

(Letter from the Prelate: September 2015)

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

I am writing you after my trip to the Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, and Colombia, and before leaving for Torreciudad for the priestly ordination of three of my sons who are Associates of the Prelature, as well as for the Marian Family Day. First of all, I want to let you share in my joy and gratitude to our Lord for the abundant spiritual fruits I have seen on my trip. I have learned a lot and prayed for you each day. On contemplating the apostolic work in these countries, I thought about how it was the fruit of St. Josemaría's desire to hide and disappear right from the beginning. It was also the fruit of his prayer—with a strong and constant faith—for those who would come afterwards. One can see how God, through the intercession of our Lady and our Father, spurred forward the Work's expansion and continues to do so now.

Let us go more frequently to our Lady in the part of the Marian year that still remains. Let us intensify our prayer during this month for the World Meeting of Families that will be held in Philadelphia, with the Pope's presence, and also for the acts in Torreciudad on the 5th. I invite you to have recourse in a special way to the intercession of our beloved Don Alvaro. On the 15th, feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, we will give thanks for the new anniversary of his election as our Father's successor. It is only natural that we rely on his petition, especially because he encouraged so effectively the apostolate with families.

In September, I like to remind you of two cardinal points of our Christian life that are inseparably united and that should take deep root in our personal lives: the Cross and joy. An authentic and deep joy is possible only if it is rooted in Jesus' self-giving on the Wood of the Cross. We are reminded of this by the liturgy for the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, on the upcoming 14th, where we consider the fulfillment of our Lord's words, *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*¹

¹ Jn 12:32.

On this feast in 1938, St. Josemaría wrote: “I asked our Lord, with all the force of my soul, to grant me the grace to ‘lift up’ the Holy Cross in all my faculties and senses. A new life! A seal confirming the authenticity of my mission. Josemaría, onto the Cross! We shall see, we shall see.”² United to our Father’s petition, let us sincerely beseech our Lord to grant us the grace of lifting up the Holy Cross in our soul and body, in our faculties and senses. And let us do so without fear, since being very close to the Cross, being with Christ on the Cross, as St. Josemaría prayed, fills us with peace and serenity, although perhaps our first reaction is to complain a bit. When that happens, it is very good to remember that point from *The Way*: “Do you want it, Lord? Then I want it too!”³

Let us strive to transmit this aspiration through our words and deeds, loving sacrifice even when it crops up unexpectedly, and actively seeking it out in the little things of each day: *In lætítia, nulla dies sine cruce*. Lord, we do not want a single day to go by without the Cross, while keeping our joy and our peace.

Let us consider how we try to take this reality to heart. When our ego rebels on seeing the need to deny ourselves, do we carry out that thing joyfully? Do we realize that this attitude, which is necessary to serve others for God, is a sure sign of true love? Do we see that following Jesus requires us to overcome all manifestations of thinking too much about ourselves?

In order for the Work to come into the world, the Holy Spirit led our Father—as he wants to lead us—along the path of mortification and penance. Let us not create any areas in our lives that are “off-limits” to these divine demands. Let us ask for the grace to allow ourselves be conformed to Christ crucified, the path for attaining true happiness. Therefore, I ask you and I ask myself: do we love the Cross? Do we seek it out in the circumstances of our daily path? Do we foster supernatural joy when Jesus passes by our side and asks us for a small sacrifice, and do we adapt ourselves to his suggestions for our life of piety, our work, and our fraternity?

It is important for us to apply these considerations not only to our personal conduct, but also in the heart of our family life, in the homes of the Associates and Supernumeraries, in the places we usually find ourselves. Living alongside other people offers us many opportunities to smooth over the rough corners of our temperament and our personality. I am not referring to the small frictions that can sometimes arise (inevitable when we live alongside others), and that are fixed by asking for forgiveness. Rather I am referring to the deeper wounds that can arise in the heart of families.

The Holy Father warns us of a danger that frequently underlies the deterioration in a family’s atmosphere: “When these wounds, which are still rectifiable, are ignored, they deepen: they are transformed into impertinence, hostility and contempt. And at that point they can become deep wounds that divide husband and wife, and induce them to find understanding, support, and consolation elsewhere. But often these ‘supports’ are not directed to the good of the family!”⁴

² St. Josemaría, *Apuntes íntimos*, no. 1587 (14 September 1938); in Vazquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, II, pp. 236-37.

³ St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 762.

⁴ Pope Francis, Address in a general audience, 24 June 2015.

With God's grace, however, a remedy is within reach for these situations, a remedy that prevents them from becoming wounds that are almost incurable. As the Pope has pointed out several times, the secret is three phrases: "May I?", "Thank you," and "I'm sorry."⁵

Saying "please" when asking for things, without intemperate demands or impatience, is a good "vaccine" to prevent confrontations, not only between spouses, but also in dealing with the children and other family members. As the saying goes: "you catch more with a thimbleful of honey than a barrel of vinegar." Besides, we need to recall that everything in our life is a gratuitous gift; we have not merited our life, nor the family we grew up in, nor the natural talents and supernatural gifts we have received. So we need to be very grateful. How easy it becomes to get along with others when we remember to sincerely say thank you for a gesture that is perhaps quite small, but that reveals true affection, a generous readiness to serve! And when we make a mistake, out of selfishness, clumsiness or insensitivity, we quickly ask for pardon, which is not a humiliation, but on the contrary reveals a great soul.

I give great thanks to God because in the Work we have learned this spirit from our Father. "We have to put our temperament in our pocket," he said, "and out of love for Jesus smile and make life pleasant for those around us."⁶ He told spouses (advice applicable to other interpersonal relationships): "As we are human, occasionally we will argue; but let it be only a little. And afterwards both have to recognize that they are to blame, and say to one another: Forgive me! And then give each other a big hug... and go forward! But try to ensure that you do not get into an argument again for a long time."⁷

I return to what I was saying at the beginning. We have to be men and women of faith. Many people can seem at times to be without principles, and therefore in need of learning to love the Cross, which is something that should not discourage us. Though we may work in a hidden corner, and hardly ever move from where we are, let us remember that our effort to exalt Christ in our senses and faculties, in our soul and body, has unimaginable consequences. For it is He who will give life to this world of ours, making use of the poor instrument that each of us is. Let us not shrink, my daughters and sons, from this effort. As our Father said, it is time to place ourselves on the Cross each day and ask forcefully for what St. Josemaría frequently asked our Lord, when kissing his crucifix: "Lord, come down from the cross; it is time for me to be raised there."

May we often ask ourselves each day: what would Jesus do now? How would he give himself? I am convinced that our small cross, yours and mine, taken up with determination, with joy, with happiness for this great discovery, will be an instrument to cauterize the wounds of today's world. There is no room for pessimism here. With Christ we hunger to bring God's healing balm to those who are distant from him. Thus we will contribute to improving society and to restoring the institution of the family, for which we ask our Lady with so much trust, especially on the 8th, when we will celebrate her birth.

With all my affection I bless you and also ask for your prayers for the upcoming Synod.

⁵ Cf. Pope Francis, Address in a general audience, 13 May 2015.

⁶ St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, June 4, 1974.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Your Father,

+ Javier

Pamplona, September 1, 2015