and work to pornography and abuse of minors; from inattention to persons with disabilities, to lack of respect for the elderly; from the legal dismantling of the family, to violence against women. The Pope insists on concreteness, which is a key concept in the Exhortation. And it is concreteness, realism and daily life that make up the substantial difference between acceptable “theories” of interpretation of reality and arbitrary “ideologies.”

Citing Familiaris Consortio, Francis states that “we do well to focus on concrete realities, since ‘the call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history,’ and through these ‘the Church can also be guided to a more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage
and the family” (AL, no. 31). Conversely, if we fail to listen to reality, we cannot understand the needs of the present or the movements of the Spirit. The Pope notes that rampant individualism makes it difficult today for a person to give oneself generously to another (see AL, no. 33). Here is an interesting picture of the situation: “The fear of loneliness and the desire for stability and fidelity exist side by side with a growing fear of entrapment in a relationship that could hamper the achievement of one’s personal goals.”

The humility of realism helps us to avoid presenting “a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families” (AL, no. 36). Idealism does not allow marriage to be understood for what it is, that is, a “dynamic path to personal development and fulfillment” (AL, no. 37). It is unrealistic to think that families can sustain themselves “simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace” (AL, no. 37). Calling for a certain “self-criticism” of approaches that are inadequate for the experience of marriage and the family, the Pope stresses the need to make room for the formation of the conscience of the faithful: “We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them” (AL, no. 37). Jesus proposed a demanding ideal but “never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery” (AL, no. 38).

Chapter three: “Looking to Jesus: The vocation of the family”

The third chapter is dedicated to some essential elements of the Church’s teaching on marriage and the family. This chapter is important because its 30 paragraphs concisely depict the vocation of the family according to the Gospel and as affirmed by the Church over time. Above all, it stresses the themes of indissolubility, the sacramental nature of marriage, the transmission of life and the education of children. The Vatican Council II document Gaudium et Spes is widely quoted, along with Paul VI's Humanae Vitae, and St. John Paul II's Familiaris Consortio.

The chapter provides a broad view and touches on “imperfect situations” as well. We can read, in fact: "Discernment of the presence of ‘seeds of the Word’ in other cultures (AL, no. 11), can also apply to the
reality of marriage and the family. In addition to true natural marriage, positive elements exist in the forms of marriage found in other religious traditions,’ even if, at times, obscurely’ (AL, no. 77). The reflection also includes the “wounded families” about whom the Pope — quoting the Final Report of the 2015 Synod extensively — says that “it is always necessary to recall this general principle: ‘Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations.’ The degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases and factors may exist which limit the ability to make a decision. Therefore, while clearly stating the Church’s teaching, pastors are to avoid judgments that do not take into account the complexity of various situations, and they are to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience and endure distress because of their condition” (AL, no. 79).

Chapter four: “Love in marriage”

The fourth chapter treats love in marriage, which it illuminates with St. Paul’s “Hymn to Charity” in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. This opening section is truly a painstaking, focused, inspired and poetic exegesis of the Pauline text. It is a collection of brief passages carefully and tenderly describing human love in absolutely concrete terms. The quality of psychological introspection that marks this exegesis is striking. The psychological insights enter into the emotional world of the spouses — positive and negative — and the erotic dimension of love. This is an extremely rich and valuable contribution to Christian married life, unprecedented in previous papal documents.

This section digresses briefly from the more extensive, perceptive treatment of the day-to-day experience of married love which the Pope refuses to judge against ideal standards: “There is no need to lay upon two limited persons the tremendous burden of having to reproduce perfectly the union existing between Christ and his Church, for marriage as a sign entails ‘a dynamic process…, one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God’” (AL, no. 122). On the other hand, the Pope forcefully stresses the fact that conjugal love by its very nature defines the partners in a richly encompassing and lasting union (AL, no. 123), precisely within that “mixture of enjoyment and struggles,
tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures” which indeed make up a marriage (AL, no. 126).

The chapter concludes with a very important reflection on the “transformation of love” because “Longer life spans now mean that close and exclusive relationships must last for four, five or even six decades; consequently, the initial decision has to be frequently renewed” (AL, no. 163). As physical appearance alters, the loving attraction does not lessen but changes as sexual desire can be transformed over time into the desire for togetherness and mutuality: “There is no guarantee that we will feel the same way all through life. Yet if a couple can come up with a shared and lasting life project, they can love one another and live as one until death do them part, enjoying an enriching intimacy” (AL, no. 163).

Chapter five: “Love made fruitful”

The fifth chapter is entirely focused on love’s fruitfulness and procreation. It speaks in a profoundly spiritual and psychological manner about welcoming new life, about the waiting period of pregnancy, about the love of a mother and a father. It also speaks of the expanded fruitfulness of adoption, of welcoming the contribution of families to promote a “culture of encounter,” and of family life in a broad sense which includes aunts and uncles, cousins, relatives of relatives, friends. Amoris Laetitia does not focus on the so-called “nuclear” family” because it is very aware of the family as a wider network of many relationships. The spirituality of the sacrament of marriage has a deeply social character (see AL, no. 185). And within this social dimension the Pope particularly emphasizes the specific role of the relationship between youth and the elderly, as well as the relationship between brothers and sisters as a training ground for relating with others.

Chapter six: “Some pastoral perspectives”

In the sixth chapter the Pope treats various pastoral perspectives that are aimed at forming solid and fruitful families according to God’s plan. The chapter use the Final Reports of the two Synods and the catecheses of Pope Francis and Pope John Paul II extensively. It reiterates that families should not only be evangelized, they should also evangelize. The Pope regrets “that ordained ministers often lack the training needed to deal with the complex problems currently facing families” (AL, no. 202). On the one
hand, the psycho-affective formation of seminarians needs to be improved, and families need to be more involved in formation for ministry (AL, no. 203); and on the other hand, “the experience of the broad oriental tradition of a married clergy could also be drawn upon” (AL, no. 202).

The Pope then deals with the preparation of the engaged for marriage; with the accompaniment of couples in the first years of married life, including the issue of responsible parenthood; and also with certain complex situations and crises, knowing that “each crisis has a lesson to teach us; we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart” (AL, no. 232). Some causes of crisis are analyzed, among them a delay in maturing affectively (see AL, no. 239).

Mention is furthermore made of accompanying abandoned, separated or divorced persons. The Exhortation stresses the importance of the recent reform of the procedures for marriage annulment. It highlights the suffering of children in situations of conflict and concludes: “Divorce is an evil and the increasing number of divorces is very troubling. Hence, our most important pastoral task with regard to families is to strengthen their love, helping to heal wounds and working to prevent the spread of this drama of our times” (AL, no. 246).

It then touches on the situations of a marriage between a Catholic and a Christian of another denomination (mixed marriages), and between a Catholic and someone of another religion (disparity of cult). Regarding families with members with homosexual tendencies, it reaffirms the necessity to respect them and to refrain from any unjust discrimination and every form of aggression or violence. The last, pastorally poignant part of the chapter, “When death makes us feel its sting,” is on the theme of the loss of dear ones and of widowhood.

Chapter seven: “Towards a better education of children”

The seventh chapter is dedicated to the education of children: their ethical formation, the learning of discipline which can include punishment, patient realism, sex education, passing on the faith and, more generally, family life as an educational context. The practical wisdom present in each paragraph is remarkable, above all the attention given to those gradual,
small steps “that can be understood, accepted and appreciated” (AL, no. 271).

There is a particularly interesting and pedagogically fundamental paragraph in which Francis clearly states that “obsession, however, is not education. We cannot control every situation that a child may experience… If parents are obsessed with always knowing where their children are and controlling all their movements, they will seek only to dominate space. But this is no way to educate, strengthen and prepare their children to face challenges. What is most important is the ability lovingly to help them grow in freedom, maturity, overall discipline and real autonomy” (AL, no. 261).

The notable section on education in sexuality is very expressively entitled: “Yes to sex education.” The need is there, and we have to ask “if our educational institutions have taken up this challenge … in an age when sexuality tends to be trivialized and impoverished.” Sound education needs to be carried out “within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving” (AL, no. 280). The text warns that the expression ‘safe sex’ conveys “a negative attitude towards the natural procreative finality of sexuality, as if an eventual child were an enemy to be protected against. This way of thinking promotes narcissism and aggressiveness in place of acceptance” (AL, no. 283).

Chapter eight: “Guiding, discerning and integrating weakness”

The eighth chapter is an invitation to mercy and pastoral discernment in situations that do not fully match what the Lord proposes. The Pope uses three very important verbs: guiding, discerning and integrating, which are fundamental in addressing fragile, complex or irregular situations. The chapter has sections on the need for gradualness in pastoral care; the importance of discernment; norms and mitigating circumstances in pastoral discernment; and finally what the Pope calls the “logic of pastoral mercy.”

Chapter eight is very sensitive. In reading it one must remember that “the Church’s task is often like that of a field hospital” (AL, no. 291). Here the Holy Father grapples with the findings of the Synods on controversial issues. He reaffirms what Christian marriage is and adds that “some forms of union radically contradict this ideal, while others realise it in at least a
partial and analogous way.” The Church therefore “does not disregard the constructive elements in those situations which do not yet or no longer correspond to her teaching on marriage” (AL, no. 292).

As far as discernment with regard to “irregular” situations is concerned, the Pope states: “There is a need ‘to avoid judgments which do not take into account the complexity of various situations’ and ‘to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition’” (AL, no. 296). And he continues: “It is a matter of reaching out to everyone, of needing to help each person find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community, and thus to experience being touched by an ‘unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous’ mercy” (AL, no. 297). And further: “The divorced who have entered a new union, for example, can find themselves in a variety of situations, which should not be pigeonholed or fit into overly rigid classifications leaving no room for a suitable personal and pastoral discernment” (AL, no. 298).

In this line, gathering the observations of many Synod Fathers, the Pope states that “the baptized who are divorced and civilly remarried need to be more fully integrated into Christian communities in the variety of ways possible, while avoiding any occasion of scandal.” “Their participation can be expressed in different ecclesial services… Such persons need to feel not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able to live and grow in the Church… This integration is also needed in the care and Christian upbringing of their children, which should be considered the most important” (AL, no. 299).

In a more general vein, the Pope makes an extremely important statement for understanding the orientation and meaning of the Exhortation: “If we consider the immense variety of concrete situations, … it is understandable that neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases. What is needed is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases, one which would recognize that, since ‘the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases’, the consequences or effects of a rule need not necessarily always be the same” (AL, no. 300). The Pope develops in depth the needs and characteristics of the journey of accompaniment and
discernment necessary for profound dialogue between the faithful and their pastors.

For this purpose the Holy Father recalls the Church’s reflection on “mitigating factors and situations” regarding the attribution of responsibility and accountability for actions; and relying on St. Thomas Aquinas, he focuses on the relationship between rules and discernment by stating: “It is true that general rules set forth a good which can never be disregarded or neglected, but in their formulation they cannot provide absolutely for all particular situations. At the same time, it must be said that, precisely for that reason, what is part of a practical discernment in particular circumstances cannot be elevated to the level of a rule” (AL, no. 304).

The last section of the chapter treats “The logic of pastoral mercy.” To avoid misunderstandings, Pope Francis strongly reiterates: “To show understanding in the face of exceptional situations never implies dimming the light of the fuller ideal, or proposing less than what Jesus offers to the human being. Today, more important than the pastoral care of failures is the pastoral effort to strengthen marriages and thus to prevent their breakdown” (AL, no. 307).

The overall sense of the chapter and of the spirit that Pope Francis wishes to impart to the pastoral work of the Church is well summed up in the closing words: “I encourage the faithful who find themselves in complicated situations to speak confidently with their pastors or with other lay people whose lives are committed to the Lord. They may not always encounter in them a confirmation of their own ideas or desires, but they will surely receive some light to help them better understand their situation and discover a path to personal growth. I also encourage the Church’s pastors to listen to them with sensitivity and serenity, with a sincere desire to understand their plight and their point of view, in order to help them live better lives and to recognize their proper place in the Church” (AL, no. 312).

On the “logic of pastoral mercy,” Pope Francis emphasizes: “At times we find it hard to make room for God’s unconditional love in our pastoral activity. We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its
concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel” (AL, no. 311).

Chapter nine: “The spirituality of marriage and the family”

The ninth chapter is devoted to marital and family spirituality, which “is made up of thousands of small but real gestures” (AL, no. 315). The Pope clearly states that “those who have deep spiritual aspirations should not feel that the family detracts from their growth in the life of the Spirit, but rather see it as a path which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union” (AL, no. 316). Everything, “moments of joy, relaxation, celebration, and even sexuality can be experienced as a sharing in the full life of the Resurrection” (AL, no. 317).

He then speaks of prayer in the light of Easter, of the spirituality of exclusive and free love in the challenge and the yearning to grow old together, reflecting God’s fidelity (see AL, no. 319). And finally the spirituality of care, consolation and incentive: the Pope teaches that “all family life is a ‘shepherding’ in mercy. Each of us, by our love and care, leaves a mark on the life of others” (AL, no. 322). It is a profound “spiritual experience to contemplate our loved ones with the eyes of God and to see Christ in them” (AL, no. 323).

In the final paragraph the Pope affirms: “No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love … All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse. Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together.... May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us” (AL, no. 325).

The apostolic exhortation concludes with a Prayer to the Holy Family.

As can readily be understood from a quick review of its contents, the apostolic exhortation Amoris Laetitia seeks emphatically to affirm not the “ideal family” but the very rich and complex reality of family life. Its pages provide an openhearted look, profoundly positive, which is nourished not
with abstractions or ideal projections, but with pastoral attention to reality. The text is a close reading of family life, with spiritual insights and practical wisdom useful for every human couple or persons who want to build a family. Above all, it is patently the result of attention to what people have lived over many years. The exhortation *Amoris Laetitia: on love in the family* indeed speaks the language of experience and of hope.

**The Roman Curia**

Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments by which the Memorial of St. Mary Magdalene is raised to a feast (June 3, 2016)

Prot. N. 257/16

**DECRETUM**

Resurrectionis dominicae primam testem et evangelistam, Sanctam Mariam Magdalenam, semper Ecclesia sive Occidentalis sive Orientalis, summa cum reverentia consideravit, etsi diversimode coluit.

Nostris vero temporibus cum Ecclesia vocata sit ad impensius consulendum de mulieris dignitate, de nova Evangelizatione ac de amplitudine mysterii divinae misericordiae bonum visum est ut etiam exemplum Sanctae Mariae Magdalenae aptius fidelibus proponatur. Haec enim mulier agnita ut dilectrix Christi et a Christo plurimum dilecta, “testis divinae misericordiae” a Sancto Gregorio Magno, et “apostolorum apostola” a Sancto Thoma de Aquino appellata, a christifidelibus huius temporis deprehendi potest ut paradigma ministerii mulierum in Ecclesia.
Ideo Summus Pontifex Franciscus statuit celebrationem Sanctae Mariae Magdalenae Calendario Romano generali posthac inscribendam esse gradu festi loco memoriae, sicut nunc habetur.

Novus celebrationis gradus nullam secumfert variationem circa diem, quo ipsa celebratio peragenda est, quoad textus sive Missalis sive Liturgiae Horarum adhibendos, videlicet:

a) dies celebrationis Sanctae Mariae Magdalenae dicatus idem manet, prout in Calendario Romano invenitur, nempe 22 Iulii;

b) textus in Missa et Officio Divino adhibendi, iidem manent, qui in Missali et in Liturgia Horarum statuto die inveniuntur, addita tamen in Missali Praefatione propria, huic decreto adnexa. Curae autem euit Coetuum Episcoporum textum Praefationis vertere in linguam vernaculam, ita ut, praevia Apostolicae Sedis recognitione adhiberi valeat, quae tempore dato in proximam reimpressionem proprii Missalis Romani inseretur.

Ubi Sancta Maria Magdalena, ad normam iuris particularis, die vel gradu diverso rite celebratur, et in posterum eodem die ac gradu quo antea celebrabitur.

Contrariis quibuslibet minime obstantibus.

Ex aedibus Congregationis de Cultu Divino et DisciplinaSacramentorum, die 3 mensis Iunii, in sollemnitate Sacratissimi Cordis Iesu.

ROBERT Card. SARAH
Praefectus

+ ARTURUS ROCHE
Archiepiscopus a Secretis

Following is a translation of the decree.

Prot. N. 257/16

DECREE
The Church, both in the East and in the West has always regarded Saint Mary Magdalene the first witness of the Lord’s resurrection and the first evangelist, and with the greatest reverence has always honored her although in diverse ways.

Given that in our time the Church is called to reflect in a more profound way on the dignity of Woman, on the New Evangelization and on the greatness of the Mystery of Divine Mercy, it seemed right that the example of Saint Mary Magdalene might also fittingly be proposed to the faithful. In fact this woman, known as the one who loved Christ and who was greatly loved by Christ, and was called a “witness of Divine Mercy” by Saint Gregory the Great and an “apostle of the apostles” by Saint Thomas Aquinas, can now rightly be taken by the faithful as a model of women’s role in the Church.

Therefore the Supreme Pontiff Pope Francis has established that from now on the celebration of Saint Mary Magdalene should be inscribed in the General Roman Calendar with the rank of Feast rather than Memorial as is presently the case.

The new rank of celebration does not involve any change of the day on which the celebration itself takes place and, as for the liturgical texts, the following is to be observed:

a) The day dedicated to the celebration of Saint Mary Magdalene remains the same as it appears in the Roman Calendar, that is 22 July.

b) The texts to be used in the Mass and in the Divine Office remain the same as those contained in the Missal and in the Liturgy of the Hours on the day of the Feast, with the addition in the Missal of a proper Preface, attached to this Decree. It will be the responsibility of the Conferences of Bishops to translate the text of the Preface into the vernacular language so that, having received the approval of the Apostolic See, it can be used and in due time included in the next reprint of the Roman Missal.

Where, according to particular law, Saint Mary Magdalene is legitimately celebrated on a different day and as a Solemnity, this day and rank remains as before.

All things to the contrary notwithstanding.
From the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 3 June 2016, Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Robert Card. Sarah
Prefect
+Arthur Roche
Archbishop Secretary

Apostolorum apostola, article of Archbishop Arthur Roche, Secretary of the Dicastery

As expressly wished by the Holy Father, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has published a new decree, dated 3 June 2016, Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, by which the celebration of St. Mary Magdalene, currently obligatory memory, will be elevated in the general calendar to the level of a feast day.

The decision is situated in the current ecclesial context, which calls upon us to reflect more deeply on the dignity of women, the new evangelization and the greatness of the mystery of divine mercy. It was St. John Paul II who dedicated great attention not only to the importance of women in the very mission of Christ and the Church, but also, and with special emphasis, to the peculiar function of St. Mary Magdalene as the first witness of the Risen Christ and the first messenger who announced to the apostles the resurrection of the Lord (see Mulieris dignitatem, no. 16). This importance remains in today's Church — as shown by the current commitment to a new evangelization — which seeks to welcome, without distinction, men and women of any race, people, language and nation (see Acts 5:9), to proclaim to them the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to accompany them on their earthly pilgrimage and to offer them the wonders of God's salvation. St. Mary Magdalene is an example of true and authentic evangelization, that is, an evangelizer who proclaims the joyful central message of Easter." (see Collect prayer of July 22 and the new Preface)
The Holy Father Francis has taken this decision precisely in the context of the Jubilee of Mercy to stress the importance of this women, who shows great love for Christ and was very dear to Christ, as confirmed by Rabano Mauro ("dilectrix Christi et Christo plurimum dilecta": De vita beate Mariae magdalenae, Prologus) and St. Anselm of Canterbury ("electa dilectrix et dilecta Electrix Dei", Oratio a LXXIII Sanctam Mariam Magdalenum). It is certain that the Christian tradition in the West, especially after St. Gregory the Great, identifies as the same person who poured perfume in the house of Simon the Pharisee, and the sister of Lazarus and Martha. This interpretation continued to influence the western ecclesiastical writers, Christian art and liturgical texts relating to the Saint. The Bollandists widely discussed the problem of the identification of the three women and prepared the way for the liturgical reform of the Roman Calendar. With the implementation of the reform, the tests of the Roman Missal, the Liturgy of the Hours and the Martyrologium Romanum, reference is made to Mary of Magdala. It is certain that Mary Magdalene formed part of the group of Jesus' disciples, that she followed Him to the foot of the cross and in the garden in which she found the tomb, she was the first 'testis divinae misericordiae' (Gregory the Great, XL Hom. In Evangelia, lib. II, Hom. 25, 10). The Gospel of John says that Mary Magdalene wept, as she had not found the body of the Lord (see Jn 20:11), and Jesus had mercy on her, allowing Himself to be recognized as the Master and transforming her tears into Easter joy.

On the one hand, she has the honor of being the first witness ('prima testis') to the resurrection of the Lord (Hymn Ad Laudes matutinas), the first to see the empty tomb and the first to hear the truth of His resurrection. Christ has a special consideration and mercy for this woman, who shows her love for Him, looking for Him in the garden with anguish and suffering, with 'lacrimas humilitatis', as St. Anselm says in the aforementioned prayer. In this sense, I would like to show the difference between the two women present in the garden of Paradise, and in the garden of the Resurrection.

The first disseminates death where there was life, and the second proclaims Life from a tomb, the place of death. This is also pointed out by St. Gregory the Great: Quia in paradiso mulier viro propinavit mortem, a
sepulcro mulier viris annunciat vitam" (XL Hom. In Evangelia, lib. II, Hom. 25). Likewise, it is in the garden of resurrection that the Lord says to Mary Magdalene, 'Noli me tangere'. It is an invitation not only to Mary, but also to all the Church, to enter into an experience of faith that overcomes any materialistic appropriation or human understanding of the divine mystery. It has ecclesial importance! It is a good lesson for every disciple of Jesus: do not seek human securities and worldly honors, but faith in the Living and Risen Christ."

Precisely since she was an eyewitness to the Risen Christ, she was also the first to testify before the apostles. She fulfills the mandate the Risen Christ gives her: “go to my brothers and say to them…” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her (Jn 20:17-18). In this way she becomes, as is already known, an evangelist, or rather a messenger who announces the good news of the resurrection of the Lord; or, as Rabano Mauro and St. Thomas Aquinas said, “apostolorum apostola,” as she announces to the apostles what they in turn will announce to all the world (Rabano Mauro, De vita beatae Mariae Magdalene, c. XXVII; S. Tomás de Aquino, In Ioannem Evangelistam Expositio, c. XX, L. III, 6). The Angelic Doctor is right to apply this term to Mary Magdalene: she is the witness to the Risen Christ and announces the message of the resurrection of the Lord, like the other apostles. Therefore it is right that the liturgical celebration of this woman should have the same level of festivity given to the apostles in the General Roman Calendar, and that the special mission of this woman be highlighted, as an example and model to every woman in the Church.

+ Arthur Roche
Archbishop Secretary
of the Congregation for Divine Worship
and the Discipline of the Sacraments

Torna ai contenuti
Decree of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints Recognizing the Heroic Virtues and the Reputation for Holiness of the Servant of God María Montserrat Grases García (April 24, 2016)

CONGREGATIO DE CAUSIS SANCTORUM
BARCINONENSIS
BEATIFICATIONIS et CANONIZATIONIS
SERVAE DEI
MARIAE MONTSERRAT GRASES GARCÍA
CHRISTIFIDELIS LAICAE
PRAELATURAE PERSONALIS SANCTAE CRUCIS ET OPERIS DEI
(1941-1959)

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DECRETUM SUPER VIRTUTIBUS

“Filia sum Dei”. “Quidquid Tu vis, quando Tu vis, eo modo quo Tu vis”. “Omnia in bonum”.

Tres hae breves precationes, quas Serva Dei Maria Montserrat Grases frequenter recitare solebat, iter eius spirituale summatim perstringunt. Vivida enim conscientia filiationis divinae ipsa ducebatur ad Dei Patris voluntatem amandam et adimplendam, cum plene persuasum sibi esset quidquid a Domino recipimus nostrum in bonum semper vertere.

Maria Montserrat Grases García, familiariter Montse vocata, secunda ex novem filiis Emmanuelis Grases et Emmanuelae García, nata est Barcinone in Hispania die 10 mensis Iulii anni 1941 et novem post dies baptismum recepit.

Infantiam et adolescentiam Dei Serva degit in ambitu sereno familiae christianis principiiis plene imbutae. Parentes enim, Operis Dei fideles,
iuxta doctrinam Sancti Iosephmariae Escrivá, e domo sua efficere contenderunt christianum larem luminosum et laetum.

Expletis studiis secundariis et frequentatis quoque lectionibus ad plectrocymbalum pulsandum, Maria Montserrat in Schola Professionali publica sese inscripsit. Ei arridebant ludi lusorii, silvestres deambulationes, musica, saltationes populares regionis eius et ludi scaenici. Multi ei erant amici.

Parentes Servam Dei docuerunt cum Iesu Christo fiducialiter se gerere et haud parum contulerunt efformandis praecipuis animi eius lineamentis, qualia sunt laetitia, simplicitas, suipsius oblivio, sollicitudo de aliorum bono materiali ac spirituali. Adolescens, comitantibus aliquibus condiscipulis, visitare solebat familias pauperes Barcinonenses et catechesim pueris impartiebat, quibus aliquando puerilia ludicra vel dulcia donabat.

Vivax erat ac simplex, et si quando acerbe respondebat, testantibus familiaribus ac magistris, ipsa adnitesuram ut mores suos emendaret utque se erga omnes affabilem et festivam exhiberet.

Anno 1954, suggerente matre, frequentare coepit sedem Operis Dei in qua christiana et humana formatio puellis impartiebat. Paulatim percepit se a Deo vocari ut viam hanc ecclesialem sequeretur et, consultis parentibus, post attentam ponderationem et orationem, die 24 mensis Decembris anni 1957, quaesivit ut in Opere Dei ascriberetur, se totam tradens Deo in “apostolico caelibatu”.

Ex eo vero tempore, Dei Serva impensius usque atque perseverantius sanctitatem quaesivit in vita sua ordinaria. Ipsa sibi proposuit cotidianum ordinem vitae spiritualis qui complectebatur sanctae Missae participationem, Rosarii marialis recitationem, lectionem Novi Testamenti necnon alicuius libri de re spirituali aliasque pias praxes. Coluit quoque profundum spiritum paenitentiae etiam in corporis mortificationibus sponte assumendis atque in diei decursu Deo offerebat tum parva sed frequentia sacrificia tum nisus ad sui animi asperitates moderandas.

Firmum quoque ac constans fuit desiderium eius ducendi ad Deum amicas et collegas. Cotidiana adiuncta et vel ipsi ludus lusorii occasionem ei praebebant ut se pro aliis impenderet eisque transmitteret pacem illam quae ex unione cum Deo oritur.
Mense Decembri, anno 1957, dum Maria Montserrat in monte nive strato cum amicis ambulabat, cecidit et ictum in genu accepit, qui primo aspectu visus est res nullius momenti, attamen, dolore non cessante, immo ingravescenti, et consultis medicis, tandem mense Junio anni 1958 diagnosis lata est tumoris maligni dicti Ewing in femore cruris sinistri. Servae Dei parentes notum eidem reddiderunt se hoc morbo insanabili et infaustae prognosis affectam esse; ipsa vero notitiam accepi animo sereno ac spiritu supernaturali, pergens in nisu placendi Deo in ordiniis vitae suae cotidianae adiunctis.

Procedente tempore dolores magis magisque augebantur et Maria Montserrat molestias quas patiebatur Deo offerebat pro Ecclesia, pro Romano Pontifice, pro Opere Dei et pro multis intentionibus quae a parentibus et amicis eidem suggerebantur. Magis de aliis quam de seipsa erat sollicita, neque unquam se praebuit commiserandam, immo eius gaudium in alios effundebatur. Qui eam invisebant ad Deum impulsos se sentiebant fueruntque testes progressionis Mariae Montserrat in unione cum Deo atque transformationis eiusdem dolorum in orationem et apostolatum, nempe in viam versus sanctitatem. Amica quaedam asseruit se intimitatem cum Christo conspicari cum eam orantem videbat.

Ex quo admissionem in Opus Dei postulavit, iter versus sanctitatem medias inter res temporales Dei Serva ita intento studio arripuit, ut aegritudo eam paratam inveniret ad heroicitatis fastigium attingendum in exercendis virtutibus dum dolores in dies augebantur.

Maria Montserrat animam Deo placide reddidit Feria V in Coena Domini, die 26 mensis Martii anni 1959. Duos post dies sepulta est et anno 1994 eius exuviae translatae sunt in cryptam oratorii Sanctae Mariae de Bonaigua, ubi nunc inveniuntur.

Iam ab initio multa fuerunt testimonia de sanctitatis fama Servae Dei, quae nunc diffusa invenitur plures in nationes. Frequentes quoque notitiae perveniunt de gratiis et favoribus eiusdem intercessioni tributis.

Maria Montserrat mortua est adhuc adolescens, decimo octavo suae aetatis anno nondum expleto. Hac brevitate non obstante, vita eius habita est ut Dei donum sive ab iis qui eam frequentaverunt sive etiam ab aliis qui
eiusdem notitiam serius acceperunt, quia ipsa muneribus suis ordinaruis amore pervasa erga Deum et animas functa est, et sua pietate, suo vultu hilari atque laeto suaque simplici et heroica generositate, multas animas ad Iesum Christum duxit. Plena eius ac praecox responsio ad vocem Dei amoris plenam exemplum exstat quod multos iuvere poterit, iuvenes praeeritum, ut persentiant pulchritudinem sequendi Christum in ordinaria cuiusque vita.

Processus Informativus super fama sanctitatis, virtutum in genere et miraculorum instructus fuit in arcidioecesi barcinonensi ab anno 1962 ad annum 1968. Novis vero promulgatis normis de canonizationis causis, anno 1993 ab archiepiscopo barcinonensi postulatum est ut commissionem peritorum in re historica nominaret ad documenta colligenda et processum dioecesanum additionali instrueret.

Congressus Peculiaris Consultorum Theologorum, qui locum habuit die 30 mensis Iunii anno 2015, affirmativo respondit ad dubium propositum circa heroicitatem virtutum et famam sanctitatis Servae Dei. Me, Card. Angelo Amato, moderante, sententiam faventem tulerunt Em.mi ac Exc.mi in Sessione Ordinaria coadunati die 19 mensis Aprilis anno 2016.

Facta de hisce omnibus Summo Pontifici Francisco accurata relatione ab infrascripto Cardinali Praefecto, Beatissimus Pater, accipiens rataque habens Congregationis de Causis Sanctorum vota, hodierna die sollemnitatem declaravit: Constare de virtutibus theologalis Fide, Spe et Caritate tum in Deum tum in proximum, necnon de cardinalibus Prudentia, Iustitia, Temperantia, Fortitudine, iisque adnexis in gradu heroico, atque de fama sanctitatis Servae Dei Mariae Montserrat (Montse) Grases Garcia, christifidelis laicae Praelaturae Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei, in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur.

Hoc autem Decretum publici iuris fieri et in acta Congregationis de Causis Sanctorum Summus Pontifex referri mandavit.


ANGELUS Card. AMATO, S.D.B.

Praefectus
DECREE OF VIRTUES

“I am a daughter of God”, “Whenever You want, as You want, and in whatever way You want”, “Omnia in bonum”.

These three aspirations, which María Montserrat Grases often repeated, describe her spiritual journey most fittingly. Her very keen awareness of her divine filiation prompted her to fulfil God the Father’s will lovingly, with the assurance that all that He sends us is always for the best. María Monserrat Grases García, known to everyone as Montse, was born in Barcelona, Spain, on the 10th July, 1941 and was baptized nine days later. She was the second of the nine children of Manuel Grases and Manolita García.

The childhood and teenage years of the Servant of God were spent in
the peaceful atmosphere of a Christian family. Montse’s parents were both faithful of Opus Dei, who tried to create a bright and cheerful home atmosphere, according to the teachings of St. Josemaría Escrivá.

After completing her secondary education, which she combined with learning to play the piano, Montse joined a professional school. She liked sports, hiking, music, folk dancing and performing in plays. She had many friends, boys and girls.

Her parents taught her to deal with Jesus with a lot of confidence, and helped her bring out the best points of her character: cheerfulness, simplicity, forgetfulness of self, and concern for the spiritual and material good of other people. During her teens, together with some of her study companions, she would visit poor families in Barcelona, and give catechism to the children and sometimes take them toys and sweets. She had a lively, impulsive temperament, and at times her reactions could be a little brusque, although her relatives and teachers recall that she used to struggle to control her feelings and be friendly and jovial with everyone.

In 1954, her mother suggested to her to attend a center of Opus Dei that offered Christian and human formation to young girls. Step by step she realized that God was calling her to the Work and on 24th December, 1957, after meditating, praying and asking her parents’ advice, she asked to join Opus Dei, with total dedication in apostolic celibacy.

From then on, she strove with greater determination and constancy to seek sanctity in her daily life.

She started on an intense daily plan of spiritual life, which included attending Mass, the Holy Rosary, reading of the New Testament and spiritual books, and other practices of piety. In addition, she lived a real spirit of penance, including generous corporal mortifications, offering Our Lord many small sacrifices throughout the day, and struggled to improve her defects of character.

Likewise, she was constant in her zeal to bring her friends and companions closer to God, taking advantage of their daily living and working together. For example, when playing sports, she would be at the service of the others and transmit to them the peace she experienced from living close to God.
In December, 1957, on a mountain excursion, she fell and hurt her knee badly. It didn’t seem serious at the time, but after some days the pain only got worse. After consulting several doctors, in June 1958 they diagnosed an Ewing sarcoma in the femur of the left leg. When her parents told her that her illness was incurable and terminal, Montse took it with immense peace and supernatural outlook, while continuing to seek to please God in her daily life.

Her illness caused her intense and ever-increasing pain. The Servant of God offered her sufferings for the Church, for the Pope, for Opus Dei and for the many specific intentions her relatives and friends asked her to pray for. She thought of her neighbor more than herself, and never complained. On the contrary, her cheerfulness was always infectious. She brought many of those who came to visit her nearer to God. Those who lived with Montse bore witness to how she grew closer to God and how she transformed her suffering into prayer and apostolate: into true sanctity.

From when she asked for admission to Opus Dei, the Servant of God had undertaken a serious quest for sanctity in the middle of the world, so that her illness found her well prepared to live the virtues with complete heroism. She died peacefully on Holy Thursday, 26th March, 1959, and was buried two days later. In 1994, her mortal remains were transferred to the crypt of Santa Maria de Bonaigua, where they now lay.

From the first moment, testimonies of her reputation of holiness —now spread to many countries— and news of graces and favours obtained through her intercession were abundant.

Montse died in the fullness of youth, just before her 18th birthday. Though short, her life was a real gift of God for those who knew her then, and who have come to know her afterwards, because she performed her daily tasks with great love for God and other people. She brought many souls to Jesus with her piety, her smile and her simple, heroic generosity. Her early correspondence to God’s love is an example that will help many people, especially the young, to understand the beauty of following Christ in their daily lives.

The investigative proceedings into the reputation of holiness, the virtues in general and the miracles took place in Barcelona from 1962 to
1968. When new legislation on causes of canonization was promulgated, the Archbishop of Barcelona, after appointing a commission of historical experts to gather relevant documents, asked for additional proceedings, which took place in 1993.

The special Congress of theological consultants, which took place on 30th June, 2015, agreed that the Servant of God had practiced the virtues to a heroic degree. The Ordinary Session of the members of the causes of the Saints, presided by the undersigned, Cardinal Angelo Amato, gave their full assent.

A detailed account was presented to the Supreme Pontiff, Francis, setting out all the stages explained above. The Holy Father, receiving and ratifying the opinion of the Congregation of the Causes of the Saints, with today’s date, has declared solemnly:

*From the foregoing, there is sure evidence of the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, both with God and neighbor, and the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude and their dependent virtues, all of which were lived to a heroic degree, and the reputation of holiness of the Servant of God Maria Montserrat (Montse) Grases Garcia, laywoman of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei.*

The Holy Father has decided that this Decree should be published and transcribed in the Acta (records) of the Congregation of the Causes of the Saints.

Given at Rome, the 26th day of the month of April in the year of Our Lord, 2016.

ANGELO Card. AMATO, S.D.B.

Prefect

MARCELLO BARTOLUCCI

Titular Archbishop of Bevagna

Secretary

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FROM THE PRELATE

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Activities

Ordination of Priests

Twenty-seven faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei received the sacrament of the priesthood at the hands of Bishop Echevarría. The ceremony was held on Saturday, April 23 in the Basilica of St. Eugene, in Rome. The new priests come from thirteen countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, the Congo, Costa Rica, Finland, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, the Philippines, Russia, Spain, and the United States.

In his homily, the Prelate told the new priests: “You will be priests in order to serve all souls.” And in words of Pope Francis he reminded them: “Without the cross you will never find the true Christ; and a Cross without Christ makes no sense.”

“You will become,” the Prelate said, “priests of the New Covenant. Acting in the person of Christ, you will be able to act with authority in the administration of the sacraments, proclaiming the Word of God in his name and serving all souls as our Lord did.” And he added: “It is Jesus who, through you, will forgive the sins of the faithful who come, well prepared, to the sacrament of Penance... It is Jesus who, in you and with you, will serve all men and women, Christians and non-Christians, when they ask
for a word of consolation, a light to illuminate the darkness in which they often find themselves submerged.”

Bishop Echevarría invited everyone “to pray for Pope Francis, for the vicar of the Pope for the diocese of Rome, Cardinal Vallini, for all the bishops and priests of the world, and to accompany all seminarians, so that they be faithful to their call.”

The new priests are José María Pérez-Seoane Mazzuchelli (Spain), Vincenzo Arborea (Italy), Fernando Hernansanz Serrano (Spain), Odon Swamotz Wazaka (the Congo), Carlos Iza García (Russia), Luis Cruz Ortiz de Landázuri (Spain), Alejandro Muñoz Vizcaíno (Spain), Mario Medina Rodríguez (Spain), Michael Nievales Quilantang (the Philippines), José Omar Espíritu Castro (Mexico), Manuel Valdés Mas (Spain), Julio Agustín Sánchez León (Costa Rica), Francisco Javier Córcoles García (Spain), Agustín Pablo González Alonso (Spain), Juan Cruz Bustillo (Argentina), Manuel Valentini Colomer (Chile), Albert Penella Mas (Spain), Javier Aranguren Sánchez-Ostiz (Spain), Guillermo Arregui Cussi (Mexico), John Paul Mitchell (the United States), Kalle Oskari Juurikkala (Finland), Gonzalo de la Morena Barrio (Spain), Marcelo José Monteiro (Brazil), Martin Abonyo Onyango (Kenya), Michael Joseph Fagan (the United States) and José Antonio Cordero Becker (Chile).

Pastoral Trips

Slovenia, June 2-3

The Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, and the auxiliary and general vicar, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, made a pastoral visit to Slovenia on June 2-3. This was their third visit since the beginning of the apostolic work of Opus Dei in that country in 2003.

They were received by Archbishop Stanislav Zore of Ljubljana on Friday, June 3. The Archbishop expressed his gratitude for the apostolic work that the faithful of the Prelature are carrying out in his diocese. On the same day they had a meeting with the nuncio, Archbishop Juliusz
Janusz, and went to pray in the Ljubljana Cathedral, where they also passed through the Holy Door of Mercy.

Bishop Echevarría and Msgr. Ocáriz had various gatherings with faithful of the Prelature, cooperators, and young people who take part in the activities of Christian formation. The Prelate encouraged them to live their faith integrally and—seconding the teachings of Pope Francis—to go out to meet many people who are waiting for them to speak about God.

They also had two get-togethers with families. The Prelate encouraged those present to live the common vocation of all the baptized to holiness, finding God in their ordinary life: in their work, in their family and in the obligations proper to any citizen.

Before ending their pastoral trip, the Prelate and Auxiliary Vicar visited the construction site of the Polzela Conference Center, where activities of spiritual formation organized by the Prelature of Opus Dei will be offered.

**Croatia, from June 3 to 6**

Bishop Echevarría and Msgr. Ocáriz visited the Archbishop of Zagreb, Cardinal Josip Bozanić, and went to pray in the cathedral, where the mortal remains of Blessed Aloysius Stepinac are preserved, known for his efforts to ensure human and civil rights in Croatia.

During his stay in Croatia, Bishop Echevarría recalled St. Josemaría’s special affection for this country and the prayer of the founder of Opus Dei that the Christian message would once again be spread there after the years during which worship was prohibited.

In the country’s capital, he met with faithful of the Prelature and others who take part in the formational activities of Opus Dei. On the occasion of the Holy Year, Bishop Echevarría encouraged everyone to practice the works of mercy in their daily life, going to the intercession of St. Josemaría.

The Prelate of Opus Dei and the Auxiliary Vicar spoke with a group of families who have started various schools for primary and pre-school children, as well as with others who organize family orientation courses. They also had a get-together with priests belonging to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross and some of their friends.
Ordination of Deacons

On February 27, Bishop Echevarría conferred diaconal ordination on six faithful of Opus Dei. The ceremony was held in the parish of St. Josemaría in Rome. The new deacons are Alejandro Jesús Arenas (Peru), Eduardo Ares (Spain), Miguel Ángel Correas (Spain), Pablo López (Spain), Carlos Rodríguez (Spain), and Irineo Pallares (Mexico).

Alejandro Jesús Arenas studied mechanical engineering at the National University of Engineering in Lima, Peru. Prior to his preparation for the priesthood, he worked for ten years in the sale of hydraulic products.

Irineo Pallares, from Culiacan, Mexico, studied financial administration. For thirteen years he managed a hotel. He had also been manager of a textile business and head of formation in the Chapultepec high school.

Eduardo Ares studied Classics at the Complutense University in Madrid, and has taught in a number of schools. He also is a well-known oral narrator and has received several international prizes.

Miguel Ángel Correas, a native of Alcázar de San Juan (Spain), studied computer engineering at the University of Castilla la Mancha. For more than ten years he was a high school teacher in Ciudad Real, Spain.

Carles Rodríguez Raventós studied Industrial Electronics and Technical Architecture. He worked for a Swiss Multinational as coordinator of security for almost ten years.

Pablo López González has a degree in Educational Psychology. A teacher in the field of Physical Education, he worked in a high school in Madrid until 2010, the year when he began his ecclesiastical studies for ordination to the priesthood.

In his homily, the Prelate of Opus Dei reminded the new deacons that the Church “conferred on them the power of preaching with authority the Word of God, of distributing the Body of Christ in Communion,” and of carrying out “the works of charity in the name of our Lord himself.”
Their ordination as priests will take place on September 4 in the Shrine of Our Lady of Torreciudad, in Spain.

Torna ai contenuti

Homilies

The Auxiliary Vicar: On the Feast of St. Josemaría, In the Parish of St. Josemaría, Rome (June 26, 2016)

It fills me with joy to celebrate Holy Mass on the feast of St. Josemaría, in this parish dedicated to him. First of all I want to transmit to you an affectionate greeting from Bishop Javier Echevarría, the Prelate of Opus Dei, who likes so much to celebrate the Eucharist in this church, although today he was not able to do so. You can be assured of his prayers for your parish community, for each one of you and your families.

Twenty years have gone by since St. John Paul II dedicated this church. I recall that day very well, when I had the good fortune to take part in the Eucharistic celebration. The Pope addressed the faithful with words that called for commitment to their Christian mission: “This church,” he said, “is built not only with bricks, but with living stones that are the people, all the baptized. You have been baptized, and therefore you too are living stones, and with these living stones a living Church is built.” Two decades later, what vitality we see in the parish of St. Josemaría! Priests and laity have worked a lot, and have begun a wide variety of initiatives: catechism classes for children and adolescents, charitable works, preparation courses for marriage, etc. How much the pastor and the other priests love you!

We are all immersed in a great apostolic adventure. In the Gospel passage that we have just read, Jesus involves many people in his mission of teaching the path to attain true happiness. So many people gather around
him that Jesus asks Simon to let him get into his boat. At the end of his preaching, our Lord addresses this challenge to the fisherman: “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch” (Lk 5:4). Put out into the deep! *Duc in altum*, as the Latin text says. These words were a strong call to St. Josemaría’s heart, where they echoed throughout his whole life. *Duc in altum!* St. Josemaría, in turn, addressed that call of our Lord to so many Christians, so that they wouldn’t be satisfied with a superficial relationship with God, so that they wouldn’t fall into the temptation of shutting themselves up in themselves. “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch,” St. Josemaría exhorts us. “The apostolic zeal Christ has put in our hearts must not be diminished or extinguished by a false humility... He tells us to fight, to acknowledge our weaknesses, not to be afraid, but to repent and foster a desire to improve.”[1]

God and others: these are the great goals of our life. We are asked to go out to meet God, who is our Father, and our fellow men and women, who are our brothers and sisters. Today, like Peter and his fishermen companions, we hear the Master’s words: *Duc in altum*, put out into the deep! It is God who is calling us to put out into the sea of infinite love that He himself is, to let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says, in order to converse as children with their Father. Let us immerse ourselves in the ocean of peace and love that is God: in our daily prayer, in those times of silence and intimate prayer that we can find, with a bit of effort, in the midst of the hustle and bustle of each day. We will discover that our Lord is always with us, even when it seems that our days end with our nets empty, as happened to Simon Peter on the day he met the Master beside the Lake of Genesareth.

*Duc in altum*, put out into the deep. This is also a call to go out to those other seas that are the men and women of our time, in order to transmit to them the joy of being God’s children. We cannot remain on the shore of our comfort, content perhaps with a relationship of mere courtesy with others. We Christians are called, like Peter, to leave behind the shore of our selfishness in order to become fishers of men, people with the courage to communicate the closeness of God with their words and deeds. We are called to do so even with simple gestures, such as an amusing joke that causes someone who is tired to smile, words of advice that hearten a
discouraged friend, or a small detail that makes a family gathering more pleasant.

Those of us who have had the great gift from God of being close to St. Josemaría, can assure you that he was always in God’s presence, while at the same time also being truly concerned about the life of each person, with very specific deeds. He had the heart of a father who loved intensely, even when he had to correct someone who had made a mistake. For as Pope Francis said, “a good father knows how to wait and how to forgive from the bottom of his heart... The father who knows how to correct without humiliating is also the one who knows how to protect without taking anything for himself.”[2]

Let us put out into the deep in our relationship with God and with those round us. And let us ask our Lady to accompany and sustain us in this decision, for as St. Josemaría so often said, Mary is Spes Nostra, our Hope.


At the Liturgical Solemnity of St. Josemaría, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (June 25, 2016)

Praised be Jesus Christ,

Dear brothers and sisters:

We are amazed and filled with gratitude on seeing the dialogue between Jesus and Peter in this Gospel. After making use of his poor boat, our Lord invites Simon to put out into the deep for a catch, and he accompanies him. Jesus knows that this man is an expert fisherman, who with great simplicity and trust tells him that during the whole night he has caught nothing.
Peter asks himself how his luck could possibly change now that it was
daytime. Even so, trusting in the person advising him, he did what Jesus
asked and cast forth the nets. The extraordinary quantity of the catch moves
Peter to get down on his knees. And Christ answers him with an even
greater gift; he tells him that, from then on, he and his companions will be
fishers of men.

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy we see, in this gesture of our Lord, one
more example of divine mercy. Jesus had pity on those fishermen whose
work, by which they had to earn their living, had been fruitless. But he
respects their freedom and, instead of carrying out a miracle that would
have left them with their mouths open but without doing anything
themselves, he suggests that they cast out their nets once more. Thus it was
the apostles themselves who brought in “a great quantity of fish,” so great
that “their nets were breaking.” It’s so natural! Our Lord, by showing them
such compassion and understanding, stirred up in them a faith so great that
it became palpable. The Master takes into account their capacity to work,
to strive shoulder to shoulder to attain a goal.

We can say that God’s mercy, which Christ has brought to earth, gives
wings to human freedom. How marvelous! God allows us to do something,
and wants us to make our own contribution. He counts on the professional
skill of each one: fishermen, teachers, masons, craftsmen, civil servants…
and so many others. Each one of us—doctors, health workers, journalists…
both young and old—can find here a teaching of St. Josemaría, who
commented as follows on our Lord’s invitation: “Put out into the deep!
Cast aside the pessimism that makes a coward of you.”[1] For each and
every one of us, it is good not only to receive, but also to give, to give our
very selves, in order to be worthy to hear our Lord’s call: “Do not be afraid;
henceforth you will be catching men.”

In giving our life in order to make Jesus known and loved—for this is
what being a fisher of men means—we find our true dignity. As Vatican
Council II teaches, man “cannot fully find himself except through a sincere
gift of himself.”[2]

But let us return to the Gospel scene. We have seen how our Lord led
Peter to a higher truth: from the material catch of fish to the fruitfulness of
“Depart from me,” exclaimed Peter, still in the boat, “for I am a sinful man.” We too, like Peter, recognize ourselves as sinners. And at the same time, we too, like Jesus, meet in our life people who inexplicably have been distanced, marginalized, rejected, and whose suffering has led them to close themselves up in their own misery and solitude.

St. Josemaría understood this reality right from his youth, and moved by his pastoral heart, he went to visit the sick lying abandoned by everyone in the hospitals or in their homes, going frequently to the poorest peripheries of Madrid.

Pope Francis, in the letter that he wrote on the occasion of the beatification of my predecessor, mentioned that Blessed Alvaro also had this readiness to go out in search of everyone. He too, said the Pope, “went to outlying districts to assist the human and Christian formation of so many needy persons.”

And St. John Paul II pointed to St. Josemaría as “a deeply human saint... who launched so many works of evangelization and human advancement for the poorest persons.” Today, following also the personal example of the Pope and taking up with joy his invitation to “announce the mercy of God,” I want to encourage all the faithful and friends of the Prelature to follow—as thanks be to God they are already doing—this path opened up by Christ and so loved by the saints: serving others, helping them in their needs, getting out of themselves, going like Christ “into the deep” and accompanying him there where so many people, perhaps without knowing it, are awaiting us.

We too, as Christ did with Peter, can bring about in others the surprise that everyone experiences when they encounter understanding, encouragement, and spiritual or material assistance. And like Peter, we can find in our daily witness of faith and our work the means to spread the mercy of God: the teacher, by teaching those who are ignorant; the doctor, by curing the sick in a refined way; the judge, by working with serious dedication; the cook, by preparing food for those who are hungry... And also in the marvelous “profession” of being parents: you fathers and mothers are witnesses to mercy in every moment of your day, from morning till
night, helping each other mutually and educating your children in the joy of love.

Finally, we can say with St. Josemaría that Christian life develops in the atmosphere of God’s mercy. It is there that our struggle to behave as a child of our Father God takes place. “I will make... the ends of the earth your possession,” sings Psalm 2. Yes, the Lord gives us the earth as our inheritance, so that we may bring to the whole world the surprise, the love, and the joy of God’s children.

May our Lady, Mother of Mercy, give us a merciful heart in order to love others as children of God, and thus attain the joy that comes from placing ourselves at their service.

Praised be Jesus Christ.


Torna ai contenuti

At the Mass for the Liturgical Memorial of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, St. Eugene’s Basilica, Rome (May 12, 2016)

Dear brothers and sisters:

“Euge serve bone et fidelis!” Well-done, good and faithful servant! (Mt 25:23). Today we can hear the echo of these words of Jesus, addressed in a special way to Blessed Alvaro on his dies natalis: come faithful servant, enter into the house of Heaven. It is only natural that we are filled with joy and
gratitude to the Blessed Trinity for the celebration of the liturgical memorial of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. Many of us knew him personally or have read so many things about his life. We all recognize in him the figure of the Good Shepherd presented in the readings of the Mass.

“Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out” (Ezek 34:11). Jesus is the only Good Shepherd in the Church, but he wants his sacred ministers to represent him in a visible way, especially the bishops—in communion with the Roman Pontiff and among themselves. But also parents, good friends, and work colleagues are all called to be “good shepherds” for others. This care for one another is one of the characteristic features of the Catholic Church. Thanks to the Paraclete’s help, we can say with the responsorial psalm: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” (Ps 23:1).

During his whole life, first in his profession as an engineer, and later as a priest and bishop, Blessed Alvaro faithfully followed in the footsteps of Jesus, who came among us to serve and to help everyone. Don Alvaro tried to guide souls towards eternal life, by pointing out the path towards holiness, also with his spiritual and human struggle to walk with the Master. His words were addressed not only to the faithful of the Prelature, but also to many others who asked for his advice, for a word of encouragement for their personal life or for the communities to which they belonged.

2. Don Alvaro lived out the parable, down to the last letter, with his sons and daughters in Opus Dei (the precious legacy he received from St. Josemaría), dedicating himself joyfully to the flock entrusted to him.

Let us recall his way of acting, which was so attractive. He went out to meet others, one by one, extending the comfort of his concern, his sympathy, his disinterested service. Thus he gave strength to everyone, accompanying them on the right path (see Ps 23:3). His passion for unity, for giving himself to everyone, led him to live in full communion with the Pope and with the other bishops, to encourage everyone to live fraternal unity, and of course to watch over untiringly the unity of this small portion of the Church that is Opus Dei.
Pope Francis’ letter for the beatification of Don Alvaro makes reference to this concern. The Holy Father writes: “Especially outstanding was his love for the Church, the Spouse of Christ, whom he served with a heart devoid of worldly self-interest, far from discord, welcoming towards everyone and always seeking in others what was positive, what united, what was constructive. He never spoke a word of complaint or criticism, even at especially difficult times, but instead, as he had learned from St. Josemaría, he always responded with prayer, forgiveness, understanding and sincere charity.”[1]

3. Another wonderful characteristic of Blessed Alvaro was that of “walking on the front line,” giving example of a man faithful to God. Engraved on his heart were these words of St. Josemaría: “I have always tried to go in front. To go in front, to give you example, is harder, but it’s more effective.”[2]

He also acted with fortitude, especially when he had to defend his flock or any other person against certain dangers. “We can’t be like dumb dogs,” he used to say, echoing an expression of the prophet Isaias. When one encounters a difficulty that requires fortitude to overcome it, simply being “condescending” is certainly more comfortable, but one runs the risk of causing grave dangers to others. That is the hireling’s way of behaving, as our Lord himself told us. In contrast “the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11).

Responsibility for souls requires at times that those to whom they are entrusted need to use all available means. In words of St. Josemaría, one has to have recourse to “the sling that wounds and drives away the enemy wolf, the shepherd’s crook and dog that guides the sheep into the sheepfold, and the loving whistle.”[3] Thus everyone realizes that one is seeking only their good and happiness. They realize that, by following faithfully the indications of those who help and understand them, they will make their own the final words of the Responsorial Psalm that we have just recited: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Ps 23[22]:6).

4. We can, perhaps, formulate a resolution from today’s feast: that of trying to be men and women who are able to give people good advice, who
are sincerely interested in others. St. Josemaría used to say that everyone, not just priests, need to be both “sheep and shepherd.” That is, we need to help others and let ourselves be helped. How? By our prayer, our example, our advice that encourages those we know to draw closer to Jesus. Especially during this year, dedicated to mercy, we can invite them to approach more frequently the sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist.

Let us entrust our intentions to our Lady, in this month dedicated especially to her. Let us also have recourse to the intercession of Blessed Alvaro on the day of his liturgical memorial, and he will help us. Praised be Jesus Christ!


At the Priestly Ordination of Deacons of the Prelature, St. Eugene’s Basilica, Rome (April 23, 2016)

My dear ordinands,

Dear brothers and sisters:

1. During Easter time, the liturgy often recalls Jesus’ words to his apostles at the Last Supper, where our Lord instituted the Eucharist and the sacrament of Holy Orders. The words of today’s Gospel come from St. John: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another... By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:34-35). Charity is the essence of sanctity. This commandment is addressed to everyone, and Pope Francis reminds us of it frequently, especially in this jubilee year, by inviting us to practice the
works of mercy.

These words of the Master are directed to you, my dear sons, in a special way, since you were spiritually present that evening in the Cenacle of Jerusalem in the person of the disciples. As St. Josemaría, our beloved Father, taught us repeatedly: you will be priests to serve all souls and, of course, your brothers and sisters, with a constant service that finds its supreme example in Christ, the Good Shepherd who cares for his flock, who feeds and defends it, even at the cost of his life.

All of us, as baptized person, must follow his example. For us who are priests, not only is it a duty of fidelity to Jesus, but also an essential condition for the fruitfulness of our ministry. The first reading reminds us of this truth. When Paul and Barnabas return from their first apostolic trip to strengthen the disciples in the evangelized cities, they state with conviction: “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

I recall how forcefully St. John Paul II commented on this passage in the Mass of beatification for the founder of Opus Dei: “Although the way of the Kingdom of God passes through many tribulations, it ends in a sharing in glory, that glory which Christ revealed to us in his resurrection.”[1] Embracing the Cross means practicing the new commandment, since “greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13).” As the Holy Father said a few days ago, speaking to new priests about to be ordained: “Without the cross you will never find the true Christ; and a cross without Christ makes no sense.”[2]

2. My dear sons who are about to be ordained. Through the imposition of the hands of the bishop and the prayer of ordination, you will become priests of the New Covenant. In persona Christi Capitis, that is, acting in the person of Christ, the head of the Church, you will be able to act with his authority in the administration of the sacraments, proclaiming the Word of God in his name and serving all souls as our Lord did. You have in St. Josemaría a model for your priestly service. Meditate on the following words that he wrote in 1973, on the occasion of an event similar to that of today: “The sacrament of Orders, in effect, equips the priest to lend our
Lord his voice, his hands, his whole being. It is Jesus Christ who, in the Holy Mass, through the words of the Consecration, changes the substance of the bread and wine into his Body, Soul, Blood, and Divinity.”

It is Jesus who, through you, will forgive the sins of the faithful who come, well prepared, to the sacrament of Penance. It is Jesus who will speak through your words, above all in the Eucharistic celebration, when you explain to the faithful the teachings of Scripture, as Christ himself did with the disciples from Emmaus. It is Jesus who, in you and with you, will serve all men and women, Christians and non-Christians, when they ask you for a word of consolation, a light to illuminate the darkness in which they often find themselves submerged. With words from the Gospel, I repeat to you: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35).

3. Before ending, I would like to thank your parents, your families, your friends, for their role in bringing about your Christian vocation in Opus Dei, and later your priestly vocation, above all with their prayer and good example.

The priesthood requires a closer conformity with Christ each day. “Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Mt 9:38). In his recent apostolic exhortation on the family, the Pope reminds us that “the family is the first school of human values, where we learn the wise use of freedom.” And he adds that “raising children calls for an orderly process of handing on the faith.”

Today is the anniversary of the First Holy Communion of St. Josemaría, in 1912, and of his Confirmation, a few years earlier. With what great love, with how much gratitude he used to recall each year these so joyful events! Through his intercession, let us ask God that these brothers of ours “be always faithful, pious, learned, dedicated, and cheerful priests.” Let us entrust them especially to our Lady, asking her “to take special care of those who will spend their lives serving her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Priest.”

I invite you, naturally, to pray for Pope Francis, for the vicar of the Pope for the diocese of Rome, Cardinal Vallini, for all the bishops and
priests of the world; and let us accompany all seminarians with our prayer so that they be faithful to their call. Amen.


At the Easter Vigil, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (March 27, 2016)

Carissime figlie e sorelle mie.

1. Esulti il coro degli angeli... Gioisca la terra inondata da così grande splendore... Gioisca la madre Chiesa, splendente della gloria del suo Signore... (Preconio pasquale).

Inizia così l’annunzio pasquale, dopo che è stato acceso il cero, simbolo di Cristo. Vogliamo manifestare il nostro giubilo in questa notte santa per il trionfo di Nostro Signore sulla morte. Le letture, sia dell’Antico che del Nuovo Testamento, ci hanno mostrato come i vaticini dei profeti si sono avverati in Cristo, morto per i nostri peccati e gloriosamente risorto per la nostra salvezza.

La Veglia Pasquale racchiude un ricchissimo contenuto. Sul Calvario, il Verbo incarnato è morto sulla Croce ed è stato sepolto. Sembra il ritratto di una sconfitta, ma proprio da quell’apparente insuccesso nasce la vittoria definitiva. Come scrive san Josemaría, proprio ora, dopo aver consumato il sacrificio redentore, «Egli è più che mai vicino al momento della
Risurrezione, della manifestazione della gloria che ha conquistato con la sua obbedienza» (È Gesù che passa, n. 95).

È questa la vittoria che oggi celebriamo, pieni di gioia. Ascoltiamo l'annuncio dell'angelo alle pie donne: «Perché cercate tra i morti colui che è vivo? Non è qui, è risorto» (Lc 24, 5-6). E commenta nostro Padre: «È risorto! Gesù è risorto: non è più nel sepolcro. La Vita ha sconfitto la morte. È apparso alla sua Santissima Madre. È apparso a Maria di Magdala, pazzia d'amore. E a Pietro e agli altri apostoli» (Santo Rosario, primo mistero glorioso).

Proclamiamo con le parole e con le opere, con tutto il nostro essere, questa verità che ha cambiato il corso della storia. Come Maria di Magdala e le altre pie donne, avete il compito di portare questa buona novella a molte persone: a tutte quelle che incontrerete, per qualsiasi motivo, lungo il cammino della vostra vita. Tutti noi abbiamo l'obbligo di essere apostoli; non abbiasi il minimo dubbio: tantissime anime ci stanno aspettando.

(English)

2. Let us now consider another lesson from the Easter Vigil: our participation in Christ's Death and Resurrection. Through the sacraments, we enter into the depth of the saving mystery through which we have been redeemed. In Baptism, Jesus Christ has made us share in his Death and Resurrection, as Saint Paul taught: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism.... so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3-5).

In a few moments you will renew your baptismal promises. In the name of the Church, I will ask you if you renounce Satan and all his seductions, and if you believe in the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And you will answer: yes, I renounce sin, which makes us slaves of the devil! I believe in God the Father who created me, in God the Son who redeemed me, in God the Holy Spirit who sanctifies me! I encourage you to renew these promises with a strong voice, and to ask our Lord that you may remain faithful to these Christian commitments in your everyday actions, and that your life may be entirely Eucharistic.
Let us listen anew to Saint Josemaría, who tells us: «God awaits you. So, wherever you are, you must commit yourself to imitating him and uniting yourself to him, cheerfully, lovingly, keenly, though circumstances might require you—even permanently—to go against the grain. God awaits you—and needs you to be faithful» (The Forge, no. 51).

(Spanish)

3. Llegamos así al tercer punto de nuestra meditación pascual. No basta que Jesucristo haya resucitado y nos haya incorporado a su triunfo mediante el Bautismo y la Confirmación. Es necesario que nos esforcemos por testimoniar con nuestra conducta el profundo cambio que se ha operado en nosotros.

Contamos con la oración, el sacramento de la Penitencia—por el que recuperamos y fortalecemos la vida sobrenatural, si la hemos perdido o debilitado por el pecado—, y con la Eucaristía, que, al alimentarnos con el Cuerpo y la Sangre de Jesucristo, realmente presente bajo las especies sacramentales, nos une íntimamente a él y nos concede el vigor necesario para triunfar sobre Satanás y todas sus insidias, *in hoc pulcherrimo caritatis bello!*, en esta hermosa pelea de amor y de paz en la que andamos metidos.

Una consecuencia necesaria del cambio que Jesús desea obrar en nosotros, como fruto de la Pascua, se concreta en renovar el afán apostólico. Es preciso comunicar a otras personas el bien recibido, como hicieron María Magdalena y sus compañeras: «Al regresar del sepulcro, anunciaron todo esto a los once y a todos los demás» (*Lc* 24, 9).

Ninguna persona que pase a vuestro lado debería irse sin haber recibido, al menos, una oración vuestra, una palabra de ánimo, un consejo que le acerque al Señor. «El bien siempre tiende a comunicarse. Toda experiencia auténtica de verdad y de belleza busca por sí misma su expansión» (*Evangelii gaudium*, n. 9), escribe el Papa Francisco. En el terreno sobrenatural, esa comunicación de la fe se llama apostolado, interés sincero por cada alma.

Nuestra misión de cristianos es colaborar con Cristo en la salvación de la humanidad. «Quiere el Señor a los suyos en todas las encrucijadas de la tierra», a cada uno según su vocación concreta en la Iglesia. A la gran mayoría, «los quiere en medio del mundo, en las ocupaciones terrenas. Por
la fábrica, al laboratorio, al trabajo de la tierra, al taller del artesano, a las calles de las grandes ciudades y a los senderos de montaña» (San Josemaría, Es Cristo que pasa, n. 105).

¿No te entusiasma el pensamiento de que Jesús cuenta contigo, para llevar los frutos de la Redención a personas de todos los ambientes? Pidamos a la Virgen, Reina de los Apóstoles y Madre de los cristianos, que mantengamos siempre en nosotros el fuego que Cristo trajo a la tierra, y que encendamos con ese fuego las almas de quienes nos rodean. Así sea.

Torna ai contenuti

At the Mass in Coena Domini, Holy Thursday, in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (March 24, 2016)

(Italian)

Carissime figlie e sorelle mie.

1. «Il primo giorno degli Azzimi, i discepoli si avvicinarono a Gesù e gli dissero: "Dove vuoi che prepariamo per te, perché tu possa mangiare la Pasqua?"» (Mt 26, 17). Il Signore dette loro le indicazioni opportune ed essi prepararono tutto. Ora che comincia il Triduo pasquale, anche noi possiamo rivolgere a Gesù la stessa domanda: Come vuoi che viviamo questi giorni di Pasqua a Roma? Che cosa ti aspetti da noi?

Figli miei e fratelli miei, è necessario preparare le nostre anime nel miglior modo possibile, perché Gesù desidera celebrare la Pasqua in noi e con noi, e vuole che cresca la nostra intimità con Lui: che ancora una volta ci decidiamo a convertirci. Il sacramento della Confessione è il modo migliore di realizzare la conversione che Dio attende da noi. In questi giorni prepariamoci a riceverlo con molto frutto, approfittando delle grazie speciali del Giubileo della misericordia.

Seguiremo così l'esempio degli Apostoli, che prepararono tutto come il Signore aveva indicato, in una sala grande, con i tappeti, nel piano alto della
casa offerta da uno dei suoi seguaci. Proprio così entrò nella storia il Cenacolo di Gerusalemme, in cui si sarebbero realizzate tante meraviglie divine. Altrettanto deve succedere in noi, giacché la Trinità dimora nelle nostre anime mediante la grazia e Gesù vuole presiedere tutti i nostri pensieri, parole ed opere.

(Spanish)

2. Recogidos en el Cenáculo, san Juan nos cuenta que Jesús, «habiendo amado a los suyos que estaban en el mundo, los amó hasta el fin» (Jn 13, 1). ¿Y qué encuentra en ese lugar tan santo? Encuentra rivalidades, celos, envidias. San Lucas lo dice claramente: «Se suscitó entre ellos una disputa sobre quién sería considerado el mayor» (Lc 22, 24). ¡Qué tristeza para Nuestro Señor! Después de tres años a su lado, habiendo contemplado tan de cerca su ejemplo y escuchado sus palabras, aún están pendientes de su yo, todavía aspiran a ser por vanidad los primeros.

La respuesta de Cristo es neta: comienza por lavar los pies a los Apóstoles, para dejar claro que ha venido a servir, no a ser servido. Y luego les hablará del amor fraterno: «Un mandamiento nuevo os doy: que os améis unos a otros. Como yo os he amado, amaos también unos a otros» (Jn 13, 34).

Si miramos a nuestro alrededor, descubrimos que este mandamiento de Jesús sigue siendo nuevo, no se vive, a pesar del ejemplo claro y preciso del Maestro, Como escribió san Josemaría, «después de veinte siglos, todavía sigue siendo un mandato nuevo, porque muy pocos hombres se han preocupado de practicarlo; el resto, la mayoría, ha preferido y prefiere no enterarse. Con un egoísmo exacerbado, concluyen: para qué más complicaciones, me basta y me sobra con lo mío» (Amigos de Dios, n. 223).

Que no suceda así entre nosotros. Amemos a todo el mundo, también a los que se consideran enemigos de la humanidad y provocan tantas muertes, tantos daños. Con el fundador del Opus Dei «os pido por amor de Dios que os queráis, que os ayudéis, que os deis la mano, que os sepáis perdonar. —Por lo tanto, a rechazar la soberbia, a ser compasivos, a tener caridad; a prestaros mutuamente el auxilio de la oración y de la amistad sincera» (Forja, n. 454), y, añado, que enseñemos a querer.

(English)
3. Let us continue considering the teachings of the Gospel regarding the Lord's Supper with his Apostles. Jesus says: «This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends» (Jn 15:12-13). This sums up what our Lord will accomplish tomorrow, Good Friday, on Calvary, redeeming us from our sins and opening for us the gates of Heaven.

His love is so intense that, in these moments in the Upper Room, he is already anticipating the sacrifice of Calvary through the institution of the Eucharist: “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given up for you.’... And likewise the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new Covenant in my blood” (Lk22:19-20).

How can we fail to be filled with wonder when we contemplate the greatness of God's love for us? Don't you feel moved to adore, to give thanks, to make reparation for our sins and those of others, to make fervent petitions every time you attend Holy Mass or pray before the Tabernacle? Put great care into your Eucharistic piety: your genuflections, the words in your heart and the words on your lips, which we direct to our Lord in this marvelous sacrament: may they be a true dialogue with Jesus.

Meditate on these words of Pope Francis. After reminding the lay faithful—each one of you—that the Lord has placed us in the world like good seeds, he adds: «But what assures our fruitfulness is our being faithful to Jesus, who says insistently: “Abide in me and I in you” (Jn 15:4). And we know well what that means: to contemplate him, to worship him, to embrace him, in our daily encounter with him in the Eucharist, in our life of prayer, in our moments of adoration; it means to recognize him present and to embrace him in those most in need» (Homily, July 27, 2013).

(Italian)

4. L'opera di amore di Cristo non si esaurisce nell'istituzione dell'Eucaristia. Affinché noi tutti possiamo prendere parte al suo sacrificio, si rivolge agli Apostoli —e in loro ai suoi successori— con queste parole: «Fate questo in memoria di me» (Lc 22, 19). Con il sacerdozio ministeriale, istituito in questo preciso momento, alcuni uomini, chiamati da lui stesso
tra i fedeli, riceveranno lungo i secoli la potestà di agire in persona Christi Capitis, in rappresentazione di Cristo Capo della Chiesa. In virtù di quest'elezione, i sacerdoti predicano con autorità la Parola di Dio, confezionano e amministrano i sacramenti—in particolar modo l'Eucaristia—e guidano il popolo cristiano verso la vita eterna.

Ancora una volta dovrebbe sgorgare in noi un sentito ringraziamento, unito all'impegno di pregare per i sacerdoti, affinché il Signore doni molti alla Chiesa; sacerdoti che siano—come chiedeva san Josemaría—santi, dotti, allegri e sportivi nella vita spirituale. Oggi, giorno della nascita del sacerdozio ministeriale nella Chiesa, e il prossimo 28 marzo, anniversario dell'ordinazione sacerdotale di nostro Padre, sono buoni momenti per innalzare una preghiera per quest'intenzione.

Vi invito a fare nostra la richiesta di san Josemaría: «Prego Dio nostro Signore che conceda a tutti noi sacerdoti la grazia di compiere santamente le cose sante, di rispecchiare con la nostra stessa vita lo splendore delle grandezze del Signore» (La Chiesa nostra Madre, n. 39). Allo stesso tempo, consideriamo profondamente che tutti siamo partecipi del sacerdozio di Cristo, della sua anima sacerdotale: i sacerdoti con il loro ministero, i fedeli laici con il loro zelo per la salvezza delle anime.

Santa Maria, Madre di tutti i cristiani, ci ottenga dal suo divino Figlio la grazia di celebrare con profitto queste festività pasquali. Così sia.

Torna ai contenuti

At the Diaconal Ordination of Faithful of the Prelature, Parish of St. Josemaría, Rome (February 27, 2016)

My dear brothers and sisters,

Beloved deacons being ordained:

1. Undoubtedly, today there will be great joy in heaven because of the ordination of these faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei. It is part of God’s
answer to that petition: “pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Lk 10:2).

The liturgical texts for the third Sunday of Lent revolve around God’s mercy, which always comes out to meet us. Thus they are a good occasion for us to ask ourselves how we are preparing ourselves for Easter, in this Year of Mercy.

The Collect prayer is addressed to God, as source of all good, and beseeches for us the grace of confessing our sins to obtain his forgiveness. The recognition of our faults is the key that opens the doors to divine clemency. The responsorial psalm invites us to pray: “Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Ps 103: 1-2). God’s hand, both fatherly and motherly, is always ready to cancel out our faults if we have recourse to confession.

The first reading also speaks to us of mercy. The sacred author tells us that Almighty God, moved by his pity, appeared to Moses and gave him the mission to free the Israelites from slavery to Pharaoh: “I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry... so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod 3:7-8).

Let us pause to consider these words, because, as St. Paul wrote, “these things” (that is, the events narrated in the Old Testament) “happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction” (1 Cor 10:11). Our Lord knows very well our spiritual and material needs, and is ready to remain with us. It is enough that we do not close our heart to the gentle impulses of his grace and that we beseech the Holy Spirit to open our minds and our lives to the words of Jesus.

2. What is our Lord teaching us today? Let us meditate attentively on the Gospel passage we have just heard. It reminds us, first of all, that the events seen as misfortunes with human outlook, are for a person with faith an invitation to conversion. Jesus alludes to certain events in Jerusalem that had left a mark on everyone’s memory, and he explains their deeper meaning: “Those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed
them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Lk 13:4-5).

It is an exhortation to remain ever vigilant, to not forget that God is, indeed, merciful, but also a judge. Although during our earthly pilgrimage he always offers us the possibility of rectifying and converting, at the opportune moment he will judge with justice those who have not wanted to repent of their sins. This is the teaching of the second part of the Gospel passage we have read. Faced with the sterility of the fig tree planted in his vineyard, the owner of the field wanted to remove it: “Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?” (Lk 13:7).

Thanks to the intercession of the vineyard worker, the owner granted the fig tree some time to remedy its unproductiveness. God is ready to pardon our faults; even more, he is ready to give a new impulse to our spiritual life. Therefore he instituted the sacrament of Penance. But we need to accept this gift and put it into practice.

In Pope Francis’s book entitled *The Name of God is Mercy*, among other topics, the Pope speaks about the forgiveness of sins. “It is true that I can talk to the Lord and ask him for forgiveness, implore him. And the Lord will forgive me immediately. But it is important that I go to confession, that I sit in front of a priest who embodies Jesus, that I kneel before Mother Church, called to dispense the mercy of Christ... It is true that there is always a certain amount of judgment in confession, but there is something greater than judgment that comes into play. It is being face-to-face with someone who acts *in persona Christi* to welcome and forgive you. It is an encounter with mercy.”[1]

3. I would now like to speak directly to you, the new deacons in the Church. From today on, our Mother entrusts to you the power of preaching the Word of God with authority, of distributing the Body of Christ in Communion, of carrying out works of charity in the name of our Lord himself. We all have to keep present, and remind our brothers and sisters of it, what today’s liturgy teaches us: within the goodness of God, mercy and justice are intertwined. The message is clear. Let us take
advantage of the time of mercy, to prepare ourselves for our future face-to-face meeting with God’s love.

In your preaching, my sons, explain the great truths of our faith in a positive way, especially those that refer to the eternal salvation of souls. This is a service of great importance in today’s world. “There is a great tendency among worldly souls,” St. Josemaría wrote, “to think of God’s mercy, and so they are emboldened to persist in their follies. It is true that God our Lord is infinitely merciful, but he is also infinitely just; and there is a judgment, and He is the Judge.”[2]

Certainly love, and not fear, is the principal spur for conversion. But the Church’s magisterium teaches that, in many cases, the fear of God—that is, the fear of separating ourselves from Him—is also of help, which the Holy Spirit uses to stir up in souls repentance and conversion.

I end with my congratulations to the new deacons, to their relatives and friends, and I once again ask all those present to pray for the Pope, for the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, and for all the bishops, priests and deacons of the universal Church. Let us go with faith to our Lady intercession, so that we ourselves may draw closer to our Lord, during the remaining weeks of Lent. A deeper confession, with greater sorrow for our sins, can be the spur we need to produce greater fruit, both in our personal life and in our apostolic work, always with Christian joy.

Praised be Jesus Christ.


Interview with Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Auxiliary Vicar of the Prelature, in Religión en Libertad (June 25, 2016)

Interview with Jordi Picazo

Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz was born in Paris, October 27, 1944, took his degree in Theology at the Pontifical Lateran University in 1969, and obtained his doctorate at the University of Navarra in 1971. He was ordained a priest that same year.

He has been a lecturer in fundamental theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, and, since 1986, a consultor of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; since 2003 he has also been a consultor of the Congregation for the Clergy; and, since 2011, for the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization.

He has been a member of the Pontifical Academy of Theology since 1989. On April 23, 1994 he was appointed Vicar General of the Prelature of Opus Dei by Bishop Prelate Msgr. Javier Echevarría, and recently, on 9 December 2014, Auxiliary Vicar, with Msgr. Mariano Fazio taking his place as Vicar General.

The figure of Auxiliary Vicar is provided for in the law of the Church for the Prelature of Opus Dei, established in numbers 134 § 1 and 135 of the Codex “Iuris particularis Operis Dei” promulgated by John Paul II in the Apostolic Constitution Ut Sit dated 28 November 1982. It had been thought of originally by the founder of Opus Dei himself.

In the decree appointing Msgr. Ocáriz as Auxiliary Vicar, Bishop Javier Echevarría states that “the expansion of the apostolic work of the Prelature and the growing number of regional circumscriptions, centers and apostolates whose pastoral care is entrusted to Opus Dei, have brought a increase in the work of government for the Prelate.” Therefore, he adds, “in view of my age, I see the need to appoint an Auxiliary Vicar”.

Bishop Echevarría, as Prelate, now shares the helm of the ship of Opus Dei for the first time with you as Auxiliary Vicar, a position provided for by its Founder. Is this a gesture of detachment by the Prelate?
After listening to the opinions of those who help him in pastoral governance, Msgr. Echevarría appointed me as Auxiliary Vicar to share with him the executive authority reserved by law to the Prelate. It is, as you say, a position provided for by Opus Dei’s founder, St. Josemaría. At the same time, the statutes of the Opus Dei Prelature speak of the role of the Prelate as that of “teacher and father”, underlining the fact that the task entrusted by the Church to the Prelate — as with every pastor who heads a church organization — is not simply the power of governing, but also includes this important dimension of being a father to all the priests and lay faithful in his care.

St. Josemaría embodied that spiritual fatherhood, which should characterize every priest, very intensely. And that is a legacy he passed on to his successors. The Prelate’s fatherhood makes all the faithful of the Prelature feel part of a family, in Opus Dei and in the Church: the family of God’s children.

In the words of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Opus Dei is a “beautiful little family”. Is “family” the word that best defines Opus Dei?

The Pope reminds us that the Church is “a family of families” (Amoris Laetitia, no. 87). It is in our families that we learn to be happy, and develop skills. It’s where we are loved as we are, and where we can always come back to.

St. Josemaría nurtured a family atmosphere around him: praying for one another, wanting to bring Christ’s love to others, serving one another and, when necessary, correcting one another. Achieving this atmosphere means daily self-conquest, a commitment by each member of the family.

What is Opus Dei’s ‘Strategic Plan’ for the near future? Where is Opus Dei heading in the twenty-first century?

Where the Holy Spirit leads us. St. Josemaría asked us to fan out: in the 21st century we must continue bringing this seed of the Church to many more places. The bottom line is being, and helping others to be, docile to God’s grace and to live up to what we believe, joyfully, at work, at home, and in serving society.
In addition, we’ll try to expand the solidarity projects set up by many faithful and Co-operators of the Prelature worldwide.

With the grace of God and the support of so many people, Christians and non-Christians alike, we want to broaden the range of those projects, which seek to bring humanity to our “common home”. A challenge in Europe right now is to foster a culture of welcome to migrants.

In the next few years, we will need to continue developing effective pastoral care for families and young people, partly because of the very strong pressures they are subjected to.

And from the geographical point of view, have you already planned where Opus Dei’s apostolate will begin next? What difficulties have arisen in places where it has recently begun?

Certainly there are many places where the local bishops are asking us to go: we are now thinking about Vietnam and Angola. However, you have to realize that people of the Work don’t just go to a place, but go there to do their own professional work. It is difficult to plan very far in advance.

Right now we are starting, for example, in Korea. The biggest problem there is not work, or people, but the language. Other places where it is hard are, for example, Estonia or Finland, but thank God, the apostolate is developing: the first Finnish priest in Opus Dei has just been ordained.

2028 will be the centenary of Opus Dei’s founding. The night from 23 to 24 June 1946 was spent by St. Josemaría Escrivá in prayer, looking at the Apostolic Palace and St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican from a nearby balcony. He had been told that Opus Dei had arrived 100 years too soon, because of its novel doctrine about sanctity for laypeople. Are laypeople in the 21st century like the early Christians, working for the sanctification of the world from within?

21st-century lay people, like those of all times, are called to act like the first followers of Christ in the world, at home, at work, and in their times of rest and entertainment. In every sphere they are invited to be apostles, to talk about Christ and talk to their Father, God, who is listening to them.

That is the ordinary way to holiness which St. Josemaría insisted on so much. The apostolate of Opus Dei is essentially what lay people do through
their work, married people in their families and priests in their pastoral ministry.

_Did God bring Alvaro del Portillo to Escrivá so that he could do Opus Dei?_

St. Josemaría often thanked God for having put Alvaro del Portillo at his side. I think the fruitfulness of Blessed Alvaro’s life was the result of seeking God’s will at all times. He never sought any glory for himself and for that very reason, he was outstanding.

Many remember him as an example of fidelity to the Church (first as an engineer, then as a priest, and finally as a bishop), and to the Popes with whom he was in contact; and of fidelity to the founder of Opus Dei. And that fidelity — which is a creative virtue, because it requires a continuous inner and external renewal — was obviously a great support for St. Josemaría.

__Pope Francisco has just approved the decree about the Venerable Montse Grases, a 17-year-old member of Opus Dei who died of cancer in Barcelona. This means she is possibly on the way to beatification and canonization. Is holiness no longer a utopia?__

Holiness, thank God, has never been a utopia: from the first century until today, there have been many examples of Christians who have sought to imitate Jesus heroically. What was maybe lost sight of for a while was that each and every baptized person is called to holiness. And to achieve it, you don’t need to make any special consecration if you don’t have that particular vocation.

The recent news about Montse, a girl from Barcelona who lived only 17 years but was determined to talk with God at all times, is like a new confirmation of all this. And it is an encouragement for many young people who, like her, spend much of their day at school or university, doing sports, and among their friends.

It’s about realizing that every Christian bears the mission of the Church. Evangelization is done by all Christians, about the whole Gospel, each in their own place. The priest as a priest, and the laity as laity: the teacher as a teacher, the worker as a worker, each in their own surroundings. The Second Vatican Council proclaimed this clearly. We
must all seek holiness. Being canonized or not, is not important for the person concerned. It only matters for the Church. It is the Church that benefits from the saints.

When you felt the ground give way beneath your feet, how did you in Opus Dei experience the mercies of the Blessed Virgin Mary? How do you experience her presence in this Jubilee Year?

Turning to your mother when you’re in trouble is almost instinctive. That is how Christians have acted ever since Pentecost, when the apostles gathered around the Virgin Mary. St. Josemaría went to numerous Marian shrines to ask Our Lady for a favor, beg for her protection, and pray to her for the Church. And he always came away as if a great weight had been taken off him, because he had experienced God’s mercy.

This Jubilee Year can help each person feel God’s providence in ordinary life, while being a channel for his mercy to reach many others. The challenge is to accept the “ordinary” signs of God’s mercy, which is extraordinary.

Opus Dei handles communications well, and the Prelate is in constant communication with the faithful of the Prelature. What is the importance of communications in the Church, and what challenges exist in this area?

You are very kind, but I think there is always a long way to go, and much to be learned from others. I think the fundamental challenge is sincerity. Communication cannot be something artificial. You have to communicate from what you are, and then with words. So you could say that charity is the best language for communicating the faith.

That is what Pope Francis said in his Message for the 50th World Communications Day. “If our hearts and actions are inspired by charity, by divine love, then our communication will be touched by God’s own power” (24 January 2016).

The mercy of God gives value to human freedom. God lets us act, and counts on our own contribution. He relies on each person’s professional skill: fishermen, professors, masons, craftsmen, government workers.…

This is something that lies at the heart of St. Josemaría’s teaching. Commenting on our Lord’s invitation to Peter to put out into the deep, he said: “reject the pessimism that makes you a coward.” It is in giving our own life to make Jesus known (which is what being a fisher of men means) that we find our true dignity. As the Second Vatican Council teaches in Gaudium et Spes, no. 24, man “cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”

Our Lord led Peter to a higher truth: from material success to a fruitful apostolate.

“Depart from me,” exclaimed Peter while still in the boat, “for I am a sinful man.” Like Peter, we too recognize that we are sinners. Moreover, like Jesus, we too find ourselves living alongside people who, inexplicably, are estranged, marginalized, rejected, or people who in their suffering enclose themselves in their own misery and loneliness.

St. Josemaría understood this reality right from his youth, and his pastoral heart spurred him to visit the sick and abandoned in hospitals or in their own homes, often in the poorest peripheries of Madrid.

In a letter written for the beatification of my predecessor, Pope Francis recalled that Blessed Alvaro had the same deep concern: “He went out into the poor districts to assist in the human and Christian formation of so many needy people.”

We, as Christ did with Peter, can awaken people’s amazement, by letting them experience our understanding and encouragement, or our spiritual and material help.
And just as Peter did, we can make use of our own work to show others God’s mercy: one who is a teacher, instructing the ignorant; a doctor, curing patients with human refinement; a judge, working with true professional dedication; a cook, preparing meals for the hungry….

And even in that very great “job” of being parents, you fathers and mothers are witnesses of mercy in every moment of the day, from morning till night, without rest, serving one another and raising your children in the joy of love. As Pope Francis says, “The works of mercy are infinite, each with its own seal, with the story of each face.”

Finally, we can say with St. Josemaría that the life of a Christian should develop in “the atmosphere of God’s mercy… That is where you strive to behave as a son or daughter of the Father.”

Monthly Meditations on the Works of Mercy

January: Visiting and Caring for the Sick

The first corporal work of mercy the Church recommends to us is centered on visiting and caring for the sick: an effort we see Jesus carrying out frequently during his earthly journey. Among many such scenes from the Gospel, we see Him curing Peter’s mother-in-law (see Mt 8:14-15), raising the daughter of Jairus (see Mk 5:21-43), attending to the paralytic by the pool of Bethsaida (see Jn 5:1-16) and pausing before the blind men waiting for Him at the entrance to Jerusalem. The suffering of these people shows us how God goes out to encounter them, announcing to them the salvation He has come to bring all men and women.

In the sick, our Lord contemplates humanity in its clearest need of salvation. It often happens that, when we enjoy good health, the temptation to forget about God can arise; yet when sorrow or suffering come into our lives, perhaps then we recall the cry of the blind man Jesus met on leaving Jericho: “Son of David, have pity on me!” (Mk 10:47) In our weakness, we feel ourselves to be especially needy creatures.
Let us too pay attention to the hardships of others, as we see Christ doing. The Holy Spirit, infinite Love, will console other people through our company, our conversation, our respectful and constructive silence when a sick person needs it. We are all busy with many activities each day and our tasks multiply without ceasing, but we shouldn’t let a demanding schedule cause us to forget about the sick.

There are many examples of saints who have imitated Jesus in this work of mercy. For example, Saint Josemaría used to say that Opus Dei was born—as a necessity—in the hospitals, and among the sick. After he moved to Madrid in 1926 or 27 and up until 1931, he worked intensely assisting several charitable institutions (the Foundation for the Sick, the confraternity of Saint Philip Neri, etc.) that cared for sick people in the hospitals and in the peripheries of the capital. Madrid[1] at that time had over a million inhabitants; the suburbs were spread out distance-wise, and good means of transportation were lacking. With a desire to serve the sick in their houses or shacks, he would go wherever needed, always on foot, bringing them the encouragement of Christ and the forgiveness of God the Father. How many people must have gone to Heaven through this priestly work of Saint Josemaría!

In these hospitals and other places, above all from 1933 on, he went accompanied by some of the young people he was helping spiritually. With them, he would offer patients words of affection or various material services, such as washing them, cutting their nails, combing their hair or giving them something worthwhile to read. Many of these young people, through their encounter with suffering and poverty, discovered Jesus in a profound way in the sick and destitute.[2]

My daughters and sons, and friends who take part in the apostolic activities of the Prelature, this care for the sick shouldn’t be reduced to a characteristic of the beginnings alone. Opus Dei continues to be born and to grow each day in you and in me, when we practice mercy with the destitute, when we discover Christ in the souls of those around us, especially those afflicted by some special suffering.

Like Christ, let us bring them God’s mercy by our care, our presence, our service—even by a simple telephone call. That way we can distract
them a little from their suffering or loneliness, listen patiently to the worries that weigh on them, and transmit to them affection and strength so that they may react with dignity in the circumstances they face. And we can remind them that illness is an opportunity to unite themselves to Jesus’ Cross.

In The Way, a book known all over the world, Saint Josemaría wrote: “Children. The Sick. — As you write these words, don’t you feel tempted to use capitals? The reason is that in children and in the sick a soul in love sees Him.” Already in his youth, Saint Josemaría saw Christ in those who were suffering, because Jesus not only cured the sick but also identified Himself with them. The Son of God suffered tremendously. We can recall, for example, his physical and spiritual exhaustion in the Garden of Olives; the indescribable agony of each lash during his scourging; the pain and physical weakness that must have overwhelmed Him during the hours of the Passion....

For those who are suffering from a disease, this painful situation could perhaps be viewed as a dark and meaningless burden; life could seem grim and senseless. Therefore, if God allows us to experience suffering, let us accept it. And if we have to go to the doctor, let us docilely obey the instructions we are given and be good patients: with the help of Heaven, let us strive to accept the situation and seek to regain our strength in order to generously serve God and others. But if his will is otherwise, we should say with our Lady, fiat, be it done unto me! Thy will be done....

Then we will be able to turn to our Lord in our prayer, saying: “I don’t understand what you want, but I don’t demand that you explain it to me. If You permit this disease, grant me the help to bear it: help me to unite myself more closely to You, and to those who are accompanying me and to all mankind.” And echoing some words of Saint Josemaría, let us place our trust in the Holy Spirit: "Spirit of understanding and counsel, Spirit of joy and peace! I want what you want, I want it because you want it, I want it as you want it, I want it when you want it..."[3]

How much good it does to each one’s soul to be a bearer of mercy! Let us beseech our Lord, through his Blessed Mother, to sustain us so that we can convey God’s affection to those who are sick. And let us welcome
God’s mercy peacefully, if his Will is that we unite ourselves to Him through the Cross.

*February: Feeding the Hungry and Giving Drink to the Thirsty*

Today we consider two more corporal works of mercy: feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty. God, Father of Mercy, has nourished his People down through the centuries and continues doing so each day, when He provides food for our table. That’s why it is very fitting to foster among families the custom of praying before meals and thanking God at the end for his blessings. Let us not fail to live this custom, including when we are away from home, since it is a deep manifestation of faith, and could be very effective apostolically for those around us.

In this extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, the daily gift of food should not only spur us to thank God, but also provoke in us a concern for the sisters and brothers of ours who lack daily sustenance. Think of the millions of people worldwide who have nothing, or practically nothing, to eat. By contrast, in other places food is wasted: to eliminate excess reserves, or out of negligence, or to keep prices high.

“Food that is thrown away,” the Holy Father said, “is food stolen from the table of the poor.”\(^4\) Therefore on several occasions the Pope has asked that we improve the global distribution of produce, and thus help combat, by these and other initiatives, what he calls the “throwaway culture.”

Let us turn our eyes to Christ, and admire how he multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed the hungry multitude. A bit earlier, the Apostles had suggested to Jesus that He send the people away: “Let them go to the nearby villages and hamlets to look for shelter and food, because we are in a desert place,” (*Lk* 9:12) they tell our Lord. Surprisingly, the Apostles, after hearing the Word of God, wanted each family to seek sustenance on their own account. But our Lord shows with deeds that feeding the hungry is everyone’s responsibility. “You give them something to eat,” (*Lk* 9:13) Jesus tells them. And then He works the great miracle that fills everyone with awe.

The Twelve learned their lesson well, since later on in the early years of the Church they encouraged the distribution of food among the poorest of the faithful. This attitude has been present in the Church right to this day,
and a great number of charitable initiatives have been brought forward by Christians. In underdeveloped countries, and also in the peripheries of developed ones, we find food banks, soup kitchens, culinary schools for the uneducated and many other service initiatives. Let us not settle for simply admiring these initiatives; at the very least, we can pray for them and lend a hand if we find ourselves in conditions to do so.

Filled with joy and generosity, let us be bearers of God’s mercy to everyone, and especially to the needy. We will find many different possibilities to do so if we practice charity: for example, dedicating time regularly to solidarity organizations or even devoting oneself to such a task professionally; donating money to these initiatives; working to amend laws that prevent fair food trade; avoiding wasting food at home, and so on.

Christ’s words should resonate in our souls: “I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink.” (Mt 25: 35) Let us ask ourselves: what can I do? How can I encourage others?

Jesus, the Giver of Life, not only distributed the loaves and fishes on a hill in Galilee, but when the sublime moment of the Last Supper came, we see Him distributing the bread that had become his Body and the wine that had become his Blood. If we ever find excuses for not committing ourselves to works of charity, or if selfishness leads us to look away from those who lack basic needs; if we waste money on ourselves; or if we think that hunger is a problem too complex to deal with personally, let us look more intently at Christ in the Eucharist: He, the fullness of Justice, has offered Himself as Food and given Himself completely. He came into this world so that his Life could be nourishment for our own. His generosity gives us vigor, and his death brings us life.

Jesus, “the face of the Father’s mercy,” [5] gives us the nourishment of his Body and Blood under the appearances of bread and wine, thus enabling us to share in eternal life. Let us imitate him: although we cannot give ourselves to that extreme, we do have the chance to give food and drink to the members of Christ’s Mystical Body, inviting them to the Eucharist as well as providing them with material assistance.

From the beginning of Opus Dei, Saint Josemaría instilled a great Christian zeal in those at his side, encouraging them to go out and
encounter the indigent and those lacking material means; his affectionate concern embraced both the needy and those who try to cover up their poverty with dignity. He called them “our Lady’s poor” and would visit them regularly on Saturdays in Mary’s honor. He practiced this work of mercy without humiliating them. He encouraged the young fellows accompanying him to give these poor people a bit of money or something entertaining to read, simple toys for their children, some sweets that only the well-off could afford…. But above all, they tried to give them affection, conversation, a genuine concern for their needs and problems, because they saw in them—with great joy!—their brothers.[6]

Each of us has opportunities to do likewise in our daily lives. We can ask Saint Josemaría to help us discover them and follow his example of service, of charity, which is true affection.

March: Clothing the Naked and Visiting the Imprisoned

We reflect this month on two corporal works of mercy that address different types of poverty: those who lack clothes and those who lack freedom.

Clothing the naked means not only protecting the body from the weather; it also means helping a person to maintain his or her dignity. One’s way of dressing makes it possible, for every man and woman, to present oneself properly before others, and is often a reflection of a Christian’s inner beauty.

In meditating on the Passion of our Lord, it is evident that Christ suffers the injustices of men. No one, except his Mother and a few others, offers him a gesture of mercy at the hour of the crucifixion. They even take his clothes, and raffle them off among the soldiers (see Jn 19:23-24). When Jesus called us to clothe the naked, he knew that even this gesture of mercy would not be granted to Him. The nakedness of Christ on the Cross is the image of the absence of mercy on the part of us men and women: our lack of love, the coldness caused by our sins and selfishness.

We can somehow make amends now with our fellow men for what happened on Golgotha. Even in affluent societies, the number of people without the material means to have decent clothes and to dress normally is not small. This Jubilee offers us another opportunity to “open our eyes to
the misery of the world,” and to discover the people in need who are quite near to us. We can contribute in various ways, with our time or money, to charities that provide decent clothing to those in need, or even help to begin one.

Moreover, in a society that can tend to make people slaves to fashion, this is also a good opportunity to donate to charity money that might have been spent on clothes we don’t really need, while taking better care of the clothing we already have. We should also try to set a good example by our unpretentious and dignified appearance.

We can also practice this work of mercy by helping, with charity, respect and patience, those who lower their own dignity by their way of dressing, owing to a poverty of ideals or proper guidance. Suggesting to someone that they not follow certain styles that represent bad or doubtful taste is an especially important educational task for parents with respect to their children, and for any person with respect to his or her friends. Each of us is a daughter or son of God, and how we dress is part of how we recognize our own dignity. Let us make clear that clothing is meant to cover a body with a spiritual soul, the most important element, and that the body is destined for a glorious resurrection.

Another unmistakable work of mercy is going to visit the imprisoned. We again turn our eyes to Christ: the Lord of the Earth was held captive the night prior to his crucifixion. How bitter those hours must have been! They deprived Jesus of freedom as He awaited trial for an absolutely unjust and false condemnation. Paradoxically, in an act of complete freedom, that Prisoner, despised by all, was freeing us from sin. And he did not disdain to carry out this service because he is the Son of God, and brother to all men and women.

Those who are deprived of freedom need to be comforted in hope. Therefore the Popes, including Pope Francis, have often gone to visit prisoners, offering words of encouragement, and inviting them to take advantage of this situation to open their lives to God. “When Jesus becomes part of our life,” Pope Francis said while visiting a prison in Bolivia, “we can no longer remain imprisoned by our past. Instead, we begin to look to the present, and we see it differently, with a different kind
of hope. We begin to see ourselves and our lives in a different light. We are no longer stuck in the past, but capable of shedding tears and finding in them the strength to make a new start.”[8]

Visiting prisoners, or helping them to reintegrate in society, is to serve those who have been alienated from society. What a beautiful work can be done by those who carry out or assist in this task! Especially by attending to those who are prisoners for religious reasons, which is so frequently the case today.

Let us also think of those who are enclosed in prisons not made of cement, but behind bars of another kind: bars that have their origin in alcohol, pornography, drugs, or other vices that shackle the soul and sink it in an abyss.

Let us bring to all these people our nearness, our understanding, our advice and, above all, our prayer. Let us remind them that God never ceases to extend his hand to everyone, and never abandons his children. He offers new opportunities to everyone, always, even until the last moment of one’s life.

Saint Josemaría would sometimes visit the Model prison in Madrid, during the 1930s. Some young people he looked after spiritually were imprisoned there, exclusively for political reasons. Dressed in a cassock, at a time where priests were often assaulted, he helped them to pray and encouraged them to take advantage of their time, studying languages or reviewing the catechism. He even invited these young people to play soccer with other prisoners who had opposing and even antichristian ideas, so that from a friendship formed while playing sports, a mutual respect could arise.[9]

Saint Josemaría knew that prisons, physical or moral, can also be places for encountering Christ, places for a deep conversion. Therefore he recommended to the faithful of the Prelature that they not shy away from taking up this effort with a Christian sense and with true fraternity. If we Christians take the balm of God’s mercy to these places, many captives will experience true liberation: the realization that they are children of God and therefore loved unconditionally, and protected also by our Mother Mary.

_April: Sheltering the Homeless_
“I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt 25: 43). Those who heard Christ speak these words knew very well the dangers threatening those who ventured out on the roads: thieves, wild animals, adverse weather conditions and other hazards. Mary and Joseph also experienced the helplessness of being homeless when Christ came into the world. One after another, the doors of Bethlehem (see Lk 2:7) were closed to them. Only a stable would welcome our new-born God. Later on the Holy Family, pursued by King Herod, fled into exile in a foreign country, taking hardly anything with them in their haste. (see Mt 2:13-15)

The Holy Father said, “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.”[10] So it is fitting that we ask God in our prayer: Why is it, Lord, that you invite us to give shelter to the homeless? What do you want to teach us?

To shelter the homeless is to welcome the stranger; it is to make room in our safe and stable world for those who need help; it is to offer protection to those being threatened, risking our own comfort for their sake, sharing our well-being and giving up part of the tranquil life we enjoy, and doing all this with external and internal joy.

In recent months, we have been pained to see every day thousands of people struggling desperately and even losing their lives in the attempt to achieve a more dignified existence in a country or continent other than their own. This is nothing new in the world, but recent social inequalities and wars have reached such levels that neither the sea nor any other natural boundary can now contain this flow of migrants.

The stranger is now no longer a distant figure, but instead is increasingly present in the streets of our cities. The Pope said that if we look at the painful journey of these families with indifference, “we have lost the sense of fraternal responsibility.”[11]

Societies that have grown for centuries with the warmth of Christianity now face this great challenge. Therefore I dare to say that we will find the capacity to welcome all those who have been forced to emigrate only if we all strive to live each day with Christ’s charity. That mercy (which so often in the past brought consolation to these people in their homelands, through...
missionaries, religious men and women, and also many other people of good will to whom we should be very thankful) will inspire now the creativity of many people.

Various initiatives will be needed to distribute among everyone the well-being they require, with jobs, homes, education, etc. We realize very well that this is not just an economic problem, but above all a moral one, because when a brother or sister demands justice, Christians need to respond also with charity.

In the Gospel we see how our Lord enjoyed the hospitality of many of his friends as he preached throughout Judea and Galilee. And for those who opened the doors of their homes, Jesus transformed their lives. Martha, Mary and Lazarus shared in the Redeemer’s friendship (see Jn 12:1-11); Simon the Pharisee learned the value of forgiveness (see Lk 7:16-50); Zacchaeus left behind his selfish life (see Lk 19:1-10). In our own times, Christ continues looking for friends to welcome Him in migrants or the displaced.

You and I can shelter our Lord in our souls every day, when we receive the Holy Eucharist. Let us each consider: what kind of hospitality do we give to the Redeemer? Do we prepare our heart well like those people in the Gospel prepared their homes before the Master’s arrival? What small signs of affection do we show our Divine Guest?

In speaking now about the Eucharist, we are not digressing from the topic of mercy, since only a heart that strives to love Christ more each day will be able to welcome a brother who needs help, work, or simply special attention.

If we put care into our Communion, our Lord will make us more generous, more sensitive to the suffering of others, more available to offer our material means and time to those who lack the care they need.

Saint Josemaría also suffered the trial of having to flee and seek shelter. Because of the religious persecution in Spain in 1936, he had to take refuge for long periods of time in various places throughout Madrid, in attics and tiny rooms, and other strange places. And if he thought the people who had taken him in would not denounce him, he would reveal his status as a priest. Without fearing to place his life in danger, he would offer them the
possibility of the sacraments, such as Confession or the Eucharist, true consolations in those difficult months. Thus, amid the hatred and fear of wartime, Christ made his way once again into the hearts of those people.

Before ending this dialogue with you, let us ask our Lady and Saint Joseph, strangers in Bethlehem and migrants in Egypt, to teach us to open the door of our life to Christ, who is asking us to be generous towards those who need to be welcomed.

*May: Burying the Dead*

The last corporal work of mercy is to *bury the dead*. Let us turn our eyes once again to Christ, who speaks to us in the Gospels. In his Passion, the cruelty of men denies the slightest gesture of mercy towards our Lord, whom we see as captive, thirsty, sick, naked and rejected by his people.

However, soon after Christ dies on the Cross, we witness a gesture of mercy towards his Body, the mercy that God has sown in human hearts. Devout hands remove our Lord from the Cross, deliver Him to his mother, wrap Him in a clean shroud and bury Him in a new tomb.

I have often considered this passage, and I understand perfectly that the only arms worthy to receive the Body of Christ were those of his Mother, with her spotless life filled with generosity towards her Son and all men and women. Meditating on this scene, a ray of hope is enkindled in our hearts, when we realize that mankind, while we failed to welcome the Savior at his birth and mistreated Him on his earthly journey, at least offered Him a decent burial.

This is how Saint Josemaría describes this episode: “Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who are hidden disciples of Christ, intercede for Him making use of the high positions they hold. In the hour of loneliness, of total abandonment and scorn, it is then that they stand up for Him audacter, boldly (*Mk* 15:43): heroic courage!”[12]

The founder of Opus Dei continues his prayer with these words: “With them I too will go up to the foot of the Cross; I will press my arms tightly round the cold Body, the corpse of Christ, with the fire of my love. I will unnail it, with my reparation and mortifications. I will wrap it in the new winding-sheet of my clean life, and I will bury it in the living rock of my
breast, where no one can tear it away from me. And there, Lord, take your rest! Were the whole world to abandon you and to scorn you... serviam! I will serve you, Lord."[13] As he himself advised us, Saint Josemaría lived the Gospel scenes, placing himself in them as one more character there.

Christ was born to die and thus save us. This scene should stir our hearts, for death is part of our lives and helps to give meaning to the time we spend on this earth. In the encyclical Spes Salvi we read that only Christ "shows us the way beyond death; only someone able to do this is a true teacher of life... The true shepherd is one who knows even the path that passes through the valley of death."[14]

My sons and daughters, and friends: knowing how to die is just as important as knowing how to live, and in both cases we can be helped. Christians must face this moment — for oneself or when it comes for others — with hope and serenity. On some occasions, we might be tempted not to talk about death to a person who is sick or very weak. But let us not fail to recognize that some words of help and comfort can be a real caress for the soul.

Offering the Anointing of the Sick does not have to be a cause for anguish or dismay: in those moments, the grace of God sustains the soul of a person who may be confronting, with understandable anxiety, the unknown. Let us allow God to act. Time and again, we priests are witnesses to how God’s mercy alleviates the dying person’s suffering when given this sacrament. On these occasions, we can all pray with the patients, talking to them in a natural way about Heaven, sustaining them with our faith, and reminding them that they will not be alone, because God’s infinite Love awaits them in eternal life.

One day in 1932, Saint Josemaría was accompanying a dying man in the General Hospital of Madrid. That person, facing his approaching death, remembered all the mistakes in his life; and his offenses against God disturbed his soul.[15] The founder of Opus Dei recalled this scene years later, "He said to me loudly, before I could stop him: ‘I can't kiss our Lord with this filthy mouth of mine!’ ‘But listen, very soon you are going to embrace him and give him a big kiss, in heaven!’"[16] The man died in
peace, sustained also by the faith of this holy priest, who was at his side at the moment of the final test.

Burying the dead is a work filled with possibilities to strengthen the faith of the living. Those who experience the death of someone close to them will appreciate being accompanied with our prayer and serenity; if we have to offer a few words of condolence, we can make sure to give them a supernatural tone, so that our faith can be a comfort to those in need. Perhaps many people today lack a friend who can remind them that God is a Father who also cares about those who have gone on to the next life.

It is also very Christian to care for the physical places where the dead are buried, by cleaning their graves and placing some flowers. This is not only for the sake of remembering them and praying for their souls; this care for the deceased also shows the respect we should give to the body. We firmly believe in the resurrection of the flesh, and the places where the remains of those we have known rest remind us that they will come back to life.

Anyone who has prayed before a tomb knows that love does not die out, but stays alive. Faith gives us the certainty that God’s mercy is able to overcome in a mysterious way the wall of death. How great is the power of his mercy by which, through Christ’s resurrection, our love can reach beyond the confines of this life!

Naturally we turn to Mary, the Mother of the Crucified One. When unnailed from the Cross, He rested on her lap. Mary continued caring for Him, even while heartbroken. “No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary,” says Pope Francis. “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.”[17] As the Holy Father invites us, let us imitate our Lady of Sorrows in our daily service to the living and the dead.

*June: “Instructing the ignorant” and “offering good advice”*

Among the spiritual works of mercy, I want to consider today the first two: instructing the ignorant and offering good advice to the one who needs it. Teaching others is one of the most beautiful works all of us can
carry out. For example, the work of mothers in educating their children. What great patience, joy and generosity they show in their attention to their children, to help them reach human and supernatural maturity! As Pope Francis said: “A mother, above all, teaches the right path in life and guides her children. She doesn’t learn this from books but from her own heart.”[18]

I would like to add here that the father too has to learn each day, with an upright heart, to be a good husband, a good father, doing all he can every day — just as his wife does — to maintain and enkindle the loving atmosphere in his home. The heart: this is the secret of the works of mercy, which involve the will and are born of charity, of God’s love that can reach out to others through you and me.

In the Gospel, we hear the words that Christ addresses to those who come to arrest him in the Garden of Olives: “Every day I sat teaching in the Temple” (Mt 26:55). Indeed, his public life consisted primarily in teaching us the path of the children of God, bringing light to our intellect, and opening up the way to reach God the Father, with the help of the Paraclete.

In the same vein, the forceful words in his Sermon on the Mount (see Mt 5), in his parables describing the Kingdom of Heaven (see Mt 13:1-55) and in his dialogues with various people still inspire wonder in us: scenes in which the Master transmits to everyone — also to us today — different ways to follow the paths of salvation. Therefore, as the Pope also points out, “to be capable of mercy, we must first of all be ready to listen to the Word of God. This means rediscovering the value of silence in order to meditate on the Word that comes to us.”[19]

The only one who can carry out the role of a good teacher, and advise others rightly, is a person who is always willing to learn. We should all open ourselves with docility to the Master’s teachings if we really want to help others sincerely. Therefore, reading the Gospel carefully and with recollection (a custom that I invite you to practice every day, reading calming, quietly, pondering what God is telling us) makes us more sensitive to experience the mercy of our heavenly Father and thus capture the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Then, when we have to orient someone or
give advice, we will immediately ask ourselves: what would Christ do here? And we will act accordingly.

On many occasions (on all of them!), our good example will also be the best way to help others. Saint Josemaría reminds us in his book Furrow: “Jesus began to do and then to teach. You and I have to bear witness with our example, because we cannot live a double life. We cannot preach what we do not practice. In other words, we have to teach what we are at least struggling to put into practice.” (no. 694) Indeed, our struggle, our own desire for conversion, will become a spur for others to notice the effort we make to live with Christian faithfulness. If we want to help them, we must be personally demanding on ourselves first.

On the other hand, giving opportune and helpful advice entails an act of generosity, because it calls for setting aside our own ego and placing ourselves in the situation of others, trying to understand them more deeply, always taking into account their personal circumstances, in order to give the best advice. This advice will always flow from friendship and often have a supernatural tone, since that is how we can help others to see things with a wider perspective that includes God.

These works of mercy should impel us to be generous in showing others the path that leads to Christ. Saint Josemaría said that “for a Christian, apostolate is like breathing. A child of God cannot live without this supernatural life-force. Our concern for souls is a response to a command of love given to us by our Lord that sends us out as his witnesses throughout the whole world.”[20]

Many people, perhaps without knowing it, are waiting for someone to introduce them to Christ. True happiness cannot be found without Him! Hopefully the graces from this Year of Mercy can help us overcome the obstacles that sometimes stop us from being apostolic: human respect, laziness, or simply the thought that the task is impossible. Nevertheless, let us invite those we encounter in our daily life to look at our Lord’s face; let us make known his teachings (I insist) in our own life; let us explain the doctrine of the Church when necessary and, of course, let us always conduct ourselves in a manner consistent with our faith. Thus we will show others that living in accord with the Gospel is attractive.
I once again want to quote Saint Josemaría: “We have to act in such a way that others will be able to say, when they meet us: this man is a Christian, because he does not hate, because he is willing to understand, because he is not a fanatic, because he is willing to make sacrifices, because he shows that he is a man of peace, because he knows how to love.”[21]

This is how the founder of Opus Dei always acted. His life primarily involved transmitting to others the spirit he had received from God. I am a witness to his zeal for showing us clearly, even in the smallest details, how to follow Christ by sanctifying ordinary life. He did so with a maternal and paternal heart, making use of small daily events, inspiring us with his example, reminding us patiently and sometimes forcefully, as often as necessary.

I suggest that, in this Year of Mercy, you read one of the biographies about Saint Josemaría’s life, even if you have already read them. His teachings come directly from the Gospel and contain, as our Lord said, “things both old and new,” and can always give a new impetus to our own spiritual life. In reading these biographies or his writings, our Lord will help us discover wonderful and attractive aspects of the Christian spirit for our personal conduct, which we can pass on to others.

Saint Josemaría defined Opus Dei as “the history of God’s mercies,”[22] since he always experienced God’s incomparable closeness while striving to make the divine will a reality. Thanks to God that history has not stopped, but continues today in the work of many men and women who are striving to assimilate this way of life and to follow Christ, putting themselves in the lowest position, as servants.

Truly, the possibility of being able to find God in the occupations of each day — isn’t this a great manifestation of divine mercy? Isn’t it a manifestation of God’s special tenderness that we can cooperate with Him in the great adventure of bringing the fruits of Redemption to all the crossroads of the world with our daily life?


[10] Pope Francis, Misericordiae Vultus, no. 15.


[13] Ibid.


[17] Pope Francis, Misericordiae Vultus, no. 24

[18] Pope Francis, Address to a general audience, September 13, 2013.

[19] Pope Francis, Misericordiae Vultus, no. 13

Addresses and Other Statements

Letter to the Faithful of Opus Dei in Ecuador after the April 16 Earthquake

After the major earthquake in Ecuador on April 16, the Prelate of Opus Dei wrote a letter to Msgr. Paulino Busca, vicar of the Prelature in that country.

My dear Paulino: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons in Ecuador for me!

Thank you for the news you sent, which has helped me to continue praying and offering suffrages for all the dead, and asking our Lord that the injured may recover fully.

From the moment I heard about the earthquake I have been keeping you very much in mind, and I want to assure you that the entire Work is accompanying you. It is marvelous to see (as I’ll never tire of telling you) this unity, both divine and human, that God has granted us.

If you know people who have been affected by the quake (like the case you mentioned), I would be grateful if you could express to these families my prayer and closeness to them.

I also ask that you suggest to the faithful of the Prelature and the cooperators, as well as those you come in contact with, to try to help, each in accord with his or her possibilities, to alleviate the needs and the physical
and moral suffering caused by the earthquake. This could involve bringing warm meals or provisions to the survivors, or assisting in the rebuilding of the homes of the poorest people. And always, it will involve your prayer and affection, especially for those who have lost loved ones.

Your Father loves you and blesses you,

+ Javier

Pastoral Letters

Pastoral Letter for April 2016

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

Once again we have been moved, during Holy Week, on seeing God’s love for mankind. God so loved the world, Saint John writes, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.[1]

How ardently we should thank the Blessed Trinity for this outpouring of goodness and mercy! And even more so when we consider that while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.[2] Our Lord’s passion and death is the culmination of the commitment that God freely wanted to take on for mankind. “His first commitment was that of creating the world, and despite our attempts to ruin it—and there are many—He is committed to keeping it alive. But his greatest commitment was that of giving us Jesus. This is God’s great commitment! Yes, Jesus is really the supreme commitment that God has assumed for us.”[3]

In virtue of this promise, renewed repeatedly throughout the course of salvation history, the incarnate Son of God did not limit himself to obtaining pardon for our sins by living and working among us, even though
his slightest action had superabundant value to redeem us; nor was he content to intercede for us, even though he well knew that God the Father always listened to his prayer. He decided to go to the extreme, since greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.[4]

Christ the Redeemer’s words during his agony on the Cross are very moving. The first was this: Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.[5] He doesn’t think about the humiliation and pain he is suffering, or the cruelty of those who crucified him, but rather about the offense against God. He came to win for us the forgiveness of our sins and his first words are a petition for mercy. His second statement, addressed to the good thief, reflects the same concern. Seeing the sincere repentance of that man, he promises him the forgiveness of his sins and eternal life: Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.[6] We can readily understand the deep piety with which our Father used to kiss the crucifix, which for those who saw him was a call to conversion and an invitation to speak about Christ and his example.

Saint Josemaría deeply assimilated these teachings of our Lord, and preached them by his example and word. “Forgiveness. To forgive with one’s whole heart and with no trace of a grudge is always wonderfully fruitful! That was Christ’s attitude on being nailed to the Cross: ‘Father, forgive them, they know not what they are doing.’ From this came your salvation and mine.”[7] What a good example for us! Let us ask God to teach us to be big-hearted and to forgive right away those who have offended us, without any resentment.

Forgiving offenses is, in a certain sense, the most divine thing we can do. This is not just a work of mercy, but also a condition and petition for God to pardon our sins, as the Master taught us in the Our Father: forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.[8]

One of the great problems in today’s society is the difficulty people have in forgiving. Individuals and entire nations dwell over and over again on the offenses they have received; they wallow around in these memories as in a muddy puddle, and don’t want to strive to forgive and forget. Quite different, and also very clear, is our Lord’s teaching. He sums up the history
of divine mercy towards mankind with these words: 

blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.\textsuperscript{[9]}

Deeply engraved on our heart are many Gospel scenes that show us this attitude of Jesus: his forgiveness of the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee; the parable of the prodigal son and of the lost sheep; his mercy towards the adulterous woman.... This is the path Christians have to travel to become like the Master. “This way can be summed up in one word: love. If we are to love, we must have a big heart and share the concerns of those around us. We must be able to forgive and understand; we must sacrifice ourselves, with Jesus Christ, for all souls. If we love with Christ’s heart, we shall learn to serve others and we shall defend the truth clearly, lovingly.”\textsuperscript{[10]}

Nevertheless, as Saint Josemaría often said, in order to love like this we need “to root out of our own lives everything that is an obstacle to Christ’s life in us: attachment to our own comfort, the temptation to selfishness, the tendency to be the center of everything. Only by reproducing in ourselves Christ’s life can we transmit it to others. Only by experiencing the death of the grain of wheat can we work in the heart of the world, transforming it from within, making it fruitful.”\textsuperscript{[11]}

The scenes of our Lord’s passion and death, which we have relived in recent days, raise some challenging questions that we have to answer sincerely. Do we forgive from the first moment the offenses we have received, which often are not really such but rather the product of our imagination or exaggerated sensitivity? Do we try to erase them from our heart, without returning over and over to them? Do we ask our Lord and our Lady for help when we find it hard to forgive?

This has to be our constant attitude, for it is not enough to forgive once, or twice, or three times.... Remember how our Lord answered Peter’s question: \textit{Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven}\textsuperscript{[12]}. That is to say, always. After these words, to engrave this lesson deeply on our heart, Jesus told the parable of the cruel servant who was foolishly intransigent over a ridiculously small debt owed by one of his companions, when his master had just forgiven him an enormous
sum. Let us make a serious effort, in this Year of Mercy and always, to deeply assimilate these demands on a true disciple of Christ.

We can’t be content to avoid external offenses; we need to strive to drown out any thoughts or judgments that are contrary to charity. Our earthly journey is a pilgrimage towards the glory of Heaven; and to attain that goal, Jesus has shown us the steps we need to take. The Pope in his Bull *Misericordiae vultus* explains for us one of these, when commenting on some words of our Lord: *Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned.*

The Holy Father wrote: “The Lord asks us above all *not to judge* and *not to condemn*. If anyone wishes to avoid God’s judgement, he should not make himself the judge of his brother or sister. Human beings, whenever they judge, look no farther than the surface, whereas the Father looks into the very depths of the soul. How much harm words do when they are motivated by feelings of jealousy and envy! To speak ill of others puts them in a bad light, undermines their reputation and leaves them prey to the whims of gossip. To refrain from judgement and condemnation means, in a positive sense, to know how to accept the good in every person and to spare him any suffering that might be caused by our partial judgment, our presumption to know everything about him. But this is still not sufficient to express mercy. Jesus asks us also to *forgive* and to *give*. To be instruments of mercy because it was we who first received mercy from God. To be generous with others, knowing that God showers his goodness upon us with immense generosity.”

Here we find another dimension of Christian forgiveness: asking others for pardon as soon as we realize that we have offended them. This is not a humiliation, but rather a manifestation of greatness of spirit, of a big heart, of a generous soul. In this too Saint Josemaría was an example for us. How readily he asked for forgiveness, with true humility, if he thought someone might have been wounded by a rebuke he had made, even though it had been deserved! He once acknowledged that he had often begged God for forgiveness, for what he saw as his failure to respond fully. “But at the same time,” he added, “I dare to say that I have given you the best of my soul. What God our Lord has granted me, I have tried to pass on to you with the greatest fidelity. And when I haven’t managed to do so, I have
acknowledged right away my mistakes. I have asked for forgiveness from God and from those around me, and immediately returned to the struggle.”

On the 20th I will begin another year of my service to the Church as Prelate of Opus Dei. And on the 23rd I will administer the priesthood to a large group of your brothers, who are now deacons of the Prelature. Pray a lot for them and for me, and for all the priests of the Church. Let us always live *consummati in unum*, closely united in prayer, in intentions, in deeds, so that our Lord continues to look upon us with mercy. And let us continue keeping very much present in our prayer the Pope and all his intentions.

With all my affection I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, April 1, 2016


ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Other New Publications

Books of St. Josemaría


Surco (Furrow), Mexico City, Minos, 2016, 18th Mexican printing.

Forja (The Forge), Mexico City, Minos, 2016, 17th Mexican printing.


Droga, Bruzda, Kuznia, Poznan, Sw. Wojciech, Polish joint edition of The Way (18th printing), Furrow (10th printing), The Forge, (9th printing).

Es Cristo que pasa (Christ Is Passing By), Mexico City, Minos, 2016, 14th Mexican printing.

Amigos de Dios (Friends of God), Mexico City, Minos, 2016, 16th Mexican printing.

In addition the following homilies have been printed:

El matrimonio, vocación cristiana (Marriage: A Christian Vocation), Mexico City, Minos, 2016, 15th and 16th Mexican printing.

Con la fuerza del amor (With the Strength of Love), Mexico City, Minos, 2016, 2nd Mexican printing.

Books about St. Josemaría:
As mãos de Deus - Matrimónio e família nos ensinamentos de São Josemaría, Antonio Vázquez, Parede, Princípio (collection Lucerna), 1st Portuguese edition of Como las manos de Dios (Like the Hands of God).

The book was introduced at the Lisbon Book Fair, on May 28. It contains teachings of St. Josemaría on marriage and the family. The translation into Portuguese was undertaken to support the pastoral concern of Pope Francis for the evangelization of the family.

Publication of Friends of God in Korean

The publishing company Luca Chulpansa has published the first edition of Friends of God in Korean. The printing was done in Seoul last May with an edition of 1,000 copies.

Besides this book of homilies of the Founder of Opus Dei, the following works of St. Josemaría have been translated into Korean: The Way (with three printings: 1979, 2006 and 2007); Holy Rosary (two printings: 1992 and 2014); and Furrow (the only Korean edition was printed in 1996).

DYA, the Academy and Residence in the History of Opus Dei

The historian and priest Jose Luis Gonzalez Gullón has published DYA, the Academy and Residence in the History of Opus Dei (1933–1939). The author analyzes the first activity of Opus Dei’s corporate apostolate started directly by its founder. The book, published by Ediciones Rialp, was put on sale last February 1.

DYA—an acronym for “Derecho y Arquitectura” (Law and Architecture) —was a student residence and a study academy that opened in Madrid, under the initiative of Josemaría Escrivá, in November 1933. With the
outbreak of the civil war in Spain, it had to abruptly interrupt its activities in June 1936.

This academy-residence has special relevance for the history of Opus Dei. DYA opened five years after the founding of Opus Dei in 1928. Together with its academic and residential activities, DYA was a place where St. Josemaría could spread the message of Opus Dei, by living alongside the university students and inviting them to follow paths of prayer compatible with their human and professional ideals. The book highlights the key points of St. Josemaría message, which would spread in the following years throughout the whole world.

The book also presents other activities of the Founder of Opus Dei in Madrid up until the outbreak of the civil war. These include sessions for Christian formation for diocesan priests, formative meetings for women, human and priestly care for the sick in Madrid’s hospitals, along with his pastoral work in the Foundation for the Sick and later in that of Santa Isabel.

The book was presented in various cities throughout Spain. On April 14, it was presented in Pamplona, in a ceremony organized by the Saint Josemaría Escrivá Center of Documentation and Studies, which took place in the School of Communications at the University of Navarra. On April 16, it was presented to the public in the ARS Bookstore in Logroño; on April 18, in the Moncloa Student Residence in Madrid; on May 18, in the Malaga College of Lawyers; on May 19, in the Provincial Assembly of Almeria; on May 20, in the Advanced Technical School of Highway Engineering at the University of Granada; on June 3, in the Oratori de Santa Maria de Bonaigua in Barcelona. The work was also presented in Ecuador in two locations: on June 29 in Quito and on July 27 in Guayaquil.

José Luis Gonzalez Gullón has doctorates in History and Theology and is a member of the Saint Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute. He is the author of El clero en la Segunda República: 1931-1935, and various articles on the contemporary history of the Church in Spain. He was one of the editors of the Diccionario de San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer.
Tenth Anniversary of the St. Josemaría Institute in Chicago

The St. Josemaría Institute was founded in Chicago in 2006 to spread knowledge of St. Josemaría’s life and message. Over the past ten first years, the institute has produced digital resources on the main aspects of the Founder of Opus Dei’s message, distributed through social networks, podcasts, videos, blogs, websites, etc.

One of the most notable initiatives is the start of a summer program of formation for seminarians, carried out in Rome in collaboration with the Midwest Theological Forum. The activity was inspired by the many years that St. Josemaría dedicated to the accompaniment of diocesan priests, in striving to meet their material and spiritual needs.

In 2011, the institute collaborated with the producer Mount Santa Fe to promote the movie *There be Dragons*. The feature film tells the story of two childhood friends, Josemaría and Manolo, whose lives take very different paths, in the midst of the political and social upheaval in the 1930s in their native country, Spain. The movie is inspired by real events, especially those that refer to the life of St. Josemaría in the years prior to the Spanish Civil War.

The Saint Josemaría Institute has also produced the documentary *Passionately Loving the World*. This presents the testimony of nine people in the United States who, inspired by St. Josemaría’s teachings, decided to respond to the universal call to holiness in the ordinary circumstances of their daily life.

Another activity carried out during these ten years is *The St. Josemaría Institute’s Annual Fall and Winter Conference*, an annual cycle of conferences open to the public on ways to find and grow in love for Christ in today’s world.

Torna ai contenuti

Devotion Throughout the World
Poland

On March 19 in the church of St. Joseph in Szczecin, Poland, a painting of St. Josemaría was blessed, on the side altar of the church. Knowing the importance of the sacrament of Confession in Josemaría teaching, the artist Tadeusz Molga decided to show the saint in a confessional, at the moment of imparting absolution to a penitent. During the ceremony the suitability of this example during the Jubilee Year dedicated to Divine Mercy was stressed.

In Jasrowie, a city near Pila, Poland, on Easter Monday (which coincided this year with the priestly ordination of St. Josemaría) the church of St. Michael the Archangel solemnly received a relic of the founder of Opus Dei during a Mass celebrated by the regional vicar of the Prelature in Poland, Msgr. Stefan Moszoro-Dabrowski. A copy of the painting of St. Josemaría installed in Szczecin was also placed in the church.

São Paulo, Brazil

In Brazil, festive celebrations in honor of certain saints in the month of June are a long-standing tradition: St. Anthony, St. John the Baptist, Sts. Peter and Paul. These Festas Juninas, as they are known, are commemorated with special costumes, songs, bonfires, dances and typical dishes in schools, parishes, etc., and attract many people. This year, the parish of Nossa Senhora do Brasil, in São Paulo, included St. Josemaría in the list of these saints, given the widespread devotion to him among parishioners.

In the archdiocese of São Paulo, the television channel Ultrafarma decided to include the Novena to St. Josemaría for Work in its program Tiempo de Misericordia. The novena was broadcast from June 14 to 24, as a way of preparing for the feast of the founder of Opus Dei.

Also, on the initiative of the pastor of the Cathedral of São Paulo, a 9-inch tall statue of St. Josemaría was produced so that the faithful could have it in their homes and workplaces. At the Mass in memory of St. Josemaría, many of those attending purchased these statues.

Seville, Spain
The Fraternity of la Macarena in Seville decided to leave permanent testimony to the Founder of Opus Dei’s prayer before the statue of Our Lady of Hope Macarena, on October 1, 1968, in the Basilica of the Fraternity. Therefore on June 24 a plaque was blessed and installed with a description of that visit “for its permanent remembrance.”

The ceremony was presided over by the Senior Brother, Manuel Garcia, accompanied by the vicar of Opus Dei for the delegation of Seville, Msgr. Ricardo Santiago, and other priests. In the homily of the Eucharistic celebration that preceded the blessing of the inscription, the priest theologian Antonio Aranda highlighted St. Josemaría’s love for our Lady, and recalled the Founder’s visit to la Macarena in 1968, when he traveled to Seville on what would be his eighth and next-to-last visit to the city.

Monterrey, Mexico

On Sunday, June 26, after the Sunday Mass, the enthroning of a painting of St. Josemaría was held in a chapel of access to the parish church of Santa Engracia, in the diocese of Monterrey, Mexico. The parochial vicar, Ricardo Garduño, said that since St. Josemaría is the saint of the ordinary, the place was very suitable, since on leaving the church the faithful could go to him to ask him to accompany them in their daily work. Taking part in the ceremony were the pastor of Santa Engracia, Msgr. Hernán Zambrano and the vicar of the Prelature for Monterrey, Msgr. Carlos Núñez.

Gliaca di Piraino, Italy

On May 16, the elementary school in the Sicilian community of Gliaca di Piraino dedicated the first floor of the building to Blessed Pino Puglisi and the second floor to St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, two saints who, in the words of the school principal, are educators for our times, bearing positive messages of holiness and social commitment. The plaque dedicated to St. Josemaría has a citation from his book The Way. In the course of that day, the students had an opportunity to learn more about these two saints.

Livorno, Italy

In May, the church of Santa Maria del Soccorso (Our Lady of Help), in Livorno, acquired a new triptych whose central panel is dedicated to our
Lady. One of the sides represents St. Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. The other side has a picture of Blessed Pio Alberto Del Corona. The representatives of the committee that oversaw the artistic work pointed out that these three saints visited the city on various occasions to venerate the icon of Our Lady of Help.

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**Eucharistic Celebrations on the Feast of St. Josemaría**

On the liturgical commemoration of St. Josemaría, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, celebrated a solemn Mass in the Basilica of St. Eugene in Rome. His homily is included in this issue of *Romana*. Many other Eucharistic celebrations took place around this date in cities throughout the world. We will point out here just a few of these.

On June 23 a solemn Mass was celebrated in the metropolitan cathedral of Guatemala City. Presiding over the celebration were the apostolic nuncio, Archbishop Nicolas Thevenin, and the metropolitan archbishop, Oscar Julio Vian. In his homily Archbishop Thevenin gave an historical sketch of the founder of Opus Dei’s life and stressed the positive influence that his message can have for people in today’s world. At the end of the ceremony a message from Archbishop Vian was read: “We are called to imitate the virtues of St. Josemaría. We should live immersed in the world, amid our daily concerns, giving full expression there to the splendor of holiness. As St. Josemaría said, ‘Marvel at the goodness of our Father God. Doesn’t it fill you with joy to know that your home, your family, your country, which you love madly, are the raw material for holiness?’ These forceful words should help us to never forget that we are invited to proclaim the universal call to holiness and apostolate. We have to serve with ardent love the work of the Redemption.”

In Ivory Coast, the Mass for the feast of St. Josemaría was held on June 25 in the church of the *Sainte Famille*, with over 3,000 people attending. Presiding over the concelebration was Archbishop Joseph Spiteri, the country’s nuncio. “Let us give thanks to the Lord for all the gifts of his love,
especially for the gift of St. Josemaría. Let us ask for the grace of fidelity and the light of the Holy Spirit to respond decisively to the universal call to sanctity and to be true witnesses, through our daily actions, of God’s tenderness and mercy towards all our brothers and sisters,” said Archbishop Spiteri at the beginning of the ceremony. In his homily, the apostolic nuncio stressed that “St. Josemaría teaches us that the simplicity of our personal relationship with God leads us to have a deeper sense of the dignity of every human being and of fraternity among all men and women. Since we are sons and daughters of the same Father, we are also brothers and sisters among ourselves. But the fraternity that we discover through God’s mercy and thanks to his love is stronger than all merely human bonds. It is the fraternity of the risen Jesus, the Lord of life.” “It is easy to understand St. Josemaría’s invitation,” continued Archbishop Spiteri, “to live always with serenity and optimism. Divine filiation radically transforms our vision of life. We are and will always remain in God and in his love. It is clear, therefore, that any human activity can become a place of encounter with God and offers the possibility of constructing a renewed society that is more just and fraternal.”

The nuncio dedicated some words to the faithful of the Prelature: “The feast of St. Josemaría, for the faithful of Opus Dei, is not only a moment of joy and thanksgiving. It should also be an invitation to renew the commitment of deep Christian life.” “The example of your Founder,” he added, “should be kept alive in you and through your testimony.”

In Montreal, Canada, Archbishop Christian Lépine celebrated the Eucharist in the cathedral Basilica Marie-Reine-du-monde, accompanied by other priests, some of whom are in the Prelature. The faithful were able to take advantage of entering through the holy door of mercy and many confessors were available for penitents. Archbishop Lépine expressed his joy at being able to celebrate the Mass in memory of St. Josemaría in the Holy Year of Mercy. Both in his initial greeting as well as in the homily he cited texts from the preaching of St. Josemaría on mercy and forgiveness. In Ottawa, the Canadian capital, the Mass for the feast of St. Josemaría took place on June 20. It was presided over by diocesan Archbishop Terence Prendergast, S.J., in the cathedral Basilica of Notre-Dame. The archbishop encouraged the families to pass through the holy door and stressed that the
feast of St. Josemaría during the Holy Year of Mercy was a good opportunity to have recourse to the sacrament of Penance.
News
Other Publications of Interest


#June for Mercy, Proposals for Deepening in Mercy

With the hashtag #JuneForMercy, the website www.opusdei.org offered advice from St. Josemaría and Pope Francis on mercy, forgiveness, and serving others, with suggestions for preparing for the feast of St. Josemaría on June 26

The initiative arose as a response to the Pope’s requests for this Jubilee Year: “announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, April 11, 2015).

Issue No. 10 of Studia et Documenta
The *Istituto Storico San Josemaría Escrivá* has published the tenth issue of *Studia et Documenta*. The first part of the volume looks at the life and vocation of five of the first faithful of Opus Dei who asked for admission to the Work before the beginning of the civil war in Spain in 1936.

John F. Coverdale depicts the life of José María González Barredo (1906-1933), who knew St. Josemaría in the 1930s and was the first member of Opus Dei to live in North America. José Luis González Gullón and Mariano Galazzi present a sketch of Ricardo Fernández Vallespín (1910-1988), director of the DYA Academy and Residence, the first corporate apostolate of Opus Dei, begun by St. Josemaría in 1933. He was a pioneer of the stable apostolic work of Opus Dei in Argentina. In the third article, José Carlos Martín de la Hoz goes deeply into the life of Msgr. Pedro Casciaro (1915-1995), who met St. Josemaría in the 1934-1935 school year. He assisted the founder of Opus Dei in the installation and direction of the first university residences in Madrid, Valencia, and Barcelona, and began the apostolic work of Opus Dei in Mexico and Central America. The fourth article, by Constantino Anchel, is dedicated to Francisco Botella Raduan (1915-1987), who met St. Josemaría in 1935. Finally, Luis Martínez Ferrer studies the life of Vicente Rodríguez Casado (1918-1990), within the framework of the Spanish Civil War and the immediate postwar period.

The volume includes a study by José Luis Illanes entitled “Points of Theological Reflection on the Juridical Path of Opus Dei.” In addition, the researcher Alfredo Méndiz presents the exchange of letters between St. Josemaría and Juan Jiménez Vargas, from the years 1937 to 1939.

The tenth volume of *Studia et Documenta* completes the first decade of publication of studies on Opus Dei and St. Josemaría Escrivá, as is noted in the prologue by the director of the Journal, Rev. Carlo Pioppi, who also highlights the goals that the publication has set for itself for the coming years.

UNIV 2016: “Family Impact”
About 3,000 young people from 35 countries took part in the 49th UNIV Forum, which was held in Rome during Holy Week. The topic proposed this year for the reflection of the young people was “Family Impact.” The President of UNIV, Martijn Pouw from the Netherlands, said that “in an era such as ours, with a crisis in the realm of finances, culture and, above all, widespread loneliness, the witness of the family becomes ever more necessary.” The current Forum, according to Martijn Pouw, seeks to “highlight more clearly family values, and their contribution to making a more human society that can respond to the deepest requirements of the person.”

On Wednesday, March 23, the university students took part in the general audience with Pope Francis, who at the end of the gathering stopped to greet some of them. The students gave the Pope the money from a collection taken up among the participants, so that he could destine it to whatever social initiatives he wishes, in thanksgiving for the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Among the speakers invited to UNIV were Loreto Spá, an architect and professor at the University of Grenada; Alan Holdren, director of Aciprensa/EWTN in Rome; Jack Valero, coordinator and co-founder of Catholic Voices; Mario Marazziti, member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies; Tugdual Derville, director general of Alliance VITA and spokesman for La Manif pour tous; and Benigno Blanco, president of the Spanish Forum for the Family.

During these same days, the Incontro Romano was also held, centered on the topic “Home Made Happiness.” In addition, the Social Innovators Project presented volunteer and solidarity projects carried out by the university students.

Interview with Msgr. Jose Luis Gutiérrez Gómez, Postulator for the Cause of Montse Grases
The interview took place after the publication of the decree on the heroic virtues of Montserrat Grases (1941-1959), on April 26 of this year.


Briefly, what sort of person was Montse Grases?

When the Church declares that someone practiced the Christian virtues heroically, then that is obviously a major part of their character. So the first thing I would say is that Montse practiced faith, hope and charity in the highest degree, as well as the cardinal virtues and the moral virtues. She was very devout, and she put all her efforts into seeking God in the context of her everyday life.

Montse was a girl just like any other, a very human person, who learnt to make the most humdrum situations into something supernatural — her family relationships, her teenage friendships, her study and work, her leisure time, etc. Everyone who knew her agreed that she had real sweetness — not sentimentality — that made her very attractive. As a result, lots of girls of her own age wanted to be friends with her, and she made friends with them generously. When she met Opus Dei, Montse used her gifts to bring her friends closer to God, quite naturally, not in any harsh or forced way, but by being a real friend to them individually.

She was a deeply happy girl, and spread happiness around her in all situations, including her illness and death.

What does the title “Venerable” say about Montse?

Canonized saints help us ordinary Christians on our path through life by their example and intercession before God. The Church states that the help they give us is a great service, so that we can and should pray for their intercession for ourselves and the whole world.

By declaring Montse “Venerable,” the Church is saying that Montse is an example who can be proposed to Catholic faithful for our devotion and imitation, and is encouraging us to have recourse to her intercession to obtain favors from Heaven.

Is there one of Montse’s heroic virtues that you would single out?
She taught us that following Christ closely does not mean doing progressively harder or more extraordinary things, but doing everyday things for love and with love, turning them into opportunities of serving God and others. Montse incarnated the spirit that God had entrusted to St Josemaría, the founder of Opus Dei.

Her life also proves that you don’t have to wait to be “older” to achieve high goals, and that youth is not just a passing stage in life, but just the opposite: it is the time when you can give yourself to God, loving him wholeheartedly, to light up the world with Christ’s light.

St Josemaría used to remind the younger Opus Dei faithful that “age does not bring either wisdom or holiness. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit places these words on the lips of young people: Super senes intellexi, quia mandata tua quaesivi (Ps 118:100) — I have more wisdom than the ancient, more holiness than the aged, because I have tried to follow the Lord’s commandments. Don’t wait for old age to be saints: it would be a big mistake.” Montse took in this message fully, and I think she will move many young people not to put off the decisions that transform life and give it a divine meaning — decisions of greater solidarity, of openness to God and other people.

And is there in fact devotion to Montse among young people?

Yes, lots of young people pray to her, and we have received news of hundreds of favors attributed to her intercession. Also, many young people go to pray before her tomb in the oratory of Bonaigua University Residence in Barcelona.

Another striking fact is the sheer number of prayer-cards for private devotion to her that have been printed. According to the information I have, just in 2014 over 40,000 prayer-cards were produced, in Arabic, Catalan, Cebu, Chinese, Dutch, English, Estonian, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish and Tagalog.

A process of beatification and canonization involves questioning many people. Who are the people who have testified about Montse, and what have they said about her?
The diocesan process, which was held between 1962 and 1968, gathered the testimonies of 27 people who had known Montse personally. In 1993, on the initiative of the then Postulator of her cause, although it was not mandatory, over 100 testimonies were collected, left by other people who had known Montse.

Given that this was someone who died at the age of 18, I consider that the search for witnesses was exhaustive, much more so than usual. And in fact many details about her life reached us that helped to build up a very complete picture of her sanctity.

What did these witnesses say? It would be hard to give a brief summary of it all. I will just give a few quotations, but not the people’s names.

“She used to tell herself, ‘I’m a daughter of God’.”

“Montse was a girl who grew up and became a woman, without any problems... She was cheerful, clean, kind, and straightforward.”

“She put a lot of care into little things: details of tidiness, mortification, cheerfulness, concern for others, and so on.”

“Montse found Jesus on the Cross — Jesus who abandoned himself into his Father’s arms, saying ‘Into your hands I commend my spirit.’ And as she trusted her Father God, and felt that she was in his hands; she was serene, calm, and happy.”

“The extraordinary thing about Montse was how normal she was. She was able to bear her illness without making a big deal of it, not wanting to be the center of attention or concern on the part of others.”

“What I admired most about the Servant of God [Montse] was her joy — her constant, infectious cheerfulness. Whenever we went to visit her, when she was already ill and we knew that the doctors had said there was no hope, we felt happy and interiorly at peace as we came away.”

*For Montse to be beatified, the Holy See has to recognize a miracle obtained through her intercession. Are there any miracles that have been attributed to Montse?*

That is correct: the next stage, before her beatification, is proof of a miracle. These miracles are usually cures for which there is no scientific
explanation — either because of the type of illness, or because of the way it was cured.

We have received news of many favors, including cures. I'll just give one example. On 10 March 2003, in Barcelona, Doctor Jose O. left his house to buy something for his wife. In Rambla de Cataluna he had a cardiac arrest. Two doctors who happened to be there gave him heart massage, and he was taken to hospital. His wife and friends prayed for his recovery to Montse. Jose said afterwards, “Nobody believed I would survive, or if I did, they all thought I would be left with heart disease or brain damage. I could have been left paralytic, blind, or simply in a vegetative state.” Whereas in fact he is in good health and leads a normal life.

However, after the decree on her heroic virtues, I am sure that many people will have recourse to the intercession of the new Venerable, and many extraordinary graces will be received, which will undoubtedly enable her to be beatified very soon.

* A process of beatification and canonization takes a long time and a lot of hard work. I am sure you think Montse's process is worthwhile. Could you say why?

Of course it’s worthwhile, just like all the processes that are carried out in the Church! We need examples who can help us to lead a Christian life, who can teach us to handle the “concrete realities” of our lives, as Pope Francis says in no. 31 of his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, “because the calls and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history.”

The example of an attractive, happy, ordinary young girl, who achieved holiness in her normal everyday activities, will be a magnet that draws many other people, especially young people, to take their faith seriously and so find happiness.

Torna ai contenuti

**Montse Grases Is Declared Venerable**

On April 26, Pope Francis authorized the Congregation for the Causes
of Saints to promulgate the decree on the heroic virtues of Montse Grases (1941—1959), a young woman of Opus Dei. The Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, on learning of the announcement by the Holy See, said: “I thank our Lord with all my heart for this step in the cause of beatification of Montse, a girl with a brief life, who was a true gift of God for those who dealt with her and also for those who got to know her later.”

He also pointed out that Montse Grases “had corresponded to God’s love from an early age in the middle of the world, and tried to work well with a spirit of service, forgetting about herself. She faithfully followed our Lord when he called her to form part of Opus Dei and strove to stay close to Him, while leading a life alongside the other young women around her. She continued doing so while suffering from that cancer that led to her death and that caused her intense pain. She tried to carry out her daily occupations out of love for God and others, and strove to bring many people closer to Jesus.”

Bishop Echevarría concluded by saying: “It is my hope that Montse’s example will continue to inspire many young women and men to embrace a life of generous self-giving to God in marriage, apostolic celibacy, the religious life, and the priesthood.”

A Biographical Sketch

María Montserrat Grases García (“Montse”) was born in Barcelona on July 10th, 1941. She was the second of nine children born to Manuel Grases and Manolita García. After finishing high school, which she alternated with studying the piano, she began taking classes at the Professional School for Women, also in Barcelona.

She liked sports, music and the traditional local dances, especially “sardanas.” She had many friends and enjoyed acting in plays. Her parents taught her to have a trusting relationship with God. At the Grases’ home, Montse developed many characteristics of her personality: cheerfulness, simplicity, forgetfulness of self and concern for the material and spiritual needs of others. With a few of her schoolmates, she would sometimes visit poorer areas of Barcelona and teach catechism classes to children, often bringing them little toys or candy. She had a lively and spontaneous
temperament, and sometimes her reactions were a bit brusque, although her family and teachers recall that she tried to control her temper and to be friendly and welcoming to everyone.

In 1954, she met Opus Dei, founded in 1928 by Saint Josemaria Escrivá to remind all Christians of their call to holiness in their family and work environment. Montse’s parents were already members of Opus Dei, and they helped her to strengthen her spiritual life and to strive to live the Christian virtues better each day. Manolita encouraged her daughter to visit a center of Opus Dei that offered classes to young girls about the faith and human virtues.

Little by little, she realized that God was calling her to this path in the Church, and on December 24th, 1957, after reflecting on it in her prayer and asking for advice, she asked to be part of Opus Dei. From then on, she made a more concerted effort to achieve holiness in her daily life. In her spiritual struggle, she tried to put in first place the contemplation of Christ’s life, as well as Eucharistic piety, devotion to our Lady, a deep humility and a determination to serve others. Playing basketball or tennis also became opportunities for being generous with others. Montse strove to find God’s will in the fulfilment of her daily duties and in caring for small details out of love, and she spread to many of her friends and family members the peace that comes from living close to God.

In December 1957, Montse began to experience pain in her left leg. Six months later, doctors discovered that this was being caused by a cancer (Ewing’s sarcoma) in her thigh bone. This disease caused Montse intense pain, which she accepted with serenity and fortitude. In spite of her sickness, she never lost her contagious cheerfulness or capacity for making friends, grounded in a deep love for souls. She brought many of her friends and classmates who went to visit her closer to God. In her pain, she found Jesus and Our Lady. Those closer to her witnessed her progressive union with God and the way in which she transformed her suffering into prayer and apostolate: in a word, into holiness. One of her friends says that when she saw Montse praying, she could sense Montse’s closeness to Christ.

Montse died on March 26th, 1959, which was Holy Thursday that year, a few months before she would have turned 18. She was buried in the
Sudoeste cementary in Barcelona. Many people have attested to her heroic and exemplary life. Since then, her reputation for holiness has continued to spread, not only in Spain but throughout the world.

Since 1994, the mortal remains of Montse Grases are kept in the crypt of the oratory of the Bonaigua student residence on Jiménez i Iglesias Street in Barcelona. Many people go there to pray to her intercession and ask for help. A large number of favors and graces have been attributed to Montse’s intercession, many of them on behalf of young people who solicit Montse’s help in their needs.

**Itinerary of the cause of canonization**

The process of gathering information about Montse Grases took place in Barcelona. It was initiated by Archbishop Gregorio Modrego Casaus on December 19, 1962, and was concluded on March 26, 1968, under the authority of the new Archbishop, Marcelo González Martín.

During the following years the cause proceeded more slowly, due to the reforms of the norms governing causes of canonization carried out by Blessed Paul VI and St. John Paul II. During that time Montse’s reputation for holiness continued to grow.

On May 15, 1992, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints declared the validity of the diocesan process. But in that same year they also decided to carry out a supplementary process of information gathering, among other reasons, to enrich the materials gathered in the 1960s. This additional process took place in Barcelona from June 10 to October 28 in 1993. On January 21, 1994, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints decreed the validity of this second process.

On November 21, 1999, the *Positio on the life and virtues of the servant of God* was presented. On June 30, 2015, a meeting of the theological consultors for the Congregation for the Causes of Saints gave an affirmative reply to the question regarding the heroic exercise of the virtues by Montse Grases, and on April 19, 2016, the ordinary congress of the cardinals and bishops ratified this reply.

On Tuesday April 26, 2016, Pope Francis received from Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, a
detailed summary of the phases of the cause. The Holy Father ratified the vote of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and authorized the publication of the decree declaring Montse Grases venerable.

The news was made public the following day, April 27, liturgical feast of our Lady of Montserrat.

Eucharistic Celebrations on the Feast of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo

For the liturgical memorial of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, on May 12, Masses were celebrated throughout the world. In Rome, the Prelate of Opus Dei presided over a Eucharistic celebration in the parish of St. Eugene. Bishop Echevarria stressed, among the most characteristic features of Blessed Alvaro’s personality, “his passion for unity, for giving himself to everyone,” which “led him to live in full communion with the Pope and with the other bishops, to encourage everyone to live fraternal unity, and of course to watch over untiringly the unity of this small portion of the Church that is Opus Dei.” He said that Blessed Alvaro was a man faithful to God, and that “his words were addressed not only to the faithful of the Prelature, but also to many others who asked for his advice, for a word of encouragement for their personal life or for the communities to which they belonged.”

In the church of the Holy Spirit in Munich, a Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Reinhard Marx. During his homily he said that “Don Alvaro made known by his own life that Christ is among us, in the midst of the lives of people today.” Cardinal Marx said also that Opus Dei provides “a response to the challenges of a secular and open society.”

“On my occasional visits to centers and initiatives of Opus Dei,” he recalled, “what noticeably called my attention was the various ways in which the Gospel was brought into the real life of people, so that it could be inserted into their daily lives.” Cardinal Marx stressed that “the path to attain this is the sanctification of one’s own life.” The President of the
German Bishops Conference continued: “I am happy to see how they make their own the initiatives of Pope Francis and I thank them for that. Harmony with the successor of St. Peter is a characteristic of the Work.”

In Lima, Peru, Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani celebrated Holy Mass in honor of Blessed Alvaro in the parish of Santa Maria Reina. “Today, on celebrating the memory of Don Alvaro, let us fix our attention on the features of his holy life, among them his loyalty to the Church. Don Alvaro was a man of prayer who worked diligently; he lived a joyful and prompt obedience.” Cardinal Cipriani also stressed that Blessed Alvaro was a “faithful son of the Church, devoted to the truth. Truly he was a giant in his loyalty and love for the Church.”

Some Diocesan Assignments Received by Priests of the Prelature

The following appointments have been made by the authorities of the respective dioceses

Rev. Carlos Carrasco Guerrero
Parochial Vicar of San Miguel dos Agros, Archdiocese of Santiago de Compostela (Spain)

Rev. Bernardo Oliver Ferrer
Pastor of San Nicolás, diocese of Palma de Mallorca (Spain);

Rev. Emili Roure Boada
Pastor of Santa Maria de Gràcia and Vicar of Santa Teresa del Niño Jesús, Archdiocese of Barcelona (Spain);

Rev. Gabriel Herráiz
Defender of the Bond for the diocesan tribunal of Saint-Pierre, diocese of Saint-

Pierre, Ivory Coast;
Rev. Toshihiro Sakai

*Member of the Committee on the Liturgy for the diocese of Osaka, Japan.*

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**New Centers of the Prelature**

The vicar of the circumscription of Ecuador has established a new center of the Prelature in the city of Guayaquil.

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**Pontifical Appointments**

On June 24, 2016, Rev. Richard James Umbers was appointed auxiliary bishop of Sydney. Until then he was the chaplain of Warrane College, in the University of New South Wales.
INITIATIVES

• In Brief
Ten Years of Professional Seminars on Church Communications - Communicating the Faith with Joy

In 1996 the School of Church Communications at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome was begun. Already then, the University saw the advisability of organizing an international forum for directors of communication offices of dioceses, bishops’ conferences, religious congregations or institutes, and new movements in the Church, that is to say, a conference for the same kind of professionals studying in the new School of Church Communications.

The forum sought to bring together those responsible for communication in the Church and help them to reflect on their task and how to better carry it out in service of the Church. Its goal was to help them be better communicators and to grow in their knowledge and love for the Church.

Thus arose the Professional Seminar for Church Communications, which takes place every two years in the central building of the University. In April 2016 the tenth session was held, with more than 400 spokesmen and women from all over the world taking part.

Participants usually include several bishops, many priests and religious, along with a majority of lay men and women who work in various offices of communications. The diversity of the institutions represented is an external manifestation of the rich variety of the Church. But what is most noticeable is the underlying harmony and family environment that marks the seminar.

Over the years, this gathering has been gradually becoming more international. From the Netherlands, directors of communications from most of the dioceses now usually take part. Also present are a good number of directors of communications from dioceses in Italy, the United States, Portugal, Poland, Spain, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and other countries where the Catholic Church has an important presence.
An enriching perspective is also provided by those who come from countries in which the Church does not have a strong presence, such as Norway, Estonia, and Denmark, where the need to awaken a new curiosity about Christianity is evident. Or from other countries where, besides finding themselves in a minority, Catholics are suffering persecution, as in some countries in the Middle East.

The director of communications for a Latin American bishops’ conference mentioned how helpful it had been to speak briefly, during a break in the conference, with Bishop Basilio Yaldo from Baghdad. Speaking about the topic of martyrdom, Bishop Yaldo said that *Iraqi Catholics see this as a real and imminent possibility*. In the conference he gave, Bishop Yaldo made the remark that the Sunday Eucharist was a joyful event for Catholics in Baghdad: “Besides receiving our Lord, it is an opportunity to celebrate the faith together, without the precautions we have to observe during the rest of the week in the workplace or on the street.”

Participants from the younger Churches in Asia and Africa also make an important contribution and are an inspiration for those who live in more secularized countries.

Professionals from other Christian denominations also often take part. For example, in the most recent seminar the secretary general and the director of communications for the United Methodist Church in America were present. They gave a paper on how to dialogue better, through the social networks, with young people who sense spiritual concerns. Their suggestions referred to a challenge common to all Christians: to go out to meet others where they are and bring the Gospel to them.

Those attending also often include alumni from the School of Church Communications at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, who now hold positions of responsibility in their respective dioceses or institutions in places as far-flung as Tanzania, Ukraine, the United States, El Salvador, Croatia, Liberia, Indonesia, Switzerland, Spain, Romania, Germany, India, France, and Colombia, among others.

*God and the world of social communication*

The ten seminars held up to now have all had a common thread: furthering the work of offices of communication in support of the Church’s
evangelizing mission. A *culture of encounter* is fostered that helps people to find God through debates and conversations in public opinion and the media. The task of the Church communicator is thus seen as helping to overcome misunderstandings and clear away obstacles to the catechetical work of Christians.

One of the basic questions in all the seminars is how to foster a public dialogue on the faith that is attractive and creative, while also being faithful to the perennial message of the Gospel. This dialogue requires going beyond the “institutional” aspects of the Church and stressing the key elements of the Christian faith.

The most recent Pontiffs have been an effective guide in this regard, and therefore stress is placed on lessons that can be learned from Pope Francis, Benedict XVI, Saint John Paul II and their predecessors. This year, for example, one of the speakers spoke about “guidelines from Pope Francis” on how Christians should be present in the social networks. He cited the Pope’s words: “Access to digital networks entails a responsibility for our neighbor whom we do not see but who is nonetheless real and has a dignity which must be respected.” Another suggestion of Pope Francis is that we need “to choose our words with care” when communicating on the internet; and that, in the social media, “we can and we must judge situations of sin—such as violence, corruption and exploitation—but we may not judge individuals, since only God can see into the depths of their hearts” (*Message for Fiftieth World Communications Day*, January 24, 2016).

Speakers often include well-known figures from the academic and professional worlds, from both civil and ecclesiastical entities. For example, specialists have spoken about topics such as brand management, entrepreneurship, media training, publicity, the use of television, and storytelling, with valuable lessons for every communicator, including a Church spokesperson. Each year there are also plenary sessions with well-known speakers from the ecclesiastical milieu. The first seminar, for example, featured Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, from Paris, who died not long afterwards in 2007.

In 2014, the opening session was presented by Cardinal Timothy Dolan. He passed on seven lessons he had learned in his interactions with
journalists since being named archbishop of New York. One of these was the importance of professionalism: “Church communicators,” he said, “should make our own the best and highest professional standards.” The video of his presentation can be found on the YouTube channel of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

In the most recent seminar, Joaquin Navarro-Valls was the featured speaker. He spoke about the 22 years he spent alongside St. John Paul II as spokesman and director of the Vatican press office. At the end he presented a list of valuable experiences for those working in Church communications. These included the importance of “having access to and being in close harmony with the one who is governing,” as well as dedicating a lot of attention to the content of messages, since “what one wants to get across to others is the core of all communication.”

In 2016 special recognition was given to Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, who presided for more than a decade over the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, and to Father Federico Lombardi, former director of Vatican Radio and spokesman for Pope Benedict XVI and for Pope Francis until 2016. They were given a statuette of St. Catherine of Siena, Patroness of the School of Church Communications, in gratitude for the assistance they have provided the seminar over the years.

Archbishop Chelli challenged everyone to have the “daring and clarity needed to transmit the beauty of our Christian identity... the daring to make Christ’s face known through all the media, so that others will grasp that beauty.”

On his part, Fr. Lombardi stressed that the task of communicating the faith, serving those who seek to spread the Gospel, is a privilege, because it means imbuing with “a positive message a world filled with worries and problems.” A Church communicator, he said, “speaks all day about the most beautiful and important realities, such as faith, peace, justice, the development of the human person.... Therefore we have a vocation and a marvelous service to carry out” that helps strengthen the “service that the Church is providing to all humanity.”

Fr. Lombardi spoke about some of his most vivid experiences alongside Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, and shared some key advice for
communicators. The first and most obvious rule is never to fail to speak truthfully. “While maintaining proper reserve and discretion, we can never say what is false.” Only “if we are in the service of the truth can we enter into relationship and dialogue with others.” This talk of Father Lombardi is also available on the University’s YouTube channel.

*Giving priority to projects and initiatives that inspire others*

Much of the seminar involves parallel activities. Each participant can thus choose the activity that he or she finds most interesting.

For example, in the most recent seminar a session on the experiences of *Catholic Voices* coincided with a session on how to take advantage of beatification and canonization ceremonies to communicate a message. In the first, Jack Valero, Austen Ivereigh and other international coordinators of this initiative imparted a special session on media training, while in the second session, the recent beatifications of Archbishop Oscar Romero in San Salvador and that of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo in Madrid were analyzed.

Besides the main presentations, panel discussions were also offered on topics of special interest today, including the family, marriage, the beginning and end of life, immigration, etc. There were also other working groups in which journalists, Church communicators, and academicians shared ideas with one another on various topics: practical experiences on the management of communications during the Pope’s trips, means of confronting certain crises, use of “big data” in the work of an office of Church communications, etc. An opportunity is also offered for the sharing of experiences by those attending.

*Communication open to all*

St. Josemaría Escrivá insisted that spreading the Christian message is never *anti-anything nor anti-anybody*. He followed St. Paul’s advice: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (*Rom* 12:21), which he paraphrased as “drowning evil in an abundance of good” (see *Furrow*, no. 864; *The Forge*, no. 848). This intuition of the saint who inspired the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross was one of the keys to the positive tone given to this professional seminar in its first twenty years.
The focus is always on positive experiences in communicating the Christian message. As the spokesman for one Italian diocese said, in explaining why he keeps coming back to this seminar every two years: “Coming to this seminar helps me to plan my work for the upcoming year in a positive way, and not limit myself to simply reacting to what others do or say.”

Thus positive experiences in one country can serve as an example for those from other countries, with the needed cultural adjustments. For example, a session was given by Tom Peterson, founder and president of Catholics Come Home, an organization that runs campaigns directed to those thinking about returning to the Church.

In a session several years back, Tugdual Derville, president of a well-known French pro-life association, explained the communication keys of La tournée Bioéthique. This movement, started by lay people but assisted by authorities in the Catholic Church, among others, has fostered a significant cultural change in the country and has brought into focus in the public sphere fundamental human values, doing so in a joyful and attractive way.

Rafael Medeiros, from Brazil, shared with those present the experiences of Project Comunicação Aberta, which makes available to the media Catholics with adequate preparation to speak about significant events, such as a trip of the Pope, a canonization, or an important Vatican document. He gave as an example the encyclical Laudato Si’, which gained solid and widespread media coverage. The experts provided appeared in the principal newspapers and television programs in the country.

A spokeswoman for the English bishops’ conference, Margaret Doherty, explained the communications approach taken for the day the Church dedicated to members of religious orders. The testimony of a young nun who spoke about her vocation to the contemplative life was made available to the national television stations. It had great communicative impact and generated a broad public conversation about the beauty of the Christian faith and the meaning of life. A commemorative day that seemed destined to go unnoticed gained national relevance, simply by offering an attractive and readily available testimony.
In a past seminar, two producers from Chicago projected and explained the reasons that had led them to produce the video *The Catholic Priest Today*. The film was shown on television in quite a few countries and provided a widespread catechesis on the priesthood. Patricia Ryan and other promoters of the website www.foryourmarriage.org and the campaign *What Have You Done For Your Marriage Today?* spoke about this service sponsored by the Bishops Conference of the United States. It seeks to encourage married people, through publicity campaigns and other means, to carry out small daily actions that strengthen their married life: preparing morning coffee, smiling at one's spouse more frequently, providing small household services, sending an affectionate message, etc.

Experiences of this kind are very abundant: informative actions that have worked well, successful videos on some aspect of Christian life, courses of formation for religious communicators, initiatives for evangelization through art, formative experiences on the social networks, and many more.

After each seminar, a volume is published that gathers together the principal presentations and a selection of the communications. Ten of these volumes have already been published, and provide a wealth of useful experiences for those beginning to work in this area.

*A Visit with the Chancellor*

At the end of the conference, Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei and Chancellor of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, met with all those who wished. He personally greeted a number of the people there and addressed some word to everyone.

“The Gospel is the communication of God’s happiness,” said the Prelate of @opusdei in #churchcom16.” This was one of the tweets sent out by the account of @iMission, a Catholic organization that fosters the presence of Catholic content on the web. The religious who founded it were at the conference and spread some of its content via their official Twitter account.

Chesterton wrote that “joy is the gigantic secret of the Christian” (G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*). A similar idea was the *leitmotiv* of Bishop
Echevarría’s words in this tenth edition of the seminar: “May you be women and men filled with joy,” he told them, “communicators of the *gaudium cum pace*, the joy with peace that God came to bring to the world.”

Bishop Echevarría noted that the last two documents of Pope Francis allude to joy in their titles: *Evangelii gaudium* and *Amoris laetitia*. And he added: “A happy face is already fifty percent of the success for communication; a sad face spoils everything.”

At another moment he said: “Let us try to be people who communicate positively. If we ever encounter misunderstanding, that is no reason for us to become sad and defensive. In the face of a person who does not understand us or who shows an aggressive attitude, we should react by showing that we love them and that, between them and us, there is not even a wall as thin as a sheet of silk paper. On the contrary, for us they are and always will be souls that God has placed on our path so that we can help them and so that we can learn from them.”

The Prelate of Opus Dei pointed to the true sources of joy: “Be enthused about the Gospel. Live the Gospel. Live that conversation that God wanted to have with his sons and daughters. Read it and live it every day. Don’t be satisfied with knowing it superficially.”

And he helped them to consider something that every Christian experiences in the work of evangelization: “Christ began the Redemption in a small corner of the world. So it makes no sense to think: what importance does what I am doing have? A lot of importance, a lot. What Christ came to carry out on earth is being repeated. From a tiny corner of the world, he was already redeeming. Therefore don’t fail to see the importance of your ordinary life. Fill it with joy, with supernatural meaning, and with communicating God’s truth.

*Reasons for thanksgiving*

The tenth edition of the seminar also featured the presentation of a special University medal to Ronnie Convery, director of communications for the Archdiocese of Glasgow, Scotland, as the most faithful attendee. He has participated in all ten of the seminars. On receiving his award, he took the microphone and joked that he didn’t need medals to continue coming back, because he considered this conference an indispensable
appointment for nourishing his professional work in his diocese: “My suggestion today,” he said, “is that you make it an annual event, since two years without seeing each other is too long a time.”

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.

In Brief

Italy -- Referees for Harambee

On March 19 and 20, the referees for the first division games in the Italian soccer league wore—in the warm-ups for each game—a tee shirt with the name *Harambee* on it to support the projects which this association, born in connection with the canonization of St. Josemaría,
fosters in various African countries. Since October 2002, Harambee has collaborated in 59 initiatives by various organizations operating in Africa to improve the conditions of life for many people. Among those currently underway, most notable are the project to assist missionary hospitals in two regions of Kenya, the Wale health center in the Ivory Coast, several schools for young children in Sierra Leon, Cameroon, and Botswana, and a training center for future business people in Mvimwa, Tanzania.

Valencia, Spain -- Almudi Theology Dialogues

The 18th annual “Almudi Theology Dialogues” was held at the beginning of May, on the topic of “The Eucharist and Reconciliation in the Holy Year of Mercy.” The inaugural presentation was given by Juan José Silvestre, Liturgy professor at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. The conference was concluded by Bishop José María Yanguas, who spoke about “Pastoral Aspects of the Sacrament of Mercy.” The sessions took place at the San Vicente Ferrer School of Theology, in Valencia.

São Paulo, Brazil -- Pastoral Care and Mercy

For the opening of the Holy Year of Mercy, twenty-five seminarians from six dioceses of the State of São Paulo gathered at the Ibiúna Cultural Center to reflect more deeply on pastoral care and mercy and forgiveness in the light of the Papal Bull Misericordiae Vultus.

The working sessions were supervised by Rev. José Eduardo de Oliveira, a professor of Moral Theology in the São Bento School of São Paulo, Rev. Francisco Faus and other priests.
Frequent reference was made to the teachings of St. Josemaría on mercy, forgiveness and the sacrament of joy.

The symposium was accompanied by a photographic exposition on the encyclical, put together by the students of the photography class at the Taular Institute of Technology, who had sent this material to Pope Francis a few days earlier.

Torreciudad, Spain -- Science, Religion, and the Environment

Scientists and religious leaders from 15 countries and 8 religions participated in the “International Seminar on Science and Religion Cooperating for Environmental Care,” which was held at the shrine of Torreciudad. The seminar reflected on the role of science and religion in caring for the environment. The point of departure for the dialogue was the concept of “ecological conversion” in the encyclical *Laudato si’*.

Pope Francis sent a message saying that he hoped this encounter would help to “further scientific and interreligious dialogue on care for our common home” and foster “joint efforts to promote greater solidarity for the good of each and every human being.”

In the course of the presentations, Archbishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, president of the Pontifical Academy of Science, stressed that care for the environment “is a point of encounter not only for interreligious dialogue, but also for the common work of the different religions.”

Peter H. Raven, an international expert in botany from the University of Washington, said that “science explains to us the problems the environment faces, but the ethical visions of the major religious traditions can guide our efforts to create a sustainable world living in peace.”

The director of the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, Hillary Marlow, stressed that “science alone is unable to solve the environmental
problem since this has to be approached from the perspective of values that the major religions have spoken about for many centuries.”

Other religious leaders taking in the event were Professor Wael Farouq, president of the Tawasul Islamic Cultural Center for Intercivilizational Dialogue; Rabbi Yonatan Neril of Jerusalem, founder and director of the Interreligious Center for Sustainable Development; the Buddhist monk Tsunma Karma Chimney Lhatso; the Hindu Swamini Umananda; the Bulgarian Orthodox Archdeacon Petar Gramatikov; and the Procurator General of the Cistercian Order, Father Lluc Torcal. Participants included people from Hinduism, Buddhism, Shiite Islam, Judaism, and Orthodox, Lutheran, Anglican and Catholic Christians.

Upon finishing the conference, organized by the Tatiana Pérez de Guzmán el Bueno Foundation and the Social Promotion of Culture Foundation, a declaration was signed for the protection of the environment.

The choice of Torreciudad as the sight for the seminar was in part due to the natural beauty of the setting. None of the participants had previously visited the shrine and they all praised the harmony between the surrounding environment and the architecture, and the care taken to preserve the natural setting.

Madrid -- 50th Anniversary of Retamar School

The Retamar School recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Under the impulse of St. Josemaría, the educational center opened in October 1966. On the occasion of this anniversary, forty former students, now priests, concelebrated with Archbishop Carlos Osoro of Madrid, at a Mass in which the sacrament of Confirmation was also administered to a group of students.

From its beginnings, the school’s Christian inspiration has been shown in activities of solidarity, carried out by teachers and students: helping in
soup kitchens, visits to the aged, sick and needy, etc. Over the last ten years volunteer work camps have been organized in various countries of Africa, as well as in the Holy Land, Russia, and many other places.

Two especially memorable events during these past fifty years were the visit of St. Josemaría on October 28, 1972, and that of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, on November 24, 1993.

Tegucigalpa, Honduras -- Symposium on the Encyclical Laudato si’

On June 2nd, the Academic Committee of the Guaymura University Center organized a symposium on the Encyclical *Laudato si’,* on the occasion of the first anniversary of its publication and the celebration of the 35th anniversary of this university center. Presentations were given by Gracia de Villeda, a lawyer and university professor, and a member of the Honduran delegation for the International Summit Conference on Women at Beijing; Leonardo Casco Fortin, a Honduran lawyer and entrepreneur; Christian Wing, a philosopher and businessman; and Luis Zelaya, an engineer and rector of the Central American Technical University (UNITEC) in Honduras.

The speakers commented on various aspects of the encyclical from the perspective of their specialization. The event was closed by Archbishop Novatus Rugambwa, apostolic nuncio in Honduras.

Rome -- Study Week for Seminary Formation Personnel

From February 1 to 5, the fourth study week for seminary formation personnel was held, organized by the Center for Priestly Formation at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. The theme this year was “Spiritual
Formation for Candidates to the Priesthood.” The study week coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Conciliar decree Optatum Totius, dedicated to the formation of priests. Topics dealt with included the role of the spiritual director in the seminary, educating for communion and for spiritual paternity, and the relationship between psychology and the spiritual life. Archbishop Jorge Patrón Wong, secretary for seminaries of the Congregation for the Clergy, gave the opening address. Others taking part included Bishop José María Yanguas of Cuenca, Spain; Bishop Arturo Aiello of Teano-Calvi, Italy; Bishop Stefano Manetti of Montepulciano-Chiusi-Pienza, Italy; and Bishop Francesco Marino of Avellino, Italy.

Enxomil, Portugal -- Pastoral Conferences for Priests

On April 4, the 20th yearly Pastoral Conference for Priests was held at the Enxomil Conference Center, on the topic “God’s Mercy and Conversion.”

Those taking part included Bishop Antonio Couto of Lamego, who spoke about mercy in Sacred Scripture, and Sister Angela Coelho, postulator for the canonization cause of the little shepherds of Fatima, who highlighted the call to conversion in the message from the apparitions, in the context of the Year of Mercy. Presiding over the sessions was the Regional Vicar of the Prelature in Portugal.

Brasilia, Brazil -- A Solidarity Adventure

More than thirty university women from Brasilia took part in the Solidarity Adventure project, a work camp in Urucuíia organized by the Lajedo Cultural Center during the vacation period.
From January 10 to 17, the students put into operation educational activities for over 100 children in the city. The students of medicine, dentistry, and nutrition, coordinated by a medical professional, examined children and adults to detect basic health problems, by carrying out a series of heart, lung, ear-nose-and-throat, and eye examinations. Mothers in the neighborhood received classes with practical ideas on how to improve nutritional health in their homes. Upon completing the project the volunteers provided health officials with a detailed analysis of the local situation.

Santiago, Chile -- Archbishop Ricardo Ezzati Visits El Salto

Archbishop Ricardo Ezzatti of Santiago, Chile, visited the El Salto Polyclinic, the first corporative work of Opus Dei in the country, located in the Recoleta district. The Archbishop walked through its departments, and had a get together with the students, doctors and other personnel at the center, whom he thanked for the service they provide and the warm welcome they give to patients.

El Salto was begun in 1961, through the efforts of Fr. Adolfo Rodriguez Vidal, whose cause of canonization was recently begun. It began as a small dispensary and over time has become an initiative aimed at helping families and a medical center, which offers medical attention to the people living in the district.
IN PACE
Suffrages for the Deceased

In the first half of 2016, 446 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—and the ordinary circumstances of their lives 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 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

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The title of this study connects the mercy of God with the history of Opus Dei. As will become clear below, these two realities were intertwined in the thought and foundational experience of St. Josemaría. The words cited in the title above—"the mercy of God inspired his Work"—are taken from one of his letters.[1] The Holy Year of Mercy, convoked by Pope Francis, offers us a good opportunity to go deeper into this link.

The fact that St. Josemaría had a strong devotion right from his youth to God’s Merciful Love is well known. “About the Merciful Love,” he wrote in the early 30s, “I will say that it is a devotion that steals my soul.”[2] As we have shown elsewhere, the manifestations of this devotion evolved throughout his life, but the theme of Mercy was always present, and even grew stronger towards the end of his days on earth.[3] Thus, for example, he said in 1972: “I recently discovered more deeply God’s mercy, two or three years ago. Understand what I’m trying to say: the deep riches of his mercy that I need so that our Lord does not take into account so many of my lacks of docility to his grace and so many mistakes.”[4]

The purpose of these pages is not to look at St. Josemaría’s devotion to Merciful Love, nor to study the theme of God’s mercy in his teachings. What I am trying to do now (as the explanation of the title makes clear) is to go more deeply into the relationship between God’s mercy and the very existence and life of Opus Dei, as presented to us in the thought of its founder.

This relationship is studied in various texts in which St. Josemaría carries out a theological reading of the history of the institution he began and its projection into the future: “I see the Work projected through the centuries,” he often said.[5] A reading of those texts shows clearly that for
St. Josemaría: 1. the history of Opus Dei is the history of the mercies of God; and 2. Opus Dei is a manifestation of God’s mercy towards humanity. These two ideas—interconnected, but distinct—form the structure of the following considerations. Naturally, these reflections are situated within St. Josemaría’s understanding of Opus Dei as a part of the Church. As Pope Francis wrote, “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life.”[6]

1. The history of Opus Dei is the history of God’s mercies

St. Josemaría, when speaking to his spiritual children, used to express himself in these terms: “I have always said—and it’s the pure truth—that the history of Opus Dei will have to be written kneeling down, because it is the history of God’s mercies.”[7] And he used similar expressions on various occasions, both in speaking and in writing.[8]

To give these expressions the right context, first of all we need to take into account that for St. Josemaría the whole history of mankind is the domain in which God’s mercy unfolds. “In his letter to the Galatians—a hymn to the riches of the faith—Saint Paul tells us that Christians should live with the freedom Christ has won for us (see Gal 4:3). This was the message of Jesus to the first Christians, and it will continue being the same throughout the centuries: an announcement of liberation from misery and anguish. History is not subject to blind forces nor is it the result of chance; it is the expression of the mercies of God the Father. The thoughts of God are far above our thoughts, says Scripture (see Is 55:8; Rom 11:33). Therefore to trust in God means to have faith in spite of everything, going beyond the appearances of things. The charity of God, who loves us eternally, lies behind each event, even though at times it may be difficult for us to appreciate it.”[9]

In accord with what Saint Thomas Aquinas taught and as Pope Francis recently reiterated, St. Josemaría saw God’s mercy as the greatest expression of divine omnipotence.[10] We should also keep in mind that the founder of Opus Dei attributed omnipotence primarily to God the Father and Creator, as the result of his own personal and deeply sensed experience of divine filiation.
God’s merciful omnipotence not only tolerates, but requires the existence of real freedom on the part of men and women—a freedom that, in the case of the saints, reaches its fullness through a determined struggle to identify themselves with God’s will. With these ideas in place, we can now focus on our main concern: the link between God’s mercy and the history of Opus Dei.

“I always say—and it’s the pure truth—that the history of Opus Dei will have to be written kneeling down, because it is the history of God’s mercies. This is made especially clear in my own life: our Lord has done everything. I am fifty years old and am still full of defects. In the Work, God has done everything. 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.”[11]

The words cited above make clear that, for St. Josemaría, the statement that “the history of Opus Dei is the history of God’s mercies” has two principal implications: that God’s mercy is displayed, first of all, in his own biography; and secondly, that it is shown in the development of Opus Dei. Two closely related but distinguishable realities.

The founder of Opus Dei pointed to the action of God’s mercy in his own life by stressing the way in which God used him as an instrument (“God has done everything”), moving him around as a child plays with a lead soldier. In the following text, St. Josemaría shows the clear disproportion between the instrument and the Work, between his personal situation and the mission entrusted to him. “God continues to work his mercies and to carry out the history of his mirabilia (see Ps76:15), his wonderful deeds. And he continues to set his eyes on inadequate instruments, who feel the same holy fear and suffer before the Holy Spirit’s action, which is like a spur of hardened steel. For God, as divine Teacher, guides souls that have no teacher to this extreme: Go down, if you want to go up; lose, if you want to win; suffer, if you want to rejoice; die, if you want to live, says the Spanish mystic.”[12]
St. Josemaría also saw clearly that the principal manifestation of God’s mercy in his life had not been choosing him as an instrument to carry out God’s works. Rather, this had been preceded by an even greater manifestation of his mercy that strengthened his freedom, and prevented any purely instrumental perception of his collaboration with God’s will. For St. Josemaría, the great manifestation of God’s mercy in his life was teaching him how to love: “My children, with contrition comes Love. None of these efforts, no sorrow has made me lose gaudium cum pace, because God has taught me to love, and nullo enim modo sunt onerosi labores amantium (St. Augustine, De bono viduitatis, 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 amatur, aut non laboratur, aut et labor amatur (St. Augustine, 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.”[13]

The close tie between freedom and identification with God’s will in St. Josemaría’s life is highlighted by Cardinal Ratzinger in an article entitled “Letting God Work,” written on the occasion of his canonization. “I have always been struck by the interpretation that Josemaría Escrivá gave of the name Opus Dei—an interpretation that we could call biographical and that allows us to understand the founder in his spiritual dimension. Escrivá knew that he should found something, but he was always aware that it was not his work, that he had not invented anything, that the Lord had simply made use of him. Thus it was not his work, but the Work of God. He was only an instrument through which God had acted.”[14]

Guided by these words of Cardinal Ratzinger, we now turn to the second expression of God’s mercy that St. Josemaría saw in his life: the origin and development of Opus Dei. Some words of his, written on the seventh anniversary of the foundation of the Work, are quite relevant here: “Since that October 2 of 1928, how many mercies from our Lord! Today I cried a lot. Now, when everything is going very well, is when I find myself weak, without strength. How clearly I see that everything has been done, and is done, by you, my God!”[15]
Many texts of St. Josemaría make reference to the mercies of God that mark the history of Opus Dei. Two of these can serve as an example. One is taken from his preaching: “The memory of the great mercies of God that mark the history of our Work.”[16] The other is taken from his writings: “I want to open my heart to you, on this feast of the apostle to the Gentiles, so that you will be filled with gratitude on considering how God has been leading us along this new path he has provided in Opus Dei. The whole history of the Work is a history of God’s mercies. Neither in this letter, 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.”[17]

Therefore it is impossible to try to list all the moments when St. Josemaría discovered God’s mercy in carrying out his foundational mission, given the limits of these pages. But we can focus here on two facets of Opus Dei’s history: its consolidation and expansion, and the misunderstandings that sometimes arose. Paradoxically, St. Josemaría often united these two dimensions in the history of Opus Dei precisely within the framework of mercy.

Here are two relevant texts. Once again, we begin by choosing one from his preaching: “And now I could continue speaking about so many things: about the mercies of God, because these forty-seven years have been a history of the mercies of our Lord. How much work, how much expansion, how many souls all over the world! Jesus has scattered the seed, pressing it in his bleeding hands, and we have gone with dishonor, with defamations, with calumnies, and with affection: because we have never lacked the affection of good people in every place. For the part that involves you, I thank you; my brothers and sons: thank you, thank you very much.”[18] And another quote from his writings: “Then, from time to time, small waves of mud have been directed at us. The mercy of God, who lovingly cares for his Work, has permitted these campaigns of defamation in order to fill us with fruitfulness. How much good they have done us! Thus the Work and its spirit and apostolic methods—all its teachings—have been, not roughly sketched out, but sculpted in stone.”[19]

For St. Josemaría, all of this meant that the history of Opus Dei should be written and read “kneeling down.” Once more, both his writings as well
as his preaching offer us examples of this expression. The first that we are going to cite alludes to the moment when that history would come to be written. “With these Letters that I am writing you, I am not trying to record the internal history of the Work, which will be written when the time comes, and which—as I have sometimes said—will have to be done on one’s knees, since it is the history of God’s mercies. But what I want to do is to explain some points of a juridical and theological nature, and make some observations connected with our history that you should find useful.”[20] The second quote, along the same lines, dates from his last years on earth: “Those who write the internal history of the Work will have to do it on their knees, because it is the history of God’s mercies.”[21] The third speaks rather about the reading of that history, as he himself has told it as the founder: “Some things I have had to write down, because my confessor ordered me to; others, I have written down in conscience, and here is everything that was asked of me. Read them without curiosity, but kneeling down, because it is the history of God’s mercies: the internal history of the Work is incredible! It is impossible, it is having brought about an impossibility. Now everything seems easy. An impossibility!”[22]

It cannot have passed unnoticed to the reader, in the three texts we have just presented, that the founder of Opus Dei, when referring to the history of Opus Dei, uses the expression “the internal history of the Work.” I think it is relevant for our topic to try to understand the meaning that St. Josemaría gave to that expression. I will limit myself to offering an interpretation that, certainly, has to be considered provisional.

One might think that for St. Josemaría, the “internal history of the Work” is identified with the authentic history of Opus Dei, which in turn is identified with what God “has done.” We can recall here the words “God has done everything” and similar expressions in the above texts. St. Josemaría was a privileged witness (in the strict sense we could even say the only witness) of that “internal history of the Work,” which he himself lived and then transmitted to Opus Dei, in passing on what is habitually called the charism or spirit of Opus Dei. That is to say, the “internal history of the Work” would be the process of decantation or filtration that the founder carried out throughout his life, to give form to and incarnate with fidelity in institutions, norms and customs, apostolic methods and styles of
life, the light that he received on October 2, 1928 and on later occasions. The mercy of God had shown itself in making use of an “inept and deaf” instrument, as he sometimes defined himself, to carry out his Work. God “writes with the leg of a table,” or “writes straight with crooked lines,” are expressions the founder often used that can be applied in this context. The “internal history of the Work” would, in short, be the history of God’s action in St. Josemaría and, through him, in the setting up of Opus Dei.

From another perspective, one might say that the “internal history of the Work” is distinguished in the mind of its founder from what we might call, in academic language, a “history of Opus Dei” that includes the consequences of the purely human actions of those involved, with their limitations, errors and infidelities. That is, what cannot be included in “God has done everything,” or in other words, the weakness and even the infidelity of those involved, and not as transformed by divine mercy and converted into an instrument of that mercy. Obviously, to attain this “internal” perspective a theological reading of events is required, which is that which St. Josemaría carried out. A “simply” historical approach would not be sufficient. At the same time, we need to point out that we are speaking of two distinct, but not conflicting histories of a single supernatural and human reality. To use an analogy, we could think of a Church historian who needs to integrate into his narrative both the sanctity that comes from what “God provides” for his Church through the fidelity of the saints—through every Christian’s holiness—as well as the limits that Christians also introduce through their imperfections and unfaithfulness. In the end, to speak about writing a history of Opus Dei, in the academic sense of the expression, is to speak about writing a history of the Church, with all its possibilities and limits.[23]

In any case, independently of the question raised, I think that the texts cited in the preceding pages clearly show the depth with which St. Josemaría considered the origin and maturing of Opus Dei as a “history of God’s mercies.” A mercy that was shown in his own life, in his mission as founder, in the growth of Opus Dei, in the features of its spirit, in its consolidation and extension, and even in the misunderstandings that accompanied this growth.
At the same time, we need to add that St. Josemaría’s considerations on the relationship between Opus Dei and the mercy of God are not limited to this dimension, which we might call the history of the development of Opus Dei. In St. Josemaría’s mind, Opus Dei, which was born and matured through the mercy of God, becomes in turn and inseparably an instrument to make this same mercy present in the world, among men and women. Let us now turn to this point.

2. Opus Dei as an instrument of God’s mercy in the history of mankind

The texts cited above allow us to intuit that for St. Josemaría God’s mercy was not expressed only in the great gifts that marked the history of Opus Dei from its beginning and in its development: “how God has been leading us along this new path he has provided in Opus Dei.” For St. Josemaría, the mercy of God is also shown, and even more strongly, when Opus Dei is seen in the Church, fulfilling the mission in the world that God has entrusted to it. As we saw above, God’s mercy, which reaches its pinnacle in the redemption, is a manifestation of divine power even greater than the original creation. The nothingness that is man in his condition as a sinner becomes an instrument of redemption (see 1 Cor 1:27-28).

Moreover, for the founder of Opus Dei, God’s mercy is shown not only in the possibility of becoming an instrument of redemption, but also in the call to carry out that mission, precisely in the middle of the world. We will provide context for this view by citing two texts from St. Josemaría.

In the first, St. Josemaría directs himself specifically to the faithful of Opus Dei, to remind them that they should recognize the greatness of God’s gifts and strive to share them with others, while respecting each person’s freedom. “Each day, my dear children, should witness our eagerness to fulfill the divine mission that, by his mercy, God has entrusted to us. God’s heart is a heart of mercy, which has compassion on mankind and comes close to them. Our self-giving in the service of souls is a manifestation of this mercy of God, not only towards us, but towards all mankind. For he has called us to struggle for sanctity in ordinary, daily life; and to teach others—providentes, non coacte, sed spontanee secundum Deum (1 Pt 5:2), prudently, without coercion, spontaneously, in accord
with God’s will—the path for each one to attain sanctity in their state, in the middle of the world.”[24]

In the second text, St. Josemaría speaks of “us Christians,” stressing the idea that the members of Opus Dei are “ordinary Christians,” sharing in the mission of the baptized to sanctify the world from within. “God wants it to be us Christians—because we have the supernatural responsibility of cooperating with God’s power, since he has disposed it thus in his infinite mercy—who strive to reestablish the broken order and return to temporal structures, in all nations, their natural function as an instrument for mankind’s progress, and their supernatural function as a means for reaching God, for the Redemption. Venit enim Filius hominis (and we have to follow in our Lord’s footsteps) salvare quod perierat (Mt 18:11). Jesus came to save all mankind. Being Himself the life, the truth, and the way (see Jn 14:6), he wanted to teach the way, the truth and the life to all men, in every age.”[25]

St. Josemaría also discovered God’s mercy in other features of the spirit of Opus Dei. Thus for example, in what we might call the “style” of formation in the Work, which carries out its formative activities in a fraternal and family context: “Jesus goes in search of the lost sheep with a word of affection and consolation, with a clear indication of your directors, with the affection of your brothers, with a correction filled with supernatural and human meaning, with a reading that moves us…”[26] Also in the way that spirit harmonizes the divine and the human: “You have to be very grateful to God, because he has given us this spirituality that is so sincerely and simply supernatural, and at the same time so human, so close to our noble earthly endeavors. It is a very special grace—a light from God, as I said—that we have received through his mercy, and that we have to pass on to many other souls with humble fidelity.”[27]

We can end with a reference to confession, the sacrament of God’s mercy, par excellence. The sacrament of Reconciliation holds a prominent place in St. Josemaría’s preaching. Mercy is here the expression of the love of a Father who loves his children infinitely and always forgives them when they go to him with humility (expressed in contrition). Both the spirit and the pastoral work of Opus Dei are imbued with this conviction. St. John Paul II on various occasions referred to the charism of confession that he
saw in Opus Dei: “The upcoming canonization of Pope John Paul II reminds me,” wrote Bishop Echevarría in April 2014, “of how frequently this holy Pontiff remarked that the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei have received the ‘charism’ of Confession: a special grace from God to bring many souls to this tribunal of mercy and of forgiveness, and thus to help them recover their Christian joy.”[28]

The writings of St. Josemaría that mention this feature of the spirit and the pastoral practice of Opus Dei are quite numerous. We will offer here only one, directed to a group of faithful of Opus Dei who were preparing to receive priestly ordination. “You are going to be ordained, my sons, to administer the sacraments and to preach the Word of God. Especially the sacrament of Penance has to be for you a ‘dominant passion.’ You have to dedicate many hours to administering it in the confessional, through auricular confession, urged on in your charity by the merciful love of Jesus, thus reproducing in yourselves the divine image of the Good Shepherd, who looks for the sheep one by one.”[29]

In summary, for St. Josemaría Opus Dei will be an instrument of God’s mercy towards mankind, in the measure that its faithful welcome the mercy of God and pass on with “humble fidelity,” through their own lives, what they have received.

Conclusion

Our reflections on the writings of St. Josemaría regarding the history of Opus Dei show that he discovered divine mercy not only in his own life, but also in the birth and expansion of the Work. God’s mercy and the existence of Opus Dei in the Church are closely intertwined in the thought of its founder, giving us the key to correctly grasp its history.

The history of Opus Dei is seen as the history of God’s mercies and Opus Dei as an instrument of divine mercy in the history of mankind. The link between God’s mercy and the history of Opus Dei—and analogically, the history of the Church—can be summed up in the following way. On the personal level, the greatest expression God’s mercy is that he loves us and teaches us to love. The fact that the faithful of Opus Dei—and every Christian—have become an instrument of co-redemption, in spite of their personal limitations, is also a manifestation of his mercy, as is the reality of
being called to carry out this mission in the middle of the world. To be a son or daughter of the Church and to receive the specification of Christian life that is the call to Opus Dei, is to receive God’s mercy, and, at the same time, to become an instrument to spread mercy in the world.

The mercy of God is, therefore, not only an important dimension in the spiritual experience of St. Josemaría, but a reality that is presented in his thought as the raison d’être of Opus Dei as a whole and, ultimately, of the Church herself.


[7] Notes from a meditation, April 11, 1952, in AGP, series A.


[22] Notes from a family get-together, June 1, 1974, in AGP, series A.4.

[23] I have had occasion to deal with this question, with the collaboration of José Luis González Gullón, although from a different perspective, in “Escribir la historia del Opus Dei: Algunas consideraciones historiográficas,” in Luis Martínez Ferrer (Ed.), Venti secoli di storiografia ecclesiastica: Bilancio e prospettive, Edusc, Rome, 2010, pp. 413-425.


[27] Letter (March 11, 1940), no. 17, in AGP, series A.3, 91-6-2.
