

Rome, 1 May 2015

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

The beginning of May, a month especially dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary in many countries, reminds us that we have to take the atmosphere of Nazareth, the virtues and the behaviour of the Holy Family, everywhere, very especially through the example of our Lady.

Today we are celebrating the liturgical commemoration of St Joseph the Worker, the man whom God trusted to look after Jesus and our Lady, his two great treasures on earth. This feast-day, a true gateway into Mary's month, invites us to enter more deeply into the house at Nazareth. And let us not forget that that home is still alive now, in the Church, the real family of God; in Christian homes; and in this *little family* within the Church, which is the Opus Dei prelature.

For the whole of this marian year we are praying hard and perseveringly, especially for the institution of the family, that it may reflect God's design in its fullness, and follow the divine model shown us in Bethlehem, Nazareth and wherever Jesus rested from his tiring journeys. How could we fail to think, too, of the house at Bethany, where Lazarus, Martha and Mary offered the Master lodging so that he could rest, making every effort to give him the best they had! This is why our Father, as you know, called tabernacles "Bethany", and urged us to shower our Lord continually with our attention and affection, adoring Jesus with Mary and Joseph.

Although we try to reproduce the atmosphere of the Holy Family in our homes at all times, we should not be surprised if sometimes we are unable to reflect the serenity that always reigned there. Let's think about what happened to Mary and Joseph, when they suddenly had to flee from Herod's persecution. Nor should we forget that in the primitive Church, together with descriptions of the harmony that united the early Christians, there were also pages telling how peace was sometimes disturbed because of persecutions, misunderstandings from outside, or even some people's evil behaviour. However, with the help of the Holy Spirit they overcame those obstacles and were faithful to Jesus Christ with serene loyalty.

In the heart of the home, differences can arise sporadically, and the affectionate atmosphere that is so much part of a life of faith can be shattered, at least temporarily. In these cases, as always, we should have recourse to prayer, in order to mend even the tiniest rift between the various family members, and also to contribute to the good of society, since **there is a close link between the hope of a people and the harmony among generations.**<sup>1</sup> And the Pope added on another occasion, **The bond of fraternity which forms in the family between children arises in an educational atmosphere of openness to others, and it is the great**

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, General audience, 11 February 2015.

**school of freedom and peace. (...) Perhaps we are not always aware of it, but the family itself introduces fraternity into the world!**<sup>2</sup>

In the last years of his life, St Josemaría held gatherings with many people who told him about their problems, small or not so small, and asked him for advice. Not infrequently, fathers and mothers suffered because some of their sons or daughters became rebellious on reaching adolescence. Our Father would try to calm them and would remind them that rebelliousness has always existed at that age, although perhaps in recent times it has become more prominent. But the remedy, together with prayer, has not changed. ***Keep calm with your children, and don't just smack them for the sake of it. The children get angry, you get all upset, you suffer because you do love them a lot, and on top of all that, you have to calm down again. Have a little patience, reprimand them when you are no longer upset, and between you and them alone. Don't humiliate them in front of their brothers and sisters. Talk to them, reason a bit with them, so they realise they should behave differently, because then they're pleasing God. That way you are training them well, and soon enough they will be able to open up their own paths in life and be good Christians and good parents too, if God leads them that way.***

***So the first step is to avoid both extremes: neither being too soft nor too harsh.***<sup>3</sup>

St Josemaría took this way of acting from the Gospel. In his conversations with parents, it is easy to recognise our Lord's instructions on the charitable practice of fraternal correction, even though in these cases it is not called that. In Opus Dei, we all have to do our best to put into practice this Christian commitment which is so closely linked to the teachings of Jesus Christ himself. And so we can understand why, among the questions our Father asked in order to *take the pulse* of a Centre when he arrived there, he included this one: ***Is fraternal correction being practised?***

We have learnt that St Joseph received messages from heaven during his sleep; and, focusing on this point, the Pope tells us: ***You can't have a family without dreams. Once a family loses the ability to dream, children do not grow, love does not grow, life shrivels up and dies.***<sup>4</sup> And he offers fathers and mothers the following invitation, to consider every day before going to sleep: ***Today did I dream about my children's future? Today did I dream about the love of my husband, my wife? Did I dream about my parents and grandparents who have gone before me?***<sup>5</sup>

These are questions which in one way or another we can all ask ourselves. Let us consider every day whether we pray for our brothers and sisters in the Work, for our families and the people who come to our apostolate; whether we ask God for the best for them, for what they need most; whether we think in our prayer about

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, General audience, 18 February 2015.

<sup>3</sup> St Josemaría, notes from a family gathering, 24 November 1972.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, Meeting with families in the Philippines, 16 January 2015.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

how to help them..., whether we serve them without expecting anything in return: they love us already!

*With great power*, we read in the Acts of the Apostles, *the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all*.<sup>6</sup> Urged on by the Holy Spirit, they optimistically overcame the obstacles to their apostolate, and were even filled with joy if they had to suffer dishonour, prison, and scourging for the name of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> This inner fortitude, this capacity to grow in the face of difficulties, was strengthened by the care which the Mother of Jesus – who was also the Mother of each of them – lavished on them. After the descent of the Paraclete at Pentecost, they treated her with still more filial trust. *The prayer of the disciples*, wrote our Father about this scene, *accompanies the prayer of Mary: all praying as a single family*.<sup>8</sup> That is what we have to do, especially during the traditional May pilgrimages, which this year have a special content: leaving trustingly in our Lady's hands the Church's prayer for the fruits of the Synod on the family to be celebrated in October.

Moreover, it is eighty years tomorrow since this Custom of the May pilgrimage was born in the Work – a custom adopted by millions of people throughout the world. Recalling that 2nd May 1935, many years afterwards, on one of his last marian visits to the shrine of Our Lady of Sonsoles, St Josemaría said: *Pray a lot to our Blessed Lady in the month which is about to begin. The May pilgrimages are something wonderful. I was in Sonsoles yesterday and I was thinking that if everyone who goes on a May pilgrimage around the world – in Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Oceania – went to Sonsoles one after the other, there would be people coming and going at this shrine of our Lady uninterruptedly from 1st January to 31st December*.<sup>9</sup>

With the piety and effort of everyone, closely united to the Pope, the Bishops and all Christians, let us raise up an intense prayer of petition for the Church, the world, families, and civil society. Then personal and corporate activities in the service of souls will develop more and will overflow with effectiveness. Our Father said that *all the apostolic tasks and the instruments to set them in motion are onus et honor, a burden and an honour (...) for the Numeraries, Associates and Supernumeraries; and also for the Cooperators. Anyone who thought that these projects only concern the Numeraries would be mistaken and would show bad spirit and little generosity, because it must always be possible to say of us, when speaking of our apostolic aims, what we read in the Acts: multitudinis autem credentium erat cor unum et anima una, (Acts 4:32), the whole multitude of the faithful had one single heart and one single soul*.<sup>10</sup>

In the penultimate week of April I was in Valencia, where, at the invitation of the Cardinal Archbishop, I celebrated a Thanksgiving Mass in the cathedral for Don Alvaro's beatification and gave a talk on his work in the Second Vatican

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<sup>6</sup> Acts 4:33.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Acts 5:41.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 141.

<sup>9</sup> St Josemaría, notes from a family gathering, 29 April 1969.

<sup>10</sup> St Josemaría, *Letter*, 31 May 1954, no. 34.

Council. As well as that, I met many of my daughters and sons, and people of all ages who participate in the Work's apostolate. Help me to thank God for all the spiritual fruits he may have willed to bring forth from those days. Accompany me, too, in my thanksgiving for the ordination to the priesthood of a good group of your Numerary brothers in St Eugene's Basilica on 9th May. *Deo omnis glória!* – All the glory to God!

I will finish, my daughters and sons, by recalling St Josemaría's novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe in May 1970. He went there to pray for the Church, the Holy Father, and Opus Dei. And how much fruit it produced! The fruits will continue to be abundant, through God's goodness and our Blessed Lady's intercession, if we work hard at following in our Father's footsteps every day, as Don Alvaro did so loyally. Let us appeal to his intercession, especially on 12th May, when we will celebrate his liturgical memorial for the first time.

A very affectionate blessing, and a renewed request for prayers, from

your Father

✠ Javier