

Our Lord himself promised the apostles: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt 28:20*); and to Peter, in particular, he said: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (*Mt 16:18*). According to these words, we can be sure that the faith, in the sense of the deposit of revealed truths, will always be faithfully guarded by the Church. But whether our Lord, when he comes at the end of time, will find in Christians an adherence to his teaching, alive and operative through charity, depends on each of us, on how well we correspond to God's gift and transmit it to many other people, making it something alive and not just a theory.

And what can we say about the possibility of a massive conversion to the faith? The Gospels recount various occasions when large crowds followed Jesus, attracted by him and by his teachings. These scenes have been repeated in history every time that a Christian has endeavored to identify himself with Christ, letting his message be manifested in himself, as St. Paul was able to say: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (*Gal 2:20*). Such a Christian naturally attracts and wins over others: not by himself, but Christ by means of him. I saw this from close up become a reality in the life of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, who brought thousands of souls to God, trying "to hide and disappear, so that only Jesus would shine forth," as he used to say. And we are seeing it in Pope John Paul II who, in so many different countries and by being demanding, not by giving in, wins over the multitudes. Whether

the scenes of the Gospel, when multitudes of men and women followed Christ, are to be repeated today depends on the grace of God and on our freedom, our union with him. This was proclaimed by Christ himself when he said: "He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit" (*Jn 15:5*). If this does not happen, we cannot lay the blame on the times that we are living in. "If we are living well, in a Christian manner, the times will be good. We are the times: as we are, so will the times be," said St. Augustine (*Sermon 80, 8*). And St. John Chrysostom declared: "There would not be a single pagan if we were really Christians" (*Hom. in I Tim., 10, 3*). We have to make up our mind to resolutely seek sanctity, identification with Jesus Christ.

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"An appeal to live the faith with the vitality of the earliest days," an interview published in Alfa and Omega, a supplement of the newspaper ABC, Madrid.

1. *What are the priorities in connection with the evangelization of Europe and what is the role of the Synod for Europe in this regard?*

First of all, I should explain that it is not my job to point out these priorities. The work of the Synod is precisely an opportunity to reflect about

the evangelization of Europe. During these days we will pray, work, and listen to one another, with an openness of spirit and a desire to learn. And always with confidence that the Holy Spirit will show us the path to illuminate Europe with Christ's light. In this sense, the Synod is not only a vivid experience of the communion of the Church, but also a manifestation of faith. We believe that this communion and unity will bring us light for our apostolic task in the coming years.

After this clarification, I think I can comment on some aspects that, in my opinion, it would be good to confront, moved by the desire that a Christians spirit renew our continent, as the Church has always done. It seems very important to me to practice the faith with the vitality of the beginnings. We will also focus our attention on the multicultural dimension of evangelization, within its overall unity. And I think that the responsibilities of women will also be an important topic.

A central concern is the need to present our faith in a genuine way, with a consistency of life and the enthusiasm of Christ's first disciples. We have to put Christ in first place, the One whom we believe in, whom we follow, and whom we are called to speak about. The Catholics of this continent have no reason to consider ourselves as representatives of an outworn lifestyle that has lost its original attractiveness. We have to "dust off" our way of practicing the faith, purify it, connect it more deeply with the spring, the source, our Lord Jesus Christ. And Christ is eternally young, perennially new. Thus our hope will

be strengthened; we will recover and communicate with ever greater conviction the joy of knowing ourselves to be Christians, sons and daughters of God.

The Holy Father, in an address to the Latin American bishops' conference in 1983, said that evangelization had to be "new in its zeal, new in its methods, new in its expression." I think that we could very well apply to Europe this requirement of newness which the Christian message bears within itself. And, I repeat, this newness is the living Christ, who continues to walk at our side and who calls us to share in the great newness that is his life.

I also think that there is an urgent pastoral need, because it concerns many of our countries, with regard to the "new Europeans" who come here from many other parts of the world, suffering from hunger, violence and poverty. Europe is once more faced by the challenge of integration. A challenge which has a social and economic dimension, but also a moral dimension. This is certainly a complex question and one that is difficult to solve, demanding a capacity for openness towards others, towards those who are very different from us.

In these circumstances, Christians, as so often in the course of history, encounter a demanding task that can be summed up in three words: respect, accept, proclaim. We need to respect, that is to love, all these people who are arriving in Europe by waves, often in material conditions of extreme indigence. Their poverty does not diminish their dignity. We need

to accept them, opening our ears and our hearts to those words that must be rediscovered: “feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty... .” And we need to proclaim our faith, because many of those “new Europeans” have never heard of Jesus, and we have the joyous duty of making him known to them.

I think that all of us pastors are looking forward joyfully to the possibility of taking part in a discussion of what we might call the “new responsibilities” of women in the Europe of the future. To put it succinctly, in the century that is now ending women have gone from playing a very limited role in public life to occupying posts of great importance. This is a very profound process of transformation that has not yet ended. The change has at times been complicated and painful, with good aspects and bad. The growing influence of women has new facets that are quite positive, and her responsibilities call for the mature reflection that we all desire. In this context, the Church has a lot to say about the dignity of women and the greatness of their mission in society, on the importance of paternity and maternity, on the role of the family, etc. And when stressing that “the Church has a lot to say,” I am referring especially to the Catholic women of Europe. I dare say that the future of all of us depends to a great extent on their talent and holiness.

2. How do you see the future of the Church in Spain?

First, don't forget that I have spent the last fifty years outside of Spain. Nevertheless, I receive a lot of news, and I have the opportunity of

speaking with many Spanish bishops, especially when they come to Rome, and I frequently meet with Spaniards, both individually and in groups.

I can say that I detect, especially among young people, a feeling of optimism and a desire to take part in the Church's apostolic mission. Perhaps this is due to the fact that I live in Rome, but I have noticed that a great number of these Spaniards are sincerely in harmony with the universal dimension of the Church, with the challenges of evangelization in Africa, in Asia, in countries where Jesus is not yet known. This is not of course something new or exclusive to Spain. I have noticed it also in other countries. I have come to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is very active, much more so than some statistical data that is published might seem to indicate.

3. What is the current state of the apostolic work of Opus Dei, in the world, in Europe and in Spain?

Your question reminds me of some words of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá regarding Opus Dei's first steps. He used to speak of “the early times, when we never slowed down.” With God's grace, we will never slow down. Seventy years have gone by, and each of the Prelature's faithful feels as much urged on as at the beginning. New undertakings are springing up on all sides; we are beginning in new countries, although we are unable to go to all the places where the bishops are calling for us. The work of Opus Dei is developing, and growth requires, in a certain sense, being born again. For example, on September 12

I ordained the first priests from the Ivory Coast and from Trinidad-Tobago incardinated in the Prelature. As you can understand, that was a motive of particular joy for me and a marvelous feeling of a new beginning.

In Europe, the reality of Opus Dei has been established for many years, except in the countries of the East. More than half of the Prelature's faithful are in Europe. Opus Dei was born in Spain and its growth there, thanks be to God, has been great. But I am convinced that even in Spain, as in other nations, we are just beginning. There is so much to be done.

I must confess that when I consider how the apostolic work of the Prelature is going, I use other instruments of measurement. The Prelature is going well when every one of its faithful is praying, working, and serving others in the place where he or she is, with a desire to be a good son or daughter of the Church, to sow the peace and joy of Christ in one's family and among one's colleagues and friends. These are realities that are difficult to measure, but they are what is really important.

4. What criteria do you recommend for the public activity of Christians?

My practice, which I learned from Blessed Josemaría, is to abstain from giving advice in these matters, beyond reminding people of the need to follow the ethical demands and inspiration of our Christian faith. One cannot hide one's light beneath the bed for fear of clashing with a de-Christianized environment or with

what some try to impose as "politically correct" even though it is not morally acceptable, or in order to safeguard selfish personal interests. Christians share with all citizens of good will the desire to serve the common good of society.

Recently Pope John Paul II received the Lithuanian bishops in Rome for their *ad limina* visit. Among other things, he reminded them that "the laity cannot be passive subjects in the Church." Those words should serve to remind us of a basic criterion for the public activity of Catholics. A Catholic cannot be a passive subject in the public life of his country and of the world. We Christians are citizens of the society in which we live and we feel ourselves just as responsible as the rest, that is to say, protagonists, with all our fellow citizens, in the political, cultural, economic life of the country, as well as in public opinion and in all that configures, transforms and makes a human community move ahead.

A Christian should not be inhibited, nor limit himself to complaining. And, above all, he does not feel that the fullness of his Christian vocation is realized only in the private and individual realm. He is sensitive to problems, seeks solutions, tries to be generous, commits himself. Each one, I insist, shows his faith in whatever he does, with the freedom proper to a son or daughter of God. Blessed Josemaría says in *Furrow* that "if Christians really lived in conformity with our faith, it would be the greatest revolution of all times." A revolution of justice, of charity, of peace.