Romana is the bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei. These pages reprint documents of the Holy See directed to the entire Church, as well as those referring specifically to Opus Dei. It also provides news about the activities of the Prelate and the Prelature in the service of the Church and the local dioceses. Brief articles are included about some of the apostolic initiatives fostered by faithful of the Prelature within their profession and in society at large in their endeavor to infuse a Christian spirit into the secular sphere.

The contents of the bulletin do not provide an entire picture of Opus Dei’s activities, since the Prelature’s fundamental apostolate is that which its faithful carry out personally, guided by the Christian formation and spiritual assistance they receive from the Prelature. This apostolate takes place in the context of each person’s professional, social, and family setting, and its variety and creativity naturally cannot be reduced to a set of statistics.

Romana’s publication fulfills an express desire of St. Josemaría Escrivá. In choosing the title Romana for the future bulletin, St. Josemaría wished to emphasize the catholic and universal character of Opus Dei’s pastoral mission.
SUMMARY
EDITORIAL

• The Canonization: Grace and Conversion

HOLY SEE

The Roman Pontiff

• Letter of the Holy Father John Paul II to priests for Holy Thursday 2002 (March 17, 2002)
• Address to the Roman Academy for Life (February 27, 2002)
• Address to the participants in the UNIV’2002 Congress (March 25, 2002)
• Address to participants in the congress on «The Greatness of Ordinary Life» (January 12, 2002)
• Address to the Roman Rota on the opening of the judicial year (January 28, 2002)
• Apostolic letter in the form of a «Motu proprio» Misericordia Dei, on certain aspects of the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance (April 7, 2002)

Review of Other Documents

• Review of other documents

PRELATE

Activities of the Prelate

• Establishment of new Centers of the Prelature
• Pastoral Trips

Homilies

• At the Mass in suffrage for Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, Parish of Blessed Josemaría. Rome, March 23, 2002
• On the feast of Blessed Josemaría, Basilica of St. Eugene. Rome, June 26, 2002

Addresses

• Discourse at the Symposium «Witnesses of the Twentieth Century, Teachers of the Twenty-First Century» organized by the Academy of the Ecclesiastical History of Spain and America. Seville, April 8, 2002
• Inaugural Address of the Congress 'The Greatness of Ordinary Life', with title was 'Teacher, Priest, Father. A human and supernatural profile of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer'. Rome, January 8, 2002

Articles and Interviews

• Newspaper interview published in “El País”, on the eve of the centennial of the birth of Opus Dei’s founder. Madrid, Spain, January 8, 2002

• Article on the University of Navarre, published in the weekly “Alfa y Omega”


• Interview in the weekly “Alfa y Omega”. Madrid, Spain, February 21, 2002

• Article in “L’Osservatore Romano”, on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. Vatican City, January 9, 2002

• Article published in the magazine “Redacción,” of the University of Navarre, under the title «A Universal Legacy». Pamplona, Spain, January 2002

• Interview published in the newspaper “La Repubblica”, on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. Rome, Italy, January 10, 2002

ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA

The Cause of Canonization

• Publication of the Book ‘Cures Through the Intercession of Josemaría Escrivá’

• Ordinary Public Consistory for voting on various Causes of Canonization (February 26, 2002)

The Centennial of His Birth

• Eucharistic celebrations throughout the world

• Congress at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome

• Commemorative issues of stamps

• Ceremony at the Colombian Academy of Language

• Theological Congress in Fatima
Other Items

- Around June 26
- Publication of the critical-historical edition of 'Camino' ('The Way')
- Other publications about the founder of Opus Dei
- Books of Blessed Josemaría, now available on the Internet
- Illustrated biography for children
- Introduction of the book 'Un santo per amico'
- Commemorative book in Germany
- Commemorative edition of 'Holy Rosary'
- Other editions of his work

NEWS

- Cardinal Grocholewski at the Roman College of Holy Mary
- Pontifical appointments
- In suffrage for Bishop Álvaro del Portillo

INITIATIVES

- Moergestel, The Netherlands. Symposium for priests
- Nairobi, Kenya. 25th anniversary of Kianda School
- Sydney, Australia. Excelling with Xcel
- Chicago, United States. Character education
- Alice Springs, Australia. Desert work camp
- Guatanfur: in the Colombian countryside
- Torreciudad, Spain Conference on volunteer work
- Buenos Aires, Argentina. Round-table at the book fair
- Paris, France. Colloquium at the Grenelle Forum
- Santiago, Chile. Inauguration at the University of the Andes
- San José, Costa Rica. Students involved in social development projects
- Thornycroft Hall, England. Conference on the life and message of Blessed Josemaría
- Jerez de la Frontera, Spain. Study conference for priests
- Quito, Ecuador. New buildings for the Solana School
• Guayaquil, Ecuador. The Montepiedra Clinic
• Dublin, Ireland. Aid Resources Ltd.
• Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Four meetings in the Congo
• Singapore. An exposition on the life and writings of Blessed Josemaría

IN PACE
• Suffrages

A STUDY
• Priestly soul and Lay Mentality
EDITORIAL
The Canonization: Grace and Conversion

By God’s providence, the centennial of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá’s birth, celebrated on January 9, will culminate with his canonization. On October 6 the Church will proclaim Josemaría Escrivá a saint, for the glory of God and as an example and stimulus for all Christians. This great gift of sanctity from the Blessed Trinity calls for our own correspondence, striving to grow in sanctity in our own life.

Therefore this time of preparation is, above all, a time for conversion, for «growing on the inside.»[1] As the Prelate of Opus Dei has pointed out, the announcement of the canonization is an invitation to renew our personal Christian commitment and to undertake a new conversion. We are being asked to strive to love God with our whole heart, mind, and strength, and other men and women out of love for him. This great grace will leave a deep mark on history, if it deeply marks our own hearts, and stirs us to undertake at God’s pace the path of sanctity in ordinary life that was lived and taught by Blessed Josemaría.

It is also a time for deep joy and supernatural hope: the hope of being saints. For various reasons, many Catholics are still unfamiliar with this goal. Who among us was not surprised when someone told him for the first time that he is in the world precisely for the purpose of becoming a saint? «I don’t want to generalize. But one day perhaps an ordinary Christian, just like you, opened your eyes to horizons both deep and new, yet as old as the Gospel. He suggested to you the prospect of following Christ earnestly, seriously, of becoming an apostle of apostles.... I don’t like to speak of someone being singled out to be part of a privileged elect. But it is Christ who speaks, who chooses. It is the language of holy Scripture: Elegit nos in ipso ante mundi constitutionem, says Saint Paul, ut essemus sancti (Eph 1:4). He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be saints.»[2] We can’t allow this certainty to be dimmed by the suffering life may bring, whether physical or moral, which for a Christian ought to be an encounter with the Cross of Christ. The canonization of Josemaría Escrivá shows us, as he liked to say, that dedication to God, the self-sacrifice our Lord asks of those who follow him, «is worthwhile.» It is a path of happiness.
The ideal that the founder of Opus Dei strove to spread to all souls, holiness in daily life and the sanctification of professional work, takes on with his canonization a new and deeper resonance. Transmitting that message will often be for the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei like sowing good seed in a field already prepared by the spread throughout the world of Blessed Josemaría’s holy life and teachings.

Although the epoch in history we are called to live through contains many shadows, we must never forget that there are always many people eager to hear Christ’s voice. Our Lord counts on us to help them encounter the treasure that can ennoble their lives. This is our mission as ordinary Christians, who live alongside so many millions of people, sharing in their noble aims and interests, and also their worries and problems. We have to make know to them the light of Christ’s faith and love.

We must help the men and women of today to personally discover the path of sanctity that God has traced out for their lives. Each person has his or her own vocation, their own path towards God. The saint is the paradigm of the man or woman who has made of their life a personal journey towards Jesus Christ. And the new saint whom the Church will proclaim on October 6 is such in a very special way, since he has opened up to a multitude of souls the path to holiness and apostolate in ordinary professional, family and social life. We must do everything possible to spread, in a more convincing and above all more convinced way, the universal call to holiness, the only true foundation for the meaning of human life.

A renewed optimism, a renewed commitment, a renewed sense of mission. These should be the savory fruits of the canonization of Josemaría Escrivá, nourished by a heart vigilant with love for God and all mankind, like that of our holy mother Mary.


HOLY SEE

- The Roman Pontiff
- Review of Other Documents
The Roman Pontiff

Letter of the Holy Father John Paul II to priests for Holy Thursday 2002 (March 17, 2002)

Dear Priests,

1. With deep emotion I am sending you this traditional Holy Thursday Letter, taking my seat beside you as it were at the table in the Upper Room at which the Lord Jesus celebrated with his Apostles the first Eucharist: a gift to the whole Church, a gift which, although veiled by sacramental signs, makes him “really, truly and substantially” present (Council of Trent: DS 1651) in every tabernacle throughout the world. Before this unique presence, the Church bows down in adoration: “Adoro te devote, latens Deitas”; she is unceasingly moved by the spiritual raptures of the Saints and, as the Bride, she assembles in an intimate outpouring of faith and love: “Ave, verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine”.

To the gift of this singular presence, which brings him to us in his supreme sacrifice and makes him our bread, Jesus, in the Upper Room, associated a specific duty of the Apostles and their successors. From that time on, to be an apostle of Christ, as are the Bishops and the priests sharing in their mission, has involved being able to act in persona Christi Capitis. This happens above all whenever the sacrificial meal of the Body and the Blood of the Lord is celebrated. For then the priest as it were lends Christ his own face and voice: “Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19).

How marvellous is this vocation of ours, my dear Brother Priests! Truly we can repeat with the Psalmist: “What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord” (Ps 116:12-13).

2. Joyfully meditating once again on this gift, I would like this year to speak to you about an aspect of our mission to which I called your attention last year at this same time. I believe that it warrants further reflection. I
mean the mission which the Lord has given us to represent him not just in the Eucharistic Sacrifice but also in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Between the two sacraments there is a profound relationship. The Eucharist, the summit of the sacramental economy, is also its source: all the sacraments in a sense spring from the Eucharist and lead back to it. This is true in a special way of the sacrament charged with “mediating” the forgiveness of God, who welcomes the repentant sinner back into his embrace. It is true that as a re-enactment of Christ’s Sacrifice, the Eucharist also serves to deliver us from sin. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us: “The Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from future sins” (No. 1393). Nevertheless, in the economy of grace willed by Christ, this purifying power, while it directly cleanses from venial sins, only indirectly cleanses from mortal sins, which radically compromise the believer’s relationship with God and his communion with the Church. “The Eucharist,” the Catechism continues, “is not ordered to the forgiveness of mortal sins. That is proper to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Eucharist is properly the sacrament of those who are in full communion with the Church” (No. 1395).

In insisting on this truth, the Church in no way wishes to detract from the role of the Eucharist. Her intention is to grasp its significance in relation to the whole sacramental economy as instituted by God’s saving wisdom. This, after all, is what Saint Paul clearly indicated when writing to the Corinthians: “Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement upon himself” (1 Cor 11:27-29). In line with this admonition of Saint Paul is the principle which states that “anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1385).

3. My dear Brothers in the Priesthood: in recalling this truth, I feel a pressing need to urge you, as I did last year, to rediscover for yourselves and
to help others to rediscover the beauty of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In recent decades and for a variety of reasons, this sacrament has passed through something of a crisis. More than once I have drawn attention to this fact, even making it the theme of a gathering of the Synod of Bishops, whose reflections I then presented in the Apostolic Exhortation Reconciliatio et Paenitentia. On the other hand, I cannot fail to acknowledge with deep joy the positive signs which, in the Jubilee Year especially, have shown that this sacrament, when suitably presented and celebrated, can have a broad appeal, even among the young. Its appeal is enhanced by the need for personal contact, something that is becoming increasingly scarce in the hectic pace of today’s technological society, but which for this very reason is increasingly experienced as a vital need. Certainly, this need can be met in various ways. But how can we fail to recognize that the Sacrament of Reconciliation — without confusing it with any of the various forms of psychological therapy — offers an extraordinarily rich response to this need? It does so by bringing the penitent into contact with the merciful heart of God through the friendly face of a brother.

Yes, great indeed is the wisdom of God, who by instituting this sacrament has made provision for a profound and unremitting need of the human heart. We are meant to be loving and enlightened interpreters of this wisdom though the personal contact we are called to have with so many brothers and sisters in the celebration of Penance. In this regard, I wish to repeat that the usual form of administering this sacrament is its individual celebration, and only in “cases of grave necessity” is it lawful to employ the communal form with general confession and absolution. The conditions required for this form of absolution are well known; but perhaps we should remember that for absolution to be valid the faithful must have the intention of subsequently confessing their grave sins individually (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1483).

4. With joy and trust let us rediscover this sacrament. Let us experience it above all for ourselves, as a deeply-felt need and as a grace which we constantly look for, in order to restore vigour and enthusiasm to our journey of holiness and to our ministry.

At the same time, let us make every effort to be true ministers of mercy. We know that in this sacrament, as in others, we are called to be agents of a
grace which comes not from us but from on high and works by its own inner power. In other words — and this is a great responsibility — *God counts on us*, on our availability and fidelity, in order to work his wonders in human hearts. In the celebration of this sacrament, perhaps even more than in the others, it is important that the faithful have an intense experience of the face of Christ the Good Shepherd.

Allow me therefore to speak to you on this theme, imagining as it were all the places — cathedrals, parishes, shrines or elsewhere — in which you are daily engaged in administering this sacrament. Our minds turn to the pages of the Gospel which reveal most directly the merciful face of God. How can we fail to think of the *moving meeting between the prodigal son and his forgiving Father*? Or the image of the *sheep which was lost and then found*, and which the Shepherd joyfully lifts onto his shoulders? The Father’s embrace and the Good Shepherd’s joy must be visible in each one of us, dear Brothers, whenever a penitent asks us to become ministers of forgiveness.

In order to bring out certain specific aspects of the unique saving dialogue that is sacramental confession, I would like to use the “biblical icon” of *the meeting between Jesus and Zacchaeus* (cf. Lk 19:1-10). To me it seems that what takes place between Jesus and the “chief tax collector” of Jericho resembles in a number of ways the celebration of the sacrament of mercy. As we follow this brief but powerful story, we try to capture in Christ’s demeanour and in his voice all those nuances of wisdom, both human and supernatural, which we too must strive to communicate if the sacrament is to be celebrated in the best possible way.

5. The story, as we know, presents the meeting between Jesus and Zacchaeus as if it happened by chance.

Jesus enters Jericho and moves through the city accompanied by the crowd (cf. Lk 19:3). In climbing the sycamore tree, Zacchaeus seems prompted by curiosity alone. At times, God’s meetings with man do appear to be merely fortuitous. But nothing that God does happens *by chance*. Surrounded by a wide variety of pastoral situations, we can sometimes lose heart and motivation because so many Christians pay too little attention to the sacramental life, and even when they do approach the sacraments, they
often do so in a superficial way. Those who hear many confessions and see how people ordinarily approach the sacrament can be disconcerted by the way certain penitents come to confession without even a clear idea of what they want. Some come only because they feel the need to be listened to. Others because they want advice about something. Others have a psychological need to be released from burdensome feelings of guilt. Many, on the other hand, feel a real need to restore their relationship with God, but they confess without being really aware of the obligations which this entails. They may make a poor examination of conscience because they have little knowledge of the implications of a moral life inspired by the Gospel. Is there any confessor who has not had this experience?

This is precisely the case of Zacchaeus. Everything that happens to him is amazing. If there had not been, at a certain point, the “surprise” of Christ looking up at him, perhaps he would have remained a silent spectator of the Lord moving through the streets of Jericho.

Jesus would have passed by, not into, his life. Zacchaeus had no idea that the curiosity which had prompted him to do such an unusual thing was already the fruit of a mercy which had preceded him, attracted him and was about to change him in the depths of his heart.

Dear Priests, with so many of our penitents in mind, let us re-read Luke’s magnificent account of how Christ behaved: “When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today’” (Lk 19:5).

Every encounter with someone wanting to go to confession, even when the request is somewhat superficial because it is poorly motivated and prepared, can become, through the surprising grace of God, that “place” near the sycamore tree where Christ looked up at Zacchaeus. How deeply Christ’s gaze penetrated the Jericho publican’s soul is impossible for us to judge. But we do know that that same gaze looks upon each of our penitents. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation we are agents of a supernatural encounter with laws of its own, an encounter which we have only to respect and facilitate. For Zacchaeus, it must have been an stunning experience to hear himself called by his name, a name which many of his townsmen spoke with contempt. Now he hears it spoken in a tone of tenderness, expressing not
just trust but familiarity, insistent friendship. Yes, Jesus speaks to Zacchaeus like an old friend, forgotten maybe, but a friend who has nonetheless remained faithful, and who enters with the gentle force of affection into the life and into the home of his re-discovered friend: “Make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today” (Lk 19:5).

6. Luke’s account is remarkable for the tone of the language: everything is so personal, so tactful, so affectionate! Not only is the text filled with humanity; it suggests insistence, an urgency to which Jesus gives voice as the one offering the definitive revelation of God’s mercy. He says: “I must stay at your house”, or to translate even more literally: “I need to stay at your house” (Lk 19:5). Following the mysterious road map which the Father has laid out for him, Jesus runs into Zacchaeus along the way. He pauses near him as if the meeting had been planned from the beginning. Despite all the murmuring of human malice, the home of this sinner is about to become a place of revelation, the scene of a miracle of mercy. True, this will not happen if Zacchaeus does not free his heart from the ligatures of egoism and from his unjust and fraudulent ways. But mercy has already come to him as a gratuitous and overflowing gift. Mercy has preceded him!

This is what happens in every sacramental encounter. We must not think that it is the sinner, through his own independent journey of conversion, who earns mercy. On the contrary, it is mercy that impels him along the path of conversion. Left to himself, man can do nothing and he deserves nothing. Before being man’s journey to God, confession is God’s arrival at a person’s home.

In confession, therefore, we can find ourselves faced with all kinds of people. But of one thing we must be convinced: anticipating our invitation, and even before we speak the words of the sacrament, the brothers and sisters who seek our ministry have already been touched by a mercy that works from within. Please God, we shall know how to cooperate with the mercy that welcomes and the love that saves. This we can do by our words and our attitude as pastors who are concerned for each individual, skilful in sensing people’s problems and in delicately accompanying them on their journey, and knowing how to help them to trust in God’s goodness.
7. “I must stay at your house”. Let us try to penetrate these words still more deeply. They are a proclamation. Before indicating a choice on the part of Christ, they proclaim the will of the Father. Jesus appears as someone with a precise mandate. There is a “law” which he too must observe: the will of the Father which he accomplishes with such love that it becomes his “food” (cf. Jn 4:34). The words which Jesus speaks to Zacchaeus are not just a means of establishing a relationship but the declaration of a plan drawn up by God.

The meeting unfolds against the background of the Word of God, which is one with the Word and the Face of Christ. It is here too that the encounter which is at the heart of the celebration of Penance must begin. How poor if everything were reduced to the skills of human communication! Awareness of the laws of human communication can help and should not be overlooked, but it is the Word of God which must sustain everything. That is why the rite of the sacrament provides for the proclamation of this Word to the penitent.

This is a detail that should not be underestimated, even if it is not always easy to implement. Confessors very often find it hard to communicate what the Word demands to those who have only a superficial knowledge of it. Obviously, the actual celebration of the Sacrament is not the best time to make up for the lack. This should be done with pastoral insight during the time of preparation, by offering basic pointers that allow penitents to measure themselves against the truth of the Gospel. In any event, the confessor should not fail to use the sacramental encounter to lead penitents to some grasp of the way in which God is mercifully reaching down to them, stretching out his hand, not to strike but to save.

Who can deny that the dominant culture of our time creates very real difficulties in this regard? Even mature Christians are often hindered by it in their efforts to live by God’s commandments and follow the guidelines set out on the basis of the commandments by the Church’s magisterium. This is the case with many issues in the area of sexual and family morality, bio-ethics and professional and social morality; but it is also true of problems regarding obligations in the area of religious practice and participation in the life of the Church. For this reason there is a need for a catechesis which the confessor cannot offer at the moment of celebrating
the sacrament. It would be best to make this catechesis part of a deeper preparation for confession. With this in mind, penitential celebrations with community preparation and individual confession can be very helpful.

To clarify all of this, the “biblical icon” of Zacchaeus provides yet another important cue. In the sacrament, the penitent first meets not “the commandments of God” but, in Jesus, “the God of the commandments”. **To Zacchaeus, Jesus offers himself**: “I must stay at your house”. He himself is the gift that awaits Zacchaeus, and he is also “God’s law” for Zacchaeus. When we see our encounter with Jesus as a gift, even the most demanding features of the law assume the “lightness” of grace, in line with that supernatural dynamic which prompted Saint Paul to say: “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (**Gal** 5:18). Every celebration of Penance should cause the soul of the penitent to leap with the same joy that Christ’s words inspired in Zacchaeus, who “made haste and came down and received him joyfully” (**Lk** 19:6).

8. The availability and superabundance of mercy should not however obscure the fact that it is only the premise of salvation, which reaches fulfilment to the extent that it meets a response in the human being. In fact, the forgiveness granted in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not some external action, a kind of legal “remission of the penalty”, but a real encounter of the penitent with God, who restores the bond of friendship shattered by sin. The “truth” of this relationship requires that we welcome God’s merciful embrace, overcoming all the resistance caused by sin.

This is what happens in the case of Zacchaeus. Aware that he is now being treated as a “son”, he begins to think and act like a son, **and this he shows in the way he rediscovers his brothers and sisters**. Beneath the loving gaze of Christ, the heart of Zacchaeus warms to love of neighbour. From a feeling of isolation, which had led him to enrich himself without caring about what others had to suffer, he moves to an attitude of sharing. This is expressed in a genuine “division” of his wealth: “half of my goods to the poor”. The injustice done to others by his fraudulent behaviour is atoned for by a fourfold restitution: “If I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold” (**Lk** 19:8). And it is only at this point that the love of God achieves its purpose, and salvation is accomplished: “Today salvation has come to this house” (**Lk** 19:9).
Dear Priests, this journey of salvation, so clearly described in the story of Zacchaeus, should guide us and help us accomplish with wise pastoral balance our difficult work in the ministry of the confessional. It is a ministry always beset by two opposite extremes: severity and laxity. The first fails to take account of the early part of the story of Zacchaeus: mercy comes first, encouraging conversion and valuing even the slightest progress in love, because the Father wants to do the impossible to save the son who is lost: “The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost” (Lk 19:10).

The other of the two extremes, laxity, fails to take into account the fact that the fullness of salvation, not just offered but also accepted, the salvation which truly heals and restores, involves a genuine conversion to the demands of God’s love. If Zacchaeus had welcomed the Lord into his home without coming to an attitude of openness to love and reparation for the harm done, without a firm commitment to living a new life, he would not have received in the depths of his heart the forgiveness which the Lord had offered him with such concern.

We must always be careful to maintain a proper balance in order to avoid falling into one or the other of these extremes. Severity crushes people and drives them away. Laxity is misleading and deceptive. The minister of pardon, who exemplifies for penitents the face of the Good Shepherd, must express in equal measure the mercy already present and at work and the pardon which brings healing and peace. It is on the basis of these principles that the priest is deputed, in dialogue with the penitent, to discern whether he or she is ready for sacramental absolution. Undoubtedly, the delicacy of this meeting with souls, at such a personal and sometimes difficult moment, demands the utmost discretion. Unless it appears otherwise, the priest must assume that, in confessing his or her sins, the penitent is genuinely sorry and is determined to make amends. This can be more readily assumed if there are suitable pastoral aids for sacramental Reconciliation, including a time of preparation for the sacrament, in order to help penitents come to a more mature and satisfactory sense of what it is that they are looking for. Clearly, when there is no sorrow and amendment, the confessor is obliged to tell the penitent that he or she is not yet ready for absolution. If absolution were given to those who actually say that they have no intention of making amends, the rite would become a mere fiction;
indeed, it would look almost like magic, capable perhaps of creating the semblance of peace, but certainly not that deep peace of conscience which God’s embrace guarantees.

9. In the light of what has been said, it is all the more evident why the personal encounter between confessor and penitent is the ordinary form of sacramental Reconciliation, while the practice of general absolution is only for exceptional circumstances. It is well known that the practice of the Church moved gradually to the private celebration of penance, after centuries in which public penance had been the dominant form. Not only did this development not change the substance of the sacrament — and how could it be otherwise! — but it actually expressed this substance more clearly and made it more effective. This happened not without the aid of the Holy Spirit, who here too fulfilled the mission of leading the Church “into all truth” (Jn 16:13).

The ordinary form of Reconciliation not only expresses well the truth of divine mercy and the forgiveness which springs from it, but also sheds light on the truth of man in one of its most fundamental aspects. Although human beings live through a network of relationships and communities, the uniqueness of each person can never be lost in a shapeless mass. This explains the deep echo in our souls when we hear ourselves called by name. When we realize that we are known and accepted as we are, with our most individual traits, we feel truly alive. Pastoral practice needs to take this into greater account, in order to strike a wise balance between gatherings which emphasize the communion of the Church and other moments which attend to the needs of the individual. People ordinarily want to be recognized and looked after, and it is precisely this nearness to them that allows them to experience God’s love more strongly.

Seen in these terms, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is one of the most effective instruments of personal growth. Here the Good Shepherd, through the presence and voice of the priest, approaches each man and woman, entering into a personal dialogue which involves listening, counsel, comfort and forgiveness. The love of God is such that it can focus upon each individual without overlooking the rest. All who receive sacramental absolution ought to be able to feel the warmth of this personal attention. They should experience the intensity of the fatherly embrace offered to the
prodigal son: “His father... embraced him and kissed him” (Lk 15:20). They should be able to hear that warm and friendly voice that spoke to the tax collector Zacchaeus, calling him by name to new life (cf. Lk 19:5).

10. Accordingly, confessors too need to be properly trained for the celebration of this Sacrament. It must be celebrated in such a way that even in its external form it has all the liturgical dignity indicated in the norms laid down in the Rite of Penance. This does not exclude the possibility of adaptations for pastoral reasons, where the situation of the penitent truly calls for them, in light of the classical principle which holds that the suprema lex of the Church is the salus animarum. Let us make the wisdom of the Saints our guide. And let us move with courage in proposing confession to young people. We must be close to them, able to be with them as friends and fathers, confidants and confessors. They need to discover in us both of these roles, both dimensions.

While we remain firmly anchored in the discernment of the Church’s magisterium, let us also make every effort to keep our theological training truly up-to-date, especially where emerging ethical issues are concerned. It can happen that in the face of complex contemporary ethical problems the faithful leave the confessional with somewhat confused ideas, especially if they find that confessors are not consistent in their judgments. The truth is that those who fulfil this delicate ministry in the name of God and of the Church have a specific duty not to promote and, even more so not to express in the confessional, personal opinions that do not correspond to what the Church teaches and professes. Likewise, a failure to speak the truth because of a misconceived sense of compassion should not be taken for love. We do not have a right to minimize matters of our own accord, even with the best of intentions. Our task is to be God’s witnesses, to be spokesmen of a mercy that saves even when it shows itself as judgment on man’s sin. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 7:21).

11. Dear Priests! Know that I am especially close to you as you gather with your Bishops on this Holy Thursday of the year 2002. We have all experienced a new momentum in the Church at the dawn of the new millennium, in the sense of “starting afresh from Christ” (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 29 ff.). We had all hoped that this momentum might coincide with
a new era of brotherhood and peace for all humanity. Instead we have seen more bloodshed. Once again we have been witnesses of wars. We are distressed by the tragedy of the divisions and hatreds which are devastating relations between peoples.

At this time too, as priests we are personally and profoundly afflicted by the sins of some of our brothers who have betrayed the grace of Ordination in succumbing even to the most grievous forms of the *mysterium iniquitatis* at work in the world. Grave scandal is caused, with the result that a dark shadow of suspicion is cast over all the other fine priests who perform their ministry with honesty and integrity and often with heroic self-sacrifice. As the Church shows her concern for the victims and strives to respond in truth and justice to each of these painful situations, all of us — conscious of human weakness, but trusting in the healing power of divine grace — are called to embrace the “mysterium Crucis” and to commit ourselves more fully to the search for holiness. We must beg God in his Providence to prompt a whole-hearted reawakening of those ideals of total self-giving to Christ which are the very foundation of the priestly ministry.

It is precisely our faith in Christ which gives us the strength to look trustingly to the future. We know that the human heart has always been attracted to evil, and that man will be able to radiate peace and love to those around him only if he meets Christ and allows himself to be “overtaken” by him. As ministers of the Eucharist and of sacramental Reconciliation, we in particular have the task of communicating hope, goodness and peace to the world.

My wish is that you will live this most holy day in peace of heart, in profound communion among yourselves, with your Bishop and your communities, when we recall, with the institution of the Eucharist, our own “birth” as priests. With the words of Christ to the Apostles in the Upper Room after the Resurrection, and calling upon the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Regina Apostolorum* and *Regina Pacis*, I warmly embrace you all as brothers: Peace, peace to each and every one of you. Happy Easter!

*From the Vatican, on 17 March, the Fifth Sunday of Lent, in the year 2002, the twenty—fourth of my Pontificate.*

John Paul II
1. Dear and Illustrious Members of the Pontifical Academy for Life, once again we hold a meeting that is always for me a source of hope and joy. I warmly and personally greet each of you. I want to thank your President, Juan de Dios Vial Correa for his kind words of homage on behalf of all of you. I want to greet your Vice-President, Bishop Sgreccia, and thank him for being the force behind the activity of your Academy.

2. This week you are participating in your eighth General Assembly and for this reason, coming together from many countries, to address a crucial subject, in the context of a broader reflection on the dignity of human life: “The nature and dignity of the human person as the foundation of the right to life. The challenges raised by the approach of contemporary culture”.

You have chosen to deal with one of the connecting links at the foundation of any further discussion, either of ethical applications in the field of bio-ethics or of socio-cultural thought for the promotion of a new pro-life mentality. For many contemporary thinkers, the concepts of “nature” and of “natural law” appear to apply only to the physical and biological world, or, as a way of expressing the order of the cosmos, in scientific research and in the field of ecology. Unfortunately, in such a view, it becomes difficult to use natural law to mean human nature in a metaphysical sense and to use natural law for the moral order.

What makes it more difficult to see the depth of reality is the fact that our culture has greatly restricted the concept of creation, a concept that refers to the entire cosmic reality, and that takes on a particular meaning in relation to man. We see in this change the influence of the weakening of confidence in reason, so much a part of contemporary philosophy, as I pointed out in the Encyclical Fides et ratio (cf. n. 61). What is needed, therefore, is a conscious effort that returns to its original meaning, with all its force, namely, to the anthropological and ethical meaning of natural law and of
the related concept of natural right. In fact, we are discussing if and how it is possible to “recognize” the distinguishing characteristics of the human being, which form the basis of the right to life in its various historical formulations. Only on this basis, can there be a true dialogue and authentic collaboration between believers and non-believers.

3. Daily experience reveals the existence of a fundamental reality common to all human beings by which they can recognize each other as such. It is necessary to refer always “to man’s proper and primordial nature, the “nature of the human person’, that is the person himself in the unity of soul and body, in the unity of his spiritual and biological inclinations and of all the other specific characteristics necessary for the pursuit of his end” (Veritatis splendor, n. 50; cf. also Gaudium et spes, n. 14).

This distinctive nature is the foundation for the rights of every human individual, who has the dignity of personhood from the moment of his conception. This objective dignity, that has its origin in God the Creator, is founded on the spiritual nature that belongs to the soul, but also extends to the corporeality that is an essential component. No one can take human dignity away, rather all must respect it in themselves and in others. It is this dignity that is equal for all and that remains entire at every stage of the individual human life.

The recognition of such natural dignity is the foundation of the social order, as Vatican II reminds us: “Furthermore, while there are rightful differences between people, their equal dignity as persons demands that we strive for fairer and more humane conditions” (Gaudium et spes, n. 29). The human person, with his reason, is capable of recognizing both this profound and objective dignity of his own being, and the ethical requirements that derive from it. In other words, man can discern in himself the value and the moral requirements of his own dignity. It is a discernment that entails a discovery open to further refinement following the coordinates of the “historicity” that are typical of human knowledge.

This is what I pointed out in the Encyclical Veritatis splendor on the subject of the natural moral law, that, according to the words of St Thomas Aquinas, “is nothing else than the light of understanding infused in us by God. As a result of it we know what must be done and what must be
avoided. God has given this light and this law to man at creation” (n. 40, cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 1954-1955).

4. It is important to help our contemporaries understand the positive and humanizing value of the natural moral law, clarifying a number of misunderstandings and false interpretations. The first misunderstanding to be eliminated is “the alleged conflict between freedom and nature” that “has repercussions on the interpretation of certain specific aspects of the natural law, especially its universality and immutability (*Veritatis splendor*, n. 51). In fact, freedom belongs to the rational nature of the human being and can and should be guided by reason: “Precisely because of this “truth’ the natural law involves universality. Inasmuch as it is inscribed in the rational nature of the person, it makes itself felt to all beings endowed with reason and living in history (*ibid*).

5. Another point to be clarified is the presumed static and fixed connotation given to the notion of natural moral law, that is perhaps prompted by an erroneous analogy with the concept of nature used for physical reality. In truth, the fact of its universality and obligatory nature is what incites and urges the person to develop. “In order to perfect himself in his specific order, the person must do good and avoid evil, be concerned for the transmission and preservation of life, refine and develop the riches of the material world, cultivate social life, seek truth, practise good and contemplate beauty” (*Veritatis splendor*, n. 51; cf. *St Thomas I-II*, q. 94, a. 2).

In fact, the magisterium of the Church appeals to the universality and to the dynamic and perfective character of the natural law when referring to the transmission of life, whether it be to maintain the fullness of the spousal union in the procreative act, and to preserve the openness to life in the conjugal act (cf. *Humanae vitae*, n. 10; Instruction *Donum Vitae*, II. 1-8). In the same way the magisterium speaks on the subject of the respect for innocent human life: our thought goes to abortion, euthanasia, the suppression and destructive experimentation on embryos and human fetuses (cf. *Evangelium vitae*, nn. 52-67).

6. The natural law, in so far as it regulates human social relationships is defined as “natural rights” and as such requires complete respect for the dignity of individuals in the realization of the common good. An authentic
conception of the natural right, understood as the protection of the illustrious and inalienable dignity of every human being, is the guarantee of equality and gives real substance to those “rights of man” that serve as the foundation of international declarations.

The rights of man, in fact, should refer to what man is by nature and by force of his own dignity and not to the expression of the subjective choices of those who are able to participate in social life or of those who obtain the consensus of the majority. In the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae* I warned against the serious threat that such a false interpretation of the rights of man seen as the subjective rights of an individual or a group, free from any reference to the truth of human nature, can pose, leading even democratic systems of government to turn into an effective totalitarianism (cf. nn. 19-20). Particularly, among the fundamental rights of man, the Catholic Church claims for every human being the right to life as the primary right. She does it in the name of the truth about man and to protect his freedom, that cannot be sustained without respect for the right to life. The Church affirms the right to life of every innocent human being and at every moment of his existence. The distinction sometimes implied in international documents between “human being” and “human person”, so as to limit the right to life and to physical integrity to persons already born is an artificial distinction, without any scientific or philosophical foundation: every human being, from the moment of his conception until the moment of his natural death, possesses an inviolable right to life and deserves all the respect owed to the human person (cf.*Donum vitae*, n. 1).

7. My dear friends, in conclusion, I want to encourage your reflection on the natural moral law and natural rights with the hope that from your discussions will come fresh zeal for establishing the true good of the human being and a just and peaceful social order. It is always by returning to the deep roots of human dignity and of the true good of the human being, and by building on the foundation of what exists as everlasting and essential in man, that a fruitful dialogue can take place with men of every culture in order to build a society inspired by the values of justice and brotherhood.

With gratitude for your collaboration, I entrust the activity of the Pontifical Academy for Life to the Mother of Jesus, Word made flesh in her virginal womb so that she may be with you as you fulfil the mission that
the Church has entrusted to you for the defence and promotion of the gift of life and of the dignity of every human being. With this prayerful wish, I grant you and your loved ones my heartfelt Blessing.

Address to the participants in the UNIV’2002 Congress (March 25, 2002)

Dear Young People,

1. I am pleased to welcome you gathered here for UNIV’s traditional Roman gathering. You will take part in the Holy Week rites and this will offer you a special religious experience. I thank the Lord who this year has given me an opportunity to meet your association full of young people from many nations who take part in the formation activities organized by the Prelature of Opus Dei. Thank you for your visit, and welcome to this house; it is also yours!

2. During your Roman stay, you intend to intensify your Christian formation around your theme: Study, work, service. The term “service” is the key for interpreting the two terms that go before it. In fact, study and work imply a personal attitude of willingness to give oneself which we call, precisely, service. It is a personal dimension that must characterize the person’s character. The Second Vatican Council says it when it asserts, that only through the sincere gift of self, can the human creature fully discover himself (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 24). Dear young people, with an openness to keep brothers and sisters, each one perfects the basic thrust of his or her mission, through studies and work, putting to good use the talents that God has generously entrusted to you.

In this regard, how useful you will find the teachings of Bl. Josemaría Escrivá, the centenary of whose birth we celebrate this year! Several times he wanted to stress that in the Gospel Jesus is known as a *carpenter* (cf. *Mk* 6,3), indeed as *the son of the carpenter* (cf. *Mt* 13,55). Trained in school of Joseph, the Son of God made manual work not only a necessary source of daily bread, but a “service” to humanity, and indeed made it an integral
element of the saving plan. In this way it becomes an example for us so that each person, following his own vocation, may fully realize his own potential, putting it at the service of his neighbour.

3. In these days of Holy Week the reflection of the faithful is focused on the mystery of the Cross. In the light of this mystery, we can understand better the value of service, work and, for you now, study. The Cross is the symbol of a love that becomes a total and free gift. Does not the Cross witness to Christ’s love for us? The Cross is a silent school of love, in which we learn how costly it is to love. In following Christ, the crucified King, believers learn that to “reign” is to serve the good of others and discover that the sincere gift of themselves expresses the true meaning of love. St Paul repeats to us that Christ loved us and gave himself for us (cf. Gal 2,20).

Bl. Escrivá wrote: “The dignity of work is based on Love”. And he continued: “Man’s great privilege is to be able to love and thus to transcend what is fleeting and ephemeral. Man can love other creatures, he can pronounce an ‘I’ and a “you’ that are full of meaning.... Work is born of love, manifests love, is directed towards love” (Christ Is Passing By, n. 48).

A person who is faithful to this spiritual journey, seriously applies himself to study and work, and he becomes the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt 5,13-14). This is the invitation that you can take from the theme of the upcoming World Youth Day: be the salt of the earth and the light of the world in daily life.

It is not an easy path and it can be at odds with the mindset of your peers. It means going against the prevailing way of acting and today’s fashion. 4. Dear young men and women! Do not be surprised at this: the mystery of the Cross teaches people to live and work in a way that is different from the spirit of this world. The Apostle clearly alerts us to this: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12,12).

Dear young members of UNIV, resist the temptation of mediocrity and conformism. Only in this way will you be able to make your life a gift and a service to humanity; only in this way will you help to alleviate the hurt and
suffering of many poor and marginalized persons who are very much a part of our technologically advanced world. Let the Law of God guide you in your studies today and in your future professional activity. In this way you will “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5,16).

For all this to happen, prayer, intimate dialogue with the One who is calling you to be his disciples, must come first. Be generous in your active life, young people, and be deeply immersed in the contemplation of God’s mystery. Make the Eucharist the heart of your day. In union with the sacrifice of the Cross which it re-presents, offer your studies and your work, so that you yourselves may be “spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God, through Jesus Christ” (1 Pt 2,5).

Mary is always beside you just as she was beside Jesus. To her, the Handmaid of the Lord and Seat of Wisdom, I entrust your resolutions and desires. For my part, I assure you a constant remembrance in prayer, as I wish you a fruitful Easter Triduum and a Blessed Easter. With these sentiments, I cordially bless you.

Torna ai contenuti

Address to participants in the congress on «The Greatness of Ordinary Life» (January 12, 2002)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am pleased to meet you at the end of the Conference held on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of the Blessed Founder of Opus Dei. I greet the Prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarría, and I cordially thank him for his words that sum up the sentiments of devotion of all those gathered here. His words highlighted the nature and importance of your congress. More than a celebration of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, you tried to penetrate more deeply into the most current aspects of his message. In a special way you have studied the grandeur of daily life as a path to holiness. I greet Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani Thorne and the cardinals,
bishops and priests present. I greet each one of you, who have come to Rome to take part in this important celebration.

2. From the beginning of his priestly ministry, Bl. Josemaría Escrivá put at the very heart of his preaching the truth that all the baptized are called to the fullness of charity and that the most direct way to attain this goal is to be found in the midst of normal daily life. The Lord wants to enter into a loving communion with each one of his children, right in the heart of daily occupations, in the context of everyday life.

In the light of these considerations, one’s every day activities came to be seen as a valuable means for achieving union with Christ. They become the place and the matter of holiness, the playing field for exercising the virtues, and a dialogue of love that is expressed in deeds. One’s work is transfigured by the spirit of prayer. Each person discovers the capacity of remaining in a contemplative relation with God even while carrying out the most diverse tasks. For every baptized person who desires to follow Christ faithfully, the factory, the office, the library, the laboratory, the workshop, the home, can be transformed into places for an encounter with the Lord, who chose to live in obscurity for thirty years. Who can doubt that the time Jesus spent in Nazareth was an integral part of his saving mission? The same holds true for us. Daily activities, even in their seeming dullness in the monotony of actions that seem to be repeated and always the same, can also acquire a supernatural dimension and become in a certain way transfigured.

3. In the Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio ineunte, at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I recalled specifically that the ideal of Christian perfection “must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few “uncommon heroes’ of holiness”. Furthermore I added, “The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living” (n. 31). The Lord gives to every baptized person the grace necessary to reach the summit of divine charity. The small events of each day hold, locked with them, an unsuspected greatness. Those actions, undertaken with the love of God and neighbour, can overcome at their very roots every division between faith and daily life. The Second Vatican Council denounced such a division as “one of the gravest errors of our time” (cf. Gaudium et spes, n. 43).
Moreover, by sanctifying one’s work in accord with the norms of objective morality, the lay faithful contribute in an effective way to building up a society that is more worthy of man. They set free creation that groans and suffers waiting for the revelation of the sons of God (cf. Rom 8,19-22). Thus the lay faithful cooperate in fashioning a truly human society that is attentive to the needs of the person and of the common good.

4. Dear brothers and sisters! Continue on with your mission enthusiastically and faithfully, following in the footsteps of your Founder. Show with your daily efforts that the love of Christ can indeed inform the whole gamut of human existence. In this way you will attain the ideal of the unity of life which I insisted on in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, as fundamental to the evangelization of contemporary society (cf. n. 17).

Prayer, work and the apostolate, as you learned from Bl. Josemaría, converge and fuse together when they are lived in this spirit. He always encouraged you to “love the world passionately”. And he added one important clarification: “Be men and women of the world but do not be worldly men and women” (*The Way*, 939). In this way you will avoid the danger of falling into a worldly mentality that views the spiritual life as something confined to the private sphere and irrelevant to the public forum. If men do not welcome the grace of God into their hearts, if they do not pray, if they do not frequent the sacraments, if they do not strive for personal holiness, they lose the very meaning of their earthly pilgrimage. The earth, your Blessed Founder reminds us, is a pathway to heaven, and the life of every believer, even with his or her burdens and limitations, can become a true temple in which dwells the Son of God made man.

5. Along this challenging spiritual and apostolic journey, may you always encounter the example and protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her husband St Joseph. I entrust all of your families to their intercession. To them I entrust all of your activities, so that they may always be at the service of the Gospel. May you always work in fraternal communion and solidarity with all the other members of the Christian people and with all the other ecclesial institutions. May Bl. Josemaría continue to watch over you from Heaven, so that in every circumstance you may be faithful disciples of Christ. I assure you of the support of my prayer
Address to the Roman Rota on the opening of the judicial year (January 28, 2002)

1. I cordially thank Monsignor Funghini, the Dean, who, while expressing your sentiments of respect and concern, explained your daily labour with comments and statistics that stress the serious and complex matters on which you must render a decision. The solemn inauguration of the new judicial year gives me the welcome chance for a cordial meeting with all those who carry out the mission of justice in the Tribunal of the Roman Rota — Prelate Auditors, Promoters of Justice, Defenders of the Bond, Officials and Advocates — to show them my appreciation, my esteem and encouragement. The administration of justice in the Christian community is a precious service, because it constitutes the indispensable premise for authentic charity. Your judicial activity, as the Dean has stressed, is directed above all to causes of matrimonial annulment. On this subject, together with other ecclesiastical tribunals and with a special role among them, that I emphasized in Pastor Bonus (cf. art. 126), you constitute a particular institutional expression of the solicitude of the Church in judging, according to truth and justice, the delicate matter of whether or not a marriage exists. This mission of the tribunals in the Church, an indispensable contribution, belongs to the whole area of the pastoral service to marriage and family life. The pastoral aspect itself calls for the constant effort to develop more fully the truth about marriage and the family, even as a necessary condition for administering justice in this field.

2. The essential properties of marriage — unity and indissolubility (cf. CIC, can. 1056; CCEO, can. 776 3) — offer an opportunity for a fruitful reflection on marriage. Today, taking up what I treated last year in my discourse on indissolubility (cf. AAS, 92 [2000], pp. 350-355), I want to examine indissolubility as a good for spouses, for children, for the Church and for the whole of humanity. A positive presentation of the indissoluble
union is important, in order to rediscover its goodness and beauty. First of all, one must overcome the view of indissolubility as a restriction of the freedom of the contracting parties, and so as a burden that at times can become unbearable. Indissolubility, in this conception, is seen as a law that is extrinsic to marriage, as an “imposition” of a norm against the “legitimate” expectations of the further fulfilment of the person. Add to this the widespread notion that indissoluble marriage is only for believers, who cannot try to “impose” it on the rest of civil society.

3. To give a valid and complete response to this problem one must begin with the word of God. I am thinking concretely of the passage of the Gospel of Matthew that recounts Jesus’ conversation about divorce with some Pharisees and then with his disciples (cf. Mt 19,3-12). Jesus goes radically beyond the debates of his day concerning the factors that could justify divorce asserting: “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (Mt 19,8).

According to the teaching of Jesus, it is God who has joined man and woman together in the marital bond. Certainly this union takes place with the free consent of both parties, but this human consent concerns a plan that is divine. In other words, it is the natural dimension of the union and, more concretely, the nature of man created by God himself that provides the indispensable key for interpreting the essential properties of marriage. The further reinforcement that the properties obtain in Christian marriage by virtue of the sacrament (cf. can. 1056) is based on a foundation of natural law that, if removed, would make incomprehensible the very work of salvation and elevation of the conjugal reality that Christ effected once and for all.

4. Countless men and women of all times and places have complied with this divine and natural plan, even before the Saviour’s coming and a great many others have done so after his coming, even without knowing him. Their freedom expands to the gift of God, both at the moment of their marriage and throughout their entire conjugal life. Yet the possibility always exists of rebelling against that loving plan: then returns the “hardness of heart” that had led Moses to permit divorce but which Christ definitively overcame. To such situations as these, one has to respond with the humble courage of faith, a faith that supports and corroborates reason
itself, to enable it to carry on a dialogue with all who are in search of the true good of the human person and of society. To treat indissolubility not as a natural juridical norm but as a mere ideal empties of meaning the unequivocal declaration of Jesus Christ, who absolutely refused divorce because “from the beginning it was not so” (Mt 19,8).

Marriage “is” indissoluble: this property expresses a dimension of its objective being, it is not a mere subjective fact. Consequently, the good of indissolubility is the good of marriage itself; and the lack of understanding of its indissoluble character constitutes the lack of understanding of the essence of marriage. It follows that the “burden” of indissolubility and the limits it entails for human freedom are no other than the reverse side of the coin with regard to the good and the potential inherent in the marital institution as such. In this perspective, it is meaningless to speak of an “imposition” by human law, because human law should reflect and safeguard the natural and divine law, that is always a freeing truth (cf. Jn 8,32). Pastoral care entails clarity about indissolubility and the support of marital love and communion.

5. This truth about the indissolubility of marriage, like the entire Christian message, is addressed to the men and women of every time and place. In order to make that a reality, testimony to that truth must be given by the Church and, in particular, by individual families as “domestic Churches” in which husband and wife recognize that they are bound to each other forever by a bond that demands a love that is ever renewed, generous and ready for sacrifice.

One cannot give in to the divorce mentality: confidence in the natural and supernatural gifts of God to man prevents that. Pastoral activity must support and promote indissolubility. The doctrinal aspects should be transmitted, clarified and defended, but even more important are consistent actions. Whenever a couple is going through difficulties, the sympathy of Pastors, and of the other faithful must be combined with clarity and fortitude in remembering that conjugal love is the way to work out a positive solution to their crisis. Given that God has united them by means of an indissoluble bond, the husband and wife by utilizing all their human resources, together with good will, and by, above all, confiding in the
assistance of divine grace, can and should emerge from their moments of crisis renewed and strengthened.

6. When one considers the role of law in marital crises, all too often one thinks almost exclusively of processes that ratify the annulment of marriage or the dissolution of the bond. At times, this mentality extends even to canon law, so that it appears as the avenue for resolving the marital problems of the faithful in a way that does not offend one’s conscience. There is indeed some truth to this, but these eventual solutions must be examined in a way that the indissolubility of the bond, whenever it turns out to be validly contracted, continues to be safeguarded. The attitude of the Church is, in contrast, favourable to convalidating, where possible, marriages that are otherwise null (cf. CIC, can. 1676; CCEO, can. 1362). It is true that the declaration of the nullity of a marriage, based on the truth acquired by means of a legitimate process, restores peace to the conscience, but such a declaration — and the same holds true for the dissolution of a marriage that is ratum non consummatum or a dissolution based upon the privilege of the faith — must be presented and effected in an ecclesiastical context that is totally favourable to the indissolubility of marriage and to family founded upon it. The spouses themselves must be the first to realize that only in the loyal quest for the truth can they find their true good, without excluding a priori the possible convalidation of a union that, although it is not yet a sacramental marriage, contains elements of good, for themselves and their children, that should be carefully evaluated in conscience before reaching a different decision.

7. The judicial activity of the Church, which is always at the same time genuinely pastoral activity, draws its inspiration from the principle of the indissolubility of marriage and strives to guarantee its effective existence among the People of God. In effect, without the proceedings and sentences of ecclesiastical tribunals, the question of whether or not an indissoluble marriage exists would be relegated solely to the consciences of the faithful, with the evident risk of subjectivism, particularly when the civil society is experiencing a profound crisis concerning the institution of marriage.

Every correct judgement of the validity or nullity of a marriage contributes to the culture of indissolubility, in the Church and in the world. It is a very important and necessary contribution: indeed, it has an
immediate practical application, since it gives certainty not only to the individual persons involved, but also to all marriages and families. Consequently, an unjust declaration of nullity, opposed to the truth of the normative principles or the facts, is particularly serious, since its official link with the Church encourages the spread of attitudes in which indissolubility finds verbal support, but is denied in practice.

At times, in recent years some have opposed the traditional “favor matrimonii” in the name of a “favor libertatis” or “favor personae”. In this dialectic it is obvious that the basic theme is that of indissolubility, but the antithesis is even more radical with regard to the truth about marriage itself, more or less openly relativized. Against the truth of a conjugal bond, it is not right to invoke the freedom of the contracting parties, who, in freely consenting to that bond, were bound to respect the objective demands of the reality of marriage that cannot be altered in the name of human freedom. Judicial activity must therefore be inspired by a “favor indissolubilitatis”; that clearly does not mean prejudice against just declarations of nullity, but an active conviction of the good at stake in the processes, together with the ever renewed optimism that derives from the natural character of marriage and from the support of the Lord for the spouses.

8. The Church and every Christian must be the light of the world: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5,16). Jesus’ words have a special application today to the indissoluble nature of marriage. It could perhaps seem that divorce is so firmly rooted in certain social sectors that it is almost not worth continuing to combat it by spreading a mentality, a social custom and civil legislation in favour of the indissolubility of marriage. Yet it is indeed worth the effort! Actually, this good is at the root of all society, as a necessary condition for the existence of the family. Its absence, therefore, has devastating consequences that spread through the social body like a plague — to use the term of the Second Vatican Council to describe divorce (cf. Gaudium et spes, n. 47) — and that have a negative influence on the new generations who view as tarnished the beauty of true marriage.
9. The essential witness to the value of indissolubility is given through the married life of the spouses, in their fidelity to the bond, through all the joys and trials of life. *However the value of indissolubility cannot be held to be just the object of a private choice:* it concerns one of the cornerstones of all society. Therefore, while all the initiatives that Christians, along with other persons of good will, promote for the good of the family (for example, the celebrations of wedding anniversaries) are to be encouraged, one must avoid the risk of permissiveness on fundamental issues concerning the nature of marriage and the family (cf. *Letter to Families*, n. 17).

Among the initiatives should be those that aim at obtaining the public recognition of indissoluble marriage in the civil juridical order (cf. *ibid.*, n. 17). Resolute opposition to any legal or administrative measures that introduce divorce or that equate *de facto* unions—including those between homosexuals—with marriage must be accompanied by a *pro-active attitude*, acting through juridical provisions that tend to *improve the social recognition of true marriage* in the framework of legal orders that unfortunately admit divorce. On the other hand, *professionals in the field of civil law* should avoid being personally involved in anything that might imply a *cooperation with divorce*. For *judges* this may prove difficult, since the legal order does not recognize a conscientious objection to exempt them from giving sentence.

For grave and proportionate motives they may therefore act *in accord with the traditional principles of material cooperation*. But they too must seek effective means to encourage marital unions, especially through a *wisely handled work of reconciliation*.

*Lawyers*, as independent professionals, should always decline the use of their profession for an end that is contrary to justice, as is divorce. They can only cooperate in this kind of activity when, in the intention of the client, it is not directed *to the break-up of the marriage*, but *to the securing of other legitimate effects* that can only be obtained through such a judicial process in the established legal order (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2383). In this way, with their work of assisting and reconciling persons who are going through a marital crises, lawyers truly serve the rights of the person and avoid becoming mere technicians at the service of any interest whatever.
10. I entrust to the intercession of Mary, Queen of the Family and Mirror of Justice, the heightening of everyone’s conviction of the good of the indissolubility of marriage. To her I also entrust the zealous work of the Church and of her children, together with that of many other men and women of good will, in this cause that is so crucial for the future of humanity. With these wishes, as I ask divine assistance on all your activities, Prelate Auditors, Officials and Advocates of the Roman Rota, I warmly impart my Blessing to you.

Apostolic letter in the form of a «Motu proprio» Misericordia Dei, on certain aspects of the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance (April 7, 2002)

By the mercy of God, the Father who reconciles us to himself, the Word took flesh in the spotless womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary to save “his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21) and to open for them “the way of eternal salvation”[1]. By identifying Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29), Saint John the Baptist confirms this mission. In all his deeds and preaching, the Precursor issues a fervent and energetic summons to repentance and conversion, the sign of which is the baptism administered in the waters of the Jordan. Jesus himself underwent this penitential rite (cf. Mt 3:13-17), not because he had sinned, but because “he allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (Jn 1:29); already he is anticipating the ‘baptism’ of his bloody death”[2].

Salvation is therefore and above all redemption from sin, which hinders friendship with God, a liberation from the state of slavery in which man finds himself ever since he succumbed to the temptation of the Evil One and lost the freedom of the children of God (cf. Rom 8:21).

Christ entrusts to the Apostles the mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and preaching the Gospel of conversion (cf. Mk 16:15;
Mt 28:18-20). On the evening of the day of his Resurrection, as the apostolic mission is about to begin, Jesus grants the Apostles, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the authority to reconcile repentant sinners with God and the Church: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn 20:22-23).

Down through history in the constant practice of the Church, the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18), conferred through the Sacraments of Baptism and Penance, has always been seen as an essential and highly esteemed pastoral duty of the priestly ministry, performed in obedience to the command of Jesus. Through the centuries, the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance has developed in different forms, but it has always kept the same basic structure: it necessarily entails not only the action of the minister — only a Bishop or priest, who judges and absolves, tends and heals in the name of Christ — but also the actions of the penitent: contrition, confession and satisfaction.

I wrote in my Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte: “I am asking for renewed pastoral courage in ensuring that the day-to-day teaching of Christian communities persuasively and effectively presents the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As you will recall, in 1984 I dealt with this subject in the Post-Synodal Exhortation Reconciliatio et Paenitentia, which synthesized the results of a General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops devoted to this question. My invitation then was to make every effort to face the crisis of ‘the sense of sin’ apparent in today’s culture. But I was even more insistent in calling for a rediscovery of Christ as mysterium pietatis, the one in whom God shows us his compassionate heart and reconciles us fully with himself. It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the Sacrament of Penance, which for the faithful is ‘the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness and the remission of serious sins committed after Baptism’. When the Synod addressed the problem, the crisis of the Sacrament was there for all to see, especially in some parts of the world. The causes of the crisis have not disappeared in the brief span of time since then. But the Jubilee Year, which has been particularly marked by a return to the Sacrament of Penance, has given us an encouraging message, which should not be ignored: if many people, and among them
also many young people, have benefited from approaching this Sacrament, it is probably necessary that Pastors should arm themselves with more confidence, creativity and perseverance in presenting it and leading people to appreciate it”[4].

With these words, I intended, as I do now, to encourage my Brother Bishops and earnestly appeal to them — and, through them, to all priests — to undertake a vigorous revitalization of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is a requirement of genuine charity and true pastoral justice[5], and we should remember that the faithful, when they have the proper interior dispositions, have the right to receive personally the sacramental gift.

In order that the minister of the Sacrament may know the dispositions of penitents with a view to granting or withholding absolution and imposing a suitable penance, it is necessary that the faithful, as well as being aware of the sins they have committed, of being sorry for them and resolved not to fall into them again[6], should also confess their sins. In this sense, the Council of Trent declared that it is necessary “by divine decree to confess each and every mortal sin”[7]. The Church has always seen an essential link between the judgement entrusted to the priest in the Sacrament and the need for penitents to name their own sins[8], except where this is not possible. Since, therefore, the integral confession of serious sins is by divine decree a constitutive part of the Sacrament, it is in no way subject to the discretion of pastors (dispensation, interpretation, local customs, etc.). In the relevant disciplinary norms, the competent ecclesiastical authority merely indicates the criteria for distinguishing a real impossibility of confessing one’s sins from other situations in which the impossibility is only apparent or can be surmounted.

In the present circumstances of the care of souls and responding to the concerned requests of many Brothers in the Episcopate, I consider it useful to recall some of the canonical laws in force regarding the celebration of this Sacrament and clarify certain aspects of them — in a spirit of communion with the responsibility proper to the entire Episcopate[9] with a view to a better administration of the Sacrament. It is a question of ensuring an ever more faithful, and thus more fruitful, celebration of the gift entrusted to the Church by the Lord Jesus after his Resurrection (cf. Jn
20:19-23). This seems especially necessary, given that in some places there has been a tendency to abandon individual confession and wrongly to resort to “general” or “communal” absolution. In this case general absolution is no longer seen as an extraordinary means to be used in wholly exceptional situations. On the basis of an arbitrary extension of the conditions required for grave necessity[10], in practice there is a lessening of fidelity to the divine configuration of the Sacrament, and specifically regarding the need for individual confession, with consequent serious harm to the spiritual life of the faithful and to the holiness of the Church.

Thus, after consultation with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, and the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, and after hearing the views of venerable Brother Cardinals in charge of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, and reaffirming Catholic doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation as summarized in the Catechism of the Catholic Church[11], conscious of my pastoral responsibility and fully aware of the need for this Sacrament and of its enduring efficacy, I decree the following:

1. Ordinaries are to remind all the ministers of the Sacrament of Penance that the universal law of the Church, applying Catholic doctrine in this area, has established that:

   a) “Individual and integral confession and absolution are the sole ordinary means by which the faithful, conscious of grave sin, are reconciled with God and the Church; only physical or moral impossibility excuses from such confession, in which case reconciliation can be obtained in other ways”[12].

   b) Therefore, “all those of whom it is required by virtue of their ministry in the care of souls are obliged to ensure that the confessions of the faithful entrusted to them are heard when they reasonably ask, and that they are given the opportunity to approach individual confession, on days and at times set down for their convenience”[13].

Moreover, all priests with faculties to administer the Sacrament of Penance are always to show themselves wholeheartedly disposed to administer it whenever the faithful make a reasonable request[14]. An
unwillingness to welcome the wounded sheep, and even to go out to them in order to bring them back into the fold, would be a sad sign of a lack of pastoral sensibility in those who, by priestly Ordination, must reflect the image of the Good Shepherd.

2. Local Ordinaries, and parish priests and rectors of churches and shrines, should periodically verify that the greatest possible provision is in fact being made for the faithful to confess their sins. It is particularly recommended that in places of worship confessors be visibly present at the advertized times, that these times be adapted to the real circumstances of penitents, and that confessions be especially available before Masses, and even during Mass if there are other priests available, in order to meet the needs of the faithful[15].

3. Since “the faithful are obliged to confess, according to kind and number, all grave sins committed after Baptism of which they are conscious after careful examination and which have not yet been directly remitted by the Church's power of the keys, nor acknowledged in individual confession”[16], any practice which restricts confession to a generic accusation of sin or of only one or two sins judged to be more important is to be reproved. Indeed, in view of the fact that all the faithful are called to holiness, it is recommended that they confess venial sins also[17].

4. In the light of and within the framework of the above norms, the absolution of a number of penitents at once without previous confession, as envisaged by Can. 961 of the Code of Canon Law, is to be correctly understood and administered. Such absolution is in fact “exceptional in character”[18] and “cannot be imparted in a general manner unless:

1. the danger of death is imminent and there is not time for the priest or priests to hear the confessions of the individual penitents;

2. a grave necessity exists, that is, when in light of the number of penitents a supply of confessors is not readily available to hear the confessions of individuals in an appropriate way within an appropriate time, so that the penitents would be deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time through no fault of their own; it is not considered sufficient necessity if confessors cannot be readily available only
because of the great number of penitents, as can occur on the occasion of some great feast or pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{[19]}

With reference to the case of \textit{grave necessity}, the following clarification is made:

a) It refers to situations which are objectively exceptional, such as can occur in mission territories or in isolated communities of the faithful, where the priest can visit only once or very few times a year, or when war or weather conditions or similar factors permit.

b) The two conditions set down in the Canon to determine grave necessity are inseparable. Therefore, it is never just a question of whether individuals can have their confession heard “in an appropriate way” and “within an appropriate time” because of the shortage of priests; this must be combined with the fact that penitents would otherwise be forced to remain deprived of sacramental grace “for a long time”, through no fault of their own. Therefore, account must be taken of the overall circumstances of the penitents and of the Diocese, in what refers to its pastoral organization and the possibility of the faithful having access to the Sacrament of Penance.

c) The first condition, the impossibility of hearing confessions “in an appropriate way” “within an appropriate time”, refers only to the time reasonably required for the elements of a valid and worthy celebration of the Sacrament. It is not a question here of a more extended pastoral conversation, which can be left to more favourable circumstances. The reasonable and appropriate time within which confessions can be heard will depend upon the real possibilities of the confessor or confessors, and of the penitents themselves.

d) The second condition calls for a prudential judgement in order to assess how long penitents can be deprived of sacramental grace for there to be a true impossibility as described in Can. 960, presuming that there is no imminent danger of death. Such a judgement is not prudential if it distorts the sense of physical or moral impossibility, as would be the case, for example, if it was thought that a period of less than a month means remaining “for a long time” in such a state of privation.

e) It is not acceptable to contrive or to allow the contrivance of situations of apparent \textit{grave necessity}, resulting from not administering the
Sacrament in the ordinary way through a failure to implement the above mentioned norms, and still less because of penitents’ preference for general absolution, as if this were a normal option equivalent to the two ordinary forms set out in the Ritual.

f) The large number of penitents gathered on the occasion of a great feast or pilgrimage, or for reasons of tourism or because of today’s increased mobility of people, does not in itself constitute sufficient necessity.

5. Judgement as to whether there exist the conditions required by Can. 961 §1, 2 is not a matter for the confessor but for “the diocesan Bishop who can determine cases of such necessity in the light of criteria agreed upon with other members of the Episcopal Conference”. These pastoral criteria must embody the pursuit of total fidelity, in the circumstances of their respective territories, to the fundamental criteria found in the universal discipline of the Church, which are themselves based upon the requirements deriving from the Sacrament of Penance itself as a divine institution.

6. Given the fundamental importance of full harmony among the Bishops’ Conferences of the world in a matter so essential to the life of the Church, the various Conferences, observing Can. 455 § 2 of the Code of Canon Law, shall send as soon as possible to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments the text of the norms which they intend to issue or update in the light of this Motu Proprio on the application of Can. 961. This will help to foster an ever greater communion among the Bishops of the Church as they encourage the faithful everywhere to draw abundantly from the fountains of divine mercy which flow unceasingly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In this perspective of communion it will also be appropriate for Diocesan Bishops to inform their respective Bishops’ Conferences whether or not cases of grave necessity have occurred in their jurisdictions. It will then be the task of each Conference to inform the above-mentioned Congregation about the real situation in their regions and about any changes subsequently taking place.

7. As regards the personal disposition of penitents, it should be reiterated that:
a) “For the faithful to avail themselves validly of sacramental absolution given to many at one time, it is required that they not only be suitably disposed but also at the same time intend to confess individually the serious sins which at present cannot be so confessed”[22].

b) As far as possible, including cases of imminent danger of death, there should be a preliminary exhortation to the faithful “that each person take care to make an act of contrition”[23].

c) It is clear that penitents living in a habitual state of serious sin and who do not intend to change their situation cannot validly receive absolution.

8. The obligation “to confess serious sins at least once a year” [24] remains, and therefore “a person who has had serious sins remitted by general absolution is to approach individual confession as soon as there is an opportunity to do so before receiving another general absolution, unless a just cause intervenes”[25].

9. Concerning the place and confessional for the celebration of the Sacrament, it should be remembered that:

a) “the proper place to hear sacramental confessions is a church or an oratory”[26], though it remains clear that pastoral reasons can justify celebrating the Sacrament in other places[27].

b) confessionals are regulated by the norms issued by the respective Episcopal Conferences, who shall ensure that confessionals are located “in an open area” and have “a fixed grille”, so as to permit the faithful and confessors themselves who may wish to make use of them to do so freely[28].

I decree that everything I have set down in this Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio shall have full and lasting force and be observed from this day forth, notwithstanding any provisions to the contrary. All that I have decreed in this Letter is, by its nature, valid for the venerable Oriental Catholic Churches in conformity with the respective Canons of their own Code.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on 7 April, the Second Sunday of Easter, the Feast of Divine Mercy, in the year of our Lord 2002, the twenty-fourth of
my Pontificate.

John Paul II

[1] Roman Missal, Advent Preface I.


[8] Ibid., Chap. 5: DS 1679; Ecumenical Council of Florence, Decree for the Armenians (22 November 1439): DS 1323.


[27] Cf. Can. 964 § 3.


Torna ai contenuti

Review of Other Documents

Review of other documents

John Paul II: Message for the 36th World Communications Day (January 23, 2002)

John Paul II: Letter to all the Heads of State and Government of the World and decalogue of Assisi for peace (March 4, 2002)

Pontifical Council for Social Communications: Ethics in Internet (February 22, 2002)


Torna ai contenuti
Prelate

- Activities of the Prelate
- Homilies
- Addresses
- Articles and Interviews
Activities of the Prelate

Establishment of new Centers of the Prelature

The Prelates Vicars in their respective regions have established Centers of the Prelature in:

Caracas (Venezuela), Las Rozas (Madrid, Spain), Madrid (Spain), Mar del Plata, Rosario, and Trenque Lauquen (Argentina).

Pastoral Trips

On March 17, Bishop Echevarría left Rome for Jerusalem where he stayed for a few days with the faithful of Opus Dei living there and prayed for peace in the Holy Land.

On the morning of the eighteenth, after celebrating Holy Mass in the Holy Sepulcher, the Prelate of Opus Dei visited the Patriarch of Jerusalem and the Apostolic Nuncio. Later that same day, he prayed the Rosary in the Basilica of the Dormition and also went to the Cenacle, to the Church of St. Anne and to the Garden of Olives.

On the Feast of Saint Joseph he spent some time with the faithful of the Prelature and Cooperators of Jerusalem and also visited Emmaus, where he was able to pray the Rosary in the so-called «house of Cellophane» and in the Pretorium of Jerusalem. On the 20th he returned to the Garden of Olives to celebrate Holy Mass.

He returned to Rome by plane from Tel Aviv, on the morning of March 21.

Bishop Echevarría also traveled to Seville at the invitation of Archbishop
Carlos Amigo Vallejo, to participate from April 8 to 13 in the Thirteenth Symposium of the Academy of Ecclesiastical History of Spain and America, entitled «Witnesses of the Twentieth Century, Teachers of the Twenty-First Century.» The Symposium, after some opening words by the Archbishop of Seville, included presentations by Cardinal José Saraiva Martins, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, by Bishop Rafael Palmero Ramos of Palencia, and by other academics who spoke about various persons who lived in the last century and who have been beatified or canonized, or whose cause has begun. The presentation of the Prelate of Opus Dei was entitled «Passionately Loving the World: Blessed Josemaría Escrivá.»

The Symposium, which was closed by the Papal Nuncio to Spain, Bishop Manuel Monteiro de Castro, was also attended by Archbishop Antonio Montero of Mérida-Badajoz, and by the Vicar Generals of various dioceses, and by academic and cultural leaders of Seville.

On the sixth and seventh, Bishop Echevarría took part in get-togethers with a large group of people from Western Andalusia and Extremadura, one of them for more than ten thousand persons, including faithful of the Prelature and their families, Cooperators, and many others who take part in the various formational activities of the Prelature. He exhorted them, among other things, to undertake a new conversion each day, as a way of preparing for the approaching canonization of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. He also had a chance to visit the work being carried out to install a new reredos in the Church of El Señor San José, which was entrusted to priests of the Prelature some years ago by the Archbishop of Seville.

My dear brothers and sisters:

One more year has gone by since my beloved predecessor, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, successor to Blessed Josemaría at the head of Opus Dei, left this world for heaven. It is the eighth anniversary of the day that (as those of us who personally witnessed his virtues are all convinced) was his «birthday» to the glory of his eternal reward. It is easy to imagine that this would be a particularly happy day for him, if one can speak in this way, since after having worked with such great effort, prudence and hope to bring forward Blessed Josemaría's cause of canonization, he now sees it so close to becoming a reality. Reflecting upon the spirit with which Don Alvaro celebrated these grace-filled events, I am sure that, if he were here in the midst of us, he would ask us to view the canonization primarily as an occasion for a deep conversion, as a moment for a great step forward on the path to sanctity.

Today, too, the liturgy, in the immediate prelude to Holy Week, presents us with an urgent invitation to interior transformation. The Church urges us to take this step not with the threat of implacable punishment, but with the spur of hope, with the certain consolation of the infinite efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice for us. With Jesus, of whom it was said: *men scorn me, people despise me,*[1] we too dare to invoke God trustingly: *Lord, come quickly to help me.*[2] We are convinced, as the opening prayer for today’s Mass says, that God *always works to save us.* Besides, during these days He fills us with the joy of a special gift of his grace: the gift, if we don't obstinately refuse it, of an authentic change in our spiritual life. Because conversion means above all growing in love for God.

The Holy Father in his Lenten message asks us, with Christian optimism, to consider how the call to conversion, so characteristic of this liturgical period, should stem more from a knowledge of God’s unconditional mercy, a mercy that is true friendship, than from any confidence in human strength. «God,» the Pope writes, «has loved us with
an infinite mercy, overlooking the grave rupture caused by sin in the human person. He has bent benevolently over our sickness, making of it the occasion for a new and more marvelous effusion of his love. The Church never ceases to proclaim the mystery of his infinite goodness, exalting God’s free choice and desire not to condemn man, but rather to admit him once more to communion with him.»[3] And he concludes with words that can serve as a perennial source of consolation and stimulus for Christians: «Isn’t our whole life marked by God’s benevolence?»[4] In short, the Holy Father exhorts us to meditate on the fact that God does not make his good will depend on our own qualities. He loves us unconditionally, in spite of our continual failings. The Church does not act like some misguided teachers who seek to console by minimizing the importance of the fault committed, which is actually a deception. True consolation is offered only if one has the strength to stir up a desire for reparation in the person who has committed an error. The person who recommends resignation to error assumes that others can’t change, that they can’t escape from their errors. In contrast, the spirit of Lent reminds us that, in God’s eyes, no desire for good goes unheeded.

How can one be sure of God’s unfailing help? We listened a short time ago, in the Gospel of the Mass, to the cruel proposal of the High Priest, Caiaphas: «You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.»[5] A Christian should always remember that Christ died for all men and women, as the Evangelist points out when he affirms that those words, in spite of their malevolence, were in reality a prophetic anticipation of the infinite redemptive value of Christ’s death: *He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.*[6] No one can ever erase from history what happened on Calvary, and which made friendship with God possible for us. That Love that led the Son of God to the Cross embraces every single human being of all times. This is the source of our confidence: the Cross has such great divine efficacy that all of us, despite the weight of our miseries, can look to it with hope for our salvation.
2. Conversion implies a decision to change interiorly, to make a more or less radical change of ideals, of values, of aspirations. Nevertheless, this does not refer only to a person’s interior world. Conversion also entails, inevitably, an effort to improve one’s behavior and habits, and even one’s character. All this does not happen automatically, as if by magic, once we have decided to change. Struggle is needed, a constant joyful, positive struggle against our own defects. Even though at first sight all this may seem difficult, experience teaches us that conversion cannot be seen as a leap into the dark. Rather, it is a return to our Father’s house. This is the meaning of the marvelous parable of the prodigal son, and also of those words from the prophet Ezekiel in the first reading: Behold I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all sides, and bring them to their own land... They shall not defile themselves any more with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will save them from all the backsliding in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people... They shall dwell in the land where your fathers dwelt that I gave to my servant Jacob. They shall live in it.

3. After so many years at Bishop Alvaro del Portillo’s side, I can say that the most pronounced feature of his personality as pastor was precisely his capacity to infuse in those around him, in all circumstances, a hope stronger than any discouragement. He helped everyone to flee from resigning themselves to defeat, from being overwhelmed by the weight of their own weakness. Don Alvaro inherited from Blessed Josemaría a vivid sense of spiritual paternity, and, like a good father, he knew how to understand and love his children with their defects. When someone made a mistake, he did not consider him incapable of reform, but rather showed him that our Lord always gives us a new chance to try once more, to begin again. This fatherly spirit of his was so evident that many people, men and women, priests or laity (many have told me so), asked Don Alvaro to hear their confessions, opening their hearts to him without hesitation.

Tomorrow, Palm Sunday, is the beginning of Holy Week. The liturgy will begin the commemoration of our Lord’s passion, death and resurrection, the culmination of the mystery of our redemption. This is a good moment to apply to ourselves Saint Paul’s exhortation to the Romans:
It is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.\[8\] This is the moment for conversion. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá saw vividly the urgent need to live the fullness of love in every moment of our life. Tomorrow, he wrote, is the adverb of the defeated.\[9\] On occasion I heard him say: I don't believe in that expression «this is the last time»; the last time has already happened! He was referring to the attitude of those who, instead of cutting something off immediately when it is separating them from God or preventing them from getting as close to him as they should, say as an excuse: «This will be the last time.»\[10\] Bishop del Portillo always exemplified the fortitude that, united to prudence, enables one to decide at the right moment, without hesitation. He is telling us now that the moment for conversion has come. And therefore he is inviting us to have recourse without delay, with the needed frequency and with absolute confidence, to the sacrament of Penance, where our heavenly Father, in his infinite mercy, always welcomes each of his children.

May our heavenly Mother help us all to accept this invitation to a new conversion, which will bring a deeper joy and peace to our soul. Amen.

\[1\] Entrance Antiphon (Ps 21:7).

\[2\] Ibid. Ps. 21:20.


\[4\] Ibid.

\[5\] Gospel (Jn 11:49-50).

\[6\] Ibid., verses 51-52.

\[7\] First reading (Ezek 37:21 and 23-25).

\[8\] Rom 13:11.


My dear brothers and sisters:

June 26, the anniversary of the dies natalis of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá to the glory of heaven, is for all of us a day of celebration: a day in which our gratitude to God is shown by a new effort to convert, by the desire to follow more closely the example of fidelity to the Christian vocation given us by Opus Dei’s founder.

Today this anniversary takes on a special significance. It not only marks the centennial of his birth, but also stands at the threshold of his canonization. All of this spurs us to focus with special clarity on the message our Lord wanted to transmit through Blessed Josemaría and his teachings. We have the certitude that, in the life and work of this holy priest, we see reflected the face of God. For the Holy Spirit speaks to us through his saints, whose mission it is to lead men to God.

What is Blessed Josemaría saying to all of us? His personality, both humanly and supernaturally, is so rich that it is impossible to characterize it in a few words. But, thanks be to God, certain features stand out that enable us to formulate an answer. When my predecessor, Don Alvaro, immediately after the death of our beloved founder, had to sum up his life, the meaning of his mission, in one word (for the inscription to be placed on his tomb), he didn’t waver for a moment: The Father. This word, imbued with affection, summed up his life of love and of sacrifice. He had truly been, more than anything, a father for so many souls. He taught us to love Christ. He watched over our formation. He encouraged us to travel the path of holiness with humble acceptance of our personal weakness and, at the same time, with total trust in the power of grace. He inspired in us the determination to make of our life a generous service to the Church and all souls, transmitting the conviction that the Christian vocation is a call to apostolate.

History will remember him as one of the outstanding figures in the life of the Church in the twentieth century—one of the great teachers of Christian life who have left an indelible mark on the passage of time. For
the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei, he will always and above all be: the Father. He taught us to raise all that is human to God. Therefore, among his most characteristic features we find the blending of the human and supernatural virtues, which gives such a natural and normal tone to Christian life. Faith is expressed in an attitude of unfailing trust, fleeing presumption just as much as discouragement. Hope is shown in daring and undertaking great ideals, refusing to be cowed by life’s reversals and lamenting in a corner. Charity is shown in affection, understanding, friendship, loyalty. For Blessed Josemaría, the highest expression of charity was precisely paternity, a gift that made him so deeply loved by those who had the good fortune of knowing him.

Spiritual paternity was certainly one of Blessed Josemaría’s defining features. Many of you recall a passage in which he expresses his own awareness of his mission in life: *I cannot fail to raise my soul in gratitude to God, «from whom every family on heaven and on earth is named»* (Eph 3:15), *for having given me this spiritual paternity, which, through his grace, I have taken on with the full awareness of being on earth only to carry it out. For this reason, I love you with the heart of a father and a mother.*[1]

Thus one can understand Blessed Josemaría’s insistence that in Opus Dei we must foster the united family atmosphere that characterized the early Christian community. We are a family in which each should feel himself loved just as he is (with his defects), understood, esteemed, not judged, excused, appreciated, and, when necessary, corrected (yes, because that too is a way of showing that we truly love one another). A family that is not closed in on itself, but, as a part of the Church, that is open to loving all men and women, bringing to everyone God’s love. Blessed Josemaría gave us the example of such a love, without exceptions or conditions. *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*[2] Charity is the clearest reflection of the love with which God loves us. This is why Blessed Josemaría so insisted on the importance of fraternity. As he wrote in *The Way*, it is in fraternal affection that each of us finds an indispensable support for our spiritual struggle. Relying only on our own strength we can do very little: *frater qui adiuvatur a fratre quasi civitas firma «A brother who is helped by his brother is like a strong city.»*[3] With Christ, and like Christ, we have to give our lives for others.
He also wrote: *The power of charity!* If you live that blessed and brotherly spirit, your mutual weakness will also be a support to keep you upright in the fulfillment of duty—just as in a house of cards, one card supports the other.\[4\]

Those who had the good fortune of knowing Blessed Josemaría personally can relate anecdotes, often moving and graphic ones, that bear witness to his immense affection, expressed in a thousand apparently small details. One need only page through the biographies that have already appeared to see so many examples of this. Now, in heaven, close to God, he is praying untiringly for us, looking after our needs, interceding for our intentions.

Every day letters arrive from all parts of the world telling of spiritual and material favors obtained through his intercession. In this devotion, which the pontifical decree on the heroicity of his virtues called a «part of popular piety,» one can see the fulfillment of God’s plan. God chose him as an instrument to reawaken in many souls the realization that all the ordinary activities of life can be turned into prayer, into a path and means of holiness, a source of peace and joy for so many hearts.

The meeting with Blessed Josemaría or with his writings has changed the lives of many of us here. It has led us to find Christ, to listen to him, to converse with him, to feel his call, to struggle to give witness to him with full Christian consistency. In one way or another, all of us have been led to a real conversion, to the discovery of prayer, to the practice of penance, to the joy of frequent participation in the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist. Thanks to his teachings there has opened out before us the horizons of an active commitment to the building up of the Kingdom of Christ on earth. Thus we can consider ourselves with every right to be his children, and we can be certain that, as the good Father that he is, he will not deny us his personal intercession to obtain the graces that we need.

In particular, today we entrust to his intercession our struggle for sanctity in the midst of the world. Blessed Josemaría taught us to cultivate this great ideal, the only truly necessary one,\[5\] in everyday realities, in occupations that seem ordinary but that conceal something divine. *Sanctity doesn't consist in doing more difficult things each day, but in fulfilling them each time with greater love.*\[6\] Let us ask him to help us to assimilate this truth,
the core of his spiritual message. Let us ask him to help us see the fatherly face of God, who looks for a little more love from us in each of our actions, teaching us to turn our whole day into prayer, into a dialogue with God.

In this context, I would like to read a rich text about a virtue that he considered so important for Christians: naturalness. *Naturalness means that the supernatural, the life of God present in us, shows itself in what is most simple, in ordinary things, in everyday life.*[7] The conclusion of this reflection seems especially relevant to me: *To act naturally is a virtue that requires effort, assiduous practice and determination.*[8] One who acts with the awareness that God is not only a spectator, but also the one to whom our acts are directed, realizes that he is called to heroism, to the plenitude of love, in the most ordinary situations.

May the intercession of Mary Most Holy, the Mother of Christ and our Mother, obtain for us from the Blessed Trinity the grace needed for a new and deeper conversion, a new beginning on the path towards sanctity in all the circumstances of our life. Amen.

[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.

Addresses
Discourse at the Symposium «Witnesses of the Twentieth Century, Teachers of the Twenty-First Century» organized by the Academy of the Ecclesiastical History of Spain and America. Seville, April 8, 2002

«It is especially necessary for us to direct our thoughts to the future which lies before us. Often during these months we have looked towards the new millennium which is beginning, as we lived this Jubilee not only as a remembrance of the past, but also as a prophecy of the future. We now need to profit from the grace received, by putting it into practice in resolutions and guidelines for action.»[1] Thus spoke John Paul II as he concluded the Jubilee of the year 2000, inviting us to begin the new millennium with this perspective. And it is with this perspective that we have to live all the events of the Church’s history, discovering in each circumstance, with the light of faith, motives for giving thanks and prophecies for the future.

The present symposium is a response to this spirit, bringing to our memory certain saints with whom God has blessed his Church in the 20th century, so that, as its title indicates, they might be «teachers of the 21st century.» On various occasions, in connection with the recent commemoration of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, I pointed out that this anniversary should not limit itself to recalling his life and rich personality, but that it should lead us above all to feel challenged by the message that God is addressing to us through his example and teaching.

Similar words could be said about all the saints we are considering today, among whom are included, I am happy to point out, some whose lives were intertwined with that of Blessed Josemaría. These include John XXIII, whom he had the opportunity of meeting several times during his pontificate, and Father Manuel Gonzalez, to whom he was deeply united by their mutual love for the Eucharist and their sincere personal friendship. The 20th century has been, like every period in the Church’s history, rich in saints, in witnesses to God. Turning our glance towards them should fill us with hope for the future, awakening in us a sincere desire that the seed
God planted through their lives and struggles may take root in many hearts.

What was the seed that God planted in history through the preaching and example of Blessed Josemaría? Among other aspects that we might consider, I would like to focus on the content of one of his homilies, «Passionately Loving the World,» which has also provided the title for my talk. Loving the world. Loving it passionately. Loving it in God and for God. Here is one of the fundamental ideas of his message, which he often spoke of as «old as the Gospel, and, like the Gospel, new.» This deeply Christian attitude towards the world, together with the universal call to holiness with which it is intimately related (central points that unfortunately more than once have been forgotten) blossom forth from the same Gospel as the «good news» of heaven for the men and women of our time and of all times.

1. The call to sanctity and passionate love for the world.

«Just think,» writes Blessed Josemaría in The Forge, «there are so many men and women on earth, and the Master does not fail to call every single one.» «He calls them,» he adds, «to a Christian life, to a life of holiness, to a chosen life, to life eternal.»\(^2\) The founder of Opus Dei dedicated his whole life to spreading this «news,» right from that second of October, 1928, when God let him see his will.\(^3\) He spread it both by word and by his writings. Above all, he did so by encouraging Christian decisions, aspiring to see this message transmitted contagiously through the witness of those who, in striving to sanctify their own lives, show that all human life can be made holy.

It is the Church’s mission, says the Holy Father in Novo Millennio Ineunte, «to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium.»\(^4\) And to bring this about, he adds, through each and every Christian, since «the men and women of our own day—often perhaps unconsciously—ask believers not only to ‘speak’ of Christ, but in a certain sense to ‘show’ him to them.»\(^5\)

Our era hungers for Christ’s presence, although often unconsciously. The desire for a world in which peace reigns, the condemnation of violence and crime, the anxiety and bitterness reflected in so much of today’s
literature, the wavering between generosity and escape seen in many young people, are some of the signs of that deep unrest. The men and women of our day, immersed in a constantly changing world, urgently need to contemplate Christ's face. And to do so tangibly, through those who are at their side. Precisely for that reason, the universal call to holiness is an ever-timely message of hope for the world.

God has come to seek us right where we are. He has taken on a body, a human nature, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and accepted all the consequences of a life like our own, culminating in the supreme self-giving on the Cross. And he wants to continue doing so throughout history through Christians as well, whose lives should be a mirror in which others, their brothers and sisters, can find the face of our Lord.

Like the disciples from Emmaus, many people today are walking without a goal, Christians who let themselves be overcome by the apparent defeat of Christ. But Christ continues to come out to meet us. He comes to us through the action of the Holy Spirit who moves hearts. He comes to us through the sacraments and the preaching of the Church. And he wants to reach everyone, making use of our example, our joy and our hope. When we truly live our faith, we Christians show the world that God's absence and Christ's defeat are illusions. Christ has conquered. Sin and death no longer enjoy full power over man, although they have not completely disappeared and at times their action may seem to some to be universal. But the love of God the Father, the power of Christ, the grace of the Holy Spirit are, and always will be, the definitive driving force of history and the north star that inspires mankind's true life.

This profound conviction, this faith, is what distinguishes the Christian, who knows how to base his joy even on pain, his optimism on affliction. The message of the universal call to holiness impels us to undertake a re-evangelization that should embrace everyone. It is striking that the Holy Father has placed holiness «as the foundation of the pastoral planning in which we are involved at the start of the new millennium.»[6] And he emphasized that «to place pastoral planning under the heading of holiness is a choice filled with consequences. It implies the conviction that, since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a
contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: ‘Do you wish to receive Baptism?’ means at the same time to ask them: ‘Do you wish to become holy?’ It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Mt 5:48).”

Blessed Josemaría not only reminded us of the importance of the divine call to be saints, but he also traced out a path to attain it. The affirmation of the universal call to holiness, as preached by the Founder of Opus Dei, was intimately united to his affirmation of the value of secular realities and, consequently, of the world as the place where men and women attain maturity and strive for sanctity. His preaching and his apostolic and priestly activity were not directed solely towards affirming that ordinary Christians can be saints, but that it is precisely their ordinary, everyday life that offers abundant matter for sanctification. The world is «not only... the background of man's life; it is a means and path of holiness. It is something to be sanctified and something which sanctifies.”

This doctrine is opposed both to naturalism and to a disembodied spirituality. Indeed naturalism, which demands the autonomy of the world with respect to God, and, in its extreme form, presents the natural world as the only existing reality, proposes a materialism that is closed to the spirit. Spiritualism, on the other hand, by conceiving the spirit as a reality totally separate from the material, or even opposed to it, ends up in a spirituality that is closed not only to the material, but also to history. In the words of Blessed Josemaría, spiritualism considers «the Christian way of life as something exclusively spiritual, proper to pure, extraordinary people, who remain aloof from the contemptible things of this world, or at most tolerate them as something necessarily attached to the spirit, while we live on this earth.» If naturalism closes man up in the world and rejects any opening to God, spiritualism encourages one to isolate himself from the world in order to attain this encounter. Either of these paths excludes a relationship between the world, man and God.

Spiritualism tries to understand man from the point of view of a God who has only a tangential relationship with the world, because all of one's life of contact with the Creator takes place in an interior space foreign to the world. Therefore, spiritualism ends up distancing oneself from temporal
realities and from history, closing oneself up in a world that is supposedly pure and uncontaminated. What this comes down to in the end is a «bad» clericalism. As Blessed Josemaría wrote «churches become the setting par excellence of the Christian life. And being a Christian means going to church, taking part in sacred ceremonies, being taken up with ecclesiastical matters, in a kind of segregated world, which is considered to be the ante-chamber of heaven, while the ordinary world follows its own separate path.»[11]

Naturalism aspires to understand man from the point of view of an autonomous world in which God should not get involved; even more, in which he has no place. The response to this mistaken focus cannot, however, be based on the mistaken vision that Christians, all Christians, should separate themselves from the world in order to find God. Certainly God calls some to separate themselves from secular activities, and even to center their response to him within the walls of a monastery. But even in that case, the world is not negated or canceled out. Those who are called to this vocation do not sever their influence in the world; on the contrary, they realize that they are invited by Christ to contribute to the salvation of all mankind with their self-giving and prayer. For his part, the ordinary Christian, called by God to sanctify himself in the middle of the world and in the midst of secular activities, understands that the place in which he finds himself, and the activities to which he is dedicated, form a part, and «an important part,» as the Founder of Opus Dei liked to say, of his vocation.

All Christians should love this world of ours, as a reality created by God and therefore endowed with goodness. The ordinary Christian should especially love the world and all the noble realities it contains: professional work, family duties, social relationships... As Blessed Josemaría said so forcefully: «My children, your ordinary contact with God takes place where your fellow men, your yearnings, your work and your affections are. There you have your daily encounter with Christ. It is in the midst of the most material things of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves, serving God and all mankind.»[12]

The world, that is «the whole human family seen in the context of everything which envelops it,»[13] should be for Christians the environment
and matter with which they build up their sanctity and carry out apostolate. The children of God, aware of the greatness of their calling, love the world, seeing it as the setting for their relationship with God. For the lay faithful, this means loving their own vocation, having a full appreciation for the place where God has placed them, in order to seek and serve him. «Be men and women of the world,» wrote Blessed Josemaría in a point in The Way, «but don’t be worldly men and women.»[14]

2. The world, place of our encounter with God

«We must love the world and work and all human things. For the world is good.»[15] The affirmation of the world’s goodness is born of a profound understanding of the central truths of Christian dogma. «I have taught this constantly using words from holy Scripture. The world is not evil, because it has come from God’s hands, because it is his creation, because Yahweh looked upon it and saw that it was good (cf. Gen 1:7ff).»[16] Therefore, God himself, not man, declares the goodness of the world. Strictly speaking, we can say that God doesn’t love it because it is good, but that its goodness is based on the fact that God loves it. Mankind’s sins, although they can make it ugly, are never enough to rob the world of its goodness as a creature of God. Therefore this world distorted by sin can be regenerated, returned to its original goodness. Let us listen once more to Blessed Josemaría: «We must love the world and work and all human things. For the world is good. Adam’s sin destroyed the divine balance of creation; but God the Father sent his only Son to re-establish peace, so that we, his children by adoption, might free creation from disorder and reconcile all things to God.»[17]

God transcends creation. But, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, this is precisely «because he is the free and sovereign Creator, the first cause of all that exists, God is present to his creatures’ inmost being.»[18] Our God is not a distant God. He remains very close to us, continuing granting being and life to everything that exists. As St. Paul says, «in him we live and move and have our being.»[19] This intimate and mysterious presence, joined to the creative act and stronger than man’s sins, is what grounds the goodness of all creation. «For all things are yours,» the apostle to the gentiles says in another place.[20] The world, a gift of God to each of us, has been given to us by God, who has given us the capacity to
possess it through knowledge and love. And in Christ and the Holy Spirit, he has given us the power to conquer evil and sin.

«Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.»[21] In our daily life in the world, we are called to discover God’s love for us, and to correspond to his perfect charity not only in thought and desire, but also with deeds. It is this divine charity that moves God to bestow on us the world as our heritage; only by recognizing this gift can we realize its implications in regard to how we have to live and work, and how we have to sanctify all that we are and all that surrounds us.

With the power and persuasiveness of St. Paul, we have to recall to the men and women of our time that «what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.»[22] «The firmament,» comments St. Athanasius, «through its magnificence, its beauty, its order, is a privileged herald of its maker, whose eloquence fills the universe.»[23] «The silence of the heavens,» says St. John Chrysostom, «is a voice more powerful than that of a trumpet. It cries out to our eyes and not to our ears, showing us the greatness of all he has made.»[24] God «speaks to us in the silence of prayer and in the hubbub of the world,»[25] said Blessed Josemaría, in a phrase that alluded not only to the beauty of the material universe, but to the events of history that man forges with his freedom. Indeed, man's free action contains a natural goodness superior to that of all other creatures in this world, and an openness to the gift of supernatural life.[26]

God shows us his face through the world that we see. This is the ultimate reason why creation presents itself to us as something true, good and beautiful. We discover it through the spectacle of nature, the immensity of the boundless spaces that surround us. But we also find it in human history, marked by sin certainly, but also by the greatness of the human spirit and, above all, by the love of our God, who as all-powerful Father draws good even from evil.[27]
Creation speaks to us of the God who transcends it. Even amid its shadows and at times darkness, it reveals the God who sustains all things in existence. The Eternal Word is «the Word of God, in which is enclosed the meaning of the world, its truth.» Thus to speak of a «sacramentality of the world,» as John Paul II has done, is to recognize there the presence of the mystery of a God who comes in search of man. Here creation is called a «sacrament» by analogy with the seven sacraments, in which the saving power of Christ is made present through the Holy Spirit.

But to speak of the «sacramentality» of the world is more than a mere metaphor. The world brings us to God and helps us to rise up to the Creator. Perhaps we could say that God’s gifts to his creatures in the sacraments complement in a new way, with a full and unexpected gratuity and freedom, his seeking out of each person through the world he has created. To separate the two paths would be to forget the marvelous continuity (within the radical newness) between man’s creation, his elevation to supernatural communion with the Trinity and his later liberation from sin. Our encounter with God in the world prepares us for what is later verified in the sacraments, which enable us to discover and love God better in the activities of each day.

Blessed Josemaría, in encouraging us to «materialize» the spiritual life, to discover God in the most material and ordinary realities, said: «Don’t you see that each Sacrament is the Love of God, with all its creative and redemptive power, giving itself to us by way of material means? What is this Eucharist which we are about to celebrate, if not the adorable Body and Blood of our Redeemer, which is offered to us through the lowly matter of this world (wine and bread), through the ‘elements of nature, cultivated by man?’»

3. The world as a task

Let us now turn to the second point I would like to consider: the world as a task. No human being can live only for himself. He needs to live alongside others, making use of these relationships in his encounter with God. He also knows that his origin and destiny are profoundly linked to creation. Thus, in seeking his own identity, he looks at the cosmos and investigates its origins. Trying to attain his plenitude, he works to perfect
the milieu in which he lives. Zeal for science and technology hide the yearning to know man’s own origin and destiny. For this reason, this search contains, although often unconsciously, a yearning for God.

The world, as a natural revelation, is a word that God directs to the human creature. It is not a word launched into empty space, but one addressed to the concrete beings who populate the earth, so that we can, through his creation, recognize and love the One who is our beginning and end. Thus John Paul II urges us to «see in visible things the message of the invisible God who created them.»[31]

But man was not created only to contemplate the cosmos, to marvel at the vastness of the universe, but also to imprint there, with the language of his work, his reply to God’s love.[32] In entrusting the world to man, God offered him the material upon which to write his filial response to the divine love that brought him into existence.

Therefore, the world is both the place where we encounter God and a task we have to carry out. The march of history, the evolution of societies and civilizations, the development of science and culture, family relationships and all that makes up man’s milieu, forms part of the task God places before his creature, entrusting it to him so that he make it fruitful through the gifts has had granted. This truth can be considered from many points of view. Here I will concentrate on the importance of work, taking as a guide an expression that Blessed Josemaría used frequently: «sanctifying one’s work, sanctifying oneself in one’s work and sanctifying others through one’s work.»[33]

a) Sanctifying work

«The Lord wants his children,» wrote the Founder of Opus Dei, «those of us who have received the gift of faith, to proclaim the original optimistic view of creation: the love for the world which is at the heart of the Christian message. —So there should always be enthusiasm in your professional work, and in your effort to build up the earthly city.»[34] This moral obligation impels us to enrich the world, to devote our time and effort to this noble effort, in a true service towards others.

Man knows he is called to work. Usually he is strongly drawn to his work, with a noble passion. Although at times his efforts lead to failure, he
also knows the joy of work well done. He wants to understand ever better the laws governing the part of nature upon which he exercises his activity, so that he thus can more fully develop the techniques needed to guide it. All of this can be summed up in one phrase: professional eagerness. A sound and upright commitment to one’s own task, which forms part of one’s love of the world.

Professional eagerness not only refers to knowledge and techniques but, also and above all, to persons. It requires not only a noble ambition to grow personally but also a responsible aspiration to serve, to contribute more effectively to the good of those around us. «Man’s great privilege is to be able to love and to transcend what is fleeting and ephemeral. He can love other creatures, pronounce an ‘I’ and a ‘you’ which are full of meaning... This is why man ought not to limit himself to material production. Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love.»[^35] Professional eagerness is not merely egoistic. We love our profession both because of the enrichment it brings our own personality as well as because it contributes to the betterment of the society in which we live.

Man, capable of pronouncing «an ‘I’ and a ‘you’ which are full of meaning.» is also able to reach God, to love the God «who opens heaven’s gates to us, makes us members of his family and allows us also to talk to him in friendship, face to face.»[^36] Thus, for it to be humanly noble, our professional enthusiasm has to make room for God’s love. While engaged in cultivating the earth and perfecting it, we want to offer it to God as a sign of our gratitude. Man, who was created to work, *ut operaretur*, as Genesis puts it,[^37] is called to dedicate himself to his occupations for the glory of God. With his work, the creature enriches the world that he received from God, to present it later to him as a sacrifice of praise.

We should always work with our sight fixed on heaven, persuaded that, by acting in this way, we are not separating ourselves from work and all that it demands, but on the contrary we are impelled to fulfill our obligations better, with a greater professional sense and with greater effort. This is what Blessed Josemaría taught those college students who came to him for advice in Burgos during the Spanish civil war. While walking with them they came to the cathedral and climbed up one of the towers, «so that they could look closely at the stonework, a real tracery of stone, the fruit of
patient and costly work.» And he would tell them: «This is God’s work, this is working for God! To finish your personal work perfectly, with all the beauty and exquisite refinement of this tracery stonework.‘ Seeing it, my companions would understand that all the work we had seen was a prayer, a loving dialogue with God. The men who spent their energies there were quite aware that no one at street level could appreciate their efforts. Their work was for God alone. Now do you see how our professional work can bring us close to our Lord? Do your job as those medieval stonemasons did theirs, and your work too will be operatio Dei, a human work with a divine substance and finish.»[38]

To sanctify one’s profession involves the daily effort to turn one’s work into a holy task, dedicated primarily to God. This means working professionally, producing a finished job, infused from beginning to end with love and a spirit of service.

b) Sanctifying oneself in one’s work

Pope John Paul II says that «the primary basis of the value of work is man himself, who is its subject. This leads immediately to a very important conclusion of an ethical nature. However true it may be that man is destined for work and called to it, in the first place work is ‘for man’ and not man ‘for work.’»[39] A responsible person should always ask himself whether he is contributing in a real and effective way to the good of others, and conduct a healthy examination of conscience based on the criteria and suggestions of the social doctrine of the Church.

The consideration of man as the subject of work has implications that are not only social but also individual. By our work we are called not only to perfect the world and to do good to those around us, but also to enrich ourselves as persons. The effort to perfect the world, to turn it into a home that is always inviting for mankind, has its impact on us as well. «Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity—because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed in a sense becomes ‘more a human being.’»[40]

By sowing good, one becomes good. By sanctifying one’s work, seeking to fulfill one’s task very well, with a Christian spirit, one grows as a
Christian, one becomes holy. When our love for our work is both an expression of our human condition and of our Christian faith, dedication to work becomes a sacrifice pleasing to God. By offering God our daily occupations, we joyfully offer him our life, the noble yearnings of love and service that move us. We present ourselves before God, as St. Paul says, as a fragrant oblation.

In trying to fulfill our tasks heroically each day, we put into play the most varied human virtues: laboriousness, justice, strength, perseverance, integrity, fortitude, prudence. And along with these, the theological virtues: faith, which leads us to perceive the nearness of God and the final meaning of our efforts; hope, which encourages us to trust deeply in God and to persevere in our efforts despite difficulties; charity, which leads us to a joyful love and dedication, shown with sincere deeds. Thus a Christian’s hopes and longings are transformed into a sincere prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God, who has entrusted us with the world and its right ordering as a sign of his predilection, and of petition for our fellow men and women. A prayer that is often expressed in words, but that does not always need them, because it is expressed in the work itself: in its order, punctuality, care for little things.

Thereby the love with which we want to serve God and others is purified, the joyful charity which impels us to be «contemplatives in the middle of the street,» as the founder of Opus Dei liked to repeat. Acting in this way, he said: «wherever we are, in the midst of the noise of the street and of human labors, in the factory, in the university, in the fields, in the office or in the home, we find ourselves in simple filial contemplation, in a constant dialogue with God.»

c) Sanctifying others through one’s work

Our work contributes to bringing those around us closer to God when, carried out with professional competence and a spirit of service, it redounds to the good of society, improving family conditions, the environment, human relationships, etc. Thus the world gradually become more fit for the dignity of man, for his condition as a child of God. But this attitude of service to society, which is always necessary, does not exhaust the apostolic dimension connatural to the Christian spirit, for we would impoverish that
intention if we failed to also foster the personal friendship of each soul with God.

In carrying out our daily work, we establish relationships with many specific people: the members of our own family, our companions and colleagues, bosses and employees, clients and suppliers, those we come across along the street or on the bus.

Faith impels us to recognize those around us as sons and daughters of God. And charity strongly urges us to treat them as such, sharing in their joys, being interested in their problems, and transmitting to them, together with the human help that we can provide, the greatest good we possess: our faith. The human contacts forged by one’s work gives rise spontaneously and naturally to friendship and, through this friendship, to apostolate, to a holy zeal to encourage them to find Christ, to get close to Christ. Citing once more Blessed Josemaría: «The apostolic concern which burns in the heart of ordinary Christians is not something separate from their everyday work. It is part and parcel of one’s work, which becomes a source of opportunities for meeting Christ. As we work at our job, side by side with our colleagues, friends, and relatives and sharing their interests, we can help them come closer to Christ.»[43]

4. The great liturgy of the universe

God, who has no need of anything, created the world out of an act of supreme generosity, purely out of love; as St. Bonaventure said: «not to augment his glory, but to manifest it and communicate it.»[44] The world points beyond its own existence to the unfathomable mystery of God’s life and love, to the immeasurable infinity of God the Father who eternally communicates his entire being to the Son, to the infinite union of love between the Father and the Son who is the Holy Spirit. The «current of love»[45] coursing in the bosom of the Trinity overflows into the creation of man and the angels, called to participate in his intimacy.

«All things have been created through and unto him [Christ]... and in him all things hold together,» said St. Paul. «For it has pleased God the Father that in him all his fullness should dwell, and that through him he should reconcile to himself all things.»[46] The eternal Son, through whom the whole universe subsists, took on human nature, taking on our condition
even to the extreme of dying. Rising in «the spirit who gives life,»\[47] he communicates to all creation the Holy Spirit, of whom He himself is full. By their powerful action, the Son and the Spirit lead all creatures to the Father. Thus the world is seen as a reflection of God’s eternal intra-Trinitarian love, as a gift or offering which the Son and the Holy Spirit continually receive from the Father and continually return to him.

The Blessed Trinity and our supernatural relationship with the Father, in the Son and through the Holy Spirit, is a reality that we can never fully grasp with our intellect. But it should be a central focus in our prayer, because it is the basis of the whole Christian life. And it grounds our love for the world, which involves the commitment to not leave the place we occupy, precisely in order to return it to its Creator. Seeing the world as a gift of heaven, we touch the paternal love that underlies our divine filiation.\[48] «The heavens proclaim the glory of God,» sings the Psalm.\[49] How can we fail to recall those words of Jesus that lead us to discern in that glory the sign of God’s infinite goodness towards us? «Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?»\[50]

Anchored in this awareness of our divine filiation, our aspiration is that not only the heavens, but also history, the development of peoples and societies, equally express the greatness of God, as a manifestation and reflection of his goodness and love. On his path to his ultimate end, man is called to perceive and develop the potentialities impressed by God on the realities that have come from his divine hands. Thus we should see ourselves as invited to continue the work of creation. As John Paul II has put it: «The word of God’s revelation is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth that man, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the Creator.»\[51]

Created in the likeness of the second Adam, Christ, who as the eternal Word upholds all creatures and directs them to the Father, and guided by God the Holy Spirit, who vivifies everything with his love, we men are called to discover in our work God’s paternal face, while striving to collaborate as sons in the Son in the great work of creation. Thus our work takes on infinite horizons, as infinite as God’s love, with a constant awareness of the great gift of our divine filiation. Working in this way, our
task will be transformed into an expression of filial gratitude and contribute to the song of glory to God that the whole universe should intone.

As Pope John Paul II wrote: «Awareness that man’s work is a participation in God’s activity ought to permeate...even the most ordinary everyday activities.» And he continues: «while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women...can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator’s work, consulting the advantages of their brothers and sisters, and contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan.»

Blessed Josemaría preached this same truth tirelessly. In Furrow he wrote graphically: «You are writing to me in the kitchen, by the stove. It is early afternoon. It is cold. By your side, your younger sister—the last one to discover the divine folly of living her Christian vocation to the full—is peeling potatoes. To all appearances—you think—her work is the same as before. And yet, what a difference there is! —It is true: before she only peeled potatoes, now, she is sanctifying herself peeling potatoes.» Through one’s daily duties, each of us, every man and woman, offers God the whole world. By carrying out our tasks in imitation of Jesus and in union with him, we actively participate in the praise that the eternal Son directs to the Father and we feel the joy of being in communion with the Trinity.

5. Christians and the redemption of the world by Christ

These great Christian perspectives would lack solidity if we failed to take into account an important element in our daily experience: the presence of evil and sin in the world.

At the dawn of history, before our first parents’ grave offense, communion with God in the midst of the world was a daily reality. Genesis, using poetic language, tells us that «they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden.» Material creation was not an obstacle to the creature’s union with his Creator. On the contrary, conversation with God arose in a spontaneous and natural way.

Original sin, and later our personal sins, have obscured our vision and weakened our will. Our domination over the earth has become arduous and frequently painful. In fatigue and misunderstandings, in sickness and the
harsh experience of death, the world seems turned against man.

We experience this wound, this difficulty to attain proper self-
dominion, also as a rebellion of the body against the soul. We are assaulted
by inclinations that are in radical opposition to the good we want to do.[56]
Sometimes the world, which should be a means to draw closer to God,
becomes an occasion for separation from him. The world escapes not only
from man’s dominion, but also seemingly from God’s, raising itself against
its own Creator.

But then is the world still something good, loved by God? Christian
faith responds with a strong and decisive Yes. Sin has wounded it, but has
not completely destroyed its goodness. Scripture says: «God so loved the
world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not
perish but have eternal life.»[57] God so loved the world.... Even after sin,
after all the sins witnessed by history, and all the evils occasioned by these
wounds, God did not abandon humanity to its fate, but went out to meet
us, sending his Son into the world.

Upon taking on our nature, the eternal Son of God accepted the world
marked by sin, with the commission of salvation the Father had entrusted
to him. Accepting and loving the world, Jesus reconciled it with God.[58]
For thirty years he experienced the exhaustion of work. Then
abandonment, persecution, treachery and derision. And finally a horrible
death on the cross. Thus God made man concluded the work of creation,
redeeming the world from sin. If God loved his creatures so deeply, even
when they rejected him, how much ought we to give ourselves, loving this
world passionately, to bring it, with Him, to the Father?

«The world awaits us,» said Blessed Josemaría,. «Yes, we love the world
passionately because God has taught us to: Sic Deus dilexit mundum. God so
loved the world. And we love it because it is there that we fight our battles
in a most beautiful war of charity, so that everyone may find the peace that
Christ has come to establish.»[59] The love of God manifested in Christ is
redemptive; it frees the world from sin. It is a love that, one might say,
creates the world anew and entrusts it to us once more.

«He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he
not also give us all things with him?»[60] This «entrusting creation to us
anew» on God’s part includes, in virtue of the grace of Christ through the Holy Spirit, a new capacity to possess it, to accept it, with love and self-giving, and thus to sanctify it and offer it to God the Father. Upon granting us his grace, Jesus illuminates us with his light to know the world as his heart knows it, and he fills us with his strength to love it with rectitude and with an attitude of service. God’s unrestrained love for his creatures, fully shown in Christ’s paschal mystery, is the source which, by overcoming sin, enables Christians to love the world.

From here stems Christian joy, the echo of that first cry of the holy women as they returned, overjoyed and astonished, from the empty sepulcher: Jesus, the Lord, has risen![61] In listening to the word of God and in receiving the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, a Christian nourishes his soul with the power of Christ’s complete self-giving. Thus his involvement in the world, in his family, his work and his social relationships, takes on a deeper and more generous tone, overflowing with faith, hope, and charity.

And when weariness, pain, misunderstanding or rejection come, along with discouragement and the temptation to waver, we can look upon the Cross and recover our strength. As Blessed Josemaría taught: «When you see a poor wooden Cross, alone, uncared-for, and of no value...and without its Crucified, don’t forget that that Cross is your Cross: the Cross of each day, the hidden Cross, without splendor or consolation, the Cross which is awaiting the Crucified it lacks: and that Crucified must be you.»[62] Christ’s Cross is the only path uniting heaven and earth.

Let us never forget it: Christ has brought us victory and invites us to take part in his mission, to cooperate with Him in the task of redemption. Loving the world with Christ’s heart, in joy and in sorrow, in great events and in the ordinary course of daily life, we collaborate with him in the task of preparing the new heavens and new earth that the Book of Revelations speaks of. It is there, the Second Vatican Council teaches, that «we will find...once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured»[63] all the fruits of freedom, fraternity, justice and peace that we have yearned for and sought during our earthly passage.

6. Conclusion
«In a society in which an unbridled craving for material things turns them into idols and a cause of separation from God, the new Beatus reminds us that these same realities, creatures of God and of human industry, if used correctly for the glory of the Creator and the service of one’s brothers and sisters, can be a way for men and women to meet Christ.»[64]

In all that has been said above, I have tried to take as my unifying thread these words spoken by John Paul II on May 17, 1992, in his homily during the solemn rite of beatification of the founder of Opus Dei. In this symposium, we have turned our eyes to «witnesses of the 20th century,» presenting them as «teachers of the 21st Century,» persons we can imitate in this new stage in history.

Every Christian is called to participate in Christ’s mission. Some do so by retiring to the isolation of a monastery, thus giving public testimony to God’s transcendence. Others, by dedicating themselves to the priestly ministry, so indispensable for the Church. Others, the majority, by sanctifying from within the vast gamut of earthly realities and occupations. To everyone the Church directs, also through the words and life of Blessed Josemaría, an invitation to discovering and make known, each in his or her own situation, the good news of the love of God, Creator and Redeemer of the world.


[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., no. 31
Ibid. On holiness as the participation of a created person in the uncreated holiness of God and as the perfection of the person, cf. L. Scheffczyk, «La santidad de Dios, fin y forma de la vida cristiana,» in Scripta Theologica 11 (1979), pp. 1021-1036.


Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, Christ Is Passing By, no. 47.

Ibid., «Passionately Loving the World,» in Conversations, no. 113.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Vatican Council II, Pastoral Const. Gaudium et Spes, no. 2.


Ibid., Christ Is Passing By, no. 112.

Ibid., «Passionately Loving the World,» in Conversations, no. 114.

Ibid., Christ Is Passing By, no. 112.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 300.


1 Cor 3: 21.

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, Passionately Loving the World, in Conversations, no. 114.

Rom 1:19-20.

Saint Athanasius, Expositiones in Psalmos, XVIII (PG, 27, 124).

Saint John Chrysostom, Ad populum antiochenum hom. IX (PG 49, 105).

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, Conversations, no. 62.

For Blessed Josemaría’s teachings on freedom, cf. «El primado existencial de la libertad,» in Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei, cit., pp. 341-356. See also A. Llano, «La libertad radical. Homenaje al Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer,» in Discursos en la
Universidad, Pamplona 2001, pp. 95-104.

[27] Cf. Rom 8, 28.


[29] «In man, created in the image of God, there has been revealed, in a certain sense, the sacramentality of the world», John Paul II, General audience, February 20, 1980, no. 5, in Enseñanzas al Pueblo de Dios, 5 (1980), p. 142-142.


[33] See, for example, Conversations, no. 70, Christ Is Passing By, no. 46 and Friends of God, no. 9.

[34] Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, The Forge, no. 703.

[35] Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, Christ Is Passing By, no. 48

[36] Ibid.


[38] Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, Friends of God, no. 65.


[40] Ibid., no. 9.

[41] Cf. 2 Cor 2:15.


[44] In secundum librum Sententiarum, dist. 1, p. 2, a. 2, q. 1; cited in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 293.


[47] 1 Cor 15:45.


[49] Ps 18 (19) 2.


[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.


[58] Deus erat in Christo mundum reconcilians sibi (2 Cor 5:19).


[60] Rom 8:32.


Inaugural Address of the Congress 'The Greatness of Ordinary Life', which title was 'Teacher, Priest, Father. A human and supernatural profile of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer'. Rome, January 8, 2002

A Christian understanding of the world assures us that divine providence governs physical and human events without destroying the legitimate autonomy of the temporal order. This truth applies, in a special and mysterious way, to the human person. In God's activity—traditionally described as reaching «from end to end mightily» and governing «all things gently»[1]—his omnipotence becomes compatible with the greatest respect for freedom. In short, human beings are not ruled by blind fate. Rather, whether we notice it or not, it is God our Father's loving solicitude that guides us towards what is best—both for his glory and for ourselves.

More specifically, part of the Christian understanding of life is that one's very existence is evidence of a loving design on the part of God, who «chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love.»[2] This universal invitation to holiness acquires in each person the form of a special and irrepeatable calling, which one discovers gradually during life, and which becomes clear if one sincerely and unselfishly seeks to fulfill the Will of God.

Naturally, the vocational condition of human life implies that God in his fatherly solicitude grants each person gratuitously the natural and supernatural gifts needed to fulfill God’s designs perfectly, that is, to fulfill a mission in the world. Therefore, the vocation—with all its demands and necessary graces—cannot be attributed exclusively to a few select or privileged persons. On the contrary, it extends in a universal way to all persons, created by God in his image and likeness. At the same time, nothing about this divine plan contradicts the fact that the vocational nature of human existence can become more evident in persons who have
received an explicit mandate from God that associates them in a singular way with the redemptive mission of his Son, as instruments chosen to spread effectively God’s kingdom among souls. This reality is seen most clearly in the lives of the saints.

The outstanding personality of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá is particularly relevant as regards this evangelical teaching of the universal call to holiness and apostolate, which, since the teaching of Vatican II, is well known to the faithful of the Catholic Church.

First of all, this holy priest is one of the most outstanding contemporary apostles of the spread of the universal call to holiness, above all among the laity. Msgr. Escrivá was a pioneer of this message by recalling clearly—right from the foundation of Opus Dei in 1928—that God’s will for all souls is their sanctification.[3] All men and women are called to the fullness of Christian life in the ordinary circumstances in which divine Providence has placed them, and specifically through their professional work, which is thus converted into a means and instrument of holiness and apostolate.

Secondly, Blessed Josemaría’s life is a convincing example that God grants all the graces needed to carry out the mission one receives. And since his calling, to which he responded so faithfully, holds extraordinary significance in the history of the world and the Church, we should not be surprised that we see his life certain human and supernatural gifts that he always tried to hide in his desire to disappear and pass unnoticed, moved by his deep humility.

This is how the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, expressed it in a homily given in St. Peter’s Square, in thanksgiving to the Most Blessed Trinity, the day after Josemaría Escrivá’s beatification: «The holiness achieved by Blessed Josemaría does not represent an impossible ideal; he is an example not only for certain chosen souls, but rather for countless Christians, called by God to sanctify themselves in the world: in their place of work, in their family and social life. His life is a clear example that daily occupations are not an obstacle to one’s spiritual life; rather they can and should be transformed into prayer. He wrote in his personal notes that he had been surprised to find himself overcome with God’s Love
precisely in the street, amid the noise of the traffic and trams and people; even while reading the newspaper (Josemaría Escrivá, January 26, 1932, in Intimate Notes, no. 673). Many of those present here knew Blessed Josemaría personally. He shared in our struggles and concerns; and it was precisely in the work of every day, in the faithful fulfillment of his daily duties in the Spirit of Christ, that he reached holiness.»[4]

1. Human virtues

The hundredth anniversary of Friedrich Nietzsche’s death took place near the end of August 2000. Many books and articles were published on that occasion. They make clear that the German thinker—in spite of his unbalanced mind and philosophical shortcomings—had a profound influence on the mentality of the last century. One of his best known criticisms of Christians is that they seek exclusively heavenly goods (an attitude that he labels hypocritical and opportunist) while scorning human values, and thus they become «enemies of life.»

Nietzsche’s unjust accusation here is, like so many of his views, confused and exaggerated. For two thousand years Christians have appreciated more than anyone the dignity of the human person. In large measure they have been the ones who have fostered the development of science. They have inspired cultures and civilizations from which have arisen geniuses of art and thought, personalities of extraordinary caliber with a great capacity to lead. And this has been possible because the Church has been faithful to the central dogma of the Incarnation of the Word: Jesus Christ was and is and always will be true God and true man,[5] who restores all things in the light of his Truth.

Blessed Josemaría’s life and teaching show his deep appreciation for the human virtues as the basis for the supernatural ones, a truth not always sufficiently emphasized in the traditional ascetical books used in his first Christian and priestly formation. In a homily he gave in 1941, he affirmed clearly: «If we accept the responsibility of being children of God, we will realize that God wants us to be very human. Our heads should indeed be touching heaven, but our feet should be firmly on the ground. The price of living as Christians is not that of ceasing to be human or of abandoning the effort to acquire those virtues which some have even without knowing
Christ. The price paid for each Christian is the redeeming blood of our Lord and he, I insist, wants us to be both very human and very divine, struggling each day to imitate him who is *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*.

The founder of Opus Dei liked to speak about the «integral formation of young people.» But the first persons who received its spirit from his lips—and the multitude of souls who have later followed this path—did not learn this way of living through a moral theory or a set of teachings. They saw it incarnated in the daily life of that priest who guided them in their Christian life. The testimony of his pastoral work, right up to his death in 1975, confirm that Josemaría Escrivá was a person in whom teaching and life formed an indissoluble unity. He wasn’t a theoretical teacher of ethics and Christian morals; nor was he an enthusiastic leader who drew others after him by appealing to their sentiments. He was a priest in love with Jesus Christ, and out of love for Christ dedicated to the service of souls. His was a strong personality in which the human and the supernatural elements were harmoniously interwoven. His personality, simple and energetic, attracted people by its unmistakable genuineness, by his loyal commitment to what he taught, by his perfect consistency.

God endowed him with special qualities, cultivated by his parents’ Christian teaching and example. In a natural way, he gradually learned the necessity of living the human and Christian virtues, which would form the foundation of his interior life as a young child, as an adolescent, and as a university student. His powers of observation and intuition were truly exceptional. He didn’t see the world around him as imposing itself on him or simply favoring or helping him. Observing how things were done at home and at school, he drew out the consequences for his own life.

He never forgot the friendly smile of his father, who never lost his peace and took a sincere interest in the concerns of everyone around him. I heard from him many stories about Don José Escrivá’s friendship and loyalty, so evident in his dealings with his wife and children. Josemaría discovered in his father the human and divine meaning of friendship and justice. From the moment he began to be aware of his surroundings, he noticed the punctuality and responsibility with which his parents worked. He saw that they carried out their tasks with generosity and joy, never
wasting time; that they strove to always finish them well, for the sake of both God and neighbor.

Their diligence went hand in hand with a deep sense of freedom. He later transmitted the climate of trust he acquired at home to all the places he would live. He also discovered in his family’s atmosphere the need to be completely sincere, and he acquired the uprightness of character that shielded him from critical spirit or murmuring, as well as from resentment or grudges. In the measure that he himself grew in freedom, he learned how to give it to others without ever distrusting them.

He grew up in a family atmosphere marked by good manners and modesty. Living alongside others, he learned how to care for and help them, as well as how to listen to and learn from them. He observed how the elderly, the sick and the poor were treated with respect and understanding. He stored up these experiences and learned that no one should be treated with indifference. He learned from his parents that the persons who help out in the home also form part of the family; thus he showed gratitude and respect towards them and didn’t allow them to serve him unless it was truly necessary. As time went on, many people found themselves freed from the bonds of sadness and loneliness when they experienced how Blessed Josemaría treated them in a brotherly way, with sincere friendship. Not a few acknowledged that in their meetings with this priest, they had nothing to offer him; instead, they found themselves enriched by the charity with which he treated them. I don’t exaggerate when I say that by his friendship and priestly fatherhood he filled many people with spiritual riches and hope. These included many poor people and countless sick persons, persons whom others had abandoned or rejected, workers with humble jobs, and others who had never experienced the security of a family.

His strong character led him to take seriously—as a Christian and a priest—his own life and that of others. Right to the end of his life here on earth, he showed a great eagerness to learn from everyone that he met, in all the countries that he visited.

He was a very grateful person precisely because he focused on the good that others did and appreciated how much it enriched him. He showed a
great capacity to appreciate the goodness and noble ideals, as well as the needs, of others. From childhood, he had a growing desire to deepen his knowledge of doctrine as well as his human, cultural and professional formation.

His naturalness—noble, elegant, normal—shone through his rich personality. He never played the comedian or actor. Yet he was a consummate performer, without trying to be one, when in public or in front of the camera. He didn’t play-act, but he was gifted with a deep capacity to communicate. His constant smile and his penetrating, intelligent and understanding gaze drew people. His words were reinforced by his gestures, by the movement or stillness of his hands. A lively person with a quick mind, he directed all his human gifts to the service of the mission God had entrusted to him.

Those who knew him as a child recall his cheerful and winsome bearing. This too he directed to the mission received from God; he was always a cheerful apostle, who transmitted the need for an operative faith, the firmness of a sure hope and the treasure of a capacity to love God and others for God’s sake. In the final years of his life on earth, he reach out to the hearts of people in many countries to unveil for them the richness of friendship with God.

2. Optimism and hope

Blessed Josemaría’s capacity to attract others cannot be ascribed to a single character trait. The heroic virtues that he lived, recognized as such by the Church, blend together to form a single, well-harmonized temperament.

Nevertheless, among his distinctive character traits, there always stands out his positive spirit, his contagious joy and optimism, with an unshakeable hope that combined human cheerfulness and deep theological roots. This cheerful optimism contrasts greatly with a cultural background so often dominated by pessimism or the somber introversion of a person closed within himself. He knew that any optimism not based on the recognition of man’s transcendent origin and end would never be securely grounded. Thus the optimism of the founder of Opus Dei is at the antipodes of the modern faith in progress, in its anthropocentric and
secularist version. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer’s strongly positive vision of man—«the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake»[8]—has an unmistakable Pauline foundation. All men and women are called to become identified with Christ[9]: to be *alter Christus, ipse Christus*, as he liked to put it.[10]

Underlying Blessed Josemaría’s positive and optimistic personality is his profound understanding of the mysteries of Creation and the Incarnation. This attitude is clearly evident in his invitation to «love the world passionately.» These words form the title of a homily he gave on the campus of the University of Navarre, on October 8, 1967, speaking to thousands of persons attending the open air Mass that day: «God is calling you to serve him in and from the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life. He waits for us every day, in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all the immense panorama of work. Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.... There is no other way. Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find him. That is why I can tell you that our age needs to give back to matter and to the most trivial occurrences and situations their noble and original meaning. It needs to restore them to the service of the Kingdom of God, to spiritualize them, turning them into a means and an occasion for a continuous meeting with Jesus Christ.»[11]

Employing a daring expression, he then referred to «a Christian materialism, which is boldly opposed to that materialism which is blind to the spirit.»[12] His rich humanity and deep faith in the saving presence of Christ in the faithful spurred him to confront in his preaching the areas in which Catholicism was being most attacked at that time. When materialism, in its different forms, was attempting to eradicate the spiritual dimension of reality, Blessed Josemaría warned that a materialism closed to the transcendent impoverishes man, reducing him to a hollow mechanical existence fraught with sadness.

Thousands of persons, including some who were not Christian or who had stopped living their faith, discovered—after meeting this simple and
holy priest overflowing with good humor—the optimism and joy that moved them to change their life. And this continues happening today to those who approach him through books about his life and teachings.

His ability to help people to «materialize» their spiritual life[13] by means of graphic images; his facility to give examples that shed light on daily life and to offer realistic and demanding advice; his capacity to raise the spirits of his listeners and readers and to clarify their confusions—all these reveal a person imbued with a genuine, living hope, a hope that has its origin in his deep union with Christ. That is why his message conveys—as much then as now—the unmistakable impression of *newness*, drinking from the fountain of living waters that flows from the God who makes all things new.[14]

Such is the effect of the transforming power of hope. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: «The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men’s activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity.»[15] A loyal follower of the spirit God gave him to found Opus Dei, a path of holiness in the middle of the world, Blessed Josemaría based his human expectations always on the supernatural virtue of hope, measuring all events in the light of the definitive happiness of contemplating God face to face. When, especially during the last years of his life, he prayed continually *vultum tuum, Domine, requiram,*[16] Lord, I seek your face, he was not giving in to a desire to escape the hardships of life here on earth. Rather he was giving voice to his uncontainable desire to find in heaven the happiness that God had already granted him on earth and that he strove to spread to those around him.

The interior peace that God granted him as a reward for his detachment and upright intention contained not the slightest shadow of stoicism. Rather it was the profound peace of a son of God, founded on the deep conviction that «in everything God works for good with those who love him.»[17] At a time when a Marxist utopian concept of life and a
fallacious liberation theology had penetrated the minds of intellectuals and even of Christians, the founder of Opus Dei promoted social justice through the professional action of lay people. At the same time, he encouraged numerous apostolic initiatives for the human development of the most needy, while reminding people that the true liberation—that which Christ won for us with his Blood—is above all liberation from sin, especially through the sacrament of Penance.

The profound unity in his life moved him to place a high value on earthly realities, to refer them to their Creator and Redeemer, and to try to convert them into an instrument of apostolate: «God did not create us to build a lasting city here on earth (cf. Heb 13:14), because ‘this world is the path to the next life, a dwelling place free from care’ (Jorge Manrique, Coplas, V). Nevertheless, we children of God ought not to remain aloof from earthly endeavors, for God has placed us here to sanctify them and make them fruitful with our faith, which alone is capable of bringing true peace and joy to all men and women. Since 1928 I have constantly preached that we urgently need to Christianize society. We must imbue all levels of mankind with a supernatural outlook. Each of us must strive to raise his daily duties, his job or profession, to the order of supernatural grace. In this way all human occupations will be lit up by a new hope that transcends time and the inherent transience of earthly realities.»[18]

3. Unity of Life

While divine filiation (knowing and sensing that one is a child of God[19]) constitutes the support of the founder of Opus Dei’s spiritual life, its external distinguishing mark is unity of life. That is, the interweaving of the cultural, professional, and social dimensions in one’s life with the spiritual and apostolic ones, since God is interested in every corner of our life. This is not simply a matter of combining our work and daily activity with ascetical struggle and apostolate. Rather unity of life entails a deep and radical unity, in which all the dimensions in one’s life interweave and work together to achieve the fullness of life that is holiness, which we never fully attain in this world.

This is how Blessed Josemaría expressed it: «There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is this life which has to become, in both
soul and body, holy and filled with God. We discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things.»[20]

In informal meetings with persons from every walk of life, he was frequently asked for advice on how one can make compatible the demands of professional work with one’s family, civic and religious obligations. In one way or another, his replies always centered on unity of life as the key to solving the ever increasing complexities generated by today’s society.

Here too one can see his positive and optimistic temperament as the defining feature of his intellectual and human profile. He always advised people to take an active role in confronting life’s difficulties, and never to simply resign themselves passively. For example, once a university student complained to him that, especially on exam days, he found it difficult to make his intense study compatible with prayer. Blessed Josemaría advised him that, besides striving not to neglect the times especially set aside for prayer, «an hour of study, for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer.» [21] A worker or businessman with an exhausting timetable will also find light in his practical advice: «Add a supernatural motive to your ordinary work and you will have sanctified it.» [22]

Another problem very relevant today is how women can make their growing presence in professional activities outside the home compatible with their indispensable work in the family. «Firstly,» Blessed Josemaría answered in an interview in 1968, «let me say that I do not think there need be any conflict between one’s family life and social life. Just as in a man’s life, but with particular shades of difference, the home and the family will always occupy a central place in the life of a woman. For it is obvious that when she spends time on her family she is fulfilling a great human and Christian role. Nevertheless, this does not exclude the possibility of her having other professional work—for housework is also professional work—in any worthwhile employment available in the society in which she lives. I can understand why you state the problem the way you do. But I think that if we systematically contrast work in the home with outside work, retaining the old dichotomy which was formerly used to maintain that a woman’s place was in the home but switching the stress, it could easily lead, from the social point of view, to a greater mistake than that which we are trying to
correct because it would be more serious if it led women to give up their work in the home.»[23]

It is significant that in this same interview, Blessed Josemaría expressly mentions the new technical aids[24] as instruments for saving time and carrying out a variety of tasks. The «new technologies» reflect one of the best known characteristics of our time, and the founder of Opus Dei recognized the possibilities that they opened up for the effective realization of the Christian’s unity of life.

Msgr. Álvaro del Portillo, in his homily on May 18, 1992, echoed what Blessed Josemaría had preached since 1928: «Yes! It is possible to be of the world without being worldly; it’s possible for each person to remain in his place, and at the same time to follow Christ and remain in Him. It’s possible to live in heaven and on earth, to be contemplatives in the middle of the world, transforming the circumstances of ordinary life into an occasion for meeting God and for bringing other souls to God, imbuing human society with the spirit of Christ, offering to God the Father all our work in union with the Sacrifice of the Cross, which is renewed sacramentally in the Eucharist.»[25]

A promoter of centers of research and higher education, Blessed Josemaría encouraged intellectuals, professors and students to work as a team in fostering an interdisciplinary approach to the different fields of human knowledge, combining scientific depth with Christian inspiration. As Grand Chancellor of the University of Navarre, he emphasized in October 1967 that «the university’s highest mission is to serve men, to be a leaven of the society in which it lives. That is why it should investigate the truth in all fields, including theology—the science of the faith, called to examine truths that are always relevant—and all the human and natural sciences.»[26] He sketched the outlines of the Universitas scientiarum, which should continually respond to the new realities and demands of society. «Conscious of this inescapable responsibility, the university opens itself in all countries to new areas, until recently unknown, incorporating into its traditional body of knowledge sciences and teachings of very recent origin, and imprints upon them coherence and intellectual dignity, which are the hallmark of university work.»[27]
In the *Furrow* he describes the characteristics that a Christian intellectual seeking unity of life should strive for:

«Since you want to acquire a Catholic or universal mentality, here are some characteristics you should aim at:

— a breadth of vision and a deepening insight into the things that remain alive and unchanged in Catholic orthodoxy;

— a proper and healthy desire, which should never be frivolous, to present anew the standard teachings of traditional thought in philosophy and the interpretation of history;

— a careful awareness of trends in science and contemporary thought;

— and a positive and open attitude towards the current changes in society and in ways of living.»[28]

Blessed Josemaría gave great importance to the human formation of the faithful of Opus Dei, so that they would conduct themselves in a loyal and noble way with others, without neglecting the most needy, materially as well as spiritually. He established a plan of intense formation, giving special attention to philosophical and theological studies. He took special care of the human and doctrinal dimensions of formation, blending them harmoniously with the ascetical, apostolic and professional dimensions, respecting the utmost freedom of each of the faithful in matters of opinion. He advised that they should never give up reading, but rather that day by day they deepen their secular and religious culture, by a diligent study of the classics of literature and Christian thought.

He saw that, to exert a Christian influence in civil society, one needs a broad, unified formation that deepens and matures over the course of one’s life. That’s why he maintained that *one’s formation never ends*. Only in this way could Christians spread the fire of Christ among their companions, relatives and friends, or, at least, elevate the temperature of their surroundings. In particular, he liked to repeat that Opus Dei «is a great catechesis.» Strictly speaking, it limits itself to forming its members so that afterwards it is they who, in a personal and free way, live according to its spirit wherever they might find themselves.

4. *Love for freedom*
Blessed Josemaría saw in man’s capacity to decide freely the clearest sign of the dignity that enables him to respond voluntarily to God’s requisites, and to undertake a trusting dialogue with God and his fellow men, without discriminating on the basis of race or culture. He points to the reality of a liberation incomparably more radical than that dreamt of by utopian thinkers, because it is the freedom for which Christ has freed us: the liberation Christ won for us on the Cross.

The founder of Opus Dei trusted fully in the free responsibility of the faithful of the Work; he preferred to run the risk that one of them might fall into a mistake than to exercise a suffocating control over them. He was pleased that the members of Opus Dei were very different from one another, even though in all of them one could perceive «the flow of Christ’s clean, supernatural blood, the family blood.» He avoided any show of protocol. He carried out his daily work with the simplicity of an ordinary family, where honorific titles are out of place. He allowed others to call him «the Father» only as a sign of affection and trust, and as a manifestation of the spiritual fatherhood that all of us experienced in him. He granted a great autonomy to all those who carried out tasks of government and formation within Opus Dei. And precisely because of that autonomy, these persons strove in everything sentire cum Patre, to unite themselves to the mind of the Father, who gave them simple and practical indications, far from any casuistry. He did not interfere in any way with the professional or social or political actions of his children, who enjoyed and enjoy, as do all Christian faithful, the greatest freedom in their public and private activities, always with fidelity to the faith and morals of the Church.

One might fear that such an affirmation of freedom could be incompatible with ordinary Christians giving themselves to God. However, Blessed Josemaría avoided falling into this mistaken view, insisting that it is precisely freedom that makes such self-surrender possible: «It is utterly false,» he said, «to oppose freedom and self-surrender, because self-surrender is a consequence of freedom.» He places the capacity for self-determination at the very root of the highest demonstration of freedom, by which a person, freeing himself from the chains of selfishness, surrenders himself trustingly into the hands of his Father God. The gift of freedom granted by God in creating man, and which He restores and strengthens
through the Redemption, becomes at the same time the gift that the creature offers to his Creator and Redeemer as the offering of a son to his Father. Blessed Josemaría proclaimed boldly that the best supernatural reason for my choice to serve God is *because I feel like it*.

Cornelio Fabro has pointed out the originality of this insight: «A new man for the new times of the Church of the future, Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer has grasped by a kind of connaturalness—and also, without doubt, by a supernatural light—the original notion of Christian freedom. Immersed in the evangelical proclamation of freedom understood as liberation from sin, he trusts in the person who believes in Christ. After centuries of Christian spirituality based on the priority of obedience, he makes obedience a consequence of freedom, like the fruit of its flower, or, more precisely, of its root.»[31]

God accepts the risk and the adventure of our freedom. He does not want our life on this earth to be a work of fiction composed beforehand, as if this world were merely a «theater» in which shadows without autonomy pretend they are free. The founder of Opus Dei’s realism led him to the conviction that man’s daily life is a *genuine history*, composed of real opportunities and challenges, of successes and failures, always under the loving protection of divine providence. This implies a certain margin of unexpected happenings, of trials and rectification: the deeply human demand of living out one’s days between the security of God’s omnipotence and the uncertainty of man’s weakness. The Christian is the person who possesses the greatest, the most genuine freedom. He is the «aristocrat» of freedom in this world.

This primacy of free will is at the root of the greatness of ordinary life, which is one of the central points of the message of Opus Dei. The decisions that a person makes each day, in ordinary things as well as extraordinary, overflow with human and supernatural transcendence. It is within this setting of ordinary life that the beautiful drama of personal holiness and apostolic efficacy unfolds. In the vicissitudes of daily life, joy alternates with sorrow, apparent success with no less apparent failure. But when a child of God confronts these situations with supernatural outlook and human competence, he is contributing to the good of his fellow men and to the *new evangelization* to which the Holy Father John Paul II is
constantly urging us. Faith then is not just something to speak about, nor even to proclaim and confess, but a virtue that the Christian must exercise every day in fulfilling his ordinary duties. Those who do so, the founder of Opus Dei used to say, will be «like an intravenous injection in the bloodstream of society.» They will be «God’s consolation,» giving a tired world reasons for hope.

«Some of you listening to me,» he said in 1970, «have known me for a long time. You can bear out that I have spent my whole life preaching personal freedom, with personal responsibility. I have sought freedom throughout the world and I’m still looking for it, just like Diogenes trying to find an honest man. And every day I love it more. Of all the things on earth, I love it most. It is a treasure which we do not appreciate nearly enough.»[32] Authentic freedom is indeed hard to find in this world of ours. Closed circles of power often dictate public opinion and cultural trends. Many people, young and not so young, fall prey to a feverish consumerism and shallow amusements. That is why Blessed Josemaría gives such importance to an education that facilitates the harmonious and complete unfolding of the person, both humanly and supernaturally. His pedagogy of emphasizing freedom seeks to form «true Christians, men and women of integrity, capable of facing all life’s situations with an open spirit, of serving their fellow men and women and helping to solve the problems of mankind, of carrying the testimony of Christ to the society of which they will be a part.»[33] Every educational institution should be a school of responsible freedom, which teaches its students to love freedom and to use it worthily, and to foster it in society.

In Furrow he defends the importance of a healthy freedom for the right exercise of authority in society: «If authority becomes dictatorial authoritarianism, and this situation is extended in time, historical continuity is lost. People without experience in government reach the top and the inexperienced and excitable young want to grab hold of the reins. How many evils and how many offences against God—their own and those of others—are to be blamed on the ones who abuse authority so badly!»[34]

Certainly the different forms of authoritarianism (including the fearsome totalitarianisms of the twentieth century) have at times originated largely from citizens’ own irresponsibility. If a person is not ready to fulfill
his own civic duties, to participate actively, in accord with his possibilities, in civic life, he can hardly complain later that others have not respected his rights or haven’t taken into account his personal opinions. Blessed Josemaría gave great importance to the duty of Catholics to be present—each one according to his or her own convictions—in places where public opinion is formed. He was not referring only or principally to the activity of professional politicians, but rather to the great variety of associations and communities that form the fabric of society, from sports leagues to international agencies. By free and active participation in these forums, the Christian defends the dignity of man, as a person and a child of God; he defends human life from its beginning until its natural end; he upholds justice, the rights of the person and of families, and the great causes of humanity.

One of the tangible consequences of freedom is *pluralism*. An atmosphere that encourages individuals and social groups to form their own ideas and convictions fosters an open dialogue. This dialogue should respect contrary opinions, but without yielding on the fundamental principles that stem from human nature itself, which form the foundation of society. Thus one avoids the error of confusing pluralism with relativism, freedom with irrational spontaneity, democracy with the absence of any firm point of reference.

Genuine pluralism cannot be founded upon relativism, because then convictions would be treated as mere conventions, with the resultant danger of not respecting diversity. Views that are considered to be in the minority (although frequently they are not) find themselves smothered by those who control the sources of public opinion and power. This is especially true today as regards scientific research, particularly in questions of biotechnology. The obvious ethical implications of some of this research must move scientists of good will—in the first place Christians—to take a clear stand in defense of human life. As Blessed Josemaría said in an academic discourse in 1974, «true scientific objectivity justly rejects all ideological neutrality, all ambiguity, all conformism, all cowardice. Love for the truth binds the scientist’s entire life and work, and sustains his upright character in the face of what may be uncomfortable situations, when the
uprightness to which he is committed does not always bring with it a favorable image in public opinion.»[35]

Blessed Josemaría pointed out clearly that the faithful of Opus Dei can, and in fact do defend, positions that are different and even opposed to each other, in all that is open to opinion in society: «Because the Work’s aims are exclusively supernatural, its spirit is one of freedom, of love for the personal freedom of all men. And since this is a sincere love for freedom and not a mere theoretical statement, we love the necessary consequence of freedom which is pluralism. In Opus Dei pluralism is not simply tolerated. It is desired and loved, and in no way hindered.»[36] Anyone with a minimal knowledge of the Prelature of Opus Dei can attest to this fact in all the countries where it carries out its work.

In this way, a positive attitude of dialogue and openness is encouraged in society. Blessed Josemaría constantly strove to «foster everywhere a genuine ‘lay outlook,’ which will lead to three conclusions: be sufficiently honest, so as to shoulder one’s own personal responsibility; be sufficiently Christian, so as to respect those brothers in the Faith who, in matters of free discussion, propose solutions which differ from those which each one of us maintains; and be sufficiently Catholic so as not to use our Mother the Church, involving her in human factions.»[37]

Freedom is essential for the Christian's task. Only by rightly valuing the freedom inseparable from the dignity of men and women created in the image and likeness of God, can one truly grasp Blessed Josemaría’s message: living ordinary life in a holy way.

5. The Greatness of Ordinary Life

A constant refrain in the teaching of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer is that it is possible for Christians to attain the fullness of holiness in the midst of the world, precisely through their normal circumstances and daily tasks. His preaching has opened up to countless persons—not only to the thousands of faithful that form part of the Prelature of Opus Dei—broad and varied paths for finding our Father God in ordinary situations. Holiness is then understood no longer as something reserved to those called to carry out the priestly ministry, nor only for those chosen by God to serve him in a consecrated life, both of which are vocations which will
always be needed in the Church. Rather, holiness is something God requires of all his daughters and sons.

The renewal of the message that all are called to holiness, is a clear sign of the open and positive character of the human and ecclesial personality of Opus Dei’s founder. This is so because it places a high value on each person—whatever his academic background, job or profession—and acknowledges that all noble human desires, including those that can seem trivial and unimportant, have a role to play in the soul’s journey to God.

Thanks, to a great extent, to the wide-reaching apostolic activity generated and sustained by Blessed Josemaría, this teaching about the greatness of ordinary life has reached millions of persons all over world. However, when his apostolic work began—now almost seventy-five years ago—it came as a surprise to many Catholics. The pontifical decree on his heroic virtues describes that reality in the following terms: «Already from the late 1920s, Josemaría Escrivá, a true pioneer of solid Christian unity of life, felt the need of bringing the fullness of contemplation to all the paths of the earth, and he moved all the faithful to take an active part in the apostolic work of the Church, each one remaining in his own place and in his own state in life.»[38] The same document calls this great servant of God and of men a «traveling contemplative.» His life reflects an intimate union with God within a tireless apostolic activity, carried out among a great variety of persons, whom he encouraged to struggle joyfully to be «contemplatives in the middle of the world,» that is, women and men who walk the paths of the earth seeking intimacy with Christ, in order to reach, in Him, the Father, through the Holy Spirit.

The founder of Opus Dei rejoiced when the Second Vatican Council promulgated its teaching about the value of the secular character proper to the laity. As the dogmatic constitution Lumen gentium expresses it: «By reason of their special vocation, it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit of the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like
leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they must manifest Christ to others. It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer.»[39]

The cultural environment in the 1920s and 30s was not receptive to young Father Josemaría Escrivá’s message. Nor in the Catholic world was the call to unite ordinary life and the faith taken seriously. The Second Vatican Council acknowledged, rather, a drastic division: «This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age.»[40] Pope Paul VI went so far as to say that the rupture between the Gospel and contemporary culture is the drama of our age.[41]

The Holy Father John Paul II, in his homily during the beatification of the founder of Opus Dei, said: «With supernatural intuition, Blessed Josemaría untiringly preached the universal call to holiness and the apostolate. Christ calls everyone to become holy in the realities of everyday life. Hence, work too is a means of personal holiness and apostolate when it is lived in union with Jesus Christ, for the Son of God, in the incarnation, has united himself in a certain way with the whole reality of man and with the whole of creation (cf. Dominum et vivificantem, n. 50). In a society in which an unbridled craving for material things turns them into idols and a cause of separation from God, the new Beatus reminds us that these same realities, creatures of God and of human industry, if used correctly for the glory of the Creator and the service of one’s brothers and sisters can be a way for men and women to meet Christ. ‘All things of the earth,’ he taught, ‘including the earthly and temporal activity of men, must be directed to God’ (Letter, 19 March 1954).[42]

Consequently, the goal of «sanctifying one’s work, of sanctifying oneself in one’s work and of sanctifying others through one’s work» implies a profound renewal of the concept of human work, as understood by much of the contemporary world. Such an undertaking would make little sense if work were an exclusively economic reality, carried out to augment one’s wealth, through the manipulation or interchange of products through the
mediation of financial agencies. This stunted view of work is merely a version of practical materialism, also found in ideologies that give scant importance to freedom or have a biased idea of it. The ultimate meaning of the human condition does not lie in the selfish pursuit of profit on the part of the individual, even though the generating of such wealth—thanks to the action of a kind of «invisible hand»—may be for the welfare of all. One cannot do away with the classic idea of the common good (brought up to date in our day by the Church’s social teaching) which is more than simply the sum total of particular interests. If solidarity, true service to one’s neighbor, is lacking, the human dimension of work is truncated. In the same way, the dignity of everyday tasks is diminished if the function of those who carry them out is simply that of a material instrument that can be replaced by a machine.

A text from Blessed Josemaría on the true Christian value of work is worth quoting at length. It is from a homily given on the feast of St. Joseph in 1963: «It is time for us Christians to shout from the rooftops that work is a gift from God and that it makes no sense to classify men differently, according to their occupation, as if some jobs were nobler than others. Work, all work, bears witness to the dignity of man, to his dominion over creation. It is an opportunity to develop one’s personality. It is a bond of union with others, the way to support one’s family, a means of aiding in the improvement of the society in which we live and in the progress of all humanity.

«For a Christian these horizons extend and grow wider. For work is a participation in the creative work of God. When he created man and blessed him, he said: ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth.’ And, moreover, since Christ took it into his hands, work has become for us a redeemed and redemptive reality. Not only is it the background of man’s life, it is a means and path of holiness. It is something to be sanctified and something which sanctifies.

«It is well to remember that the dignity of work is based on Love. Man’s great privilege is to be able to love and to transcend what is fleeting and ephemeral. He can love other creatures, pronounce an ‘I’ and a ‘you’ which are full of meaning. And he can love God, who opens heaven’s gates
to us, makes us members of his family and allows us also to talk to him in friendship, face to face.

«This is why man ought not to limit himself to material production. Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love. We see the hand of God, not only in the wonders of nature, but also in our experience of work and effort. Work thus becomes prayer and thanksgiving, because we know we are placed on earth by God, that we are loved by him and made heirs to his promises. We have been rightly told, ‘In eating, in drinking, in all that you do, do everything for God’s glory’ (1 Cor 10: 31).»

In striving to sanctify our work and other daily tasks, we imitate the thirty years of Christ’s hidden life, spent alongside Mary and Joseph, luminous examples of how the highest holiness requires the humility of not seeking to shine in the eyes of the world.

Perceiving the deep value of ordinary life moves one to put loving care into the details of each day, those «little things» that at times we pass over without noticing their eternal dimension. Christians are called to sanctify the world in the place where they find themselves, helping to repair the disorder caused by sin, and carrying out a direct apostolate with relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers. Their life of prayer, manifested in deeds, is a hidden treasure, a precious spiritual strength that upholds their brothers and sisters working in the various fields that form the complex of human life.

A core virtue for the founder of Opus Dei was his love for order, a virtue that he strove to live heroically throughout his life: finishing each task well and on time, including times for rest. He was convinced that, to carry out great undertakings, great human gifts aren’t required. All one need do is to fulfill with perfection the human and supernatural demands of the task at hand, seeking to draw the greatest possible good out of the qualities the Creator has granted to each person.

Therefore, nothing should distinguish ordinary Christians from their peers, with whom they live shoulder to shoulder in the city of men. However, this is not because they hide their union with God; on the contrary, they make it known to those around them—without timidity but at
the same time without boasting—trying to draw them to the marvels of divine grace. Although not «like the rest,» they are «equal to the rest,» without any mentality of being elite, sharing in all the hopes and challenges that life on this earth brings with it.

In this way, *lay mentality* is linked harmonically with *priestly soul,* with the practical awareness of the royal priesthood of the faithful, endowed with the prophetic mission of announcing the kingdom of Christ in every situation and circumstance. Blessed Josemaría devoted himself wholeheartedly to living his priestly vocation, and he strove to conduct himself always and only as a priest of Jesus Christ. At the same time, he loved and exercised his lay mentality, which moved him to fulfill civil laws with care and not to seek for himself any material gain, not even the smallest, that might derive from his condition as a priest. He never sought privileges. And he encouraged us all, by his example and words, to fasten ourselves to the Cross, knowing how to discover it not in imaginary situations but in the incidents of every day and in serving others with deeds: «Many who would willingly let themselves be nailed to a cross before the astonished gaze of thousands of spectators won't bear the pinpricks of each day with a Christian spirit! But think, which is the more heroic?»

Christian joy «has its roots in the shape of the Cross.» This truth explains why Blessed Josemaría was an extraordinarily joyful person. He always drew attention to the positive side of persons and events, even when at first sight there did not seem to be much that was positive. I noticed this at once when I began to work at his side in the 1950s. As I have described on other occasions, I had the clear awareness of being with a *person filled with many good human qualities,* which made him friendly, affable, affectionate. He was a person who thought about others, with a gift for noticing their needs and fulfilling them, realizing when they were having a hard time. I was very much aware that I was with a *good teacher* who knew how to teach, to encourage, to correct, to trust completely in those working with him. And above all, that I was with a priest and a father, who, day in and day out, moment by moment, devoted himself through his work entirely to serving God and souls, immersed in a very intense prayer.
His unity of life moved him to be both human and supernatural: «We must be very human, for otherwise we cannot be divine.»[47] In synthesis, let me repeat that he was a strong, understanding and optimistic person who lived charity to a heroic degree. He always behaved in a responsible, generous way, full of zeal for souls. He had a holy intransigence when it came to guarding the deposit of the faith, but he showed a holy understanding towards people. He was a persevering worker, a good, sincere and loyal friend. He showed to everyone, without distinctions of any kind, a spirit of service that was courageous and full of affection.

To these virtues one must add those proper to a good priest: He was a great lover of the Eucharist, and lived the liturgy with an extraordinary refinement. He was pious, learned, fully identified with his ministry, a great preacher and director of souls: studious, mortified, detached from himself and his activities. He was a well-ordered person with a deep supernatural outlook: humble, prayerful, passionate about anything that had to do with God, Mary or the Pope. He was obedient in doctrine, and lived heroically the theological and cardinal virtues. Every day he fell more in love with his vocation in order to come closer to God and, for God’s sake, to souls.

He had an ardent temperament. I think this was particularly evident when he spoke about our Lady, and when he revealed his desire to attain the beatific vision. His whole being exuded the joy of someone who knows he will receive a treasure because his Father has it prepared for him. He spoke through his clear, penetrating, serene eyes, as well as through his tone of voice, which was warm and persuasive, and conveyed a great sense of security. And he spoke through his gestures, which seemed to show that he had already begun to enjoy the union with God that he so deeply desired and that the Pope declared solemnly at St. Peter’s Square on May 17, 1992.

[1] Wis 8, 1.


[12] Ibid., no. 115.


[22] Ibid., no. 359.

[23] Conversations..., no. 87.

[24] Cf. Ibid., no. 89.


[27] Ibid., p. 91.

[28] Furrow, no. 428.


[33] Ibid., no. 28.

[34] Furrow, no. 397.


[36] Conversations..., no. 67.

[37] Conversations..., no. 117.

[38] Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum, Romana et Matriten., Decretum super virtutibus heroicis in causa canonizationis Servi Dei Iosephmariae Escrivá de Balaguer, April 9, 1990; AAS 82 (1990) 1450-1455.


[40] Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Const. Gaudium et Spes, no. 43.


[46] Forge, no. 28; cf. Christ Is Passing By, no. 43.

[47] Christ Is Passing By, no. 166.

Torna ai contenuti
What is the present situation of the Work?

At this moment Opus Dei has 85,000 faithful, in 60 countries. They try to spread the message of Christ to their friends, without considering themselves in any way better than others, from whom they too can learn. The true measure of Opus Dei’s situation is whether each member is faithful to Jesus Christ. And on this issue the Prelature’s faithful examine themselves at the end of each day.

The Work has organized various celebrations, but the most important will be the canonization of Blessed Josemaría. Taking into account the controversy that was stirred up by his beatification in 1992, do you fear that the criticisms will be repeated?

I don’t know the date of the canonization. That depends on the Holy Father. Dates for canonizations are usually made public during Consistories. How could we fail to be grateful for the increase of devotion to Blessed Josemaría in so many corners of the world since 1975? I don’t fear controversy, and this is not just wishful thinking: articles and letters I have read during the past months confirm this.

Opus Dei enjoys a great reputation with the present Pope, who granted it the canonical status of a personal prelature in 1982. To what extent has it been important to the Work to be able to count on the Pope’s support?

I think a Catholic should love the Pope, every Pope, with the same affection and veneration. Love for the Roman Pontiff is born of faith, not of preference, because in him we see the Vicar of Jesus Christ among men. And I venture to affirm that the Pope does not make distinctions. He is the father of all Catholics and he treats all with the same charity. Given this
premise, being able to count upon his support is encouraging, an invitation to unity, a motive for thanksgiving and responsibility. The decision to establish Opus Dei as a prelature was based on serious theological and juridical studies. The Second Vatican Council, with the sanction of Pope Paul VI, had laid the groundwork for this. Certainly, John Paul II put his seal on the final document, but the decision was arrived at through a broad agreement; and, at the request of the Pope, the bishops of the countries where Opus Dei was carrying out its apostolate gave their opinions on it.

*Opus Dei and the Society of Jesus are Spanish religious initiatives with their own personality within the Church. The Jesuits are considered liberal and Opus Dei conservative. How are their relations?*

If you will allow me to make a clarifying statement, I would like to say that I discovered Opus Dei in 1948 and have been one of its many faithful ever since, but I have never seen it as something Spanish rather than universal. It was born in Spain, but it was planned by God for the whole world. Additionally, some words that are useful for simplifying matters—such as conservative or liberal—must be used carefully, because many people, for fear of being labeled or pigeonholed, may not say what they truly think. What do I think? That the Society of Jesus has had and continues to have a great mission in the Church and in the world. The Society and the Prelature are different in nature and arose from different charisms. I would not interpret them with terms that are alien to their deepest ecclesial reality, nor would I dare to compare them. Josemaría Escrivá had a great devotion to St. Ignatius Loyola. What a big embrace they must have given each other in heaven!

*The Vatican appreciates the capacity of Opus Dei to bring together big crowds for the ceremonies of the Pope. But what has been, and is, the principal contribution of Opus Dei to the Catholic Church?*

I don’t feel comfortable speaking of Opus Dei’s contribution to the Church, because all the riches of Opus Dei’s spirit come from the Church. Likewise, Blessed Josemaría said: “It is Christ we have to speak about, not ourselves.” If I ask myself what the kernel of Opus Dei’s message and mission is, I would sum it up in the universal call to holiness, the possibility
of transforming the ordinary lives of the faithful into a path of holiness through the sanctification of work and of family and social duties.

Both you and your predecessor at the head of the Prelature, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, had been direct collaborators with Blessed Josemaría. You were his personal secretary for 25 years. Couldn’t one say that there has been too much inbreeding in the succession to the leadership of the Prelature?

I consider the 25 years that I spent close to Opus Dei’s founder as an undeserved privilege and a constant call to responsibility. I can never thank God enough for this gift. And I can say the same of the time that I worked with Bishop Del Portillo. Inbreeding? It is very normal for the choice of prelates of the Church’s hierarchical structures to fall upon persons already working in them.

Josemaría Escrivá lived almost his whole adult life in Rome. Why was this? Was it a high priority for him to obtain a canonical status for Opus Dei?

Rome is the see of Peter, the capital of the Church, the symbol of its universality. Opus Dei was born in Madrid, but with an essentially universal dimension, and therefore it was natural for it to be based in Rome. The canonical status of Opus Dei reflects that original character. Blessed Josemaría had a profound feeling for the law, and he sought a juridical status that would give form to its charism and guarantee its future in the Church. Therefore he used all possible means to find a canonical configuration that would reflect the essential features of Opus Dei.

You said in 1994 that the criticism of Opus Dei proceeded from a Spanish minority. Nevertheless, in Italy in the eighties there was an attempt in the Italian parliament to have Opus Dei considered as a sect or cult. What is it about Opus Dei that bothers people?

First of all, Opus Dei is held in esteem by very many people. In fact, the accusations that you mention were investigated and found to be baseless. In regard to your question, I think that Opus Dei could bother only a person who does not know or is bothered by the Catholic Church itself. Sometimes stereotypes have been formed that have little to do with the reality of the life of the Prelature’s faithful, and which create a picture as disagreeable as it is false. It could also be that some might be bothered by defects or mistakes they have seen in some of the faithful of Opus Dei.
Isn’t it an undue generalization to project those personal failings on the Prelature? There are also people possibly bothered by seeing intellectuals, politicians, businessmen, workers, or fathers and mothers of families who live their faith consistently and who sometimes express an opinion going against the current: in favor of life or of the family, for example.

*The Work has been accused of secrecy and of exercising its great influence in a way that is somewhat hidden. Why is there so much reserve on the part of its members to acknowledge that they belong to it?*

Please pardon me for saying that I don’t agree with this. The faithful of Opus Dei are well known as such to their families, their colleagues, their friends. They do not object, very much to the contrary, to being known as belonging to the Prelature. If this were not the case, how could they speak about what they live, about Opus Dei, about the seeking of sanctity in one’s professional work? I have the impression that this accusation of secrecy is a thing of the past, the result of a manipulation of reality promoted by small groups jealous of their turf. It seems to me that there are few institutions about which so much is known as Opus Dei. An official bulletin of the Prelature is available, and one can find Opus Dei in the telephone book and on the Internet.

*What do you make of the international situation since the terrorist attacks of September 11?*

Like everyone else, I felt great sorrow at these attacks. I was deeply moved by those words of the Pope—I am now speaking from memory—of the hopes for peace, long desired and suddenly wounded by these thorns. I have thought too about the tragedies of our time, like those of Africa, which have occurred far from the television cameras, and which also cry out to heaven. These profound crises demand radical solutions, perhaps new forms of relationship among peoples, in which not the logic of violence, power and money but that of dialogue prevails. It seems that more concrete means of fostering justice must be found.

*There are some who say that it is a question of a real conflict of cultures. How does Opus Dei see relations with Islam?*

I would rather not look at the situation as a planetary conflict. A terrible terrorist act, carried out by a group of fanatics, cannot taint at one
stroke the history and culture of dozens of countries, even though it is for everyone a warning cry.

*What do you believe would be the reaction of Blessed Josemaría, if he were to see the present-day situation, in which one can foresee even the possibility of cloning human beings?*

Humanity has always had a genius for bringing torments upon itself. Cloning is like a nightmare: man has become drunk with the power of science and uses it without moderation, sowing fear and distrust around him. It is precisely this disdain for ethics and morality that could lead one to justify even the worst forms of barbarism of the twentieth century, which wreaked such havoc. I have no doubt that this misuse of science would cause Blessed Josemaría great pain. But in today’s world there are also many positive advances that he would admire and rejoice at.

*Do you think that he would be satisfied with the evolution of his Work?*

I think so. It seems to me that one of his great achievements was encouraging Christians to see themselves as “sowers of peace and joy.” Josemaría Escrivá had great admiration for saints who possessed, according to their contemporaries, a good sense of humor, such as Thomas More, Philip Neri, St. Teresa or Don Bosco. This is why he always had a good rapport with young people.

**Article on the University of Navarre, published in the weekly “Alfa y Omega”**

To be faithful to the etymology of «university,» the University of Navarre fosters all fields of human knowledge, seeking both to augment them and to render society a real and effective service, a service to the truth that frees, that saves: *Veritas liberabit vos*. We want to help construct a rigorous and balanced body of knowledge, tested in its work of synthesis, free of reductionist attitudes, far from ideological deformations and the prejudices of intellectual fads.
Each discipline contributes in its own way to perfecting the individual and society. This common purpose means that all fields of knowledge can and should be inter-related, without losing their particular characteristics and methods. The University of Navarre wants its students to attain a professional training that will permit them to competently serve society and to benefit from an interdisciplinary dialogue. We want them to be imbued with a university and Christian spirit, acquiring an authentic ideal of human excellence that can help them live their life with rectitude and a spirit of service.

In these moments of history, humanity is particularly conscious of its limits and aspires towards profound and radical changes. The most recent experiences of this century show that events not based on a sincere search for the truth are not only futile, but in the end tragic. In the face of all this unrest, the present generation refuses to resign itself to disillusionment, seeking a foundation and a path for real hope. That foundation and path can be none other than the sincere search for the truth, because, in the words of Blessed Josemaría, founder of Opus Dei, «truth is always, in a certain way, something sacred-God’s gift, a divine light that leads us towards the One who is the fullness of light.»

The university, in fulfilling its proper mission, contributes efficaciously to the transformation and betterment of society. When we say that the university exists to serve the truth, we opt for a revolution that might appear lengthy, but that is, in the end, the only profound and lasting one. There is no greater realism than the daily effort based on hope and informed by love. The message of the Gospel, which leads to the fullness of the passage from Genesis-Yahweh looked at the world and saw that it was good-spurs us to a love that is shown in deeds. A love for the original goodness of all created realities, which recognizes in every man and woman, in that specific person who is now beside us, the marvelous dignity of the image of God.

The university, an institution dedicated to the integral formation of responsible men and women, has the task of making great cultural and scientific ideals a reality. Its success rests on the efforts of each generation to incarnate the truth about God and man in their own historic milieu. It rests on a multitude of simple, silent, apparently modest tasks, which
demand human and intellectual honesty, solidarity, initiative, a spirit of collaboration, effort—that is, a high degree of virtue, of self-detachment, of magnanimity, of dedication to others. Those who regularly work in the university, both here in Navarre and in many other places, know well what rich fruit is produced by an ethics of service. An ethic that teaches men and women to finish their work well and to seek the good of persons and societies. In a homily given by Blessed Josemaría on this campus some thirty years ago, he referred to the words of Saint Paul: «In eating, in drinking, do everything as for God's glory.» And he added: «This doctrine of Holy Scripture... leads you to do your work perfectly, to love God and mankind by putting love in the little things of everyday life, and discovering that divine something which is hidden in small details.» Thus even «the most insignificant everyday action» can «overflow with the transcendence of God. That is why I have told you repeatedly, and hammered away once and again on the idea, that the Christian vocation consists in making heroic verse out of the prose of each day.» He closed with these words: «Heaven and earth seem to merge, my children, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives.»

Encouraged by this spirit, which proclaims the greatness of ordinary life, the faculty and staff of the University of Navarre base their efforts on the transforming power of work done with love; on the capacity of social regeneration contained in family ties; on an appreciation for personal freedom and responsibility; and on a lively sense of human solidarity, especially with the most needy. As chancellor, I feel it my duty to remind everyone involved in the university of these ideals, whatever their particular beliefs, which we respect because we love and defend freedom of consciences. Following the teaching of Blessed Josemaría, I am happy to stress that the Christian message about the sanctifying value of human work and daily life is a goal that meets the highest yearnings of persons and societies.

Bishop Javier Echevarría

Chancellor

On December 20 the Holy See published the decrees for a number of canonizations, among them that of the founder of Opus Dei. Although still needing the final approval by the Pope and the cardinals, Josemaría Escrivá, born on January 9, 1902, could be canonized in the next few months. To understand the spirituality of the Work better, we spoke with its present Prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarría.

Your experience as the bishop of a personal prelature is very different from that of bishops who head a diocese. How would you characterize it?

In the four Synods of Bishops in which I have taken part as one of the Synod Fathers, I have felt the solidarity of my brother bishops. As members of the college of bishops we share, united with the Pope, the responsibility for the whole Church. One learns a lot from the others.

Naturally the geographical extension of the Opus Dei Prelature—in China and Estonia, in Lebanon and India, in Mexico and Uganda—puts us in daily contact with very diverse realities. The faithful of the Prelature and its sympathizers and friends who take part in its apostolates form a family. And we are in constant contact with all the problems of mankind, from the most ordinary to the most serious. Included among the latter are hunger (some of the Prelature’s faithful get only one meal a day, for example in the Peruvian Andes or in some of the islands of the Philippines); the war and insecurity in the Holy Land, in Colombia, in the Congo, in South Africa, and in so many other countries. One could also include here the serious intellectual challenges mankind faces, such as those connected with bioethics.

But the means are always the same: the Cross and the Gospel. The mission that the Prelature has received from the Church is addressed to all mankind, reminding all men and women that God loves us and awaits our response in our daily life. In other words, the universal call to holiness, right where each of us is. Opus Dei, therefore, participating in the Church’s mission, shares in «the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the
men of our time» (Second Vatican Council, Constitution Gaudium et Spes, no. 1).

One of the problems that the faithful of the Prelature have to confront is that in many parts of the world Christ is not known. At the same time we have to take into account the spiritual «anorexia» in old Europe, with its «culture of death» and a search for educational equality formulated «at the lowest common denominator.» Thus there is an absence of clear points of reference and the strength needed to combat one’s own defects and sins.

This panorama would be incomplete if we did not mention the noble desires found in many young people, the growth of an ecological concern that is correctly focused, and a greater openness to the existence of God. Although many Western politicians seem to be allergic to mentioning God, he continues to spur the conscience of many people. And many young people continue to discover the «newness» of Christ.

I would like to add that, thanks be to God, this thirst for renewal, for higher horizons, is not just true of youth. At all levels of society, mature men and women who have kept their heart young are ready to receive the truth and to give themselves.

The personal prelature is a unique tailor-made status that permits Opus Dei to be present in every diocese without endangering its independence and authority, something that might give rise to misunderstanding and tensions.

Personal prelatures appeared at the Second Vatican Council as a response to the present pastoral needs of the Church. The Prelature of Opus Dei is an institution that from the theological and canonical point of view is similar to a diocese, as is the case of the military vicariates. It is distinguished not so much by it independence as by the collaboration it offers to the dioceses. Thus the Prelature of Opus Dei constitutes a service that the universal Church offers to the particular churches. In no case does it take the place of these churches or of the diocesan pastoral work.

Indeed, Opus Dei, which has no special liturgy of its own, does not interfere in any way with local authorities. Its faithful go to their parishes, like anyone else, to take part in the Sunday or the daily Eucharist. They celebrate their weddings, baptisms, communions, confirmations or funerals in their parishes, which are under the authority of the bishop of each place.
Often priests of Opus Dei help out in the particular churches, taking care of a university chaplaincy, a parish, or diocesan clergy. In these tasks they are under the authority of the diocesan bishop.

The Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, which is an association united to the Prelature, follows guidelines that the Second Vatican Council set down for priests. It is made up of priests incardinated in the Prelature and diocesan priests who want to receive spiritual help from Opus Dei. To a certain extent, it can be seen as a «self-opening» of the charism of Opus Dei to clergy so that they can benefit from the spirit received by Josemaría Escrivá and sanctify their own priestly ministry.

I would like to emphasize that these priests remain under the exclusive jurisdiction of their diocesan bishop. They receive-and provide-a spiritual help within this association of priests, whose essential characteristic is precisely an ever stronger union with one’s own bishop and one’s brother priests in the diocese. It seeks to help priests in all their needs and to spur priestly vocations in the diocese.

*Do you think any one aspect of the Prelature of Opus Dei is especially difficult for the public in general, believers or non-believers, to grasp?*

In France there is a great tradition regarding the importance of work well done, both in the private and public spheres. Opus Dei, being a work of God (which is what it means in Latin) is hard to understand for a person without faith or who tries to understand his neighbor without first leaving behind his own often exclusively political or sociological mental categories. Thus the social and humanitarian aspect of the Work has drawn the sympathy and collaboration of many non-Christians.

Although it’s true that the Prelature puts special emphasis on the formation of intellectuals—which is not the same as the rich or powerful of this world—in reality its efforts are directed at all who live an ordinary life in the middle of the world. This can bother those who hide from others the fact that they are Christians, or those who nourish an atheistic ideology or desire to eliminate Catholics from public life, from the arena of social debate, from the centers of learning and the world of work.

Consistent Christians are a «pebble in the shoe» for those who want to extinguish the faith. To employ a Gospel metaphor, Christians are meant
to be salt for the world. The real danger is not a lack of understanding «from those outside,» but rather that of the salt becoming insipid, of Christians making a pact with mediocrity, failing to make their lives conform with their faith.

The Prelature of Opus Dei has organized a Congress in honor of the centennial of the birth of its founder, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá.

The Congress organized in Rome by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, under the theme «The Greatness of Ordinary Life,» is one of many ceremonies foreseen for 2002. Not the celebration of a holy priest, but, I dare to say, a celebration of Jesus Christ. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá used to say: «We should speak about Christ, not about ourselves.» Each man, each woman, everyone, is called to sanctity, that is to say, to identify themselves with Christ. Josemaría Escrivá noted in 1930 in his personal journal: «Holy! Remaining in the world, in our ordinary activities, in the duties of our state: there, and thanks to all this, holy!»

A French saying contains a lot of traditional wisdom: «If each one looks after his own concerns, the cows will be safe.» If each one makes the effort, in his own work, in his daily life, to do things well, without letting himself be carried along by agitation and without shutting himself up in a comfortable selfishness, one will be able to meet Christ in order to work with him and in him.

On the personal path of each one’s vocation to holiness, through the grace of the Holy Spirit we are able to transform the environment around us and love all those we encounter, who are our brothers and sisters.

With regard to the canonization of Josemaría Escrivá, permit me to express my joy for the fact that Josephine Bakhita, the Sudanese religious who was beatified with him in May of 1992 has already been canonized. The recognition, on December 20, of a number of miracles, one of which is attributed to the intercession of Josemaría Escrivá, is for me, especially in the framework of the centennial of his birth, another cause for joy. For miracles are always a sign of God’s mercy towards mankind.

Torna ai contenuti
A hundred years after his birth, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá continues to attract people by his fidelity to his mission. But he also continues to be misinterpreted by some for their own purposes. What features of Blessed Josemaría do people find most attractive today?

Yes, a hundred years after his birth Josemaría Escrivá is still close to us in time, and attracts us by his human and Christian vigor. History, specifically the history of the Church, teaches us that those who walk at Christ’s pace are sowers of peace and joy, and also signs of contradiction. News reaches me every day, by word and writing, of many people who find the peace and joy of God when they grasp what he wants to tell us through those friends of his, the saints, among them, Blessed Josemaría.

Features that attract us? I think millions of people have been drawn by the joy of knowing themselves to be children of God. Amid so much stale and sad triviality, souls feel the need to have at their side the smile of someone who lives as Christ’s disciple, who serves others.

What is the main thing that Opus Dei hopes to see come about as a result of the centennial celebration?

Blessed Josemaría wrote and said often that «it is Christ that we have to speak about, and not ourselves.» Therefore I hope that this celebration may awaken in many men and women the realization that Christ should be at the heart of our personal history, through a continual encounter with him in the ordinary circumstances of life. And also in our collective history, through peace, justice and forgiveness. The saddest calamity for a people is to marginalize Jesus Christ, as though He, who gave his life to save us, were an intruder. It would be a marvelous legacy of the centennial to discover once more, and help others discover, those horizons Blessed Josemaría opened to us: «To know Jesus Christ. To make him known. To bring him everywhere.»

In addition, Christian commitment to others’ needs, which Blessed Escrivá so urged us to undertake, is leading many people to begin new social and educational projects, both in third world countries and in
impoverished areas of the developed countries. In Nigeria, for example, a professional school has recently been opened for young men in Lagos who have little possibility of obtaining work. And similar initiatives are being undertaken in various countries. I was very happy during the congress in Rome to see the eagerness of many men and women to begin new tasks aimed at great needs, from the Congo to Colombia, in Asia and in Europe.

From the juridical and pastoral point of view, has the personal prelature been definitively consolidated and accepted in the Church.

Opus Dei was erected as a personal prelature almost twenty years ago. I think that this is sufficient time to speak of the firm establishment of this canonical figure, which has shown itself perfectly suited to Opus Dei’s theological and pastoral reality. From the practical point of view, Opus Dei’s configuration as a personal prelature has better placed the Work in the Church’s pastoral organism, both on the universal level and in regard to the local churches.

What would Blessed Escrivá have to say about the principal problems mankind is facing: terrorism, the family, bioethics...?

He never wanted to impose his own opinion on human problems, because of his refined respect for the freedom of those who came to receive his advice, drawn by his zeal as a good pastor. He only wanted to talk about God, the great love of his life. Precisely for this reason, he was very sensitive to detecting the presence or absence of a Christian spirit in events and situations. In the face of the burning questions of today, I think that Blessed Josemaría would once again remind us that without Christ’s light we remain in darkness, and that without Christ’s love we will never escape from our selfishness. He would invite us to consider the dignity of the person as a child of God. He would speak about the need to foster a stable peace among peoples, built on justice and solidarity, and the importance of the family, founded on indissoluble marriage, both for society and for the Church. Later he would bless the upright solutions that each Christian brings to these questions, in accord with his personal criteria and his responsibility as a faithful of the Church and as a citizen.

Is the role of women within Opus Dei growing?

I think so, both inside and outside of it. From the very beginning of
Opus Dei’s activities for women on February 14, 1930, Blessed Josemaría saw the wide-ranging possibilities of this apostolate. The foundational message was addressed to both women and to men without any distinction. Therefore, leaving aside the ministerial priesthood, which by divine disposition is reserved in the Church for men, in Opus Dei women have had and have responsibilities of equal importance to those of men, neither more nor less. Each, in and through her professional work, tries to bring Christ’s light to the environment around her. Undoubtedly women today face a great challenge, one that they are confronting eagerly, since each can, if she wishes, play a transcendental role in the life of the Church and society.

What is your relationship to the new movements and associations in the Church, and to the religious life?

When I pray the Creed, I like to savor each of the notes that define the Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. The Church is intrinsically one, not a conglomerate of dispersed elements. It is an organism, a body, the Mystical Body of Christ, in which all the members, with their enriching diversity, need one another. All of Opus Dei’s value resides in the fact that it is part of the Church. If it were not «in the Church,» Opus Dei would fall apart. Therefore, any light enkindled in the service of Jesus Christ seems to me something of my own, an expression of the initiative of the same Spirit, of the determination to announce Christ. On a practical plane, Opus Dei tries to maintain a fraternal relationship with all of the sectors in the Church. And it counts on the help of the prayer and the affection of so many persons. To mention only one example, more than five hundred contemplative communities are cooperators of Opus Dei.

What are Opus Dei’s principal apostolic activities in Spain, in regard to the new evangelization?

As in other countries, I think the principal contribution of the faithful of Opus Dei to the new evangelization in Spain is their personal apostolate, the work that each of them carries out to make Christ known in his or her own environment. The Prelature’s concern is to provide a Christian spiritual formation that is in tune with today’s needs and challenges, and that furthers the goals set by the Pope for the new evangelization, and by
my brother bishops in the particular churches. Each one tries to spread that message in his family, in his workplace, among his friends, in the associations he belongs to. The multiplying effect is great, and cannot be reduced to the already broad array of educational, social and charitable initiatives. God’s action in a soul who decides to follow Christ is what is truly fruitful. It would be easy to begin listing the different apostolic activities, but I think they are already sufficiently well known.

What should serve as the main points in the dialogue between faith and culture? What is the principal contribution of members of Opus Dei to the apostolate of the intellect?

Blessed Josemaría described the main points for this dialogue in one of his books:

«—a breadth of vision and a deepening insight into the things that remain alive and unchanged in Catholic orthodoxy;

—a proper and healthy desire, which should never be frivolous, to present anew the standard teachings of traditional thought in philosophy and the interpretation of history;

—a careful awareness of trends in science and contemporary thought;

—and a positive and open attitude towards the current changes in society and in ways of living» (Furrow, no. 428).

I have very little to add to these ideas. A faith that doesn't become culture is dying out, and a culture without faith is soulless, providing no support for man or for society.

What do you consider more important: spirituality or its social repercussions?

It may be that a purely interior spirituality could exist without any kind of repercussions on its surroundings. And social activity lacking any spiritual foundation might also be possible. But Christianity has nothing to do with either of these possibilities. In the Church even the most isolated forms of contemplative life have an immediate and very rich effect on others through the communion of saints. And any social initiative is necessarily inspired by faith, seeing Christ in the face of the needy. I don't see any split between spirit and social action. One or the other may be given more stress, but both are important, and necessary. Jesus Christ spent
long periods retired in prayer, but he also worked for many years in Nazareth, he crisscrossed his country preaching, curing the sick, dining with friends... and always loving.

In a Spain schizophrenically split between faith and life, the ordinary life of some of Opus Dei’s members has a notable social influence. How is this manifested?

I learned from Blessed Josemaría to value unity of life as a fundamental characteristic of Christian life. I agree with you in calling the split between faith and life an illness, and it’s not an exclusively Spanish phenomenon. It’s not always easy to be consistent with one’s faith. Thus neither is it strange that all of us run the risk of sometimes giving in to the enticements of power, or prestige, or simply comfort. But each person, and I include myself here, will one day have to give an account to God for the use we have made of his talents, for the effort we have put into transmitting the power of Christian faith and love to our surroundings.

I know that in Spain some people of Opus Dei are well known in the means of public opinion for trying to foster this Christian outlook. But it is not just a matter of a few people. Those who carry out a job without any public repercussion are also called to be Christ’s leaven in their own environment, to infuse all human realities with a deep Christian spirit.

In the recent congress in Rome on the greatness of ordinary life, a number of well-known intellectuals referred to the marvelous truth that no job is small if it is done in union with Christ. This discovery is not reserved to exceptional people. I would say that God has spent centuries trying to help all men and women understand that he is very close to all of us.

Torna ai contenuti

Article in “L’Osservatore Romano”, on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. Vatican City, January 9, 2002
On January 9, 1902, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer was born in a small city in Spain. A faithful picture of his fruitful passage on earth is the point with which he began The Way: «Don’t let your life be barren. Be useful. Leave a mark. Shine forth with the light of your faith and your love... —And set aflame all the paths of the earth with the fire of Christ that you bear in your heart.»

Yes, he was completely in love with Christ, with a undying love. Therefore the centennial we are now preparing to celebrate is not merely a memorial of the past. If we give in to the temptation to simply commemorate the past, we will have lost the lesson of humility given us by the founder of Opus Dei, who had no use for praise and who always worked without making noise. When the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination arrived, and everyone saw him as a teacher of interior life, he said he felt «like a babbling child.» He also used to say that, on receiving a letter, one throws out the envelope and pays attention only to the message. He was convinced that he was the envelop. The important thing was the message, the spirit of sanctifying ordinary life that God had entrusted to him.

This centennial should direct our eyes to the future. It is not a nostalgic look back, but a proposal to be carried out, a hope, a sincere desire to make progress in love for God and neighbor. We are at the threshold of a new century. The times require an open mind, a readiness to take up unprecedented challenges. They invite us, as the Holy Father wrote in his apostolic letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, to «remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look to the future with confidence» (no. 1).

The message given to the Church through the founder of Opus Dei has an internal dynamism that, as the Pope said in the decree proclaiming the heroic virtues of Blessed Josemaría, is «destined to endure as an inexhaustible source of spiritual light regardless of changing epochs and situations.» This spiritual light teaches us that no one is excluded from God’s call, and that (employing an image from one of his homilies) heaven and earth meet not only on the horizon, but also in the heart of the children of God who daringly commit themselves to seeking Christ present in all earthly realities.
Blessed Josemaría put himself entirely at the service of the mission he had received from God. Everything in his life that referred to himself was left aside. One might say that he lived solely to give birth to and consolidate the institution needed to spread that message, to recall to Christians who live in the middle of the world that God was calling them in and through the occupations of their daily life. «There is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it,» he wrote (Conversations, no. 114). And he poured all of his energies into the service of this ideal, an ideal both great and very ordinary. So many Christians have learned from him to discover, in the supernatural dimension of ordinary life (where others see only pieces of broken glass), pure gold, emeralds, rubies. Thus even routine, banality, daily monotony are transfigured.

The fruitfulness of his life stems from his total commitment to the role in the Church God had assigned to him. A supernatural logic demands that all the room be given to God, that one be humble. But not with the humility of pulling back, but rather giving oneself entirely, not keeping back for oneself the smallest iota of one’s capacities. Therefore I would like to remind everyone today, first of all myself, that in order to develop all the potentialities contained in Blessed Josemaría’s message, we have to be ready to give ourselves as he gave himself.

This is a good moment to grasp more fully that work is service. «How I like that word: service!» the founder of Opus Dei wrote. «To serve my King and, through him, all those who have been redeemed by his Blood. I really wish we Christians knew how to serve» (Christ Is Passing By, no. 182). To serve means to give oneself, ensuring that ours is a love that prefers deeds to words. Solidarity is born here, as well as the humble virtues in which true charity is wrapped: a smile, patience, the art of looking out for others’ concerns, knowing how to be quiet, how to wait. Both what is small and what is great are found in a true spirit of service, which combines humility with charity. In the soul of a Christian there is no place for mediocrity. We have Christ’s eloquent example: «He has done all things well» (Mk 7:37), was the astonished comment of those who met him, both during his childhood days and during his years spent working in Nazareth. To take
part in the epic of the redemption means combining the highest ambition, the search for holiness, with care for little things.

But in order to serve we have to truly renounce ourselves, our own excellence and success, and seek instead the glory of God: «No one can serve two masters» (Mt 6:24). The logic of service also means acquiring a solid professional prestige, based not on appearances but on the capacity to place oneself at the service of the real needs of one’s neighbor. To work in the service of God and of man means to take responsibility, to give good example with one’s own work, to make the talents one has received productive for the common good. And this cannot be attained without a serious effort to exercise virtue while we are working, putting into play one’s own professional competence for a purpose that transcends the immediate result of the activity itself. When one works in this way, the deep motivation, love for God, is evident. Therefore the person who truly works in order to serve has as a goal, beyond that of personal recognition, the search for God’s will in the thousand vicissitudes of daily life. And as a consequence he does not lose his calm in the face of life’s setbacks or unexpected events.

A spirit of service, then, radically changes the hierarchy of values upon which society is usually built up: «Behold the handmaid of the Lord,» says Mary in her eagerness to serve (Lk 1:38). It restores to the Christian a right sense of reality, since it makes him understand what are the true and overriding ideals and goals: «Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all» (Mk 10:43-44). Blessed Josemaría’s example helps us to find in the Gospel the strength to transform the world, to which all Christians are called. The saints bear witness to the reality that the Gospel is always up-to-date. Through them we understand that «Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever» (Heb 13:8).

+ Javier Echevarría

Prelate of Opus Dei
As we commemorate the centennial of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá’s birth, there comes to mind, along with other aspects of his holy life, his continual solicitude for this university, which held such a deep place in his heart and which he now protects from heaven.

He always wanted it to be a powerful focus of science and culture, which would contribute to imparting a deep Christian formation to young men and women from all over the world. He never saw this Alma Mater as a defensive bastion, but dreamt that its influence would become truly universal and that it would gain the high prestige needed to serve effectively the Church and all mankind, especially the most needy, at the same time as it fostered among its staff a sincere desire to learn from others.

When in October of this year we celebrate the University’s golden anniversary, we might be tempted to think that many of those dreams have already become a reality. But fifty years are scarcely the first steps for an institution that measures its history by centuries. The University of Navarre is beginning its path, although the wisdom of its first Grand Chancellor and the intensity of its five first decades—including the difficulties it has had to confront—have conferred on it a splendid maturity, thanks be to God and to the work of so many thousands of people: professors, employees, students, benefactors from throughout the world. Now it is a question of advancing further on the path, growing in our practice of the spirit that this holy priest gave to the university as its richest legacy.

Open and sincere dialogue

This spirit is one of openness, of understanding for everyone, of constant work, of high academic demands, of friendly and cheerful association among people of the most varied mentalities, of an open and sincere dialogue. Such is the atmosphere that, from the human point of view, characterizes the apostolic works of Opus Dei, to whose realization
on earth Blessed Josemaría dedicated his life without reserve. He did so in the fulfillment of a call to holiness which today tens of thousands of people have taken up in the most diverse occupations and professions throughout the whole world. This human atmosphere serves as the foundation for an efficacious struggle for holiness, for the effort to make God the goal of all these activities.

He wanted the university to offer freely to all those who come to it the truth that the fullness of Christian life can be attained in any circumstance of daily life and work.

This is why he wanted to ensure that the teaching imparted here was not limited to the specialized aspects of each subject, but was directed to the integral formation of youth. He left to the University the living legacy of a unified vision of all fields of knowledge, which need to be configured in a Christian synthesis that responds to the demands of our time. Therefore, he encouraged an interdisciplinary vision of university activities and working in teams, where a spirit of service takes precedence over personal recognition. From the start he promoted an environment of collaboration and mutual assistance. He wanted the discoveries that arose from intense work in libraries and laboratories to be put at the service of society.

Through the combined efforts of all of us, we have to see to it that these aspects of his spirit remain alive and ever more fruitful, reinforcing the Christian identity of the academic body in an environment of pluralism and freedom.

Love for truth, justice and freedom

The centennial of our first Chancellor, united to the beloved memory of my predecessor, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, represents a renewed impulse, a new beginning, more enthusiastic than ever, of the marvelous work that the University of Navarre is carrying out. I would like to place special stress on the intensification of research work, in both the scientific and humanistic disciplines, in order to illuminate with daring the first steps of the third millennium, inspired also by the teachings of Pope John Paul II. The help of the Association of Friends, and the Alumni Association will continue to be, as up to now, a valuable support. The level of teaching
required in all subjects offered will continue to be complemented by personal tutoring and the great variety of cultural and social activities sponsored by the University. The life of the university will have to be ever more dynamic, in order to be in accord with the rapidly changing circumstances in this historic moment.

Very timely are the words that the founder of the university spoke at an academic ceremony in 1972: «The university does not turn its back on any uncertainty, any unrest, any need of mankind. Its mission is not to offer immediate solutions. But studying problems with scientific depth will also move hearts, spur on the passive, awake sleeping powers, and form citizens ready to construct a more just society. It thus contributes with its universal work to removing barriers that make it difficult for men to understand one another; it alleviates fear of an uncertain future; and it fosters, through its love for truth, justice and freedom, the true peace and concord of persons and nations.»

A wonderful task of generous and demanding service awaits us. We will carry it out more effectively if we commend our work to the intercession of Blessed Josemaría and place it under the protection of our Lady, Mother of Fair Love, who presides over us from the campus shrine.

Torna ai contenuti

Interview published in the newspaper “La Repubblica”, on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. Rome, Italy, January 10, 2002

_Bishop Echevarría, this has to be a great moment for Opus Dei, since soon its founder will be raised to the altars._

When that takes place, it will mean that the Church will have definitively recognized the holiness of a man who reached the fullness of charity, perfect union with God. Christian holiness consists in the ability to love God above all things and to transmit that love to others. I can assure
you that Blessed Josemaría had a huge heart, amply capable of suffering with whoever suffered and of rejoicing with whoever rejoiced. And he did so whether the affected party was an entire nation, a group of people, a friend or a stranger.

Some have said that Escrivá was hard to get along with, that he was temperamental.

I don’t think that one can say that, although he himself wasn’t bashful in saying that he had a forceful character. God made use of his strong character to open a path for Opus Dei in the world, in the Church, in so many places. He knew how to say the right things, at times energetically, but without leaving resentments. And if he realized he’d made a mistake, he would immediately apologize.

Opus Dei has covered a lot of ground: more than 80,000 members all over the world, close to 2,000 priests, so many undertakings in all six continents. What would you say to a young person today to encourage him to join?

Let me clarify that I wouldn’t urge anyone to join Opus Dei. To follow our Lord in the Work, there is one pre-condition: a freedom that is exercised each day. One should do what God wants, telling him: I do so because I want to. I’d only advise such a person: Be attentive to God’s voice and do whatever he tells you.

And if someone wishes to leave Opus Dei? Is there any pressure?

None at all. Never.

But weren’t there some unpleasant instances in the past?

No, never. The doors are wide open for whoever wishes to leave, yet whoever wishes to enter needs to do a lot of pushing and shoving. If you were a parent and your child was about to choose a mistaken path, would you let him follow his whim without batting an eye? No, you would offer some advice. The only kind of pressure is paternal, fraternal advice. We tell people: Listen, you can do what you like, but think it over, because it’s your life that’s in play.

For years some people have complained about excessive proselytizing, even among minors, or about psychological pressure to go to confession with only Opus Dei priests.
Frankly, such criticisms have never been demonstrated, and it seems to me that they are now things of the past. As far as the duty to confess only with our priests, I must say that it’s simply not true. Such a policy runs counter to the freedom the Church recognizes for all Christians. Moreover, doesn’t it make sense that the prelature’s faithful naturally want to go to confession with a priest who can help them better, because he lives the same spirit as they do? Yet, they are always free to go to whichever Catholic priest they want.

*Don’t you accept any blame? Even the Pope has been known to ask forgiveness.*

I accept that we are all imperfect, that we all ought to correct each other and that we all must examine our conscience to be better children of God. And let me add that we don’t see ourselves as better than others. We know that we are only poor human beings, who must learn from others. We try, with the help of grace, to act responsibly by working well, by leading a good family life and caring for our social duties.

*In the nearly 75 years since its founding, where does the Work’s particular vitality stem from?*

Our specific mission is not to develop specific apostolic undertakings; rather we strive to help men and women at all social levels, who carry out many different kinds of work, to sanctify their lives, and thus to give witness to the Gospel’s universal values. We currently have centers in more than 60 countries, the most recent being in South Africa, Kazakhstan and Lebanon. Wherever they are, the prelature’s faithful try to live sincere Christian lives, earnestly carrying out, in our founder’s words, an apostolate of friendship and trust in their daily family and professional settings. Some of them, seeking to meet the needs of a specific community, bring forward larger undertakings of an educational or beneficent nature. They do so with the collaboration of others, often non-Catholics. It’s no secret that the founder began his apostolate among Madrid’s poor and sick.

*As a man of faith, what concerns you the most?*

The loss of a sense of the sacred in the world: letting worldliness get the upper hand.
How do you see the Church of the third millennium? How should its Pope be?

Opus Dei has no corporate line as to how the Church or papacy should be. The Pope, whoever he might be, gives unity to the Church and is guided by the Holy Spirit. Personally, I think tomorrow’s Church will look both to the future and to its Christian roots. It will look at Christ and at the world in which we live. In this sense I think the word «communion,» employed so often by the Pope in his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, can supply the key to analyzing both the Church’s problems and its mission in the world.

You were Escrivá’s personal secretary from 1953 until his death. How do you recall him?

With his word and writings but above all with his example, he taught us how to live fully the Gospel ideal. He showed us by his life that this ideal is neither utopian nor limited to privileged persons, but rather a call addressed to all Christians. It is an invitation to live the Gospel in every environment and occupation, since every kind of work can be turned into an encounter with Christ.
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA

• The Cause of Canonization
• The Centennial of His Birth
• Other Items
The Cause of Canonization

Publication of the Book 'Cures Through the Intercession of Josemaría Escrivá'

The Postulator of the Cause of Josemaría Escrivá, Msgr. Flavio Capucci, is the author of *Cures Through the Intercession of Josemaría Escrivá*, a book that describes 18 extraordinary cures. It has been published in Costa Rica, France, Italy, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the United States.

All the cures included in the book were declared scientifically inexplicable by the doctors involved. Two of them have been officially approved as miracles by the corresponding canonical process.

The book begins with the story of Sister Concepción Boullón, a Carmelite of Charity who in 1976 was cured of a tumor that disappeared instantaneously and permanently. As the author explains, «this cure has a special importance because, after a rigorous and detailed study, its miraculous character was recognized by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, which led to the beatification of the founder of Opus Dei.»

The testimonies collected in the book show the great variety of people who invoke Blessed Josemaría’s intercession and obtain favors from God: a boy of sixteen recovered his eyesight completely in a short time; a religious sister was cured of a deafness; a sterile woman conceived in a natural way and gave birth to a son; an old man of 87 suffered a cardio-respiratory stoppage which affected his brain; although the clinical symptoms indicated certain death, at the end of eleven hours he awoke from the coma and recovered mental clarity.

The last of the cures described in this volume is that of Doctor Manuel Nevado Rey, which, after being officially recognized as miraculous by decree of the Roman Pontiff, opened the doors to the canonization of Blessed Josemaría.

Msgr. Capucci offers a brief summary of each of the cures. «These are exact descriptions,» he notes, «but we have deliberately avoided overly technical terms so that they can be understood by the average reader. For
Ordinary Public Consistory for voting on various Causes of Canonization (February 26, 2002)

On February 26, His Holiness John Paul II presided over an Ordinary Public Consistory of Cardinals to approve the canonization of various persons being considered for sainthood, including Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. The ceremony took place in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace.

After an introductory prayer by the Holy Father, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints read a brief report on each one’s life and miracles. With the unanimous agreement of the Cardinals as representatives of the universal Church, the Roman Pontiff declared that they could proceed with the canonization of those presented. Then the Pope announced the dates for the canonizations and imparted his blessing.

The dates established for the canonization ceremonies were May 19 for Alonso de Orozco, Ignazio da Santhia, Umile da Bisignano, Paulina do Coração Agonizante de Jesus and Benedetta Cambiagio Frassinello; June 16 for Padre Pio de Pietralcina; July 30 for Juan Diego; July 31 for Pedro de San José Betancourt; and October 6 for Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer.
Eucharistic celebrations throughout the world

The centennial of Blessed Josemaría’s birth on January 9th was the occasion for numerous commemorative events throughout the world. Among the great variety of events organized, liturgical celebrations held the place of honor, often presided over by the local bishop.

In Rome, a solemn concelebrated Mass on January 9 in the Basilica of St. Eugene was presided over by Cardinal Camillo Ruini, the Vicar of His Holiness for the diocese of Rome. Cardinals Lopez Trujillo, Poupard, Re, Saraiva and Sebastiani, along with the Prelate of Opus Dei and seven other bishops concelebrated. Cardinal Daoud and other cardinals and bishops also attended. In his homily Cardinal Ruini stressed the importance of the founder of Opus Dei and his message for the Church.

In the Viennese Cathedral of Saint Stephen, Cardinal Schönborn concelebrated with two other bishops before a congregation of about three thousand. In other cities of Austria such as Innsbruck, Graz and Salzburg, the respective bishops or archbishops celebrated a Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaría.

In the Czech Republic there were Masses in Prague, Brno and other cities. The same was true throughout the rest of Europe, where many bishops celebrated a Mass for the faithful in their dioceses: Cardinal Laszlo Paskai in Budapest, Joachim Meisner in Cologne, Adrianus Simonis in Utrecht, Jean-Marie Lustiger in Paris; Archbishop Emile Marcus in Toulouse, Bernard Panafieu in Marseilles, Elias Yanes in Saragossa. Particularly moving was the Mass celebrated in Barbastro, the birthplace of Blessed Josemaría, by Bishop Juan José Omella, the Ordinary of that diocese.

Throughout North and South America there were Masses on or near January 9. In San José, Costa Rica, the Holy Sacrifice was offered by Archbishop Roman Arrieta, accompanied by Auxiliary Bishop Antonio Troyo, Father Luis Baura de la Peña, the Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in Costa Rica and twenty other priests of the Archdiocese. Some 2,500 people of all walks of life took part in the celebration. In the cathedral of Managua
it was Cardinal Miguel Obando Y Bravo, also accompanied by an auxiliary bishop and other priests, who officiated at the ceremony. The same was done by Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte in Montreal and Archbishop Adam Exner in Vancouver, among other Canadian prelates.

In Cali, Colombia, the solemn concelebration was presided over by Archbishop Isaias Duarte Cancino of Cali, who was assassinated a few weeks later. In his homily he referred to Blessed Josemaría as one of the great figures of the twentieth century. Our prayers are now raised in suffrage for Archbishop Duarte and in asking forgiveness for those who committed the horrible crime.

In Quito’s cathedral, ten bishops and forty priests concelebrated a Mass presided over by Archbishop Antonio Cardinal Gonzalez in memory of the centennial. Among those attending were vice-president Pedro Pinto and Bishop Alain Lebeaupin, the Apostolic Nuncio. The President of the Republic, Dr. Gustavo Noboa, and his wife participated in the solemn concelebration presided over by Archbishop Juan Larrea of Guayaquil, in the Rectoral Church of Blessed Josemaría. In his homily the Archbishop noted that the liturgical feast of that day, the Baptism of the Lord, coincided with the centennial of the baptism of Blessed Josemaría on January 13, 1902.

A large group of faithful gathered on January 9 in the Cathedral of Sydney to attend a Mass celebrated by Bishop Darwish, Eparch of the Melchite Catholics in Australia. A number of priests of the Eparchy concelebrated with him. Archbishop George Pell of Sydney had celebrated another Mass in the same Church on January 4, shortly before leaving for Rome, where he took part in the congress on «The Greatness of Ordinary Life.» Concelebrating with him was his predecessor as Archbishop, Cardinal Clancy.

Thirty persons gathered on January 12 in the Church of the Holy Redeemer, in Soi Ruam Rudee, to take part in the first Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaría to be celebrated in Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. In Japan there were Masses in honor of Blessed Josemaría in Nagasaki, Ashiya and Oita. In each of these cities the diocesan bishop was the principal celebrant. In Lebanon, the Maronite Patriarch, Cardinal Nasrallah Boutros
Sfeir, celebrated Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaría in the Patriarchal See of Bkerké. Six other Maronite Bishops and numerous priests concelebrated with him.

Archbishop Raphael Ndingi of Nairobi, and Bishop Christopher Pierre, the Nuncio in Kampala, presided over concelebrations in their respective cities.

**Congress at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome**

An international Congress held in Rome under the title «The Greatness of Ordinary Life,» from January 8 to 12, was organized by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in honor of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría. The lectures and discussions dealt with a number of central themes in the teachings of the founder of Opus Dei.

*The ordinary sessions*

The academic sessions took place in two places in the center of Rome: the Complesso Monumentale di Santo Spirito in Sassia and the Palazzo dell'Apollinare, seat of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

In the first meetings of the organizing committee for the Congress, which took place in the 1999-2000 academic year, the general outline of the assembly was traced out. Its aim was to go more deeply into the teachings and example of Blessed Josemaría, showing the influence of his message throughout the world.

On Tuesday the 8th, the Prelate of Opus Dei gave the inaugural lecture: *A human and intellectual sketch of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá*. The audience included many notable civil and ecclesiastical figures. That same morning there was a presentation on the historical context of the life of Blessed Josemaría, by Professor Georgia Rumi, of the University of Milan, and another by Dr. Maria José Cantista, Professor of Philosophy at the
University of Oporto, on some features of the founder of Opus Dei’s personality.

Wednesday, the 9th, was reserved for the celebration of the feast of the centennial of Blessed Josemaría. A Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaría, attended by the participants in the Congress, was held in the Basilica of Saint Eugene. The principal celebrant was Cardinal Camillo Ruini.

Cardinal Ruini also presided on Thursday, the 10th, at the session in which Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Vicar General of the Opus Dei Prelature, gave an address on «The Universality of the Church.» He was followed by Archbishop George Pell of Sydney speaking on «The Christian as a Child of God,» and by Janne Haaland Matlary, Professor of International Politics at the University of Oslo, on «Work, a Path to Sanctity.»

Present at this second study session was the Patriarch of Jerusalem. The Rector of the University, Msgr. Lluis Clavell, welcomed him and assured him of the prayers of all present for peace in the Holy Land.

The speakers on the final day of conference, Friday the 11th, were Professor Antonio Aranda of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Professor Mireille Heers of the Institute of Political Studies in Strasbourg, and Pierpaolo Donati, Professor of Sociology at the University of Bologna. They spoke, respectively, on the subjects of «Christian Identity and Configuration to the World,» «The Freedom of the Children of God,» and «The Meaning and Value of Ordinary Life.»

The afternoons were reserved for short papers and for workshop panels, most of which were held at the Palazzo dell’Apollinare. Each paper lasted a half hour, grouped by topics related to one of the morning conferences. The topics discussed ranged from the influence of the thought of Josemaría Escrivá on the inculturation of the faith in Africa (the theme of Charles Nyamiti, a Kenyan priest and theologian), to the meaning of work (by Grand Rabbi Angel Kreiman, President of the Judaeo-Christian Confraternity of Chile).

The workshops revolved around one of the following areas: education and research, the family, youth, solidarity, the priesthood, culture and communication, society. Each panel was made up of about ten specialists with a lively public participation.
Approximately 1200 people of 57 nationalities took part in the Congress.

**Non-academic activities**

An exhibition of posters representing different stages of Blessed Josemaría’s life was set up on the first floor of the Palazzo dell’Apollinare. There were also presentations of recent books, pamphlets and audiovisual materials. The Aletheia Foundation of the Philippines presented an interactive CD-ROM with abundant written, graphic and audio material. Included were a short biography, photos, complete English texts of the published works of Blessed Josemaría, and statements by various authorities on the influence of his teachings. In the IESE (Instituto de Estudios Superiores de la Empresa [Graduate Business School]) of Barcelona, two other discs of this type were produced, under the titles *Family and Profession* and *Business and the Common Good*.

A hall at the Apollinare was used for the projection of documentaries, while in Santo Spirito an exposition was held of works of art related to the theme of the Congress.

On Monday, the 7th, the eve of the inauguration of the Congress, there was a showing of the documentary *The Greatness of Ordinary Life*, produced by Alberto Michelini. This brief film presents the message of Blessed Josemaría and its reception by people from many different countries and cultures.

On the evening of Tuesday, the 8th, the Italian Minister for Communications, Maurizio Gaspari, made a presentation at the University of the Holy Cross introducing the stamp commemorating the centennial of the birth of the founder of Opus Dei. The stamp was officially released the following day.

In the late afternoon, the Blessed Sacrament chapel of the Basilica of Saint Apollinare was filled with people praying. The organization had included among the material provided to all the participants, a pamphlet with a homily of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, «The Greatness of Ordinary Life,» printed in four languages. At the end of the Congress, participants were given a special Italian edition of *The Way of the Cross* by Blessed Josemaría, with illustrations by the painter Paola Grossi Gondi.
The program on Thursday included a symphonic choral concert in the Auditorium of the National Academy of Saint Cecilia. The chorus of the Roman Philharmonic Academy was accompanied by the Amici Dell’Armonia orchestra, under the direction of Msgr. Pablo Colino. Before the beginning of the concert, Leon Thilolo, director of the Monkole Medical Center of Kinshasa, thanked those present for their generous contributions. The price of admission was donated to this Congolese hospital promoted by faithful of Opus Dei, Cooperators and friends. Monkole, which in addition to its hospital and nursing school, operates a number of clinics in various parts of the Congolese capital, offers medical attention and programs of hygiene, nutrition, family health, child care, literacy and household management to some thirty thousand people.

In the same auditorium, on Saturday the 12th, the participants had an evening get-together with the Prelate of Opus Dei, which gave rise to many anecdotes and questions connected with the sanctification of ordinary life.

**Audience with the Holy Father**

Earlier that day, the last of the Congress, the participants had taken part in an audience with the Pope, which gave them an opportunity to express their affection for St. Peter’s successor.

At the beginning of the audience, while going down the central aisle of the Hall amid a sea of applause, the Pope embraced and blessed the many small children held up to him by their mothers.

When the Holy Father reached the stage, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría addressed the following words to him.

«Most Holy Father:

«With a heart filled with gratitude and joy, I present to Your Holiness the homage of this Congress organized in honor of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. During these three days of intense work, the participants have been able to reflect from different perspectives upon one of the focal points of the message of the founder of Opus Dei: the human and Christian value of ordinary life when lived as a framework of sanctification and a meeting place with Christ.}
«From the first moment, the authorities of the Pontifical University committee organizing the Congress had a clear goal: the Congress should not be a simple celebration, but rather an apostolic reunion providing impetus for the future. It is not a matter of exalting the memory of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, recognizing his importance for contemporary Church history. Rather the purpose is to penetrate more deeply into his message, convinced that, as the Pontifical Decree on his heroic virtues says, he constitutes «an inexhaustible source of spiritual light» for a society which will grasp its human meaning only if it rediscovers the presence of God in all events.

«The presentations during these days have considered many facets of this message and the mark it has left in the lives of thousands of men and women of very distinct countries and cultures. It has been an eloquent testimony of the richness and universal efficacy of the Gospel when one accepts the living teaching that is found in each of its pages. Christ’s incarnation reveals that all noble human realities enclose a divine dimension.

«The Congress was not only a source of intellectual enrichment, but even more a moment of personal reflection on the need for a more profound spiritual commitment.

«Blessed Josemaría’s biography spans almost the whole of the 20th century. He was a witness to its social and cultural changes, the crises and conflicts which made that period one of history’s most traumatic centuries. And he always reminded us that only in Christ can man find the light and the strength to confront individual and collective problems in a spirit of hope.

«The centennial of his birth places us at the dawn of this third millennium. As your Holiness recalled in your message for the World Day of Peace, the great shadows that have recently arisen must not stifle the splendor of hope in the hearts of believers. *Iesus Christus heri et hodie, ipse et in saecula!* (*Heb* 13:8). Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday and today and for all ages!

«The work of the Congress has stressed the deep concern for the Church that infused the life and teachings of Blessed Josemaría. He was at
every moment a priest in love with Jesus and an exemplary son of the Church. *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!* was one of his favorite aspirations. With those same words, I would now like to express, in the name of all the participants in the Congress, our filial adhesion to the Pope and ask for his apostolic blessing."

This was followed by an address by the Holy Father. His words went to the heart of the reflections of the Congress. Before leaving, he imparted his apostolic blessing to everyone there, encouraging the participants, on returning to their own countries, to enthusiastically take up the task of helping those around them discover the greatness of ordinary life.

Commemorative issues of stamps

On January 9, the first Italian Euros stamp dedicated to Josemaría Escrivá was issued. The presentation took place on the previous evening at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. The Italian Minister for Communications, Maurizio Gasparri, stated that «the continuity in time of the undertakings inspired by the founder of Opus Dei makes this philatelic issue on the centennial of his birth very fitting.» The Minister of Communications gave a case with the new stamp and illustrative documentation to the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Echevarría, who thanked the Minister for this gesture and noted that this sign of institutional recognition by the Italian government was a just return for the deep affection the founder had always shown towards Italy: «an affection that has now become an efficacious intercession from heaven for all Italians.» The stamp shows a picture of Blessed Josemaría on the left, and on the right an allegorical representation of his ideal of enlivening human society with Christian values. The Philatelic Department of Rome also said that a special cancellation stamp would be provided for the date of emission containing the words «Centennial of the birth of Josemaría Escriva, Founder of Opus Dei.»

In Uruguay, the National Postal Administration issued four stamps dedicated to Blessed Josemaría with a printing of 60,000 stamps. The
painting is by the Uruguayan artist Gerardo Barrabino. The presentation of the stamp took place at the seat of the Postal Union of the Americas, Spain and Portugal.

Brazil also issued a commemorative stamp for the centennial of the birth of the founder of Opus Dei. It was presented publicly on the occasion of the closing of an academic ceremony organized by the University Extension Center of São Paulo, which had as its theme the influence of Blessed Josemaría’s message on the world of culture. The stamp, rectangular in shape, included a profile of Blessed Josemaría on a background representing the Basilica of Nossa Senhora de Aparecida do Norte, the patroness of Brazil. This recalls the visit that the founder made to this shrine during his stay in Brazil in June 1975. The stamp includes a phrase with which Blessed Josemaría praised Brazil for its great cultural and racial diversity: «a great mother who opens her arms to all and calls all of them her children.»

In Spain the Post Office of Barbastro began using of a commemorative cancellation stamp that included the centennial seal and the words «Barbastro January 9, 2002.» Envelopes were also printed that showed a picture of Blessed Josemaría’s last public appearance, which took place in the City Hall of Barbastro on May 25, 1975. During that ceremony he was awarded the city’s gold medal.

The centennial was also celebrated in Paraguay and Costa Rica with the issue of a stamp. The Board of Directors of the Costa Rican Post Office organized a ceremony of presentation at the Philatelic Museum in the central post office of San Jose. The ceremony was attended by the Apostolic Nuncio, Bishop Antonio Sozzo; by the Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in Costa Rica, Rev. Luis Baura; and by a number of government officials.

Torna ai contenuti

Ceremony at the Colombian Academy of Language
On March 11, a ceremony was held at the Colombian Academy of Language, honoring Blessed Josemaría Escrivá for his contribution to Christian spiritual literature. The session was opened by Dr. Jaime Posada, President of the Academy. In his address he noted that the founder of Opus Dei was able to express the perennial themes of the Church’s spirituality in terms of the concerns of contemporary men and women, doing so with simplicity, elegance and clarity.

The educator and poet David Meji Velilla gave the main presentation. «Josemaria Escrivá,» he said, «understood that his pen was an instrument for speaking with men about God, with whom he never ceased to dialogue. His conversation with God and with mankind was a single reality, a single language, a single passion.» The academician spoke about the best known works of the founder of Opus Dei, «which because of their clarity and simplicity can be understood equally by the well-educated and by those with little education.» The Way, Furrow and The Forge contain «deep considerations regarding the claims of the Creator on his creatures.» The book Holy Rosary, he said, contains an elevated mysticism, accessible to all. The Way of the Cross is «a miracle of poetry.» Christ Is Passing By and Friends of God, two collections of homilies, are «two deep and beautiful books on lay spirituality.»

Theological Congress in Fatima

Four hundred people, among them about a hundred priests, gathered in the Paul VI Center at the Shrine of Fatima, on April 15 and 16, to reflect on selected themes from the encyclical Novo Millennio Ineunte of John Paul II and on the message of Blessed Josemaría.

The symposium began on the 15th with an inaugural greeting from Bishop Serafim Ferreira e Silva, of Leiria-Fatima. Following this, Msgr. Antonio Barbosa, Regional Vicar of the Prelature of Opus Dei in Portugal, read a message from Bishop Javier Echevarría to the participants in the symposium.
The first conference, by Archbishop Julian Herranz, President of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, was on «Blessed Josemaría as a protagonist of the Second Vatican Council.»

On the morning of April 16, a panel entitled «A Response to the Challenges of the Third Millennium» was chaired by Professor Pio Alves de Sousa, from the Catholic University of Portugal. The panel's subject was identification with Christ and sanctity in the middle of the world. In the afternoon a round table on the topic «Priests and Laity: organic cooperation in the Church and in the World,» was moderated by the journalist Graça Franco.

In connection with the symposium, a biographical exposition on the founder of Opus Dei was held, which especially recalled his various visits to the Shrine of Fatima. Blessed Josemaría came as a pilgrim to Fatima on more than ten occasions, the first of these at the invitation of Sor Lucia.

Among those present at the symposium were Bishop August Cesar of Portalegre-Castelo Branco, Bishop Jacinto Botelho, of Lamego, and Auxiliary Bishop emeritus of Braga, Carlos Pinheiro.

Other Items

Around June 26

The feast of Blessed Josemaría, on June 26, was celebrated in churches throughout the world, from Asia and Australia to North and South America. One of the points furthest east in which a Mass in his honor was celebrated was in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, where Archbishop Joseph Ti-kang of Taipei officiated at the Holy Sacrifice for about a hundred faithful.
It was possible to attend a Mass in honor of the Founder of Opus Dei in or around June 26 in almost any country of Europe. In Italy the feast of Blessed Josemaría was liturgically celebrated in many of the large cities. In Modena and Ferrara, to cite two historic cities, Archbishops Benito Cocchi and Carlo Caffarra respectively presided over the Eucharistic celebrations in their cathedrals, as did many other local bishops. Celebrations were also held in many small villages and suburban areas such as Sesto San Giovanni in the industrial outskirts of Milan, where Father Marco Busca, a priest of the Prelature, celebrated a Mass for some two hundred people in the Basilica of San Esteban.

In Poland, Masses were celebrated in various dioceses including Warsaw-Praga (a suffragan diocese of Warsaw), Krakow, and Lublin. Bishop Kazimierz Romaniuk of Warsaw-Praga was the principal celebrant at the first of these.

Some 350 people also participated in the Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaría in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. Archbishop Josip Bozanic concelebrated with a large number of priests in the Church of St. Peter.

In Germany Cardinal Johannes Joachim Degenhardt, Archbishop of Paderborn, celebrated a Mass in Honor of Blessed Josemaría on June 17 in the Capuchin Church. The Regional Vicar of Opus Dei, Dr. Christoph Bockamp, and a number of diocesan priests concelebrated. On June 21 there was a Mass in Saint Hedwig's Cathedral in Berlin, celebrated by Archbishop Cardinal Georg Sterzinsky, who also attended the reception following the Mass.

Archbishop Zakarias Kamwenho of Lubango, President of the Bishop’s Conference of Angola and São Tomé, presided over a concelebration on the 26th in the Oratory of Blessed Josemaría, next to the Montes Claros University Residence in Lisbon. In his homily he recalled that during his years in the seminary, the students alternated between reading *The Imitation of Christ* and *The Way* during lunch. He expressed his desire that the Prelature would soon begin activities in Angola. At the end of the ceremony a relic *ex ossibus* of Blessed Josemaría was venerated.

and Paul in Tallinn. The congregation was about a hundred people. After
the readings, in Russian as well as Estonian, Msgr. Jourdan spoke of the
significance of the saints in the Church and concluded by inviting all those
present to take part in the canonization ceremony for Josemaría Escrivá, set
for the coming 6th of October. In Estonia this year a Mass in honor of
Blessed Josemaría was also celebrated for the first time in Tartu, the ancient
capital of the country and the seat of an historic university.

The founder of Opus Dei’s feast was also celebrated liturgically in
various parts of Africa. The cathedral of Dar-es-salaam, for example, was
the scene of a crowded Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaría. And this was
not the only city of Tanzania in which his feast was celebrated, even though
the Prelature of Opus Dei has not yet begun a stable apostolate in that
country. In the Ivory Coast there were Masses in Abidjan and
Yamoussoukro, as in previous years, and also for the first time in the city of
Yopougon. More than 1500 people attended, including members of the
Prelature, Cooperators, and friends. In Douala in Cameroun the feast of
Blessed Josemaría was commemorated this year for the first time with a
Mass celebrated by Cardinal Christian Tumi on June 27.

In the Church of San José de la Montaña in the city of San Salvador a
Eucharistic concelebration in honor of Blessed Josemaría on June 26th was
presided over by Metropolitan Archbishop Fernando Saenz Lacalle. And in
Barranquilla, Colombia, a Eucharistic concelebration was presided over by
Archbishop Ruben Salazar. Some 400 faithful filled the Church of Our
Lady of Grace of Torcoroma, one of the best known churches in the city.

In Manila’s Cathedral, Holy Mass for Blessed Josemaría was celebrated
on June 26th by the military Ordinary, Bishop Ramon Argüelles. In Cebu,
the Mass was also celebrated in the Cathedral, with Cardinal Ricardo Vidal
officiating.
Seventy years after Blessed Josemaría wrote the first points of the book that in 1939 he would publish under the name *Camino*, theologian Pedro Rodríguez has brought out a critical-historical edition of that work, the founder of Opus Dei’s most widely read book (four and a half million copies in print). This book is the first volume in the *Obras Completas* [Complete Works] of Blessed Josemaría, under the sponsorship of the Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute.

The presentation of the «critical-historical» edition of *Camino* took place in Madrid on March 13. The 1250-page volume offers a detailed historical and theological discussion of the 999 thoughts that make up *Camino*. It also includes a brief biography of the author, a history of the writing and editing of the book, and a concise literary and structural analysis of its contents.

Pedro Rodríguez, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Navarre, said that *The Way* «contains the gist of what Josemaría Escrivá wanted to offer to the Church and the world.» First published in 1939, it has seen 368 printings in 44 different languages. Soon to be published are translations into Byelorussian, Guarani, Thai, Norwegian and Tamil (India). «In the book’s 46 chapters,» said Professor Rodríguez in the presentation lecture, «Josemaría Escrivá leads the reader up an ascending slope. The first sections reaffirm the need to follow Christ with determination (prayer, interior life). Then the reader is shown how to proceed towards sanctity (faith, virtues, the Church). Finally, he is drawn into full intimacy with God (spiritual childhood, apostolic mission). The program of life proposed here is expressed concisely by the Blessed: ‘May you seek Christ, may you find Christ, may you love Christ.’» «Each of the 999 points in *The Way* has its own life, with very diverse contexts and circumstances. The points reflect the author’s intense spiritual, pastoral and literary life. When Josemaría Escrivá wrote *The Way*, Opus Dei was only recently founded. Therefore, for him these were years of very intense spiritual life, which we can see more clearly through his writings.»

Rather than maxims, the points «are actually ‘fragments’ of life,» says the editor of this edition. «He wrote this book by gathering together almost one thousand reflections taken from his personal prayer, his preaching, his dealing with souls, his correspondence, etc.» The founder of Opus Dei
explained in the 1960’s the purpose of The Way: «With this publication, I tried to present a long inclined plane, which souls could climb little by little, helping them to understand the divine call and become contemplative souls in the middle of society. It is meant to be a book that leads one to get to know and to love God and to serve everyone.»

Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, said in his presentation that he had read The Way as a young seminarian, and he was impressed by «the vigor of its direct and forceful considerations. Josemaría Escrivá became a channel of God’s grace and led us into paths of prayer. The Way is one of the most important texts of the Church’s rich cultural panorama.» Antonio Fontan, philologist and former president of the Spanish senate, stated that The Way «is written in a contemporary language that invites the reader to establish a dialogue.» In its composition, he said, one can see the literary influence of such people as St. Teresa of Jesus, St. John of the Cross, Cervantes, Calderón and Lope de Vega.

The Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute, created to study the life and works of the future saint, is bringing out his complete works, in five series: published works, non-published works, letters, manuscripts, and oral preaching.

Torna ai contenuti

Other publications about the founder of Opus Dei

The publisher Kontakt Plus of Bratislava, Slovakia, has published Rozhovor o Zakladatelovi Opus Dei, the first Slovak edition of Immersed in God, an interview by Cesare Cavalleri with Bishop Alvaro del Portillo. 800 copies were printed.

The publisher Rád in Prague has produced Blahoslaveny Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, by Karel Dachovsky, a new biography of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá in Czech. Three thousand copies were printed.
Ediciones Eunsa of Pamplona, Spain has published the book *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y los inicios de la Universidad de Navarra (1952-1960)*. In the book, some of the first professors at the university recall the founder of Opus Dei’s contribution to getting the institution underway. Another volume of history was published by Ariel under the title *Fuentes para la historia del Opus Dei*, by Federico María Requena and Javier Sesé.

Rialp has published *Josemaría Escrivá como escritor*, by the Chilean writer and priest, Jose Miguel Ibañez Langlois. It is an essay on the founder’s literary style based on his published works. Another monograph recently published is *Los años del seminario de Josemaría Escrivá en Zaragoza (1920-1925)*, by Ramon Herrando Prat de la Riva. This is a joint publication by the Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute and the publisher Rialp.

Two recent books have been published in Polish. *Zalożyiciel Opus Dei. Panie, sebym przejral!* is the title of the first volume of the biography by Andrés Vázquez de Prada, which has also been published recently in Portuguese by Verbo publishers. Another book published in Poland is *Mistrz dobrego humoru*, the Polish translation of *Maestro de buen humor*, by Jose Luis Soria.

In Portugal, Paulus Editora has published *Orar 15 dias com Josemaría Escrivá*, by Guillaume Derville.

Books of Blessed Josemaría, now available on the Internet

The works of Josemaría Escrivá are now on the internet. The address www.escrivaworks.org gives access to *The Way* and to the other books of spirituality written by Blessed Josemaría: *Furrow, The Forge, Christ Is Passing By, Friends of God, Holy Rosary, The Way of the Cross, Conversations* and the homilies collected under the title *In Love with the Church*. At present these works are available in four languages: English, French, Italian and Spanish. Other languages will be gradually included.
This new internet page includes a search engine which permits the user to find words and phrases in all of the titles under various categories. The www.escrivaworks.org page, in addition to the usual net services (a version for printing, the sending of texts, etc.), offers the possibility of creating a personal file containing quotations that one wishes to save.

Illustrated biography for children

La vida de Josemaría Escrivá [The Life of Josemaría Escrivá] by Enrique Muñiz and Alvaro Matud introduces the life of the founder of Opus Dei to children. Published by Monte Carmelo press, it forms part of a collection entitled Gente Menuda, which includes other exemplary lives such as St. Francis de Sales, St. Dominic, St. Teresa of Lisieux, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

The book presents small children with «a saint who also watched television and who liked movies and the Olympics,» and who founded Opus Dei to help everyone who wants to be Jesus’ friend, «which led to his undergoing many adventures.»

At the end of the pocket-sized book there is a vocabulary explaining words like «penance,» «ecumenism,» and «Rosary.» The biography ends with a prayer asking for God’s help through the intercession of Blessed Josemaría.

Introduction of the book 'Un santo per amico'

On February 26 the book Un santo per amico [A Saint as my Friend] was introduced to the public in Rome. Taking part in the event were Sister Fernanda Barbiero, director of the Pontifical Institute «Regina Mundi,»
and Msgr. Flavio Capucci, postulator of the Cause of canonization of Josemaría Escrivá.

The book contains the testimonies of numerous people who knew Blessed Josemaría in Spain in the first years of his pastoral ministry, between 1924 and 1946, the year in which he moved to Rome. Among them is Asunción Muñoz (1894-1984), of the Community of the Damas Apostolicas, with whom Josemaría Escrivá worked for several years in taking care of the poor and the sick in Madrid’s slum areas. Others include Bishop Jose María Bueno Monreal (1904-1987), a personal friend of the founder since 1928, who later became Archbishop of Seville and a Cardinal; Father Jose Maria Aguilar (1920-1992), whom Blessed Josemaría encouraged to become a religious in 1941; and twenty-five other bishops, priests, and men and women religious. Msgr. Flavio Capucci said the volume has the merit of presenting «direct recollections, narrated in the first person by those involved,» and not «later interpretations» about Blessed Josemaría.

Sister Fernanda Barbieros, SMSD, said that the book «contains extraordinarily incisive pages of his life.» She refers to Blessed Josemaría’s «ecclesial consciousness,» in which there was no «attempt to make use of the Church, but rather the desire to serve the Church as she wanted to be served.» The apostolic activity of Josemaría Escrivá, Sister Fernanda pointed out, was not directed towards creating «a Church within the Church, but a pastoral activity in which the growth and the autonomy of the laity would renew the frontiers of the Church’s mission and pastoral action.»

The postulator of the cause of canonization of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Fr. Brian Kolodiychule, M.C., sent a message to be read to those present. In it he pointed out some aspects of Blessed Josemaría’s life that were also prominent in the life of Mother Teresa. These included «his great love for the Church, for the Pope, for sacramental confession; his firm faith in the value of prayer as the point of departure for all apostolic action; and his capacity to undertake ambitious initiatives in service to others.» Fr. Kolodiychule’s message said: «In Blessed Josemaría we find a great commitment to help Christ present in the needy» and a great effort «of social commitment to improve the conditions of all human beings.»
line with the numerous testimonies collected in this book, the postulator for Mother Teresa pointed out that «the poor, the sick, the abandoned, were his weapons to win the battle to get Opus Dei underway.» At the end of the presentation, Msgr. Capucci said that «the book makes clear that the personal history of Josemaría Escrivá and the history of the institution that he founded are imbued with ecclesial communion.»

Commemorative book in Germany

Adamas Verlag, in Germany, has published a book entitled *Josemaría Escrivá, Profile einer Gründergestalt (Profile of a Founder)*. The 450 page volume is a collection of essays by German ecclesiastical and civic leaders and includes a prologue by Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, along with a biographical sketch of Blessed Josemaría. Some of the testimonies are by persons who knew the founder of Opus Dei personally.


Commemorative edition of 'Holy Rosary'

In the presence of President Gustavo Noboa of Ecuador, a new edition of the book *Santo Rosario [Holy Rosary]* was introduced to the public. This second Ecuadorian edition was published to commemorate the centennial of the birth of the founder of Opus Dei. About four hundred and fifty people were in attendance.

During the ceremony, President Noboa pointed out that «as Constitutional President of Ecuador, I want to express gratitude for the
work that the Prelature of Opus Dei has done, in the almost fifty years since its arrival here, to form good citizens and to promote a whole series of values that are contributing to the creation of a more just and equitable society.»

Dr. Jorge Salvador Lara, a member of the Ecuadorian Academy of History and chronicler of the city of Quito, reviewed the founder’s life. At the end he said that when the canonization of Blessed Josemaría took place it would be the culmination of «the divine adventure of the path to God, which he once described as the audacious flight of the bird who soars so high that he contemplates the sun face to face. All sinners, including ourselves, are called to love Jesus Christ, our only model.»

Another speaker was Professor Beatriz Tama, who spoke about Blessed Josemaría’s Marian devotion, and Emmanuel Martinez, president of the publishing company that prepared the commemorative edition of Santo Rosario. At the end, Msgr. Paulino Busea, Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in Ecuador, directed words of thanksgiving to the President and to the other participants.

The edition is illustrated with pictures from the school of Quito representing the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary. At the same ceremony a pocket-sized paperback edition of the book was also introduced.

Other editions of his work

The Spolok svatého Vojtecha publishing company of Bratislava, Slovakia, has published Sväty Ruzenec, the second Slovak edition of Holy Rosary, with a printing of 1,500 copies.

In Brno (Czech Republic) Rozhovory s mons. Escrivou de Balaguer, the first Czech edition of Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá, was published by Cesta. The same company has published the second edition of Krizová Cesta (The Way of the Cross). The printings were 1,200 and 3,000 copies respectively.

Rialp publishing company has published the translation of The Way of
the Cross into Euskera (Basque) under the title of Gurutz-Bidea.

The first Colombian edition of Conversations has been published with a printing of 3,000 copies.

In Italy, Cammino has just seen its fortieth printing. This brings the Italian total to more than 250,000 copies.

In Sweden the first edition of Furrow (Plogfärjan) has been published by Catholic Publishers, with a printing of 1,000 copies. The same company has also produced a second printing of The Way, also of 1,000 copies.

In Shijiazhuang, Peoples Republic of China, the Hebei Faith Press, together with Spring Publications, has published Geidou Gong Jinggwo, the second Chinese edition of Christ Is Passing By (the first in simplified ideograms). Five thousand copies were printed.
NEWS
Cardinal Grocholewski at the Roman College of Holy Mary

On May 9, the Solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord, Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, visited the International Center of Studies Villa Balestra in Rome, the seat of the Roman College of Holy Mary, the center of studies for women of the Opus Dei Prelature from all over the world. The Cardinal celebrated Holy Mass in the Oratory of the Holy Family. The choir sang the Mass *De Angelis* and a number of polyphonic pieces. Before giving his blessing at the end of the Mass, the Cardinal encouraged those present to preserve forever the joy of that Eucharistic celebration.

After Mass some of the professors accompanied Cardinal Grocholewski on a brief tour of the classrooms, auditorium and library.

Then the Cardinal had a discussion with students at the Center, who work professionally in various fields. Topics dealt with included the need to study the metaphysics of being in order to confront philosophical relativism; the importance of the *Encyclical Fides et Ratio* in this regard; the formative role of Catholic schools; and the search for truth in the study of history. The meeting concluded with the presentation of a choral piece in German.

Later the Cardinal personally greeted some of the students; before leaving wrote a few words in the visitors book of the Roman College of Holy Mary as a remembrance of his visit.

The text of his homily at the Mass follows:

«Dear professors and students of the Roman College of Holy Mary:

1. The Mission Given by Jesus

*Videntibus illis elevatus est.* The Church celebrates today our Lord Ascension’s into heaven. The definitive glorification of our Redeemer fills us with deep joy, and stirs up our hope of reaching heaven, attaining the eternal life that Christ wants to give us.

At the same time there resounds in our ears the question the angels addressed to the disciples, as we heard in the first reading: *Viri Galilaei,*
quid admiramini aspicientes in caelum? Why do you look up to heaven? The Lord will return; he will return at the end of time. He will return to establish definitively his kingdom, judging the living and the dead. But until then he leaves you here on earth to continue his saving mission, so that with the help of his grace you spread his kingdom—which he has begun with his life, death, resurrection and ascension—to the ends of the earth. That is precisely what we have just heard Christ say in the gospel: Euntes ergo docete omnes gentes.

Christ ascends into heaven and entrusts his Church with a mission that is universal both in time and in space. To carry it out Christ promises to send the Holy Spirit, who will descend on the small Christian community and empower a few poor men to be his witnesses, not only in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, but usque ad ultimum terrae (cf. First Reading).

It is also comforting to hear in the gospel that other solemn promise of Christ: Ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem saeculi.

2. The Participation of the Entire People of God

It is true that within this great mission entrusted to the Church, Jesus assigned the apostles and their successors a particular ministry among his people that no one else can carry out. They represent Christ as Head, Shepherd and Priest: they act in Persona Christi. It is through them that Christ makes present his redemptive sacrifice, that he pardons sins and communicates words of eternal life.

But the people for whom they have been ordained ministers of Christ is at the same time, in its entirety, a holy people, a priestly people. All its members participate, each in his or her own way, in the priesthood of Christ, and each fulfills a particular and specific function. The Second Vatican Council recalls in the dogmatic constitution Lumen Gentium: «Pastors indeed know well how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the whole Church. For they know that they themselves were not established by Christ to undertake alone the whole salvific mission of the Church to the world, but that it is their exalted office so to be shepherds of the faithful and also recognize the latter’s contribution and charisms that
everyone in his own way will, with one mind, cooperate in the common task» (Lumen Gentium, no. 30).

It is from this perspective of the mission entrusted to the entire Church that I want to share with you the following reflections on the role and participation of women in this mission.

3. Women’s role

The Holy Father has spoken about the dignity and vocation of woman in very beautiful language in his apostolic letter Mulieris Dignitatem (August 15, 1988). There he recalls the difference in essence (and not only in degree) between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful, following the teaching of the dogmatic constitution Lumen Gentium (cf. no. 10). Then he goes on to say: «The Second Vatican Council renewed the Church’s awareness of the universality of the priesthood. In the New Covenant there is... only one priest: Christ. All the baptized share in the one priesthood of Christ.... This concerns everyone in the Church, women as well as men. It obviously concerns those who share in the ‘ministerial priesthood’ (Lumen Gentium, no. 10), which is characterized by service... Although the Church possesses a ‘hierarchical’ structure (Lumen Gentium, nos. 18-29), nevertheless this structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ’s members» (no. 27).

It is noteworthy too that Blessed Josemaría chose to speak here at the Roman College of Holy Mary — on the very day of his going to heaven (June 26, 1975) — about woman’s participation in the royal priesthood of Christ.

In this perspective, the scene which took place after the Ascension, recounted by Saint Luke in the First Reading of today’s Mass, has a special meaning. The apostles had returned to Jerusalem and were gathered together in the Cenacle: «All these with one mind continued steadfastly in prayer with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren» (Acts 1,14). And it is there, in that place of prayer and communion, that the Holy Spirit descends upon them. Although only the apostles possess the authority to explain to the crowd what this outpouring of the Paraclete means, it is evident that He descends not only upon them but also upon all the men and women in the Cenacle, transforming this
small group into the Holy Church, with the Mother of God at the center, surrounded by the holy women. The promised Holy Spirit, which the Risen Lord sends from the Father, fills the entire Church with the fire that the Son of God brought to earth.

4. The Church’s teaching

It is fitting, therefore, that in this international educational center, where women of such diverse backgrounds and professions live and study together, we consider today the extraordinarily important role women have in the Church’s mission. The Magisterium has spoken more frequently about this topic of late, especially in the second half of the last century. And it has been the Holy Father, so sensitive to the signs of the times, who has devoted great attention to this topic, taking pains to foster a healthy «Christian feminism,» so to speak. This feminism is founded on the radical equality of men and women, but also acknowledges that the specific ways each contributes to the family, to civil society and to the Church, while different, complement each other. In addition to the above-quoted apostolic letter Mulieris Dignitatem, the Holy Father has written many other considerations about woman. I want to quote here a significant passage of the encyclical Evangelium Vitae (March 25, 1995): «In transforming culture so that it supports life, women occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It depends on them to promote a ‘new feminism’ which rejects the temptation of imitating models of ‘male domination,’ in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society» (no. 99).

I know that you, as faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei, follow with close attention, deep respect and intelligent enthusiasm the teachings of the Roman Pontiff. As good daughters of your founder, you are convinced—like those women in the Gospel who were the first witnesses of the Lord’s resurrection and who received the mission of announcing it to Simon Peter and the other apostles— that there is no Church without the Pope, since Christ made Peter the rock on which will be raised forever the spiritual edifice that is his Church. For this same reason, you feel the interior impulse to be very united to the successor of St. Peter, to follow his teachings promptly, to transmit them to your friends and companions, to
defend them with the deep conviction of one who knows *ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia, ibi Deus*.

5. Both as faithful and as women

You understand very well, as women fully immersed in the world, the specific role that corresponds to you in the Church’s mission. You know how to stay right where you are, following Blessed Josemaría’s clear teaching, «without the mad urge for change» (*The Way*, 837). You remember what he wrote in *The Way*: «From your own place in life, like a powerful generator of spiritual energy, you will give light and vigor...without losing your own vitality and your own light» (*The Way*, 837).

In the first place, you will follow your vocation as ordinary faithful who seek holiness in the middle of the world. You strive to have an intimate friendship with Jesus Christ, looking up to heaven but not turning your back on the problems that afflict humanity. And you work to spread his kingdom in the midst of today’s society by fulfilling your professional and social obligations, participating with the Church in the suffering and sorrows, but also in the hopes and dreams of all men and women. You strive to illumine with the light of the Gospel the human endeavors in which you take part as citizens, the same as everyone else, demanding your rights, each one following her own professional bent and cultural possibilities, always within the faith and the morality of the Catholic Church. And you do this all with a broad outlook, with a desire to live in peace with everyone, with a great openness of spirit, in dialogue with all persons of good will.

At the same time you are fully aware that your contribution to the common good—in civil society as well as in the Church—has certain particular features, because you are women and you want to be women. Let us recall those inspiring words of your founder: «Women are called to bring to the family, to society and to the Church, characteristics which are their own and which they alone can give: their gentle warmth and untiring generosity, their love for detail, their quick-wittedness and intuition, their simple and deep piety, their constancy... A woman’s femininity is genuine only if she is aware of the beauty of this contribution for which there is no
substitute and if she incorporates it into her own life» (Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 87).

It gives me great joy to see how Blessed Josemaría was able to grasp, not without special light from God, the precious contribution of woman, and how he fostered it, taking care of the formation of his daughters. He also took such care because he was convinced that his daughters in turn would carry out a broad and deep work of formation among so many women of the most diverse conditions and backgrounds, thus making it possible for the Church to exert a vivifying influence as a universal sacrament of salvation.

6. Conclusion

I have seen many apostolic works of Opus Dei. As Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education I am very glad to be here today, to observe more closely this hidden work that Opus Dei carries out specifically among women. This work is evidently founded on the clear grasp that your holy founder had of the importance that women have — and have always had — in the life of the Church. I would like to end by citing again some words of his which are no doubt familiar to you: «For many reasons, including some derived from positive law, I consider that the distinction between men and women with respect to the juridical capacity for receiving Holy Orders should be retained. But in all other spheres I think the Church should recognize fully in her legislation, internal life and apostolic action exactly the same rights and duties for women as for men. For example, the right to do apostolate, to found and direct associations, to give their opinion responsibly on matters which affect the common good of the Church. I fully realize that all this, which is not difficult to admit in theory when we consider the theological arguments in favor, will in fact meet with resistance from some quarters. I still remember the surprise and even the criticism with which some people reacted to the idea of Opus Dei’s encouraging women who belong to our Association to seek degrees in theological studies. Now instead they are tending to imitate us in this, as in other things» (Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá, 14).

How much the Church expects of your effort to form yourselves well, here in the heart of Christianity, very close to the See of Peter! Don't ever
forget your specific mission: with your gaze fixed on the glorious Christ, who is always at your side, work without getting discouraged to carry his love to all nations, from the particular place that corresponds to you. Thus what Blessed Josemaría prophesied about his daughters will be fulfilled more each day: «With a group of valiant women... closely united to our Sorrowful Mother, what work for souls could be done in the world!» (The Way, 982)

I desire with all my heart that your generous apostolate may bear abundant fruit within the mission that Christ confided to his Church when he ascended into heaven.»

Pontifical appointments


In suffrage for Bishop Álvaro del Portillo

On the occasion of the eighth anniversary of the death of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, the Prelate of Opus Dei celebrated a solemn Mass in suffrage for his soul in the Church of Blessed Josemaría.

Masses were also held in many other cities for the first successor of Blessed Josemaría. For example, in St. Pantaleon's church in Cologne; in the church of St. Peter, in Vienna; in that of St. Thomas Aquinas, in Paris; in the Spanish cathedrals of Valladolid, Salamanca, Leon and Burgos, among other Spanish cities; in the shrine of Torreciudad in northern Spain; in the Basilica of Saint Ambrose in Milan; in Lisbon, Amsterdam, and many other European cities.

In Guatemala, the Mass in suffrage for Bishop del Portillo took place in the Church of Our Lady of Peace. Presiding was Archbishop Rudolfo
Quezada Toruño. Members of the various bishops’ conferences presided over the anniversary Masses in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic; in Medellín and Bogotá in Colombia; in Quito and Guayaquil in Ecuador; in Lima, Chiclayo, Cañete, Piura, and Arequipa in Peru.

In Sydney, Australia, the Mass was celebrated in the parish church of Saint Mary in Strathfield. In his homily, Father John Flader recalled his meetings with Bishop Alvaro del Portillo and spoke of his deep humility.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the celebration was held in the cathedral of Notre Dame du Congo, presided over by Auxiliary Bishop Daniel Nlandu of Kinshasa.
INITIATIVES
Moergestel, The Netherlands. Symposium for priests

On April 4, 2002, Zonnewende Conference Center in Moergestel, The Netherlands, was the scene of a symposium for priests from all parts of the country. One of the speakers was Bishop Anders Arborelius, OCD, of Stockholm, who gave two talks, one on «The Catholic Church in Sweden Today» and the other on «Catholic Spirituality as a Help in Evangelization.» Bishop J. F. Lescrauwaet, retired auxiliary bishop of Haarlem, presented the speaker and moderated the colloquium held after each talk.

Torna ai contenuti

Nairobi, Kenya. 25th anniversary of Kianda School

A symposium organized by and for parents of Kianda School was held on January 9, 2002, as a commemoration of the school's 25th anniversary, in the centennial year of the birth of Blessed Josemaria Escriva. Some 550 parents attended.

Joan Odera, a graduate of the school and who has recently been named principal, opened the symposium. The first speaker, Olga Marlin, gave a slide presentation on «The Roots of Kianda.» She was one of the eight young women invited by Blessed Josemaria to begin Opus Dei’s work with women in Kenya in 1960. They started Kianda secretarial school in January 1961. It was the first multiracial school of its kind in Kenya. The student body included Africans, Europeans, and Asians, reflecting in deeds the truth of Blessed Josemaria’s words: «There is only one race on earth, the race of the children of God» (Christ Is Passing By, no. 13).

Olga Marlin ended her talk by encouraging those present to keep moving Kianda forward «so that in 25 years you can be the ones who will be telling the story of so many dreams that have become reality.»
The next speaker, Eva Beauttah, was one of the first students at Kianda College. Over the years, her three daughters studied at Kianda School, and now her granddaughter does as well.

A number of parents gave talks on family-related subjects. Mary Kibera, director of the Family Development Institute, concluded the symposium by pointing out the need to create new forums so that families could exchange experiences and gain support in ever-widening circles for the values that they share.

Sydney, Australia. Excelling with Xcel

Eremeran Hills Study Centre has developed a study techniques program for high school girls. Called Xcel, it is aimed at helping the girls acquire self-motivation in their studies and good habits of intellectual work. One distinctive feature is teaching the «why» as well as the «how» of study.

Starting with the teaching of Blessed Josemaria Escriva that «for a modern apostle, an hour of study is an hour of prayer,» the Xcel program tries to instill in the high school girls the conviction that their daily study and duties are a direct path towards sanctity. The Xcel instructors motivate them to dedicate time and effort to acquiring effective study techniques. Students learn to organize their time well, as well as to set realistic goals for themselves, prepare for exams, and work effectively both on their own and as part of a team.

The good results of the Xcel program have led parents to spread the word to many more families. The sessions are held three times each week during the school year.
On February 22, Dr. Thomas Lickona, a well-known educational specialist, gave a conference entitled «Forming your child’s character: ten key points for parents.» The conference was attended by parents of students at the Willows Academy and Northridge Prep, and other schools in northern Illinois. The Willows, a school for girls from ages 11 to 18, is known both for its academic excellence and its character education, centered on the acquisition of virtue. Conferences and seminars are held each year as part of its program for parents.

Dr. Lickona spoke about parents’ responsibility for setting high goals for their children in the area of human virtues. Many parents have doubts about their authority to educate their children in the virtues, especially if they themselves did not live them very well when they were young. Dr. Lickona explained that the parents’ authority is not based on a past life free of failures, but that it arises naturally with the birth of their first child. Parents receive from God the mission to exercise authority over their children, including the obligation to provide them with moral guidance. Dr. Lickona also emphasized the need for parents, as the primary educators of their children, to strive to practice the virtues themselves.

Alice Springs, Australia. Desert work camp

Last January a group of young men from Sydney, Canberra and Newcastle spent two weeks at the Mission of St. Teresa, near Alice Springs, Australia, repairing and painting the mission church.

The cost to the students was considerable: two weeks of vacation, quite a few dollars, and probably five or ten pounds of weight. But these losses were quickly converted into valuable benefits, and not only for the mission people. Once again, the paradox of volunteer work was proven true: by fostering their generosity, it is the volunteers themselves who gain the most.

Dartbrook Study Center has been organizing volunteer projects for high school and college students for the last fifteen years. The sites for the
projects have ranged from islands in the South Pacific (Fiji, Tonga, Samoa), to Indonesia, the Philippines, New Guinea and less-developed areas in Australia itself. This year the goal of the volunteer expedition was the desert district in the heart of Australia.

The first two days involved washing, sanding, and preparing the church roof, hidden under a dark coating formed over the years. Once this phase was finished, they began painting. While not trying to emulate Michelangelo, the work camp participants strove to do a good professional job. They worked as though they were being paid, although they themselves had to cover the expenses and even provide the paint and brushes.

The work schedule was demanding, with their work day beginning at 7:15 a.m. After two weeks of hard work, the students returned home with a sense of satisfaction at a job well done.

Guatanfur: in the Colombian countryside

Guatanfur is the name of a Family Farm School started in 1992 in the Colombian village of Machetá.

This pilot project was a joint effort of faithful of Opus Dei and Cooperators. It seeks to provide boys in the area with an education that will benefit both themselves and their families. Guatanfur combines the teaching of the traditional primary and secondary subjects with technical training in agriculture and stock-raising. In this way the students are given the means to improve the productivity of their families’ farms.

Laboratories, nurseries and stock-raising enclosures, together with classrooms and computer rooms, make up the infrastructure of Guatanfur. But the education the boys receive is not confined to academic and technical areas. It also includes a solid Christian formation aimed at helping them develop all facets of their character.

The Guatanfur Family Farm School seeks to benefit the entire community, and therefore the participation of the students’ families is
considered vital. A program is offered for fathers of families and small farmers from the region, which includes technical training in agriculture and stock raising, human and spiritual formation and business skills needed for small rural enterprises. One of its objectives is the search for alternative crops and techniques that make local farm work more efficient and profitable.

After ten years in a provisional location, Guatanfur moved into its new home on January 16 of this year. It was a day of celebration for the families, which began with the consecration of the altar of the oratory. Bishop Jorge Enrique Jimenez of Zipaquira, current president of CELAM, officiated. Afterwards there were traditional games and regional dances.

The inauguration of Guatanfur also served as a framework for a «Forum on Rural Education,» attended by representatives of the national education department and the Ministry of Agriculture. Pedro Puig and Roberto Garcia, directors of the world organization of Family Farm Schools, joined technical experts from the Ministry of Agriculture in discussing experiences in this field in countries such as France, Spain, Argentina and Brazil.

Tornaiicontenuti

**Torreciudad, Spain Conference on volunteer work**

During the third weekend of April, Torreciudad hosted the Third Conference on Volunteer Work, organized by the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Cooperación Social and the Board of Directors of Torreciudad. The participants, more than one hundred fifty volunteers and collaborators with the NGO, reflected on «The religious sense of life, a spur towards solidarity.»

Archbishop Elias Yanes Alvarez of Saragossa celebrated Mass for the participants. In his homily he asked them to strive to «create favorable conditions for families to have more children and to be in solidarity with humanity.» He insisted on «the deep tie between demography and
vocations,» since «families are the ones who spread Christian values and have children.»

Among those taking part in the work sessions were Andres Ollero, Professor of Philosophy of Law at Juan Carlos University and deputy in the Spanish parliament; Pilar Lara, President of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture; Riay Tatary Bakry, President of the Union of Islamic Communities in Spain; Mariano Burgo, Executive Secretary of the Federation of Evangelical Religious Groups in Spain; Angel Garcia, founder and president of the NGO «Messengers of Peace»; and Juan Jose Toribio, director of the IESE Graduate School of Business in Madrid, and previous executive director of the International Monetary Fund in Washington.

Buenos Aires, Argentina. Round-table at the book fair

On May 2, a round table entitled «The Greatness of Ordinary Life» was held in La Rural exposition center. Part of the event was the presentation of a special postal stamp issued by the Argentine Post Office in honor of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaria Escriva. Some 600 people attended of all ages and walks of life.

The coordinator was Dr. Roberto Bosca, professor of law at Austral University. The first speaker was a physician, Dr. Malbran, who recalled Blessed Josemaria’s special predilection for the sick.

The second speaker was Professor Marcelo Paladino of Austral University's Business School, who explained how Blessed Josemaria’s message was well suited for anyone seeking personal holiness in a professional environment. He cited numerous examples of people in business who had recognized and remedied unjust business practices. He was followed by Dr. Ana Maria Sanguineti, who began her talk with a personal recollection of her first meeting with Blessed Josemaria. She then
went on to speak of some of the social consequences of the search for holiness in ordinary work.

The official presentation of the new postage stamp followed. In his brief address, one of the directors of the Argentine post office said that it was an honor to be able to include Blessed Josemaria among those featured on their stamps. Father Patricio Olmos, Regional Vicar of the Prelature of Opus Dei in Argentina, noted that Blessed Josemaria considered himself only an instrument for transmitting Christ’s message.

Paris, France. Colloquium at the Grenelle Forum

On Saturday, February 2, a conference entitled «Sanctification of Ordinary Work, a Message for our Time» was held, with about four hundred people in attendance.

After an historical sketch by Yves-Marie Hilaire, professor emeritus at the University of Lille, on the emergence of the Catholic laity in Europe during the 20th century, Cyrille Michon, professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne, discussed Blessed Josemaria’s teaching on «the greatness of ordinary life» in connection with several 19th and 20th century philosophers and painters of the Flemish school.

Paul Olivier, professor of philosophy of the Lycée Massena of Nice, developed the theme of divine filiation, so central to the life of Blessed Josemaria. Mireille Heers, titular professor at the Strasbourg Institute of Political Studies, spoke on «the freedom of the children of God» in the works of Josemaria Escriva. Finally Jean-Luc Chabot, a professor at the University of Grenoble, emphasized various aspects of the Church’s social doctrine in the thought and apostolic activity of the founder of Opus Dei.

The conference sessions were presided over by Bishop Fortunato Baldelli, Apostolic Nuncio in France, and by Bishop Olivier de Berranger of Saint-Dennis, president of the Social Committee of the French Bishops Conference. In his presentation, Bishop Baldelli said that «Josemaria
Escriva has made it clear that Jesus’ invitation, ‘If you wish to be perfect...,’ is not limited to a few but embraces all Christ’s disciples. It is what every baptized person should aspire to....Blessed Josemaria was here a precursor of the Second Vatican Council, which insisted so much on the universal call to sanctity.

Santiago, Chile. Inauguration at the University of the Andes

To inaugurate the academic year at the University of the Andes, journalist and professor Consuelo Toro spoke on «Blessed Josemaria as communicator.» The April 17th event was attended by students, faculty and friends of the university.

Professor Toro explained the success of the spread of Blessed Josemaria’s message through a classic paradigm of communication theory: «who is saying what, how, to whom, and with what effect». The first step is the message, having something to say. In the life of Josemaria Escriva, ever since October 2, 1928, when God let him see what he wanted of him, the content of his message was always the same. This was the call to holiness and apostolate in the midst of the world through professional work, the universal call to sanctify all human realities. Blessed Josemaria dedicated his life to the transmission of this message, placing all of his considerable personal abilities at its service.

But the message, the intangible and primordial element of the communicative process, requires a form. One can speak or write or act. Msgr. Escriva did all three. His undeniable human talents for communication and a deep and serious intellectual preparation are shown in his homilies and in all of his writings, which combine spontaneity with erudition. In them we find clear simple images, accessible to everyone, which become metaphors for spiritual realities, truths discovered only in contemplation. With his colloquial tone and anecdotes, Blessed Josemaria used language to take his listeners by the hand and lead them to gradually understand the depth of the message he had the mission of transmitting.
Finally comes the receiver, without whom there is no communication. Josemaría Escriva knew how to establish a personal relationship with those he was seeking to reach. He never lost sight of his «public.» Quoting John Paul II, Ms. Toro said: «Communication is more than the process of transmitting information or stirring emotions. At its deepest level it is a personal act of love, a generous self-giving of mind and heart.» Therefore, she concluded, the key to Blessed Josemaría’s effectiveness as a communicator «is not found only in the form in which he transmitted his message. His words are eloquent, but they sink into the soul of his listeners only because they unite the divine and the human.»

San José, Costa Rica. Students involved in social development projects

The Women’s Professional Institute, La Pradera, is located in the San Rafael district of San José, Costa Rica. La Pradera provides high school instruction and training in the hospitality and tourism sector. Nearby is the Patio de Agua home, which houses families with problems of drug addiction, poverty, and domestic violence.

The teachers and students, in collaboration with other university students, carry out a social development program on Saturdays. This crafts and sports clubs for girls aged 6 to 12 also provides talks on human and Christian values and personal tutoring aimed at fostering character formation and good study habits. A club for mothers offers classes in crafts and cooking along with talks on virtues connected with family life and the raising of their children.
March 1 to 3 saw a gathering of British university people at Thornycroft Hall near Manchester to commemorate the centennial of Blessed Josemaría. Participants from the universities of Dundee, Bristol, Sheffield, London and Manchester were offered three presentations: «The historical framework of the message of Opus Dei,» by Father Peter Haverty; «Singing in the rain, or contemplation in the midst of the world,» by Doctor Karen Sanders of the University of Sheffield; and «The role and responsibility of the intellectual in the teachings of Blessed Josemaría,» by Ethel Tolansky of the University of Westminster.

Of particular interest were the panels of testimonies that followed each lecture. These were made up of university women, four in each panel, who related their own personal experience about the impact of Blessed Josemaría’s message in their own life. The discovery that study could be sanctified was emphasized as one of the most innovative features of Blessed Josemaría’s teaching. The repercussion of Blessed Josemaría’s writings in their attitude towards suffering and friendship were frequently mentioned in the personal testimonies.

Jerez de la Frontera, Spain. Study conference for priests

A study conference for priests was held at the Pozoalbero Conference Center in Jerez de la Frontera, organized by the Guadalen Association. Its title was «The spirituality of communion in the Church.»

The conference, attended by priests from the dioceses of Jerez, Cadiz and Gibraltar, centered on the study of Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*.

The symposium was opened by the Vicar of the Prelature of Opus Dei in Seville. He was followed by Bishop Juan del Rio of Jerez, who spoke on «Holiness as a cultural alternative,» and Jose Ramon Villar, Professor of Ecclesiology at the University of Navarre, who sketched a broad plan of pastoral action in accord with *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. 
Bishop Charles Caruana of Gibraltar spoke on «The Bishop’s ministry and spiritual path.» In the final morning session, Bishop Antonio Ceballos of Cadiz and Ceuta spoke on «Communion between the bishop and his priests.»

The conference reconvened in the afternoon with a colloquium on the topic: «Spirituality of communion: making the Church the home and school of communion,» in which the four major speakers once again took part.

Torna ai contenuti

**Quito, Ecuador. New buildings for the Solana School**

Cardinal Antonio Gonzalez, Ecuador’s primate, blessed Solana’s new buildings on January 26. The school imparts instruction to young women from the Tumbaco Valley and other parts of the country in skills needed for the service industry.

The new 15,000 square foot building, includes a dozen classrooms, a computer room, and training areas for cooking, laundry and dry-cleaning operations. On graduating from secondary school, the students are given a degree in Administration of Service Institutions. In the words of Amada Botillo, a native of the Zuleta community and a graduate of Solana four years ago: «This school provides not only a sound technical education but also instruction in the moral virtues, speech etiquette, etc.»

Jeannette Ramos, from the Chota area in the northern part of the country, is one of the first graduates. She expressed her appreciation to the school for «helping us to grow in virtue, learning to know ourselves so that we could become good people, in addition to the professional training which enabled us to obtain a decent job in the hotel service field.»

Thanks to the new installations, made possible through the support of many people and institutions, this undertaking for the human and Christian advancement of women will soon be able to increase its
enrollment to four hundred students from neighboring areas such as Quinche, Yaruqui, Pifo and Puembo.

Hundreds of women have been educated at Solana, where they have learned, in the words of Cardinal Gonzalez, «to unite human wisdom with true faith. In this way they carry out the apostolic vocation Blessed Josemaría insisted on so strongly.»

Guayaquil, Ecuador. The Montepiedra Clinic

On January 9, a medical clinic sponsored by the Montepiedra Educational Center was inaugurated in Mapasingue, one of the poorest parts of Guayaquil.

The clinic will provide general medical attention, treatment for respiratory ailments and minor surgery, as well as laboratory services for the people who live and work in the area.

Dr. Camilo Chiquito, director of the clinic, said that dental and gynecology services would hopefully be added soon. The president of Montepiedra’s board, Guillermo Lasso, noted that an embassy was offering to donate an ambulance, which would be another step in the growth of this social work.

Dublin, Ireland. Aid Resources Ltd.

A group of Prelature faithful and Cooperators have formed Aid Resources Ltd., to seek funds for social projects in underdeveloped countries. The group presents audiovisual informative material, explains the goals of the projects being carried out and facilitates communication with the donors.
The association’s aim is to foster a sense of Christian responsibility for assisting underdeveloped countries. Over the past two years, Aid Resources Ltd. has raised money for social initiatives in Kenya and Cameroon.

Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Four meetings in the Congo

From April 6 to 27, 150 students and young professional women gathered at the Tangwa University Center in Kinshasa on four consecutive Saturdays to learn more about Blessed Josemaria Escriva as the source of inspiration for projects aimed at the social betterment of women.

The introductory talk was given by Doctor Amisi, who cited Blessed Josemaria’s words: «A man or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ’s heart» (Christ Is Passing By, no. 167). A recurring theme was the need to find solutions that really contribute to the country’s development, and also the need to work well, with a spirit of service.

Dr. Maria Dolores Mazuecos, who lived in Rome in the 70’s and knew Blessed Josemaria personally, recounted some of her personal recollections. She described the immense panorama that Blessed Josemaria would describe to them, convinced that a whole array of initiatives for the betterment of women would some day become a reality all over the world.

The conference by Annick Rascar, Director of the Institut Supérieur en Sciences Infîmières (Advanced School of Nursing), created in 1997, showed how this dream is becoming a reality little by little in Kinshasa. The school aims at giving its students a serious professional formation permeated by human and Christian values. Three graduating classes of nurses have obtained their diplomas and are now working in different hospitals in the capital and the interior of the country.

Nelly Tshela, Technical Director of the Kimbondo Professional School, described the birth and growth of the school from its first classes, given in the open under a tree, up to the present, with a broad ranging educational
and social work in the outskirts of Kinshasa.

A documentary on development projects in various countries, among them the Monkole Medical Center in Kinshasa, followed by a discussion, completed the program. One participant summed up the feeling of everyone: getting involved in this kind of activity is not a matter of complicating one’s life, but of giving it meaning.

Singapore. An exposition on the life and writings of Blessed Josemaría

On May 17, 2002, the tenth anniversary of the beatification of Josemaría Escrivá, a solemn Mass was celebrated in his honor in Mandarin. Following this, an exposition on his life, his writings and his message was opened, commemorating the centennial of his birth. In January the same exposition had been shown in Macao.

The exposition was inaugurated by Doctor Anne Lee Tzu Pheng, a well known writer, poet, and former professor at the National University of Singapore. A substantial part of the exposition was devoted to Blessed Josemaría’s writings. Many of these works, along with biographies of the founder and other books about Opus Dei, were available for sale in English and in Chinese.

Large informative posters with illustrative photos and texts in both languages helped visitors to understand the historical context of Josemaría Escrivá’s life and key facts about the founding and development of Opus Dei, showing the universality of its message. The wide-spread devotion to Blessed Josemaría was reflected by prayer cards in many different languages.

«Blessed Josemaría’s message offers today’s world the hope it so deeply needs,» said Dr. Lee in her inaugural address. «In this exposition we will find much that can inspire and transform us, as we witness the work of this extraordinary person who answered God’s call with his whole heart, his whole mind and his whole soul.»
Torna ai contenuti
Suffrages

In the first half of 2002, 264 faithful of the Prelature and 27 members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross passed away.

The suffrages stipulated by Blessed Josemaría have been offered for these deceased. As we continue to pray for them, let us thank God for the example they left us through their fidelity in striving to transform their professional work and the ordinary circumstances of their lives into an occasion for loving God and serving the Church and all souls. Their love for God constitutes the meaning and value of their lives, whether outstanding in the eyes of others, or whether quite ordinary, as was true in most cases.

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Torna ai contenuti
A study
Priestly soul and Lay Mentality

The ecclesiological relevance of an expression of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá

Arturo Cattaneo
School of Theology
Pontifical University of the Holy Cross

1. The call to holiness and a fully lay spirituality

The message spread by Blessed Josemaría since 1928 has done much to foster the full rediscovery of the universal call to holiness, especially among all those immersed in secular realities. In 1930 he explained his understanding of the mission he had received in the following terms: «We have come to say, with the humility of one who knows he is a sinner and of very little worth — homo peccator sum (Lk 5:8), we say with Peter — but with the faith of someone who lets himself be led by God’s hand, that sanctity is not reserved for a privileged few. Our Lord calls all of us. He expects love from everyone. From everyone, no matter where they are. From everyone, no matter what their situation, profession or job. Because that normal, ordinary, apparently unimportant life can be a path of sanctity.»[1] As John Paul II observed, Opus Dei’s founder «from the beginning anticipated the theology of the laity that later came to characterize the Church of the Conciliar and post-Conciliar periods.»[2]

Little by little this message made headway until it was clearly ratified at the Second Vatican Council, specifically in chapter five of Lumen Gentium.[3] In this regard, Gérard Philips,[4] one of the best commentators on the Council, wrote: «The novelty of the declaration should be evident to everyone. We can even predict without fear of error that the Council’s insistence in proclaiming the universal vocation to sanctity, as the years go by, will receive even more attention.»[5]

Almost forty years have gone by and one can truly say that this teaching has lost none of its freshness. In his Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, when speaking about current pastoral priorities, the Pope put in first place the universal call to holiness. Referring explicitly to the laity, he
said: «The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this 'high standard' of ordinary Christian living» (no. 31).

In the years following the Council there has been a lot of talk about the laity. But the conversation has often been centered on the need to open to them new ways of collaborating in Church organisms rather than to help them understand and live more deeply their specific vocation and mission.[6]

Blessed Josemaría’s constant teaching has always been very different: «The prejudice that ordinary members of the faithful must limit themselves to helping the clergy in ecclesiastical apostolates has to be rejected. There is no reason why the secular apostolate should always be a mere participation in the apostolate of the hierarchy. Secular people too have a duty to do apostolate. Not because they receive a canonical mission, but because they are part of the Church. Their mission... is fulfilled in their profession, their job, their family, and among their colleagues and friends.»[7]

The pastoral phenomenon that «by divine inspiration»[8] arose with Opus Dei was, as the Founder said, «new, yet as old as the Gospel.»[9] To better appreciate this novelty, one should keep in mind in regard to the universal vocation to holiness and apostolate[10] that he emphasized not only the subjective dimension (all the faithful, of whatever state and condition have this vocation), but also the objective (all professions, all situations of family, social life, etc., can and should become a path of sanctity and apostolate).[11]

In consequence he asserted unhesitatingly that lay people called to the fullness of sanctity and apostolate not in spite of being immersed in temporal realities, but precisely making use of and by means of them. This affirmation forms the nucleus of the fully lay spirituality that in the decades before Vatican II was seen by many as having revolutionary features.

As Gérard Philips observed, «many Christians have long harbored the prejudice that sanctity cannot flourish outside the precincts of a monastery.»[12] Although one «cannot accuse the religious of such a presumption,»[13] one must note that their path of sanctification, especially if they are monks, implies a special separation from temporal realities. This separation forms part of their ecclesial mission, reminding people of the
fleetingness of earthly realities and pointing to the glory of heaven. Nevertheless, whenever this separation (this fuga mundi, to use a term from medieval theology) is erroneously seen as necessary for anyone who aspires to sanctity, the logical result is to think that lay people are normally not called to the fullness of Christian life, or at least not to a high standard of sanctity, and that they should try to live the demands of the Gospel in spite of being immersed in temporal realities.

One can thus understand why, after many centuries, the idea became widespread that sanctity requires the separation from temporal affairs that is proper to the religious state, defined precisely as the «state of perfection» par excellence. And this in turn led to the, at least unconscious, conviction that the laity are called to a «lesser» sanctity.

2. Dangers and Temptations along the Path

Blessed Josemaría’s extraordinary gifts as a pastor and spiritual director enabled him to clearly point out the path and to indicate the obstacles that had to be overcome in advancing towards the goal of sanctity.

He was very aware of the dangers and temptations that had to be overcome by those who, immersed in secular realities, wanted to make progress on the path to sanctity. In his memorable homily «Passionately Loving the World,» given during a Mass celebrated on the campus of the University of Navarre on October 8, 1967, he referred to some of these dangers, especially those of «a disembodied spiritualism,» «a materialism blind to the spirit,» and «clericalism.»

To overcome the first two dangers, one needs what he called a «priestly soul;» while clericalism is combated by a «lay mentality,» another of his original expressions. Before examining the meaning of these two expressions in more detail, it is worthwhile looking more fully at the three dangers to be overcome.

First, we need to remember that the Church «travels the same journey as all mankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world: it is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God» (Gaudium et Spes, 40). This has particular relevance for the laity, as the Council recalled: «They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the
earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that, being led by the Gospel spirit, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity, they must manifest Christ to others» (LG 31).

The vocation-mission of the laity is therefore determined by their full insertion both into civil society and into the Church. They are «citizens of both cities» (GS 43) and, in consequence, constitute the connecting point between them. They are «ambassadors to the world,» but they «are not of the world» (Jn 17:18). Jesus addressed the Father saying: «I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one» (Jn 17:15). In this perspective one can also understand why the Council pointed out: «That the earthly and the heavenly city penetrate one another is a fact open only to the eyes of faith; moreover, it will remain the mystery of human history, which will be harassed by sin until the perfect revelation of the splendor of the sons of God» (GS 40).

This mystery of human history, «harassed» in its advance by sin, is shown especially in the temptations to which the mission, and therefore the spirituality, of the laity is subject. Indeed, the intimate connection between earthly and supernatural realities, which they are called upon to bring about in their daily life, is exposed to a double danger: that of separating the two realms and that of confusing them. The separation of the two can be manifested as either a disembodied spiritualism or a materialism closed to the spirit.[19] Confusion of the two, on the other hand, is one of the signs of clericalism.

Blessed Josemaría described the danger of disembodied spiritualism as the tendency to «present the Christian way of life as something exclusively ‘spiritual,’ proper to pure, extraordinary people, who remain aloof from the contemptible things of this world, or at most, tolerate them as something necessarily attached to the spirit, while we live on this earth. When things are seen in this way, churches become the setting par excellence of the Christian life. And being a Christian means going to church, taking part in sacred ceremonies, being taken up with ecclesiastical matters, in a kind of segregated world, which is considered to be the ante-chamber of heaven,
while the ordinary world follows its own separate path. The doctrine of Christianity and the life of grace would, in this case, brush past the turbulent march of human history, without ever really meeting it.»[20] As we will consider more fully below, in the same homily «Passionately Loving the World» he goes on to vigorously affirm the true Christian vision of secularity: «On this October morning, as we prepare to enter upon the memorial of our Lord’s Pasch, we flatly reject this deformed vision of Christianity.»[21]

Allied to the danger of spiritualism is another error which, if less extreme, is all the more insidious: the danger of leading a «double life.» «I often said to the university students and workers who were with me in the thirties that they had to know how to ‘materialize’ their spiritual life. I wanted to keep them from the temptation, so common then and now, of living a kind of double life. On one side, an interior life, a life of relation with God; and on the other, a separate and distinct professional, social and family life, full of small earthly realities.»[22] And he goes on to insist: «No! We cannot lead a double life. We cannot have a split personality if we want to be Christians. There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is this life which has to become, in both soul and body, holy and filled with God. We discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things. There is no other way. Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find him.»[23]

In the same homily «Passionately Loving the World», Blessed Josemaría refers also to a «materialism blind to the spirit.»[24] This is the error of those who «think that we may immerse ourselves in earthly activities as if these latter were utterly foreign to religion, and religion were nothing more than the fulfillment of acts of worship and the observance of a few moral obligations» (GS 43). The Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici (1988) sees this as a growing danger, noting that often today «individuals cut the religious roots that are in their hearts; they forget God or simply retain him without meaning in their lives, or reject him outright and begin to adore various ‘idols’ of the contemporary world. The present day phenomenon of secularism is truly serious not simply as regards the individual, but in some ways as regards whole communities» (no. 4).
A widespread manifestation of secularism is seen in a bad «laicism,» in which religious values are explicitly rejected or relegated to the closed arena of one’s conscience and to the dim light of churches, without any right to penetrate and influence social and political life.

We can also mention here a practical secularism that dims the ideal of sanctity and leads to religious indifferentism. The fact of finding oneself immersed in secular realities could easily lead to becoming enmeshed in purely human ambitions, overlooking the supernatural meaning of life. These temptations come from the world itself, as our Lord warned us: «the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful» (Mt 13:22). Therefore Saint Paul exhorts us: «Do not be conformed to the world» (Rom 12:2). But despite the temptations that come from the world, we should also realize that «the deepest danger lies in ourselves: we ourselves have not converted and therefore we are not free in regard to material things. The goods of this world have for us an ambiguous character due to the avarice and disorder with which we approach them as a consequence of sin. Therefore they have the power to distract us and to seduce us, and we easily lose the right path.»[25]

Finally, turning to the danger of clericalism, we can define it as the interference by clerics in the civil arena.[26] It represents a confusion between the two spheres, which gives rise to undue interference of one sphere in the other as a result of an insufficient recognition of the legitimate autonomy of temporal realities. Clericalism is thus every use of sacred power for temporal ends, or the desire to make use of the Church in order to gain advantages in the civil sphere. Blessed Josemaría also uses the term to refer to laymen who try to make use of the Church for temporal ends, not respecting the legitimate autonomy of the secular sphere.

To overcome all these dangers, in the following sections we will consider the importance of cultivating what Blessed Josemaría called «a priestly soul» and «a lay mentality.»

3. Overcoming spiritualism and materialism: a priestly soul and love for secular realities.

Blessed Josemaría always recommended that one should «materialize one’s spiritual life.»[27] «Authentic Christianity, which professes the
resurrection of all flesh, has always quite logically opposed ‘dis-incarnation,’ without fear of being judged materialistic. We can, therefore, rightfully speak of a ‘Christian materialism,’ which is boldly opposed to a materialism blind to the spirit.»[28]

This implies an appreciation of the Christian value of secular realities. The original goodness and transcendent value of «matter and the most trivial occurrences and situations»[29] are discovered thanks to the light emanating from Christ’s work of redemption and recapitulation.

This is one of the characteristics that distinguishes Christianity from so many other religious attitudes that conceal a distrust or even rejection of all that is material. In Stoicism, in Platonism and gnosticism, in Buddhism and Hinduism, temporal realities seem to lie under a shadow. Here is where the absolute newness of Christianity is evident. God has become man and has assumed all that is human and material, transforming it into a way of expressing God’s love, into a path of holiness and of redemption.

With the light of faith, Blessed Josemaría attained a deep theological appreciation for the «secular character» (LG 31) that Vatican II recognized as proper to the laity. He never ceased to insist that «everyday life is the true setting for your lives as Christians» and that therefore «it is in the midst of the most material things of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves.»[30] «Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.»[31]

Thus «the Christian materialism» proposed by Blessed Josemaría is opposed not only to a disembodied spiritualism, but also to a materialism closed to the spirit. He truly understood that the secular character, or secularity, proper to the laity was not simply an external fact, but that it possesses a theological and vocational dimension. This is reaffirmed by Christifideles Laici. In the situation in the world in which the laity find themselves, «God manifests his plan and communicates to them their particular vocation of ‘seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God’ (LG 31)» (no. 15).
The opening to the Spirit, who by his grace transforms and elevates secular realities, implies, therefore, a call directed to the laity to discover that «something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations.» Underlying this is the reality of the common priesthood, a priesthood that is actualized by each of the faithful in accord with the nature of his or her own vocation. For the laity, characterized by their own secular character, this means that they are called to exercise this priesthood «in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life... It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and redeemer» (LG 31).

The expression «priestly soul,» used to highlight the common priesthood of the faithful, owes its existence to the founder of Opus Dei. «Live and work for God, with a spirit of love and service, with a priestly soul, even though you may not be a priest. Then all your actions will take on a genuine supernatural meaning which will keep your whole life united to the source of all graces.» He also taught that «we have been given a new principle of energy, strong new roots grafted onto our Lord.» «Thus we see why the Mass is the center and root of a Christian’s spiritual life.»

In this sense, he recalled that all «the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life,» «the immense panorama of work,» «the most ordinary situations,» «even what seems most commonplace,» all of this is included in «an ascending movement which the Holy Spirit, infused in our hearts, wants to call forth from this world, upwards from the earth to the glory of the Lord;» an ascending movement that seek to «unite all things in Christ» (Eph 1:10). In virtue of their priestly soul, all Christians therefore are called to sanctify work, to sanctify themselves in their work, and to sanctify others through their work. Thus their entire life is transformed into prayer and apostolate.

All of this is possible, as Josemaría Escrivá often noted, only if one has a deep contemplative life, an intimate and continual relationship with God that gives rise to «a supernatural instinct to purify all of one’s actions, to
raise them to the order of grace and turn them into a means of apostolate.»

Blessed Josemaría also emphasized that one’s faith and baptismal vocation must be expressed by one’s entire life: «Through baptism all of us have been made priests of our lives, ‘to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (1 Pet 2:5). Everything we do can be an expression of our obedience to God’s will and so perpetuate the mission of the God-man.»

He graphically insisted that «the Christian vocation consists of making heroic verse out of the prose of each day. Heaven and earth seem to merge, my sons and daughters, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives.»

In an interview that he granted in 1968, he said: «For many years now, ever since the foundation of Opus Dei, I have meditated and asked others to meditate on those words of Christ that we find in St. John: ‘And when I am lifted up from the earth I shall draw all things unto myself’ (Jn 12:32) By his death on the Cross, Christ has drawn all creation to himself. Now it is the task of Christians, in his name, to reconcile all things to God, placing Christ, by means of their work in the middle of the world, at the summit of all human activities.» This intuition contains a profound conviction of the priestly dimension that characterizes the life of the faithful, «the salvific meaning of Christian secularity, and in consequence, the way to sanctify it.»

Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, his first successor as head of Opus Dei, has summed up this teaching of the founder: «the priestly soul—that is, a soul which desires to make the spiritual priesthood it has received actually bear fruit—means an apostolic spirit, a yearning to serve, an effort to turn the most ordinary actions, one’s family and social relations, one’s ordinary professional work, into the effective occasion of a filial and continuous encounter with God.»

Blessed Josemaría was strongly drawn by Saint Paul’s life and teaching, above all by his struggle to imitate Christ, to have «this mind...which was in Christ Jesus» (Phil 2:5). He saw in this apostle a shining example of a priestly and apostolic soul. In the letter to the Corinthians we read: «To the
weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some» (1 Cor 9:22). «I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls» (2 Cor 12:15).

Blessed Josemaría frequently recalled that a priestly soul entails love for the Cross, a yearning to spread everywhere the fire of love that Jesus came to bring into the world (cf. Lk 12:49), to be co-redeemers with him. «This explains the apostolic responsibility of the priestly soul, which feels the divine urging, stemming from Baptism, to co-redeem with Christ.»[48] To the extent that a person is united to Christ he shares in his universal salvific mission. Every action of a Christian then acquires an apostolic dimension, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, which makes «all men partakers in redemption and salvation, and through them [establishes] the right relationship of the entire world to Christ.»[49]

The following text provides a clear synthesis of Blessed Josemaría’s teaching in this regard: «Uniting professional work with ascetical struggle and with contemplation-something that could seem impossible, but which is necessary, to contribute to reconciling the world with God—and converting that ordinary work into an instrument of personal sanctification and apostolate. Is this not a noble and great ideal, for which it is worthwhile giving one’s life?»[50] Underlying these words is the importance of attaining what he called «unity of life,» a phrase that we find him using at least since 1931 and that sums up the core of Opus Dei’s message.[51]

4. The danger of clericalism and its antidote: a lay mentality

Besides spiritualism and secularism, another danger the laity have to skirt in striving to make their daily life conform to their faith is clericalism. Clericalism is marked by an insufficient appreciation for the legitimate autonomy of temporal realities. In a letter written in 1954, Blessed Josemaría stressed among other things the autonomy of the temporal and clerical spheres, asking that there not be «clerics who want to get mixed up in the concerns of the laity, nor laity who want to get mixed up in concerns of the clergy.»[52]

This autonomy was later clearly affirmed by the Second Vatican Council, which recognized each person’s freedom and responsibility to confront the problems of his work environment. This freedom does not
mean the absence of reference to the Creator, but rather the desire to accept God’s will in every circumstance of one’s life.

As Gaudium et Spes teaches: «If by the autonomy of earthly affairs is meant the gradual discovery, exploitation, and ordering of the laws and values of matter and society, then the demand for autonomy is perfectly in order: it is at once the claim of modern man and the desire of the Creator. By the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws. These man must respect as he recognizes the methods proper to every science and technique» (GS 36).[53]

Thus pastors «will not always be so expert as to have a ready answer to every problem (even every grave problem) that arises; this is not the role of the clergy: it is rather up to the laymen to shoulder their responsibilities under the guidance of Christian wisdom and with eager attention to the teaching authority of the Church. Very often their Christian vision will suggest a certain solution in some given situation. Yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that some of the faithful, with no less sincerity, will see the problem quite differently. Now if one or the other of the proposed solutions is too easily associated with the message of the Gospel, they ought to remember that in those cases no one is permitted to identify the authority of the Church exclusively with his own opinion» (GS 43).

Lumen Gentium in turn exhorts pastors to «recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church...pastors must respect and recognize the liberty which belongs to all in the terrestrial city» (LG 37).

Josemaría Escrivá typifies clericalism as the error of one who says he is stepping down «from the temple into the world to represent the Church, or that his solutions are ‘the Catholic solutions’ to problems.»[54] And he adds forcefully: «That would be completely inadmissible! That would be clericalism, ‘official Catholicism,’ or whatever you want to call it. In any case, it means doing violence to the very nature of things.»[55]

In contrast to clericalism, he sought to foster a lay mentality,[56] emphasizing the need to view secular realities in the light of faith, while
recognizing and respecting their value. «You must foster everywhere a genuine ‘lay outlook,’ which will lead to three conclusions: be sufficiently honest, so as to shoulder one’s own personal responsibility; be sufficiently Christian, so as to respect those brothers in the Faith who, in matters of free discussion, propose solutions which differ from those which each one of us maintains; and be sufficiently Catholic so as not to use our Mother the Church, involving her in human factions.»

The spirit of freedom and responsibility that characterizes a lay mentality can be contemplated here under three points of view:

— personally («accepting personally the weight of one’s own responsibilities»);

— «intersubjectively» (respect for the legitimate pluralism «of one’s brothers in the faith»);

— in the ambit of the Church (not involving the Church in human factions).

The importance the founder of Opus Dei gives to personal freedom and responsibility is seen in the following quote: «It is obvious that, in this field as in all others, you would not be able to carry out this program of sanctifying your everyday life if you did not enjoy all the freedom which proceeds from your dignity as men and women created in the image of God and which the Church freely recognises. Personal freedom is essential to the Christian life. But do not forget, my children, that I always speak of a responsible freedom.

«Interpret, then, my words as what they are: a call to exercise your rights every day, and not merely in time of emergency. A call to fulfill honorably your commitments as citizens, in all fields—in politics and in financial affairs, in university life and in your job—accepting with courage all the consequences of your free decisions and the personal independence which corresponds to each one of you. A Christian ‘lay outlook’ of this sort will enable you to flee from all intolerance, from all fanaticism. To put it in a positive way, it will help you to live in peace with all your fellow citizens, and to promote this understanding and harmony in all spheres of social life.»
Since Blessed Josemaría was speaking to laymen in the homily just cited, one can understand why he did not stop to consider that clericalism was a danger for priests as well. It is worthwhile recalling that on other occasions he energetically noted the existence of this danger.[64] In an interview granted in October 1965, he remarked that, in spite of the solemn teachings of the Second Vatican Council, often people still viewed the apostolate of the laity as a pastoral activity «organized from above» and he recalled that the laity should never be considered as the «long arm of the Church.»[65]

He emphasized on various occasions that the ministerial priesthood is essentially a service to the common priesthood of the faithful, who are, in the great majority, lay faithful. Thus, on the occasion of the ordination of priests of Opus Dei, he said: «They are being ordained to serve. They are not being ordained to give orders or to attract attention, but rather to give themselves to the service of all souls in a divine and continuous silence. When they become priests, they will not allow themselves to yield to the temptation to imitate the occupations of lay people—even though they are well able to do that work because they have been at it until now, and have acquired a lay outlook which they will never lose.

«Their competence in the various branches of human knowledge such as history, natural sciences, psychology, law and sociology is a necessary feature of this lay outlook. But it will not lead them to put themselves forward as priest-psychologists, priest-biologists or priest-sociologists: they receive the sacrament of Holy Orders to become nothing other than priest-priests, priests through and through.»[66]

Blessed Josemaría wanted priests to have a lay mentality above all so that they would know how to respect the proper function of the lay faithful, without intruding on their autonomy and without considering them the long arm of the hierarchy. A lay mentality, in addition, permits priests to appreciate, to grasp one might say almost «connaturally,» the beauty but also the difficulties of the faithful who find themselves fully immersed in secular life.

A lay mentality leads one to discern the Christian value of secular realities and therefore of work, seeing in it an occasion and means of
sanctification. In regard to priests, Blessed Josemaría recalled that they too are called to sanctify themselves in their own daily work, in their specific pastoral tasks, which also can and should be an occasion and means of sanctification.

In this regard, we can cite the following testimony of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo: «I would like to add here what is just one more among many vivid memories which bear upon this theme: namely, the authentic joy with which the Founder of Opus Dei, an untiring preacher of the need to be ‘contemplatives in the middle of the world,’ read the following paragraph from the Constitution Lumen Gentium, which answers the objections that the cares and concerns of the priestly ministry could be obstacles for seeking personal sanctity: ‘Rather than be held back by perils and hardships in their apostolic labors they (priests) should rise to greater holiness, nourishing and fostering their action with an overflowing contemplation, for the nourishment of the entire Church of God’ (LG 41).»[67]

Therefore Blessed Josemaría stressed that the sanctification of work «is, as it were, the hinge of true spirituality for people who, like us, have decided to come close to God while being at the same time fully involved in temporal affairs.»[68]

5. Close interconnection between a priestly soul and lay mentality

Blessed Josemaría placed great stress on the interconnection between a «priestly soul» and «lay mentality.» He frequently mentioned them together, and noted that the vocation to Opus Dei led one to have «a truly priestly soul and a fully lay mentality.»[69]

A Christian immersed in temporal realities is called to bring about a vital synthesis—to bring all things to God (priestly soul), but at the same time to respect the nature proper to each reality and the freedom of each person (lay mentality).

A lay mentality that is not informed by a priestly soul leads to laicism or to a materialism blind to the spirit; while a priestly soul that is divorced from a lay mentality can degenerate into clericalism.[70]

A priestly soul leads to establishing a unity between earthly and supernatural realities,[71] overcoming the rupture caused by a disembodied
spiritualism or from a materialism closed to the spirit. While a lay mentality guarantees that the unity between earthly and supernatural realities does not end up in a confusing the two spheres, thus avoiding the improper interference we have termed clericalism.

The connection between a priestly soul and lay mentality gives one the capacity to understand secular realities and to fill them with Christian meaning, elevating them to a divine plane. Thus Bishop Alvaro del Portillo observed that the Christian dimension of secularity «can be seen as the harmonious union of a ‘priestly soul’ with a ‘lay mentality.’»[72]

The harmonious union between a priestly soul and lay mentality ensures that the apostolate of the laity is marked by a fully lay style. As Blessed Josemaría said in a homily: «The Christian apostolate-and I’m talking about an ordinary Christian, living as just one more man or woman among equals—is a great work of teaching. Through real, personal, loyal friendship, you create in others a hunger for God and you help them to discover new horizons—naturally, simply. With the example of your faith lived to the full, with a loving word which is full of the force of divine truth.»[73]

Blessed Josemaría also stressed the need to join a priestly soul with a lay mentality in order to sanctify work. The sanctification of work has two prerequisites: that it be humanly well done (in accord with a lay mentality),[74] and that it be done with and for God and men (in accord with a priestly soul). In an interview granted in 1967 he said: «What I have always taught, over the last forty years, is that a Christian should do all honest human work, be it intellectual or manual, with the greatest perfection possible: with human perfection (professional competence) and with Christian perfection (for love of God’s Will and as a service to mankind). Human work done in this manner, no matter how humble or insignificant it may seem, helps to shape the world in a Christian way. The world’s divine dimension is made more visible and our human labor is thus incorporated into the marvellous work of Creation and Redemption. It is raised to the order of grace. It is sanctified and becomes God’s work, _operatio Dei, opus Dei._»[75]
The value that the founder of the Work attributed to the union between a priestly soul and a lay mentality is evident in a letter he wrote on the occasion of the first priestly ordination of members of the Work, on June 25, 1944. At the beginning of the letter addressed to the members of Opus Dei he says: «I want all of my children, priests and laity, to engrave firmly in your head and in your heart a reality that we cannot consider in any way as something merely external, but that is, on the contrary, the hinge and foundation of our divine vocation.»

«In everything we do we must all of us (priests and lay people) have a truly priestly soul and a fully lay outlook, if we are to understand and use in our personal lives that freedom which we enjoy in the sphere of the Church and in temporal things, seeing ourselves at one and the same time as citizens of the city of God and citizens of the city of man.»[76]

One finds here a consideration of great ecclesiological relevance. When Blessed Josemaría refers to the need to have a priestly soul and a lay mentality he is not speaking only to lay faithful but also to sacred ministers. Thus he is fostering the service that priests are called to offer to the common priesthood of the lay faithful, by recognizing the latter’s specific vocation-mission,[77] while also contributing to the organic cooperation that should exist between the sacred ministers and the lay faithful.[78]

A similar reflection can be seen in these words from a late letter of his: «Since the work of Opus Dei is eminently lay, and the priesthood informs the whole of Opus Dei with its spirit; and since the work of lay people and that of priests complement one another and mutually benefit each other, our vocation requires that all members of the Work manifest this intimate union between the two elements in such a way that each is to have a truly priestly soul and a fully lay mentality.»[79]

The Holy Father has stressed the need to place sanctity as «the foundation of the pastoral planning in which we are involved at the start of the new millennium.»[80] In this perspective, the founder of Opus Dei’s contribution to developing an authentic secular spirituality that deeply influences every aspect of daily life and furthers the inculturation of the faith is clearly of great importance for the new evangelization, to which we should all feel ourselves called.


[3] There are two Conciliar statements in which this point is clearly reflected: «It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love» (Lumen Gentium [LG] 40). «All Christians, in the conditions, duties and circumstances of their life and through all these, will sanctify themselves more and more» (LG 41).

[4] As assistant secretary of the Theological Commission of Vatican II, he was one of the experts who contributed most to the writing of Lumen Gentium.


[6] Pope John Paul II, in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation Christifideles Laici (1988) observed that in the post-conciliar period, the laity has been exposed to the «temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world» (no. 2). In the same document the Pope laments «the tendency towards a ‘clericalization’ of the lay faithful» (no. 23).


[10] «Christ’s plea is addressed to each and every Christian. No one can consider himself excused, for whatever reason: age, health or occupation. There are no excuses whatsoever. Either we carry out a fruitful apostolate, or our faith will prove barren» Friends of God, Scepter, New York, 1981, no. 272.

[11] One of the central points of Blessed Josemaría’s teaching is that sanctity and apostolate constitute two indispensable dimensions of the Christian vocation. «For a Christian, apostolate is something instinctive. It is not something added onto his daily activities and his professional work from the outside. I have repeated it constantly, since the day that our Lord chose for the foundation of Opus Dei! We have to sanctify our ordinary work, we have to sanctify others through the exercise of the particular profession that is proper to each of us, in our own particular state in life» Christ is Passing By, no. 122. On this theme see I. De Celaya, Unidad de Vida y Plenitud Cristiana, in Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei. En el 50 aniversario de su fundacion, Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 1985, p. 334.


[13] Ibid.


[15] We note here that this expression was never used by Vatican II.

[16] In past eras, there was a tendency to recommend «’a holy life’ to monks, religious and to the various categories of pious persons, while the common faithful seemed too tied down by their commitments in the world to aspire to anything other than to observe the demands of a rather lax practice, with a certain indispensable minimum.» M. Labourdette La

[17] This homily was memorable not only because of the external circumstances—about thirty thousand people were present, and for many of them it was their first meeting with the founder of Opus Dei—but above all because on this occasion he vigorously highlighted the theology of secularity that was a central theme of the message he had spread untiringly since 1928.


[19] The double danger offered by this separation was clearly pointed out by Vatican II when it noted: «It is a mistake to think that, because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities; this is to forget that by our faith we are bound all the more to fulfill these responsibilities according to the vocation of each one. But it is no less mistaken to think that we may immerse ourselves in earthly activities as if these latter were utterly foreign to religion, and religion were nothing more than the fulfillment of acts of worship and the observance of a few moral obligations. One of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and the practice of their daily lives» (GS 43).

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., no. 114.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., no. 115.


[28] Ibid., n. 115.

[29] Ibid., n. 114.


[31] Ibid., n. 114.

[32] Ibid.


[36] Christ Is Passing By, no. 155

[37] Blessed Josemaría often stressed this point; see, for example, Christ Is Passing By, no. 87.
[38] «Passionately Loving the World,» in Conversations no. 114.

[39] Ibid., no. 115.

[40] Ibid.

[41] He also wrote: «An hour of study, for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer,» The Way, no. 335. This is a consideration to which he returned on many occasions: «there is no human undertaking which cannot be sanctified, which cannot be an opportunity to sanctify ourselves and to cooperate with God in the sanctification of the people with whom we work.... To work in this way is to pray. To study thus is likewise prayer. Research done with this spirit is prayer too. We are always doing the same thing, for everything can be prayer; all activity can and should lead us to God, nourish our intimate dealings with him, from morning to night. Any honorable work can be prayer and all prayerful work is apostolate. In this way the soul develops a unity of life that is both simple and strong.» Christ Is Passing By, op. cit., no. 10.


[46] Ibid. [Annales Theologici 6] p. 27. Also see Christ Is Passing By, nos. 105 and 183.

In Love with the Church, op. cit., p. 13.

Vatican II, Decree Apostolicam Actuositatem, no. 2.


Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, Letter 19 Mar 1954, no. 21, cited by Fernando Ocáriz, «Vocation to Opus Dei as a vocation in the Church,» in Rodriguez, Ocáriz, J.L. Illanes, Opus Dei in the Church, op. cit., p. 117.

Other Conciliar texts that deal with this topic are: GS 41; 56 and 76; LG 36 and Apostolicam Actuositatem [AA] 4; 7 and 31. The following is particularly interesting: «Laymen ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order.... they must bring to their cooperation with others their own special competence, and act on their own responsibility.... The temporal order is to be renewed in such a way that, while its own principles are fully respected, it is harmonized with the principles of the Christian life and adapted to the various conditions of times, places and peoples.» (AA 7). On the conciliar teaching and also commenting on other texts of Blessed Josemaría, cf. E. Reinhardt, «La legítima autonomia de las realidades temporales,» in Romana 15 (1992) 323-335.

«Passionately Loving the World,» no. 117.
We note here that the expression «lay mentality» was coined by Blessed Josemaría. «Passionately Loving the World,» no. 117.


For the founder of Opus Dei, the topic of freedom united to a corresponding personal responsibility was a constant in his teaching, as he himself noted: «If my own personal experience is of any help, I can say that I have always seen my work as a priest and shepherd of souls as being aimed at helping each person to face up to all the demands of his life and to discover what God wants from him in particular — without in any way limiting that holy independence and blessed personal responsibility which are the features of a Christian conscience. This way of acting and this spirit are based on respect for the transcendence of revealed truth and on love for the freedom of the human person. I might add that they are also based on a realization that history is undetermined and open to a variety of human options — all of which God respects.» Christ Is Passing By, no. 99.

Among the numerous texts that could be cited here is the following point from The Forge: «You need formation, because you need a profound sense of responsibility, if you are to encourage and direct the activity of Catholics in public life and do so with the respect that everyone’s freedom deserves, reminding each and every one that they have to be consistent with their faith» (no. 712).

In this respect he also noted: «You would belittle the faith if you reduced it to a human ideology, if you raised a political-religious standard to condemn — on who knows what divine authority — those who think differently from you in matters which by their very nature can be solved in a wide variety of ways.» Christ Is Passing By, no. 99. On this question, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo noted: «The mind of the Council clearly
supports this view. There was much less support however — in fact, there was opposition in certain sectors of both civil and ecclesiastical life — when, in 1932, Monsignor Escrivá wrote to the first members of Opus Dei: ‘Avoid that abuse which seems to be widely intensified in our time—it is manifest in nations throughout the world — which betrays a desire contrary to the legitimate freedom of men, in attempting to oblige all to form a single group in matters of opinion, to turn temporal doctrines into dogmas’ (Josemaría Escrivá, Letter January 9, 1932, no. 1)»: Alvaro del Portillo, «Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá: His Love for the Church,» in In Love with the Church, Scepter, New York, 1987, p. 18. In regard to the relevance of this aspect of personal freedom it is interesting to note the following observation: «It is precisely the radical presence of freedom in the personal origin of all of these undertakings of solidarity that prevents any confusion, from the very outset, of this ideal with the traditionalist program of a Christianity imposed upon people. Its essential pluralism and its intrinsic respect for freedom of consciences separates it from any kind of fundamentalism.» A. Llano, «La libertad radical,» p. 274.

[61] In another homily, preached in 1963, he said: «It makes me very sad to see a Catholic.... impudently or scandalously seek to climb up in the world on the strength of being a Christian»: Friends of God, no. 13.


[63] Conversations, no. 117. Other aspects of the responsibility that Christians have as citizens are found in many other texts by Blessed Josemaría. One might note here the chapter entitled «Citizenship» in Furrow, nos. 290-322.

[64] In an interview practically contemporaneous with that homily he said: «All those who exercise the priestly ministry in the Church should always be careful to respect the autonomy which a Catholic layman needs, so that he will not find himself in a position of inferiority in relation to his fellow laymen, and can carry out efficiently his own apostolic task in the middle of the world. To attempt the opposite, to try to instrumentalize lay
people for ends which exceed the proper limits of our hierarchical ministry, would be to fall into a lamentably anachronistic clericalism. The possibilities of the lay apostolate would be terribly curtailed; the laity would be condemned to permanent immaturity and above all, today especially, the very concept of authority and unity in the Church would be endangered. We cannot forget that the existence among Catholics of a true diversity of criterion and opinion in matters which God has left to the free discussion of men is in no way opposed to the hierarchical structure or the unity of the People of God. On the contrary, it strengthens them and defends them against possible impurities.»: Espontaneidad y pluralismo en el Pueblo de Dios, interview published in Palabra in October 1967 and included in Conversations, no. 12.

[65] Conversations, no. 21.

[66] Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, «A Priest Forever,» in In Love with the Church, no. 35.


[71] This idea is well expressed in the following text of Blessed Josemaría: «If the Son of God has become a man and died on the Cross, it was so that all men might be one with Him and the Father (cf. John 17:22). All of us, therefore, are called to form a part of this divine unity. With a priestly soul and with the Holy Mass as the center of our interior life, we strive to be present with Jesus, between God and men,» Letter, March 11, 1940, cited by Alvaro del Portillo in «Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá, His love for the Church,» in In Love with the Church, p. 12.
We recall here that «by the autonomy of earthly affairs is meant the gradual discovery, exploitation and ordering of the laws and values of matter and society...By the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws. These man must respect as he recognizes the methods proper to every science and technique» (GS 36).

Josemaría Escrivá, Letter of February 2, 1945, no. 1, cited by Jose Luis Illanes, «The Church in the world: the secularity of the members of Opus Dei,» in Opus Dei in the Church, p. 165.

Pope John Paul II expressed this idea repeatedly in his apostolic exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis (March 25, 1992): «Finally, because their role and task within the Church do not replace but promote the baptismal priesthood of the entire People of God, leading it to its full ecclesial realization, priests have a positive and helping relationship to the laity. Priests are there to serve the faith, hope and charity of the laity. They recognize and uphold, as brothers and friends, the dignity of the laity as children of God and help them to exercise fully their specific role in the overall context of the Church’s mission.» (no. 17). «Above all it is necessary that he be able to teach and support the laity in their vocation to be present in and to transform the world with the light of the Gospel, by recognizing this task of theirs and showing respect for it.» (no. 59).

The Second Vatican Council has indicated that the Church is a «priestly community» with an «organic structure» (LG 11) and that this structure is characterized by the correlation (reciprocal relation) between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood (cf. LG 10 and 32).

Letter, March 28, 1955, no. 3. cited in The Canonical Path of Opus Dei, p. 271. The expression «all members of the Work» is explained by the fact that in that period Opus Dei had not yet attained a canonical configuration fully adequate to its pastoral and apostolic reality. The
present status of personal prelature now offers an adequate context for the organic cooperation between laity and priests.