Dear Friends in Christ,

Praised be our Lord Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary His Mother! My previous letter took an honest look at the times in which we are living in contrast with the teaching of the Tradition of the Church, particularly that of Saint John Paul II in his 10th encyclical, Veritatis Splendor [The Splendor of Truth]. The words of our Lord Jesus Christ to the rich young man as recorded in the Gospel serve as a springboard for the Saint’s meditation on the question of morality. As you may recall, the rich young man questioned Jesus with the words, “Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?” [Mt 19:16] Jesus responded with the words, “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

The question as to whether the commandments of God are too difficult for ordinary people is addressed by the Saint, again from the perspective of both Scripture and Tradition, guided by the Holy Spirit. The Christian life has never been easy. When Jesus asks us to follow Him, He points the way to the Cross and Resurrection, with the help of the Holy Spirit. And, in fact, it is the Spirit Who gives us the Life and Love of God the Father by forming Jesus in our hearts. Anyone who has meditated on the mysteries of the Holy Rosary, and I’m sure you have done so many times, has insight into the Conception, Birth, Death and Resurrection of Christ, followed by His Mother into Heaven. As St. John the Apostle wrote, “I write to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.” [1 Jn 5:13]

Truth and Freedom Chapter Two of The Splendor of Truth builds on the meditation begun in Chapter One with the young man’s question to Jesus in Mark 10:17 – 18: “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” and the thought-provoking response of our Lord, “Why do you call me good? God alone is good.” Saint JPII points out the dangers of certain tendencies in moral theology that have deviated from the objective truth of the goodness of God, Who alone establishes moral truth, symbolized in the first book of the Bible by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As Jesus said and Saint JPII has reasserted, “Sacred Scripture remains the living and fruitful
source of the Church’s moral doctrine.” [VS 2:28] According to the biblical account of the creation of man in Genesis, God grants man the freedom to eat of every tree in the garden with the one exception of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: “The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may eat freely of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.’” [Gn 2:16 – 17] “With this imagery, revelation teaches that the power to decide what is good and what is evil does not belong to man, but to God alone.” [VS 2:35]

DID YOU KNOW?

Saint Pope John Paul II was the second longest reigning pope, after Pope Pius IX who reigned for 32 years. He was elected in 1978 and died in 2005 while still in office. He upheld the Church’s teachings on the ordination of woman, artificial contraception and abortion, and he strengthened the Tradition of the Church on all the Life issues such as euthanasia, marriage between one man and one woman, what it means to be a woman and a mother, the centrality of the home, the moral issues surrounding conception and childbirth, what it means to be a father, the role of the laity, the meaning and value of celibacy, and the call to religious life. His contributions to the Church and to humanity include his popular talks on the theology of the body, particularly for married people, an updated Code of Canon Law, 483 new canonized saints and martyrs from beatifications, and the fall of the Berlin Wall, which many historians and scholars attribute to his direct intervention. Many believe that it was his God-given mission to accomplish the defeat of Communism in his native Poland. Known as “Mary’s Pope” or “the Pope of Fatima,” his devotion to the Blessed Mother inspired much of his teaching. He was truly a GREAT POPE.

JP II, we love you!

Freedom and Conscience According to Saint JP II and the long Tradition of the Church, beginning with the Apostles, human freedom is not in conflict with the law of God. God alone knows what is best for man. The light of conscience, granted to man as a gift, illuminates his choices made in greater and greater freedom, a freedom to choose the truth and to live by it. In choosing to respect and even to adore God's beautiful Law, we choose freedom from the binding servitude of sin. “In fact, human freedom finds its authentic and complete fulfillment precisely in the acceptance of that law. God, who alone is good, knows perfectly what is good for man, and by virtue of his very love proposes this good to man in the commandments.”

One does not need to look far to see the consequences of the exaltation of human freedom over God’s law in the many moral deviations today that are proposed as good. In other words, according to Saint JP II and the Tradition, subjective human reasoning has exalted itself over the truth established by God, even to go so far as to say what is good and what is not. The “good” that results from this subjectivism and moral relativism proposes the human
conscience as the ultimate judge of what is acceptable for each individual. The consequence of this type of subjectivism is the conflict of “goods” – in other words, my “rights” may not accord with your “rights.” When this occurs, whose rights prevail? Saint JP II warned us of the general disorder that results from this type of thinking, and the tendency toward various types of totalitarianism, where the true God-given rights of the poorest and weakest members of the human community are trampled underfoot.

**You Will Know the Truth and the Truth Will Set You Free**

“Genuine freedom is an outstanding manifestation of the divine image in man. For God willed to leave man ‘in the power of his own counsel’ [Sirach 15:14] so that he would seek his Creator of his own accord and would freely arrive at full and blessed perfection by cleaving to God.”

“Certain tendencies in contemporary moral theology, under the influence of the currents of subjectivism and individualism, involve novel interpretations of the relationship of freedom to the moral law, human nature and conscience, and propose novel criteria for the moral evaluation of acts. Despite their variety, these tendencies are at one in lessening or even denying the dependence of freedom on truth. If we wish to undertake a critical discernment of these tendencies .... we must examine them in the light of the fundamental dependence of freedom upon truth, a dependence which has found its clearest and most authoritative expression in the words of Christ: ‘You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’ [Jn 8:32].” [VT 2:34]

**The Danger of the Autonomy of Human Reason**

“God’s law does not reduce, much less do away with human freedom; rather, it protects and promotes that freedom. In contrast, however, some present-day cultural tendencies have given rise to several currents of thought in ethics which center upon an alleged conflict between freedom and law. These doctrines would grant to individuals or social groups the right to determine what is good or evil. Human freedom would thus be able to “create values” and would enjoy a primacy over truth, to the point that truth itself would be considered a creation of freedom. Freedom would thus lay claim to a moral autonomy which would actually amount to an absolute sovereignty.” [VT 2:35]

“Some people, disregarding the dependence of human reason on divine wisdom and the need, given the present state of fallen nature, for divine revelation as an effective means for knowing moral truths, even those of the natural order, have actually posited a complete sovereignty of reason in the domain of moral norms regarding the right ordering of life in this world. Such norms would constitute the boundaries for a merely ‘human’ morality; they would be the expression of a law which man in an autonomous manner lays down for himself and which has its source exclusively in human reason. In no way could God be considered the author of this law ....
These trends of thought have led to a denial, in opposition to sacred Scripture and the Church’s constant teaching, of the fact that the natural moral law has God as its author and that man, by the use of reason, participates in the eternal law, which it is not for him to establish.

In their desire, however, to keep the moral life in a Christian context, certain moral theologians have introduced a sharp distinction, contrary to Catholic doctrine, between an ethical order, which would be human in origin and of value for this world alone, and an order of salvation for which only certain intentions and interior attitudes regarding God and neighbor would be significant. This has then led to an actual denial that there exists, in divine revelation, a specific and determined moral content, universally valid and permanent.... Naturally, an autonomy conceived in this way also involves the denial of a specific doctrinal competence on the part of the Church and her magisterium with regard to particular moral norms which deal with the so-called ‘human good.’ No one can fail to see that such an interpretation of the autonomy of human reason involves positions incompatible with Catholic teaching. “VT 2:37

Human Reason and the Natural Law

There is much discussion during our times of what is called “the natural law.” Those of us who have not studied philosophy or theology, depending only upon insights gathered in prayer, know in our hearts what is right and what is wrong, and we call this the natural law, because somehow we know, as the Church teaches, that God’s creation is good. Saint Pope John Paul II defines the natural law with these words:

“The natural law ‘is nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided. God gave this light and this law to man at creation.’ ... man possesses in himself his own law, received from the Creator.”

During our times, because of the growing preoccupation and demand for the autonomy of human reason, an autonomy that has been granted to man by his Creator when He gave him the earth and free will, there is a tendency to deny the dependence of human reason on the divine Wisdom of God. “Were this autonomy to imply a denial of the participation of the practical reason in the wisdom of the divine Creator and lawgiver or were it to suggest a freedom which creates moral norms on the basis of historical contingencies or the diversity of societies and cultures, this sort of alleged autonomy would contradict the Church’s teaching on the truth about man. It would be the death of freedom: ‘But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall die.’” [Gn 2:17]

As you can see, the encyclical Veritatis Splendor (The Splendor of Truth) is rich in teaching that applies to our times. It is worthy of meditation and contemplation. I hope to continue further study of the encyclical in my next letter.

THE LOVERS OF YOUR LAW HAVE GREAT PEACE; THEY NEVER STUMBLE. --Psalm 119