

Letter from the Prelate (24 September 2017)

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

After the recent months, during which I had the joy of seeing many of you, I now write to you with my thoughts already on the upcoming Synod of Bishops, which will take place in a year's time in Rome. The topic of the Synod will be "Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment." As you know, the apostolic work with young people was an important topic in the recent General Congress.¹ With this letter I would like to encourage you to consider, without getting down to many details, how we can intensify this primary concern of our Christian vocation.

"What do you seek?", our Lord asks John and Andrew, as they first approach Him (*Jn* 1:38). Youth is a time for searching; it is the period in life when the question "who do I want to be?" comes to the fore. For a Christian this also means "who am I *called* to be?" It is the question about vocation, about how to respond to God's love. "You, dear young man, dear young woman, have you ever felt the gaze of everlasting love upon you, a gaze that looks beyond your sins, limitations and failings, and continues to have faith in you and to look upon your life with hope? Do you realize how precious you are to God, who has given you everything out of love?"²

Today there are many obstacles, at times quite complex, that stand in the way of this personal encounter with God's love. But there are also signs of hope. "It isn't true that young people think only of consumerism and pleasure. It isn't true that they are materialistic and self-centred. Just the opposite is true: young people want great things."³ These words reflect the reality of the life of many young people, eager to improve the world. But these words also seem to conflict with the indolence of so many others we see "made old" by the constant bombardment of consumption, entertainment, living for the moment, frivolity. It's easy to lament this situation. But what requires more effort is finding ways to challenge the desires for great things that lie in the hearts of young persons, sometimes covered over with a layer of apparent indifference. Are we capable of inspiring them with the beauty of the faith, of a life lived for others? I ask each of my younger sons and daughters: are you able to inspire in your friends a hunger for this God of ours who is Beauty, Goodness, Truth, the only one who can satisfy the desire for happiness they carry in their heart? And for those of us who are no longer so young in terms of age, but who strive to keep our heart youthful: do we try to understand their difficulties, their dreams? Do we become young once again with them?

Saint Josemaria liked the way young people are referred to in Portuguese as *os novos*. As he once said: "You should all be very young. Be renewed! . . . To be renewed is to once again become young, to once again be new, to have a new capacity for self-giving."⁴ In order to encourage many souls to foster generous dreams of self-giving to God and other men and women, all of us Christians need to strive to be authentic witnesses to a life that sincerely struggles to be identified with Christ. Despite our limitations, with God's grace we can be sowers

¹ Pastoral letter, 14 February 2017, 17, 24-28, 31.

² Francis, Message for 31st World Youth Day in Krakow, 15 August 2015.

³ Benedict XVI, Address, 25 April 2005.

⁴ Saint Josemaria, notes from a family get-together, 19 March 1964.

of peace and joy in that place—whether a small corner of the world or a crossroads of culture—where our Lord wants us to be. Let us try to conserve and strengthen the “youth” that God gives us.⁵ Our serene testimony of this youthful spirit always leaves on others a mark that, sooner or later, becomes a help for their life.

Saint Josemaria used to say (and this consideration applies to all those who take part in one way or another in the education of young people) that parents are responsible for 90 percent of their children’s vocation. With all of you in mind and especially the cooperators and supernumeraries, I encourage you to consider whether you can increase, with creativity and generosity, your involvement in formative initiatives for young people (like schools and clubs). Even more, I suggest that you turn your attention to your own home. Consider whether your children can be happy to belong to their family, because they have parents who listen to them and take them seriously, who love them as they are, who are able to ask themselves the same questions that their children are asking themselves. Parents who help them to grasp, in the small realities of daily life, the real value of things, the effort required to bring forward a home. Parents who can make demands on them, and who aren’t afraid to put them in contact with suffering and human weakness, so often present in the life of many people, perhaps beginning in their own family. Parents who help them, by their piety, to “touch” God, to be “souls of prayer.” In short, you need to help them grow with a strong and healthy heart, in order to hear God saying to each of them, as he did to John and Andrew, “come and see” (*Jn* 1:39).

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leonardo". The script is cursive and fluid.

Rome, 24 September 2017, feast of our Lady of Ransom

⁵ Cf. Saint Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 79.