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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Jesus Comes To Meet Us

In Pope Francis’ letter announcing the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, the Pontiff evoked the encounter of the first disciples with our Lord. “I would also remind you of the words that Jesus once said to the disciples who asked Him: ‘Teacher ... where are you staying?’ He replied, ‘Come and see’ (Jn 1:38) Jesus looks at you and invites you to go with Him,” Pope Francis wrote. “Dear young people, have you noticed this look towards you? Have you heard this voice? Have you felt this urge to undertake this journey? I am sure that, despite the noise and confusion seemingly prevalent in the world, this call continues to resonate in the depths of your heart so as to open it to joy in its fullness.” It will be possible to respond to it, the Pope concludes, “to the extent that, through the accompaniment of expert guides,” each one learns how “to undertake a journey of discernment to discover God’s plan in your life.”

Meeting Christ is the decisive experience for any Christian. As Benedict XVI said forcefully in Deus caritas est: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a Person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (no. 1). It is very revealing that Pope Francis has also wanted to remind us of this right from the beginning of his pontificate: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day” (Evangelii gaudium, no. 3).

In a letter that Pope Francis addressed to university students taking part in the 50th edition of the UNIV congress, he invited them to follow our Lord “with joy,” and “to love God and neighbor with an unconditional love.” And he continued: “This advice from Saint Josemaria will be of great help to you: ‘May you seek Christ. May you find Christ. May you love Christ’ (The Way, 382). Strive to strengthen each day your friendship with Christ, asking yourselves frequently: ‘What would Jesus do in my place? What can I do to become more and more like Him and bring Him to others?’ Seek Him in prayer,” the Pope continued, “in the sacraments, in all the circumstances of your life and also in the people around you: in your
friends, family members, fellow students, and in the most needy and forgotten of the world, in whom Christ’s face is reflected in an especially clear way. I invite you to get out of yourselves, overcoming comfort-seeking and the selfishness of thinking only about your own concerns, in order to set out on the path of encountering those in need, and serving them with your talents. This is the best way of following Christ and keeping your heart always enkindled with love for Him.”

Our Lord is moved by young and generous hearts. Saint Josemaría all his life remembered his personal and unexpected encounter with Jesus. He was a teenager, with his heart overflowing with dreams and ideals. After a night of heavy snow that covered the streets of his hometown with a thick white blanket, he left home early in the morning. He was surprised to find a trail in the snow left by the feet of a discalced friar. He followed the tracks and saw a friar who was returning to his friary. This chance encounter left a deep impression on his heart. “If others can make so many sacrifices for God and neighbor,” he told himself, “can’t I offer Him something?”

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The Roman Pontiff

The Holy Father’s Letter to the young people of UNIV on the 50th Anniversary of this University Gathering (March 16, 2018)

To the young people of UNIV

The Vatican, March 16, 2018

Dear Young People:

On the fiftieth anniversary of this university encounter organized by the Prelature of Opus Dei, you once again are coming to the Eternal City moved by love for God, the Church, and the Pope. Thus you have a beautiful opportunity to draw closer to Christ during Holy Week and to strengthen your faith and your commitment, along with other young people from diverse cultures and backgrounds, spurred on by the same desire for happiness, fulfillment and generous self-giving.

Your gathering is taking place during the year when the Synod on “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment” will be held. I encourage you to prepare to take part in this ecclesial event. You will be helped to do so by turning your eyes to John, the young disciple whom Jesus loved and to whom he entrusted Mary as our Mother. He will teach you to recognize Jesus who is passing by in your life and to follow Him with the impetus and joy that “fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus” (Evangelii gaudium, 1).

Yes, our Lord is inviting all of us to follow Him with joy and to love God and neighbor with an unconditional love. This advice from Saint Josemaría will be of great help to you: “May you seek Christ. May you find Christ. May you love Christ” (The Way, 382). Strive to strengthen each day your friendship with Christ, asking yourselves frequently: “What would Jesus do in my place? What can I do to become more and more like Him and bring Him to others?” Seek Him in prayer, in the sacraments, in all the circumstances of your life and also in the people around you: in your friends, family members, fellow students, and in the most needy and
forgotten of the world, in whom Christ’s face is reflected in an especially clear way. I invite you to get out of yourselves, overcoming comfort-seeking and the selfishness of thinking only about your own concerns, in order to set out on the path of encountering those in need and serving them with your talents. This is the best way of following Christ and keeping your heart always enkindled with love for Him.

I am praying for you, and for your hopes and endeavors, so that you may always sense the love of our Lord, who called us to a life of self-giving and service.

I also ask that you don’t forget to pray for me. May Jesus bless you and our Lady watch over you.

Cordially,

Francis

The Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exaltate on The Call to Sanctity In Today’s World (March 19, 2018)

1. “Rejoice and be glad” (Mt 5:12), Jesus tells those persecuted or humiliated for his sake. The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence. The call to holiness is present in various ways from the very first pages of the Bible. We see it expressed in the Lord’s words to Abraham: “Walk before me, and be blameless” (Gen 17:1).

2. What follows is not meant to be a treatise on holiness, containing definitions and distinctions helpful for understanding this important subject, or a discussion of the various means of sanctification. My modest goal is to repropose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities. For the Lord has chosen each one of us “to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph 1:4).
CHAPTER ONE

THE CALL TO HOLINESS

The Saints Who Encourage and Accompany Us

3. The Letter to the Hebrews presents a number of testimonies that encourage us to “run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (12:1). It speaks of Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Gideon and others (cf. 11:1-12:3). Above all, it invites us to realize that “a great cloud of witnesses” (12:1) impels us to advance constantly towards the goal. These witnesses may include our own mothers, grandmothers or other loved ones (cf. 2 Tim 1:5). Their lives may not always have been perfect, yet even amid their faults and failings they kept moving forward and proved pleasing to the Lord.

4. The saints now in God’s presence preserve their bonds of love and communion with us. The Book of Revelation attests to this when it speaks of the intercession of the martyrs: “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, ‘O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge?’” (6:9-10). Each of us can say: “Surrounded, led and guided by the friends of God… I do not have to carry alone what, in truth, I could never carry alone. All the saints of God are there to protect me, to sustain me and to carry me.” [1]

5. The processes of beatification and canonization recognize the signs of heroic virtue, the sacrifice of one’s life in martyrdom, and certain cases where a life is constantly offered for others, even until death. This shows an exemplary imitation of Christ, one worthy of the admiration of the faithful. [2] We can think, for example, of Blessed Maria Gabriella Sagheddu, who offered her life for the unity of Christians.

The Saints Next Door

6. Nor need we think only of those already beatified and canonized. The Holy Spirit bestows holiness in abundance among God’s holy and faithful people, for “it has pleased God to make men and women holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather as a people who might acknowledge him in truth and serve him in
holiness.” [3] In salvation history, the Lord saved one people. We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people. That is why no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual. Rather, God draws us to himself, taking into account the complex fabric of interpersonal relationships present in a human community. God wanted to enter into the life and history of a people.

7. I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God’s people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbors, those who, living in our midst, reflect God’s presence. We might call them “the middle class of holiness.” [4]

8. Let us be spurred on by the signs of holiness that the Lord shows us through the humblest members of that people which “shares also in Christ’s prophetic office, spreading abroad a living witness to him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity.” [5] We should consider the fact that, as Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross suggests, real history is made by so many of them. As she writes: “The greatest figures of prophecy and sanctity step forth out of the darkest night. But for the most part, the formative stream of the mystical life remains invisible. Certainly the most decisive turning points in world history are substantially co-determined by souls whom no history book ever mentions. And we will only find out about those souls to whom we owe the decisive turning points in our personal lives on the day when all that is hidden is revealed.” [6]

9. Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church. But even outside the Catholic Church and in very different contexts, the Holy Spirit raises up “signs of his presence which help Christ’s followers.” [7] Saint John Paul II reminded us that “the witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants.” [8] In the moving ecumenical commemoration held in the Colosseum during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, he stated that the martyrs are “a heritage which speaks more powerfully than all the causes of division.” [9]
The Lord Calls

10. All this is important. Yet with this Exhortation I would like to insist primarily on the call to holiness that the Lord addresses to each of us, the call that he also addresses, personally, to you: “Be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44; cf. 1 Pet 1:16). The Second Vatican Council stated this clearly: “Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord —each in his or her own way— to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect.” [10]

11. “Each in his or her own way” the Council says. We should not grow discouraged before examples of holiness that appear unattainable. There are some testimonies that may prove helpful and inspiring, but that we are not meant to copy, for that could even lead us astray from the one specific path that the Lord has in mind for us. The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts (cf. 1 Cor 12:7), rather than hopelessly trying to imitate something not meant for them. We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness.[11] Indeed, when the great mystic, Saint John of the Cross, wrote his Spiritual Canticle, he preferred to avoid hard and fast rules for all. He explained that his verses were composed so that everyone could benefit from them “in his or her own way.”[12] For God’s life is communicated “to some in one way and to others in another.”[13]

12. Within these various forms, I would stress too that the “genius of woman” is seen in feminine styles of holiness, which are an essential means of reflecting God’s holiness in this world. Indeed, in times when women tended to be most ignored or overlooked, the Holy Spirit raised up saints whose attractiveness produced new spiritual vigor and important reforms in the Church. We can mention Saint Hildegard of Bingen, Saint Bridget, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. But I think too of all those unknown or forgotten women who, each in her own way, sustained and transformed families and communities by the power of their witness.
13. This should excite and encourage us to give our all and to embrace that unique plan that God willed for each of us from eternity: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (Jer 1:5).

For You Too

14. To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by laboring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain.[14]

15. Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness. Let everything be open to God; turn to him in every situation. Do not be dismayed, for the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life (cf. Gal 5:22-23). When you feel the temptation to dwell on your own weakness, raise your eyes to Christ crucified and say: “Lord, I am a poor sinner, but you can work the miracle of making me a little bit better.” In the Church, holy yet made up of sinners, you will find everything you need to grow towards holiness. The Lord has bestowed on the Church the gifts of scripture, the sacraments, holy places, living communities, the witness of the saints and a multifaceted beauty that proceeds from God’s love, “like a bride bedecked with jewels” (Is 61:10).

16. This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures. Here is an example: a woman goes shopping, she meets a neighbor and they begin to speak, and the gossip starts. But she says in her heart: “No, I will not speak badly of anyone.” This is a step forward in holiness. Later, at home, one of her children wants to talk to her about his
hopes and dreams, and even though she is tired, she sits down and listens with patience and love. That is another sacrifice that brings holiness. Later she experiences some anxiety, but recalling the love of the Virgin Mary, she takes her rosary and prays with faith. Yet another path of holiness. Later still, she goes out onto the street, encounters a poor person and stops to say a kind word to him. One more step.

17. At times, life presents great challenges. Through them, the Lord calls us anew to a conversion that can make his grace more evident in our lives, “in order that we may share his holiness” (Heb 12:10). At other times, we need only find a more perfect way of doing what we are already doing: “There are inspirations that tend solely to perfect in an extraordinary way the ordinary things we do in life.” When Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyên van Thuân was imprisoned, he refused to waste time waiting for the day he would be set free. Instead, he chose “to live the present moment, filling it to the brim with love.” He decided: “I will seize the occasions that present themselves every day; I will accomplish ordinary actions in an extraordinary way.”

18. In this way, led by God’s grace, we shape by many small gestures the holiness God has willed for us, not as men and women sufficient unto ourselves but rather “as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet 4:10). The New Zealand bishops rightly teach us that we are capable of loving with the Lord’s unconditional love, because the risen Lord shares his powerful life with our fragile lives: “His love set no limits and, once given, was never taken back. It was unconditional and remained faithful. To love like that is not easy because we are often so weak. But just to try to love as Christ loved us shows that Christ shares his own risen life with us. In this way, our lives demonstrate his power at work – even in the midst of human weakness.”

Your Mission In Christ

19. A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness, for “this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess 4:3). Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel.
20. That mission has its fullest meaning in Christ, and can only be understood through him. At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord’s death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him. But it can also entail reproducing in our own lives various aspects of Jesus’ earthly life: his hidden life, his life in community, his closeness to the outcast, his poverty and other ways in which he showed his self-sacrificing love. The contemplation of these mysteries, as Saint Ignatius of Loyola pointed out, leads us to incarnate them in our choices and attitudes.[18] Because “everything in Jesus’ life was a sign of his mystery.[19] “Christ’s whole life is a revelation of the Father.” [20] “Christ’s whole life is a mystery of redemption.”[21] “Christ’s whole life is a mystery of recapitulation,”[22] “Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us.”[23]

21. The Father’s plan is Christ, and ourselves in him. In the end, it is Christ who loves in us, for “holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full.”[24] As a result, “the measure of our holiness stems from the stature that Christ achieves in us, to the extent that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole life on his.”[25] Every saint is a message which the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people.

22. To recognize the word that the Lord wishes to speak to us through one of his saints, we do not need to get caught up in details, for there we might also encounter mistakes and failures. Not everything a saint says is completely faithful to the Gospel; not everything he or she does is authentic or perfect. What we need to contemplate is the totality of their life, their entire journey of growth in holiness, the reflection of Jesus Christ that emerges when we grasp their overall meaning as a person.[26]

23. This is a powerful summons to all of us. You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission. Try to do so by listening to God in prayer and recognizing the signs that he gives you. Always ask the Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received. Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today’s world.
24. May you come to realize what that word is, the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be transformed. Let yourself be renewed by the Spirit, so that this can happen, lest you fail in your precious mission. The Lord will bring it to fulfillment despite your mistakes and missteps, provided that you do not abandon the path of love but remain ever open to his supernatural grace, which purifies and enlightens.

Activity that Sanctifies

25. Just as you cannot understand Christ apart from the kingdom he came to bring, so too your personal mission is inseparable from the building of that kingdom: “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Mt 6:33). Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace. Christ himself wants to experience this with you, in all the efforts and sacrifices that it entails, but also in all the joy and enrichment it brings. You cannot grow in holiness without committing yourself, body and soul, to giving your best to this endeavor.

26. It is not healthy to love silence while fleeing interaction with others, to want peace and quiet while avoiding activity, to seek prayer while disdaining service. Everything can be accepted and integrated into our life in this world, and become a part of our path to holiness. We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission.

27. Could the Holy Spirit urge us to carry out a mission and then ask us to abandon it, or not fully engage in it, so as to preserve our inner peace? Yet there are times when we are tempted to relegate pastoral engagement or commitment in the world to second place, as if these were “distractions” along the path to growth in holiness and interior peace. We can forget that “life does not have a mission, but is a mission.”[27]

28. Needless to say, anything done out of anxiety, pride or the need to impress others will not lead to holiness. We are challenged to show our commitment in such a way that everything we do has evangelical meaning and identifies us all the more with Jesus Christ. We often speak, for example, of the spirituality of the catechist, the spirituality of the diocesan
priesthood, the spirituality of work. For the same reason, in *Evangelii Gaudium* I concluded by speaking of a spirituality of mission, in *Laudato Si’* of an ecological spirituality, and in *Amoris Laetitia* of a spirituality of family life.

29. This does not mean ignoring the need for moments of quiet, solitude and silence before God. Quite the contrary. The presence of constantly new gadgets, the excitement of travel and an endless array of consumer goods at times leave no room for God’s voice to be heard. We are overwhelmed by words, by superficial pleasures and by an increasing din, filled not by joy but rather by the discontent of those whose lives have lost meaning. How can we fail to realize the need to stop this rat race and to recover the personal space needed to carry on a heartfelt dialogue with God? Finding that space may prove painful but it is always fruitful. Sooner or later, we have to face our true selves and let the Lord enter. This may not happen unless “we see ourselves staring into the abyss of a frightful temptation, or have the dizzying sensation of standing on the precipice of utter despair, or find ourselves completely alone and abandoned.” [28] In such situations, we find the deepest motivation for living fully our commitment to our work.

30. The same distractions that are omnipresent in today’s world also make us tend to absolutize our free time, so that we can give ourselves over completely to the devices that provide us with entertainment or ephemeral pleasures. [29] As a result, we come to resent our mission, our commitment grows slack, and our generous and ready spirit of service begins to flag. This denatures our spiritual experience. Can any spiritual fervor be sound when it dwells alongside sloth in evangelization or in service to others?

31. We need a spirit of holiness capable of filling both our solitude and our service, our personal life and our evangelizing efforts, so that every moment can be an expression of self-sacrificing love in the Lord’s eyes. In this way, every minute of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness.

*More Alive, More Human*

32. Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in
mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self. To depend on God sets us free from every form of enslavement and leads us to recognize our great dignity. We see this in Saint Josephine Bakhita: “Abducted and sold into slavery at the tender age of seven, she suffered much at the hands of cruel masters. But she came to understand the profound truth that God, and not man, is the true Master of every human being, of every human life. This experience became a source of great wisdom for this humble daughter of Africa.”[30]

33. To the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world. The bishops of West Africa have observed that “we are being called in the spirit of the New Evangelization to be evangelized and to evangelize through the empowering of all you, the baptized, to take up your roles as salt of the earth and light of the world wherever you find yourselves.”[31]

34. Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace. For in the words of León Bloy, when all is said and done, “the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.”[32]

CHAPTER TWO
TWO SUBTLE ENEMIES OF HOLINESS

35. Here I would like to mention two false forms of holiness that can lead us astray: gnosticism and pelagianism. They are two heresies from early Christian times, yet they continue to plague us. In our times too, many Christians, perhaps without realizing it, can be seduced by these deceptive ideas, which reflect an anthropocentric immanentism disguised as Catholic truth.[33] Let us take a look at these two forms of doctrinal or disciplinary security that give rise “toa narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others.”[34]

*Contemporary Gnosticism*
36. Gnosticism presumes “a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings.”[35]

An Intellect Without God and Without Flesh

37. Thanks be to God, throughout the history of the Church it has always been clear that a person’s perfection is measured not by the information or knowledge they possess, but by the depth of their charity. “Gnostics” do not understand this, because they judge others based on their ability to understand the complexity of certain doctrines. They think of the intellect as separate from the flesh, and thus become incapable of touching Christ’s suffering flesh in others, locked up as they are in an encyclopedia of abstractions. In the end, by disembodying the mystery, they prefer “a God without Christ, a Christ without the Church, a Church without her people.” [36]

38. Certainly this is a superficial conceit: there is much movement on the surface, but the mind is neither deeply moved nor affected. Still, gnosticism exercises a deceptive attraction for some people, since the gnostic approach is strict and allegedly pure, and can appear to possess a certain harmony or order that encompasses everything.

39. Here we have to be careful. I am not referring to a rationalism inimical to Christian faith. It can be present within the Church, both among the laity in parishes and teachers of philosophy and theology in centers of formation. Gnostics think that their explanations can make the entirety of the faith and the Gospel perfectly comprehensible. They absolutize their own theories and force others to submit to their way of thinking. A healthy and humble use of reason in order to reflect on the theological and moral teaching of the Gospel is one thing. It is another to reduce Jesus’ teaching to a cold and harsh logic that seeks to dominate everything. [37]

A Doctrine without Mystery

40. Gnosticism is one of the most sinister ideologies because, while unduly exalting knowledge or a specific experience, it considers its own vision of reality to be perfect. Thus, perhaps without even realizing it, this
ideology feeds on itself and becomes even more myopic. It can become all the more illusory when it masks itself as a disembodied spirituality. For gnosticism “by its very nature seeks to domesticate the mystery,” whether the mystery of God and his grace, or the mystery of others’ lives.

41. When somebody has an answer for every question, it is a sign that they are not on the right road. They may well be false prophets, who use religion for their own purposes, to promote their own psychological or intellectual theories. God infinitely transcends us; he is full of surprises. We are not the ones to determine when and how we will encounter him; the exact times and places of that encounter are not up to us. Someone who wants everything to be clear and sure presumes to control God’s transcendence.

42. Nor can we claim to say where God is not, because God is mysteriously present in the life of every person, in a way that he himself chooses, and we cannot exclude this by our presumed certainties. Even when some- one’s life appears completely wrecked, even when we see it devastated by vices or addictions, God is present there. If we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit rather than our own preconceptions, we can and must try to find the Lord in every human life. This is part of the mystery that a gnostic mentality cannot accept, since it is beyond its control.

The Limits of Reason

43. It is not easy to grasp the truth that we have received from the Lord. And it is even more difficult to express it. So we cannot claim that our way of understanding this truth authorizes us to exercise a strict supervision over others’ lives. Here I would note that in the Church there legitimately coexist different ways of interpreting many aspects of doctrine and Christian life; in their variety, they “help to express more clearly the immense riches of God’s word.” It is true that “for those who long for a monolithic body of doctrine guarded by all and leaving no room for nuance, this might appear as undesirable and leading to confusion.” Indeed, some currents of gnosticism scorned the concrete simplicity of the Gospel and attempted to replace the trinitarian and incarnate God with a superior Unity, wherein the rich diversity of our history disappeared.
44. In effect, doctrine, or better, our understanding and expression of it, “is not a closed system, devoid of the dynamic capacity to pose questions, doubts, inquiries... The questions of our people, their suffering, their struggles, their dreams, their trials and their worries, all possess an interpretational value that we cannot ignore if we want to take the principle of the incarnation seriously. Their wondering helps us to wonder, their questions question us” [40]

45. A dangerous confusion can arise. We can think that because we know something, or are able to explain it in certain terms, we are already saints, perfect and better than the “ignorant masses.” Saint John Paul II warned of the temptation on the part of those in the Church who are more highly educated “to feel somehow superior to other members of the faithful.” [41] In point of fact, what we think we know should always motivate us to respond more fully to God’s love. Indeed, “you learn so as to live: theology and holiness are inseparable.” [42]

46. When Saint Francis of Assisi saw that some of his disciples were engaged in teaching, he wanted to avoid the temptation to gnosticism. He wrote to Saint Anthony of Padua: “I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to the brothers, provided that... you do not extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion during study of this kind.” [43] Francis recognized the temptation to turn the Christian experience into a set of intellectual exercises that distance us from the freshness of the Gospel. Saint Bonaventure, on the other hand, pointed out that true Christian wisdom can never be separated from mercy towards our neighbor: “The greatest possible wisdom is to share fruitfully what we have to give... Even as mercy is the companion of wisdom, avarice is its enemy.” [44] “There are activities that, united to contemplation, do not prevent the latter, but rather facilitate it, such as works of mercy and devotion.” [45]

Contemporary Pelagianism

47. Gnosticism gave way to another heresy, likewise present in our day. As time passed, many came to realize that it is not knowledge that betters us or makes us saints, but the kind of life we lead. But this subtly led back to the old error of the gnostics, which was simply transformed rather than eliminated.
48. The same power that the gnostics attributed to the intellect, others now began to attribute to the human will, to personal effort. This was the case with the pelagians and semi-pelagians. Now it was not intelligence that took the place of mystery and grace, but our human will. It was forgotten that everything “depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy” (Rom 9:16) and that “he first loved us” (cf. 1 Jn 4:19).

A Will Lacking Humility

49. Those who yield to this pelagian or semi-pelagian mindset, even though they speak warmly of God’s grace, “ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style.” When some of them tell the weak that all things can be accomplished with God’s grace, deep down they tend to give the idea that all things are possible by the human will, as if it were something pure, perfect, all-powerful, to which grace is then added. They fail to realize that “not everyone can do everything,” and that in this life human weaknesses are not healed completely and once for all by grace. In every case, as Saint Augustine taught, God commands you to do what you can and to ask for what you cannot, and indeed to pray to him humbly: “Grant what you command, and command what you will.”

50. Ultimately, the lack of a heartfelt and prayerful acknowledgment of our limitations prevents grace from working more effectively within us, for no room is left for bringing about the potential good that is part of a sincere and genuine journey of growth. Grace, precisely because it builds on nature, does not make us superhuman all at once. That kind of thinking would show too much confidence in our own abilities. Underneath our orthodoxy, our attitudes might not correspond to our talk about the need for grace, and in specific situations we can end up putting little trust in it. Unless we can acknowledge our concrete and limited situation, we will not be able to see the real and possible steps that the Lord demands of us at every moment, once we are attracted and empowered by his gift. Grace acts in history; ordinarily it takes hold of us and transforms us progressively. If we reject this historical and progressive reality, we can actually refuse and block grace, even as we extol it by our words.
51. When God speaks to Abraham, he tells him: “I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be blameless” (Gen 17:1). In order to be blameless, as he would have us, we need to live humbly in his presence, cloaked in his glory; we need to walk in union with him, recognizing his constant love in our lives. We need to lose our fear before that presence which can only be for our good. God is the Father who gave us life and loves us greatly. Once we accept him, and stop trying to live our lives without him, the anguish of loneliness will disappear (cf. Ps 139:23-24). In this way we will know the pleasing and perfect will of the Lord (cf. Rom 12:1-2) and allow him to mold us like a potter (cf. Is 29:16). So often we say that God dwells in us, but it is better to say that we dwell in him, that he enables us to dwell in his light and love. He is our temple; we ask to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life (cf. Ps 27:4). “For one day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere” (Ps 84:10). In him is our holiness.

An Often Overlooked Church Teaching

52. The Church has repeatedly taught that we are justified not by our own works or efforts, but by the grace of the Lord, who always takes the initiative. The Fathers of the Church, even before Saint Augustine, clearly expressed this fundamental belief. Saint John Chrysostom said that God pours into us the very source of all his gifts even before we enter into battle. Saint Basil the Great remarked that the faithful glory in God alone, for “they realize that they lack true justice and are justified only through faith in Christ.”

53. The Second Synod of Orange taught with firm authority that nothing human can demand, merit or buy the gift of divine grace, and that all cooperation with it is a prior gift of that same grace: “Even the desire to be cleansed comes about in us through the outpouring and working of the Holy Spirit.” Subsequently, the Council of Trent, while emphasizing the importance of our cooperation for spiritual growth, reaffirmed that dogmatic teaching: “We are said to be justified gratuitously because nothing that precedes justification, neither faith nor works, merits the grace of justification; for 'if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise, grace would no longer be grace’ (Rom 11:6).”
54. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also reminds us that the gift of grace “surpasses the power of human intellect and will” and that “with regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man. Between God and us there is an immeasurable inequality.” His friendship infinitely transcends us; we cannot buy it with our works, it can only be a gift born of his loving initiative. This invites us to live in joyful gratitude for this completely unmerited gift, since “after one has grace, the grace already possessed cannot come under merit.” The saints avoided putting trust in their own works: “In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you empty-handed, for I do not ask you, Lord, to count my works. All our justices have stains in your sight.”

55. This is one of the great convictions that the Church has come firmly to hold. It is so clearly expressed in the word of God that there can be no question of it. Like the supreme commandment of love, this truth should affect the way we live, for it flows from the heart of the Gospel and demands that we not only accept it intellectually but also make it a source of contagious joy. Yet we cannot celebrate this free gift of the Lord’s friendship unless we realize that our earthly life and our natural abilities are his gift. We need “to acknowledge jubilantly that our life is essentially a gift, and recognize that our freedom is a grace. This is not easy today, in a world that thinks it can keep something for itself, the fruits of its own creativity or freedom.”

56. Only on the basis of God’s gift, freely accepted and humbly received, can we cooperate by our own efforts in our progressive transformation. We must first belong to God, offering ourselves to him who was there first, and entrusting to him our abilities, our efforts, our struggle against evil and our creativity, so that his free gift may grow and develop within us: “I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom 12:1). For that matter, the Church has always taught that charity alone makes growth in the life of grace possible, for “if I do not have love, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13:2).

New Pelagians
57. Still, some Christians insist on taking another path, that of justification by their own efforts, the worship of the human will and their own abilities. The result is a self-centered and elitist complacency, bereft of true love. This finds expression in a variety of apparently unconnected ways of thinking and acting: an obsession with the law, an absorption with social and political advantages, a punctilious concern for the Church’s liturgy, doctrine and prestige, a vanity about the ability to manage practical matters, and an excessive concern with programs of self-help and personal fulfillment. Some Christians spend their time and energy on these things, rather than letting themselves be led by the Spirit in the way of love, rather than being passionate about communicating the beauty and the joy of the Gospel and seeking out the lost among the immense crowds that thirst for Christ. [63]

58. Not infrequently, contrary to the promptings of the Spirit, the life of the Church can become a museum piece or the possession of a select few. This can occur when some groups of Christians give excessive importance to certain rules, customs or ways of acting. The Gospel then tends to be reduced and constricted, deprived of its simplicity, allure and savor. This may well be a subtle form of pelagianism, for it appears to subject the life of grace to certain human structures. It can affect groups, movements and communities, and it explains why so often they begin with an intense life in the Spirit, only to end up fossilized… or corrupt.

59. Once we believe that everything depends on human effort as channeled by ecclesial rules and structures, we unconsciously complicate the Gospel and become enslaved to a blueprint that leaves few openings for the working of grace. Saint Thomas Aquinas reminded us that the precepts added to the Gospel by the Church should be imposed with moderation “lest the conduct of the faithful become burdensome,” for then our religion would become a form of servitude. [64]

The Summation of The Law

60. To avoid this, we do well to keep reminding ourselves that there is a hierarchy of virtues that bids us seek what is essential. The primacy belongs to the theological virtues, which have God as their object and motive. At the center is charity. Saint Paul says that what truly counts is
"faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). We are called to make every effort to preserve charity: “The one who loves another has fulfilled the law... for love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom 13:8.10). “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal 5:14).

61. In other words, amid the thicket of precepts and prescriptions, Jesus clears a way to seeing two faces, that of the Father and that of our brother. He does not give us two more formulas or two more commands. He gives us two faces, or better yet, one alone: the face of God reflected in so many other faces. For in every one of our brothers and sisters, especially the least, the most vulnerable, the defenseless and those in need, God’s very image is found. Indeed, with the scraps of this frail humanity, the Lord will shape his final work of art. For “what endures, what has value in life, what riches do not disappear? Surely these two: the Lord and our neighbor. These two riches do not disappear!”[65]

62. May the Lord set the Church free from these new forms of gnosticism and pelagianism that weigh her down and block her progress along the path to holiness! These aberrations take various shapes, according to the temperament and character of each person. So I encourage everyone to reflect and discern before God whether they may be present in their lives.

CHAPTER THREE

IN THE LIGHT OF THE MASTER

63. There can be any number of theories about what constitutes holiness, with various explanations and distinctions. Such reflection may be useful, but nothing is more enlightening than turning to Jesus’ words and seeing his way of teaching the truth. Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23). The Beatitudes are like a Christian’s identity card. So if anyone asks: “What must one do to be a good Christian?” the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount. [66] In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives.

64. The word “happy” or “blessed” thus becomes a synonym for “holy.”
It expresses the fact that those faithful to God and his word, by their self-giving, gain true happiness.

**Going Against The Flow**

65. Although Jesus’ words may strike us as poetic, they clearly run counter to the way things are usually done in our world. Even if we find Jesus’ message attractive, the world pushes us towards another way of living. The Beatitudes are in no way trite or undemanding, quite the opposite. We can only practice them if the Holy Spirit fills us with his power and frees us from our weakness, our selfishness, our complacency and our pride.

66. Let us listen once more to Jesus, with all the love and respect that the Master deserves. Let us allow his words to unsettle us, to challenge us and to demand a real change in the way we live. Otherwise, holiness will remain no more than an empty word. We turn now to the individual Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew (cf. Mt 5:3-12).

“**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**”

67. The Gospel invites us to peer into the depths of our heart, to see where we find our security in life. Usually the rich feel secure in their wealth, and think that, if that wealth is threatened, the whole meaning of their earthly life can collapse. Jesus himself tells us this in the parable of the rich fool: he speaks of a man who was sure of himself, yet foolish, for it did not dawn on him that he might die that very day (cf. Lk 12:16-21).

68. Wealth ensures nothing. Indeed, once we think we are rich, we can become so self-satisfied that we leave no room for God’s word, for the love of our brothers and sisters, or for the enjoyment of the most important things in life. In this way, we miss out on the greatest treasure of all. That is why Jesus calls blessed those who are poor in spirit, those who have a poor heart, for there the Lord can enter with his perennial newness.

69. This spiritual poverty is closely linked to what Saint Ignatius of Loyola calls “holy indifference,” which brings us to a radiant interior freedom: “We need to train ourselves to be indifferent in our attitude to all created things, in all that is permitted to our free will and not forbidden; so that on our part, we do not set our hearts on good health rather than bad,
riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one, and so in all the rest.” [68]

70. Luke does not speak of poverty “of spirit” but simply of those who are “poor” (cf. Lk 6:20). In this way, he too invites us to live a plain and austere life. He calls us to share in the life of those most in need, the life lived by the Apostles, and ultimately to configure ourselves to Jesus who, though rich, “made himself poor” (2 Cor 8:9).

Being poor of heart: that is holiness.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”  

71. These are strong words in a world that from the beginning has been a place of conflict, disputes and enmity on all sides, where we constantly pigeonhole others on the basis of their ideas, their customs and even their way of speaking or dressing. Ultimately, it is the reign of pride and vanity, where each person thinks he or she has the right to dominate others. Nonetheless, impossible as it may seem, Jesus proposes a different way of doing things: the way of meekness. This is what we see him doing with his disciples. It is what we contemplate on his entrance to Jerusalem: “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey” (Mt 21:5; Zech 9:9).

72. Christ says: “Learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:29). If we are constantly upset and impatient with others, we will end up drained and weary. But if we regard the faults and limitations of others with tenderness and meekness, without an air of superiority, we can actually help them and stop wasting our energy on useless complaining. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux tells us that “perfect charity consists in putting up with others’ mistakes, and not being scandalized by their faults.” [69]

73. Paul speaks of meekness as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:23). He suggests that, if a wrongful action of one of our brothers or sisters troubles us, we should try to correct them, but “with a spirit of meekness,” since “you too could be tempted” (Gal 6:1). Even when we defend our faith and convictions, we are to do so “with meekness” (cf. 1 Pet 3:16). Our enemies too are to be treated “with meekness” (2 Tim 2:25). In the Church we have often erred by not embracing this demand of God’s
74. Meekness is yet another expression of the interior poverty of those who put their trust in God alone. Indeed, in the Bible the same word – *anawim* – usually refers both to the poor and to the meek. Someone might object: “If I am that meek, they will think that I am an idiot, a fool or a weakling.” At times they may, but so be it. It is always better to be meek, for then our deepest desires will be fulfilled. The meek “shall inherit the earth,” for they will see God’s promises accomplished in their lives. In every situation, the meek put their hope in the Lord, and those who hope for him shall possess the land… and enjoy the fullness of peace (cf. *Ps 37*:9.11). For his part, the Lord trusts in them: “This is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word” (*Is 66*:2).

Reacting with meekness and humility: that is holiness.

“*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted*”

75. The world tells us exactly the opposite: entertainment, pleasure, diversion and escape make for the good life. The worldly person ignores problems of sickness or sorrow in the family or all around him; he averts his gaze. The world has no desire to mourn; it would rather disregard painful situations, cover them up or hide them. Much energy is expended on fleeing from situations of suffering in the belief that reality can be concealed. But the cross can never be absent.

76. A person who sees things as they truly are and sympathizes with pain and sorrow is capable of touching life’s depths and finding authentic happiness. He or she is consoled, not by the world but by Jesus. Such persons are not afraid to share in the suffering of others; they do not flee from painful situations. They discover the meaning of life by coming to the aid of those who suffer, understanding their anguish and bringing relief. They sense that the other is flesh of our flesh, and are not afraid to draw near, even to touch their wounds. They feel compassion for others in such a way that all distance vanishes. In this way they can embrace Saint Paul’s exhortation: “Weep with those who weep” (*Rom 12*:15).

Knowing how to mourn with others: that is holiness.
“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”

77. Hunger and thirst are intense experiences, since they involve basic needs and our instinct for survival. There are those who desire justice and yearn for righteousness with similar intensity. Jesus says that they will be satisfied, for sooner or later justice will come. We can cooperate to make that possible, even if we may not always see the fruit of our efforts.

78. Jesus offers a justice other than that of the world, so often marred by petty interests and manipulated in various ways. Experience shows how easy it is to become mired in corruption, ensnared in the daily politics of *quid pro quo*, where everything becomes business. How many people suffer injustice, standing by powerlessly while others divvy up the good things of this life. Some give up fighting for real justice and opt to follow in the train of the winners. This has nothing to do with the hunger and thirst for justice that Jesus praises.

79. True justice comes about in people’s lives when they themselves are just in their decisions; it is expressed in their pursuit of justice for the poor and the weak. While it is true that the word “justice” can be a synonym for faithfulness to God’s will in every aspect of our life, if we give the word too general a meaning, we forget that it is shown especially in justice towards those who are most vulnerable: “Seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Is 1:17).

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness: that is holiness.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy”

80. Mercy has two aspects. It involves giving, helping and serving others, but it also includes forgiveness and understanding. Matthew sums it up in one golden rule: “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you” (7:12). The Catechism reminds us that this law is to be applied “in every case,” especially when we are “confronted by situations that make moral judgments less assured and decision difficult.”

81. Giving and forgiving means reproducing in our lives some small measure of God’s perfection, which gives and forgives superabundantly. For this reason, in the Gospel of Luke we do not hear the words, “Be
“perfect” (Mt 5:48), but rather, “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you” (6:36-38). Luke then adds something not to be overlooked: “The measure you give will be the measure you get back” (6:38). The yardstick we use for understanding and forgiving others will measure the forgiveness we receive. The yardstick we use for giving will measure what we receive. We should never forget this.

82. Jesus does not say, “Blessed are those who plot revenge.” He calls “blessed” those who forgive and do so “seventy times seven” (Mt 18:22). We need to think of ourselves as an army of the forgiven. All of us have been looked upon with divine compassion. If we approach the Lord with sincerity and listen carefully, there may well be times when we hear his reproach: “Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” (Mt 18:33).

Seeing and acting with mercy: that is holiness.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God”

83. This Beatitude speaks of those whose hearts are simple, pure and undefiled, for a heart capable of love admits nothing that might harm, weaken or endanger that love. The Bible uses the heart to describe our real intentions, the things we truly seek and desire, apart from all appearances. “Man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart” (1Sam 16:7). God wants to speak to our hearts (cf. Hos 2:16); there he desires to write his law (cf. Jer 31:33). In a word, he wants to give us a new heart (cf. Ezek 36:26).

84. “Guard your heart with all vigilance” (Prov 4:23). Nothing stained by falsehood has any real worth in the Lord’s eyes. He “flees from deceit, and rises and departs from foolish thoughts” (Wis 1:5). The Father, “who sees in secret” (Mt 6:6), recognizes what is impure and insincere, mere display or appearance, as does the Son, who knows “what is in man” (cf. Jn 2:25).

85. Certainly there can be no love without works of love, but this Beatitude reminds us that the Lord expects a commitment to our brothers and sisters that comes from the heart. For “if I give away all I have, and if I
deliver my body to be burned, but have no love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor 13:3). In Matthew’s Gospel too, we see that what proceeds from the heart is what defiles a person (cf. 15:18), for from the heart come murder, theft, false witness, and other evil deeds (cf. 15:19). From the heart’s intentions come the desires and the deepest decisions that determine our actions.

86. A heart that loves God and neighbor (cf. Mt 22:36-40), genuinely and not merely in words, is a pure heart; it can see God. In his hymn to charity, Saint Paul says that “now we see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor 13:12), but to the extent that truth and love prevail, we will then be able to see “face to face.” Jesus promises that those who are pure in heart “will see God.”

Keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love: that is holiness.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”

87. This Beatitude makes us think of the many endless situations of war in our world. Yet we ourselves are often a cause of conflict or at least of misunderstanding. For example, I may hear something about someone and I go off and repeat it. I may even embellish it the second time around and keep spreading it… And the more harm it does, the more satisfaction I seem to derive from it. The world of gossip, inhabited by negative and destructive people, does not bring peace. Such people are really the enemies of peace; in no way are they “blessed.”

88. Peacemakers truly “make” peace; they build peace and friendship in society. To those who sow peace Jesus makes this magnificent promise: “They will be called children of God” (Mt 5:9). He told his disciples that, wherever they went, they were to say: “Peace to this house!” (Lk 10:5). The word of God exhorts every believer to work for peace, “along with all who call upon the Lord with a pure heart” (cf. 2 Tim 2:22), for “the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (Jas 3:18). And if there are times in our community when we question what ought to be done, “let us pursue what makes for peace” (Rom 14:19), for unity is preferable to conflict.

89. It is not easy to “make” this evangelical peace, which excludes no one but embraces even those who are a bit odd, troublesome or difficult, demanding, different, beaten down by life or simply uninterested. It is hard
work; it calls for great openness of mind and heart, since it is not about creating “a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority,” [75] or a project “by a few for the few.” [76] Nor can it attempt to ignore or disregard conflict; instead, it must “face conflict head on, resolve it and make it a link in the chain of a new process.” [77] We need to be artisans of peace, for building peace is a craft that demands serenity, creativity, sensitivity and skill.

Sowing peace all around us: that is holiness.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”

90. Jesus himself warns us that the path he proposes goes against the flow, even making us challenge society by the way we live and, as a result, becoming a nuisance. He reminds us how many people have been, and still are, persecuted simply because they struggle for justice, because they take seriously their commitment to God and to others. Unless we wish to sink into an obscure mediocrity, let us not long for an easy life, for “whoever would save his life will lose it” (Mt 16:25).

91. In living the Gospel, we cannot expect that everything will be easy, for the thirst for power and worldly interests often stands in our way. Saint John Paul II noted that “a society is alienated if its forms of social organization, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer this gift of self and to establish this solidarity between people.” [78] In such a society, politics, mass communications and economic, cultural and even religious institutions become so entangled as to become an obstacle to authentic human and social development. As a result, the Beatitudes are not easy to live out; any attempt to do so will be viewed negatively, regarded with suspicion, and met with ridicule.

92. Whatever weariness and pain we may experience in living the commandment of love and following the way of justice, the cross remains the source of our growth and sanctification. We must never forget that when the New Testament tells us that we will have to endure suffering for the Gospel’s sake, it speaks precisely of persecution (cf. Acts 5:41; Phil 1:29; Col 1:24; 2 Tim 1:12; 1 Pet 2:20, 4:14-16; Rev 2:10).
93. Here we are speaking about inevitable persecution, not the kind of persecution we might bring upon ourselves by our mistreatment of others. The saints are not odd and aloof, unbearable because of their vanity, negativity and bitterness. The Apostles of Christ were not like that. The Book of Acts states repeatedly that they enjoyed favor “with all the people” (2:47; cf. 4:21.33; 5:13), even as some authorities harassed and persecuted them (cf. 4:1-3, 5:17-18).

94. Persecutions are not a reality of the past, for today too we experience them, whether by the shedding of blood, as is the case with so many contemporary martyrs, or by more subtle means, by slander and lies. Jesus calls us blessed when people “utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account” (Mt 5:11). At other times, persecution can take the form of gibes that try to caricature our faith and make us seem ridiculous.

Accepting daily the path of the Gospel, even though it may cause us problems: that is holiness.

The Great Criterion

95. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel (vv. 31-46), Jesus expands on the Beatitude that calls the merciful blessed. If we seek the holiness pleasing to God’s eyes, this text offers us one clear criterion on which we will be judged. “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (vv. 35-36).

In Fidelity to the Master

96. Holiness, then, is not about swooning in mystic rapture. As Saint John Paul II said: “If we truly start out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified.”[79] The text of Matthew 25:35-36 is “not a simple invitation to charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ.”[80] In this call to recognize him in the poor and the suffering, we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices, which every saint seeks to imitate.
97. Given these uncompromising demands of Jesus, it is my duty to ask Christians to acknowledge and accept them in a spirit of genuine openness, sine glossa. In other words, without any “ifs or buts” that could lessen their force. Our Lord made it very clear that holiness cannot be understood or lived apart from these demands, for mercy is “the beating heart of the Gospel.” [81]

98. If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own, a creature infinitely loved by the Father, an image of God, a brother or sister redeemed by Jesus Christ. That is what it is to be a Christian! Can holiness somehow be understood apart from this lively recognition of the dignity of each human being? [82]

99. For Christians, this involves a constant and healthy unease. Even if helping one person alone could justify all our efforts, it would not be enough. The bishops of Canada made this clear when they noted, for example, that the biblical understanding of the jubilee year was about more than simply performing certain good works. It also meant seeking social change: “For later generations to also be released, clearly the goal had to be the restoration of just social and economic systems, so there could no longer be exclusion.” [83]

Ideologies Striking at the Heart of the Gospel

100. I regret that ideologies lead us at times to two harmful errors. On the one hand, there is the error of those Christians who separate these Gospel demands from their personal relationship with the Lord, from their interior union with him, from openness to his grace. Christianity thus becomes a sort of NGO stripped of the luminous mysticism so evident in the lives of Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Teresa of Calcutta, and many others. For these great saints, mental prayer, the love of God and the reading of the Gospel in no way detracted from their passionate and effective commitment to their neighbors; quite the opposite.
101. The other harmful ideological error is found in those who find suspect the social engagement of others, seeing it as superficial, worldly, secular, materialist, communist or populist. Or they relativize it, as if there are other more important matters, or the only thing that counts is one particular ethical issue or cause that they themselves defend. Our defense of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection. We cannot uphold an ideal of holiness that would ignore injustice in a world where some revel, spend with abandon and live only for the latest consumer goods, even as others look on from afar, living their entire lives in abject poverty.

102. We often hear it said that, with respect to relativism and the flaws of our present world, the situation of migrants, for example, is a lesser issue. Some Catholics consider it a secondary issue compared to the “grave” bioethical questions. That a politician looking for votes might say such a thing is understandable, but not a Christian, for whom the only proper attitude is to stand in the shoes of those brothers and sisters of ours who risk their lives to offer a future to their children. Can we not realize that this is exactly what Jesus demands of us, when he tells us that in welcoming the stranger we welcome him (cf. Mt 25:35)? Saint Benedict did so readily, and though it might have “complicated” the life of his monks, he ordered that all guests who knocked at the monastery door be welcomed “like Christ,” with a gesture of veneration; the poor and pilgrims were to be met with “the greatest care and solicitude.”

103. A similar approach is found in the Old Testament: “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex 22:21). “When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Lev 19:33-34). This is not a notion invented by some Pope, or a momentary fad. In today’s world too, we are
called to follow the path of spiritual wisdom proposed by the prophet Isaiah to show what is pleasing to God. “Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn” (58:7-8).

The Worship Most Acceptable to God

104. We may think that we give glory to God only by our worship and prayer, or simply by following certain ethical norms. It is true that the primacy belongs to our relationship with God, but we cannot forget that the ultimate criterion on which our lives will be judged is what we have done for others. Prayer is most precious, for it nourishes a daily commitment to love. Our worship becomes pleasing to God when we devote ourselves to living generously, and allow God’s gift, granted in prayer, to be shown in our concern for our brothers and sisters.

105. Similarly, the best way to discern if our prayer is authentic is to judge to what extent our life is being transformed in the light of mercy. For “mercy is not only an action of the Father; it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are.” [88] Mercy “is the very foundation of the Church’s life.” [89] In this regard, I would like to reiterate that mercy does not exclude justice and truth; indeed, “we have to say that mercy is the fullness of justice and the most radiant manifestation of God’s truth.” [90] It is “the key to heaven.” [91]

106. Here I think of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who asked which actions of ours are noblest, which external works best show our love for God. Thomas answered unhesitatingly that they are the works of mercy towards our neighbor, [92] even more than our acts of worship: “We worship God by outward sacrifices and gifts, not for his own benefit, but for that of ourselves and our neighbor. For he does not need our sacrifices, but wishes them to be offered to him, in order to stir our devotion and to profit our neighbor. Hence mercy, whereby we supply others’ defects, is a sacrifice more acceptable to him, as conducing more directly to our neighbor’s well-being.” [93]

107. Those who really wish to give glory to God by their lives, who truly long to grow in holiness, are called to be single-minded and tenacious
in their practice of the works of mercy. Saint Teresa of Calcutta clearly realized this: “Yes, I have many human faults and failures... But God bends down and uses us, you and me, to be his love and his compassion in the world; he bears our sins, our troubles and our faults. He depends on us to love the world and to show how much he loves it. If we are too concerned with ourselves, we will have no time left for others.” [94]

108. Hedonism and consumerism can prove our downfall, for when we are obsessed with our own pleasure, we end up being all too concerned about ourselves and our rights, and we feel a desperate need for free time to enjoy ourselves. We will find it hard to feel and show any real concern for those in need, unless we are able to cultivate a certain simplicity of life, resisting the feverish demands of a consumer society, which leave us impoverished and unsatisfied, anxious to have it all now. Similarly, when we allow ourselves to be caught up in superficial information, instant communication and virtual reality, we can waste precious time and become indifferent to the suffering flesh of our brothers and sisters. Yet even amid this whirlwind of activity, the Gospel continues to resound, offering us the promise of a different life, a healthier and happier life.

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109. The powerful witness of the saints is revealed in their lives, shaped by the Beatitudes and the criterion of the final judgement. Jesus’ words are few and straightforward, yet practical and valid for everyone, for Christianity is meant above all to be put into practice. It can also be an object of study and reflection, but only to help us better live the Gospel in our daily lives. I recommend rereading these great biblical texts frequently, referring back to them, praying with them, trying to embody them. They will benefit us; they will make us genuinely happy.

CHAPTER FOUR

SIGNS OF HOLINESS IN TODAY’S WORLD

110. Within the framework of holiness offered by the Beatitudes and Matthew 25:31-46, I would like to mention a few signs or spiritual attitudes that, in my opinion, are necessary if we are to understand the way of life to which the Lord calls us. I will not pause to explain the means of sanctification already known to us: the various methods of prayer, the
inestimable sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, the offering of
personal sacrifices, different forms of devotion, spiritual direction, and
many others as well. Here I will speak only of certain aspects of the call to
holiness that I hope will prove especially meaningful.

111. The signs I wish to highlight are not the sum total of a model of
holiness, but they are five great expressions of love for God and neighbor
that I consider of particular importance in the light of certain dangers and
limitations present in today’s culture. There we see a sense of anxiety,
sometimes violent, that distracts and debilitates; negativity and sullenness;
the self-content bred by consumerism; individualism; and all those forms of
ersatz spirituality —having nothing to do with God— that dominate the
current religious marketplace.

Perseverance, Patience and Meekness

112. The first of these great signs is solid grounding in the God who
loves and sustains us. This source of inner strength enables us to persevere
amid life’s ups and downs, but also to endure hostility, betrayal and failings
on the part of others. “If God is for us, who is against us?” (Rom 8:31): this
is the source of the peace found in the saints. Such inner strength makes it
possible for us, in our fast-paced, noisy and aggressive world, to give a
witness of holiness through patience and constancy in doing good. It is a
sign of the fidelity born of love, for those who put their faith in God (pístis)
can also be faithful to others (pistós). They do not desert others in bad
times; they accompany them in their anxiety and distress, even though
doing so may not bring immediate satisfaction.

113. Saint Paul bade the Romans not to repay evil for evil (cf. Rom
12:17), not to seek revenge (v. 19), and not to be overcome by evil, but
instead to “overcome evil with good” (v. 21). This attitude is not a sign of
weakness but of true strength, because God himself “is slow to anger but
great in power” (Nah 1:3). The word of God exhorts us to “put away all
bitterness and wrath and wrangling and slander, together with all malice”
(Eph 4:31).

114. We need to recognize and combat our aggressive and selfish
inclinations, and not let them take root. “Be angry but do not sin; do not let
the sun go down on your anger” (Eph 4:26). When we feel overwhelmed,
we can always cling to the anchor of prayer, which puts us back in God’s hands and the source of our peace. “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts…” (*Phil 4:6-7*).

115. Christians too can be caught up in networks of verbal violence through the internet and the various forums of digital communication. Even in Catholic media, limits can be overstepped, defamation and slander can become commonplace, and all ethical standards and respect for the good name of others can be abandoned. The result is a dangerous dichotomy, since things can be said there that would be unacceptable in public discourse, and people look to compensate for their own discontent by lashing out at others. It is striking that at times, in claiming to uphold the other commandments, they completely ignore the eighth, which forbids bearing false witness or lying, and ruthlessly vilify others. Here we see how the unguarded tongue, set on fire by hell, sets all things ablaze (cf. *Jas 3:6*).

116. Inner strength, as the work of grace, prevents us from becoming carried away by the violence that is so much a part of life today, because grace defuses vanity and makes possible meekness of heart. The saints do not waste energy complaining about the failings of others; they can hold their tongue before the faults of their brothers and sisters, and avoid the verbal violence that demeans and mistreats others. Saints hesitate to treat others harshly; they consider others better than themselves (cf. *Phil 2:3*).

117. It is not good when we look down on others like heartless judges, lording it over them and always trying to teach them lessons. That is itself a subtle form of violence. [95] Saint John of the Cross proposed a different path: “Always prefer to be taught by all, rather than to desire teaching even the least of all.” [96] And he added advice on how to keep the devil at bay: “Rejoice in the good of others as if it were your own, and desire that they be given precedence over you in all things; this you should do wholeheartedly. You will thereby overcome evil with good, banish the devil, and possess a happy heart. Try to practice this all the more with those who least attract you. Realize that if you do not train yourself in this way, you will not attain real charity or make any progress in it.” [97]
118. Humility can only take root in the heart through humiliations. Without them, there is no humility or holiness. If you are unable to suffer and offer up a few humiliations, you are not humble and you are not on the path to holiness. The holiness that God bestows on his Church comes through the humiliation of his Son. He is the way. Humiliation makes you resemble Jesus; it is an unavoidable aspect of the imitation of Christ. For “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21). In turn, he reveals the humility of the Father, who condescends to journey with his people, enduring their infidelities and complaints (cf. Ex 34:6-9; Wis 11:23-12:2; Lk 6:36). For this reason, the Apostles, after suffering humiliation, rejoiced “that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for [Jesus’] name” (Acts 5:41).

119. Here I am not speaking only about stark situations of martyrdom, but about the daily humiliations of those who keep silent to save their families, who prefer to praise others rather than boast about themselves, or who choose the less welcome tasks, at times even choosing to bear an injustice so as to offer it to the Lord. “If when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval” (1 Pet 2:20). This does not mean walking around with eyes lowered, not saying a word and fleeing the company of others. At times, precisely because someone is free of selfishness, he or she can dare to disagree gently, to demand justice; or to defend the weak before the powerful, even if it may harm his or her reputation.

120. I am not saying that such humiliation is pleasant, for that would be masochism, but that it is a way of imitating Jesus and growing in union with him. This is incomprehensible on a purely natural level, and the world mocks any such notion. Instead, it is a grace to be sought in prayer: “Lord, when humiliations come, help me to know that I am following in your footsteps.”

121. To act in this way presumes a heart set at peace by Christ, freed from the aggressiveness born of overweening egotism. That same peacefulness, the fruit of grace, makes it possible to preserve our inner trust and persevere in goodness, “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” (Ps 23:4) or “a host encamp against me” (Ps 27:3). Standing firm in the Lord, the Rock, we can sing: “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety” (Ps 4:8).
Christ, in a word, “is our peace” (Eph 2:14); he came “to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Lk 1:79). As he told Saint Faustina Kowalska, “Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to my mercy.” [98] So let us not fall into the temptation of looking for security in success, vain pleasures, possessions, power over others or social status. Jesus says: “My peace I give to you; I do not give it to you as the world gives peace” (Jn 14:27).

Joy and a Sense of Humor

122. Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the saints are joyful and full of good humor. Though completely realistic, they radiate a positive and hopeful spirit. The Christian life is “joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17), for “the necessary result of the love of charity is joy; since every lover rejoices at being united to the beloved… the effect of charity is joy.” [99] Having received the beautiful gift of God’s word, we embrace it “in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:6). If we allow the Lord to draw us out of our shell and change our lives, then we can do as Saint Paul tells us: “Rejoice in the Lord always; I say it again, rejoice!” (Phil 4:4).

123. The prophets proclaimed the times of Jesus, in which we now live, as a revelation of joy. “Shout and sing for joy!” (Is 12:6). “Get you up to a high mountain, O herald of good tidings to Zion; lift up your voice with strength, O herald of good tidings to Jerusalem!” (Is 40:9). “Break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and he will have compassion on his afflicted” (Is 49:13). “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he” (Zech 9:9). Nor should we forget Nehemiah’s exhortation: “Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!” (8:10).

124. Mary, recognizing the newness that Jesus brought, sang: “My spirit rejoices” (Lk 1:47), and Jesus himself “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” (Lk 10:21). As he passed by, “all the people rejoiced” (Lk 13:17). After his resurrection, wherever the disciples went, there was “much joy” (Acts 8:8). Jesus assures us: “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy... I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your
joy from you” (Jn 16:20.22). “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (Jn 15:11).

125. Hard times may come, when the cross casts its shadow, yet nothing can destroy the supernatural joy that “adapts and changes, but always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.” [100] That joy brings deep security, serene hope and a spiritual fulfillment that the world cannot understand or appreciate.

126. Christian joy is usually accompanied by a sense of humor. We see this clearly, for example, in Saint Thomas More, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Philip Neri. Ill humor is no sign of holiness. “Remove vexation from your mind” (Eccl 11:10). We receive so much from the Lord “for our enjoyment” (1 Tim 6:17), that sadness can be a sign of ingratitude. We can get so caught up in ourselves that we are unable to recognize God’s gifts. [101]

127. With the love of a father, God tells us: “My son, treat yourself well... Do not deprive yourself of a happy day” (Sir 14:11.14). He wants us to be positive, grateful and uncomplicated: “In the day of prosperity, be joyful... God created human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes” (Eccl 7:14.29). Whatever the case, we should remain resilient and imitate Saint Paul: “I have learned to be content with what I have” (Phil 4:11). Saint Francis of Assisi lived by this; he could be overwhelmed with gratitude before a piece of hard bread, or joyfully praise God simply for the breeze that caressed his face.

128. This is not the joy held out by today’s individualistic and consumerist culture. Consumerism only bloats the heart. It can offer occasional and passing pleasures, but not joy. Here I am speaking of a joy lived in communion, which shares and is shared, since “there is more happiness in giving than in receiving” (Acts 20:35) and “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7). Fraternal love increases our capacity for joy, since it makes us capable of rejoicing in the good of others: “Rejoice with those who rejoice” (Rom 12:15). “We rejoice when we are weak and you are strong” (2 Cor 13:9). On the other hand, when we “focus primarily on our own needs, we condemn ourselves to a joyless existence.” [102]
Boldness and Passion

129. Holiness is also parrhesía: it is boldness, an impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in this world. To allow us to do this, Jesus himself comes and tells us once more, serenely yet firmly: “Do not be afraid” (Mk 6:50). “I am with you always, to the end of the world” (Mt 28:20). These words enable us to go forth and serve with the same courage that the Holy Spirit stirred up in the Apostles, impelling them to proclaim Jesus Christ. Boldness, enthusiasm, the freedom to speak out, apostolic fervor, all these are included in the word parrhesía. The Bible also uses this word to describe the freedom of a life open to God and to others (cf. Acts 4:29, 9:28, 28:31; 2 Cor 3:12; Eph 3:12; Heb 3:6, 10:19).

130. Blessed Paul VI, in referring to obstacles to evangelization, spoke of a lack of fervor (parrhesía) that is “all the more serious because it comes from within.” How often we are tempted to keep close to the shore! Yet the Lord calls us to put out into the deep and let down our nets (cf. Lk 5:4). He bids us spend our lives in his service. Clinging to him, we are inspired to put all our charisms at the service of others. May we always feel compelled by his love (2 Cor 5:14) and say with Saint Paul: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:16).

131. Look at Jesus. His deep compassion reached out to others. It did not make him hesitant, timid or self-conscious, as often happens with us. Quite the opposite. His compassion made him go out actively to preach and to send others on a mission of healing and liberation. Let us acknowledge our weakness, but allow Jesus to lay hold of it and send us too on mission. We are weak, yet we hold a treasure that can enlarge us and make those who receive it better and happier. Boldness and apostolic courage are an essential part of mission.

132. Parrhesía is a seal of the Spirit; it testifies to the authenticity of our preaching. It is a joyful assurance that leads us to glory in the Gospel we proclaim. It is an unshakeable trust in the faithful Witness who gives us the certainty that nothing can “separate us from the love of God” (Rom 8:39).

133. We need the Spirit’s prompting, lest we be paralyzed by fear and excessive caution, lest we grow used to keeping within safe bounds. Let us remember that closed spaces grow musty and unhealthy. When the
Apostles were tempted to let themselves be crippled by danger and threats, they joined in prayer to implore *parrhesia*: “And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness” (*Acts* 4:29). As a result, “when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” (*Acts* 4:31).

134. Like the prophet Jonah, we are constantly tempted to flee to a safe haven. It can have many names: individualism, spiritualism, living in a little world, addiction, intransigence, the rejection of new ideas and approaches, dogmatism, nostalgia, pessimism, hiding behind rules and regulations. We can resist leaving behind a familiar and easy way of doing things. Yet the challenges involved can be like the storm, the whale, the worm that dried the gourd plant, or the wind and sun that burned Jonah’s head. For us, as for him, they can serve to bring us back to the God of tenderness, who invites us to set out ever anew on our journey.

135. God is eternal newness. He impels us constantly to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar, to the fringes and beyond. He takes us to where humanity is most wounded, where men and women, beneath the appearance of a shallow conformity, continue to seek an answer to the question of life’s meaning. God is not afraid! He is fearless! He is always greater than our plans and schemes. Unafraid of the fringes, he himself became a fringe (cf. *Phil* 2:6-8; *Jn* 1:14). So if we dare to go to the fringes, we will find him there; indeed, he is already there. Jesus is already there, in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded flesh, in their troubles and in their profound desolation. He is already there.

136. True enough, we need to open the door of our hearts to Jesus, who stands and knocks (cf. *Rev* 3:20). Sometimes I wonder, though, if perhaps Jesus is already inside us and knocking on the door for us to let him escape from our stale self-centeredness. In the Gospel, we see how Jesus “went through the cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God” (*Lk* 8:1). After the resurrection, when the disciples went forth in all directions, the Lord accompanied them (cf. *Mk* 16:20). This is what happens as the result of true encounter.
137. Complacency is seductive; it tells us that there is no point in trying to change things, that there is nothing we can do, because this is the way things have always been and yet we always manage to survive. By force of habit we no longer stand up to evil. We “let things be,” or as others have decided they ought to be. Yet let us allow the Lord to rouse us from our torpor, to free us from our inertia. Let us rethink our usual way of doing things; let us open our eyes and ears, and above all our hearts, so as not to be complacent about things as they are, but unsettled by the living and effective word of the risen Lord.

138. We are inspired to act by the example of all those priests, religious, and laity who devote themselves to proclamation and to serving others with great fidelity, often at the risk of their lives and certainly at the cost of their comfort. Their testimony reminds us that, more than bureaucrats and functionaries, the Church needs passionate missionaries, enthusiastic about sharing true life. The saints surprise us, they confound us, because by their lives they urge us to abandon a dull and dreary mediocrity.

139. Let us ask the Lord for the grace not to hesitate when the Spirit calls us to take a step forward. Let us ask for the apostolic courage to share the Gospel with others and to stop trying to make our Christian life a museum of memories. In every situation, may the Holy Spirit cause us to contemplate history in the light of the risen Jesus. In this way, the Church will not stand still, but constantly welcome the Lord’s surprises.

In Community

140. When we live apart from others, it is very difficult to fight against concupiscence, the snares and temptations of the devil and the selfishness of the world. Bombarded as we are by so many enticements, we can grow too isolated, lose our sense of reality and inner clarity, and easily succumb.

141. Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others. We see this in some holy communities. From time to time, the Church has canonized entire communities that lived the Gospel heroically or offered to God the lives of all their members. We can think, for example, of the seven holy founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary, the seven blessed sisters of the first monastery of the Visitation in Madrid,
the Japanese martyrs Saint Paul Miki and companions, the Korean martyrs Saint Andrew Taegon and companions, or the South American martyrs Saint Roque González, Saint Alonso Rodríguez and companions. We should also remember the more recent witness borne by the Trappists of Tibhirine, Algeria, who prepared as a community for martyrdom. In many holy marriages too, each spouse becomes a means used by Christ for the sanctification of the other. Living or working alongside others is surely a path of spiritual growth. Saint John of the Cross told one of his followers: “You are living with others in order to be fashioned and tried.” [104]

142. Each community is called to create a “God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord.” [105] Sharing the word and celebrating the Eucharist together fosters fraternity and makes us a holy and missionary community. It also gives rise to authentic and shared mystical experiences. Such was the case with Saints Benedict and Scholastica. We can also think of the sublime spiritual experience shared by Saint Augustine and his mother, Saint Monica. “As the day now approached on which she was to depart this life, a day known to you but not to us, it came about, as I believe by your secret arrangement, that she and I stood alone leaning in a window that looked onto a garden... We opened wide our hearts to drink in the streams of your fountain, the source of life that is in you... And as we spoke of that wisdom and strained after it, we touched it in some measure by the impetus of our hearts... eternal life might be like that one moment of knowledge which we now sighed after.” [106]

143. Such experiences, however, are neither the most frequent nor the most important. The common life, whether in the family, the parish, the religious community or any other, is made up of small everyday things. This was true of the holy community formed by Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, which reflected in an exemplary way the beauty of the Trinitarian communion. It was also true of the life that Jesus shared with his disciples and with ordinary people.

144. Let us not forget that Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to details. The little detail that wine was running out at a party. The little detail that one sheep was missing. The little detail of noticing the widow who offered her two small coins. The little detail of having spare oil for the
lamps, should the bridegroom delay. The little detail of asking the disciples how many loaves of bread they had. The little detail of having a fire burning and a fish cooking as he waited for the disciples at daybreak.

145. A community that cherishes the little details of love, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father’s plan. There are times when, by a gift of the Lord’s love, we are granted, amid these little details, consoling experiences of God. “One winter night I was carrying out my little duty as usual… Suddenly, I heard off in the distance the harmonious sound of a musical instrument. I then pictured a well-lighted drawing room, brilliantly gilded, filled with elegantly dressed young ladies conversing together and conferring upon each other all sorts of compliments and other worldly remarks. Then my glance fell upon the poor invalid whom I was supporting. Instead of the beautiful strains of music I heard only her occasional complaints… I cannot express in words what happened in my soul; what I know is that the Lord illumined it with rays of truth which so surpassed the dark brilliance of earthly feasts that I could not believe my happiness.”

146. Contrary to the growing consumerist individualism that tends to isolate us in a quest for well-being apart from others, our path to holiness can only make us identify all the more with Jesus’ prayer “that all may be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you” (Jn 17:21).

In Constant Prayer

147. Finally, though it may seem obvious, we should remember that holiness consists in a habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration. The saints are distinguished by a spirit of prayer and a need for communion with God. They find an exclusive concern with this world to be narrow and stifling, and, amid their own concerns and commitments, they long for God, losing themselves in praise and contemplation of the Lord. I do not believe in holiness without prayer, even though that prayer need not be lengthy or involve intense emotions.

148. Saint John of the Cross tells us: “Endeavor to remain always in the presence of God, either real, imaginative, or unitive, insofar as is permitted
by your works.” [109] In the end, our desire for God will surely find expression in our daily lives: “Try to be continuous in prayer, and in the midst of bodily exercises do not leave it. Whether you eat, drink, talk with others, or do anything, always go to God and attach your heart to him.” [110]

149. For this to happen, however, some moments spent alone with God are also necessary. For Saint Teresa of Avila, prayer “is nothing but friendly intercourse, and frequent solitary converse, with him who we know loves us.” [111] I would insist that this is true not only for a privileged few, but for all of us, for “we all have need of this silence, filled with the presence of him who is adored.” [112] Trust-filled prayer is a response of a heart open to encountering God face to face, where all is peaceful and the quiet voice of the Lord can be heard in the midst of silence.

150. In that silence, we can discern, in the light of the Spirit, the paths of holiness to which the Lord is calling us. Otherwise, any decisions we make may only be window-dressing that, rather than exalting the Gospel in our lives, will mask or submerge it. For each disciple, it is essential to spend time with the Master, to listen to his words, and to learn from him always. Unless we listen, all our words will be nothing but useless chatter.

151. We need to remember that “contemplation of the face of Jesus, died and risen, restores our humanity, even when it has been broken by the troubles of this life or marred by sin. We must not domesticate the power of the face of Christ.” [113] So let me ask you: Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord’s presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze? Do you let his fire inflame your heart? Unless you let him warm you more and more with his love and tenderness, you will not catch fire. How will you then be able to set the hearts of others on fire by your words and witness? If, gazing on the face of Christ, you feel unable to let yourself be healed and transformed, then enter into the Lord’s heart, into his wounds, for that is the abode of divine mercy. [114]

152. I ask that we never regard prayerful silence as a form of escape and rejection of the world around us. The Russian pilgrim, who prayed constantly, says that such prayer did not separate him from what was happening all around him. “Everybody was kind to me; it was as though
everyone loved me... Not only did I feel [happiness and consolation] in my own soul, but the whole outside world also seemed to me full of charm and delight.”

153. Nor does history vanish. Prayer, because it is nourished by the gift of God present and at work in our lives, must always be marked by remembrance. The memory of God’s works is central to the experience of the covenant between God and his people. God wished to enter history, and so our prayer is interwoven with memories. We think back not only on his revealed Word, but also on our own lives, the lives of others, and all that the Lord has done in his Church. This is the grateful memory that Saint Ignatius of Loyola refers to in his *Contemplation for Attaining Love*, when he asks us to be mindful of all the blessings we have received from the Lord. Think of your own history when you pray, and there you will find much mercy. This will also increase your awareness that the Lord is ever mindful of you; he never forgets you. So it makes sense to ask him to shed light on the smallest details of your life, for he sees them all.

154. Prayer of supplication is an expression of a heart that trusts in God and realizes that of itself it can do nothing. The life of God’s faithful people is marked by constant supplication born of faith-filled love and great confidence. Let us not downplay prayer of petition, which so often calms our hearts and helps us persevere in hope. Prayer of intercession has particular value, for it is an act of trust in God and, at the same time, an expression of love for our neighbor. There are those who think, based on a one-sided spirituality, that prayer should be unalloyed contemplation of God, free of all distraction, as if the names and faces of others were somehow an intrusion to be avoided. Yet in reality, our prayer will be all the more pleasing to God and more effective for our growth in holiness if, through intercession, we attempt to practice the twofold commandment that Jesus left us. Intercessory prayer is an expression of our fraternal concern for others, since we are able to embrace their lives, their deepest troubles and their loftiest dreams. Of those who commit themselves generously to intercessory prayer we can apply the words of Scripture: “This is a man who loves the brethren and prays much for the people” (*2 Mac* 15:14).

155. If we realize that God exists, we cannot help but worship him, at
times in quiet wonder, and praise him in festive song. We thus share in the experience of Blessed Charles de Foucauld, who said: “As soon as I believed that there was a God, I understood that I could do nothing other than to live for him.” [117] In the life of God’s pilgrim people, there can be many simple gestures of pure adoration, as when “the gaze of a pilgrim rests on an image that symbolizes God’s affection and closeness. Love pauses, contemplates the mystery, and enjoys it in silence.” [118]

156. The prayerful reading of God’s word, which is “sweeter than honey” (Ps 119:103) yet a “two-edged sword” (Heb 4:12), enables us to pause and listen to the voice of the Master. It becomes a lamp for our steps and a light for our path (cf. Ps 119:105). As the bishops of India have reminded us, “devotion to the word of God is not simply one of many devotions, beautiful but somewhat optional. It goes to the very heart and identity of Christian life. The word has the power to transform lives.” [119]

157. Meeting Jesus in the Scriptures leads us to the Eucharist, where the written word attains its greatest efficacy, for there the living Word is truly present. In the Eucharist, the one true God receives the greatest worship the world can give him, for it is Christ himself who is offered. When we receive him in Holy Communion, we renew our covenant with him and allow him to carry out ever more fully his work of transforming our lives.

CHAPTER FIVE

SPIRITUAL COMBAT, VIGILANCE AND DISCERNMENT

158. The Christian life is a constant battle. We need strength and courage to withstand the temptations of the devil and to proclaim the Gospel. This battle is sweet, for it allows us to rejoice each time the Lord triumphs in our lives.

Combat and Vigilance

159. We are not dealing merely with a battle against the world and a worldly mentality that would deceive us and leave us dull and mediocre, lacking in enthusiasm and joy. Nor can this battle be reduced to the struggle against our human weaknesses and proclivities (be they laziness, lust, envy, jealousy or any others). It is also a constant struggle against the
devil, the prince of evil. Jesus himself celebrates our victories. He rejoiced when his disciples made progress in preaching the Gospel and overcoming the opposition of the evil one: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Lk 10:18).

More than a Myth

160. We will not admit the existence of the devil if we insist on regarding life by empirical standards alone, without a supernatural understanding. It is precisely the conviction that this malign power is present in our midst that enables us to understand how evil can at times have so much destructive force. True enough, the biblical authors had limited conceptual resources for expressing certain realities, and in Jesus’ time epilepsy, for example, could easily be confused with demonic possession. Yet this should not lead us to an oversimplification that would conclude that all the cases related in the Gospel had to do with psychological disorders and hence that the devil does not exist or is not at work. He is present in the very first pages of the Scriptures, which end with God’s victory over the devil. Indeed, in leaving us the Our Father, Jesus wanted us to conclude by asking the Father to “deliver us from evil.” That final word does not refer to evil in the abstract; a more exact translation would be “the evil one.” It indicates a personal being who assails us. Jesus taught us to ask daily for deliverance from him, lest his power prevail over us.

161. Hence, we should not think of the devil as a myth, a representation, a symbol, a figure of speech or an idea. This mistake would lead us to let down our guard, to grow careless and end up more vulnerable. The devil does not need to possess us. He poisons us with the venom of hatred, desolation, envy and vice. When we let down our guard, he takes advantage of it to destroy our lives, our families and our communities. “Like a roaring lion, he prowls around, looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8).

Alert and trustful

162. God’s word invites us clearly to “stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11) and to “quench all the flaming darts of the evil one” (Eph 6:16). These expressions are not melodramatic, precisely because our path
towards holiness is a constant battle. Those who do not realize this will be prey to failure or mediocrity. For this spiritual combat, we can count on the powerful weapons that the Lord has given us: faith-filled prayer, meditation on the word of God, the celebration of Mass, Eucharistic adoration, sacramental Reconciliation, works of charity, community life, missionary outreach. If we become careless, the false promises of evil will easily seduce us. As the sainted Cura Brochero observed: “What good is it when Lucifer promises you freedom and showers you with all his benefits, if those benefits are false, deceptive, and poisonous?” [122]

163. Along this journey, the cultivation of all that is good, progress in the spiritual life and growth in love are the best counterbalance to evil. Those who choose to remain neutral, who are satisfied with little, who renounce the ideal of giving themselves generously to the Lord, will never hold out. Even less if they fall into defeatism, for “if we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents… Christian triumph is always a cross, yet a cross which is at the same time a victorious banner, borne with aggressive tenderness against the assaults of evil.” [123]

_Spiritual corruption_

164. The path of holiness is a source of peace and joy, given to us by the Spirit. At the same time, it demands that we keep “our lamps lit” (Lk 12:35) and be attentive. “Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess 5:22). “Keep awake” (Mt 24:42; Mk 13:35). “Let us not fall asleep” (1 Thess 5:6). Those who think they commit no grievous sins against God’s law can fall into a state of dull lethargy. Since they see nothing serious to reproach themselves with, they fail to realize that their spiritual life has gradually turned lukewarm. They end up weakened and corrupted.

165. Spiritual corruption is worse than the fall of a sinner, for it is a comfortable and self-satisfied form of blindness. Everything then appears acceptable: deception, slander, egotism and other subtle forms of self-centeredness, for “even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14). So Solomon ended his days, whereas David, who sinned greatly, was able to make up for disgrace. Jesus warned us against this self-deception that easily leads to corruption. He spoke of a person freed from
the devil who, convinced that his life was now in order, ended up being possessed by seven other evil spirits (cf. *Lk* 11:24-26). Another biblical text puts it bluntly: “The dog turns back to his own vomit” (*2 Pet* 2:22; cf. *Prov* 26:11).

*Discernment*

166. How can we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit or if it stems from the spirit of the world or the spirit of the devil? The only way is through discernment, which calls for something more than intelligence or common sense. It is a gift which we must implore. If we ask with confidence that the Holy Spirit grant us this gift, and then seek to develop it through prayer, reflection, reading and good counsel, then surely we will grow in this spiritual endowment.

*An Urgent Need*

167. The gift of discernment has become all the more necessary today, since contemporary life offers immense possibilities for action and distraction, and the world presents all of them as valid and good. All of us, but especially the young, are immersed in a culture of zapping. We can navigate simultaneously on two or more screens and interact at the same time with two or three virtual scenarios. Without the wisdom of discernment, we can easily become prey to every passing trend.

168. This is all the more important when some novelty presents itself in our lives. Then we have to decide whether it is new wine brought by God or an illusion created by the spirit of this world or the spirit of the devil. At other times, the opposite can happen, when the forces of evil induce us not to change, to leave things as they are, to opt for a rigid resistance to change. Yet that would be to block the working of the Spirit. We are free, with the freedom of Christ. Still, he asks us to examine what is within us – our desires, anxieties, fears and questions – and what takes place all around us – “the signs of the times” – and thus to recognize the paths that lead to complete freedom. “Test everything; hold fast to what is good” (*1 Thess* 5:21).
169. Discernment is necessary not only at extraordinary times, when we need to resolve grave problems and make crucial decisions. It is a means of spiritual combat for helping us to follow the Lord more faithfully. We need it at all times, to help us recognize God’s timetable, lest we fail to heed the promptings of his grace and disregard his invitation to grow. Often discernment is exercised in small and apparently irrelevant things, since greatness of spirit is manifested in simple everyday realities. It involves striving untrammeled for all that is great, better and more beautiful, while at the same time being concerned for the little things, for each day’s responsibilities and commitments. For this reason, I ask all Christians not to omit, in dialogue with the Lord, a sincere daily “examination of conscience.” Discernment also enables us to recognize the concrete means that the Lord provides in his mysterious and loving plan, to make us move beyond mere good intentions.

* A Supernatural Gift *

170. Certainly, spiritual discernment does not exclude existential, psychological, sociological or moral insights drawn from the human sciences. At the same time, it transcends them. Nor are the Church’s sound norms sufficient. We should always remember that discernment is a grace. Even though it includes reason and prudence, it goes beyond them, for it seeks a glimpse of that unique and mysterious plan that God has for each of us, which takes shape amid so many varied situations and limitations. It involves more than my temporal well-being, my satisfaction at having accomplished something useful, or even my desire for peace of mind. It has to do with the meaning of my life before the Father who knows and loves me, with the real purpose of my life, which nobody knows better than he. Ultimately, discernment leads to the wellspring of undying life: to know the Father, the only true God, and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ (cf. *Jn* 17:3). It requires no special abilities, nor is it only for the more intelligent or better educated. The Father readily reveals himself to the lowly (cf. *Mt* 11:25).

171. The Lord speaks to us in a variety of ways, at work, through others and at every moment. Yet we simply cannot do without the silence of prolonged prayer, which enables us better to perceive God’s language, to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received,
to calm our anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in his own light. In this way, we allow the birth of a new synthesis that springs from a life inspired by the Spirit.

_Speak, Lord_

172. Nonetheless, it is possible that, even in prayer itself, we could refuse to let ourselves be confronted by the freedom of the Spirit, who acts as he wills. We must remember that prayerful discernment must be born of a readiness to listen: to the Lord and to others, and to reality itself, which always challenges us in new ways. Only if we are prepared to listen, do we have the freedom to set aside our own partial or insufficient ideas, our usual habits and ways of seeing things. In this way, we become truly open to accepting a call that can shatter our security, but lead us to a better life. It is not enough that everything be calm and peaceful. God may be offering us something more, but in our comfortable inadvertence, we do not recognize it.

173. Naturally, this attitude of listening entails obedience to the Gospel as the ultimate standard, but also to the Magisterium that guards it, as we seek to find in the treasury of the Church whatever is most fruitful for the “today” of salvation. It is not a matter of applying rules or repeating what was done in the past, since the same solutions are not valid in all circumstances and what was useful in one context may not prove so in another. The discernment of spirits liberates us from rigidity, which has no place before the perennial “today” of the risen Lord. The Spirit alone can penetrate what is obscure and hidden in every situation, and grasp its every nuance, so that the newness of the Gospel can emerge in another light.

_The Logic of Gift and of the Cross_

174. An essential condition for progress in discernment is a growing understanding of God’s patience and his timetable, which are never our own. God does not pour down fire upon those who are unfaithful (cf. _Lk_ 9:54), or allow the zealous to uproot the tares growing among the wheat (cf. _Mt_ 13:29). Generosity too is demanded, for “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (_Acts_ 20:35). Discernment is not about discovering what more we can get out of this life, but about recognizing how we can better accomplish the mission entrusted to us at our baptism. This entails a
readiness to make sacrifices, even to sacrificing everything. For happiness is a paradox. We experience it most when we accept the mysterious logic that is not of this world: “This is our logic,” says Saint Bonaventure, pointing to the cross. Once we enter into this dynamic, we will not let our consciences be numbed and we will open ourselves generously to discernment.

175. When, in God’s presence, we examine our life’s journey, no areas can be off limits. In all aspects of life we can continue to grow and offer something greater to God, even in those areas we find most difficult. We need, though, to ask the Holy Spirit to liberate us and to expel the fear that makes us ban him from certain parts of our lives. God asks everything of us, yet he also gives everything to us. He does not want to enter our lives to cripple or diminish them, but to bring them to fulfillment. Discernment, then, is not a solipsistic self-analysis or a form of egotistical introspection, but an authentic process of leaving ourselves behind in order to approach the mystery of God, who helps us to carry out the mission to which he has called us, for the good of our brothers and sisters.

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176. I would like these reflections to be crowned by Mary, because she lived the Beatitudes of Jesus as none other. She is that woman who rejoiced in the presence of God, who treasured everything in her heart, and who let herself be pierced by the sword. Mary is the saint among the saints, blessed above all others. She teaches us the way of holiness and she walks ever at our side. She does not let us remain fallen and at times she takes us into her arms without judging us. Our converse with her consoles, frees and sanctifies us. Mary our Mother does not need a flood of words. She does not need us to tell her what is happening in our lives. All we need do is whisper, time and time again: “Hail Mary…”

177. It is my hope that these pages will prove helpful by enabling the whole Church to devote herself anew to promoting the desire for holiness. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us a fervent longing to be saints for God’s greater glory, and let us encourage one another in this effort. In this way, we will share a happiness that the world will not be able to take from us.
Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on March 19, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, in the year 2018, the sixth of my Pontificate.

Francis

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[20] Ibid., 516.

[21] Ibid., 517.

[22] Ibid., 518.

[23] Ibid., 521.


[25] Ibid., 450.


[29] We need to distinguish between this kind of superficial entertainment and a healthy culture of leisure, which opens us to others and to reality itself in a spirit of openness and contemplation.


[33] Cf. Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith, Letter *Placuit Deo* on Certain Aspects of Christian Salvation (February 22, 2018), 4, in
“Both neo-Pelagian individualism and the neo-Gnostic disregard of the body deface the confession of faith in Christ, the one, universal Savior.” This document provides the doctrinal bases for understanding Christian salvation in reference to contemporary neo-gnostic and neo-pelagian tendencies.


[37] As Saint Bonaventure teaches, “we must suspend all the operations of the mind and we must transform the peak of our affections, directing them to God alone... Since nature can achieve nothing and personal effort very little, it is necessary to give little importance to investigation and much to unction, little to speech and much to interior joy, little to words or writing but all to the gift of God, namely the Holy Spirit, little or no importance should be given to the creature, but all to the Creator, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”: Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, VII, 4-5.


[40] Video Message to Participants in an International Theological Congress held at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina (September 1-3, 2015): AAS 107 (2015), 980.


[44] *De septem donis*, 9, 15.

[45] *In IV Sent.*, 37, 1, 3, ad 6.


[47] Cf. Bonaventure, *De sex alis Seraphim*, 3, 8: “*Non omnes omnia possunt.*” The phrase is to be understood along the lines of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1735.

[48] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 109, a. 9, ad 1: “But here grace is to some extent imperfect, inasmuch as it does not completely heal man, as we have said.”


[52] In the Ecumenical Council Of Trent understanding of Christian faith, grace precedes, accompanies and follows all our actions (cf., Session VI, *Decree on Justification*, ch. 5: DH 1525).


[54] *Homilia de Humilitate*: PG 31, 530.


[56] Session VI, *Decree on Justification*, ch. 8: DH 1532.


[58] Ibid., 2007.


This is, in a word, the Catholic doctrine on “merit” subsequent to justification: it has to do with the cooperation of the justified for growth in the life of grace (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2010). Yet this cooperation in no way makes justification itself or friendship with God the object of human merit.


*Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 107, art. 4.


The order of the second and third Beatitudes varies in accordance with the different textual traditions.

*Spiritual Exercises*, 23d.

*Manuscript C*, 12r.

From the patristic era, the Church has valued the gift of tears, as seen in the fine prayer “*Ad petendam compunctionem cordis*.” It reads: “Almighty and most merciful God, who brought forth from the rock a spring of living water for your thirsting people: bring forth tears of compunction from our hardness of heart, that we may grieve for our sins, and, by your mercy, obtain their forgiveness” (cf. *Missale Romanum*, ed. typ. 1962, p. [110]).


Ibid., 1787.

Detraction and calumny are acts of terrorism: a bomb is thrown, it explodes and the attacker walks away calm and contented. This is completely different from the nobility of those who speak to others face to face, serenely and frankly, out of genuine concern for their good.
At times, it may be necessary to speak of the difficulties of a particular brother or sister. In such cases, it can happen that an interpretation is passed on in place of an objective fact. Emotions can misconstrue and alter the facts of a matter, and end up passing them on laced with subjective elements. In this way, neither the facts themselves nor the truth of the other person are respected.


Ibid., 239: 1116.

Ibid., 227: 1112.


Ibid.


We can recall the Good Samaritan’s reaction upon meeting the man attacked by robbers and left for dead (cf. *Lk* 10:30–37).


The Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, echoing the Church’s constant teaching, stated that human beings “are always sacred, from their conception, at all stages of existence, until their natural death, and after death,” and that life must be safeguarded “starting at conception, in all its stages, until natural death” (*Aparecida Document*, June 29, 2007, 388; 464).


Cf. ibid., 53, 7: PL 66, 750.


[89] Ibid., 10, 406.


[93] Ibid., ad 1.


[95] There are some forms of bullying that, while seeming delicate or respectful and even quite spiritual, cause great damage to others’ self-esteem.


[97] Ibid., 13.


[99] Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I-II, q. 70, a. 3.


[101] I recommend praying the prayer attributed to Saint Thomas More: “Grant me, O Lord, good digestion, and also something to digest. Grant me a healthy body, and the necessary good humor to maintain it. Grant me a simple soul that knows to treasure all that is good and that doesn’t frighten easily at the sight of evil, but rather finds the means to put things back in their place. Give me a soul that knows not boredom, grumbling, sighs and laments, nor excess of stress, because of that obstructing thing called ‘I’. Grant me, O Lord, a sense of good humor. Allow me the grace to be able to take a joke and to discover in life a bit of joy, and to be able to share it with others.”

[103] Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi (December 8, 1975), 80: AAS 68 (1976), 73. It is worth noting that in this text Blessed Paul VI closely links joy and parrhesía. While lamenting a “lack of joy and hope” as an obstacle to evangelization, he extols the “delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing,” linked to “an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench.” This ensures that the world does not receive the Gospel “from evangelizers who are dejected [and] discouraged.” During the 1975 Holy Year, Pope Paul devoted to joy his Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete in Domino (May 9, 1975): AAS 67 (1975), 289-322. Precautions, 15.

[104] Precautions, 15.


[107] I think especially of the three key words “please,” “thank you,” and “sorry.” “The right words, spoken at the right time, daily protect and nurture love”: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia (March 19, 2016), 133: AAS 108 (2016), 363.


[110] Idem, Counsels to a Religious on How to Attain Perfection, 9.


[117] Letter to Henry de Castries, August 14, 1901.


[121] Cf. Paul VI, *Catechesis*, General Audience of November 15, 1972: *Insegnamenti X* (1972), pp. 1168-1170: “One of our greatest needs is defense against that evil which we call the devil… Evil is not simply a deficiency, it is an efficiency, a living spiritual being, perverted and perverting. A terrible reality, mysterious and frightful. They no longer remain within the framework of biblical and ecclesiastical teaching who refuse to recognize its existence, or who make of it an independent principle that does not have, like every creature, its origin in God, or explain it as a pseudo-reality, a conceptual and imaginative personification of the hidden causes of our misfortunes.”


[124] The tomb of Saint Ignatius of Loyola bears this thought-provoking inscription: *Non coerceri a maximo, conteneri tamen a minimo divinum est* (“Not to be confined by the greatest, yet to be contained within the smallest, is truly divine”).

[125] *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, 1, 30.
The Roman Curia

Decree on the Celebration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, in the General Roman Calendar (February 11, 2018)

CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS

ROME

ON THE CELEBRATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH, IN THE GENERAL ROMAN CALENDAR

DECREE

The joyous veneration given to the Mother of God by the contemporary Church, in light of reflection on the mystery of Christ and on his nature, cannot ignore the figure of a woman (cf. Gal 4:4), the Virgin Mary, who is both the Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church.

In some ways this was already present in the mind of the Church from the premonitory words of Saint Augustine and Saint Leo the Great. In fact the former says that Mary is the mother of the members of Christ, because with charity she cooperated in the rebirth of the faithful into the Church, while the latter says that the birth of the Head is also the birth of the body, thus indicating that Mary is at once Mother of Christ, the Son of God, and mother of the members of his Mystical Body, which is the Church. These considerations derive from the divine motherhood of Mary and from her intimate union in the work of the Redeemer, which culminated at the hour of the cross.

Indeed, the Mother standing beneath the cross (cf. Jn 19:25), accepted her Son’s testament of love and welcomed all people in the person of the beloved disciple as sons and daughters to be reborn unto life eternal. She thus became the tender Mother of the Church which Christ begot on the
cross handing on the Spirit. Christ, in turn, in the beloved disciple, chose all disciples as ministers of his love towards his Mother, entrusting her to them so that they might welcome her with filial affection.

As a caring guide to the emerging Church Mary had already begun her mission in the Upper Room, praying with the Apostles while awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:14). In this sense, in the course of the centuries, Christian piety has honored Mary with various titles, in many ways equivalent, such as Mother of Disciples, of the Faithful, of Believers, of all those who are reborn in Christ; and also as “Mother of the Church” as is used in the texts of spiritual authors as well as in the Magisterium of Popes Benedict XIV and Leo XIII.

Thus the foundation is clearly established by which Blessed Paul VI, on 21 November 1964, at the conclusion of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Council, declared the Blessed Virgin Mary as “Mother of the Church, that is to say of all Christian people, the faithful as well as the pastors, who call her the most loving Mother” and established that “the Mother of God should be further honored and invoked by the entire Christian people by this tenderest of titles”.

Therefore the Apostolic See on the occasion of the Holy Year of Reconciliation (1975), proposed a votive Mass in honor of Beata Maria Ecclesiæ Matre, which was subsequently inserted into the Roman Missal. The Holy See also granted the faculty to add the invocation of this title in the Litany of Loreto (1980) and published other formularies in the Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1986). Some countries, dioceses and religious families who petitioned the Holy See were allowed to add this celebration to their particular calendars.

Having attentively considered how greatly the promotion of this devotion might encourage the growth of the maternal sense of the Church in the pastors, religious and faithful, as well as a growth of genuine Marian piety, Pope Francis has decreed that the Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, should be inscribed in the Roman Calendar on the Monday after Pentecost and be now celebrated every year.

This celebration will help us to remember that growth in the Christian life must be anchored to the Mystery of the Cross, to the oblation of Christ
in the Eucharistic Banquet and to the Mother of the Redeemer and Mother of the Redeemed, the Virgin who makes her offering to God.

The Memorial therefore is to appear in all Calendars and liturgical books for the celebration of Mass and of the Liturgy of the Hours. The relative liturgical texts are attached to this decree and their translations, prepared and approved by the Episcopal Conferences, will be published after confirmation by this Dicastery.

Where the celebration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, is already celebrated on a day with a higher liturgical rank, approved according to the norm of particular law, in the future it may continue to be celebrated in the same way.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

From the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 11 February 2018, the memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes.

Robert Card. Sarah Prefect
+ Arthur Roche Archbishop Secretary

Commentary on the Decree by the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments

The Memorial of Mary “Mother of the Church”

With a Decree dated February 11, 2018, the 160th anniversary of the first apparition of our Lady at Lourdes, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments implements the decision of Pope Francis, requiring that the Memorial of the “Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of the Church” be inscribed in the General Roman Calendar. Attached to the Decree are the relevant liturgical texts in Latin for the Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, and the Roman Martyrology. The Episcopal Conferences will approve the translation of the texts they need and, after receiving their confirmation, will publish them in the liturgical books for their jurisdiction.

The new celebration is briefly described in the Decree itself, which recalls the gradual maturing of liturgical veneration given to Mary
following a better understanding of her presence “in the mystery of Christ and of the Church,” as explained in Chapter 7 of Vatican II's *Lumen gentium*. Indeed, with good reason, in promulgating this Conciliar Constitution on November 21, 1964, Blessed Paul VI wished to solemnly bestow the title “Mother of the Church” upon Mary. The feeling of Christians through two millennia of history has cultivated the filial bond which inseparably binds the disciples of Christ to his Blessed Mother in various ways. John the Evangelist gives explicit witness to such a bond when he reports the testament of Jesus dying on the Cross (cf. *Jn* 19:26-27). Having given his Mother to the disciples and the disciples to his Mother, “knowing that all was now finished.” the dying Jesus “gave up his spirit” for the life of the Church, his Mystical Body: indeed it was “from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the Cross that there came forth the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 5).

The water and blood that flowed from the heart of Christ on the Cross as a sign of the totality of his redemptive offering, continue to give life to the Church sacramentally through Baptism and the Eucharist. In this wonderful communion between the Redeemer and the redeemed, which always needs to be nourished, the Blessed Virgin Mary has her maternal mission to carry out. This is recalled in the Gospel passage of *Jn* 19:25-31 that is recommended for the Mass of the new Memorial, which had already been indicated, together with readings form Genesis 3 and Acts 1, in the Votive Mass “*de sancta Maria Ecclesiae Matre,*” approved by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1973 in view of the upcoming Holy Year of Reconciliation of 1975 (cf. *Notitiae* 1973, pp. 382-383).

The liturgical commemoration of the ecclesial motherhood of Mary had thus already found a place among the Votive Masses of the *editio altera* of the *Missale Romanum* of 1975. Then, during the pontificate of Saint John Paul II, the possibility was granted to Episcopal Conferences of adding the title “Mother of the Church” to the Litany of Loreto (cf. *Notitiae* 1980, p. 159); and on the occasion of the Marian Year the Congregation for Divine Worship published other Mass formularies for Votive Masses under the title of “Mary, Mother and Image of the Church” in the *Collectio missarum de Beata Maria Virgine*. In the course of the years
the insertion of the celebration “Mother of the Church” into the proper calendars of some countries, such as Poland and Argentina, on the Monday after Pentecost was also approved. In other cases the celebration was inscribed in particular places such as Saint Peter’s Basilica, where Blessed Paul VI proclaimed the title, as well as in the Propers of Religious Orders and Congregations.

Given the importance of the mystery of Mary’s spiritual motherhood, which from the awaiting of the Spirit at Pentecost has never ceased to take motherly care of the pilgrim Church on earth, Pope Francis has decreed that on the Monday after Pentecost the Memorial of Mary Mother of the Church should be obligatory for the whole Church of the Roman Rite. The connection between the vitality of the Church of Pentecost and the maternal care of Mary towards it is evident. In the texts of the Mass and Office the text of Acts 1:12-14 throws light on the liturgical celebration, as does Genesis 3:9-15,20, read in the light of the typology of the New Eve, who became the “Mater omnium viventium” under the Cross of her Son, the Redeemer of the world.

The hope is that the extension of this celebration to the whole Church will remind all Christ’s disciples that, if we want to grow and to be filled with the love of God, it is necessary to plant our life firmly on three great realities: the Cross, the Eucharist, and the Mother of God. These are three mysteries that God gave to the world in order to structure, fructify, and sanctify our interior life and lead us to Jesus. These three mysteries are to be contemplated in silence. (cf. Robert Sarah, *The Power of Silence*, no. 57).

Robert Card. Sarah

Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments

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Decree on the Extraordinary Character of a Cure Attributed to the Venerable Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri, Congregation for the Causes of the Saints (June 8, 2018)

CONGREGATIO DE CAUSIS SANCTORUM
MATRITENSIS
BEATIFICATIONIS et CANONIZATIONIS
Ven. Servae Dei
MARIAE GUADALUPE ORTIZ DE LANDÁZURI
Y FERNÁNDEZ DE HEREDIA
Christifidelis laicae
Praelaturae personalis Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei
(1916-1975)

DECRETUM SUPER MIRACULO


Sanctitatis fama qua in vita gaudebat magis magisque diffusa est et haud pauci sunt qui testificantur se a Domino gratias acceperit, quas intercessioni Servae Dei tribuunt. Inter notitias harum gratiarum spiritualium et materialium peculiariter eminuit sanatio, anno 2002, viri 76 annos nati a tumore maligno in pelle prope oculum dexterum. Aegrotus intercessionem postulaverat Mariae Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri ad sanationem obtinendam et alias quoque personas rogaverat ut hac ipsa petizione Mariam Guadalupe adirent.


Episcoporum, posito dubio an de miraculo divinitus patrato constaret, responsum affirmativum prolatum est.

Facta demum de hisce omnibus Summo Pontifici Francisco per subscriptum Cardinalem Praefectum accurata relatione, Sanctitas Sua, vota Congregationis de Causis Sanctorum excipiens rataque habens, hodierna die declaravit: *Constare de miraculo a Deo patrato per intercessionem Venerabilis Servae Dei Mariae Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri y Fernández de Heredia, Christifidelis Laicae Praelaturae personalis Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei, videlicet de celeri, perfecta ac constanti sanatione cuiusdam viri a «cancro cutaneo ulcerato».*

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


Angelus Card. Amato

*Praefectus*

+ Marcellus Bartolucci

Archiepiscopus tit. Mevaniensis

*a Secretis*

*Following is our translation of the Latin Decree:*

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CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSES OF SAINTS

MADRID

BEATIFICATION and CANONIZATION

Of the Venerable Servant of God

MARIA GUADALUPE ORTIZ DE LANDÁZURI

Laywoman

of the Personal Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei

(1916 – 1975)

DECREE ON THE MIRACLE
The Venerable Servant of God Guadalupe Ortiz de Landazuri y Fernandez de Heredia was born in Madrid on December 12, 1916, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Her parents were devout Catholics, and she was the youngest of four children. She obtained a degree in chemistry, and started work as a chemistry teacher. In 1944 she asked to be admitted to Opus Dei, living in apostolic celibacy. Saint Josemaría put her in charge of some evangelization initiatives in Madrid and Bilbao. In 1950 she moved to Mexico to begin Opus Dei’s apostolate among women there. She dedicated herself to giving human and Christian formation to young women in various cities and towns. In 1956 the Servant of God was called to Rome to help Saint Josemaría in the governance of the apostolate of the women of Opus Dei. Because of a serious heart problem, she underwent an operation and, from 1958 onwards, she lived in Madrid, where she continued teaching and in 1965 gained her doctorate in chemistry and received a prize for her research. Despite her poor health she continued to dedicate herself with care and enthusiasm to her teaching, and her apostolate with colleagues, students and friends. Among other projects, she directed a domestic services training center. On July 1, 1975, she had a high risk operation as her heart condition had worsened. While convalescing she suffered a sudden respiratory crisis, and devoutly surrendered her soul to God on July 16, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. In 2017 Pope Francis solemnly recognized her heroic virtues.

The reputation for holiness she had had during her lifetime spread more and more, and many people testify that they received favors from God which they attribute to the intercession of the Servant of God. Among reports of these spiritual and material graces, one that stands out particularly is the cure, in 2002, of a 76-year-old man from a malignant skin tumor close to his right eye. The sick man had prayed to be healed through the intercession of Guadalupe Ortiz, and had asked other people to appeal to Guadalupe for this same intention.

One night, when he was worried about a forthcoming operation to remove the cancer, the sick man begged the Servant of God with great faith that he might avoid the operation. On the following morning, he found that the tumor had completely disappeared. In the opinion of the doctors the disappearance of a cancerous tumor of that kind without...
medical intervention cannot be explained scientifically. Also extraordinary is the instantaneous nature of the cure.

A diocesan enquiry into this cure was carried out in the Archdiocese of Barcelona from May 25, 2007 to January 16, 2008. On October 24, 2008, this Congregation issued a decree confirming the juridical validity of the aforementioned enquiry. In a meeting held on October 5, 2017, the Medical Council of the Congregation judged the cure to have been instantaneous, complete and permanent, and declared that it could not be explained by medical science. On March 1, 2018, a Special Congress of Theological Consultors was held; the Cardinals and Bishops met in an Ordinary Session on June 5, 2018, headed by Cardinal Angelo Amato. In both sessions, that of the Consultors and that of the Cardinals and Bishops, the answer Yes was given to the question as to whether a miracle had been worked by God.

After having received from the undersigned Cardinal Prefect a detailed account of all the above, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, receiving and ratifying the votes of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, with today’s date, has solemnly declared that: “Proof exists of a miracle obtained from God through the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God Maria Guadalupe Ortiz de Landazuri y Fernandez de Heredia, laywoman of the Personal Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, namely of the sudden, complete and lasting cure of a certain man from an ‘ulcerated skin cancer’.”

The Holy Father has ordered that this decree be published and transcribed in the Acts of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Given at Rome, on the 8th day of the month of June in the year of Our Lord 2018.

Angelo Cardinal Amato, S. D. B.

Prefect

L. + S.

+ Marcello Bartolucci

Titular Archbishop of Bevagna

Secretary
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FROM THE PRELATE

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Activities

Pastoral Trips

Participation in the 27th Course for Brazilian Bishops, Brazil, from January 26 to February 4

Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz traveled to Brazil, invited by Cardinal Oraní Tempesta, Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, to give three lectures at the 27th Theological Studies Course for Bishops organized by the archdiocese. At the end of the course, the Prelate took advantage of the opportunity to meet with faithful of the Prelature, cooperators and friends in Rio de Janeiro. He reminded them of the importance of making Christ the center of their Christian life and urged them to read and meditate on the Gospel following the guidance of Pope Francis in Evangelii gaudium. Among other topics, he highlighted the importance of interior freedom and of fraternity. In every gathering he never failed to ask people to pray for the Pope and his intentions.

Taking advantage of his trip to Brazil, he also went to São Paulo, from January 30 to February 4. On the 1st of February he was received by Cardinal Odilo Scherer at the bishop’s residence.

In São Paulo, Brazil’s largest city, he also met with the Prelature’s faithful and their friends, and with priests from various dioceses, whom he
encouraged to live in close union with the Pope, their diocesan bishop, and all the other priests in the diocese.

Sweden, April 12-15


On April 14, during Mass, Msgr. Ocáriz addressed a brief homily to some faithful of Opus Dei. “The apostles were alone on the lake, without Jesus. Each of us can also travel in darkness, when we encounter difficulties in life. We may think then that Jesus is absent, but he is always with us.”

Later that morning he received several families in Lärkstaden. The Prelate spoke about friendship as a natural way to share the Gospel: “When there is friendship, one desires the good of the other person. This requires personal contact and dedicating time to get to know that person. When there is friendship, apostolate results spontaneously.”

In the afternoon he met with a group of people from various places in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark at the Finlandiahuser conference center. “We can always be joyful,” he told those present, “despite the concerns and sufferings we face, because the foundation of our joy is Christ. We can't always understand suffering, but we can always love. Each time we look at a crucifix, we realize how great Christ’s love for us is.” Topics discussed included interior freedom, faithfulness, fraternal love, the virtue of chastity, and passing on the faith to others.

On the last day of his pastoral trip, on Sunday April 15, the Prelate went to Katarina Kyrka, a shrine of our Lady located in the heart of the capital. After spending some time in prayer, he lit a vigil light and prayed a Salve Regina with those present before the image of the patroness of Sweden. Afterwards he visited a member of the Prelature in Branbergen who is suffering from a serious illness, and encouraged her to take advantage of the supernatural effectiveness that suffering has when offered to God.
In the afternoon, he returned to Rome from Arlanda airport. In his farewell words, he encouraged everyone to live “joyful in hope,” as Saint Paul told the first Christians.

_Sicily, from May 31 to June 3_

The Prelate of Opus Dei arrived at Falcone e Borsellino airport on May 31. On Friday June 1, he visited the facilities of SAME, a professional training school for imparting skills needed to find employment in the hospitality and hotel sectors. The Prelate reminded them that nothing is lost in their work of formation and that, as proof of this, many students over the years continue to express gratitude for what they have learned at the school on the human and professional level, as well as for the deeper knowledge of the faith they were given.

The morning continued with a family gathering during which several people expressed their desire to create job opportunities for young Sicilians. In the afternoon, Msgr. Ocáriz was received by Archbishop Corrado Lorefice of Palermo. At the end of the day he had an opportunity to talk with students at the Segesta University Residence and with other young Sicilians who came to Palermo for the occasion. He encouraged them to face difficulties with an outlook based on faith: “Faith is to be sure of something that is not seen. We have faith not only in the existence of God, but in the fact that God loves us, and wants us to be happy.”

On Saturday June 2, Msgr. Ocáriz went to Calarossa, where he met with families from all over the island. Special attention was paid to the topic of marriage, in particular how to help young couples in the first steps of their married life. At the end of the day he went to Monreale to visit the cathedral, at the invitation of the pastor Fr. Nicola Gaglio.

On his last day in Sicily, the Prelate visited the RUME University Residence, where he presided over Eucharistic benediction for the solemnity of Corpus Christi. He then had an informal meeting with the residents and those who attend means of Christian formation there.

_Honoring Bishop Javier Echevarría at the University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain, on January 19_
The Prelate of Opus Dei traveled to Pamplona to take part in a tribute to Bishop Javier Echevarría as Chancellor of the University of Navarra. Also taking part in the ceremony, held on January 19, were the rector of the university, Alfonso Sánchez-Taberneró, the former head of IESE Business School, Jordi Canals, and the vice-dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Dr. Arantza Campo.

Dr. Campo, who helped provide medical care for Bishop Javier Echevarría, recalled his “heartfelt gratitude for all the care he received” and his “affectionate and cordial manner, often combined with a humorous remark.” Professor Canals made reference to the “legacy of good governance” that Bishop Echevarría left to those who work at the University of Navarra: a sense of mission, impetus for the projects undertaken, and the ability to combine a universal outlook with concern for each person. On his part, the University’s rector highlighted three aspects of the personality of the former Chancellor: his closeness to people, his magnanimity, and his gratitude.

Msgr. Ocáriz, in turn, pointed to a feature that his predecessor, in harmony with Saint Josemaría, wanted the University of Navarra to possess: “Being open to the entire world, with an eagerness to serve, to share the best that one has.”

After the academic act, the Prelate greeted student representatives from the University. He encouraged them to be diligent in their studies and to foster unity with their fellow students, shunning isolation and “individualism.”

In the afternoon, Msgr. Ocáriz met with professors and staff who hold directive positions. In responding to their questions, he spoke about the priority of the person in the work of government, the need to foster an inter-disciplinary approach in their academic work, and the importance of making the University’s Christian identity clear.

Afterwards he visited the Izaga Student Residence and spent time with the staff and families of students living there. He reminded them that their efforts should be aimed not only at helping the young women grow humanly and intellectually, but especially at strengthening their love for
Christ, which is “what enables us to be better persons, better able to do good.”

He next took part in an academic meeting in the Ecclesiastical Faculties Building, where he congratulated the theology professors for the 50th anniversary of their faculty. Paraphrasing Saint Josemaria, Msgr. Ocáriz reminded them that “theology studies are done well when the subject matter is made the topic of each one’s prayer.” He also encouraged the professors to carry out their work “with enthusiasm for God’s truth and for the mystery of Christ and his Church.”

Following this act, the Prelate met with seminarians in Bidasoa International Ecclesiastical Seminary, where currently almost a hundred students from 24 different countries are studying.

**Audience with Pope Francis, May 26**

On May 26, the Prelate of Opus Dei was received in an audience by Pope Francis. Msgr. Ocáriz assured the Holy Father that all the faithful of the Prelature were united in prayer for him and for his intentions.

He also spoke about the evangelizing efforts of the faithful of the Work in various countries and about some apostolic, educational and social initiatives inspired by the message of Saint Josemaria.

Pope Francis expressed his joy at seeing the contribution being made by the Prelature’s faithful through their daily lives to help evangelize society.

**Participation in the Saxum Conference, Rome, June 9**

On June 9, *Experiencing the Holy Land*, an event organized by the Association of Friends of Saxum, was held in Rome. Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, was the guest of honor.

Msgr. Ocáriz briefly presented the aims of the Saxum project. He stressed that this initiative “has proved to be a splendid opportunity for international cooperation,” to which “many thousands of people from many different countries and from the most varied professional and social backgrounds” have contributed.
Msgr. Ocáriz also stressed that those who assist this project are contributing “to the new evangelization of so many people in the Holy Land who can discover the greatness and beauty of the salvation brought by Christ.” In addition, they are also contributing to “the creation of an environment of civil coexistence, necessary for the recovery and preservation of peace even in territories as conflicted as those in the Middle East.”

The Prelate concluded his speech with words from St. Josemaría on peace: “In the name of this victorious love of Christ, we Christians should go out into the world to be sowers of peace and joy through everything we say and do” (*Christ Is Passing By*, no.168).

The Saxum project arose to help pilgrims to the Holy Land deepen the roots of their faith, and to foster intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Saxum originated in 1994, when Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, then the Prelate of Opus Dei, visited the holy sites. Following a wish of St. Josemaría Escrivá, Bishop Del Portillo encouraged the establishment of a center that would fulfill this function. It includes an information center for pilgrims and a residential area where activities for spiritual formation take place.

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**Homilies**

At the Easter Vigil, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (March 31, 2018)

1. *Lumen Christi!* This proclamation that the Church announces to us three times at the beginning of the Paschal Vigil brings us a truth that fills us with joy.
Christ’s light blazes a trail through the shadows of sin and death! Jesus has risen! This is the joyful message that we want to receive anew on this holy night.

We have tried to live the Paschal Triduum intensely, contemplating Jesus’ self-giving for us: from the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper to his death on the Cross. The Gospel this evening shows us that the darkness of Calvary is not the last word. The holy women who accompanied our Lord in the Passion lead us towards the light of the Resurrection. Jesus rewards their affection shown in wanting to embalm his Body by making them the first bearers of the joy of Easter.

2. Like the holy women, we too receive the news of Jesus’ Resurrection as a new light for our lives. Saint Paul reminds the Romans, in the passage from the letter we just read, that we unite ourselves to the death of Jesus “so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Easter announces to us that we are not bound by our past sins, by the weight of our previous errors, by the limitations we see in our lives. Therefore the Apostle insists: “consider yourselves dead to sin and
alive to God in Christ Jesus” (*Rom 6:11*).

On this night, we want to respond to our Lord’s invitation to undertake a new life. But what is this new life He calls us to? We might be tempted to think that everything we have experienced these days will soon pass, and we will return to our old routines: the same work, the same people, the same problems. Isn’t it naïve to think that simply because we have attended some ceremonies and prayed a bit more, the circumstances around us will change.

What does this newness consist in? In the light of faith—vivified by charity, sustained by hope—that fills our life. As Saint Josemaría tells us, “this certainty which the faith gives enables us to look at everything in a new light. And everything, while remaining exactly the same becomes different, because it is an expression of God’s love” (*Christ is Passing By*, 144). By faith we know that Jesus is alongside us in our daily life, helping us discover its true meaning. And then we carry out the same work, but with love for God and a spirit of service; we fight against routine in our dealings with others and, with the creativity of...
charity, we discover new ways to make their lives happy; and we are grateful
for the Christian formation we receive and strive to grasp it more fully with
new lights.
3. After announcing to the holy women the news of Jesus’ Resurrection, the
angel adds: “go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee;
there you will see him, as he told you” (Mk 16:7). The disciples are told to return
to Galilee, to where everything began for them, to the land they traveled
through each day with the Master during the years of his preaching.
The same call is also addressed to us: to go back to our Galilee, to our daily life,
but bringing to it the light and joy of Easter. As Pope Francis told us several
years ago: “To return to Galilee means above all to return to that blazing light
with which God’s grace touched me at the start of the journey. From that flame I
can light a fire for today and every day, and bring heat and light to my brothers
and sisters” (Homily in the Easter Vigil, April 19, 2014).
So let us welcome this invitation from our Lord. May Jesus’ Resurrection be for
us a source of joy. Let us receive the light he wants to give us and share it with
those around us. Like the holy women, let us announce with joy the
truth that

Christ is alive. And let us ask for the help of our Lady, whose face we contemplate tonight shining with joy at the Resurrection of her Son.

On the Feast of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (May 12, 2018)

This is the faithful and prudent steward whom the master will put in charge of his household (cf. Lk 12:42). These words from the entrance hymn begin this celebration with an expression of joy and reverence.

Indeed, Blessed Alvaro was a faithful servant who gave his life to be a support and then successor of Saint Josemaría at the head of Opus Dei. He was a loyal son of the Church. As Pope Francis wrote on the occasion of his beatification: “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 Saint Josemaría, he always responded with prayer, forgiveness, understanding, and sincere charity.” We can ask ourselves now: is this the attitude that I usually have in my daily life, when faced with difficulties or problems?

A faithful and prudent man: that's what Blessed Alvaro was. And that is why I now turn to his intercession, so that our Lord will make us all faithful and prudent. Let us ask for the virtue of prudence so that we can always be faithful to the Gospel, amid the changing circumstances of every time and place. We need fidelity not to follow an idea but to follow a Person: Jesus Christ, our Lord, who always gives a new horizon to the life of each one of us.
Today's liturgy of the Word presents us with the figure of the Good Shepherd. In the first reading, God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel: “As a shepherd examines his flock while he himself is among his scattered sheep, so will I examine my sheep. I will deliver them from every place where they were scattered on the day of dark clouds” (Ez 34,12). Then, in Saint John's Gospel, the figure of the shepherd becomes more evident: “I am the good shepherd ... and I will lay down my life for the sheep” (Jn 10:14-15).

It is he, Jesus, who truly gives his life for his flock, who goes after the lost sheep and brings it to still waters, as we prayed in the responsorial psalm (cf. Ps 22). Loving those entrusted to his care, as Christ loves them, is one of the essential traits of a good shepherd. This is how Blessed Alvaro lived his whole life: with a welcoming and understanding outlook, full of peace. For “a person who is very immersed in God is able to be very close to other people. The first condition for announcing Christ to them is to love them, because Christ loves them before we do. We have to leave behind our selfish concerns and love of comfort, and go out to meet our brothers and sisters.”

We can ask ourselves: why should we leave behind our selfishness and comfort? Doesn't this clash with what many today consider happiness to be? What happens to my freedom if I surrender it to God and, for his sake, to others? We could even think about it in terms of utility, something very characteristic of our modern society: what do I gain if I decide to forget about myself, in order to give myself to others? These questions speak to us about a fundamental issue: it is only by welcoming the gift of God that one finds true happiness.

Happiness is expressed in joy. And Christian joy, as Saint Josemaria said, has its “roots in the shape of a Cross;” it is joy “in the Lord” (cf. Phil 4:4) that Jesus has won for us on the Cross. This joy is capable not only of lasting forever but also of increasing, amid difficulties and sufferings, with the strength of faith, hope and love. This is what we have witnessed in the life of Blessed Alvaro, good shepherd of his daughters and sons.

During this month of May, we turn to Holy Mary, *Virgo fidelis, Virgo prudentissima*, so that she might help us grow in the *prudent faithfulness* of
Knowing how and wanting to give our lives for others joyfully, day after day.
Amen.

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Articles and Interviews

An Interview Granted to Vida Nueva, Spain, (March 3, 2018)

What do you see as the most important decisions you have made at the head of Opus Dei since you were elected Prelate last January? And the biggest difficulties you have faced?

A large part of the work has involved tackling the priorities set forth by the General Congress of Opus Dei for the upcoming years: above all, evangelization in the areas of the family and young people. Here there are many challenges that all of us in the Church face. Our society needs engaged couples and married people who show others the beauty of an authentic love, giving testimony to a happy and fulfilled life in the commitment of marriage. We also need to care for our young people, going out to meet them in their yearnings and concerns.

At the same time, we cannot forget the needy: the sick, immigrants, the unemployed, the poor, etc. They hold a privileged place in Jesus’ heart, as they should also in ours. How do we tackle all these challenges? Starting from the personal encounter with Christ, in prayer and the sacraments. It is the encounter with Christ that spurs us to start moving.

You asked me about the biggest difficulties I have faced... Thanks be to God, in these months spent as Prelate, I haven't encountered any special difficulties. I rely a lot on the strength of the prayer of so many people.

What is your leadership style? Do you have any model you intend to follow?
I would like to follow in the footsteps of St. Josemaría, who poured out his life for everyone. Thanks be to God, the government in Opus Dei is collegial, and that means there are other people who help me with this task. Every mission of government, of leadership, must be a mission of service. In my case, of service to the Church, to the Pope, and to all the priests and laity entrusted to me in the Prelature of Opus Dei.

How is your relationship with the Pope? Do you speak often with each other?

It is a relationship of affection. I am grateful to the Holy Father for his signs of affection towards the Prelature of Opus Dei, and also towards myself, on the occasion of the death of the previous Prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarría, and of my appointment to succeed him. And in the following months I have continued to experience his fatherly affection when I have spoken with him personally and when we have communicated in writing.

In the audience he granted you last March, Francis asked Opus Dei to give priority to the peripheries and to be present among the middle class, the professional world and intellectuals distanced from God. What has been done so far to follow his recommendation?

In that audience, the Pope encouraged us to bring God's love to the existential peripheries of the middle classes, to make God present in the immense panorama of professional work. This requires that each of us through our behavior strives to make Christ present to others. Hopefully each person in the Work will be a consistent witness to the Gospel in their family, at work, and in the other sectors of society.

With regard to physical peripheries, some initiatives brought forward by faithful of the Prelature that I have been able to visit this summer come to mind. For example, in the Raval neighborhood, in Barcelona, I visited the Braval and Terra associations. There, over 300 volunteers carry out educational, sports, and formational programs for immigrants in that city. In Madrid, I visited the Laguna palliative care center, where people are accompanied in the delicate moments of their final stretches in life. In Cologne, Germany, I met with volunteers and priests from the parish of St. Pantaleon, entrusted to the Prelature. There they are assisting 30 Syrian families in a building built in collaboration with the diocese and the local government. Families can spend six months there. They receive a lot of
help to integrate themselves into the country, so that they can be autonomous.

Thanks be to God, welfare institutions have arisen in many parts of the world. For example, in Kinshasa, capital of the world’s third poorest country, Monkole Hospital provides medical care for many people.

But as I was saying, the real revolution would be that everyone, despite our limitations and defects, would decide to act as good Samaritans in our home and at work, listening to others, offering spiritual and material help. I have met courageous business people, like that person in the Philippines who, with the profits from his three hotels, decided to start an orphanage for 50 abandoned children. He has now expanded it and offers assistance to about 100 children. There are also financial experts who dream of building a fairer world, far removed from an exclusionary economy; and prestigious doctors who pour themselves out for their patients. In Opus Dei we all have to keep making an effort in this area and learn from so many others in the Church.

_Were those words an implicit criticism for having been too concerned in the past about the “elites”?_

I didn’t get that impression. The Pope’s words seemed to me rather to be an invitation to bring the joy of the Gospel to the great field for apostolic sowing that is the middle class, where most people find themselves in many countries and also in Opus Dei.

_What would you say to those who view Opus Dei as a closed and sectarian group with an ultraconservative ideology?_

In first place, that those in Opus Dei—as is obvious—aren’t perfect, that we have defects and make mistakes. At the same time, I would invite them to get to know the reality at first hand, without being taken in by clichés. It is always a good practice in life to be open to the truth! Look, back in the 60s we had the opposite problem: quite a few people said that Opus Dei was a dangerous innovation. Faithfully conserving the faith received in the Church doesn’t make you ultraconservative. And progressing in the mission of spreading Christ’s light, attentive to the needs of each age, doesn’t make you a follower of the ideology of progressivism.
How can young people sanctify their work today, as Opus Dei urges, when their job is often insecure, poorly paid, and intermittent?

Prolonged unemployment or a job that isn’t secure can lead to a painful situation that seriously harms young people. This also clearly harms society as a whole because it is a waste of human potential, results in marriages being delayed, and is a source of insecurity for families. Those in these painful situations have the job, so to speak, of looking for work, which they can sanctify, as they can also sanctify the effort to obtain more training in order to find a better job. Obviously, this is not a solution for specific problems, but neither is it simply facile consolation.

For a Christian, adversity is a call to foster hope, above all in our goal which is Heaven. But it is also a call for our present life, in which with God’s help we are called to serve others and strive for the common good, especially through our work. Christian hope spurs us to do all we can to solve the problems around us.

Given the situation you describe, I think that those of us who are less young can and should help with our prayer, and lend a hand to those who are beginning their professional path by passing on to them our experience and knowledge, and helping them acquire the virtues needed to work well. And also, by seeking and proposing solutions to the problem of youth unemployment and job insecurity that afflicts so many young people.

What do you see as Pope Francis’ greatest achievement up to now in his pontificate?

You can already see some effects of his evangelizing impulse. Francis is urging the Church to reflect, in an ever-clearer way, the reality that she is the incarnation of divine mercy. He is a shepherd who is guiding his flock with his word and example: with the coherence between what he says and what he does. Also quite frequently he encourages people to have recourse to the sacrament of reconciliation. The results can already be seen in parishes. The Pope is also calling us to a more joyful and enthusiastic pastoral effort. He is providing support to families in their struggles, assuring them of our Lord’s assistance, despite all the difficulties and deficiencies.

What is your reaction to the criticism a certain sector in the Church is
It’s very painful. A son or daughter of the Church should never utter a word of destructive criticism towards anyone, much less towards the Pope. Pope Francis once said that he understands this commotion, especially regarding *Amoris laetitia*. With this apostolic exhortation, the Pope — among many other things — is urging us to draw close to people who are in difficult situations, and to do so with greater availability. But Francis himself expressly said that doctrine doesn’t change. It is, in my opinion, aimed at getting priests to dedicate more time to people who are going through difficulties, accompanying them in a process — sometimes long — that helps them understand better their personal situation and overcome it with God’s grace.

*What memories do you have of your relationship with the Pope Emeritus? Do you ever talk with him or go to visit him? How do you think he will be remembered by the Church?*

My relationship with Benedict XVI dates back to 1986, when I began working as a consultant to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, of which he was then prefect. That job gave me many opportunities for personal contact. I remember how he listened to each one with a sincere and unhurried interest, despite his many occupations. He was very interested in others’ opinion and was eager for a dialogue in search of the truth. After his resignation, I have visited him several times.

As Pope, he will be remembered for his rich teaching, found in his three encyclicals and his apostolic exhortations, and also in his abundant preaching. His homilies and addresses are filled with light, and many of them are grouped around specific themes: on the Church, the Apostles, the Fathers of the Church, prayer....

In addition, as a theologian, he holds a prominent place in contemporary theology, with important contributions in various fields, including central questions of fundamental theology and aspects of social and political morality.
An Interview Granted to The Times, London (June 9, 2018)

_Interview by Tom Kington_

**What have you achieved in your first year and what are your plans for upcoming years?**

I think that having completed this first year has been quite an achievement in itself! I have felt strongly supported by the prayers of so many people, especially those in Opus Dei. But I am very aware that I am the first Prelate who has not worked closely with our founder, and that can be a bit overwhelming. However, I think we have established some clear priorities: supporting the family as an institution, trying to help young people more effectively, and reaching more needy people. These are goals that we set in the congress that elected me in January 2017.

_In what parts of the world is the number of members growing and what kind of people are joining?_

Its growth is similar to that of the Church as a whole throughout the world. For example, in recent years the number of Catholics in several African and Asian countries has increased somewhat, as has the number of those who wish to be part of Opus Dei. In other more secularized parts of the world, we experience the same difficulties as many other institutions in the Church, and strive to react with peace and hope. Regardless of the statistics, I like to consider it is almost a miracle that there are so many millions of people in the Church who, with God’s grace, respond freely each day to their Christian call to love and service. And among them are also many thousands of men and women of Opus Dei, or people who take part in the Work’s activities.

Those who join Opus Dei are lay people, both women and men, who are legally adults and who feel a special vocation or call to seek God and transmit the Gospel through their ordinary life: in professional work, in the family, in social and professional relationships. From a sociological point of view, they are mostly married people (some 70%), workers and middle class people, who have to struggle to make ends meet each month.
How do people view Opus Dei now?

I think we are being increasingly accepted. The support and encouragement we have received from all the Popes over the years, including Pope Francis now, and from so many bishops in so many places, has helped people realize that we are simply one more institution in the Church. We do not want to be considered special, either positively or negatively. Indeed, the fact that some don’t seem to accept us is a challenge, but it is the same struggle that every Christian individual and institution has. In other words, Christians are called to be the salt of the earth, and salt should never lose its flavor. Our goal is not to be accepted, but to bear witness to Christ in the heart of society. And to do that, sometimes you have to stand out and not conform to what others are doing.

Opus Dei has been accused of being an elitist group that attracts people from the highest levels of society, and of having quite aggressive recruitment technique for young people. Is there any truth to this?

You point to two specific accusations. Let’s consider them one by one.

In fact, there are many members of Opus Dei who are poor, especially in less developed countries, and members of Opus Dei organize many initiatives in the service of the poor. That is a fact. I would say that the members of Opus Dei come from the same levels of society as the other Catholics in their country. In Britain, and in most countries, that means the middle class. Pope Francis recently encouraged members of Opus Dei to continue evangelizing “the peripheries of the middle classes” in the countries where they live and work.

Opus Dei is interested in helping every type of person—whether rich, middle class, or poor—to draw closer to Christ. However, I don’t think we reach that many people in the highest spheres of society. I wish we could reach more, as I also wish we could reach many more poor people. We are trying to get underway more projects for the poor and for immigrants, and we have some wonderful initiatives, such as the Baytree Center in Brixton, in London; Braval, in Barcelona; and activities for Syrian refugees in a parish in Cologne, Germany. But I pray that we may do more in this regard. However, I would say, and this is a key point, that the essence of the spirit of Opus Dei is not so much what we do as an institution, as what
its individual members—most of whom are lay people—do through carrying out their daily work. So although the specific activities of Opus Dei will always be limited, I hope that the people of Opus Dei will take seriously the evangelical call to serve the poor in their family and work life.

As for “aggressive techniques for recruiting young people,” although I think the accusation somewhat unfair, I would say we have learned it is very necessary that those who wish to join the Prelature seek the opinion of as many people as they wish, and do not take a step forward without great conviction. Together with the whole Church, we increasingly love the value of freedom. If you allow me a personal reference, I refer you to a pastoral letter that I wrote about freedom, dated January 9 of this year, which is available on the Opus Dei website.

**Opus Dei attracted more members after the Da Vinci Code. Why?**

Yes, in fact the *Da Vinci Code* had the opposite effect from what you might have expected. This was due mainly to God’s grace, which turns each cross into a blessing. The lies about us—about the Catholic Church in general and about Opus Dei in particular—were so outrageous and brazen that they forced many Catholics to try to explain the truth about themselves. Many Opus Dei members had opportunities to give talks and speak with the media, or just with their friends. Suddenly, everyone wanted to learn about us. And the fact that the book was filled with ridiculous and unfounded falsehoods helped other Catholics value us more and overcome any misgivings they might have had. Seeing all the absurdities in the book about the Church helped many Catholics to realize that what was said there about Opus Dei was also false. For example, as you know, in the book the main villain is Silas, an “assassin monk of Opus Dei,” when in reality there are no monks in Opus Dei nor can there be, because, as wonderful as the monks are, we are a Prelature only for lay people and secular priests. Errors like this were ridiculous, but God allowed them to bring about good; whenever he allows evil it is to draw good from it.

*Are you worried about the growing number of conservative critics of Pope Francis?*
Is it really a growing number? Whatever their number, I experience sorrow and pain over every criticism of the Pope. The lips of a son or daughter of the Church should never utter a destructive criticism of anyone, let alone of the one who is our common father and a source of unity in the Church. I like to think about the challenge that the founder of Opus Dei set before us: to express, in every circumstance, a love for the Holy Father that is both heartfelt and shown in deeds.

Pope Francis is calling us especially to evangelize and to live the virtue of mercy by reaching the marginalized in society. As was often the case with his predecessors, Francis’ call to social action and the defense of the poor is uncomfortable —because he is rightly criticizing so much injustice in our world— and we should all be challenged by it.

What is your position in the debate on the granting of communion to divorced people who have remarried?

I suppose you are referring here to the issues raised in 2016 by Pope Francis’ document on marriage, Amoris Laetitia. Pope Francis once said that he understands the stir this caused, especially in regard to the eighth chapter, where he refers specifically to divorced and remarried Catholic faithful. There, the Pope urges us to draw close to people who are in difficult situations, such as the one just mentioned, and to do so with greater availability and with great mercy. But Francis himself expressly states that doctrine does not change. It is, in my opinion, mainly about getting priests to dedicate more time to people who are going through difficulties, accompanying them in a process—sometimes a long one—that helps them to understand their personal situation and overcome it with God’s grace. We have to help them take the necessary steps so that one day they will be able to receive the Eucharist.

You visited London in December to meet with Opus Dei members. What were your impressions from that visit?

I loved it! It was great to see the energy and enthusiasm of the Opus Dei members in the United Kingdom and all their friends. They are really trying to do beautiful things to serve society: wonderful schools with a truly Catholic vision, great initiatives to help families, projects for the
needy, and much more, including above all their personal testimony. It was refreshing.

I saw many people who are true friends of their friends, as our founder wanted. I had a chance to speak, for example, with Peter, a young student suffering from cancer, who would die a few weeks later and who left us a great example of trust in God, friendship and joy. The large number of people who have been moved by his death has led me to reflect on how God makes use of human friendship to reach many people with his love.

*In recent years, special emphasis has been placed in Opus Dei on setting up reasonably priced primary and secondary schools, open to everyone, that have proven to be very popular among non-Catholic parents due to their academic standards. Will more schools be started?*

We would certainly like to. The Catholic educational effort is very beautiful. We want to share this with as many people as possible. Already back in the sixties, St. Josemaría saw that parents, who are the first educators, should be more involved in the creation and management of schools. This is a dream, by the way, that Cardinal Newman also had a hundred years before, although at that time the Catholic laity did not have as much access to good formation. The schools you refer to have been started by groups of parents who want to be very involved in their children’s education, which includes not only teaching the faith, but also character development and an individual mentoring program that tries to pinpoint the best approach for each student.

*What else would you like to see the British members of Opus Dei accomplish?*

Many things, but we are relatively few people in Britain and I know that my spiritual children are doing the best they can. I hope there will be more members so that they can start more apostolic initiatives in the United Kingdom, both for the poor and needy and in the field of education, in addition to what they are already doing. Above all, the members, cooperators and friends of Opus Dei need to continue carrying out the task of evangelization among their companions, colleagues, neighbors and families, so that we help bring it about that Christ’s message reaches everyone in the United Kingdom and the whole world. I would like
the faithful of Opus Dei in England to be sowers of peace and joy in their social and professional milieu.

How do you relax?

Although I don’t see this as of much interest, I like being with people, and I relax with reading, classical music (especially Beethoven), and with tennis—but not at the level of Wimbledon!

An Interview Granted to Avvenire, Milan, Italy (June 2018)

Interviewed by Francesco Ognibene

Ninety years have gone by since the day that St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer “saw” Opus Dei. Can you say that this “vision” has been fulfilled?

That inspiration regarding the sanctification of ordinary life and the role of the laity is today increasingly present in the heart of the Church, although it is not “exclusive” to anyone. The Work is carried out through the generous response of each one in every moment of history. Since 1928 it has spread to every continent, and the diversity of its faithful has increased, both in age and in backgrounds, nationalities, etc. But that vision needs to become a reality in the life of each person, and to be present in the changing circumstances of every epoch. What does it mean for a layperson today to seek holiness in a digital society, which is experiencing unprecedented changes, both in behavior and in culture?

Among other things, it requires sowing friendship in this digital world, thus overcoming the risk of depersonalization. Each person is important, because Christ died and rose for each one of us. Authentic relationships begin when we are able to see specific people at the center of each interaction, although often, in digital conversations, we don’t have them in front of us. Also it means sharing with others beneficial content, without reducing culture merely to information. And to do so one needs to study, reflect, pray, listen. Christians should, among other things, instill serenity
into the rapid flow of the digital world. Finally, it requires living consistently, with a unity of life, without being “two-faced.” One cannot claim to be a model citizen and a good “offline” Christian and then act “online” in an unbridled way, with actions that may be lacking in charity and understanding for others. You have been at the head of Opus Dei for more than a year and have had the opportunity to travel a fair bit. What guidance have you been giving to the Prelature with respect to your predecessors? And what situations do you encounter worldwide? Personally I would like to be close to people and live spiritual fatherhood with them, especially with those in Opus Dei, because the Church has entrusted them to me in a special way. I would like to bring them the affection and evangelizing impulse that St. Josemaría and his successors transmitted to us. The first priority is to help each lay person and each priest of the Prelature to constantly renew their life by contemplating Christ’s face—to encourage them to serve the Church in the ordinary circumstances of their lives: at work, in their family, in social relationships, helping others to discover Christ’s love there, as witnesses to the joy of the Gospel. The last General Congress of Opus Dei highlighted, among other priorities, the work of evangelization in the field of the family, the young, and the most needy, both in body and spirit. In Opus Dei we want to continue fostering initiatives that help alleviate the specific needs of this wounded world of ours, and that make present the consolation of God. As for the situations found in today’s world, they are very different. In countries such as Indonesia and Sri Lanka, where Christians are a small minority, it is particularly important to foster trust in God and a deep faith. The Christian commitment of the faithful of Opus Dei is a small seed, whose fruits grow little by little with God’s grace. In other countries where the Christian tradition is stronger, perhaps the main challenge is to live the Gospel with joy and authenticity, in the midst of a world that often seems to be ruled by predominantly financial and material interests. The Pope is urging the Church to go out ever more towards mankind’s “peripheries,” to go outside the walls, to overcome fears, to open up a dialogue based on a faith lived authentically. What is Opus Dei learning from Francis’ teaching and example? The Pope is teaching everyone the same thing: to live the Gospel, to try to go out to those human peripheries that can sometimes frighten us, but where the Lord is asking us to be present. His example is
leading many Catholics, and among them many faithful of Opus Dei, to begin, for example, initiatives to welcome immigrants and refugees, who are now among the people most in need of help. And also many other apostolic initiatives in difficult areas, to bring the Gospel closer to unbelievers. What “peripheries” are the members of the Prelature caring for? Recently, Pope Francis asked that we try to work in the “peripheries of the middle classes.” In our societies based on material comfort, we sometimes tend to reduce the concept of periphery to poor districts in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, or to the large disadvantaged areas in our big cities. I thank God for the generosity of so many people in Opus Dei and their friends who, like many other Catholics, are carrying out educational or support initiatives in these poor peripheries. For example, the Eastlands College of Technology, a vocational school that has just opened in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Nairobi. In Rome, the ELIS Center a year ago opened an evening school for 80 children from the district of Tiburtino and the shelters in the neighborhoods with the most pressing social problems. Most of these young people have serious family and social difficulties, and many are unaccompanied minors who arrived in Italy as migrants from the Mediterranean. But I think that, by that request, the Pope wanted to remind people that the “peripheries” also include that friend or co-worker who is by our side every day, in any Italian city, but who is far from God, or who is going through a family crisis, or who is simply finding no answer to the question: what is the meaning of this life?

The Pope’s recent apostolic exhortation Gaudete et exsultate, on the call to holiness in today’s world, echoes many points of the founder of Opus Dei’s teachings. What were your thoughts on reading it?

The universal call to holiness is the center of all the founder of Opus Dei’s teachings. He always insisted that sanctity was not just for a few privileged people, right from the beginning of Opus Dei. “God calls everyone,” he said, “he looks for Love from everyone: from all men and women, wherever they are; from all, whatever their situation in life, profession or job.” God is calling the high school teacher to be holy, the artist, the business person, the pizza maker, the farm worker, those working in the home, the journalist, the sports person, those confronting the challenges of unemployment...
During his lifetime, the founder had the great joy of seeing how the Second Vatican Council confirmed and proclaimed the truth that sanctity is for everyone. Therefore you can understand why, in reading Gaudete et exsultate, my thoughts quickly went to the joy Saint Josemaría would have experienced on seeing this new expression of the message of the universal call to holiness in Pope Francis’ words. What surprised you the most about it?

The Pope points to Jesus’ words in the beatitudes as the “identity card” for a person seeking sanctity in daily life. This path requires that we sometimes go against the current, but it leads in the end to happiness. It is very important to help people see, by our example, that an integral Christian life also leads to human fulfillment already here on earth, despite the difficulties we all confront. The path of the beatitudes is a path to happiness for us and for all men and women.

I also thought it was very beautiful to see how the Pope insisted, throughout the entire exhortation, that holiness is based on small gestures, something we also see Saint Josemaría stressing in his book The Way: “Have you noticed how human love consists of little things? Well, divine Love also consists of little things.” The ninetieth anniversary of Opus Dei coincides with the year that the Church has dedicated to young people, with a view to the October Synod. Many of the apostolates of the Work are directed to the world of youth. What does Opus Dei offer young people today? I remember the answer that St. Josemaría once gave to a young person: “I look at you, and see that the world needs people like you: in your surroundings, in your workplace, in your family, in the place where you live, where you spend your free time, you need to be Christians who are strong, pleasant to get along with. Your duties as a Christian can be summed up as being loyal. Those who fail to wage a war against themselves aren’t loyal. You have to resolve to be loyal, to be serious about the way you live. Students have to study, those with a job have to work, and to do so without shirking the effort it requires.” We need to present to young people the ideal of holiness—of following Jesus—in ordinary life, made up of study, friendship, work, service. We have to help them realize that the world, and with it the Church, will soon be in their hands. That is why they need to receive human and Christian formation, and also realize that
people are looking at them with hope and confidence. The key point is to help them to come to know Christ, to draw close to Christ, to love Christ, in the circumstances of their ordinary lives. Another key point for society and the Church is the family, which now seems to be undergoing a crisis and to be growing steadily weaker. What do you ask from members and friends of Opus Dei in this regard? That they give a positive testimony, above all through their perseverance in love. Being faithful to God or a person is something that needs to be renewed every day. Sometimes we find this easy, and sometimes it requires effort. We need to desire and seek the good of others. In the family, this good requires accepting the other person as he or she is, being able to renounce one’s own opinions, recognizing signs of fatigue, finding time and reasons to talk, not complaining... These efforts, simple but sometimes heroic, will make it clear that we care about people, that we never want to consider them as “expired” or “defective” objects, to be “replaced” when we no longer need them. A family that doesn't give up in the face of difficulties, in which parents and children seek God’s help to know and want the good of others, is a great support for the Church and for society. What does the Prelate of the Work expect from Italy? That all of us in Opus Dei, by being faithful to the charism of St. Josemaría, let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit in a renewed evangelizing impetus. Not only in Italy, but in every country. We need to bring Christ’s warmth to many friends, family members, colleagues, neighbors and acquaintances. This evangelizing impulse in Italy is not so much a question of starting new activities or institutions like those already in existence, which in themselves are something very good and positive, but rather of fostering personal friendship, openness to everyone and a spirit of service. These are deeply evangelical attitudes that are essential for the Christian apostolate, while also being compatible with the defects and weaknesses we all have.

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“Sanctifying Daily Work,” Studi Cattolici, Italy (no. 686)
A round table moderated
by Maria Aparecida Ferrari

The Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome hosted on October 19-20 a conference entitled *Quale anima per il lavoro professionale?* Among the speakers were professors Brad S. Gregory, University of Notre Dame (Indiana, U.S.); Benedetta Giovagnola, University of Macerata (Italy); Jens Zimmermann, Trinity Western University (Vancouver, Canada); Ana Marta González, University of Navarra (Spain); Brian Griffiths, Goldman Sachs International; Maria Chiara Carrozza, Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna of Pisa; and from the University organizing the event, Javier López Díaz, Santiago Sanz, and Martin Schlag. On October 21, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Prelate of Opus Dei and Chancellor of the University of the Holy Cross, answered some questions that the professors and other participants asked him about the sanctification of work, a central aspect of the spirit of Opus Dei. The round-table moderator was Professor Maria Aparecida Ferrari.

*Prof. Maria Aparecida Ferrari: I would like to start by inviting Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz to offer some remarks on the short video *The Heart of Work*, which we have just watched.*

I think that almost all the basic elements of St. Josemaría’s message on the sanctification of work are resent in the video. In first place, work as something that can be offered to God, which requires the effort to do it well. Secondly, the fact that all work is important, because its importance depends on the love with which it is done. And finally, service to others through work.

All these elements of the relationship between holiness and work are part of a broader framework: the universal call to holiness, a key theme in St. Josemaría’s teaching, which is a Gospel teaching. He always stressed that his message, the spirit of Opus Dei, is “as old and as new as the Gospel.” In his thought, his teachings and his life, the universal call to holiness does not just refer to the subjective aspect, meaning the statement that everyone is called to be a saint. That is true, unquestionably, but there is also an objective aspect in that call, in the sense that all the circumstances of ordinary life are a means, path, instrument, opportunity and matter of
sanctification. The video that has just been shown ends with St. Josemaría saying: “On the horizon, my children, heaven and earth seem to merge, but no: where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives” (Conversations, no. 116).

I recall Roland Joffe’s film about St. Josemaría during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) [There Be Dragons, 2011], and specifically the scene where St. Josemaría receives light from God to found Opus Dei. At that point the film shows him writing the words “everyone” and “everything.” Everyone is called to holiness and all human realities, any honest activity, can and should be a path to holiness, an opportunity for meeting Christ.

Work holds a very important place in the sanctification of ordinary life. Not only because of the time we spend working, which is a lot, but especially because of its repercussions for the person who does the work and for other people. Work is a central part of the universal call to holiness. This is revealed by God’s plan for mankind as narrated in Genesis, right at the beginning of the Bible. There we learn that the world is characterized by its relationship with God, and that the creation of the first man and woman was oriented to forming a family – “increase and multiply” (Gen 1:28) – and to working: “ut operaretur, to work” (Gen 2:15). Work and the family, together with the relationship with God, are, so to speak, the pillars that support God’s plan for mankind.

The sanctification of work can be explained in different ways. St. Josemaría wrote in one of the points in The Way, “Add a supernatural motive to your ordinary work and you will have sanctified it” (no. 359). This does not just mean adding on to one’s work a sort of external devotional adornment. It goes to the heart of the very purpose of the work: the why and wherefore that determines the way it is done.

The philosophers call this “why and wherefore” the “final cause” of human actions. Aristotle, as St. Thomas quotes him in Latin, says that the final cause is “causa causalitatis in omnibus causis” (In I Sent., d.45, q.1, a.3), which means that the intrinsic finality of human activity determines the efficiency of the efficient cause and, through that, the formality and materiality of what is done. Therefore, the “supernatural motive”
determines the fact of working and the way of working: it leads one to work and to work well, to accomplish a task that is done well.

So what is the “supernatural motive” that the sanctification of work depends on? It cannot be anything except love for God and, as an inseparable part of that love, service to others. Sanctifying work is just that: doing it for love of God and in order to serve other people, and that demands doing it well, “professionally,” as St. Josemaría often said. We have to work well, as we have just heard in the video, because “God will not accept shoddy workmanship” (Friends of God, no. 55). We cannot offer him things deliberately done badly — failing to look after the little details and not seeking the perfection of the job being done.

When work is sanctified it contributes to the sanctification of the person who does it, and is an instrument to help in the sanctification of others. St. Josemaría united these three aspects in the phrase “sanctifying their work, sanctifying themselves in it, and sanctifying others through it” (Conversations, no. 55). The three are inseparable, because in order to work for love of God and as a service to others, and to do it well, one has to bring the virtues into play. Thus we grow in our spiritual life, both in the human virtues raised up by God’s grace, and in the theological virtues, above all in charity. Indeed, St. Josemaría used to say that work “is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love” (Christ is Passing By, no. 48). This is the root that enables work to be something truly holy and sanctifying.

Sanctifying others with our work requires setting an example of working well, and also friendship. St. Josemaría laid a lot of stress on this aspect of Christian apostolate, on friendship, because where there is real friendship people share their own spiritual experience and their personal commitment to Christ spontaneously and effectively, since what matters to one friend matters to the other.

Well, there’s a lot more that could be said about these topics, but maybe that’s enough for now. Other facets that are worthwhile considering may come up in the other points you raise.

Prof. Santiago Sanz: In a study published a few years ago you stated that sanctifying work does not just mean doing something holy while
working, but making the work itself holy: the action of working. In that way the person doing the work becomes holy. Is it also true to say that the object of the work, the thing itself, becomes holy in some way?

What is holiness? It’s a broad question, but one could say that holiness means belonging to God. We become holy in the measure in which, by our free response to grace, we belong to God. So the more we belong to God through our free response to his grace, the holier we are. As regards things, they become holy in the measure in which they are offered to God. The things of this world already belong to God, because he created them, but through human freedom they acquire a new dimension. Because of our freedom, work itself, including its material aspect, can become holy, can belong more to God.

We also need to consider the Christological dimension, which is essential in Christianity. The offering of work to God is always done through Christ; it is an exercise of the common priesthood, which consists of sharing in Christ’s priesthood and is always exercised in Christ. The very fact of being adoptive children of God is a “being in Christ,” and for that reason sanctified work is always work done “in Christ.” Sometimes, when he began work, St. Josemaría would say to Jesus, aloud or silently, “Let’s do this together, the two of us.” For us the only way to be united to God is through Christ. He is the Way, the only Mediator, and we can be mediators by bringing the world to God, including through work, in the measure in which we are “in Christ” and Christ’s instruments.

Prof. Pilar del Rio: What is the connection between the dimension of worship in Christian life, and the sanctification of work?

I would say that the worship dimension of work consists basically in the exercise of the common priesthood. We are speaking of spiritual worship: offering work to God is an act of spiritual worship. St. Josemaría always highlighted the connection between offering up work and the celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is the center and root of the spiritual life, and therefore of the sanctification of work.

Another major feature of his teaching which comes into this relationship is the unity of one’s life. Working and participating in the Eucharist are done at different times, but they should be united in a
Christian’s life. How can we unite the Eucharist to our work? The strength to sanctify our work and other daily activities comes ultimately from the Eucharist. All spiritual strength to work “with Christ and in Christ” comes from the Eucharist, which is the Sacrifice of our Redemption.

Prof. Philip Goyret: In the renewal of ecclesiology in the 20th century the Church’s mission was presented as saving not just souls, but the whole person: soul, body, relationships with other people and with everything in creation. In the task of bringing creation back to the Creator, the sanctification of work has great importance. I would like to know how you see this question from the ecclesiological point of view.

To talk about an ecclesiological dimension we first need to have an adequate understanding of the Church. If we follow the thought of the then Professor of Theology Joseph Ratzinger, we can consider the Church under three aspects. First, as the “people of God,” a special kind of people, but one with a true unity. A second way of defining the Church is as the “Body of Christ.” And the third way is as the “universal sacrament of salvation.” These three aspects express everything that the Church is. Ratzinger said, quite rightly, that out of these three, the one that defines the Church best is the Body of Christ. And it’s not a metaphor, because in Christ we really do form a body, with a shared life, which is the Communion of Saints.

The ecclesiological dimension of the sanctification of work lies in the Communion of Saints because, in the measure in which we are living members of the Body of Christ, sanctified work has a positive repercussion on the whole Body of the Church. Building up our personal holiness by sanctifying our work means that we are sanctifying the whole Church. At the same time, we each receive the positive effect of everyone else’s holiness. I think that this is the most radical ecclesiological dimension.

The Communion of Saints also includes the part of the Church that is in Heaven. At the end of time, however, there will be a glorification. The real goal of sanctification is the glorification not only of the spirit but also of the body. There will be “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet 3:13) – new, not just a continuation of this world – and our bodies will be glorified. St. Thomas says that the body will be so transformed by glory that our
bodily eyes will see God in his bodily effects, principally the glorified body of Christ (cf. *In IV Sent.*, d.48, q.2, a.1, c).

Prof. Amalia Quevedo: I’m especially happy that you referred to Aristotle, since I have dedicated a large part of my life to Aristotle. According to him, “being is said in many ways.” I would like to know what you think about this Aristotelian way of seeing things, open to a plurality of meanings, and also whether it may be connected with an ability to distinguish what is essential from what is accidental.

The diversity of meanings and the lack of univocal terminology is clear, in many ways, but we also need to avoid the relativism that is so widespread in present-day culture, which aims to limit truth to what can be verified experimentally. In everything else, relativism claims that there is no such thing as truth and all we can talk about are sensations and personal opinions. To take another angle, we are under pressure from the tendency that in its most explicit form goes back to Hegel: the claim that truth does not precede action but is the result of action. That is taken to its extreme by Marxism. We need to be quite clear that objective truth exists, however many instances there may be where there is no univocal term for a concept.

As to the distinction between what is essential and accidental, it is true that sometimes it may not be that clear, among other reasons because what is essential is manifested through what is accidental. What’s more, there are accidental realities that are necessary, despite being accidental. The fact is that “accidental” isn’t always the same as “superfluous,” something that can be done without. What is accidental is simply what exists in another being, and there are things that exist in another being, in the essence, and that cannot be separated from it.

Prof. Susan Hanssen: Professor Martin Schlag said yesterday that many people don’t only work for money but because of a mission they have freely taken on, guided by their own conscience before God. From another angle, Prof. Robert Gahl, in his presentation, showed the theatrical, dramatic nature of work done in the sight of God, who is our spectator. Would it be fair to say that according to St. Josemaría’s teaching God watches us as a spectator while we work?

Is God a spectator? If “spectator” is understood in the external sense, I
think God is much more than just a spectator. In the deepest sense he is always a protagonist, even when we don't know or don't want to know it, because we depend on him for everything, he maintains us in existence. Moreover, speaking of the sanctification of work, God’s presence is not only the presence of someone outside, to whom we offer what we do. God is with us and within us. We work with Christ and in Christ. St. Paul says, “If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord” (Rom 14:8). So that our relationship with God is never the sort of relationship we might have with someone who just watches us. But if a “spectator” is understood not just as someone who observes from the outside, but in the sense in which within the Blessed Trinity the Father sees the Son and those who are “sons in the Son” (Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes, no. 22), then yes, it is legitimate to speak in those terms.

**Prof. Jose Ignacio Murillo:** St. Josemaría teaches people to be contemplatives in their work. However, contemplation has an essentially intellectual dimension. So my question is: Is it possible to be contemplatives in intellectual work, which takes up the whole of one’s attention?

Contemplation is not only an act of the intellect. For St. Thomas, it is a “*simplex intuitus veritatis*” (cf. *S. Th.* II-II, q.180, a.3, ad 1), “*ex caritate procedens*” (cf. *In III Sent.*, d.35, q.1, a.2, sol.1): an intuitive, not discursive, vision of the truth—a grace from God—which proceeds from love. If intellectual work is motivated by love, since love can also be present in the work of the mind, then contemplation is possible in that work.

As we saw in the short video we have just watched, St. Josemaría talks about turning work into prayer. He does not mean that we have to be reciting vocal prayers while we work. Even when we aren’t thinking about anything except the work we are doing, if we have offered it to God as spiritual worship and if we are with God, we can contemplate him in that work, if it is work that stems from charity.

**Prof. Rosario Polo:** What is the *quid divinum* that St. Josemaría speaks of, the “something holy, hidden, that it is up to each one to discover” in order to turn work into prayer?

The *quid divinum* (cf. *Conversations*, no. 114) has, I think, different connotations, many different aspects. From the existential, personal point
of view, I would say that discovering the *quid divinum* is mainly about discovering an expression of God’s love for us in everything: in people, in circumstances, in the actual physical tasks, in the difficulties. St. John says, in a sort of summary of the Apostles’ experience of their relationship with Christ, “We know and believe the love God has for us” (*I Jn* 4:16). Discovering the *quid divinum* means seeing others and God’s creatures whom he loves; and also seeing in difficulties the hidden love of God for us, even when we don’t understand the reason for a setback, because we need to believe in God’s love, believe in what is not seen.

Prof. Jose Luis Illanes: Work is a human activity, so that sanctifying work does not mean sanctifying “this table that I am making,” but sanctifying my activity of making the table, although both aspects go together. The table in itself is always the same, independently of whether I make it with love or without it. So I wonder whether the fact of working well is the same as Christianizing things.

It’s true that sanctifying work and sanctifying oneself in one’s work are two aspects that go together. Work is sanctified as the activity of the person who does it, and at the same time the world is brought closer to God. Sometimes the result of the work – “this table,” as you put it – can be materially the same whether it is made with love for God or without it. But material things give God glory through us. In that sense, a table made with love for God is not the same as one made without it. Even though materially it may be the same, I think that in its relationship with the rest of the world and with God, it’s different.

Prof. Maria Raffaella Dalla Valle: When we work with people who are different from ourselves, including people of other religions, how can we try to bring them closer to the faith?

It depends on the person you are talking to. I think the first step has to be friendship. Rather than talking on the theoretical level, it’s preferable to share your own personal experience, to talk about who God is for you. If there is genuine friendship, you’ll get to the point where you can share ideas that will help the other person reflect too. And in every case, you need to pray, because faith is not something we can bestow by means of rational argument.
Prof. Jose Tomas Martin de Agar: Talking of turning work into prayer, which is not merely adding vocal prayer to work, I remember what Benedict XVI said about prayer, when he described it as the profound orientation of the heart or the soul to God, which we can achieve in whatever we do; and he recalled in that context the “prayer of the heart” practiced especially by our brothers and sisters in the Eastern churches. I wonder whether sanctifying work might mean making our work into the prayer of the heart.

There comes to mind something St. Augustine says, with reference to the Gospel phrase about “oportet semper orare et non deficere” (Lk 18:1): the need to pray always and not lose heart. How is it possible to pray always? St. Augustine writes: “When we exercise faith and hope and charity, we pray always with our continuous desire” (Ep. 130 ad Probam, 9.18). In the measure in which we do things for love of God, it is already prayer. For our work to be prayer we don’t have to be thinking about God while we work. Transforming it into prayer means offering it to God, doing it for love of God, and doing our best to finish it well.

Prof. Luis Manuel Calleja: I’d be grateful for some suggestions on work-related themes where St. Josemaría’s teaching is particularly significant or innovative.

A very important field today is the link between ethics and work: the sanctification of work and ethics. Working well isn’t simply a matter of technique, because all human work always has an ethical dimension. In today’s world, unfortunately, the ethical dimension is neglected in many professional spheres.

Prof. Massimo De Angelis: I think you said previously that by sanctifying our work we also sanctify the product of our work. What I am wondering is whether that means that through our work we somehow become co-redeemers of things and of the world.

We should understand co-redeeming not as adding something to the Redemption accomplished by Christ, but as being channels for the fruits of his Redemption to reach other people. It is mainly about co-redeeming people, helping them through our work and the way we live our lives to come closer to God and to the means by which the fruits of his
Redemption reach us — especially the Word of God and the Sacraments. This is the immediate, specific meaning of co-redemption: helping people to go to the sources of the fruits of the Redemption. Additionally, one can also speak of co-redeeming the material world, in an analogical sense, in so far as the material, structural things of the world can be a greater or lesser help to people in reaching God.

Prof. Fabiana Cristofari: The place where I work is orientated towards working hard and producing an ever greater output. I would like to ask you, what should be the starting-point for attaining the sanctification of work, where working hard and well does not necessarily mean sanctifying one’s work?

The central question is undoubtedly one’s personal relationship with God. Without that, without the conviction that there is a relationship with God that we have to nurture and develop in our work, the concept of sanctifying work doesn’t hold any meaning. The starting-point needs to be one’s own relationship with God.

Prof. Maria Aparecida Ferrari: It is time to close this session. I think we can best do so by thanking St. Josemaría in the first place. With God’s grace and through the intercession of this “saint of ordinary life,” as St. John Paul II called him, each of us too can sanctify our daily life in all its aspects. I am grateful to Pope Francis for the words of encouragement he sent us, together with his blessing. And I would also like to thank especially our Grand Chancellor, Msgr. Ocáriz, who had honored us by being present in this session. Thank you, likewise, to all the people — organisers, technicians, translators— who have made this encounter possible by their discreet and effective work.

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Letter on the Occasion of the Decree on a Miraculous Cure Attributed to Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri. (June 9, 2018)

*Rome, June 9, 2018*

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

This morning, on the day of the memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Holy See made public Pope Francis’ decision to promulgate the decree on a miraculous cure attributed to the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God, Guadalupe Ortiz.

Let us give thanks to God and to the most Blessed Virgin our Mother for this pontifical act, which opens the way to the beatification of this sister of ours. As the Church has declared, “she dedicated herself entirely and with joy to God and to the service of his Church, and experienced intensely God’s love.”

Guadalupe converted all her activities into a place of meeting with Christ: her work as a researcher in chemistry, the classes she taught in various educational institutions, the work of domestic administration, the direction of university residences, etc. Her sanctity was forged in her correspondence to God’s grace in her daily life, in her apostolate, and in her desire to improve the lives of the most needy.

Let us have recourse to Guadalupe’s intercession, so that she obtains for us the grace of living with joy and fidelity our vocation to holiness and apostolate in the middle of the world.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

Fernando
PRELATE

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Pastoral Letters

Pastoral Letter of January 9, 2018

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

1. Following a guideline of the General Congress, over the past months I have frequently made reference to freedom. Now, in accord with the teachings of Saint Josemaría, who throughout his life was a lover of freedom, I want us to recall some aspects of this great gift from God. “I will never tire of repeating, my children,” he once told us, “that one of the clearest characteristics of the spirit of Opus Dei is its love for freedom and for the need to understand others.” [1] As we reread and meditate on his words, let us give heartfelt thanks to God. And let each of us examine how we can give better expression to these words in our own life, with God’s grace. Thus we will also be better prepared to help more souls attain “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:21).

An ardent desire for freedom, the demand for it on the part of persons and peoples, is a positive sign of our times. Acknowledging the freedom of each woman and man means acknowledging that they are persons: masters of their own acts and responsible for them, able to direct their own lives. Although freedom does not always lead everyone to develop into their best selves, we can never exaggerate its importance, since if we were not free we would not be able to love.

But unfortunately, in many circles there is great ignorance about what freedom really is. Often an illusory freedom without limits is aspired to, as though it were the ultimate goal of progress. And not infrequently, we are pained to see that this claim goes hand in hand with many forms of oppression and of apparent freedoms that in reality are only chains that enslave. This form of freedom, sooner or later, reveals its emptiness. “Some people think they are free if they can avoid God,” the Pope writes. “They fail to see that they remain existentially orphaned, helpless, homeless. They cease being pilgrims and become drifters.” [2]

*Called to freedom*
2. We have been “called to freedom” (Gal 5:13). Creation itself is a manifestation of divine freedom. The Genesis accounts give us a glimpse of God’s creative love, his joy in sharing with the world his goodness, his beauty (cf. Gen 1:31), and with human beings, his freedom (cf. Gen 1:26-29). In calling each of us into existence, God has made us able to choose and to love the good, and to respond with love to his Love. Nevertheless, our limitation as creatures makes it possible for us to separate ourselves from God. “It is a mystery of divine Wisdom that, when creating man in his image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-29), God wanted to run the sublime ‘risk’ of human freedom” [3]

In fact, at the dawn of history this risk led to the rejection of God’s Love through the original sin. Thus the strength of human freedom’s attraction to the good was weakened, and the will was left to a certain degree inclined towards sin. Afterwards, personal sins weaken human freedom even more, and therefore sin always implies, to a greater or lesser degree, a form of slavery (cf. Rom 6:17, 20). Nevertheless, “man always remains free.[4] Even though “his freedom is always fragile,” [5] it remains an essential good of each human person and needs to be protected. God is the first to respect and love it, since he “does not want slaves, but children.” [6]

3. “But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom 5:20). Grace gives rise to a new and higher freedom for which “Christ has set us free” (Gal 5:1). Our Lord frees us from sin through his words and actions, all of which have redemptive efficacy. Hence “this hymn to freedom is echoed in all the mysteries of our Catholic faith.” [7] I often remind you that we need to put Christ at the center of our lives. To discover the deepest meaning of freedom, we have to contemplate him. We are amazed to see the freedom of a God who, out of pure love, decides to abase himself by taking on flesh like ours. We see this freedom unfold throughout his steps on earth towards the sacrifice of the Cross. “I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (Jn 10:17-18). Human history has never witnessed an act as deeply free as our Lord’s self-giving on the Cross. “He gives himself up to death with the full freedom of Love.” [8]

Saint John’s gospel recounts a dialogue of our Lord with some persons
who had believed in him. Jesus’ words resound with a clear promise: “Veritas liberabit vos, the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:32). “How great a truth is this,” Saint Josemaría writes, “which opens the way to freedom and gives it meaning throughout our lives. I will sum it up for you, with the joy and certainty which flow from knowing there is a close relationship between God and his creatures. It is the knowledge that we have come from the hands of God, that the Blessed Trinity looks upon us with predilection, that we are children of so wonderful a Father. I ask my Lord to help us decide to take this truth to heart, to dwell upon it day by day; only then will we be acting as free men.” [9]

4. Our divine filiation enables our freedom to expand with all the strength that God has bestowed on it. It is not by emancipating ourselves from the Father’s house that we become free, but rather by embracing the reality that we are sons or daughters. “Anyone who does not realize that he is a child of God is unaware of the deepest truth about himself.” [10] Such a person is unaware of who he is and lives in conflict with himself. How liberating it is, then, to know that God loves us. How liberating is God’s pardon that allows us to return to ourselves and to our true home (cf. Lk 15:17-24). And when we pardon others, we also experience this liberation.

Our faith in God’s love for each one of us (cf. 1 Jn 4:16) leads us to respond with love. We can love because he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:10). It fills us with security to know that God’s infinite Love is to be found not only at the origin of our existence but also at every moment in our lives. For God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. [11] Realizing that God is waiting for us in each person (cf. Mt 25:40), and that he wants to make himself present in their lives also through us, leads us to strive to share abundantly with others what we have received. And in our lives, my daughters and sons, we have received and we receive a lot of love. Giving love to God and to others is the most proper act of freedom. Love fulfills freedom, it redeems it. Love enables freedom to discover its origin and goal in God’s Love. “Freedom finds its true meaning when it is put to the service of the truth which redeems, when it is spent in seeking God’s infinite Love which liberates us from all forms of slavery.” [12]

Our sense of divine filiation leads, then, to great interior freedom, to deep joy, and to the serene optimism of hope: spe gaudentes (Rom 12:12).
Realizing we are God’s children also leads us to love the world, which came forth good from the hands of our Father God. It leads us to face life with the clear awareness that it is possible to do good, to conquer sin, and to bring the world to God. As Pope Francis said when contemplating our Mother: “From Mary, full of grace, we learn that Christian freedom is more than mere liberation from sin. It is freedom that enables us to see earthly realities in a new, spiritual light. It is the freedom to love God and our brothers and sisters with a pure heart, and to live a life of joyful hope for the coming of Christ’s Kingdom.” [13]

Freedom of spirit

5. Acting freely, without any sort of coercion, is proper to human dignity and, even more so, to the dignity of the daughters and sons of God. At the same time, we need to “fortify our love for a freedom that is not merely arbitrary, but is rendered truly human by acknowledgment of the good that underlies it”: a freedom that is reconciled with God.[14]

Therefore I would like to stop and consider the importance of freedom of spirit. I am not referring to the ambiguous meaning sometimes given to this phrase, as acting in accord with one’s caprices and without restraint by any law. In reality, the freedom of every human person is limited materially by natural duties and acquired commitments (family, professional, civic, etc.). Nevertheless, we can act freely in everything we do, if we do it for love: “Dilige et quod vis fac: Love and do what you will.” [15] True freedom of spirit is this capacity and habitual attitude to act out of love, especially in the effort to follow what God is asking of us in each circumstance.

“So you love me?” (Jn 21:17). The Christian life is a free response, imbued with initiative and availability, to our Lord’s question. Therefore “it is utterly false to oppose freedom and self-surrender, because self-surrender is a consequence of freedom. Look, when a mother sacrifices herself for love of her children, she has made a choice, and the more she loves the greater will be her freedom. If her love is great, her freedom will bear much fruit. Her children’s good derives from her blessed freedom, which presupposes self-surrender, and from her blessed self-surrender, which is precisely freedom.” [16]
In this context we can understand why encouraging the freedom of each person does not mean a lessening in demands. The freer we are, the more we can love. And love is demanding: “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:7). In turn, growing in love means growing in freedom, being more free.

As Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote: “Quanto aliquis plus habet de caritate, plus habet de libertate.” [17] The more intense our charity is, the freer we are. We also act with freedom of spirit when we don’t feel like doing something or find it especially difficult, if we do it out of love, that is, not because we like it, but because we want to. “We should all realize that we are God’s children, and strive to fulfill the will of our Father. We should do things as God wants them done, because we want to, which is the most supernatural of reasons.” [18]

6. Cheerfulness is also a sign of freedom of spirit. “In the human realm,” Saint Josemaría said, “I want to leave you as an inheritance love for freedom and good humor.” [19] These two things can seem quite distinct, but they are actually closely connected, since realizing that we are free to love floods our soul with joy, and with it good humor. Our vision of the world deepens beyond the merely natural and we learn to grasp the positive—and, sometimes, amusing—side of things and situations. As Pope Francis said, God “is the author of joy, the Creator of joy. And this joy in the Spirit brings us true Christian freedom. Without joy, we Christians can’t be free, and we become slaves of our sadness.” [20]

This joy needs to imbue our whole life. God wants us to be happy. In speaking to the Apostles, Jesus is also speaking to us: “that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (Jn 15:11). Therefore we can carry out joyfully even duties that we may find unpleasant. As Saint Josemaría tells us, “we shouldn’t think that the only work we can do joyfully is what we find pleasing.” [21] We can carry out joyfully—and not reluctantly—what we find hard, what doesn’t please us, if we do it for and with love, and therefore freely. When doing his prayer out loud, on 28 April 1963, Saint Josemaría spoke about the lights God had granted him years before in 1931: “You have led me to understand, Lord, that having the Cross means finding happiness, joy. And the reason, as I now see more clearly than ever,
is this: having the Cross means being identified with Christ, being Christ, and therefore being a child of God.” [22]

7. The whole of the divine law, and everything that is God’s will for each person, is not a law that restricts freedom. Rather it is lex perfecta libertatis (cf. Jas 1:25), the perfect law of freedom. So too is the Gospel, since all of it is summed up in the law of love—and not only as an exterior rule that requires love, but also as the interior grace that gives us the strength to love. “Pondus meum amor meus”: my love is my weight, Saint Augustine said, referring not simply to the obvious fact that at times it is hard for us to love, but to the fact that the love we have in our heart is what leads us on, what carries us to wherever we go. [23] “Eo feror, quocumque feror”: wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me. [24] Each of us can consider: what is the love that carries me everywhere?

Anyone who lets God’s Love take hold in their heart, personally experiences how true it is “that freedom and self-surrender are not contradictory. They sustain one another. Freedom can only be given up for love; I cannot conceive any other reason for surrendering it. And I am not just playing with words or phrases. When people give themselves freely, at every moment of their self-surrender, freedom renews their love, and to be renewed in that way is to be always young, generous, capable of high ideals and great sacrifices.” [25] Obeying God, therefore, is not only a free act, but also a freeing, liberating act.

“I have food to eat of which you do not know,” Jesus tells his disciples. “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (Jn 4:32-34). For Jesus, obeying the Father is what nourishes him, what gives him strength. And so it should be for us. Being Jesus’ disciple, Saint John Paul II said, means “holding fast to the very person of Jesus, partaking of his life and his destiny, sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father.” [26]

Benedict XVI goes more deeply into this intimate relationship between freedom and self-giving: “It is in his very obedience to the Father that Jesus achieves his own freedom as a conscious decision motivated by love. Who is freer than the One who is the Almighty? He did not, however, live his freedom as an arbitrary power or as domination. He lived it as a service. In
this way he ‘filled’ freedom with content, which would otherwise have remained an ‘empty’ possibility of doing or not doing something. Like human life itself, freedom draws its meaning from love . . . Therefore, Christian freedom is quite the opposite of arbitrariness; it consists in following Christ in the gift of self even to the sacrifice of the Cross. It may seem a paradox, but the Lord lived the crowning point of his freedom on the Cross as a summit of love. When they shouted at him on Calvary: ‘If you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross!’, he showed his freedom as the Son precisely by remaining on that scaffold, to do the Father’s merciful will to the very end.” [27]

“Lord, you enticed me, and I was taken in. You were too strong for me, and you prevailed” (Jer 20:7). What a breadth of feeling is found in this prayer of the prophet Jeremias. Seeing one’s own vocation as a gift from God (and not as a mere list of obligations), even when we are suffering, is also a sign of freedom of spirit. How liberating it is to know that God loves us as we are, and that he calls us first of all to let ourselves be loved by him.

8. Freedom of spirit also means not binding ourselves to obligations that are not real—being able to set aside and change with flexibility so many small details in life that depend on our free personal initiative. As Don Javier wrote to us twenty years ago: “There are, of course, actions which we are obliged to carry out and others which, in a given instance, we are not specifically obliged to do. However, in both cases we have to seek to fulfill freely and responsibly the supreme commandment of love for God. Thus we are free and obedient at the same time and at every moment.” [28]

We need to always preserve in the Work the atmosphere of trust and freedom that enables us to make known to the relevant person what is worrying us, and talk about what we don’t understand or what we think should be improved. This atmosphere of trust, in turn, is also nourished by our loyalty and patience in accepting, with serenity and good humor, human limitations, annoying situations, etc. This is the attitude of good sons or daughters who, although they may be convinced they are right, exercise their freedom by seeking to protect goods greater than their own point of view, goods such as unity and family peace, which are priceless. In contrast, “when our ideas separate us from other people, when they weaken
our communion, our unity with our brothers, it is a sure sign that we are not doing what God wants.” [29]

9. Although sometimes situations can make us suffer, God frequently uses these to identify us more closely with Jesus. As we read in the Letter to the Hebrews, he “learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb 5:8) and thus brought “eternal salvation to all who obey him” (5:9). Jesus brought us the freedom of the children of God. Accepting the human limitations that we all have, without giving up in our effort to overcome them as far as possible, is also a sign and source of freedom of spirit. Consider in contrast the sad attitude of the elder son in the parable (Lk 15:25-30). He complained to his father about so many things that he had been keeping bitterly in his soul, and was unable to join in the family’s joy. His freedom had become small and selfish, incapable of loving, of understanding that “all that is mine is yours” (Lk 15:31). He was living at home, but he was not free, because his heart was elsewhere.

How beautiful, in contrast, is the story of Ruth, the Moabite woman, whose freedom and self-giving are rooted in a deep sense of belonging to her family. It is moving to see how this woman responds to the insistence of her mother-in-law, who encourages her to remake her life on her own: “Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried” (Ruth 1:16-17).

In contemplating our Lady, we see even more clearly how freedom unfolds in faithful self-giving. “Consider now the sublime moment when the Archangel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary the plans of the Most High. Our Mother listens, and asks a question to understand better what the Lord is asking of her. Then she gives her firm reply: *Fiat!* Be it done unto me according to thy word! This is the fruit of the best freedom of all, the freedom of deciding in favor of God.” [30]

*Forming and governing free people*

10. In our formation, personal spiritual direction plays an important role. It should always be carried out in an atmosphere of freedom and aim at forming people who feel “as free as the birds.” [31] As Saint Josemaría
writes, referring to those who receive the personal chats of their brothers or sisters, “the authority of the spiritual director is not power. Always instill in souls a great spirit of freedom. Consider what I have so often told you: because I want to seems to me the most supernatural reason of all. The role of the spiritual director is to help the soul to want to fulfill, to ‘feel like’ fulfilling, God’s will. Don’t command, advise.” [32] The aim of the advice given in spiritual direction is to second the action of the Holy Spirit in each soul and help each person to approach God and his or her own duties with personal freedom and responsibility. “In creating souls, God does not repeat himself. Each one is the way he or she is, and we have to treat each one according to what God has done, and according to the way that God is leading them.” [33]

Along with advice, ordinarily there can also be some affectionate encouragement that helps them realize it is always worthwhile to strive to be faithful out of love, freely. Spiritual direction can also occasionally contain a clear, but always affectionate and refined, “imperative counsel,” which reminds the person of the obligation to fulfill a duty. The force of this advice, however, does not stem from the advice itself, but from the duty involved. When there is trust, one can and should speak in this way, and the person who receives that indication is grateful for it, because they recognize in it the fortitude and affection of an older brother or sister.

11. The formation that we receive throughout our whole life, without disregarding its necessary demands, tends to a large degree to open up new horizons. In contrast, if we limit ourselves to just making demands and being demanded of, we can end up seeing only what we are not managing to do, our defects and limitations. We can forget about the most important thing: God’s love for us.

In this context, let us recall how Saint Josemaría taught us that “in the Work, we are great friends of freedom, including in the interior life. We aren’t tied to particular schemes or methods . . . There is a lot—there should be a lot—of self-determination even in the spiritual life.” [34] Therefore sincerity in spiritual direction, which leads us to open up our soul freely in order to receive advice, also leads us to foster personal initiative, to make known freely what we see as possible points for our interior struggle to identify ourselves ever more closely with Christ.
Therefore our formation, while passing on the same spirit to everyone, does not produce uniformity, but rather unity. Making use of a striking image, Saint Josemaría said that in the Work “we can travel along this path in many different ways: staying on the right or on the left, zigzagging from side to side, on foot or by horse. There are thousands of ways to advance along our divine path. Each one’s conscience, in keeping with their particular circumstances, will oblige them to go forward in one or another of these ways. The only thing essential is not to leave the path.” [35] The spirit of the Work, like the Gospel, does not impose itself on our way of being, but rather gives it life. It is a seed destined to grow in the earth of each person.

12. In our formation, it is also important to prevent an excessive desire for security or protection from inhibiting the soul and restricting us. “Those who have met Christ cannot shut themselves in their own little world; how sad such a limitation would be! They must open out like a fan in order to reach all souls.” [36] How important it is, then, to form ourselves in the need to live without fear of making mistakes, without fear of failing, without fear of an adverse environment. With supernatural outlook we need to be involved—with prudence and determination—in our own social and professional environment.

Love for freedom is also shown, therefore, in spontaneity and initiative in the apostolate, made compatible with one’s specific apostolic assignments. It is important always to be very aware that “our apostolate is, above all, personal apostolate.” [37] The same holds true for the encouragement directors give to apostolic activities.. “I have never wanted to tie you down. On the contrary, I have tried to ensure that you work with great freedom. In your apostolic action you have to have initiative, within the very broad margins provided by our spirit, in order to find—in each place, in each environment, in each epoch—the activities best suited to the circumstances.” [38]

13. Another important sign of love for freedom is found in the pastoral government that falls to the Prelate and his Vicars, with the help of their corresponding Councils. Let us meditate once again with gratitude on these words of Saint Josemaría: “As a consequence of this spirit of freedom, formation—and government—in the Work is based on trust. . . . Nothing
can be accomplished if government is based on distrust. In contrast, governing and forming souls with respect produces fruit. It develops in souls the true and holy freedom of God’s children and teaches them to administer their own freedom. To form and to govern is to love.” [39]

Governing with respect for souls is, firstly, to delicately respect the privacy of consciences, without confusing government and spiritual direction. Secondly, this respect leads one to distinguish directives from what are only opportune exhortations, counsels, or suggestions. And thirdly—and not, for that reason, less important—is the need to govern with such great trust in others that one always tries to take into account, to the extent possible, the opinion of the people involved. This attitude of those who govern, their readiness to listen, is a wonderful manifestation of the fact that the Work is a family.

We also have grateful experience of the full freedom there is in Opus Dei in matters open to opinion in economics, politics, theology, etc. “In everything that is not a matter of faith, each member thinks and acts as he or she wishes with complete freedom and personal responsibility. The pluralism which logically and sociologically derives from this fact does not create any problems for the Work. Rather, it is a sign of good spirit.” [40] This pluralism should be loved and fostered, although someone may find this diversity hard to accept at times. A person who loves freedom manages to see the positive and attractive aspects of what others think and do in these broad areas.

As regards the way government is carried out, Saint Josemaría established and always forcefully reminded us of the need for collegiality, which is another manifestation of the spirit of freedom that imbues our life in Opus Dei. “I have reminded you in a great variety of circumstances, and I will repeat it many times over the course of my life, that I demand in the Work, at all levels, collegial government, so that no one will fall into tyranny. This is a manifestation of prudence, since with collegial government matters are studied more easily, errors are corrected better, and the apostolic works that are already going well are improved more effectively.” [41]
Collegiality is not only or principally a method or system for making decisions; it is, above all, a spirit, rooted in the conviction that all of us can and need to receive from others insights, information, etc., that will help us to improve and even to change our opinion. At the same time, this leads to respecting—even more, to fostering in a positive way—the freedom of the others, so that they can make known their own points of view without any difficulty.

Respecting and defending freedom in the apostolate

14. Our apostolate stems from a sincere desire to help others find Christ or grow in intimacy with him. “Our attitude towards souls can be summed up in this phrase from the Apostle, which is almost a shout: *caritas mea cum omnibus vobis in Christo Iesu!* (1 Cor 16:24): my affection for all of you, in Christ Jesus. With charity, you will be sowers of peace and joy in the world, loving and defending the personal freedom of souls, the freedom that Christ respects and won for us (cf. Gal 4:31).”[42]

We love, first of all, the freedom of those we are trying to help come closer to our Lord, in the apostolate of friendship and trust which Saint Josemaría invites us to carry out by our witness and word. “Also in our apostolic activities—better: principally in our apostolic activities—we don’t want there to be even the slightest shadow of coercion. God wants to be served freely, and therefore an apostolate that did not respect the ‘freedom of consciences’ would not be upright.” [43]

True friendship entails sincere mutual affection, which is the true protection of the reciprocal freedom and intimacy that exists between friends. Apostle is not something superimposed on friendship, because (as I wrote you), “we don’t ‘do apostolate,’ we are apostles!” [44] Friendship is itself apostolate; friendship is itself a dialogue in which we give and receive light. In friendship plans are forged as we mutually open up new horizons. In friendship we rejoice in what is good and support one another in what is difficult; we have a good time with one another, since God wants us to be happy.

15. As you know, proselytism, understood in its original meaning, is a positive reality, nothing other than the missionary activity of spreading the Gospel.[45] That was how Saint Josemaría always understood the term,
and not with the negative meaning it has acquired in more recent times. Still, we need to keep in mind that, despite what we would like, at times words take on new connotations different from their original meaning. Therefore consider carefully, in light of the context, the fittingness of employing this term, since at times your hearers could understand something different from what you want to say.

Respecting and defending the freedom of everyone is also made manifest—if possible, even more clearly—when raising with someone the possibility of God’s call to the Work. Here we mean the freedom to seek advice from whomever one wants and, above all, full freedom in discerning one’s own possible vocation and in the ensuing decision. When commenting on a forceful expression in the Gospel, the 
\[\text{compelle intrare}\] (force them to enter) of the parable (Lk 14:23), Saint Josemaría wrote: “A chief characteristic of our spirit is respect for the personal freedom of everyone. Thus the \text{compelle intrare} that you should employ in your proselytism is not a physical push but an abundance of light, of doctrine. It is the spiritual stimulus of your prayer and work, which bear authentic witness to doctrine. It is all the sacrifices you offer. It is the smile that comes to your lips because you are children of God: the filiation that fills you with a serene happiness (even though setbacks will not be lacking in your life) and that others will see and envy. Add to this your human bearing and charm and here we have the content of the \text{compelle intrare}.”

How clear it is, then, that the Work grows and should always grow in an atmosphere of freedom, by presenting to others—with determination and simplicity—the dazzling beauty of living close to God.

16. \textit{Veritas liberabit vos} (Jn 8:32). All the promises of liberation that have followed one upon another throughout the centuries are true to the extent that they are nourished by the Truth about God and man. And this Truth is a Person: Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. Jn 14:6). “Today also, even after two thousand years, we see Christ as the one who brings man freedom based on truth, frees man from what curtails, diminishes and as it were breaks off this freedom at its root, in man’s soul, his heart and his conscience.”

God has given us freedom forever; it is not a temporary gift, to employ only during our life here on earth. Freedom, like love, “never ends” (1 Cor
13:8), but it continues in heaven. Our path to heaven is a path towards the freedom of the glory of the children of God: in libertatem gloriae filiorum Dei (Rom 8:21). In heaven our freedom not only won’t disappear, but rather will attain its fullness in embracing God’s Love. “In heaven a great Love awaits you, with no betrayals and no deceptions. The fullness of love, the fullness of beauty and greatness and knowledge . . . And it will never cloy: it will satiate, yet still you will want more.” [48] If we are faithful, by God’s mercy, in heaven we will be fully free, with the fullness of love.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

Fernando

Rome, January 9, 2018, anniversary of the birth of Saint Josemaría


[5] Ibid.


[10] Ibid.


[17] Saint Thomas, *In III Sent.*, d. 29, q. un., a. 8, qla. 3 s.c. 1.
[29] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 17.
[40] Saint Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 98.
Homilies

At the Mass In Coena Domini Holy Thursday, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (March 29, 2018)

1. “Having loved those who were his own in the world, he loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1). These words from Saint John’s gospel are as it were the entrance way to the Pascual Triduum. We have arrived at the center of the liturgical year, and the Church wants to remind us that everything we relive during these days—the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus—is a manifestation of our Lord’s immense love for us. If we open wide our eyes and listen more attentively, and above all prepare our heart, we will discover during these days how Jesus also loves us “to the end,” to the extreme of giving his life for us.

You have come to Rome to experience Holy Week. During these days we all want to strive to contemplate, and in some way relive, the Passion,
Death and Resurrection of Jesus. We should each ask ourselves: what place does Jesus occupy in my life? Who is he for me? In order to answer these questions, let us start with another, more fundamental one: who am I for Jesus? He himself gives us the answer with the words and gestures we contemplate in the Last Supper. For him, we are his friends, and he loves us as we are: with our defects and our need for purification, just like the apostles as they celebrated the Passover with Jesus in the Upper Room. Our Lord admits into his presence people with limitations, and introduces them into the intimacy of his life and makes them his friends.

2. In the eyes of Jesus, our life is so important that, to make us his friends, he has given over his Body and allowed his Blood to be poured out. Moreover, he has wanted to perpetuate this self-giving in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, whose institution we commemorate today. As Saint Paul in the second reading from the Mass tells us: “the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’” (1 Cor 11:23-25).

The Eucharist is Jesus Christ himself, really present and given for us. In the Eucharist, he shows us in a special way his friendship, and his desire to accompany us each day in our life. May each of us, on realizing how close our Lord is to us, react as Saint Josemaría suggests: “Be filled with wonder at God’s goodness, for Christ wants to live in you. Be filled with wonder too when you are aware of all the weight of your poor flesh, of your wretched flesh, and all the vileness of the poor clay you are made of. Yes, but then remember too that call from God: Christ, who is God and Man, understands me and looks after me, for he is my Brother and my Friend” (The Forge, no. 182).

Jesus wants to be present in our lives. But how do we respond, by offering to accompany him, taking part in the Holy Mass, spending time with him in front of the tabernacle or in an act of Eucharistic adoration? What place does the Eucharist have in my life? This evening, when traditionally a vigil is held for the Eucharistic Jesus present on the Altar of
Repose, is also a special opportunity to accompany him and thus show him our friendship.

3. The Gospel of today ends by saying: “I have given you an example...” (Jn 13:15). Our Lord has shown us the path of love, which is a path of service, of understanding, of helping others to be better. He shows us what it means to truly be friends, and gives us the strength so that what he has done for us, we can also do for others (see Jn 13:15). Experiencing Jesus’ company in the Eucharist spurs us to overcome our selfishness, our fear to complicate our lives with the concerns of those around us. Therefore I invite you to pay heed to God’s call, who is asking us to accompany our friends: dedicating time to them, listening to their problems or simply being with them when they are discouraged or are suffering. Our Lord also asks us to be open to letting ourselves be helped by them. In this way we will become capable of loving others to the end, as Christ did with us.

Our Lady is the Mother of Jesus, the Friend who is always with us. Let us ask Mary to help us to recognize Jesus’ presence in our lives, especially in the Eucharist, and to encourage those around us to accompany him each day.

Good Friday Services, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (March 30, 2018)

The liturgy of Good Friday places us directly in front of the great Christian Mystery of the Cross and the Crucified One.

In the Gospel, we have contemplated how our Lord was taken prisoner, in the Garden of Olives, by the cohort headed by Judas; we have seen how he is led before the high priest Caiaphas and how, after being interrogated, he is struck on the face by one of the soldiers. Then, in the presence of Pilate, the people shout: “Crucify him, crucify him!” (Jn 19:6); and soon afterwards Jesus is scourged and crowned with thorns. We can ask ourselves: Why all this? The Gospel continues: Jesus carries the wood of the Cross in the presence of the people he loved; he is stripped of his
garments and, apparently, also of his dignity; and, when crucified, our Lord addresses these words to God the Father, recorded by Saint Matthew: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46). Again we ask ourselves: why the Cross?

Although we only partly understand it, the Crucifixion reveals to us that where there seems to be only weakness, there God manifests his limitless power; where we see failure, defeat, misunderstanding and hatred, it is there that Jesus reveals to us the great power of God: the power to transform the Cross into an expression of love. This power of faith can be seen in the first and second readings. While Isaiah shows us that face “with no comeliness that we should look at him … despised and rejected by men” (Is 53:2-3), the letter to the Hebrews proclaims that there we find “the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy” (Heb 4:16).

This was the experience of one of those executed with Christ on Golgotha. The “good thief” experiences in his greatest failure and weakness how the Cross of Jesus becomes the powerful place where he knows he is forgiven and loved: “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43). On the Cross we hear the word “Paradise” spoken.

From an instrument of torture and contempt, the Cross is transformed into a means of salvation, a symbol of hope, since it has become a manifestation of God’s free and merciful Love. This Love becomes present for us—in an eminently effective way—in the sacraments. Let us not fail to have recourse to divine mercy in the sacrament of Confession. Let us do all we can to participate frequently in the Eucharist. It is also in the sacraments that we will see, as Saint Josemaría said, how Christ “hands himself over to death with the full freedom of Love.” To look at the Crucified One is to contemplate our hope.

Pope Francis told young people: “Don’t let yourselves be robbed of hope!” Therefore I invite you to experience the transforming power of God’s Love, which on the Cross embraces our weakness and fills us with hope. Making our own the symbol of the Cross means becoming, right where we are, a clear sign of God’s love. In your families, in your friendships and in your future profession you can be a clear sign of hope.
The Church today turns her attention to the Lignum Crucis, the tree of the Cross. In the liturgy we pray: “We worship your Cross, Lord, and praise and glorify your holy Resurrection. Through the wood, joy has come into the world.” The adoration of the Holy Cross is a gesture of faith and a proclamation of the victory of Jesus. It is also a gesture of hope, which comes from experiencing the transforming power of God’s Love.

We end by asking our Lady to help us to stay close to the Cross, since from there stems the hope that, as Christians, we want to offer to our contemporaries.

On the Feast of St. Josemaría, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (June 26, 2018)

“All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Rom 8:14). These words of St. Paul express the highest vocation to which we are called: to be God’s children. The book of Genesis narrates that, in the beginning, man received life by the breath of God (cf. Gen 2:4); and Christ sent us, from God the Father, the Holy Spirit, who leads us to a new life in which we can recognize the face of the Father and exclaim: “Abba, Father!” (Rom 8:15).

How often St. Josemaría meditated on these words from today’s Mass! One day in 1931, he felt the Holy Spirit acting in his heart and placing them on his lips while on a streetcar in Madrid. He himself remembers repeating for a long time “Abba, Father!” The Paraclete engraved on his soul a new and deeper certainty of being a child of God, and he understood that divine filiation was the foundation of the spiritual life. An exciting panorama opened before his eyes. We are children of God in Christ! We share in the eternal filiation of the Only Begotten Son of God the Father.

Today we can ask ourselves whether, as St. Paul advises, the awareness of being children of God imbues every dimension of our life. Frequently considering our divine filiation, with faith, will help us to advance each day with hope, despite our own weakness, along the path towards identification
with Christ, towards holiness. Saint Josemaría tells us: “Jesus understands
our weakness and draws us to himself on an inclined plane. He wants us to
make an effort to climb a little each day” (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 75).

Do we feel the freedom and trust offered us by being daughters and
sons of God? For we have not received “a spirit of slavery to fall back into
fear” (*Rom* 8:15): the fear of failure, which can dampen our efforts to
undertake new initiatives of service to others; the fear of losing the false
securities provided by comfort-seeking and selfishness. The fear, in short,
to put out into this wonderful sea of a life of prayer that promises, along
with many joys, a life of self-giving that will not lack “the sufferings of this
present time,” which “are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be
revealed to us” (*Rom* 8:18).

Our Lord tells us as he did Peter: “Put out into the deep” (*Lk* 5:4). He
is telling us, as it were: trust the deepest truth about yourself, that of being
a child of God, and don’t be afraid to walk through a world that sometimes
seems to be a storm-tossed sea. Indeed, it may be that things don’t go as
ideally as we had planned, that at work our efforts encounter setbacks, that
a person we love turns their back on God, that unexpected or adverse
events arise... And we may want to answer as Peter did: “We have toiled all
night and caught nothing” (*Lk* 5:5); “depart from me, for I am a sinful
man, O Lord” (*Lk* 5:8). In those moments, how much it helps when we
pray with faith, and hear Jesus addressing us personally: “Do not be afraid”
(*Lk* 5:10).

Pope Francis tells each one of us: “Holiness, deep down, is the fruit of
the Holy Spirit in your life (cf. *Gal* 5:22-23). When you feel tempted to
become entangled in your weakness, raise your eyes to the Crucified One
and say: Lord, I am a poor thing, but you can perform the miracle of
making me a little better” (Apost Exhort. *Gaudete et exsultate*, no. 15).

The Holy Spirit teaches us to live as God’s children, and urges us to
help the people we meet along the path of our life to discover this truth.
We all hear, with the Apostles, the commanding and encouraging voice of
Jesus: “Put out into the deep and lower your nets for a catch” (*Lk* 5:4). A
fishing to which all of us Christians are called: to help many people to be
docile to the Holy Spirit’s action that, in Christ, leads them to God the
Father. And to do so in ordinary life: in the family, at work, with our friends and neighbors... For example, when fathers and mothers take in their arms a small child who has fallen and been hurt, and they pour out their affection, they are helping that child to know the love of God the Father, “from whom,” as St. Paul writes. “all paternity in heaven and earth is named” (Eph 3:15). At these and many other times, parents are instruments of the care of our Father God.

You can help your friends in the same wonderful way. For example, when you listen attentively, with real interest and affection, to someone with a problem, and provide the support of your prayer and, if needed, timely advice, you are helping that person realize that they are not alone, that they have a Father in Heaven and brothers and sisters on earth.

To conclude, we can make our own the prayer we will say after Communion: “May the mysteries we have received in this celebration of St. Josemaría, strengthen in us the spirit of adoption as your children, so that, in faithful adherence to your will, we may advance joyfully along the path of holiness.” And on this path we will always find our Mother Mary, who accompanies us closely.

Addresses

At the Academic Ceremony Honoring Bishop Javier Echevarría, University of Navarra, Spain (January 19, 2018)

Authorities, academic faculty, students and all who work in this university, ladies and gentlemen:

In this academic act in tribute to the one who was Chancellor of this university for twenty-two years, I unite myself to the sentiments of the
previous speakers, who have made clear how closely Bishop Echevarría followed and encouraged its development, and especially the University Hospital of Navarra and the IESE Business School.

Don Javier energetically encouraged a key feature of this university, a seal that St. Josemaría imprinted on it right from the beginning: being open to the whole world, with an eagerness to serve, to share the best that one has. He strove to ensure that the Christian spirit and passionate love for the world that inspires the University of Navarra would spread to similar initiatives in other countries. During his years as Prelate of Opus Dei and Chancellor of this university, he closely followed the birth and development of university institutions that contribute to making a reality, in almost every continent, the great aspiration of St. Josemaría: to put the Cross of Christ in the heart of the world and at the summit of all human activities.

That Catholic, universal spirit was also shown in his deep sense of communion with everyone in the Church. To those of you who knew him well, his filial love for the Roman Pontiff was evident; in particular the insistence with which he invited everyone to pray for the Pope. And those of us who worked more closely with him saw his eagerness to respond, as soon as possible, to requests from other bishops: both to begin the apostolic work of Opus Dei in their dioceses, and to assist in diocesan tasks through the work of priests of the Prelature.

But while Don Javier’s vision was directed towards great horizons, he never missed details of what, so to speak, awaited him around the corner. I would like to highlight, in this regard, his concern for specific people. During the twenty-two years in which I witnessed his eagerness for souls, his sense of mission, I never stopped being surprised at his great concern for each man and each woman, young or not so young, he came in contact with. At times this was a brief greeting or an affectionate remark to someone he met in the hallway, or on entering or leaving the house, or on arriving somewhere; or his attentive listening to someone asking for advice, for guidance, for a prayer.

Naturally, he showed a special concern for those whom our Lord had entrusted to his pastoral care. He learned to be a good Father by being a
good son of St. Josemaría, who he was close to for so many years. He was inspired by his example in everything and went frequently to his intercession. Here he was following in the footsteps of “our beloved Don Alvaro,” as he used to refer to his predecessor. From him he learned to be Father—a successor of the Founder—while realizing at the same time that he was a son.

His effort to follow St. Josemaría so closely was never a mechanical or superficial imitation. With his own character, with his personal way of being, Don Javier faithfully transmitted to us the spirit of Opus Dei. His was a “dynamic” fidelity, as I’ve said in the past, for he was well aware that, without changing the core, the essence of the Founder’s spirit, it was necessary to live it in changing historical circumstances.

Although I’ve already mentioned it, I want to stop to recall his encounters with people. Don Javier didn’t limit himself to hearing; he listened carefully to what people told him; he followed attentively what they said without being in a hurry, taking an interest in details. God expanded his heart of a shepherd, enabling him to sympathize right away with the joys, sorrows, concerns and plans of others. That’s how he lived until the last moment. It was moving to see how, when he was hospitalized and realized he might soon die, he showed concern for the health service staff that cared for him: for their families, their work, their rest...

I recall, in this regard, the story of a person who is not in the Work. His wife had recently died and Don Javier himself offered to celebrate a Mass in suffrage for her soul, in the crypt of the prelatic church of Our Lady of Peace. That man has never forgotten Don Javier’s concern and affection, as he testified to in article he wrote a few days after his death: “He was a person with a great ability to get into the lives of others and find a place in their heart. His friendship for me was shown with details that only true friends show and that I will never forget.” In the homily of that Mass, he says, Don Javier addressed him with “consoling and moving” words that he still finds helpful.

That’s how Don Javier was. Everyone found a place in his priestly heart. He made each person feel as if they were the only person in the world: whether in a more leisurely personal conversation or in a chance
meeting. What drove him to be so concerned about others? The only answer can be his personal and intimate relationship with Christ, in the Bread and in the Word. A relationship that matured throughout the years, in prayer and in the Eucharist. In his Mass each day, he took on the needs of the Church and the world. There, closely united to the sacrifice of the Cross, he reached out with Christ to everyone’s suffering: the sick, refugees, those who were unemployed or undergoing some difficulty; and also the positive accomplishments of the world and the Church, giving thanks to God for them.

I would like to end with a simple story, about a person who lived for several years in the same house in Rome, and who was sick for a while. Don Javier often went to see him, and on one of these occasions the sick person said: Father, I’m sorry about the time you are spending with me, with all the work you have to do. And Don Javier replied: if I wasn’t thinking about my children, what would I be thinking about?

And we, if we weren’t thinking about those around us, what would we be thinking about? I ask our Lady, Mother of Fair Love, to put in our hearts the ardent and generous love that she put in Don Javier’s, so that we may give ourselves to everyone without holding back, giving them the best that we have.

Many thanks.

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At the Eleventh Seminar for Church Communications, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome, (April 19, 2018)

We are concluding this seminar, which every two years brings to this university professional men and women from all over the world who carry out communication tasks in the Church. I am happy to accept this invitation, since it gives me an opportunity to thank you for your work in the service of the Church and society and encourage you to continue to carry it out with generosity.
Regarding the three main topics of this year’s seminar (dialogue, respect, and freedom of expression), I would like to focus on two ideas found in the quote from Pope Francis that was used in opening this conference: “We need to resolve our differences through forms of dialogue which help us grow in understanding and mutual respect. A culture of encounter demands that we be ready not only to give, but also to receive.”

In first place, what does it mean to grow in understanding and mutual respect in the sphere of communicating information. Perhaps above all it means realizing that every form of communication involves specific persons with names: the person who is communicating, the persons about whom one is communicating, and the persons being addressed. Understanding begins when we strive to see specific people (and not an anonymous “crowd”) at the heart of each act of communication, even though these people are not physically present. We don’t see them, but they are there, with all their dignity, especially when they are more vulnerable. Every person is important, above all because Christ has died and risen for that person.

Especially in recent years, when false news has appeared on a massive scale, understanding and mutual respect entails a deep renewal of the news profession, a deeper grasp of its dimension of service to each woman and man, since a well-informed person is a freer and more responsible person, and therefore better able to carry out acts of solidarity in society.

Moreover, those who respect other people, the truth of things and the essence of their profession become more “respectable,” better interlocutors in public debates. And in striving to understand others, to grasp their point of view, we discover aspects of the truth we hadn’t seen before. Our suggestions are better aimed and we become more “understandable” to others. If, in contrast, the work of communication ignores others’ questions and perplexities, monologue supplants dialogue.

In second place, in this interplay of giving and receiving to which the Pope refers, it is important to rediscover that, as Church communicators, you have the opportunity, intrinsic to your religious freedom, to present to society “the strength of the truth” found in the Catholic faith (Dignitatis Humanae, no. 1).
The possibility of illuminating human realities with the spirit of the Gospel is one of the fundamental rights of religious freedom. Men and women today continue to thirst for the truth and seek the deeper meaning of their lives. With your work and friendship you can be instruments in the marvelous task of “assisting one another in the quest for truth” (Dignitatis Humanae, no. 3).

Human dignity requires that the person’s capacity for self-determination towards the truth be protected, being neither impeded nor forced. Therefore the foundation of the right to religious freedom, as understood by the Church’s Magisterium, is the same as that of other civil rights (of the press, of personal opinions). And this foundation is nothing other than our human dignity.

Finally, allow me a reflection related to the speed that sometimes affects the work of communication, the immediacy with which you often have to make important decisions. This is the need we all have of cultivating wide interior spaces filled with serenity in order to make our work fruitful.

Serenity enables us to give depth to our work, to discover its dimension of eternity and to rest in God. Saint Josemaría, whose spirit lies behind the creation of this university, made a specific suggestion that is apt for our daily life: “Find repose in the reality of being a child of God. God is a Father who is full of tenderness, of infinite love. Call him ‘Father’ many times a day and tell him—alone, in your heart—that you love him, that you adore him, that you feel proud and strong because you are his child.”

The meaning and strength we find in realizing we are children of God—more evident in this Easter season—will lead us to be serene in our work, to spread peace and hope and unite faith with professionalism.

A serene communicator will find ways to infuse Christian meaning into the inevitably rapid flow of public opinion.

Serenity will give us a broad vision of reality and help us to transmit the faith that was entrusted to the Church twenty centuries ago, in an original, fresh, and attractive way. And to spread understanding and respect for everyone.
Thank you.

Articles and Interviews

An Interview Granted to the Website of Strathmore University (May 15, 2018)

Strathmore University congratulates you on your election as Prelate of Opus Dei and, thereby also as Chancellor of this Academic Center. What was the vision of Saint Josemaría for Africa and specifically Kenya when he sent the first members of Opus Dei who started the Strathmore A-Level College in 1961?

Kenya was the first country in Africa to receive faithful of Opus Dei, in 1958. That is why Saint Josemaría always looked at your nation with great affection. He prayed a lot for Kenyans and for Strathmore. He hoped that his daughters and sons, who had arrived there to carry out their professional work, would become good citizens of the land that had welcomed them. He wanted Strathmore College to be interracial: in the management team, in the faculty and in the student body. “Because there is only one race,” he liked to say, “the race of the children of God.” That is why Strathmore is, in a way, a place where one has to learn to live like this, as children of God.

What are your expectations for Strathmore University as we celebrate 10 years since it was awarded its charter?

I hope that this anniversary will be an opportunity to open up to a yearning for truth. This is an attitude very much in keeping with the university spirit and is what Saint Josemaría wanted – and later Don Alvaro and Don Javier – for people who work in this field. Being open to the whole world, eager to serve and share the best you have.
Strathmore’s charter was awarded in 2008, at a time when Kenya was greatly divided after the 2007 post-election violence in the country. What is your take on the University’s Christian orientation and foundational values that emphasize charity and unity, as is clearly spelt out in its motto “Ut omnes unum sint”?

Unity is not improvised. It is an asset, a great good based on the willingness to help others and avoid making a big deal about differences, no matter what they are. This motto, therefore, is a basis for further work and also a goal to be reached. Unity is a daily conquest: a struggle to appreciate and respect differences and to learn how to ask for forgiveness. And at the University people are taught how to build society on this foundation. Pope Francis, during his visit to Kenya, encouraged people to work with integrity and transparency for the common good, to say no to corruption and to foster a spirit of solidarity in all areas of society and especially with those most in need. Difficulties, for a Christian, are rather challenges, because we always have God’s grace and encouragement to contribute to improving relationships among people, even if we take our own limitations as our starting point.

In following Saint Josemaria’s message on the universal call to holiness while carrying out ordinary work, what is your advice to the staff working in the University in order to foster excellent work and uphold high human standards at all times?

The history of Strathmore University can be a source of inspiration: over the years it has grown from a small academic institution to a university. The stature of the university depends on your commitment to try to work hard and to work well, to carry out each task with human perfection and with love for God. In that sense, the key lies in the heart of every teacher, every employee, every student and every manager. By fostering an effective desire to help others and to find God in their ordinary work, this work – whatever it may be – is always relevant. Hence the importance of putting love into one’s work. It is something simple and, at the same time, supernatural.

Technological advancement has spread rapidly in the world, and Kenya has not been left behind. What advice would you give to students, who need to
balance being tech savvy with being truly human?

I would tell them not to be afraid to exercise their freedom in projects that are worthwhile. Technologies contribute a great deal to life, but one also needs to “disconnect” in order to interact, face to face, with others. On the other hand, the future of the country and, perhaps, of other nations, depends on the students who are now being trained.

What advice would you give to professors who use technology to teach and carry out research and should guide young people in cultivating meaningful family and social relationships?

Technical means contribute to improved performance in research work. At the same time, they are simply means, that is, instruments that allow us to attain an end. Therefore, a good professional tries to use them with a prudent measure so they do not distance him or her from others. The consequence of this attitude is the positive influence of the teachers on the rest of the university, especially on the students, who will be the leaders of society in a few years.

How does one find God amid the noise of social media?

One can learn to communicate with God in many ways. For example, going to the chapel or spending some time every day praying with the Gospel. A necessary mode of “access” is the sacraments, especially Confession and the Eucharist. With the power of God’s grace, we work and live in the company of the Lord amidst the noise of the factory, the classroom, the streets or the countryside.

Saint Josemaría loved working with the disadvantaged and marginalized in society. What insights would you give to those working on projects in community outreach, in order to be more effective? What role does the University play in assisting the development of the economy of our country?

Opus Dei first grew, Saint Josemaría often said, in the poor neighborhoods of Madrid, because he found God’s strength in those who were sick or suffering. The priority of the individual spurs Christians to take an interest in each person. The Pope recalled – for example in the recent Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exultate – the need to live with understanding, affection, and true concern for those around us, inviting
them to live the teaching found at the end of chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew. It is about seeing Christ in others. The initiatives to help the needy promoted in Strathmore are a concrete way of trying to live like this.

Looking ahead to the future with the foundational years behind us, what is the most important contribution you expect Strathmore to make in this region and in Africa?

A university of Christian inspiration contains the potential remedy that society needs: human values, the will to contribute to the needs of the country and to culture, training the professionals of the future. And, above and beyond that, a place where, within the personal limitations of each one, an effort is made to try to give every student, every person who works here, the opportunity to feel very free and very responsible. Many great things depend on their lives and on the good they actually do around them, for others and for God.

Messages

Message of January 23

From Brazil, on the first anniversary of my election as Prelate of Opus Dei, I am keeping all of you very much in mind, and I feel accompanied by the help of your prayer. I entrust to Our Lady of Aparecida your joys, concerns and initiatives in the service of souls and society.

Fernando

Rio de Janeiro, January 23, 2018
Message of March 19

Saint Josemaría was deeply moved by Saint Joseph’s simplicity and greatness. His life—that of “a craftsman from Galilee, just one man among many”—was intimately united to the life of Jesus and Mary. In Saint Joseph he discerned the features of those who understand that they are called by God to live close to him in their daily lives, with everything this involves, including unforeseen events and worries. Saint Joseph lived under the same roof as God. We could think that in this respect he doesn’t seem to be “just one man among many.” Nevertheless, don’t we ourselves pray: “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof”? And if we let him, he enters. And a single word of his is enough to heal us (cf. Mt 8:8).

Today especially, with the whole Church, we contemplate Saint Joseph, that just and faithful man. Let us entrust ourselves to his intercession, so that he may help us to respond each day to Christ’s immense love, opening wide to him the doors of our house, of our heart. And we ask that this response may spur us to ever greater service to those around us, spreading the joy of the Gospel.

Fernando

Rome, March 19, 2018

Message of April 8

Today, on Divine Mercy Sunday, the liturgy reminds us with the joy proper to the Easter season of Saint John’s words: “This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith” (1 Jn 5:4).

In the exciting mission of bringing the Gospel to all peoples, every environment, every person, all of us in the Church encounter, along with many joys, also many difficulties. We will remain happy and filled with hope if we live with faith in divine Mercy. We cannot attain this faith by
our own efforts; but, especially when we feel weak, we can ask Jesus for it like the apostles: “Increase our faith!” (Lk 17:5).

Fernando

Rome, April 8, 2018

Message of May 10

We have begun the month of May, which is especially dedicated to our Lady, with joy and gratitude to God for the ordination of 31 new priests of the Prelature, on May 5th.

Let us go to our Lady, Mother of priests, to pray for all the world’s priests. Let us ask that they receive and preserve the gift of the priesthood with grateful love, as faithful servants of God and souls.

Mary is also the Mother of all believers. On the 21st of this month we will celebrate for the first time the liturgical feast of Mary, Mother of the Church, instituted by Pope Francis’ decision. With ever renewed trust, let us have recourse to Mary’s motherly mediation.

Fernando

Rome, May 10, 2018
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Eucharistic Celebrations for the Feast of St. Josemaria

For the feast day of St. Josemaría, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, celebrated a solemn Mass in the basilica of St. Eugene, in Rome. The homily is included in this issue of Romana. Hundreds of Eucharistic celebrations took place around that date in cities throughout the world. We note some below.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan was the main celebrant at the Mass on the feast day of St. Josemaría, which took place in Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in New York. In his homily, making reference to the passage about the miraculous catch of fish (Lk 5:1-11), he said that “St. Josemaría encourage all of us to find sanctity, to cast out into the deep, not in some exotic apostolates, not just in faraway missionary lands, not just in cloistered convents, or sanctuaries of cathedrals—no, to cast out to the deep, to pursue perfection, to go after sanctity in our professions, in our work, in our labor. An insight that seems so simple that it is downright profound. So he, anticipating the great teaching of the Second Vatican Council, would be the poet of the universal call to holiness. Everyone is called to holiness and sanctity, everyone is called to the pursuit of perfection, in whatever walk of life we find ourselves.”

In the Cathedral of Milan, Italy, Archbishop Mario Delpini told those participating in the Mass in memory of St. Josemaría that “holiness is not the measure of the impossible; it is not the end of a climb that tests our strength, and that only the strongest, the most intelligent, the bravest can reach.” “Holiness,” he insisted, “is not the conquest of a goal but a docility that offers no resistance to the loving breath of the Spirit of God. We have learned this from the testimony and teaching of St. Josemaría, and we try to put it into practice each day, making of our life a ‘sail’ open to the wind of the Holy Spirit leading us to a safe port.”

Bishop Hermann Gletter, bishop of Innsbruck, Austria, celebrated a Mass in the church of the hospital in that city. The memorial of St. Josemaría, he said, “encourages us to undertake a new and broad reflection on the call to holiness, particularly after the recent Papal exhortation
“Gaudete et exsultate.” He reminded people that, in the words of the founder of Opus Dei, “‘great’ holiness consists in fulfilling the ‘small duties’ of each moment.”

In the Cathedral of Cordoba, Spain, Bishop Demetrio Fernandez stressed that “Saint Josemaría has infused into the Church a great hope: that holiness is within reach, that it is possible. For God has called us to live as his children, to be happy here on earth, with the hope of the children’s inheritance: Heaven.” “Holiness is nothing other than aligning our will with God’s will,” he said in his homily.

The archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, celebrated a solemn Mass in the parish of Our Lady Queen of Peace in the Irish capital. “St. Josemaría,” he said in his homily, “had the special gift of guiding men and women along a path of holiness that yields fruit in a life immersed in daily realities. Faith does not separate us from the realities of life. A Christian spirituality—that of any missionary disciple of Jesus—permeates our daily commitment in the world.” “I am very happy,” he added, “to be with all of you, who have found strength and support in the spiritual heritage of St. Josemaría. We give thanks to God because he has helped us—both priests and laity—to experience a trusting intimacy with the Lord, and we ask the Spirit to inspire us to become joyful disciples, missionaries of Jesus Christ to the world of our time.”

On Saturday, June 23, the Mass for the feast of St. Josemaría Escrivá was celebrated for the first time at the Saxum Visitor Center in Abu Gosh, Israel, an initiative promoted by faithful of the Prelature in the Holy Land. Those attending included families from Jerusalem and pilgrims. In the homily, Bishop Joaquín Paniello—Vicar of Opus Dei in the Holy Land—said: “Saint Josemaría reminds us that God calls all of us to live our Christian faith in our daily life by doing our professional work as well as we can and by being kind towards others.” Before and after the Mass, visits were made to the multimedia center, giving many of the local families the opportunity to become acquainted with this new resource about the sacred places. The Visitor Center offers historical, geographical and biblical information about the most important events in salvation history, through multimedia resources. It also has a chapel for groups who want to celebrate the Eucharist.
One Hundredth Anniversary of Footprints in the Snow

On January 18, the Library of La Rioja (Logroño, Spain) hosted a ceremony commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the vocation of St. Josemaría. This institution is located a few dozen feet from Marqués de San Nicolás Street, where “between December 1917 and January 1918, St. Josemaría Escrivá discovered his vocation of self-giving to God when he saw the tracks left in the snow by a discalced Carmelite friar walking along the street,” as a plaque recalls.

Inmaculada Alva, from the Josemaría Escrivá Center for Documentation and Studies, described the social situation and environment that the Escrivá family found on their arrival in the capital city of La Rioja. Next, José Luis González Gullón, professor at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome and a member of the St. Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute, spoke about the decisions brought about in the soul of young Josemaría as a result of that chance encounter and the important repercussions of that discovery. The ceremony was attended by more than 200 people.

A Reredos in Honor of St. Josemaria

On Sunday the 21st of January, in the Royal Church of St. James (the parish of the Escrivá family during their stay in Logroño), a new reredos dedicated to St. Josemaría was blessed. The ceremony was presided over by Bishop Carlos Escribano Subias, of the diocese of Calahorra and La Calzada-Logroño, accompanied by Bishop Daniel Fernández Torres of Arecibo, Puerto Rico, and the Vicar of Opus Dei for La Rioja and Aragón, Pablo Lacorte Tierz. Also taking part were other priests and seminarians, as well as a large group of faithful.
This is the parish church St. Josemaría attended during his years in Rioja. His brother Santiago was baptized there and his father’s funeral was celebrated there. The new reredos is next to a statue of Our Lady of Hope, patroness of the city.

The ceremony began with the blessing of the reredos composed mainly of an oil painting by Isabel Guerra; it has been placed in a side chapel that the many pilgrims walking the “Camino of Santiago” will see as soon as they enter the church. In the homily, Bishop Escribano described the event that gave rise to the vocation of the founder of Opus Dei, represented in a bas-relief by Diana García Roy located below the painting. The bishop asked those who will seek the intercession of St. Josemaría in front of this new painting to pray for priestly vocations and for the apostolic mission of the diocese.

Devotion Throughout the World

A Sculpture in Solanas, Uruguay

On the feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, a sculpture of Saint Josemaría was placed outside the chapel of Solanas, a coastal town in Uruguay. The image, one meter high and installed at the initiative of the residents of the area, was produced at Talleres de Arte Granda, Spain.

A painting in Alcázar de San Juan, Spain

On June 26, during a Mass for the feast of St. Josemaría, the parish of Santa María la Mayor of Alcázar de San Juan, Spain, installed a painting of the founder of Opus Dei in the church. The painting was done by Víctor López-Jurado.

A Chapel in Valencia, Spain

The parish of San Nicolás, in Valencia, celebrated on Saturday April 14th the inauguration of the restoration of its Communion chapel, with a solemn Mass presided over by the Archbishop of Valencia, Cardinal Antonio Cañizares. The chapel was decorated with paintings representing
saints of the twentieth century: St. Pius X, St. John XXIII and St. John Paul II; Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Padre Pio; the martyrs St. Maria Goretti, Saint Edith Stein, and Saint Maximilian Kolbe; and St. Josemaría Escrivá and Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, who both had a great devotion to St. Nicholas.

*A Painting in the Cathedral of Jaén, Spain*

At the end of the Mass for the feast of St. Josemaría, on June 26, Bishop Amadeo Rodríguez Magro, bishop of Jaén, blessed a new painting of St. Josemaría, which was installed in the Cathedral’s chapel of St. Joseph. The painting was the work of Mexican artist José Antonio Ochoa.

**Polyphonic Mass in Honor of St. Josemaria**

Miguel del Barco, orchestra conductor, organist and professor emeritus of the Royal Conservatory of Madrid, composed a Mass for organ and four mixed voices with the texts for the feast of St. Josemaría. Its first performance was on January 9, anniversary of the birth of the founder of Opus Dei, in the Basilica of San Miguel (Madrid), during a Mass celebrated by Cardinal Antonio María Rouco, archbishop emeritus of Madrid.

The polyphonic Mass includes the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei, and texts from the liturgical memorial of St. Josemaría: the entrance antiphon, the alleluia and the communion antiphon. Miguel del Barco said that the new composition is based on Gregorian chant and the religious motifs found in the popular music of Extremadura.

It was sung by the Guadalajara City Choir and the Kromática Vocal Group, conducted by Mercedes Padilla, who directed the Symphony Orchestra of the Royal Conservatory of Madrid.
Studies on St. Josemaría and the History of Opus Dei

*Studia et Documenta*, the publication of the *Istituto Storico San Josemaría Escrivá*, based in Rome, publishes many articles on the life of St. Josemaría and the development of Opus Dei. *The Saint Josemaría Institute*, based in Chicago, has launched a new website ([https://opusdeihistory.org/](https://opusdeihistory.org/)) to make it easier for historians and readers in the English-speaking world to access a selection of these articles in English.

The website coordinator, John F. Coverdale, is Professor Emeritus of Law at Seton Hall University. He previously taught history as an assistant professor at Princeton University and as an associate professor at Northwestern University. He has published three books and various articles on the history of Opus Dei.

Hidden: Opus Dei in the Republican Zone During the Spanish Civil War (1936 - 1939), by Jose Luis Gonzalez Gullon

*Hidden* is an academic research work about the history of Opus Dei during the three years of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), in the so-called “Republican zone.” At the time of the war’s outbreak, most of the 30 members of Opus Dei—founded just eight years earlier—lived in that area of Spain. The book describes their lives and that of the founder amid the great collective drama of war. José Luis González Gullón’s book is a new addition to the series being published by the *Istituto Storico San Josemaría Escrivá*.

The first chapter discusses the impact of the revolutionary movement unleashed in the Republican occupied areas. The harsh repression against those known to be Catholics led the members of Opus Dei to seek any refuge that would allow them to escape prison and probable death, both in Madrid and in the Levant and La Mancha areas of Spain.
The second chapter focuses on the period between October 1936 and March 1937, when four members of the Work were confined to prison, and two others—including Josemaría Escrivá himself—hid in a psychiatric sanatorium.

The third chapter looks at the months the founder of Opus Dei spent hidden in the Honduran consulate in Madrid. In that precarious hiding place he managed to maintain regular contact with the other members of the Work and to encourage them in their efforts.

The escape from the Republican zone by Josemaría Escrivá and a number of members of Opus Dei forms the topic of the fourth chapter. These pages show the daunting challenges faced by the founder during this period, and his unwavering determination to carry out God’s will for Opus Dei’s expansion.

Finally, the last chapter covers the life of the members of Opus Dei who continued to reside in the Republican zone until the end of the war.

José Luis González Gullón is professor of History at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross and a member of the San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer Historical Institute. His previous publications include DYA: The Academy and Residence in the History of Opus Dei (1933–1939), and The Clergy in the Second Republic. Madrid: 1931–1936. He is one of the editors of the Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer Dictionary. He has also published articles on contemporary religious history in The Catholic Historical Review, Historia Contemporánea, Hispania Sacra, and Studia et Documenta.

The Last Romantic, Reflections on the Founder of Opus Dei, by Mariano Fazio

The Vicar General of Opus Dei, Msgr. Mariano Fazio, has published El Ultimo Romantico, Ediciones Rialp, 2018 [The Last of the Romantics, Scepter Publishers]. The book seeks to “present in an orderly way some of the consequences of the light received by St. Josemaría ninety years ago, and which are especially relevant for our times,” the author said. We
reproduce below an interview with Roberto Bosca for the Argentinean Catholic website AICA in which Msgr. Mariano Fazio talks about his new book.

After taking part in the recent Synod on Youth in Rome, where he resides, the vicar general of Opus Dei, Msgr. Mariano Fazio, traveled to Argentina to present his book *The Last of the Romantics: Saint Josemaría in the 21st Century*. In it he sets forth some key features of the founder of Opus Dei’s personality, including his passionate love for the world as the setting for Christian life, and explains why he calls him the “last romantic,” because of his great love for freedom.

—*What led you to write this book? Were you trying to highlight something special about Saint Josemaría’s personality?*

The immediate occasion was the 90th anniversary of the founding of Opus Dei. With that anniversary on the horizon I wanted to reread letters and texts of Saint Josemaría to go more deeply into his message and meditate on his founding charism. In this more systematic reading I was struck by how easy it is to appreciate his spirit, because it is a message closely tied to the Gospel, while also being so well suited to the circumstances of the ordinary life of a person in the 21st century, with the work, family and social commitments this life involves.

In a special way, I was emphasizing some aspects of his message that seemed especially illuminating to me for the contemporary world, such as the centrality of charity, the joy of knowing oneself to be a child of God, work as a place for seeking holiness, the value of pluralism, and the social repercussions of a Christian’s life.

—*Haven’t enough biographies already been written about the founder of Opus Dei? Why write one more? Or maybe it is not properly speaking a biography?*

As you rightly say, it is not a biography about the founder of Opus Dei, nor a theological study, nor a compilation of texts. I have tried to collect essential points of a message that has changed the lives of many people
throughout these decades and that, in my opinion, are destined to expand in influence.

I also tried to relate that message to the writings of other authors, especially to some classics of literature that can help illuminate some of the important issues that affect us all. For example, Gogol and Tolkien thanked God for having made the human being a sharer in his creative power. Kafka and Kierkegaard were very concerned about the relationship of each person with their father. Chesterton reflected on how we can truly love the the world. Machado provokes us with his reflections on what true love is. As I try to show in the book, work, love, filiation, and the world are all topics about which St. Josemaría can offer us great light.

—*Why does the title of the book describe Saint Josemaría as the last romantic? The word “romanticism” can mean various things, and can sometimes even have a negative connotation, as though a romantic were a dreamer or an idealist. What do you mean by “The Last of the Romantics”?*

He had a very high regard for human freedom. He sometimes said that saw himself as a romantic, continuing the work of those nineteenth-century romantics who fought so hard to win their own and others’ freedom. In the 1960s he spoke about the human and divine value of freedom in a homily: “I love the freedom of others, yours, that of the person passing by right now on the street, because if I didn’t love it, I couldn’t defend mine. But that’s not the main reason. The main reason is this: Christ died on the Cross to give us freedom, so that we could live in the freedom and glory of the children of God.”

—*A well-known philosopher described Josemaría as a man who loved freedom. Do you think this is true? Many people today, even Christians, view freedom with suspicion. How can we understand this?*

St. Josemaría’s vision is far removed from those who demand freedom for themselves and then try to subject and control others. Hence he sometimes added the adjective “Christian” to “romantic”: the Christian romantic is someone who does things out of love, and who loves the freedom of others. In St. Josemaría’s mind, the greatest gift God gave to human beings, in the natural order, was to have created us free: to take the risk of our freedom, so that we could respond freely with our love to his
infinite love. One could say that freedom is a necessary condition for love. It is impossible to love only on the basis of obligation, although certainly obligations can also help us to love rightly when our feelings don’t respond.

—Many people today are disheartened by recent sad events in the Church, and the scandal may be leading some to leave the Church. What would you say to those who feel discouraged or even spurred to leave?

One’s own sins and those of others always cause dejection and sadness. In this context, it is helpful to realize that the Church is not just the group of men and women who have joined her (from the most recently baptized to the pastors). Above all, as Saint Josemaría said, the Church is “Christ present among us: God who comes to save mankind, calling us with his revelation, sanctifying us with his grace, sustaining us with his constant help, in the small and big battles of daily life.”

As Saint Josemaría said, we believe “a pesar de los pesares,” despite the sins or even crimes of each member. We believe because of Christ and in Christ, and not because of how well someone has done something, although certainly the exemplary behavior of pastors and faithful in the Church will be of great help in bringing people closer to Christ, and the opposite creates an obvious barrier.

The situation you describe should lead to the determination to do everything possible to ensure that these crimes do not happen again and, at the same time, it should lead us to make reparation for our own and others’ sins, to pray for the holiness of the pastors in the Church, and to accept this moment of purification as a way of beginning a new personal conversion that draws us closer to God’s grace, to the sacrament of forgiveness, to a renewed relationship with Jesus in the Eucharist, and to a selfless service towards others, starting with the people closest to us.

—You say that St. Josemaría was labeled a heretic, and that something similar happened with other saints who opened new paths in the life of the Church. But now the opposite occurs, since often in the press Opus Dei is viewed as a conservative institution and no friend of changes in the Church and in society. What do you think about this?

You are right. In the 1960s, many people were saying that Opus Dei was a dangerous innovation. While today the opposite is the case.
Although it is something obvious, the people of Opus Dei, like everyone else, make mistakes and have shortcomings. Therefore, in the face of criticism, wherever it comes from, it is good to make an examination of conscience to see if the criticism is justified and, in that case, to change whatever needs to be changed.

At the same time, I think it’s good to know reality directly, without accepting clichés. My experience is that many people, after meeting some members or coming in contact with some apostolic initiatives of the Prelature, change their opinion.

These changes in people’s perceptions also perhaps show the limits of political language when applied to realities of a spiritual nature. In the Church, faithfully conserving the faith we’ve received does not make someone an “ultraconservative.” At the same time, to make progress in the mission of spreading the light of Christ, while being attentive to the requirements of each moment, does not mean someone should be labeled as a “progressive.” I think this is the right way of focusing this question.

Most of the people in Opus Dei are fathers or mothers who have to change diapers several times a day, and make their work compatible with their family life, who live alongside people of all beliefs and ways of thinking and make use of the social media. So they live amid all the changes that society is undergoing today, in their family and workplace.

—How is the “truth-mercy equation” solved? Some Christians say that Francis places too much emphasis on the second term and forgets the first, and they think the Pope is watering down the faith, which causes them to suffer. Are they right in this? Why do you think this happens? What advice would you give these people?

I would advise them to personally read the writings of the Holy Father, to follow him directly and pay less attention to those who interpret his words or actions. They should read his homilies, his Wednesday catechesis, his words at the Angelus on Sunday, his exhortations. Today, thanks to God and the new technologies, it is very easy to have a direct connection with the Pope, with what he is saying, doing, and writing every day. When one goes to the direct sources one immediately sees the connection between
truth and mercy, because the truth without mercy would be fanaticism, and mercy without truth would be a false “goodness.”

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Other New Publications

Works of St. Josemaría

Camino, Madrid, Rialp, 2018, 89th printing.

Camino, Bogota, Procodes, 2018, 14th Colombian printing.


Dieve Draugi, Riga, Kala Raksti, 2018, 1st Latvian edition of Friends of God.

Works about St. Josemaría

La devoción a San José en san Josemaría, De la Herrán, Laurentino María; Madrid, Palabra, 2018, 1st ed., 96 pages.

San Josemaría y los burritos, Jiménez, Enrique; Madrid, Palabra, 2018, 1st ed., 96 pages.


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NEWS
Pontifical Appointments

On June 2, the Holy Father Francis appointed Rev. Paul Toshihiro Sakai, till then spiritual director of Opus Dei in Japan, as auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Osaka, Japan.

New Centers of the Prelature

The vicars of the respective circumscriptions have erected new centers of the Prelature in the following cities: Majadahonda (Spain), Querétaro (Mexico) and Kismaros (Hungary).

Diocesan Assignments Received by Priests of the Prelature

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

Miracle Approved for the Beatification of Guadalupe Ortiz de Landazuri

On June 8, Pope Francis authorized the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the decree approving a miracle attributed to the intercession of Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri (1916-1975), a member of Opus Dei. He also authorized the decrees concerning the causes of canonization of Blessed Nunzio Sulprizio, Venerable Concepción Cabrera, and Enrique Angelelli and companions, martyrs in Argentina.
Upon hearing the news, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Prelate of Opus Dei, said: “The life of Guadalupe leads us to see how giving ourselves entirely to the Lord, responding generously to what God is asking of us at each moment, makes us very happy, both here on earth and afterwards in Heaven, where the happiness that never ends is found.

“I ask our Lord that Guadalupe’s example may encourage us to be strong in undertaking with enthusiasm and an enterprising spirit the big and small challenges of each day, in order to serve God and our fellow men and women with love and joy.”

The miracle involves the instant healing of Antonio Jesús Sedano, 76, of a malignant skin tumor next to the right eye, in 2002.

One night, when only a few days remained before having surgery to remove the cancer, Antonio went with faith to the intercession of Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri, asking her that he not have to undergo the surgery. The next morning, the tumor had completely disappeared. In successive medical check-ups, the healing was confirmed.

Antonio Jesús Sedano died twelve years later, in 2014, due to a cardiac arrest, at the age of 88. The skin cancer, which was cured through the intercession of Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri, never reappeared.

In an interview, the postulator for the cause, the priest Antonio Rodríguez de Rivera, described Guadalupe as “a woman in love with God, full of faith and hope, who with her work and optimism helped others in their spiritual and material needs. The joy that permeated all her efforts was evident, even in the most difficult situations.”

**The miraculous cure of Antonio Jesús Sedano**

During the summer of 2002, Antonio Jesús Sedano, 76 years old and widowed since 1991, discovered that he had a wound on the skin of the inner corner of his right eye. The wound was similar to a pimple, and it burned, sometimes causing pain. It did not go away and, during a number of weeks, his three children and a few friends also noticed it. Nevertheless, nothing was done to treat it at this point.

Because of additional difficulty with his sight, Antonio was scheduled for an ophthalmological consultation, with the possibility that a cataract
operation would need to be done, in a health facility in Barcelona (Spain), where he was living. During the consultation, on August 2, 2002, Antonio also showed the ophthalmologist the wound that had appeared in the skin next to his eye. The doctor immediately directed him to the Clinical Hospital of Barcelona, suspecting that it might be a tumor.

On October 30, 2002, Antonio was evaluated at the hospital by the head of the department of ophthalmology, who gave a clinical diagnosis of basal cell carcinoma, in the form known as *ulcus rodens*. This is one of the most frequent malignant skin tumors, typically affecting people in their later years, and often appearing on the scalp or neck. It develops progressively and implies the deterioration of local tissues. These tumors are generally removed through an operation, normally curing the patient.

In Antonio’s case, the lentil-sized tumor was causing a graver situation than usual because of its close vicinity to his eye and the possibility of affecting delicate organs nearby. The doctor informed Antonio that he would need to have surgery to remove it, and he sent him to a specialist in plastic surgery. Considering the certainty of his diagnosis and that Antonio would need to have treatment as soon as possible, the doctor determined the type of tumor that, in his judgment, Antonio was suffering from. The next day, a plastic surgeon examined Antonio and confirmed the previous diagnosis: basal cell carcinoma. Without losing time, he ordered an emergency operation to remove the tumor, explaining to the patient that it was undoubtedly a malignant tumor, but that it was possible to remove it through a surgery that needed to be done as soon as possible.

The cancer diagnosis caused Antonio a great deal of anxiety and those closest to him noticed this. As the day of the surgery approached, his worries increased, as the tumor got visibly worse, ulcerating and even starting to bleed.

In the Oratory of Holy Mary of Bonaigua (Barcelona), where Antonio often went to Mass, he found a prayer card for private devotion to the Servant of God, Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri, along with information about her life. Right away, he began to feel a personal and spiritual closeness to her, so he began to ask her, repeatedly, for his cure. His
children and other relatives did the same, as Antonio gave out copies of Guadalupe’s prayer card to his family members.

Before knowing the date of his operation, Antonio was discouraged and frightened – also because of other health problems he suffered – and, upon receiving news of the exact date of his surgery, his fear only increased. One night when he felt especially nervous he held Guadalupe’s prayer card in his hands and prayed to her spontaneously, with a lot of faith: “You can do it: make it so that I don’t need to be operated on. It’s nothing for you.”

After invoking Guadalupe, Antonio calmed down, slept without interruptions, and the next morning he woke up calm and rested. Upon seeing himself in the mirror, he discovered that the wound had disappeared. He couldn’t believe it; he thought these things could happen to other people, but not to him. His mood changed completely and that morning he even joked when giving the news to his daughter, who was amazed. The same thing happened to his other daughter when she realized that the tumor had disappeared from one day to the next, not even leaving a mark. Antonio called his son to give him the news, and he also communicated it to other friends. In addition, he called the secretary of the plastic surgeon to cancel the date of his surgery, since there was no longer any need for it.

When the plastic surgeon examined the patient, he confirmed that the cancer had completely disappeared, due to unknown causes. His initial reaction was fright. His first question was, “Where did they operate on you?” Antonio replied by describing his cure in detail and the intercession of Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri. The cure, which had happened overnight, was inexplicable. In the clinical history, on this date, it reads: “The lesion disappeared after praying to the Servant of God, Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri.” In subsequent examinations the cure was confirmed.

Antonio Jesús Sedano Madrid died twelve years later, in 2014, due to heart disease. He was 88 years old. The skin cancer, of which he was cured through the intercession of Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri, never came back again.

As the cure seemed to constitute an extraordinary event, according to the indications given for these cases, on May 18, 2007 the archbishop of
Barcelona decreed the opening of a canonical process on the miracle and appointed a diocesan tribunal to investigate it. The process took place from May 25, 2007 to January 17, 2008. On October 24, 2008, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints sanctioned the validity of this diocesan process.

On October 5, 2017, the medical board of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints examined the case. The doctors highlighted the most relevant aspects of the healing under study: the adequate diagnostic process of the injury, confirmed by medical specialists, and especially its healing in a period of a few hours, without any treatment. The experts of the Congregation declared the occurrences not explicable from a scientific point of view.

Subsequently, the case was submitted to the examination of the theological consultants, who in the session of 1 March 2018 declared proven, beyond a reasonable doubt, the relationship between the miraculous healing of Antonio and the invocation of Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri.

Finally, at the ordinary session on June 5, 2018, the cardinals and bishops belonging to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints ruled it solidly proven that the case should be considered a miracle.

On June 8, 2018, the Holy Father Pope Francis, after receiving from Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, an account of all that has just been described, declared that there is evidence of the miracle worked by God through the intercession of the venerable Servant of God, Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri.

Diaconal Ordination of Three Faithful of the Prelature (March 3, 2018)

On March 3, three faithful of Opus Dei received the diaconate from Bishop Klaus Küng, Bishop of the diocese of St. Pölten (Austria). The ceremony took place in the parish of St. Josemaría, in Rome.
“The diaconate is a threefold service: a service to the Word of God, a service to the altar and a service to one’s neighbor, to all those who suffer,” Archbishop Klaus Küng said in his homily. “It is a great joy to see three professionals who have worked hard for many years receiving ordination as deacons, because they want to become priests,” he added, addressing the candidates —Gabriel Robledillo, Javier Pérez and Emanuel Estrada. “St. Josemaría always had a strong sentiment in his heart whenever one of his sons was becoming a priest. On the one hand, he believed that all men and women are called to holiness and the apostolate in the middle of the world, constituting in itself a vocation of great value; on the other, he knew all too well about the urgent need for good and holy priests.”

Gabriel Robledillo (born in Jódar, Spain, in 1961) began his working career in a poultry slaughterhouse in El Vendrell (Tarragona). While working there, he obtained a Masters in Hispanic Literature at the University of Barcelona. Since 1991 he was a teacher at the Alto castillo school in Jaén. He studied theology and obtained a doctorate in Moral and Spiritual Theology with his research on “The Cross in Calderón de la Barca.”

Francisco Javier Pérez (Jimena, Spain, 1963) dedicated a great part of his professional career to editorial and graphic design for various media outlets in Spain. These included Marca, a sports newspaper; Expansión, a journal on finance, and Mundo Cristiano, a Christian magazine. He obtained a degree in Theology at the University of Navarra.

Emanuel Estrada (Monterrey, Mexico, 1976) studied English Literature and worked at Ciudad de los Niños, an educational initiative inspired by the teachings of St. Josemaría. His interest in helping his students extended to their families, which is why he decided to pursue a master’s degree in Family Counseling.

Cardinal Robert Sarah Ordains 31 Priests of the Prelature (May 5, 2018)
Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, ordained 31 new priests of the Opus Dei Prelature, from 15 countries, in a ceremony that took place on Saturday, May 5, in the Roman basilica of Saint Eugene.

“The Bible presents the priest as a man of the Word of God,” he said during the homily. “Contemporary man goes to the priest seeking Christ. About other topics (whether economic, social or political) they have so many other competent persons they can consult.” In Sacred Scripture, “the priest is also presented as the man of pardon.” “Like the holy Curé of Ars or Padre Pio, the priest is the apostle of the confessional, as Pope Francis reminded us a few days ago.”

Cardinal Sarah also referred to the priest as the “friend of Christ.” A friend who is recognized in a special way in the Eucharist, because “there is no Eucharist without priesthood, just as there is no priesthood without the Eucharist.” That is why,” he added, “each day we need the Eucharist to live out our priesthood and to be daring messengers of the Gospel in the midst of the sufferings, difficulties and hostilities that we encounter.” He invited the new priests to seek holiness and to be men “of deep inner life.” Quoting St. Josemaría, he stressed that “the path that leads to holiness is a path of prayer; and prayer ought to take root and grow in the soul little by little, like the tiny seed which later develops into a tree with many branches” (Friends of God, nos. 294-295).

The priesthood is service to the Church and to all souls. “As you have learned from St. Josemaría and from all his successors, always be very loyal to the Roman Pontiff, to the bishops, successors of the Apostles, and to your Prelate. Love the priests in each diocese; beg the Lord constantly to send many laborers for his harvest, to send many holy priests, as guardians to feed the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood (Acts 20:28).”

The Cardinal also congratulated the parents and families of the new priests: “From today on, you will have someone with your own blood interceding for you before God. At the same time, we all need to pray for them even more than before, since the responsibility they have taken on is great.”

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the Cardinal gave each of the new
priests a rosary and a small icon of Our Lady of Tenderness. “I want to give these to you,” he told them, “so that you may unite yourselves more closely to Holy Mary, and to remind you to also pray for me.”

The new priests are: Pablo González-Villalobos Bergamo (Spain), Francisco Javier Fernández Centeno (Spain), Agustín Alfredo Silberberg Muiño (Argentina), Alejandro Gratacós Casacuberta (Spain), Juan José Velasco Fernández (Spain), Antonio Vargas-Machuca Salido (Spain), Francis Anthony Jose Inzon Ong III (Philippines), Francisco Felipe Nieto López (Spain), Gonzalo Trelles Villanueva (Spain), Juan Suárez-Lledó Grande (Spain), Ignacio María Varela Vega (Uruguay), Luis Poveda Talavera (Spain), Manuel Ignacio Candela Temes (Spain), Alberto de Ángel Castel (Spain), Michele Crosa di Vergagni (Italy), Jorge Segarra Taús (Spain), Ángel Miquel Aymar (Slovakia), Jude Kasirima Karuhanga (Uganda), Pedro Emeka Okafor (Nigeria), Alfred Robert Cruz Vergara (Philippines), Pierre Laffon de Mazières (France), Frederick Vincent Ifechukwu Oraegbu (Nigeria), Yao N’zian Jean Eudes Téhia (Ivory Coast), Raphael Rezende Fernandes (Brazil), Anthony Elobuike Asogwa (Nigeria), Martijn Sebastian Pouw (Holland), Ignacio Ramoneda Pérez del Pulgar (Spain), Alberto José Ospina Sánchez (Colombia), José Guillermo Muñoz Maldonado (Colombia), Donatus Dedan Wainaina (Kenya) and Manuel Alejandro Vielma Alvarado (Venezuela).
Strive to strengthen each day your friendship with Christ, asking yourselves frequently: ‘What would Jesus do in my place? What can I do to become more and more like Him and bring Him to others?’ Seek Him in prayer, in the sacraments, in all the circumstances of your life and also in the people around you: in your friends, family members, fellow students, and in the most needy and forgotten of the world, in whom Christ’s face is reflected in an especially clear way,” he advised the more than 2,500 participants. The letter is printed in its entirety in The Roman Pontiff section of this bulletin.

The young people gave Pope Francis the money from a collection taken up for social initiatives, and also a mosaic of our Lady Mater Ecclesiae (Mother of the Church), for the Christians of Syria.

The topic for reflection was Rethink the Future. As Alain Kiwan, who came from Lebanon and is the president of UNIV this year, explained: “In May 1968, the young people of the world broke through all the barriers that, in their opinion, had created so many prejudices, taboos and stale traditions. After 50 years, can we say that society is fulfilling all our desires? We have to ‘rethink the future,’ asking ourselves why some of those dreams have not been fulfilled, and create together the world we want.”

UNIV 2018 offered cultural activities in various places in Rome, involving lectures, colloquiums, exhibitions and round tables. The speakers included: Anna Halpine, founder of the World Youth Alliance and CEO of FEMM Health; David Post, Head of Business Development Global Thermal Generation for Enel; Paloma Durán, director of the Fund for Sustainable Development Goals at the UN; Ignacio Vicens, professor at the Polytechnic University in Madrid; Kevin Majeres, professor at Harvard Medical School; Giorgia Pergolini, environmental policy consultant for the World Food Programme; Jack Valero, co-founder of Catholic Voices; and Benedetto Ippolito, professor of Philosophy at the Roma Tre University.

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"Return to Ithaca", Returning Home to the Faith
The documentary *Return to Ithaca* is a multimedia report published on the Spanish website of Opus Dei. It follows the story of six people who left God for very different reasons in their youth or adolescence, and then decided to return later on to leading a Christian life.

María Villarino, coordinator of the project, explained that the name of the documentary is based on the island in the Ionian Sea, which is “a symbol of the journey of the person who returns home, the return of Ulysses narrated by Homer in *The Odyssey*.”

The report, which lasts half an hour, begins with words of Pope Francis: “God is a Father who loves me and awaits my return.” The Pontiff “presents an image of the Church as mother and home, and not as a cold and bureaucratic institution,” Villarino said at the presentation of the documentary on May 31. “Although today many people say they are agnostic, others return to the Church after many years. Suddenly something changes in their lives. These are very intense stories, based on moving experiences or more ordinary events, but which represent a turning point in the person’s life.”

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**Volume 12 of Studia et Documenta**

The *Saint Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute* published volume 12 of the journal *Studia et Documenta*. The volume opens with a study by Constantine Ánchel on the priests who spiritually accompanied Saint Josemaría Escrivá until June 1944, when Blessed Alvaro del Portillo became his confessor and spiritual director.

Another study, signed by Jesús Gil Sáenz, describes the 2,500 books in St. Josemaría’s personal library. The author reconstructs the genesis of this collection, which began to take shape in 1937. These are books that the founder of Opus Dei used for his study, personal work and spiritual reading.

The *Studies and Notes* section includes five articles. In the first, Inmaculada Alva gives an overview of the apostolic work of Opus Dei with
women from the end of the Spanish Civil War up to 1942, based on letters, diaries and testimonies of the protagonists. In the second article, Onésimo Díaz writes about the Jenner Residence, begun by Saint Josemaría Escrivá in post-war Madrid, and focuses on the human and Christian formation offered to its residents. Another article, by Luis Cano, gives a brief overview of the first workshop for supernumeraries of Opus Dei that was held in 1948 in Molinoviejo (Segovia, Spain). Fifteen people attended, to whom St. Josemaría explained in detail what the life of a supernumerary in Opus Dei entails. The notes and testimonies of some of those present provide valuable information in this regard. In the fourth article, Francisca Colomer focuses on Ramona Sanjurjo, a supernumerary of Opus Dei since 1948 who, from her native Vigo, assisted the development of the apostolic works of Opus Dei in Galicia and Portugal. The last article, by Federico Requena, deals with the apostolic work of Fr. William Porras, chaplain of Harvard University from 1954 to 1960.

In the Documents section, Alfredo Méndiz comments on the correspondence between Salvador Canals and St. Josemaría Escrivá in the years 1948 and 1949.

The News section briefly presents the origin and development of the Josemaría Escrivá Virtual Library, an online platform created by the Josemaría Escrivá Documentation and Studies Center, which disseminates academic works on Opus Dei, its founder and successors, members and some apostolic initiatives.

The Bibliographic section closes the volume. It presents details of fourteen recent publications, as well as an extensive list of works on Opus Dei and various apostolic initiatives promoted by its members, published between 2010 and 2013.

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En la tierra como en el cielo (On Earth as in Heaven), the First Book about Bishop Javier Echevarria by Alvaro Sanchez Leon
The book *En la tierra como en el cielo* (Rialp), by journalist Álvaro Sánchez León, recounts through 45 interviews the life of the second successor of Saint Josemaría at the head of Opus Dei, Javier Echevarría. The first book about the previous Prelate of Opus Dei, it was presented on March 1 in Madrid.

During his presentation, the author explained that he had tried to “provide a sketch of the life of Bishop Javier Echevarría (1932-2016) through 45 interviews with people who lived with him or dealt with him, including relatives, friends, and co-workers, as well as the prefect of the Pontifical Household, Georg Gänswein, and the Cardinal of Madrid, Carlos Osoro.”

Sánchez León, who was born in Seville in 1979, said that the book contains “stories about the heart and soul” of Bishop Javier Echevarría, highlighting “his humanity, the scope of his pastoral concern and the projects he urged forward throughout the world.”

With a preface by the current Prelate of Opus Dei, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, the book focuses on the 22 years during which Bishop Javier Echevarría was at the head of the Prelature’s government. It also gives an overview of his relationship with Saint John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis.

Sánchez León stressed that this book “is not a biography or hagiography. It is a journalistic collage that illustrates, with a panoramic view, the keys to the life of a good person who strove to improve our contemporary world.”

He also noted that *On Earth as in Heaven* is addressed to a very broad audience, which can find an attractive example to lead a deep life of faith: “My protagonist first found God in his life, and then met St. Josemaría, and both discoveries were the key to his life, both humanly and supernaturally.”


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INITIATIVES

• In Brief
Xabec Vocational Training Center (Valencia, Spain)

Xabec is a vocational training school that offers technical education related to industrial maintenance and building facilities. Besides courses for young people, occupational training courses aimed at unemployed people and specific training modules for workers are offered, both in the academic center and in the facilities of the companies involved. The school is located in the Valencian neighborhood of Orriols, where many laborers and immigrants reside. One of its main goals is to reduce unemployment, by providing the technical training need to find a good job. At the same time, for those who want it, human and Christian formation is offered based on respect for others, a job well done, and love for freedom.

Since its inception in 2002, Xabec has relied on the help of the Eifor Foundation and other entities to carry out its social mission. It seeks to make vocational training accessible to people with few economic resources who are at risk of social exclusion. A number of those studying at the center are foreigners. Those who arrive in Spain without documentation are offered help to regularize their situation and an opportunity to integrate into the world of work. Xabec’s dual training program recently received the Prize for Excellence in Vocational Training awarded by the European Commission.

In Brief

Rome, Italy A Work Camp in Madagascar

Rome’s Campus Bio-Medical University has carried out an international service project in Madagascar. Many of the activities took place at the St. Damien Surgical Medical Center, in the city of Ambanja.
Students and teachers provided assistance to the local staff in their daily tasks in the operating room, in the analysis laboratory, in the departments of radiology, dentistry, ophthalmology, etc. In addition, in collaboration with local pediatricians, tests were carried out to identify cases of malnutrition and anemia in children, and treatment was provided thanks to donations raised from the students and teachers taking part in this project.

Oporto, Portugal Dialogue that breaks down barriers

Inspired by the teachings of Pope Francis, in the first half of 2018 two sessions were organized for women faced with the challenge of reconciling an intense professional life with care for their families. The first was held near Lisbon, at the Penaferrim Meeting Center, and the second near Oporto, in Enxomil Conference Center. The two sessions were guided by some words of the Pope: “Dialogue breaks down the walls of division and misunderstandings: it builds bridges of communication, and it does not allow anyone to isolate themselves, or withdraw into their own little world” (Audience, October 22, 2016). The women taking part shared some of their personal experiences, with the conviction that these can be of help to others.

Seville, Spain 50th anniversary of Altair School

The Altair School in Seville celebrated the 50th anniversary of its foundation. The academic center was built in one of the most disadvantaged areas of Seville in the 60s of the last century, and since then it has helped hundreds of its students to obtain access to higher education.
Montevideo, Uruguay University solidarity

Twenty university students took part in a work camp in January in Pueblo Aznárez, a township with about one thousand inhabitants in southeastern Uruguay. “University Students for Social Development” is a joint endeavor of professors, students and professionals that seeks to help further human development by organizing volunteer activities and social projects. Key goals include strengthening social inclusion, human values, and social responsibility.

San José, Costa Rica A Professional Development Program

Fifteen years ago, Miravalles University Center started the Professional Development Program, aimed at preparing young people for the first steps in their professional life. It takes place over an eight month period and provides guidance in three areas: ethics and human values, human development, and the strengthening of “soft skills” needed for success in the professional world, including leadership qualities, communication skills, and time management. Over 1,300 university students from 20 different areas of study have taken part in the program since its inception.
IN PACE
The Faithful of Opus Dei Who Died During the First Half of 2018

In the first half of 2018, 568 faithful of the Prelature died and, besides the priests incardinated in it, 21 members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. Suffrages have been offered for all of these deceased. As we continue to pray for them, let us thank God for the example they left us through their fidelity in striving to transform their professional work—their pastoral ministry in the case of the priests—their family lives, and their social relationships into an occasion for loving God and serving the Church and all souls. Their love for God and neighbor constitutes the meaning and value of their lives, whether outstanding in the eyes of others, or whether quite ordinary, as was true in most cases.

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.
A study
When considering the topic of religion and all that it includes, few people today think about freedom. For many people, in fact, religion is viewed as something from which one can—and perhaps should—be freed. Whether viewed as positive or negative, the first thing usually evoked are the obligations any religion or specific set of beliefs entails: the obedience and renunciation it requires. Hence it can be surprising for people today to hear that the Christian faith (which still forms the foundation for Western culture, although in an ever weaker and dimmer way) has presented itself right from the start as liberation.

In the Prelature of Opus Dei, freedom is not only greatly respected but holds a prominent place in its evangelizing mission and in the life of its members. So much so that it is almost impossible to describe the Prelature’s specific role within the Church without expressly mentioning freedom. Recently the Prelate of Opus Dei dedicated one of his pastoral letters to this topic, echoing Saint Josemaría’s abundant teachings about freedom. As the founder of Opus Dei once wrote, there is a great need “to form Christians filled with optimism and drive who are able to live their divine adventure in the world as *compossores mundi, non erroris* (Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 14)—as possessors of the world with their fellow men, but not of its errors. Christians who are determined to promote, defend and protect the interests—the loves—of Christ in society; who know how to distinguish Catholic doctrine from what is simply a matter of opinion, and who strive to be united and compact in what is essential; who love freedom and its resulting sense of personal responsibility.”

This article will not attempt to carry out an exhaustive study of the place of freedom in the spirit of Opus Dei, with all of its ramifications. Rather I will limit myself to highlighting the central place freedom holds there, and how it accords very well with its essential features.

**Divine filiation and secularity**

I think we could define the vocation to Opus Dei as a call to holiness that is characterized externally by *being in the world*—that is, by secularity
—and internally by being rooted in a deep sense of one’s divine filiation. At least Blessed Alvaro del Portillo expressed it in this way: “Holiness in the world and, at the same time, rooted in and nourished by an essential and deep sense of the Christian’s supernatural filiation in Christ. If the first postulate—being in the world—could be defined as an external defining quality of the vocation to holiness announced by Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, the second one—its being rooted in the sense of one’s divine filiation—should be understood as the internal defining quality par excellence, the most characteristic, the most important one.” Here we see reflected St. Josemaría’s clear affirmation that divine filiation or, as he often stressed, the “sense” of one’s divine filiation, is the foundation of the interior life of those who seek holiness through the spirit of Opus Dei.

I will take this “definition” as a guide, since I think the two characteristics highlighted there enable us to set out clearly the various aspects that make up this particular vocation, the spirit that animates it, and the institution that promotes and preserves it.

In particular, the topic that concerns us here, freedom, is explicitly connected with both aspects. Encouraging sanctity in the middle of the world implies affirming the secular condition of those being addressed and the lay mentality that corresponds to them. What characterizes this lay mentality? St. Josemaría tells us that it is “freedom, my children, freedom, which is the key to the lay mentality that we all have in Opus Dei.” And to grasp the deep union between divine filiation and freedom, we need only consider his commentary on Jesus’ words veritas liberabit vos (Jn 8:32), the truth will set you free: “How great a truth is this, which opens the way to freedom and gives it meaning throughout our lives. I will sum it up for you, with the joy and certainty which flow from knowing there is a close relationship between God and his creatures. It is the knowledge that we have come from the hands of God, that the Blessed Trinity looks upon us with predilection, that we are children of so wonderful a Father. I ask my Lord to help us decide to take this truth to heart, to dwell upon it day by day; only then will we be acting as free men. Do not forget: anyone who does not realize that he is a child of God is unaware of the deepest truth about himself. When he acts he lacks the dominion and self-mastery we find in those who love our Lord above all else.”
This intimate tie between freedom and the foundation of Opus Dei’s spirit shows how freedom imbues every dimension of this particular vocation. Viewing it also as the key to secularity, another essential feature of its spirit, points to the relationship between the sense of one’s divine filiation and secularity, as two defining qualities of the vocation to Opus Dei.

A growing awareness of freedom

The spirit of Opus Dei has come to birth as at a time in the world’s history when the importance of freedom is becoming ever clearer. Already in the nineteenth century Hegel had said that “the ultimate goal of the world is for the spirit to become aware of its freedom and thus for its freedom to become a reality.” And at the end of the twentieth century St. John Paul II said in his address to the United Nations: “On the threshold of a new millennium we are witnessing an extraordinary global acceleration of that quest for freedom which is one of the great dynamics of human history. This phenomenon is not limited to any one part of the world; nor is it the expression of any single culture. Men and women throughout the world, even when threatened by violence, have taken the risk of freedom, asking to be given a place in social, political, and economic life that is commensurate with their dignity as free human beings. This universal longing for freedom is truly one of the distinguishing marks of our time.” As the Prelate of Opus Dei stressed: “An ardent desire for freedom, the demand for it on the part of persons and peoples, is a positive sign of our times.” Hence it is part of a Christian understanding of history.

This growing awareness of the importance of freedom is linked to secularization, understood as the process by which the secular world has become aware of its autonomy. Secularization, understood as the affirmation of the laws that spontaneously govern the activities of human beings and their mutual relations, is already implicitly present from the beginning in Christian life and preaching. This conviction, at least in Western culture, has led to the recognition of the autonomy of politics, law and science, which have enabled modern societies to arise. In fact, it is commonly accepted that Christianity has occupied a decisive role in mankind’s growing awareness of freedom. For some people, however, this process necessarily leads to secularization understood in another sense,
perhaps the most common one in public discourse: the marginalization of religion and its manifestations, viewed as a requirement to bring about a fully free society. This last way of understanding freedom involves a long and complex historical development.

In the ancient world, freedom (*eleuthería*) has above all a social and political connotation, which is linked to the laws that govern the *polis*. A person who is outside the law is not free, but only one who is ruled by it. The free man thus stands in contrast to the slave, who is not recognized as a citizen with full rights nor shares in the collective end of the *polis*, and whose activity is oriented towards the aims of another person. The importance of being ruled by the law explains the gravity of the sentence of exile, which deprives the exiled person of the possibility of developing his or her own humanity. That person is dead from society’s point of view.

Socratic philosophy formulates a new meaning of freedom, where being free consists above all in knowing—or at least in seeking—the true good, beyond one’s immediate desires. Hence what is most radically opposed to freedom is ignorance. This Socratic inspiration led to several attempts to achieve the human good, guided by the rational search for the true good and the determination, also rational, of the adequate means to achieve it. One of them—extreme in its manifestations, but very significant, because it highlights the limitation of the social order and the dangers this can pose for the good life—is that embodied by the cynics, who advised people to follow the tendencies they deem “natural” and to reject those imposed by social conventions.

With the spread of Greek culture throughout the known world by the conquests of Alexander the Great, the *polis* or city-state lost its central role. The awareness arose that it is impossible to reduce humanity to the narrow sphere of one’s own society and that law can no longer be viewed as the measure of what is human. In this context, where human actions are no longer measured by social norms, the Stoics formulated, in continuity with the Socratic stress on moral freedom, the concept of natural law. Man is no longer understood primarily as a citizen of a *polis*, but as a citizen of the cosmos and subject to its laws. The rational recognition and acceptance of this higher law frees one from the foolishness of those who are unable to order their desires in accord with reality.
For the Stoics, each human being is called to accept one’s destiny, what we cannot change, and to act according to nature, that is, to seek to bring all human tendencies into accord with the noblest part of man: reason. Here freedom is understood as *apatheia* (absence of passion), seen as the end result of virtue, which bestows self-mastery on a person. Being free means not being at the mercy of one’s passions, which lead to a lack of self-control and subjection to one’s lower appetites, and not being affected by external events.

But it is Christianity that places freedom at the center of our understanding of reality. “Creation itself is a manifestation of divine freedom. The Genesis accounts give us a glimpse of God’s creative love, his joy in sharing with the world his goodness, his beauty (cf. Gen 1:31), and with human beings, his freedom (cf. Gen 1:26-29). In calling each of us into existence, God has made us able to choose and to love the good, and to respond with love to his Love.” Being free, for human beings, means the capacity to correspond on one’s own initiative to God’s love. Human freedom is thus the reflection—the image—of the freedom of a God who is a loving communion of persons and who creates without any need, out of a free love for his creatures.

The measure of man is no longer to be a good citizen of a *polis* constituted according to human laws, although Christian inspiration makes use of and reinforces the interpersonal character implicit in it. Thus in St. Augustine we find the new concept of the “City of God.” One of the most striking characteristics of this new community—mysteriously brought about in history, but whose full realization will only be in the next life—is that all men and women are called to belong to it.

The Stoic vision of freedom as independence from everything external is also transformed by Christianity. Being free is no longer limited to self-mastery and not being affected by what is external. Now we are offered the possibility of uniting ourselves with God, the Supreme Good, and thus share in his sovereign dominion over the whole universe. “Our sense of divine filiation leads, then, to great interior freedom, to deep joy, and to the serene optimism of hope: *spe gaudentes* (Rom 12:12). Realizing we are God’s children also leads us to love the world, which came forth good from the hands of our Father God. It leads us to face life with the clear
awareness that it is possible to do good, to conquer sin, and to bring the world to God.”

Trust in an almighty and benevolent God thus changes the meaning of freedom, which is no longer viewed as the ability to rationally adjust one’s desires to reality. For those who freely decide to correspond to God’s love, everything cooperates for one’s good (see Rom 8:28), and we can now aspire to the fullness of the good. Hence what we need to be freed from now is, above all, sin, which is responsible for mankind’s slavery, our submission to lower realities and, ultimately, the isolation that frustrates our personal life.

Accepting the existence of a free, all-knowing and all-powerful God could be crushing if not linked to the conviction that he looks on us with infinite love and seeks our good. This conviction can be tarnished by the awareness of our sin, which, if not united to hope, could lead to fleeing from God, to denying or distorting his image. But it is restored by faith in Jesus Christ. The freedom Christ has won us is that of being God’s children, and a good father does not exercise his authority for his own benefit but for his child’s good. “Grace gives rise to a new and higher freedom for which ‘Christ has set us free’ (Gal, 5:1). Our Lord frees us from sin through his words and actions, all of which have redemptive efficacy. Hence ‘this hymn to freedom is echoed in all the mysteries of our Catholic faith’ (Friends of God, no. 25).” The assurance that the God who creates and loves us is omnipotent and the Lord of history guarantees our total liberation and gives human dignity a new meaning, the consequences of which are still being drawn out and developed today.

Christian freedom and divine filiation

In modern times, freedom takes on a new prominence. A political manifestation of this new sensitivity are the revolutions in the late eighteenth century, which were followed by theoretical formulations, especially in German idealism. Both inspirations, politics and theory, resulted in various initiatives and movements throughout the nineteenth century, whose consequences reached into the twentieth century and also into the present one.

In particular, in modern times the discovery was made that freedom also means the ability to introduce new realities into history through one’s
own action. This capacity is experienced as the possibility for progress not only in the moral and personal realm, but also in society. The formulation of this meaning of freedom deepened the perspective of classical thinkers that freedom above all meant following one’s rational nature and perfecting oneself through one’s own actions. This conviction led to a certain disdain for productive activity and the benefits it can bring about. In recent times, however, confidence has grown in the human being’s creative and transformative capacity.

In any case, together with this discovery, a new interpretation of nature and human dynamism has come about. Nature is understood as an environment devoid of ends and subject to laws, and freedom as the possibility of self-determination. This leads little by little to viewing freedom as simply independence and to oppose it to nature, which is seen as a limit that must be mastered or overcome.

Understanding freedom as the independence of an undetermined being capable of self-realization prevents one from recognizing it as a created capacity to respond freely to love and forces one to reject the existence of a nature that can offer criteria about what should or should not be done. We can understand why this concept of freedom, which has taken shape in the modern world, can come to merit the severe denunciation voiced by Cornelio Fabro: “Lacking a transcendent basis, freedom has taken itself as its own object: it has become an empty freedom, the freedom of being free, a law unto itself; for it is in fact freedom without law, its only law being the slavery of the instincts, the tyranny of absolute reason, which immediately becomes the whim of a tyrant.” In this complicated history, the contemporary revindication of freedom leads to a distancing from Christianity and even to opposing it and inspiring overtly anti-Christian or even atheistic systems of thought and political movements.

It is precisely in this confused context that St. Josemaría’s effort to reaffirm the Christian meaning of freedom takes place. “We Christians do not have to ask anyone to tell us the true meaning of this gift,” he insists, “because the only freedom that can save mankind is Christian freedom.” Where he differs most clearly from modern concepts of freedom is perhaps in the close connection he defends between freedom and divine filiation. Leonardo Polo asserts that “one of the most notorious aspects of modern
ideologies is not wanting to be a son, considering filiation as an intolerable debt.” Nevertheless, “whatever the duration of his biography, man is always challenged by the question of his origin, a question that leads him to the recognition of his generated being, from which he cannot flee: he cannot ignore or replace it. One’s personal identity is, therefore, inseparable from this recognition.”

This recognition leads us back to our condition as creatures. At times we can tend to undervalue the Christian doctrine of creation, not denying it but treating it as a “fact” that can be dispensed with when trying to understand the human being. One then loses sight of the reality that the creature is absolutely unrecognizable outside the creative act of God, and that to consider the creature as independent from him can only lead to a mirage. Modern thought has discovered the radical nature of freedom. But often, to defend it, it has seen the need to deny all dependence and has fallen into the errors highlighted by authors such as Cornelio Fabro and Leonardo Polo, which deprives the person of identity and destiny, and condemns him to become the result of his own activity.

But for a Christian, to depend on God is to be created as free, with the freedom of those who know they are loved—as a child—and with an unlimited horizon —God himself— to welcome their growth and development. Thus the recognition of one’s own identity is resolved in the reality of one’s divine filiation: “Each passing day increases my yearning to proclaim to the four winds this inexhaustible treasure that belongs to Christianity: ‘the glorious freedom of the children of God!’ (Rom 8:21).” Commenting on the teachings of St. Josemaria, Polo says: “The most intimate interiority from which man lives transcends his entire being. This means that on rising above oneself, one discovers the fatherhood of God. This discovery is never enough, for if God is Father, man starts from beyond his own ‘I.’ If God is Father, we are children, not authors of ourselves, but truly co-workers.” Thus recognizing our dependence on God is tantamount to asserting the reality of our freedom rather than limiting it.

But it is not enough to be aware of the richness of our divine filiation and the freedom that accompanies it. We also need to make it a norm for
our behavior: “I ask my Lord to help us decide to take this truth to heart, to dwell upon it day by day; only then will we be acting as free persons.” The Prelate of Opus Dei, in his January 9, 2018 pastoral letter, devotes special attention to the intimate tie between freedom and divine filiation: “Our divine filiation enables our freedom to expand with all the strength that God has bestowed on it. It is not by emancipating ourselves from the Father’s house that we become free, but rather by embracing the reality that we are sons or daughters. ‘Anyone who does not realize that he is a child of God is unaware of the deepest truth about himself’ (Friends of God, no. 26). Such a person is unaware of who he is and lives in conflict with himself. How liberating it is, then, to know that God loves us. How liberating is God’s pardon that allows us to return to ourselves and to our true home (see Lk 15:17-24).”

The Christian is aware that living up to his condition requires responding with a loving self-giving to God’s call. This self-giving is not an annoying demand, but the unheard of possibility of treating God as a friend, speaking with him in a personal conversation. “Let us ask ourselves once again, here in the presence of God: ‘Lord, why have you given us this power? Why have you entrusted us with the faculty of choosing you or rejecting you? You want us to make good use of this power. Lord, what you do want me to do?’ His reply is precise, crystal-clear: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind’ (Mt 22:37).” Thus freedom acquires its true dignity and the law is no longer seen as a constraint; rather it becomes the means—the language, we might say—to manifest love, correspondence. “It’s because we love freedom that we tie ourselves down. Only pride sees such bonds as a heavy chain.”

“When we breathe this air of freedom, we see clearly that doing evil is an enslavement, not a liberation.” It means placing ourselves at the mercy of what we have been freed from. A person who acts in this way “has decided for the worst, for the absence of God, where there is no freedom to be found.” For God is the author of freedom and the only one who can fulfill it. This risk involves the “light and shade of human freedom,” a risk that, more than a risk for man, is a risk for God.
It is true that the Christian should be aware of the possibility of abdicating his privileged condition, by using his freedom badly. But even this fallible character of freedom can also become a song of gratitude: “Once again I raise my heart in thanksgiving to my God and Lord, because there was nothing to stop him from creating us impeccable, irresistibly drawn towards the good. Nevertheless, ‘he judged that his servants would be better if they served him freely’ (St. Augustine, *De vera religione*, XIV, 27). How great is the love, the mercy of our Father! Whenever I think of his divine ‘extravagance’ for us his children, I wish I had a thousand tongues, a thousand hearts and more, with which to be constantly praising God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.”

**Christian freedom: responsibility and secularity**

The founder of Opus Dei’s love for freedom is filled with important consequences for our daily life. According to Fabro, “after centuries of Christian spiritualities based on the priority of obedience, he inverted the situation and made obedience an attitude and consequence of freedom, a fruit of its flower or, more deeply, of its root.” This is not, of course, a revolution against Christian spiritualities of the past, but rather the highlighting of one of their key legacies. But this change in perspective and the consequences drawn from it are not a coincidence. They are a requirement of the message and spirituality of Opus Dei, since at least one of its essential features depends on it: secularity.

True freedom can be distinguished from its counterfeits by its accompaniment by responsibility: personal freedom with personal responsibility. At times, responsibility tends to be seen as the reverse side of freedom, but this identification is due, in the end, to a mistaken conception of both. For despite what may seem to be the case at first sight, it is the exercise of freedom that is more costly. This has a great relevance in the spirit of Opus Dei, which rather than suppressing the risk that accompanies personal decision, offers light to exercise it more effectively. We also need to keep in mind that we are responsible above all for carrying out the good, and not, as one sometimes tends to think, for the bad, despite our bad actions.
It is not surprising that one of the first manifestations of mistaken freedom, of sin, is that man encloses himself in himself and seeks excuses, even before God, to uselessly try to avoid the consequences of his own actions. In psychic life this attitude can also be a manifestation of immaturity. Given this danger, the work of formation that takes place in Opus Dei encourages all of its members to accept their own responsibility and to avoid making excuses.

This norm of behavior is another manifestation of a way of acting that requires the same behavior with other men and women as with God. It is, in my opinion, a consequence of viewing everyday realities as the place where and from which one strives to achieve holiness. As sanctity is not acquired through an interior life separated from one’s common life among other men and women, to reach God one needs to begin by exercising with others the conditions needed for a sincere dialogue with God. Thus, for example, to be sincere with God one needs to strive at the same time to be sincere with others. The sincerity in spiritual direction encouraged by Saint Josemaría is a clear example of this norm of behavior. To open our soul clearly to those who can help us is the best way to present ourselves before God without anonymity, a condition that is necessary to converse with him in a friendly and filial way, and not with a hollow formalism full of stereotyped formulas: “Sincerity in spiritual direction, which leads us to open up our soul freely in order to receive advice, also leads us to foster personal initiative, to make known freely what we see as possible points for our interior struggle to identify ourselves ever more closely with Christ.”

Of course, the struggle to draw close to God without anonymity helps us to be sincere with others. But this insistence on one’s previous sincerity with others as a path for learning how to draw close to God seems intrinsic to the spirit of the Work and highly consistent with its character.

The very fact that the person at the head of Opus Dei, the Prelate, is viewed above all as a father is also important in this context, where daily life becomes a path for grasping spiritual realities. We learn what a filial relationship means, and at the same time we are helped to understand why obedience does not enslave, since a father’s authority is exercised for the benefit of the child and not for external goals. If the relationship with those
who govern is lived in this way, a sure path is opened for acquiring a filial and trusting relationship with God.

Since the acceptance of each one’s personal responsibility is the best anchor for true freedom, those who govern should strive to strengthen it. And the most effective way to do so is to foster trust: “Governing with respect for souls is, firstly, to delicately respect the privacy of consciences, without confusing government and spiritual direction. Secondly, this respect leads one to distinguish directives from what are only opportune exhortations, counsels, or suggestions. And thirdly—and not, for that reason, less important—is the need to govern with such great trust in others that one always tries to take into account, to the extent possible, the opinion of the people involved. This attitude of those who govern, their readiness to listen, is a wonderful manifestation of the fact that the Work is a family.”

Whoever feels trusted feels urged to be responsible. Since the appeal here is directly to one’s freedom, it differs radically from coercion. Coercion forces freedom to decide to do something for negative reasons, to avoid an evil, out of fear in the end. In contrast, trust reinforces freedom, because it spurs one to exercise freedom in carrying out the good; and when the fulfillment of duty stems from the depths of freedom, it summons up all the forces in the human heart. This in turn facilitates unity of life, without which the effort to attain holiness in the middle of the world is thwarted.

The conviction that God has wanted to run the risk of our freedom, and the Christian demand to imitate God’s way of acting —“be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48)— requires us not only to tolerate, but to respect, love and encourage the freedom of others. This applies in a special way to the tasks of formation and government where one collaborates in a special way with divine action. That is why St. Josemaría stressed the importance of not imposing personal opinions and, in the case of doubt, always being on the side of freedom. The founder of Opus Dei did not see freedom as a principle of disorder or anarchy, something that had to be controlled, but on the contrary as a principle of organization and government: each one acting with personal freedom and spontaneity.
Rather than the primacy being placed on obedience, freedom comes first, as the most effective way to attain what one wants. Hence the important thing is to truly want it. And this is already something supernatural, and is the most supernatural motive. “Remember what I have so often told you: “because I want to,’ seems to me the most supernatural reason.” Here we see clearly that grace and freedom are not only compatible, but they reinforce each other. The full and radical exercise of our freedom brings us into contact in a special way with divine grace. For God does not want slaves.

This in no way implies failing to value obedience. In fact, just as the redemption was achieved through the Son’s obedience, every Christian can make their own this attitude of trusting and joyful acceptance of the Father’s will, which does not subjugate, but rather frees us in the end. This will is expressed in the moral law, but also in all legitimate authority. With our “intelligent obedience” —using an expression of Saint Josemaría—we identify ourselves with Christ, who does not have to renounce being the eternal Logos to submit himself, as man, intelligently and freely to the Father out of love.

Conclusion

Opus Dei offers a spirituality for those living in the middle of the world that does not clash with their secular condition but rather reinforces it; the circumstances of each one’s family and social life are seen as the means and path of sanctification. Hence the vocation is not “built around” secularity as an adornment, but precisely through and by means of it, and a greater commitment to holiness can never lead to abandoning the world, but rather to a deeper immersion in it.

But for this to become possible, it is important that one’s response to the vocation respects spontaneity, that is, acting on one’s own initiative and in the first person, which corresponds to behavior in the world, a domain with its own laws, deduced from its own nature. One can never see oneself as merely a recipient of “orders” that annul or compromise one’s own spontaneity. Hence, one manifestation of the love for freedom in the Work is to show the maximum respect for the opinions of each member, especially with regard to professional work and public activities.
On the other hand, to prevent obedience in the spiritual and apostolic sphere from conflicting with one’s secular condition, it must be assumed with full freedom, so that whoever obeys is in a position to accept whatever God is asking and to carry it out as one’s own decision. If the acting of a Christian in social life required showing publicly a bond of a spiritual nature, that person’s behavior would seem to be a result of the renunciation of personal initiative, and therefore as contrary to full identification with the very condition that a lay mentality entails.

Like other family or personal ties freely taken on, the bond to Opus Dei is part of the dynamics of each one’s personal freedom. Hence in Opus Dei freedom is not only recognized and respected but, as Saint Josemaria insists, “the constant exercise of freedom, in which the members of the Work are formed, is the very foundation of our asceticism, as something innate and intimately connected with the secular condition of my children, and with what is the cornerstone of our vocation and the specific path of our dedication.”

Clearly an attitude like this can avoid falling prey to deception or, even worse, self-deception, only to the extent that freedom lies at its foundation. And this only seems possible by recognizing our filial condition. The son works in the Father’s field according to the spirit of the Father, but at the same time as though in his own field. Probably only this outlook is capable of reconciling loving submission to God’s will with the joy and spontaneity needed not to use the world’s goods —understood as the field of spontaneous relations between men—as mere instruments of a spiritual end separate from them. Only the self-awareness of the freedom of glory that the children of God possess (Rom 8:21) allows a person to understand their activity as a “transfiguration” brought about from within, thus avoiding the danger of succumbing to the pressure of sin that can deform these activities.