

## (Letter from the Prelate: January 2015)

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

We are in Christmas time and, as our Father said, “our thoughts turn to the different events and circumstances surrounding the birth of the Son of God. As we contemplate the stable in Bethlehem or the home of the holy family in Nazareth, Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus occupy a special place in our hearts. What does the simple, admirable life of the Holy Family tell us? What can we learn from it?”<sup>1</sup>

These words help to situate us in the atmosphere suited to such a holy time. We stop to contemplate the birth of our Lord again and again, without becoming tired. We would like to go ever more deeply into this marvelous mystery, but we always fall short. God’s love for mankind, for each and every one of us, is truly beyond our grasp. Therefore, our attitude is one of constant gratitude to God. He has lowered himself to the level of our poor humanity, to free us from our miseries and raise us to the condition of children of God. On Christmas Eve, we read in the Collect for the Mass: *Come quickly, we pray, Lord Jesus, and do not delay, that those who trust in your compassion may find solace and relief in your coming.*<sup>2</sup> And we are not surprised to sense he is answering each of us, as Ananias told Paul: *Quid moraris?*<sup>3</sup> What are you waiting for? Let us ask our Lady and St. Joseph that we may always feel the urgent need to be with Christ, to seek him.

Today, on the 1st of January, we are celebrating the solemnity of the Mother of God, whom our Lord gave us as our Mother. Mary is the path chosen by God the Father so that his only-begotten Son might become man, through the working of the Holy Spirit. We direct our gratitude also to Mary. We give her thanks because by her response at the Annunciation, and by her strong and silent presence at the foot of the Cross, she has opened for us the path of divine filiation. With words of St. Josemaría we tell her: “Mother, Oh Mother! With that word of yours—*fiat*, ‘be it done’—you have made us brothers of God and heirs to his glory. —Blessed are you!”<sup>4</sup>

I have convoked a Marian year in Opus Dei, to pray with the whole Church for the upcoming Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will consider the vocation and mission of the family in the Church and the world. We are asking God fervently, through our Lady’s intercession, that the irreplaceable value of this fundamental cell of society be rediscovered everywhere. If Christian homes recognize and accept God’s plan for them, the evils afflicting peoples and nations will be able to be remedied.

St. John Paul II, in the first weeks of his pontificate, received a group of married couples taking part in courses of family development. And he told them: “The future of the Church and humanity is born and grows in the family.”<sup>5</sup> Later he repeated the same idea, in one way or another, on countless occasions during his long and fruitful pontificate. In the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, fruit of the Synod of Bishops held in 1980, he wrote: “The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do. The role that God calls the family to perform in history

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<sup>1</sup> St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Roman Missal*, December 24, *Collect*.

<sup>3</sup> *Acts* 22:16.

<sup>4</sup> St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 512.

<sup>5</sup> St. John Paul II, Address at a private audience, October 30, 1978.

derives from what the family is; its role represents the dynamic and existential development of what it is.”<sup>6</sup> And he ended with an urgent call that continues to resonate today with even greater force, “Family, become what you are!”<sup>7</sup>

It is always a good moment to raise up this petition to Heaven, and with greater reason during the feasts of Christmas time, which shed bright light on the divine plan for the human race. The angels announced to the shepherds *a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*<sup>8</sup> The whole human race is seen as destined to receive this good news. St. Luke recounts briefly: *They went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger.*<sup>9</sup> In the beginning God created man and woman with equal dignity, establishing the first human family, and he gave them the mandate to have dominion over the material universe and to populate the earth.<sup>10</sup> From here stems the root of the family institution. But the event at Bethlehem goes much further: God himself, in his infinite condescension, has become incarnate within the heart of a family, thus showing his will for the ordered development of humanity. The family at Bethlehem is seen as a model for all the homes on earth.

In the first of his series of catechetical addresses on this topic, Pope Francis said that “the Incarnation of the Son of God opens a new beginning in the universal history of man and woman. And this new beginning takes place within a family at Nazareth. Jesus was born in a family. He could have come spectacularly, or as a warrior, an emperor... No, no: he came as a son of a family, in a family. This is important: to contemplate in the Crib this very beautiful scene.”<sup>11</sup>

“As we read in Holy Scripture, the birth of Jesus means the beginning of the fullness of time (cf. *Gal 4:4*). It was the moment God chose to show the extent of his love for men, by giving us his own Son. And God’s will is fulfilled in the simplest, most ordinary of circumstances: a woman who gives birth, a family, a home. The power of God and his splendor come to us through a human reality to which they are joined. Since that moment Christians have known that, with God’s grace, they can and should sanctify everything that is good in their human lives. There is no human situation, no matter how trivial and ordinary it may seem, which cannot be a meeting-place with Christ and a step forward on our journey toward the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>12</sup>

The conjugal union was established by God right from the moment of the creation of man and woman, but unfortunately it is now neglected in so many places. The family is so mistreated! An attempt is made to present as normal situations that are a very grave attack on God’s creative and saving plan. In many places and environments (not only among individuals, but even the public authorities, through laws and government decisions), the family institution is weakened and people try to change it into something very different. They fail to realize—the devil is very skilled at blinding intellects—that by emptying the concept of the family, they cause immense damage to civil society.

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<sup>6</sup> St. John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, November 22, 1981, no. 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Lk 2:11.*

<sup>9</sup> *Lk 2:16.*

<sup>10</sup> See *Gen 1:26-28.*

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, December 17, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 22.

This past Sunday we celebrated the feast of the Holy Family. On that day, as we do every year, we renewed the consecration of our parents, sisters and brothers, to the Holy Family of Nazareth, as our Founder established for that feast day. And we invited our relatives and friends, and all those who take part in the Prelature's apostolic work, to unite themselves with us in that act. As always, we have prayed for all the Christian homes in the world, asking that they may be and live in accord with the divine model shown to us in Bethlehem and in Nazareth.

During this Marian year we are praying especially for this intention. Perhaps we can make use of an aspiration that will help us to keep it present. Our Father frequently prayed: "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I always be with the Three." We will ask insistently that all the families on earth may always be well protected by the Holy Family of Nazareth.

And as we raise up this prayer to Heaven, we will also include those who govern and those who direct international institutions, on whom falls the responsibility of caring for the integrity of this fundamental cell of society. Let us ask God that the unity and indissolubility of marriage and its openness to life may be reaffirmed, along with the right of parents to educate their children in accord with their beliefs. Let us ask that civil laws, instead of placing obstacles to the harmonious development of the family, may rather facilitate the fulfillment of the aims God established in creating it.

A determined effort is needed in the new evangelization of society, beginning with every home. "As Mary and Joseph did, every Christian family can first of all receive Jesus, listen to him, talk with him, guard and protect him, grow with him, and thus improve the world."<sup>13</sup> Families need to foster in their own home the virtues the liturgy reminds us of in one of the readings for the feast of the Holy Family. *Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts.*<sup>14</sup>

These recommendations are for all the family's members: parents, children, brothers and sisters and other relatives. And although the term "family" is most specifically used to designate the environment where a person is born and grows, we also know that the Church is God's family on earth; and that the living portion of the Church that is Opus Dei is also a family. St. Josemaría stressed that an immense variety of people, with their own ways of being and very personal characteristics, could belong to the Work in one way or another. "I am not saying it just for the sake of saying it," he once remarked, "when I tell you that the Work is a divine and human family; and as happens in natural families abundantly blessed by God with many children, some are tall and others short, some have dark hair and others blond . . . In addition, we have at our side those relatives of ours whom we love so much, the Cooperators . . . and then so many friends and colleagues who in one way or another share in our family."<sup>15</sup>

We have to do all we can to make life pleasant for those we live with, or who are close to us for one reason or another. "Let us make room in our heart and in our day for the Lord. As Mary and Joseph also did, and it was not easy. How many difficulties they had to overcome! They

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<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, December 17, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Col 3:12-15.

<sup>15</sup> St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a meditation, March 5, 1963.

were not an artificial family, an unreal family. The family of Nazareth urges us to rediscover the vocation and mission of the family, of every family.”<sup>16</sup>

Let us beseech our Lord, through the intercession of our Lady and St. Joseph, that in the Centers of the Work, in the homes of the other faithful and the Cooperators of the Prelature, of our friends and relatives, and in all Christian homes, the example of the Holy Family may be reflected. Contemplating Jesus, Mary and Joseph has to impel us to be truly concerned about the others, as they were. Each day we have to pray about and strive to meet their spiritual and material needs, their need for rest, for order and material care of the house, which has to be a mirror of the home at Nazareth. Let us never consider these duties as a burden, but rather as wonderful opportunities to serve.

Within the intimacy of the family at Nazareth, Jesus was the witness to so many small points of refinement, so many manifestations of affection. When he began his public life, he was known by his family of origin: *Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary?*<sup>17</sup> Would that, on observing our behavior as faithful followers of Christ, people could say: it is clear this person is imitating Jesus’ example, because of the care shown for the atmosphere in his or her home, because they bring it everywhere they go, because they try to help others share in this joy and peace.

The 9th is the anniversary of the birth of St. Josemaría. In Barbastro and Logroño, our Founder learned so many small points of refinement that strengthen family unity, and that he later passed on to us. Our gratitude also extends to his parents for having been docile instruments of God in the human and supernatural formation of St. Josemaría.

Let us unite ourselves to the intentions of the Pope, praying also for the religious and consecrated souls, in this year the Church has dedicated to them. And let us go with great trust to our Lady in this prayer.

With other words of our Founder, let us ask that families may always preserve the spirit of the early times of Christianity: “small Christian communities which were centers for the spreading of the Gospel and its message. Families no different from other families of those times, but living with a new spirit, which spread to all those who were in contact with them. This is what the first Christians were, and this is what we have to be: sowers of peace and joy, the peace and joy that Jesus has brought to us.”<sup>18</sup>

A few days ago, I passed through Pamplona and visited people there who are sick. I also had a get-together in the university gymnasium with some two thousand five hundred people. I recalled how St. Josemaría would look at our Lord, filled with gratitude. And the thought came to me that, wherever we are, we find ourselves “in our own home,” closely united in order to serve God and all souls.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, January 1, 2015

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<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, Address at a general audience, December 17, 2014

<sup>17</sup> *Mt* 13:55.

<sup>18</sup> St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 30.

