

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

I write you this brief letter with a still vivid memory of the recent days I spent in Brazil, where I was once again able to “touch” the vitality of the Church and the Work. In my encounters with a great number of people and families and with so many young people, the joy and desire to work for God was so evident. Let us give thanks, because all this comes from Him.

Our gratitude wells up especially today, on the 75th anniversary of February 14, 1943, when Saint Josemaria received a new foundational light about the Work: the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. On this anniversary I want to express to my priest sons incardinated in the Prelature and in the various dioceses, the gratitude of the whole Work for your generous dedication in the service of souls. Renew in your heart once again the desire to be “priests one hundred percent,” as our Father used to say.

Today is also the date when, in 1930, God let Saint Josemaria see that He also wanted women in his Work. My daughters, looking back and seeing the apostolic panorama of the work you have done up to now and that will continue to grow; and seeing the fruits of your efforts and initiatives in the Work as a whole, we say spontaneously, “How well God does things, relying on our own littleness!”

Finally, today also marks the beginning of Lent. In the message the Pope wrote for this occasion, he warns us energetically against false prophets and against so many short-lived promises of happiness that leave the soul empty and that prevent people from perceiving and spreading God’s joy. The Holy Father encourages us to “learn to look closely, beneath the surface, and to recognize what leaves a good and lasting mark on our hearts, because it comes from God.” Let us consider, then, as we begin this Lent: this activity, that environment, does it lead me to God or distance me from Him? And also: how can I bring all this to God? Let us together undertake this path of conversion towards Easter.

As is habitual at this time of the year, in a few days I will begin my yearly retreat, coinciding with that of the Holy Father. Don’t forget to pray for the Pope, and also accompany me with your prayer.

I bless you with all my affection,

Your Father,

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

Rome, 14 February 2018