

(Letter from the Prelate: April 2014)

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

As we approach Holy Week, let us try to foster the desire to prepare ourselves as well as possible for those days when we will remember and relive the central events of the Redemption. Let us strengthen our eagerness for a personal conversion, so appropriate to the time of Lent.

In his Lenten message this year, the Holy Father invites us to consider that “when Jesus stepped into the waters of the Jordan and was baptized by John the Baptist, he did so not because he was in need of repentance, or conversion; he did it to be among people who need forgiveness, among us sinners, and to take upon himself the burden of our sins. In this way he chose to comfort us, to save us, to free us from our misery.”¹

Our Lord came down to earth to heal our indigence, which has many different forms. Besides the material poverty that affects so many people, the Pope emphasized other forms of still greater misery, the consequence of distancing oneself from God: *moral destitution* and *spiritual destitution*. The first is seen in so many men and women, above all young people, who suffer from a serious addiction (really, a slavery) to alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography, which gives rise to great distress in the people themselves and in their families, who don’t know how to help them. “This type of destitution, which also causes financial ruin, is invariably linked to the spiritual destitution which we experience when we turn away from God and reject his love. If we think we don’t need God who reaches out to us through Christ, because we believe we can make do on our own, we are headed for a fall. God alone can truly save and free us.”²

Let us not forget that, also with our own personal struggle, with our life, it is necessary (it will always be so) to show these people the path to regaining joy and peace. And this path passes through recourse to the sacrament of Penance. Let us strive to improve our personal dispositions in approaching this means of salvation instituted by Jesus, and let us tell others how to benefit from divine mercy.

This is “the real antidote to spiritual destitution: wherever we go, we are called as Christians to proclaim the liberating news that forgiveness for sins committed is possible, that God is greater than our sinfulness, that he freely loves us at all times and that we were made for communion and eternal life. The Lord asks us to be joyous heralds of this message of mercy and hope! It is marvelous to experience the joy of spreading this good news, sharing the treasure entrusted to us, consoling broken hearts and offering hope to our brothers and sisters experiencing darkness. It means following and imitating Jesus, who sought out the poor and sinners as a shepherd lovingly seeks his lost sheep. In union with Jesus, we can courageously open up new paths of evangelization and human promotion.”³

St. Paul urged Christians to “put on” our Lord Jesus Christ.⁴ And it is precisely “in the Sacrament of Penance that you and I clothe ourselves in Jesus Christ and his merits,”⁵ wrote St.

1 Pope Francis, *Message for Lent*, December 26, 2013.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 See *Rom* 13:14.

5 St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 310.

Josemaría. Moved by his example and his words, Don Alvaro too insisted on the need to prepare ourselves with refinement to receive this sacrament. He was convinced that people will hear the invitation of our Lord, who calls all men and women to holiness, if they are struggling, with effort and with peace, to walk along the paths of grace, guided by God. “That is why,” he added, “the apostolate of Confession has a special importance. Only when souls acquire a habitual friendship with God, a friendship based on the gift of sanctifying grace, can they be ready to hear the invitation that Jesus is addressing to us: *If anyone wishes to follow me... (Mt 16:24).*”⁶

Now, with Holy Week so close, we can examine ourselves on how we have personally taken advantage of this means of sanctification, how we are spreading it among our acquaintances, and how we care for it throughout the year. The upcoming canonization of John Paul II reminds me of how frequently this holy Pontiff remarked that the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei have received the “charism” of Confession: a special grace from God to bring many souls to this tribunal of mercy and forgiveness, and thus to help them recover their Christian joy. We can’t let up in our effort to have recourse to God’s forgiveness, to keep ourselves in his friendship.

As Easter drew near, Don Alvaro would redouble his efforts to take good advantage of the Paschal Triduum. He once told us: “We have to try to be ‘another person in the scene,’ reliving in our heart the Master’s steps during his Passion, with a deep desire for self-giving. We should accompany our Lord and his Mother with our heart and our mind in those shattering events, from which we ourselves were not absent when they happened, since our Lord suffered and died for the sins of each and every one of us. Ask the Most Holy Trinity to grant us the grace to enter more deeply into the suffering that each one of us has caused Jesus, in order to acquire the habit of contrition, which was so deeply rooted in the life of our holy Founder and which he took to heroic levels of Love.”⁷

The Liturgy of Holy Thursday made a deep impression on Don Alvaro. Filled with hope, with joy (human as well), he contemplated the self-giving of Christ for the Church, for each soul, shown in the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood. He visited the “monuments of repose” in order to meditate on and learn from the supreme Sacrifice of Jesus. He liked to visit the churches where these were set up with the greatest solemnity, also with the desire to prepare himself better to give a constant welcome to God in his soul.

Often he remarked that he was moved by the liturgical readings during those days, especially the narration of the Passion according to St. John. He recommended reading and meditating on the Passion of our Lord and adoring the Holy Cross. He prayed intensely while the *Lamentations* on Good Friday were being sung, and during the *Exsultet*, the triumphant cry of the Easter Vigil.

As a sign of gratitude and hope, he frequently kissed the crucifix that he carried in his pocket, or that he placed on his work table. Let us draw close to Jesus and show him that we truly love him, as Don Alvaro did in following our Father’s advice: “Your Crucifix. As a Christian, you should always carry your Crucifix with you. And place it on your desk. And kiss it before going to bed and when you wake up: and when your poor body rebels against your soul, kiss it again.”⁸ I have seen this way of acting deeply impact other people, who ended up imitating him in those practices so filled with a strong piety and Christian naturalness.

6 Don Alvaro, *Letter* December 1, 1993.

7 Don Alvaro, *Letter* April 1, 1987.

8 St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 302.

The memory of St. Josemaría's first successor, precisely in the year of his beatification, can help us a lot to grow in our personal piety; and now, specifically, to prepare ourselves well to live Holy Week with love and gratitude. "Let us meditate deeply and slowly on the scenes of these days. Let us contemplate Jesus in the Garden of Olives, how he seeks in prayer for the strength to confront the terrible suffering that he knew to be so close. During those moments, his Most Holy Humanity needed the physical and spiritual closeness of his friends. But the apostles left him alone: *Simon! Are you sleeping? Weren't you able to watch for an hour?* (Mk 14:37). He also says this to you and to me, who so often have assured him, like Peter, that we were ready to follow him to the point of death and who, nevertheless, often left him alone, and slept.

"We have to foster sorrow for these personal desertions, and for those of others. And we have to realize that we abandon our Lord, perhaps each day, when we are careless in the fulfillment of our professional and apostolic duties; when our piety is superficial and lacking in refinement; when we justify ourselves because humanly we feel weighed down by fatigue; when we lack the divine eagerness to follow God's will, even when our soul and body put up resistance."⁹

In the "school" of St. Josemaría, Don Alvaro learned to meditate on our Lord's Passion. And in doing so, as he wrote, he encouraged us to put ourselves more deeply into the Gospel, "as another person in the scene," transforming the scenes we contemplate into personal prayer. Thus there will arise in our soul a powerful desire to make reparation, with a big heart, for the sins of all mankind, and not only for our own faults. "When meditating on the Passion," he confided to us in a family letter, "there arises spontaneously in the soul an eagerness to make reparation, to console our Lord, to alleviate his suffering. Jesus suffered for the sins of all men and women, and today people seem determined, with a sad tenacity, to offend their Creator frequently.

"Let us decide to make reparation! Do all of you truly feel a desire to offer much joy to our Love? Do you truly understand that a fault of ours, no matter how small, has to mean great sorrow for Jesus? Therefore I insist that you give great importance to small things, that you be refined in caring for details, that you have a real horror of falling into routine. God has given us so much, and Love is repaid with love! Contemplating Jesus on the gibbet of the Holy Cross, I ask that he gain for us the gift that our sacramental confessions may be more contrite: because, as our Father taught us, he has been on that Wood for twenty centuries, and now it's time that we put ourselves there. I beg him also to increase in us the imperative eagerness to bring more souls to Confession."¹⁰

At the beginning of Easter week let us remember with thanksgiving the anniversary of St. Josemaría's first Holy Communion, on April 23, 1912. Since then, until the day of his leaving us for Heaven, how often did Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament take up residence in the heart and soul of that good and faithful servant who was our Founder! Thus God was preparing him with an outpouring of graces for the mission he was going to entrust him with in the bosom of the Church. Later this month, on the 27th, the canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II will take place. On that date, our thanksgiving will rise to Heaven imbued with the joy of having two new intercessors who knew and loved Opus Dei when they were here on earth.

Continue presenting to our Lord my intentions every day, especially in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar. You are always there, every one of you, with the Church, with all mankind. And let us

⁹ Don Alvaro, *Letter* April 1, 1987.

¹⁰ Don Alvaro, *Letter* April 1, 1987.

not cease to pray for (to love, because they need it) those who have distanced themselves from or attack our Holy Mother the Church.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, April 1, 2014