

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

You will understand how moved I am in writing you, and calling you my daughters and sons for the first time. Right from the evening of Monday the 23rd, your sisters and brothers in Rome began to call me Father. They did so with a naturalness and spontaneity that surprised and moved me. While it has taken me almost a week to bring myself to call them my daughters and sons, for I feel some confusion, at the same time that I give thanks for their courageous and simple fidelity. We are all sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ, at the same time that I am now Father of the multitude of people in Opus Dei throughout the whole world: an immense number of laity, men and women from the most varied walks of life, and many priests, some incardinated in the prelature, others in a great variety of dioceses where they depend only on their respective bishops, but who also form part of this little family that is closely united in serving the Church.

During these days those words of Saint Paul to the Corinthians have come to mind, which emphasize that God's call always precedes us, that he doesn't pay heed to our foolishness and weakness (see *1 Cor* 1:27). I give thanks to God for the serenity he has given me and that I can find no explanation for if not for your prayers and closeness. I ask—and you should also ask—our Lady that we all may always be closely united, with the unity that the Holy Spirit, infinite Love, grants us.

The memory of Don Javier, second successor of Saint Josemaría, is constantly with me. It is not a thought about the past; it is part of the history of God's mercies, which in some way are always alive in the Church. To recall Don Javier is right away to call to mind Saint Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro. It is to recall with deep gratitude a man who gave his life to carry out the Work as the good son of two saints, and who now continues helping us from heaven.

“Every generation of Christians needs to redeem, to sanctify its own time. To do so, it must understand and share the concerns of other men and women—one's equals—in order to make known to them, with a gift of tongues, how they are to correspond to the action of the Holy Spirit, to the permanent outflow of the riches in Christ's heart. We Christians are called upon to announce, in our own time, to this world of ours in which we live, the message—old and at the same time new—of the Gospel” (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 132). My daughters and sons, it is up to us, every day, to incarnate these apostolic yearnings of our Founder, to make a reality of that motto of his: *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam*.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

Fernando

Rome, January 31, 2017