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.
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EDITORIAL
God Who is Near

April 19 was the fifth anniversary of the day when the Cardinals, united in Conclave, chose Joseph Ratzinger as the successor of the apostle Peter. It is easy to recall the emotions of those days. After the death of John Paul II, on April 2, 2005, during the twenty-seventh year of his Pontificate, Rome experienced a huge influx of people from all over the world. We all bear indelibly engraved on our memory the interminable lines of people seeking to spend a few moments close to the mortal remains of the beloved Pope, or the funeral Mass celebrated by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, as well as the beginning of the Conclave, a few hours after the end of the Mass “Pro eligendo Romano Pontifice.”

On April 24, in the homily at the solemn beginning of his Petrine ministry, the new Pope opened his heart to the world, expressing his joy at having seen in recent days so much filial affection, both human and supernatural, for John Paul II: “it has become wonderfully evident to us that the Church is alive. And the Church is young.”[1]

On the fifth anniversary of Benedict XVI’s pontificate, the signs of affection and gratitude towards the Roman Pontiff are abundant. In this issue of Romana we have reproduced, for example, a letter signed by young people from more than 30 countries who were in Rome during Holy Week. After recalling the moments of special significance that have taken place since he became Pope, the young people wrote: “Thank you, Holy Father, for these five years of your Pontificate, for your example of service, and for your example in the search for truth.” And they added: “Thank you, Your Holiness, for the courage with which you invite all the faithful in the Church to follow Christ with a total dedication, without letting themselves be intimidated by the false appearances of prevailing opinions.”

In this issue we reproduce an article by the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, in which he highlights Benedict XVI's efforts to make known “God who is near to us,” who has made himself one with us and who, in his goodness, has wanted to remain as food for us in the Eucharist.
The Prelate writes that His Holiness, from the beginning of his ministry, has considered it his mission to communicate to others the joy that comes from being close to God; and to stir up in the world a new commitment in response to God's love, aware that “there is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ,” and “to know him and to speak to others of our friendship with him.”[2]

The article by Bishop Echevarría recalls the love that St. Josemaría had for the Roman Pontiff and that he showed openly on so many occasions. “For me,” the Founder of Opus Dei once said, “in the hierarchy of love, the Pope comes right after the Most Holy Trinity and our Mother the Blessed Virgin.”[3] And on another page of his writings, he raised his soul in gratitude to God for this gift: “Thank you, my God, for placing in my heart such love for the Pope.”[4]


[2] Ibid.


HOLY SEE

- The Roman Pontiff
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I greet with joy the Patriarchs and Bishops of the various ecclesial communities of the Middle East who have come to Cyprus for this occasion, and I thank especially the Most Reverend Youssef Soueif, Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus, for the words that he addressed to me at the start of Mass.

Let me also say how glad I am to have this opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist in the company of so many of the faithful of Cyprus, a land blessed by the apostolic labors of Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas. I greet all of you most warmly and I thank you for your hospitality and for the generous welcome you have given me. I extend a particular greeting to the Filipino, Sri Lankan and other immigrant communities who form such a significant grouping within the Catholic population of this island. I pray that your presence here will enrich the life and worship of the parishes to which you belong, and that you in turn will draw much spiritual sustenance from the ancient Christian heritage of the land that you have made your home.

Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Lord’s Body and Blood. Corpus Christi, the name given to this feast in the West, is used in the Church’s tradition to designate three distinct realities: the physical body of Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, his Eucharistic body, the bread of heaven which nourishes us in this great sacrament, and his ecclesial body, the Church. By reflecting on these different aspects of the Corpus Christi, we come to a deeper understanding of the mystery of communion which binds together those who belong to the Church. All who feed on the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist are “brought together in unity by the Holy
Spirit” (Eucharistic Prayer II) to form God’s one holy people. Just as the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, so too the same Holy Spirit is at work in every celebration of Mass for a twofold purpose: to sanctify the gifts of bread and wine, that they may become the body and blood of Christ, and to fill all who are nourished by these holy gifts, that they may become one body, one spirit in Christ.

St. Augustine expresses this process beautifully (cf. Sermon 272). He reminds us that the bread is not made from a single grain, but many. Before all these grains become bread, they must be ground. He is referring here to the exorcism which catechumens must undergo before their baptism. Each of us who belong to the Church needs to leave the closed world of his individuality and accept the ‘companionship’ of others who “break bread” with us. We must think not in terms of ‘me’ but ‘we.’ That’s why every day we pray ‘our’ Father, ‘our’ daily bread. Breaking down the barriers between us and our neighbors is the first prerequisite for entering the divine life to which we are called. We need to be liberated from all that imprisons us and isolates us: fear and mistrust towards others, greed and selfishness, unwillingness to run the risk of vulnerability to which we expose ourselves when we are open to love.”

The grains of wheat, once crushed, are mixed into the dough and baked. Here, Augustine refers to immersion in the baptismal waters followed by the sacramental gift of the Holy Spirit, which inflames the heart of the faithful with the fire of God’s love. This process unites and transforms a single isolated grain into bread, it gives us an evocative image of the unifying action of the Holy Spirit upon the church members, made so prominent in the celebration of the Eucharist. Those who take part in this great sacrament become the Body of Christ’s Church, so they feed his Eucharistic Body. “Be what you can see,” says St. Augustine encouraging, “and receive what you are.”

These strong words invite us to respond generously to the call to “be Christ” to those around us. We are his body now on earth. To paraphrase a famous remark attributed to Saint Teresa of Avila, we are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on those in need, we are the hands with which he seeks to bless and to heal, we are the feet that on which he walks
to do well, and we are the lips by which his Gospel is proclaimed. However, it is important to understand that when we participate in his healing work, we are not honoring the memory of a dead hero in extending what he did: on the contrary, Christ is alive in us, his body, the Church, his priestly people. By feeding on Him in the Eucharist and receiving the Holy Spirit in our hearts we truly become the Body of Christ that we receive, we are truly in communion with him and with each other, and we truly become instruments, in witness to him before the world.

“Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul” (*Acts* 4:32). In the first Christian community, nourished at the Lord’s Table, we see the effects of the Holy Spirit’s unifying action. They shared their goods in common, all material attachment being overcome by love for the brethren. They found equitable solutions to their differences, as we see for example in the resolution of the dispute between Hellenists and Hebrews over the daily distribution (cf. *Acts* 6:1-6). As one observer commented at a later date: “See how these Christians love one another, and how they are ready to die for one another” (Tertullian, *Apology*, 39). Yet their love was by no means limited to their fellow believers. They never saw themselves as exclusive, privileged beneficiaries of divine favor, but rather as messengers, sent to bring the good news of salvation in Christ to the ends of the earth. And so it was that the message entrusted to the Apostles by the Risen Lord was spread throughout the Middle East, and outward from there across the whole of the world.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we are called, just as they were, to be of one heart and one soul, to deepen our communion with the Lord and with one another, and to bear witness to him before the world.

We are called to overcome our differences, to bring peace and reconciliation where there is conflict, to offer the world a message of hope. We are called to reach out to those in need, generously sharing our earthly goods with those less fortunate than ourselves. And we are called to proclaim unceasingly the death and resurrection of the Lord, until he comes. Through him, with him and in him, in the unity that is the Holy Spirit’s gift to the Church, let us give honor and glory to God our heavenly Father in the company of all the angels and saints who sing his praises forever. Amen.
Address of the Holy Father

Benedict XVI

Eleftheria Sports Center, Nicosia

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I thank Archbishop Eterovic for his kind words, and I renew my greetings to all of you who have come here in connection with the launch of the forthcoming Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops. I thank you for all the work that has been accomplished already in anticipation of the Synodal Assembly, and I promise you the support of my prayers as you enter this final phase of preparation.

Before I begin, it is only fitting that I recall the late Bishop Luigi Padovese who, as President of the Turkish Catholic Bishops, contributed to the preparation of the Instrumentum Laboris that I am consigning to you today. News of his unforeseen and tragic death on Thursday surprised and shocked all of us. I entrust his soul to the mercy of almighty God, mindful of how committed he was, especially as a bishop, to interreligious and cultural understanding, and to dialogue between the Churches. His death is a sobering reminder of the vocation that all Christians share, to be courageous witnesses in every circumstance to what is good, noble and just.

The motto chosen for the Assembly speaks to us of communion and witness, and it reminds us how the members of the early Christian community “were of one heart and soul”. At the center of the Church’s unity is the Eucharist, Christ’s inestimable gift to his people and the focus of our liturgical celebration today on this Solemnity of the Lord’s Body and Blood. So it is not without significance that the date chosen for the Instrumentum Laboris of the Special Assembly to be consigned should be today.

The Middle East has a special place in the hearts of all Christians, since it was there that God first made himself known to our fathers in faith. From the time when Abraham set out from Ur of the Chaldeans in obedience to the Lord’s call, right up until the death and resurrection of Jesus, God’s saving work was accomplished through particular individuals and peoples in your homelands. Since then, the message of the Gospel has
spread all over the world, but Christians everywhere continue to look to the Middle East with special reverence, on account of the prophets and patriarchs, apostles and martyrs to whom we owe so much, the men and women who heard God’s word, bore witness to it, and handed it on to us who belong to the great family of the Church.

The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, convoked at your request, will endeavor to deepen the bonds of communion between the members of your local Churches, as well as the communion of the Churches themselves with each other and with the universal Church. This Assembly also wishes to encourage you in the witness of faith in Christ that you are bearing in the countries where this faith was born and developed. It is likewise well known that some of you endure great trials due to the current situation in the region. The Special Assembly is an opportunity for Christians in the rest of the world to offer spiritual support and solidarity to their brothers and sisters in the Middle East. It is an opportunity to bring out the important value of the presence and witness of Christians in the countries of the Bible, not only for the Christian community on a global scale but also for your neighbors and your fellow-citizens. You contribute in countless ways to the common good, for example through education, care of the sick and social assistance and you work to build society. You wish to live in peace and harmony with your Jewish and Muslim neighbors. You often act as peacemakers in the difficult process of reconciliation. You deserve recognition for the incalculable role you fulfill. I seriously hope that all your rights will be increasingly respected, including the right to freedom of worship and religious freedom, and that you will no longer suffer discrimination of any kind.

I pray that the work of the Special Assembly will help to focus the attention of the international community on the plight of those Christians in the Middle East who suffer for their beliefs, so that just and lasting solutions may be found to the conflicts that cause so much hardship. On this grave matter, I reiterate my personal appeal for an urgent and concerted international effort to resolve the ongoing tensions in the Middle East, especially in the Holy Land, before such conflicts lead to greater bloodshed.

With these thoughts, I now present to you the text of the *Instrumentum*
Homily on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, closing of the Year for Priests, Rome (June 11, 2010)

Dear Brothers in the Priestly Ministry,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Year for Priests which we have celebrated on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the death of the holy Curé of Ars, the model of priestly ministry in our world, is now coming to an end. We have let the Curé of Ars guide us to a renewed appreciation of the grandeur and beauty of the priestly ministry. The priest is not a mere office-holder, like those which every society needs in order to carry out certain functions. Instead, he does something which no human being can do of his own power: in Christ’s name he speaks the words which absolve us of our sins and in this way he changes, starting with God, our entire life. Over the offerings of bread and wine he speaks Christ’s words of thanksgiving, which are words of transubstantiation—words which make Christ himself present, the Risen One, his Body and Blood—words which thus transform the elements of the world, which open the world to God and unite it to him.

The priesthood, then, is not simply “office” but sacrament: God makes use of us poor men in order to be, through us, present to all men and women, and to act on their behalf. This audacity of God who entrusts himself to human beings—who, conscious of our weaknesses, nonetheless considers men capable of acting and being present in his stead—this audacity of God is the true grandeur concealed in the word “priesthood.” That God thinks that we are capable of this; that in this way he calls men
to his service and thus from within binds himself to them: this is what we wanted to reflect upon and appreciate anew over the course of the past year. We wanted to reawaken our joy at how close God is to us, and our gratitude for the fact that he entrusts himself to our infirmities; that he guides and sustains us daily. In this way we also wanted to demonstrate once again to young people that this vocation, this fellowship of service for God and with God, does exist—and that God is indeed waiting for us to say “yes.”

Together with the whole Church we wanted to make clear once again that we have to ask God for this vocation. We have to beg for workers for God’s harvest, and this petition to God is, at the same time, his own way of knocking on the hearts of young people who consider themselves able to do what God considers them able to do. It was to be expected that this new radiance of the priesthood would not be pleasing to the “enemy”; he would have rather preferred to see it disappear, so that God would ultimately be driven out of the world. And so it happened that, in this very year of joy for the sacrament of the priesthood, the sins of priests came to light—particularly the abuse of the little ones, in which the priesthood, whose task is to manifest God’s concern for our good, turns into its very opposite. We too insistently beg forgiveness from God and from the persons involved, while promising to do everything possible to ensure that such abuse will never occur again; and that in admitting men to priestly ministry and in their formation we will do everything we can to weigh the authenticity of their vocation and make every effort to accompany priests along their journey, so that the Lord will protect them and watch over them in troubled situations and amid life’s dangers. Had the Year for Priests been a glorification of our individual human performance, it would have been ruined by these events. But for us what happened was precisely the opposite: we grew in gratitude for God’s gift, a gift concealed in “earthen vessels” which ever anew, even amid human weakness, makes his love concretely present in this world. So let us look upon all that happened as a summons to purification, as a task which we bring to the future and which makes us acknowledge and love all the more the great gift we have received from God. In this way, his gift becomes a commitment to respond to God’s courage and humility by our own courage and our own humility.
The word of God, which we have sung in the Entrance Antiphon of the liturgy, can speak to us, at this hour, of what it means to become and to be priests: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29).

We are celebrating the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and in the liturgy we peer, as it were, into the heart of Jesus opened in death by the spear of the Roman soldier. Jesus’ heart was indeed opened for us and before us—and thus God’s own heart was opened. The liturgy interprets for us the language of Jesus’ heart, which tells us above all that God is the shepherd of mankind, and so it reveals to us Jesus’ priesthood, which is rooted deep within his heart; so too it shows us the perennial foundation and the effective criterion of all priestly ministry, which must always be anchored in the heart of Jesus and lived out from that starting-point.

Today I would like to meditate especially on those texts with which the Church in prayer responds to the word of God presented in the readings. In those chants, word (Wort) and response (Antwort) interpenetrate. On the one hand, the chants are themselves drawn from the word of God, yet on the other, they are already our human response to that word, a response in which the word itself is communicated and enters into our lives. The most important of those texts in today’s liturgy is Psalm 23(22)—“The Lord is my shepherd”—in which Israel at prayer received God’s self-revelation as shepherd, and made this the guide of its own life. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”: this first verse expresses joy and gratitude for the fact that God is present to and concerned for us. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”: this first verse expresses joy and gratitude for the fact that God is present to and concerned for us. The reading from the Book of Ezekiel begins with the same theme: “I myself will look after and tend my sheep” (Ezek 34:11). God personally looks after me, after us, after all mankind. I am not abandoned, adrift in the universe and in a society which leaves me ever more lost and bewildered. God looks after me. He is not a distant God, for whom my life is worthless. The world’s religions, as far as we can see, have always known that in the end there is only one God. But this God was distant. Evidently he had abandoned the world to other powers and forces, to other divinities. It was with these that one had to deal. The one God was good, yet aloof. He was not dangerous, nor was he very helpful. Consequently one didn’t need to worry about him. He did not lord it over us. Oddly, this kind of thinking re-emerged during
the Enlightenment. There was still a recognition that the world presupposes a Creator. Yet this God, after making the world, had evidently withdrawn from it. The world itself had a certain set of laws by which it ran, and God did not, could not, intervene in them. God was only a remote cause. Many perhaps did not even want God to look after them. They did not want God to get in the way. But wherever God’s loving concern is perceived as getting in the way, human beings go awry. It is fine and consoling to know that there is someone who loves me and looks after me. But it is far more important that there is a God who knows me, loves me and is concerned about me. “I know my own and my own know me” (Jn10:14), the Church says before the Gospel with the Lord’s words.

God knows me, he is concerned about me. This thought should make us truly joyful. Let us allow it to penetrate the depths of our being. Then let us also realize what it means: God wants us, as priests, in one tiny moment of history, to share his concern about people. As priests, we want to be persons who share his concern for men and women, who take care of them and provide them with a concrete experience of God’s concern. Whatever the field of activity entrusted to him, the priest, with the Lord, ought to be able to say: “I know my sheep and mine know me.” “To know”, in the idiom of sacred Scripture, never refers to merely exterior knowledge, like the knowledge of someone’s telephone number. “Knowing” means being inwardly close to another person. It means loving him or her. We should strive to “know” men and women as God does and for God’s sake; we should strive to walk with them along the path of God’s friendship.

Let us return to our Psalm. There we read: “He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me” (23[22]:3ff.). The shepherd points out the right path to those entrusted to him. He goes before them and leads them. Let us put it differently: the Lord shows us the right way to be human. He teaches us the art of being a person. What must I do in order not to fall, not to squander my life in meaningless? This is precisely the question which every man and woman must ask and one which remains valid at every moment of one’s life. How much darkness surrounds this question in our own day! We are constantly reminded of the words of Jesus, who felt compassion for the
crowds because they were like a flock without a shepherd. Lord, have mercy on us too! Show us the way! From the Gospel we know this much: he is himself the way. Living with Christ, following him — this means finding the right way, so that our lives can be meaningful and so that one day we might say: “Yes, it was good to have lived.” The people of Israel continue to be grateful to God because in the Commandments he pointed out the way of life. The great Psalm 119(118) is a unique expression of joy for this fact: we are not fumbling in the dark. God has shown us the way and how to walk aright. The message of the Commandments was synthesized in the life of Jesus and became a living model. Thus we understand that these rules from God are not chains, but the way which he is pointing out to us. We can be glad for them and rejoice that in Christ they stand before us as a lived reality. He himself has made us glad. By walking with Christ, we experience the joy of Revelation, and as priests we need to communicate to others our own joy at the fact that we have been shown the right way of life.

Then there is the phrase about the “darkest valley” through which the Lord leads us. Our path as individuals will one day lead us into the valley of the shadow of death, where no one can accompany us. Yet he will be there. Christ himself descended into the dark night of death. Even there he will not abandon us. Even there he will lead us. “If I sink to the nether world, you are present there,” says Psalm 139[138]. Truly you are there, even in the throes of death, and hence our Responsorial Psalm can say: even there, in the darkest valley, I fear no evil. When speaking of the darkest valley, we can also think of the dark valleys of temptation, discouragement and trial through which everyone has to pass. Even in these dark valleys of life he is there. Lord, in the darkness of temptation, at the hour of dusk when all light seems to have died away, show me that you are there. Help us priests, so that we can remain beside the persons entrusted to us in these dark nights. So that we can show them your own light.

“Your rod and your staff—they comfort me”: the shepherd needs the rod as protection against savage beasts ready to pounce on the flock; against robbers looking for prey. Along with the rod there is the staff which gives support and helps to make difficult crossings. Both of these are likewise part of the Church’s ministry, of the priest’s ministry. The Church
too must use the shepherd’s rod, the rod with which he protects the faith against those who falsify it, against currents which lead the flock astray. The use of the rod can actually be a service of love. Today we can see that it has nothing to do with love when conduct unworthy of the priestly life is tolerated. Nor does it have to do with love if heresy is allowed to spread and the faith twisted and chipped away, as if it were something that we ourselves had invented. As if it were no longer God’s gift, the precious pearl which we cannot let be taken from us. Even so, the rod must always become once again the shepherd’s staff—a staff which helps men and women to tread difficult paths and to follow the Lord.

At the end of the Psalm we read of the table which is set, the oil which anoints the head, the cup which overflows, and dwelling in the house of the Lord. In the Psalm this is an expression first and foremost of the prospect of the festal joy of being in God’s presence in the temple, of being his guest, whom he himself serves, of dwelling with him. For us, who pray this Psalm with Christ and his Body which is the Church, this prospect of hope takes on even greater breadth and depth. We see in these words a kind of prophetic foreshadowing of the mystery of the Eucharist, in which God himself makes us his guests and offers himself to us as food—as that bread and fine wine which alone can definitively sate man’s hunger and thirst. How can we not rejoice that one day we will be guests at the very table of God and live in his dwelling-place? How can we not rejoice at the fact that he has commanded us: “Do this in memory of me”? How can we not rejoice that he has enabled us to set God’s table for men and women, to give them his Body and his Blood, to offer them the precious gift of his very presence. Truly we can pray together, with all our heart, the words of the Psalm: “Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life” (Ps 23[22]:6).

Finally, let us take a brief look at the two communion antiphons which the Church offers us in her liturgy today. First there are the words with which Saint John concludes the account of Jesus’ crucifixion: “One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out” (Jn 19:34). The heart of Jesus is pierced by the spear. Once opened, it becomes a fountain: the water and the blood which stream forth recall the two fundamental sacraments by which the Church lives: Baptism and the
Eucharist. From the Lord’s pierced side, from his open heart, there springs the living fountain which continues to well up over the centuries and which makes the Church. The open heart is the source of a new stream of life; here John was certainly also thinking of the prophecy of Ezekiel who saw flowing forth from the new temple a torrent bestowing fruitfulness and life (Ezek 47): Jesus himself is the new temple, and his open heart is the source of a stream of new life which is communicated to us in Baptism and the Eucharist.

The liturgy of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus also permits another phrase, similar to this, to be used as the communion antiphon. It is taken from the Gospel of John: Whoever is thirsty, let him come to me. And let the one who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said: “Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water” (cf. Jn 7:37ff.) In faith we drink, so to speak, of the living water of God’s Word. In this way the believer himself becomes a wellspring which gives living water to the parched earth of history. We see this in the saints. We see this in Mary, that great woman of faith and love who has become in every generation a wellspring of faith, love and life. Every Christian and every priest should become, starting from Christ, a wellspring which gives life to others. We ought to be offering life-giving water to a parched and thirst world. Lord, we thank you because for our sake you opened your heart; because in your death and in your resurrection you became the source of life. Give us life, make us live from you as our source, and grant that we too may be sources, wellsprings capable of bestowing the water of life in our time. We thank you for the grace of the priestly ministry. Lord bless us, and bless all those who in our time are thirsty and continue to seek. Amen.

Homily for Palm Sunday, St. Peter’s Square, Rome (March 28, 2010)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Dear Young People,
The Gospel of the blessing of the palms that we have heard gathered here in St Peter’s Square, begins with the sentence: “[Jesus] went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem” (Lk 19: 28). At the very beginning of today’s Liturgy, the Church anticipates her response to the Gospel saying: “Let us follow the Lord.” This clearly expresses the theme of Palm Sunday. It is the sequela. Being Christian means considering the way of Jesus Christ as the right way for being human as that way which leads to our destination, to a completely fulfilled and authentic humanity. In a special way I would like to repeat to all young people on this 25th World Youth Day that being Christian is a path or, better, a pilgrimage; it is to travel with Jesus Christ, to journey in the direction he has pointed out and is pointing out to us.

But what direction is this? How do we find it? Our Gospel passage offers two clues in this regard. In the first place it says that it is an ascent. This has first of all a very concrete meaning. Jericho, where the last part of Jesus’ pilgrimage began, is 250 meters below sea-level, whereas Jerusalem the destination is located at 740 to 780 meters above sea level: a climb of almost 1,000 meters. But this external route is above all an image of the internal movement of existence that occurs in the following of Christ: it is an ascent to the true heights of being human. Man can choose an easy path and avoid every effort. He can also sink to the low and the vulgar. He can flounder in the swamps of falsehood and dishonesty. Jesus walks before us and towards the heights. He leads us to what is great, pure. He leads us to that healthy air of the heights: to life in accordance with the truth; to courage that does not let itself be intimidated by the gossip of prevalent opinions; to patience that bears with and sustains the other. He guides people to be open towards the suffering, to those who are neglected. He leads us to stand loyally by the other, even when the situation becomes difficult. He leads us to the readiness to give help; to the goodness that does not let itself be disarmed, even by ingratitude. He leads us to love, he leads us to God.

Jesus “went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.” If we interpret these words of the Gospel in the context of the way Jesus took in all its aspects a journey which, precisely, continues to the end of time in the destination, “Jerusalem,” we can discover various levels indicated. Of course, first of all, it must be understood that this simply means the place, “Jerusalem”: it is
the city in which God’s Temple stood, whose uniqueness must allude to the oneness of God himself. This place, therefore, proclaims two things: on the one hand it says that there is only one God in all the world, who exceeds by far all our places and times; he is that God to which the entire creation belongs. He is the God whom all men and women seek in their own depths, and of whom, in a certain way, they all have some knowledge. But this God gave himself a Name. He made himself known to us, he initiated a history with human beings; he chose a man Abraham as the starting point of this history. The infinite God is at the same time the close God. He, who cannot be confined to any building, nevertheless wants to dwell among us, to be totally with us.

If Jesus, with the pilgrim Israel, goes up to Jerusalem, he goes there to celebrate with Israel the Passover: the memorial of Israel’s liberation a memorial which, at the same time, is always a hope of definitive freedom, which God will give. And Jesus approaches this feast in the awareness that he himself is the Lamb in which will be accomplished what the Book of Exodus says in this regard: a lamb without blemish, a male, who at sunset, before the eyes of the children of Israel, is sacrificed “as an ordinance for ever” (cf. Ex 12: 5-6, 14). And lastly, Jesus knows that his way goes further: the Cross will not be his end. He knows that his journey will rend the veil between this world and God’s world; that he will ascend to the throne of God and reconcile God and man in his Body He knows that his Risen Body will be the new sacrifice and the new Temple; that around him, from the hosts of Angels and Saints the new Jerusalem will be formed, that is in Heaven and yet also on the earth, because by his Passion he was to open the frontier between Heaven and earth. His way leads beyond the summit of the Mountain of the Temple to the heights of God himself: this is the great ascent to which he calls us all. He always remains with us on earth and he has always already arrived with God. He guides us on earth and beyond the earth.

Thus, the dimensions of our sequela become visible in the ascent of Jesus the goal to which he wants to lead us: to the heights of God, to communion with God, to being “with” God. This is the true destination and communion with him is the way to it. Communion with Christ is being on the way, a permanent ascent toward the true heights of our call.
Journeying on together with Jesus is at the same time also a journeying on in the “we” of those who want to follow him. It introduces us into this community. Since the way to true life, to being people in conformity with the model of the Son of God Jesus Christ, surpasses our own strength, this journey always means being carried. We find ourselves, so to speak, roped to Jesus Christ together with him on the ascent towards God’s heights. He pulls and supports us. It is part of following Christ that we allow ourselves to be roped together; that we acknowledge we cannot do it alone. This act of humility, entering into the “we” of the Church is part of it; holding tight to the rope, the responsibility of communion not breaking the rope through stubbornness or self-importance. Humbly believing, with the Church, like being a roped-party on the ascent towards God, is an essential condition for the following of Christ. This being roped together also entails not behaving as masters of the Word of God, not running after a mistaken idea of emancipation. The humility of “being with” is essential for the ascent. The fact that in the Sacraments we always let the Lord once again take us by the hand is also part of it; that we let ourselves be purified and strengthened by him; that we accept the discipline of the ascent, even when we are weary.

Lastly, we must say again: the Cross is also part of the ascent towards the heights of Jesus Christ, of the ascent to the heights of God. Just as in the affairs of this world it is impossible to achieve great results without self-sacrifice and hard work; just as joy in a great discovery of knowledge or in a true operational skill is linked to discipline, indeed, to the effort of learning, so the way toward life itself, to the realization of one’s own humanity, is linked to communion with the One who ascended to God’s heights through the Cross. In the final analysis, the Cross is an expression of what love means: only those who lose themselves find themselves.

Let us sum up: the following of Christ requires, as a first step, a reawakening of the desire to be authentic human beings and thus the reawakening of oneself for God. It then requires us to join the climbing party, in the communion of the Church. In the “we” of the Church we enter into communion with the “you” of Jesus Christ and thus reach the path to God. We are also asked to listen to the Word of Jesus Christ and to live it: in faith, hope and love. Thus we are on the way toward the
definitive Jerusalem and, from this moment, in a certain way, we already find ourselves there, in the communion of all God’s Saints.

Our pilgrimage following Christ is not therefore bound for an earthly city, but for the new City of God that develops in the midst of this world. Yet the pilgrimage to the earthly Jerusalem can also be useful to us Christians for that more important journey. I myself linked three meanings to my pilgrimage in the Holy Land last year. First of all I thought that what St John says at the beginning of his First Letter can happen to us on such an occasion: that what we have heard, we can in a certain manner see and touch with our hands (cf. 1 Jn 1: 1). Faith in Jesus Christ is not a legendary invention. It is based on a true story. This history we can, so to speak, contemplate and touch. It is moving to find oneself in Nazareth in the place where the Angel appeared to Mary and intimated to her the duty to become the Mother of the Redeemer. It is moving to be in Bethlehem on the spot where the Word, made flesh, came to dwell among us; to walk on the holy ground in which God chose to become a man and a child. It is moving to climb the steps to Calvary, to the place where Jesus died for us on the Cross. And lastly, to stand before the empty sepulcher; to pray where his holy body rested and where, on the third day, the Resurrection occurred. Following the exterior ways taken by Jesus must help us walk more joyfully and with new certainty on the interior way that he pointed out to us, that is he himself.

When we go to the Holy Land as pilgrims we also go, however and this is the second aspect as messengers of peace, with the prayer for peace; with the strong invitation to all to do our utmost in that place, which includes in its name the word “peace”, to make it truly become a place of peace. Thus this pilgrimage is at the same time as a third aspect an encouragement to Christians to stay in their country of origin and to work hard in it for peace.

Let us return once again to the Palm Sunday Liturgy. In the prayer with which the palms are blessed, we pray that in communion with Christ we may bear fruit with good works. Subsequent to an erroneous interpretation of St Paul, the opinion that good works are not part of being Christian or in any case are insignificant for the human being’s salvation has emerged time and again in the course of history and also today. But if
Paul says that works cannot justify man, with this he did not oppose the importance of right action and, if he speaks of the end of the Law, he does not say that the Ten Commandments are obsolete and irrelevant. There is no need now to reflect on the full breadth of the issue that concerned the Apostle. What is important is to point out that with the term “Law” he does not mean the Ten Commandments but rather the complex way of life Israel had adopted to protect itself against the temptations of paganism. Now, however, Christ has brought God to the pagans. This form of distinction was not imposed upon them. They were given as the Law Christ alone. However, this means love of God and of neighbor and of everything that this entails. The Commandments, interpreted in a new and deeper way starting from Christ, are part of this love, those Commandments are none other than the fundamental rules of true love: first of all, and as a fundamental principle, the worship of God, the primacy of God, which the first three Commandments express. They say: “without God nothing succeeds correctly. Who this God is and how he is we know from the person of Jesus Christ. Next come the holiness of the family (4th Commandment), the holiness of life (5th Commandment), the order of marriage (6th Commandment), the social order (7th Commandment), and lastly the inviolability of the truth (8th Commandment). Today all this is of the greatest timeliness and precisely also in St Paul’s meaning if we read all his Letters. “Bear fruit with good works”: at the beginning of Holy Week let us pray the Lord to grant us this fruit in ever greater abundance.

At the end of the Gospel for the blessing of the palms, we hear the acclamation with which the pilgrims greet Jesus at the Gates of Jerusalem. It takes up the words of Psalm 118 [117], which priests originally proclaimed to pilgrims from the Holy City but which, in the meantime had become an expression of messianic hope: “Blessed is he who enters in the Name of the Lord” (Ps 118[117]: 26; cf. Lk 19: 38). Pilgrims see in Jesus the One who is to come in the Name of the Lord. Indeed, according to St Luke’s Gospel they insert one more word: “Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord.” And they continue with an acclamation that recalls the message of the Angels at Christmas, but change it in a manner
that prompts reflection. The Angels spoke of the glory of God in the highest and of peace on earth among men with whom he was pleased.

The pilgrims at the entrance to the Holy City say: “Peace on earth and glory be to God in the highest!” They know only too well that there is no peace on earth. And they know that the place of peace is Heaven. They know that it is an essential part of Heaven to be a haven of peace. This acclamation is therefore an expression of profound suffering and, at the same time, a prayer of hope; may the One who comes in the Name of the Lord bring to the earth what there is in Heaven. May his kingship become the kingship of God, the presence of Heaven on earth. The Church, before the Eucharistic consecration, sings the words of the Psalm with which Jesus was greeted before his entry into the Holy City: She greets Jesus as the King who, coming from God, comes among us in the Name of God. Today too, this joyous greeting is always a supplication and hope. Let us pray the Lord that he bring to us Heaven, the glory of God and peace among men.

Let us understand this greeting in the spirit of the request in the Our Father: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” We know that Heaven is Heaven, a place of glory and peace because the will of God totally prevails there. And we know that the earth will not be Heaven as long as God’s will is not done on it. Let us therefore greet Jesus who comes down from Heaven and pray him to help us to recognize and to do God’s will. May God’s kingship enter the world and thus be filled with the splendor of peace. Amen.
devoutly gathered at the feet of Our Lady of Fatima. Dearly beloved brothers and sisters, I too have come as a pilgrim to Fatima, to this “home” from which Mary chose to speak to us in modern times. I have come to Fatima to rejoice in Mary’s presence and maternal protection. I have come to Fatima, because today the pilgrim Church, willed by her Son as the instrument of evangelization and the sacrament of salvation, converges upon this place. I have come to Fatima to pray, in union with Mary and so many pilgrims, for our human family, afflicted as it is by various ills and sufferings. Finally, I have come to Fatima with the same sentiments as those of Blessed Francisco and Jacinta, and the Servant of God Lucia, in order to entrust to Our Lady the intimate confession that “I love” Jesus, that the Church and priests “love” him and desire to keep their gaze fixed upon him as this Year for Priests comes to its end, and in order to entrust to Mary’s maternal protection priests, consecrated men and women, missionaries and all those who by their good works make the House of God a place of welcome and charitable outreach.

These are the “people whom the Lord has blessed.” The people whom the Lord has blessed are you, the beloved Diocese of Leiria-Fatima, with your pastor, Bishop Antonio Marto. I thank him for his words of greeting at the beginning of Mass, and for the gracious hospitality shown particularly by his collaborators at this Shrine. I greet the President of the Republic and the other authorities who serve this glorious Nation. I spiritually embrace all the Dioceses of Portugal, represented here by their Bishops, and I entrust to Heaven all the nations and peoples of the earth. In God I embrace all their sons and daughters, particularly the afflicted or outcast, with the desire of bringing them that great hope which burns in my own heart, and which here, in Fatima, can be palpably felt. May our great hope sink roots in the lives of each of you, dear pilgrims, and of all those who join us through the communications media.

Yes! The Lord, our great hope, is with us. In his merciful love, he offers a future to his people: a future of communion with himself. After experiencing the mercy and consolation of God who did not forsake them along their wearisome return from the Babylonian Exile, the people of God cried out: “I greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being exults in my God” (Is 61:10). The resplendent daughter of this people is the Virgin
Mary of Nazareth who, clothed with grace and sweetly marvelling at God’s presence in her womb, made this joy and hope her own in the canticle of the Magnificat: “My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.” She did not view herself as a fortunate individual in the midst of a barren people, but prophesied for them the sweet joys of a wondrous maternity of God, for “his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation” (*Lk* 1:47, 50).

This holy place is the proof of it. In seven years you will return here to celebrate the centenary of the first visit made by the Lady “come from heaven”, the Teacher who introduced the little seers to a deep knowledge of the Love of the Blessed Trinity and led them to savor God himself as the most beautiful reality of human existence. This experience of grace made them fall in love with God in Jesus, so much so that Jacinta could cry out: “How much I delight in telling Jesus that I love him! When I tell him this often, I feel as if I have a fire in my breast, yet it does not burn me.” And Francisco could say: “What I liked most of all was seeing Our Lord in that light which Our Mother put into our hearts. I love God so much!” (*Memoirs of Sister Lucia*, I, 42 and 126).

Brothers and sisters, in listening to these innocent and profound mystical confidences of the shepherd children, one might look at them with a touch of envy for what they were able to see, or with the disappointed resignation of someone who was not so fortunate, yet still demands to see. To such persons, the Pope says, as does Jesus: “Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?” (*Mk* 12:24). The Scriptures invite us to believe: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (*Jn* 20:29), but God, who is more deeply present to me than I am to myself (cf. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 6, 11)—has the power to come to us, particularly through our inner senses, so that the soul can receive the gentle touch of a reality which is beyond the senses and which enables us to reach what is not accessible or visible to the senses. For this to happen, we must cultivate an interior watchfulness of the heart which, for most of the time, we do not possess on account of the powerful pressure exerted by outside realities and the images and concerns which fill our soul (cf. Theological
Commentary on The Message of Fatima, 2000). Yes! God can come to us, and show himself to the eyes of our heart.

Moreover, that Light deep within the shepherd children, which comes from the future of God, is the same Light which was manifested in the fullness of time and came for us all: the Son of God made man. He has the power to inflame the coldest and saddest of hearts, as we see in the case of the disciples on the way to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:32). Henceforth our hope has a real foundation, it is based on an event which belongs to history and at the same time transcends history: Jesus of Nazareth. The enthusiasm roused by his wisdom and his saving power among the people of that time was such that a woman in the midst of the crowd—as we heard in the Gospel—cried out: “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that nursed you!” And Jesus said: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!” (Lk 11:27-28). But who finds time to hear God’s word and to let themselves be attracted by his love? Who keeps watch, in the night of doubt and uncertainty, with a heart vigilant in prayer? Who awaits the dawn of the new day, fanning the flame of faith? Faith in God opens before us the horizon of a sure hope, one which does not disappoint; it indicates a solid foundation on which to base one’s life without fear; it demands a faith-filled surrender into the hands of the Love which sustains the world.

“Their descendants shall be known among the nations, […] they are a people whom the Lord has blessed” (Is 61:9) with an unshakable hope which bears fruit in a love which sacrifices for others, yet does not sacrifice others. Rather, as we heard in the second reading, this love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:7). An example and encouragement is to be found in the shepherd children, who offered their whole lives to God and shared them fully with others for love of God. Our Lady helped them to open their hearts to universal love. Blessed Jacinta, in particular, proved tireless in sharing with the needy and in making sacrifices for the conversion of sinners. Only with this fraternal and generous love will we succeed in building the civilization of love and peace.

We would be mistaken to think that Fatima’s prophetic mission is complete. Here there takes on new life the plan of God which asks
humanity from the beginning: “Where is your brother Abel [...] Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!” (Gen 4:9). Mankind has succeeded in unleashing a cycle of death and terror, but failed in bringing it to an end... In sacred Scripture we often find that God seeks righteous men and women in order to save the city of man and he does the same here, in Fatima, when Our Lady asks: “Do you want to offer yourselves to God, to endure all the sufferings which he will send you, in an act of reparation for the sins by which he is offended and of supplication for the conversion of sinners?” (Memoirs of Sister Lucia, I, 162).

At a time when the human family was ready to sacrifice all that was most sacred on the altar of the petty and selfish interests of nations, races, ideologies, groups and individuals, our Blessed Mother came from heaven, offering to implant in the hearts of all those who trust in her the Love of God burning in her own heart. At that time it was only to three children, yet the example of their lives spread and multiplied, especially as a result of the travels of the Pilgrim Virgin, in countless groups throughout the world dedicated to the cause of fraternal solidarity. May the seven years which separate us from the centenary of the apparitions hasten the fulfillment of the prophecy of the triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity.

Blessing of the Sick

Dear brothers and sisters who are sick,

Before I walk among you carrying the monstrance containing Jesus present in the Eucharist, I would like to offer you a word of encouragement and hope, a word which I extend to all those following us on television and radio, and to those without even such means, but who are united to us by the deeper bonds of the Spirit, that is, in faith and prayer.

My dear brother and sister, in the eyes of God you are “worth so much to God that he himself became man in order to suffer with man in an utterly real way—in flesh and blood—as is revealed to us in the account of Jesus’ Passion. Hence in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering with us; hence con-solatio is present in all suffering, the consolation of God’s compassionate love—and so the star of hope rises” (Spe Salvi, 39). With such hope in your heart, you can leave
behind the quicksand of illness and death and stand on the firm rock of divine love. In other words, you can overcome the feeling of the uselessness of suffering which consumes a person from within and makes him feel a burden to those around him when, in reality, suffering which is lived with Jesus assists in the salvation of your brethren.

How is this possible? Because the spring of divine power rises in the midst of human weakness. This is the paradox of the Gospel. Therefore, the divine Master, instead of explaining the reasons for suffering, preferred to call everyone to follow him, saying: Take up your cross and follow me (cf. Mk 8:34). Come with me. With your suffering, take part in the work of salvation which is realized through my suffering, by means of my cross. As you gradually embrace your own cross, uniting yourself spiritually to my cross, the salvific meaning of suffering will be revealed to you. In suffering, you will discover an interior peace and even spiritual joy.

Dear friends who are sick, welcome the call of Jesus who will shortly pass among you in the Most Blessed Sacrament, and entrust to him every setback and pain that you face, so that they become—according to his design—a means of redemption for the whole world. You will be redeemers with the Redeemer, just as you are sons in the Son. At the cross… stands the mother of Jesus, our mother.

General Audience for the Easter Triduum, Rome (March 31, 2010)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are living the holy days that invite us to meditate on the central events of our Redemption, the essential core of our faith. Tomorrow the Easter Triduum begins, the fulcrum of the whole Liturgical Year in which we are called to silence and prayer in order to contemplate the mystery of the Passion, death and Resurrection of the Lord.

In their homilies, the Fathers often referred to these days which, as St Athanasius observed in one of his Easter Letters, bring “us to a new
beginning, even the announcement of the blessed Passover, in which the Lord was sacrificed” (Letter 5, 1-2: PG 26, 1379).

I therefore urge you to live these days intensely, so that they may decisively direct the life of each one to generous and convinced adherence to Christ, who died and rose for us.

Tomorrow morning, the Holy Chrism Mass, a morning prelude to Holy Thursday, will see priests gathered with their own Bishop. During an important Eucharistic celebration which usually takes place in the diocesan cathedrals, the oil of the sick and of the catechumens and chrism will be blessed. In addition, the Bishop and Priests will renew the priestly promises that they spoke on the day of their Ordination. This year, this action acquires a very special prominence because it is taking place in the context of the Year for Priests, which I established to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the death of the holy Curé d’Ars. To all priests I would like to repeat the hope I expressed at the end of my Letter for its inauguration: “In the footsteps of the holy Curé of Ars, let yourselves be enthralled by him. In this way you too will be, for the world in our time, heralds of hope, reconciliation and peace!”

Tomorrow afternoon we shall celebrate the institution of the Eucharist. Writing to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul strengthened the early Christians in the truth of the Eucharistic Mystery, conveying to them what he himself had learned. “The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my Body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my Blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11: 23-25).

These words clearly express Christ’s intention: under the species of the bread and the wine, he makes himself really present with his Body given and his Blood poured out as a sacrifice of the New Covenant. At the same time, he constitutes the Apostles and their successors ministers of this Sacrament, which he entrusts to his Church as a supreme proof of his love.

We also commemorate with an evocative rite the gesture of Jesus who washes the Apostles’ feet (Jn13: 1-25). For the Evangelist this act comes to
portray the whole of Jesus’ life and reveals his love to the end, an infinite
love that is capable of preparing man for communion with God and of
setting him free. At the end of the Holy Thursday Liturgy the Church puts
the Blessed Sacrament in a specially prepared place that represents Jesus’
loneliness and mortal anguish in Gethsemane. Before the Eucharist, the
faithful contemplate Jesus in the hour of his solitude and pray that all the
loneliness in the world may cease. This liturgical itinerary is likewise an
invitation to seek the intimate encounter with the Lord in prayer, to
recognize Jesus among those who are lonely, to watch with him and to
proclaim him with the light of one’s own life.

On Good Friday we shall commemorate the Passion and death of the
Lord. Jesus wanted to give his life as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of
humanity’s sins, choosing to this end the most brutal and humiliating
death: crucifixion. There is an inseparable connection between the Last
Supper and Jesus’ death. At the Last Supper Jesus gives his Body and his
Blood, that is, his earthly existence, himself, anticipating his death and
transforming it into an act of love. Thus he makes death which by its
nature is the end, the destruction of every relationship an act of the
communication of himself, a means of salvation and of the proclamation of
the victory of love. In this way, Jesus becomes the key to understanding the
Last Supper, which is an anticipation of the transformation of violent
death into a voluntary sacrifice; into an act of love that redeems and saves
the world.

Holy Saturday is marked by a profound silence. The Churches are bare
and no special Liturgies are planned. In this time of waiting and hope,
believers are invited to prayer, reflection and conversion, also by means of
the sacrament of Reconciliation, in order to take part, intimately renewed,
in the celebration of Easter.

In the night of Holy Saturday, during the solemn Easter Vigil,
“mother of all vigils,” this silence will be broken by the singing of the
Alleluia which announces Christ’s Resurrection and proclaims the victory
of light over darkness, of life over death. The Church will rejoice in the
encounter with her Lord, entering Easter Day which the Lord will
inaugurate by rising from the dead.
Dear brothers and sisters, let us prepare to live intensely this Sacred Triduum, now at hand, so as to be ever more deeply inserted into the Mystery of Christ, who died and rose for us. May the Most Holy Virgin accompany us on this spiritual journey. May she, who followed Jesus in his Passion and who stood beneath the Cross, lead us into the Paschal Mystery so that we may experience the joy and peace of the Risen One.

With these sentiments, from this moment I offer you all my most cordial good wishes for a holy Easter, extending them to your Communities and to all your loved ones.

To Special Groups

I am pleased to welcome all the English-speaking visitors present at today’s Audience, especially those from England, Japan, Canada and the United States. I also greet the various student groups present, including those taking part in the annual “Univ Congress.” Upon all of you I invoke God's Blessings of joy and peace!

In addressing the Italian-speaking pilgrims, I greet the university students from various countries who are taking part in the international Congress sponsored by the Prelature of Opus Dei. Dear friends, you have come to Rome for Holy Week for an experience of faith, friendship and spiritual enrichment. I ask you to reflect on the importance of university studies in forming that “Catholic or universal mentality” that St Josemaría described as: “a breadth of vision and a vigorous endeavor to study more deeply the things that are permanently alive and unchanged in Catholic orthodoxy.” May the desire to encounter Jesus Christ personally increase in each and every one, to witness to him in every context.

Lastly, I address my cordial thoughts to the young people, the sick, and the newlyweds. May contemplation of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus, dear young people, make you ever stronger in your Christian witness. And may you, dear sick people, draw from the Cross of Christ daily support to get the better of moments of trial and discouragement. May you, dear newlyweds, receive from the Paschal Mystery which we contemplate in these days, an encouragement to make your family a place of faithful and fruitful love.
Prayer and greeting at the Grotto of St. Paul, Rabat, Malta (April 17, 2010)

Dear Archbishop Cremona,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

My pilgrimage to Malta has begun with a moment of silent prayer at the Grotto of Saint Paul, who first brought the faith to these islands. I have come in the footsteps of those countless pilgrims down the centuries who have prayed in this holy place, entrusting themselves, their families and the welfare of this nation to the intercession of the Apostle of the Gentiles. I rejoice to be at last in your midst and I greet all of you with great affection in the Lord!

Paul’s shipwreck and his three-month stay in Malta left an indelible mark upon the history of your country. His words to his companions prior to his arrival in Malta are recorded for us in the Acts of the Apostles and have been a special theme in your preparation for my visit. Those words—”But we are to be stranded on some island” (Acts 27:26)—in their original context are a summons to courage in the face of the unknown and to unfailing confidence in God’s mysterious providence. The castaways were, in fact, warmly welcomed by the Maltese people, following the lead given by Saint Publius. In God’s plan, Saint Paul thus became your father in the Christian faith. Thanks to his presence among you, the Gospel of Jesus Christ took deep root and bore fruit not only in the lives of individuals, families and communities, but also in the formation of Malta’s national identity and its vibrant and distinctive culture.

Paul’s apostolic labors also bore a rich harvest in the generations of preachers who followed in his footsteps, and particularly in the great number of priests and religious who imitated his missionary zeal by leaving Malta in order to bring the Gospel to distant shores. I am happy to have had the opportunity to meet so many of them today in this Church of Saint Paul, and to encourage them in their challenging and often heroic vocation. Dear missionaries: I thank all of you, in the name of the whole
Church, for your witness to the Risen Lord and for your lives spent in the service of others. Your presence and activity in so many countries of the world brings honor to your country and testifies to an evangelical impulse deeply embedded in the Church in Malta. Let us ask the Lord to raise up many more men and women to carry forward the noble mission of proclaiming the Gospel and working for the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom in every land and people!

Saint Paul’s arrival in Malta was not planned. As we know, he was traveling to Rome when a violent storm arose and his ship ran aground on this island. Sailors can map a journey, but God, in his wisdom and providence, charts a course of his own. Paul, who dramatically encountered the Risen Lord while on the road to Damascus, knew this well. The course of his life was suddenly changed; henceforth, for him, to live was Christ (cf. Phil 1:21); his every thought and action was directed to proclaiming the mystery of the Cross and its message of God’s reconciling love.

That same word, the word of the Gospel, still has the power to break into our lives and to change their course. Today the same Gospel which Paul preached continues to summon the people of these islands to conversion, new life and a future of hope. Standing in your midst as the Successor of the Apostle Peter, I invite you to hear God’s word afresh, as your ancestors did, and to let it challenge your ways of thinking and the way you live your lives.

From this holy place where the apostolic preaching first spread throughout these islands, I call upon each of you to take up the exciting challenge of the new evangelization. Live out your faith ever more fully with the members of your families, with your friends, in your neighborhoods, in the workplace and in the whole fabric of Maltese society. In a particular way I urge parents, teachers and catechists to speak of your own living encounter with the Risen Jesus to others, especially the young people who are Malta’s future. “Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!” (cf. Redemptoris Missio, 2). Believe that your moments of faith assure an encounter with God, who in his mighty power touches human hearts. In this way, you will introduce the young to the beauty and richness of the Catholic faith, and offer them a sound catechesis, inviting
them to ever more active participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

The world needs this witness! In the face of so many threats to the sacredness of human life, and to the dignity of marriage and the family, do not our contemporaries need to be constantly reminded of the grandeur of our dignity as God’s children and the sublime vocation we have received in Christ? Does not society need to reappropriate and defend those fundamental moral truths which remain the foundation of authentic freedom and genuine progress?

Just now, as I stood before this Grotto, I reflected on the great spiritual gift (cf. Rom 1:11) which Paul gave to Malta, and I prayed that you might keep unblemished the heritage bequeathed to you by the great Apostle. May the Lord confirm you and your families in the faith which works through love (cf. Gal 5:6), and make you joyful witnesses to the hope which never disappoints (cf. Rom 5:5). Christ is risen! He is truly risen! Alleluia!

Torna ai contenuti
GENERAL
CONGRESS
Eighth Ordinary General Congress of Opus Dei

From the 7th to the 19th of April, the Eighth Ordinary General Congress of the Prelature of Opus Dei was held. Two hundred and fifty-five persons took part from practically all the countries where the Prelature is carrying out its apostolic work.

As prescribed by the Prelature’s Statutes (cf. no. 133), the Prelate convokes the ordinary congresses—which are celebrated every eight years—to take stock of the situation of its apostolic service to the Church, and to provide guidelines for the evangelizing activity of the Prelature’s faithful, both priests and laity (men and women, married and single). Appointments are also renewed for the tasks on the General Council and the Central Advisory (cf. Statutes, no. 140), the two organs that assist the Prelate of Opus Dei in his work of government. In the Congress the appointment of Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz as Vicar General (a position he has occupied since 1994) was renewed. In the corresponding section of this edition of Romana information is provided on the other appointments made.

The opening session of the Congress was held on the afternoon of April 7. At 8:00 in the morning, the Prelate celebrated Mass in the prelatic church of Our Lady of Peace. For the women members of the Congress, who began their work on April 17, some days after the men, there was another Eucharistic celebration, also in the prelatic church, on the 17th. The balance of the eight years since the previous Congress offered many reasons for gratitude to God: among them, the holy life of the Venerable John Paul II, whose generous dedication throughout his Pontificate has left an indelible mark on countless persons, including non-Catholics and non-Christians. The Congress also expressed its profound gratitude to the Holy Father Benedict XVI for his magisterium and his untiring vigilance for the Church. “As an effective sign of our unconditional union with the Vicar of Christ on earth,” one can read in the letter written by Bishop Echevarría at the conclusion of the Congress, “we will continue making the effort, as we have up until now, to spread his teachings and to help to make the Church better known and more deeply loved” (Letter May 17, 2010, no. 8). The Year of the Eucharist, the Pauline Year and the recent Year for Priests have
been providential occasions for fostering a deeper appreciation of the gifts granted by God to his People.

Another reason for gratitude to God, for the good of Prelature and the whole Church, has been the spread of devotion to St. Josemaría throughout the world, especially since his canonization in 2002. It is also a source of joy that, with God’s help, Opus Dei has begun in the three countries recommended by the Seventh Congress—Croatia, Slovenia and Latvia—as well as in four others: Russia, Indonesia, Korea and Romania. A decision was made to study the possibilities of beginning apostolic activities in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Angola, and Bulgaria in the near future.

During this period, a large number of faithful of the Prelature and members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross have finished their earthly path. They have left us with their luminous example, along with that of many others who have also entrusted their souls to God in a holy way during these years. Some of them have seen their cause of canonization opened. Besides that of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, the work of preparation of the causes of other faithful has begun—men and women, priests and laity, single and married persons—who echo for us the words of the Master: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48).

The members of the Congress reaffirmed the need to put ever greater care into the formation of all those who come close to the apostolates of Opus Dei, and first of all the Prelature’s faithful themselves, especially in the spiritual, doctrinal-religious, and apostolic areas. The faithful of Opus Dei were also reminded (in accord with each one’s personal circumstances and possibilities) of the great importance we should give to the study of the sacred sciences.

The conclusions of the General Congress insist on the need for living Christian detachment as an indispensable condition for the development of a contemplative life in the midst of one’s ordinary circumstances. Emphasis was also placed on the need to continue making manifest, with serenity and humility, the beauty and importance of the virtue of chastity in today’s world.
Recalling that the principal apostolate of the faithful of Opus Dei is that of friendship and confidence with those around them, the Congress stressed once again the priority of the work of Christian formation with young people, so decisive for the Church and the future of society. It also pointed to the pressing need today to explain the greatness and fruitfulness of apostolic celibacy in the middle of the world.

The Congress renewed its hope that parents will participate actively in the high schools and youth centers entrusted to the pastoral care of the Prelature. As the Prelate wrote in his letter on the occasion of the Congress, “Let us tirelessly remind fathers and mothers—and also grandparents—that they should keep in the forefront of their minds that their first task is the family, the upbringing and education of their children or grandchildren. And they should be convinced that the most important aspect of this is passing on the faith in their own homes. They have to realize that in educating children and teenagers it is very important to invest time and energy in cultivating the cardinal virtues, especially fortitude and temperance.” (Letter May 17, 2010, no. 24).

Referring to certain specific apostolates, the Assembly recommended that the activities of social development already existing in the various regions be consolidated, and that the possibility of starting other educational and social initiatives aimed at the resolution of local needs be studied, which should have a cultural, social and spiritual point of reference and where catechesis is provided to those who desire it.

The Congress also reflected especially on the importance of giving new Christian life to various aspects of society in order to foster the development of “a new culture, new legislation, and new fashions, in keeping with the dignity of the human person and with its destiny to the glory of the children of God in Jesus Christ.”[1] The personal action of the Prelature’s faithful, ordinary citizens who live and work in civil society, has to lead them to infuse the charity of Christ into families and customs, into education and culture, into communications and politics, into their own professional environment, always with full freedom and personal responsibility.
In this sense it was urged that the universities and other educational centers that seek inspiration and support in the spirit of Opus Dei take great pains in the areas of research on matters that have the greatest repercussions on the configuration of society: the relationship between science and faith, the defense of human life from conception until natural death, promotion of justice in conformity with the social doctrine of the Church, education of youth, etc.

In the public sphere, as the Congress recalled in its conclusions, Christians are called to participate actively in the debate on fundamental ethical questions, “putting forward solutions, in accordance with the natural law and the magisterium of the Church, that help defend the dignity of the person” (Letter May 17, 2010, no. 22). Catholics know they have been entrusted with human values grounded on the primacy of charity, which the present day world so greatly needs and which represent vital fronts that the Christian conscience cannot give in on.

In particular, the Congress pointed out the importance to society of tasks related to the care of the home. The family has as its model the home of Nazareth: promoting the dignity of work in the home is an important part of the evangelization of society.

Taking occasion of the Year for Priests convoked by Pope Benedict XVI, the Assembly expressed its gratitude to God for the gift of priesthood in the Church. It suggested intensifying prayer for priestly vocations throughout the world, for the sanctity of every priest, and for the development of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, inseparably united to the Prelature.

At the end of the sessions, the Congress members noted in their conclusions the gratitude towards and unity with the Prelate that is felt by all the faithful of the Prelature and the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, and renewed the determination to preserve with great care the spirit left as a heritage by St. Josemaría, which was guarded and transmitted by Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, his first successor, and by many women and men of Opus Dei who have already passed away.

The Eighth Ordinary General Congress concluded with a Eucharistic celebration with the singing of the Te Deum in thanksgiving, on April 19th.

Torna ai contenuti
PRELATE

- Appointments
- Decrees
- Activities of the Prelate
- Pastoral Letters
- Homilies
- Articles and Interviews
Appointments

Appointments

On the occasion of the Eighth Ordinary General Congress of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, the Prelate, his Excellency Bishop Javier Echevarría, in accord with what is established in the Statutes of the Prelature, has approved the following appointments to the General Council and the Central Advisory:

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.

Decrees

Some decrees

Decree of Appointment of the Regional Vicar of the Philippines:

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA

Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia

Prælatus

D E C R E T U M

Presentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Carolum Vincentium Estrada Guilatco, nominamus atque constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Regione Philippinarum, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexit.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem
in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiae Prælatitiae, die 13 mense aprili anno 2010.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Prælatus Operis Dei
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiae Prælattiae Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 37

Decree of Appointment of the Regional Vicar of Italy:
Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus
DECRETUM

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Matthæum Fabbri, nominamus atque constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Regione Italæ, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiae Prælatitiae, die 14 mense aprili anno 2010.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Prælatus Operis Dei
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiae Prælattiae Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 37

Decree of Appointment of the Regional Vicar of Venezuela:
Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA
Decree of appointment of the Vicar of the Quasi-Region of Puerto Rico:

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA

Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia

Prælatus

D E C R E T U M

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Iustinianum García Arias, nominamus atque constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Quasi-Regione Portoricensi, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatitiæ, die 15 mense aprili anno 2010.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA

Prælatus Operis Dei

Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart

Curiæ Prælatitiæ Cancellarius

Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 37

Decree of appointment of the Vicar of the Quasi-Region of Puerto Rico:

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA

Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia

Prælatus

D E C R E T U M

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Ignatium Iosephum Rodríguez Mayz, nominamus atque constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Regione Venetiola, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatitiæ, die 15 mense aprili anno 2010.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA

Prælatus Operis Dei

Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart

Curiæ Prælatitiæ Cancellarius

Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 37
Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatitiæ, die 16 mense aprili anno 2010.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Prælatus Operis Dei
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiæ Prælatitiæ Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 37

Decree of appointment of the Vicar of the Delegation of Scandinavia, which includes Sweden, Norway, and Denmark:

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus

D E C R E T U M

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Andream Bernar Borda, nominamus atque constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Delegatione Scandiae, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexit.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriam et Ecclesiae bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatitiæ, die 17 mense aprili anno 2010.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Prælatus Operis Dei
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiæ Prælatitiæ Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 37

Decree of appointment of the Vicar of the Delegation of Croatia:
Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus
D E C R E T U M

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Iosephum Peguera Poch, nominamus atque constituiimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Delegatione Croatiæ, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatitiæ, die 20 mense aprili anno 2010.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Prælatus Operis Dei
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiæ Prælatitiæ Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 37

Decree of appointment of the Vicar of the Delegation of Slovenia:
Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus
D E C R E T U M

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Raphaelem Arias Villalta, nominamus atque constituiimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Delegatione Sloveniæ, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem
Decree of Appointment of the Regional Vicar of Argentina:

**Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA**

Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia

Prælatus

**D E C R E T U M**

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Marianum Rodulfum Fazio Fernández, nominamus atque constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Regione Argentinæ, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiae Prælatiæ, die 22 mense aprili anno 2010.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA

Prælatus Operis Dei
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiae Prælatiæ Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 38

Decree of appointment of the Vicar of the Delegation of Jerusalem:
Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus
D E C R E T U M

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Ioachim Paniello Peiró, nominamus atque constituiimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Delegatione Hierosolymæ, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiae Prælatitiae, die 22 mense aprili anno 2010.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Prælatus Operis Dei
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiae Prælatitiae Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 37

Decree of appointment of the Vicar of the Delegation of South Africa:

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus
D E C R E T U M

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Antonium Borrás Cabacés, nominamus atque constituiimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Delegatione Africæ Meridionalis, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem
in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiae Prælatitiae, die 6 mense maio anno 2010.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Prælatus Operis Dei
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiae Prælatitiae Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 38

Activities of the Prelate

Audience with the Holy Father Benedict XVI (January 21, 2010)

On Thursday January 21, the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, received Bishop Javier Echevarría, the Prelate of Opus Dei, in audience.

Pastoral trips

On February 4 the Prelate began a pastoral trip to Spain that lasted till the 6th of that month. His first stop was Valencia, where he gave a conference on the priestly role of the Founder of Opus Dei. The session opened a series of meetings organized in connection with the Year for Priests by the School of Theology and the Almudi priests’ library (see “Priestly Identity, Priestly Piety,” the complete text of the Prelate’s address in Valencia, on page 96).
The series of lectures was aimed at looking at the lives of four priests with connections to the city. In addition to St. Josemaría, the priest discussed were the Servants of God, José Maria Garcia-Lahiguera (who had been archbishop of Valencia), and Frs. Eladio España and José Bau.

Archbishop Carlos Osoro of Valencia was the principal celebrant of the Mass in honor of St. Josemaría in the cathedral of the city. Joining him as concelebrants were Bishop Javier Echevarría, the two Auxiliary Bishops of Valencia, Esteban Escudero and Enrique Benavent, as well as the Vicar General of the Archdiocese, Msgr. Vicente Fontestad, and the Dean of La Seo, Emilio Aliaga.

On February 6 the Prelate arrived in Mallorca and asked the 1500 people that he met with to learn to “forgive and love” anyone who may have offended them, even in such dramatic situations as a terrorist attack.

This gathering, held at the “Llaüt” school, in BIT Park, was Bishop Echevarría’s first visit to the island, offering him the opportunity to meet with faithful of the Prelature there and their families, as well as cooperators and friends. He also took advantage of the occasion to greet the Bishop of Mallorca, Most Reverend Jésus Murgui.

Ars (France), from March 5 to 7

St. Jean Marie Vianney, the holy Curé of Ars, was the pastor of this small French village between 1818 and 1859. Following the footsteps of the patron of the Year for Priests convoked by Benedict XVI, the Prelate of Opus Dei made a pilgrimage to Ars from March 5 to 7.

As soon as he arrived in Ars, on Friday the 5th early in the evening, Bishop Echevarría prayed before the tomb of the Holy Curé, accompanied by Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Vicar General of Opus Dei, and Msgr. Antoine de Rochebrune, Vicar of Opus Dei in France. The Prelate lit three votive candles in the chapel, entrusting to the saint the intentions of the Church and the people of Opus Dei. Then he traveled to Lyons where he visited Cardinal Philippe Barbarin at the Cathedral of Saint Jean.
On Saturday, before returning to Ars, the Prelate met with faithful of the Work and friends from Lyons, Grenoble, and Clermont-Ferrand. At this gathering, he invited those present to imitate the love for the Eucharist and Confession that the Curé of Ars had, a love that St. Josemaría also shared in. At the same time, he encouraged them to be witnesses to Christ in their surroundings, taking advantage of every opportunity in their professional and family life to help the Church in its evangelizing mission.

Back in Ars, he prayed for a long time before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the Chapel of Divine Providence. Finally he visited the house in which the Holy Curé of Ars lived.

**Palermo, Italy, from March 26 to 28**

On Friday, April 26, the Prelate visited the Segesta University Residence in Palermo, to meet with students there. Afterwards he met with several families. On Saturday, after celebrating the Eucharist, the Prelate held a meeting with some twenty priests. Later he had a get-together with about 400 persons connected with the Altavilla School in Palermo, where he recalled the importance of true friendship for every Christian, in order to carry out a fruitful apostolate.

On the 28th, Palm Sunday, before returning to Rome, the Prelate celebrated Mass in the oratory of the Mediterranean University Residence. During his homily he recalled a significant anniversary, especially during the Year for Priests: the priestly ordination of the Founder of Opus Dei, which took place on March 25 in Saragossa, 85 years ago. These were the first steps in a priesthood that has brought to the Church, through God’s grace, so much fruit of holiness.

**Turin, Italy, May 20**

Bishop Echevarría visited Turin to pray before the Holy Shroud, during a special exhibition held from April 10 to May 23. He was accompanied by Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Vicar General of Opus Dei, and Father Matteo Fabbri, Vicar of Opus Dei in Italy.
Before viewing the Shroud, the Prelate saw a short explanatory film projected for the pilgrims. Later, he was able to meditate before the Holy Shroud in a secluded place. At the end, Bishop Echevarría wrote a few words in the visitors’ book: “With gratitude, I pray for all the people of this beloved city and unite myself to the intentions of the Pastor of this diocese and to the intentions of all the authorities.”

In the evening, Bishop Echevarría had an opportunity to chat with various groups of faithful of Opus Dei and friends who attend the means of Christian formation in Turin and other cities in the Piedmont region. Recalling the text that was read to the pilgrims waiting in line to pray before the Holy Shroud, the Prelate said that our Lord had suffered a great deal for love of all men and women, and that now each Christian had the duty of reminding others of this reality. “Nevertheless, we also have the possibility of frustrating God’s omnipotence, when we fail to treat well that Lord who constantly wants to serve us, who extends his hand to help you, who says to you: ‘Take courage, be faithful!’”

Administration of the Sacrament of Holy Orders

Ordination of faithful of the Prelature to the Diaconate

(February 20, 2010)

The Prelate conferred the diaconate on two faithful of the Work: Josep Maria Viñolas and Mario Vera Juarez. The ceremony took place in the church of St. Josemaría in Rome. The new deacons are from Spain and Mexico, respectively.

Priestly ordination of deacons of the Prelature (May 8, 2010)

Thirty-two deacons received ordination as priests from the hands of Bishop Javier Echevarría in the Basilica of St. Eugene in Rome. The new priests are from 14 different countries. During his homily, the bishop said:
“To you, my sons... I say: stay always very close to our Lord by means of prayer and sacrifice. Try to fulfill with love, each day, your ministerial duties. Stay close to Jesus Christ, not only in the moment of the Eucharistic celebration, but throughout the whole day. Be very devoted to the Blessed Virgin, our Mother, and to St. Joseph. Imitate the example of St. Josemaría, our beloved Father, and thus you will always be well protected in Jesus’ hands.”

Bishop Echevarría also exhorted the families and friends of the new priests and all those present to “ask our Lord to make them and all the priests in the world truly holy: accompanying them closely with our prayer and sacrifice.”

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.

Pastoral Letters

Letter of March 2010

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

This year, in his message for Lent, the Pope reflects on the broad topic of justice. Referring to the classical definition of this virtue—rendering to each man his due—Benedict XVI says that “what man needs most cannot be guaranteed to him by law. In order to live life to the full, something more intimate is necessary that can be granted only as a gift: we could say that man lives by that love which only God can communicate since he created the human person in his image and likeness.”[1]

Rendering to each one his or her due, in the sphere of human relations, is an indispensable requirement for the development of a just, truly human society. And in this regard, each of us has to strive to fulfill our duties
towards others as well as possible, whether individually or as part of the community to which we belong: family, business, civil society. But we can't be satisfied with this. St. Josemaría’s advice was to “practice justice and go beyond it with the grace of charity.”[2]

Honesty, rectitude in the fulfillment of one’s duties towards others, forms the basis of a rightly ordered community, although more is required. Our Lord was concerned about curing the sick and feeding those who were hungry, but he was also concerned, above all, about alleviating spiritual needs: ignorance of divine realities, the sickness of sin.… For as St. Augustine wrote, if “justice is the virtue which gives every one his due… where, then, is the justice of man, when he deserts the true God?”[3] As our Father insisted: “be convinced that justice alone is never enough to solve the great problems of mankind. When justice alone is done, don’t be surprised if people are hurt. The dignity of man, who is a son of God, requires much more. Charity must penetrate and accompany justice because it sweetens and deifies everything: ‘God is love’ (1 Jn 4:16). Our motive in everything we do should be the Love of God, which makes it easier for us to love our neighbor and which purifies and raises all earthly loves on to a higher level.”[4]

These considerations, at the beginning of Lent, also help us to put into practice the liturgy’s call during these weeks to conversion, to prepare for Easter. In order to contribute effectively to bringing about a more just society, we first have to put order in our own hearts.

Our Lord, when he reproached the Pharisees for their concern about “pure” and “impure” foods, said that there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him.[5] For it is the human heart, wounded by original sin and our personal sins, that is the source of the greatest evils; while it is also the human heart, healed and elevated by grace, that is the source of the greatest goods.

Original sin was the cause of the break up of the communion closely uniting mankind with God and with one another in our earliest history. Personal sins make this rupture even worse, turning it into a deep separation. We see this in so many aspects of our individual and collective
life. Although open by nature to others, man “finds in his being a strange force of gravity that makes him turn in and affirm himself above and against others: this is egoism, the result of original sin. Adam and Eve, seduced by Satan’s lie, snatching the mysterious fruit against the divine command, replaced the logic of trusting in Love with that of suspicion and competition; the logic of receiving and trustfully expecting from the Other, with anxiously seizing and doing on one’s own (cf. Gen 3:1-6), experiencing, as a consequence, a sense of disquiet and uncertainty. How can man free himself from this selfish influence and open himself to love?”[6]

This question expresses the deepest aspiration of each person, because having been created by love and for love, all men and women—no matter how much at times they try to hide it—aspire to fill their heart with a great and pure love, which comes from giving themselves to God and to others for God, so that no room remains for a disordered love of self. This is possible only with the help of divine grace, which heals, strengthens and elevates our soul—grace that reaches us abundantly, above all, through the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist.

So let us foster during this Lent a desire for spiritual renewal, taking greater care in preparing for Confession with due frequency, and putting more love into our daily preparation to receive our Lord in the Eucharist. Let us also do everything possible to help those we come in contact with each day to follow the same path. Have we decided on specific ways to live the Lenten practices that the Church recommends for these weeks? Striving to stay close to our Lord and his Blessed Mother, being more generous in our spirit of penance, setting specific goals to help others, especially in our apostolate, will help ensure that our soul is well prepared to receive the fruit of Easter.

As we travel along this path, our daily effort to convert our heart to God in some specific point is very important. These successive changes—perhaps in small things, but with the same effort as if it were something big—are moments of great importance for our sanctification. Our Lord ardently desires that this change take place in us, but he needs our personal cooperation. Let us recall St. Augustine’s words: “God, who created you without you, will not save you without you.”[7]
With the urging of the Holy Spirit, these small daily steps forward have the power to open wide the door of our ego so that divine grace can purify it and enkindle it with love for God and neighbor. Therefore, as St. Josemaría wrote, “we cannot regard this Lent as just another liturgical season which has simply happened to come around again. It is a unique time: a divine aid which we should accept. Jesus is passing by and he hopes that we will take a great step forward—today, now.”

Let us remember that the word “justice” in Sacred Scripture has a very deep meaning, especially when speaking about God. In this sense, it means above all the divine holiness, which God wants to freely communicate to us through faith in Jesus Christ, as St. Paul teaches in the letter to the Romans. For there is no distinction, as all have sinned and have need of the glory of God. They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth as a propitiation by his blood through faith, to manifest his justice.

Only by being united to Christ through faith and the sacraments will we make that holiness our own, which he attained for us by dying on the Cross for our sins and resurrecting for our justification. “Here we discover divine justice, which is so profoundly different from its human counterpart. God has paid for us the price of the exchange in his Son, a price that is truly exorbitant. Faced with the justice of the Cross, man may rebel, for this reveals that he is not a self-sufficient being, but in need of Another in order to realize himself fully. Conversion to Christ, believing in the Gospel, ultimately means this: to exit the illusion of self-sufficiency in order to discover and accept one’s own need—the need for others and for God, the need for his forgiveness and friendship.”

How well we understand, in this context, our Father’s constant insistence—first, by his own example—that we relive each day in our own life “the role of the prodigal son”? This is a teaching that is ever timely for us, but especially during the upcoming weeks. “Human life is in some way a constant returning to our Father’s house. We return through contrition, through the conversion of heart which means a desire to change, a firm decision to improve our life and which, therefore, is expressed in sacrifice and self-giving. We return to our Father’s house by means of that sacrament of pardon in which, by confessing our sins, we put on Jesus
Christ again and become his brothers, members of God’s family.

“God is waiting for us, like the father in the parable, with open arms, even though we don’t deserve it. It doesn’t matter how great our debt is. Just like the prodigal son, all we have to do is open our heart, to be homesick for our Father’s house, to wonder at and rejoice in the gift which God makes us of being able to call ourselves his children, of really being his children, even though our response to him has been so poor.”[11]

We will find it easier to travel this path without tiring if we remain very close to Mary our Mother, and to St. Joseph, her most chaste Spouse. Let us go to them with great trust in this Marian year that we have begun in Opus Dei, with the pressing desire to renew our dedication in the Work on the feast of the Holy Patriarch. I have been moved once again by some other words of St. Josemaría that we should all deeply ponder on. Referring to the beginning of Opus Dei’s apostolic work with women, he told his daughters: “I thought there would only be men in Opus Dei. It’s not that I didn’t want women... but before February 14, 1930, I had no knowledge of your existence in Opus Dei, although my heart burned with the desire to fulfill God’s will in everything.”[12] My daughters and sons, are we striving to foster this disposition—the desire to fulfill God’s will—at all times? Do we realize that it is only with this ardent desire that the behavior of a Christian woman, of a Christian man, makes sense?

During the past month I made a quick trip to Valencia, invited by the Archbishop of that diocese within the framework of the Year for Priests, and to Palma de Mallorca in the Balearic Islands, where the apostolic work of the Prelature is growing steadily. There I once again sensed the hunger for God present in so many souls, and I saw how they receive the spirit of Opus Dei gratefully, which helps them to seek and find the Blessed Trinity in their daily activities. As always when I make these trips, I leaned on the prayer of all of you. Always continue to accompany me!

On the 23rd we will commemorate once more the anniversary of the passing of our beloved Don Álvaro. In recalling the constancy with which he always encouraged us to go to our Lady, I suggest that you go privately to his intercession so that the graces of this Marian Year will deeply permeate your souls.
At the end of the month, on the 28th, we will commemorate another anniversary of our Father’s priestly ordination. Let us go to his intercession in praying for the Pope and those who assist him, for the other bishops, for the priests of the whole world, for priestly and religious vocations, for the sanctity of the entire people of God that Jesus has acquired at the price of his blood.\[13\]

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, March 1, 2010


[5] *Mk* 7:15


Torna ai contenuti

**Letter of April 2010**

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!
Yesterday, March 31, was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the day St. Josemaría first celebrated Mass in the Ferraz Residence and left the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle. And tomorrow, April 2, it will be five years since the death of John Paul II. Two very different anniversaries that nevertheless awaken a special echo in our hearts. The two dates fall this year in the middle of Holy Week. They invite us to walk the path of our Christian vocation in close union with Jesus Christ, truly present in the Holy Eucharist, accompanying him closely in his redemptive Passion.

St. Josemaría often thought about the fact that, after leaving our Lord in the tabernacle of the center, the apostolic work experienced a great growth. Very soon afterwards, without seeing an end to the difficulties (which we will always encounter, since that is the path our Lord took), the harvest began to be more abundant. He put this in writing in a letter to the Vicar General of the diocese of Madrid-Alcalá: “Since we have had Jesus in the tabernacle of this house, it’s been greatly noticeable. He came, and our work increased in both range and intensity.”[1]

All of us recall how the death of John Paul II produced a spiritual “earthquake” in so many people and brought about immense fruit. This was preceded by years, months and weeks during which that great Pontiff offered—through his preaching and example, through his long illness, through his dedicated life and his death—a marvelous testimony of how to follow Christ. Surely we remember the determination with which he grasped the Holy Cross, while he followed by television the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, in which he could not be present.

These and other recollections can help us to “put ourselves” more deeply into the scenes of Holy Week. The liturgy of the Sacred Triduum, which begins this evening with the Mass In Cena Domini and concludes with the Easter Vigil, eloquently recalls the way that God chose to redeem us. Let us ask our Lord for abundant grace to understand more fully the immense gift, truly inestimable, that he has given mankind through his sacrifice on the Cross. What resolutions have you made to not abandon Jesus? Are you asking him to make you a generously penitent soul? Are you using the means so as never to flee as the Apostles did?
Commenting on St. Paul’s hymn in his letter to the Philippians that describes the self-lowering of God to save us,[2] Benedict XVI said: “the Apostle concisely and effectively retraces the mystery of the history of salvation, mentioning the arrogance of Adam who, although he was not God, wanted to be like God. And he compares the arrogance of the first man, which we all tend to feel in our being, with the humility of the true Son of God who, in becoming man does not hesitate to take upon himself all human weaknesses, save sin, and going even as far as the depths of death. This descent to the ultimate depths of the Passion and death is followed by his exaltation, the true glory, the glory of love which went to the very end. And it is therefore right, as St Paul says, that at Jesus’ name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue profess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2:10-11).”[3]

Let us pause to meditate on these words of St. Paul, which we will hear once again on Good Friday before reading the passion according to St. John. They are, as it were, a door that allows us to enter into the divine plans, often far removed from merely human plans. Let us embrace the setbacks that God permits or sends us, with the sure knowledge that they are a proof of his love, as was the passion and death of his Son. “All this,” said Benedict XVI, “was not the fruit of an obscure mechanism or blind fate: rather, it was his own free choice, through generous adherence to the Father’s saving plan. And the death he went to meet, Paul adds, was that of crucifixion, the most humiliating and degrading death imaginable. The Lord of the universe did all this out of love for us: out of love he chose ‘to empty himself’ and make himself our brother; out of love he shared our condition, that of every man and every woman.”[4]

With his humiliation and his subsequent exaltation, our Lord has traced out for us the path we should follow in our daily life. “If we are faithful to him, Jesus’ own life,”wrote St. Josemaría, “will somehow be repeated in the life of each one of us, both in its internal development (the process of sanctification) and in our outward behavior.”[5] Thus, under the action of the Holy Spirit, with our personal collaboration, Christ’s features will steadily become more visible in us. Also when doing the way of the Cross, we can deeply meditate on what our Father wrote: “Lord, help me decide to tear off, through penance, this pitiful mask I have fashioned with
my wretched doings... Then, and only then, by following the path of contemplation and atonement, will my life begin to copy faithfully the features of your life. We will find ourselves becoming more and more like You. We will be other Christs, Christ himself, *ipse Christus*.”[6]

My daughters and sons, I am asking God that we may understand very well that the greatest manifestation of love, of happiness, is in our self-lowering, because then God fills our soul to the brim. Let us not forget the great truth contained in those verses—poor ones, our Father said—that came to the lips of St. Josemaría: Heart of Jesus, enlighten me, / today I say that you are my Love and my Good, / today you have given me your Cross and your thorns, / today I say that you love me.

Our Lord treats us in this way—union with the Cross—to sanctify us, and also allows the Church herself to suffer many attacks. “This is nothing new,” said St. Josemaría. “Since Jesus Christ our Lord founded the Church, this Mother of ours has suffered constant persecution. In times past the attacks were delivered openly. Now, in many cases, persecution is disguised. But today, as yesterday, the Church continues to be buffeted from many sides.”[7]

None of this should surprise us. Our Lord already announced it to the Apostles: If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also.[8]

Certainly at times these attacks on Catholic doctrine, on the Pope and on the bishops are intensified. Priests are ridiculed along with anyone trying to live a morally upright life. Lay Catholics who, using their freedom, try to illumine civil laws and structures with the light of the Gospel are ostracized. I am sure all of you feel sorry for these poor people who have room only for bitterness in their minds and souls. Let us bring them to our Lord through our prayer.

Faced with these situations, we should not lose heart or be intimidated. We should feel fraternal sadness for those who are in error, and pray for
them. Let us return good for bad, and decide to be more joyfully faithful and more apostolic. Let us call to mind St. Josemaría’s expression “God and daring” in the early years of the Work, when the difficulties in the life of the Church were no less great than now. Let us consider the words of our Lord that I just quoted: If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. God does not lose battles. With his infinite love and omnipotence, he can draw good out of evil.

Those who thought they had definitively finished off the Church have often shouted in victory, and the Spouse of Christ has always arisen more beautiful, more pure, to continue being an instrument of salvation among the nations. St. Augustine already pointed this out in his time, in words our Father used in one of his homilies. “If by chance you hear offensive words or shouts hurled against the Church, show their loveless authors, with humanity and charity, that they cannot mistreat a mother in that way. They attack her now with impunity, because her kingdom, which is that of her Master and Founder, is not of this world. ‘As long as the wheat groans among the straw, as long as the spikes of wheat sigh among the cockle, as long as the vessels of mercy lament among those of ire, as long as the lily sobs among the thorns, there will always be enemies who say: when will she die and her name perish? They think: there will come a time in which the Church will disappear and there will be no more Christians... But, when they say this, they of necessity die. And the Church remains’ (St. Augustine, En. In Ps., 70, II, 12).”[9]

Sometimes we might wish that God would show forth his power by freeing the Church definitively from those who persecute her. And perhaps we would like to ask: Why do you permit them to humiliate the people that you have redeemed in this way? This is the complaint that St. John, in the Apocalypse, puts on the lips of those who have given witness to Christ by their death: I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?”[10] The answer is not long in coming: They were... told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.[11]
This is how God acts. Those who witnessed Christ’s arrest, his impious trial, his unjust condemnation, his ignominious death, mistakenly concluded that all had ended. And, nevertheless, the Redemption of mankind was never closer than when Jesus voluntarily suffered for us. “How marvelous and at the same time surprising this mystery is! We can never sufficiently meditate on this reality. In spite of being God, Jesus does not want to make his divine prerogative an exclusive possession; he does not want to use his being as God, his glorious dignity and his power, as an instrument of triumph.”

Our Lord wants the members of his Mystical Body to share in the mystery of abasement and exaltation by which he carried out the Redemption. “If Good Friday is a day full of sorrow, it is therefore at the same time a particularly propitious day to reawaken our faith, to consolidate our hope and courage so that each one of us may carry our cross with humility, trust and abandonment in God, certain of his support and his victory. The liturgy of this day sings: O Crux, ave, spes unica, Hail, O Cross, our only hope!” I suggest to you something that I saw our Father do: savoring, meditating on, making very much his own those words that are repeated in a special way during Holy Week: Adoramus te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi. Quia per sanctam Crucem tuam redemisti mundum! We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world!

In the light of his glorious Resurrection, which followed Christ’s death and burial, the events that cause us pain or suffering acquire their true meaning. So let us strive to understand them in this way, loving at every moment the will of God, who, although he does not want evil, permits it in order to respect our freedom and make his mercy shine forth more strongly. And let us try to help many other people, who perhaps are confused or disoriented, to understand this.

“No matter what happens, Christ will not abandon his Spouse.” Our Lord continues dwelling in the Church, to whom he has sent the Holy Spirit to accompany her forever. “That was what God planned: Jesus, dying on the cross, gave us the Spirit of truth and life. Christ stays in his Church, its sacraments, its liturgy, its preaching—in all that it does.” And our Father added: “Only when a man is faithful to grace and decides to place
the cross in the center of his soul, denying himself for the love of God, detaching himself in a real way from all selfishness and false human security, only then—when a man lives by faith in a real way—will he receive the fullness of the great fire, the great light, the great comfort of the Holy Spirit.”[16]

On the 23rd of this month we will celebrate once more the First Holy Communion of our Father. I don’t know how to explain to you his joy, his adoration, his Eucharistic fervor on Holy Thursday. But I can tell you that his thanksgiving and his adoration of Jesus Christ in the Sacred Host were exemplary: everything seemed little to him, and he asked our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament to teach him how to love, to teach us to love.

There are other anniversaries of the history of the Work during this month: I leave them to your healthy curiosity, so that, as good daughters and sons, we may know how to thank the Blessed Trinity for all his goodness towards us. Now, among other things, for the spiritual fruit of the trip that I made to Palermo, last weekend.

Continue praying for the Pope and those who assist him, and for all my intentions. The “password” that I suggest to you is the same as that of St. Josemaría in the beginnings of Opus Dei: “God and daring,” faith and courage, with an optimism grounded in hope. Let us intensify the apostolate of friendship and confidence that is proper to the Work, without worrying what others may think, based on a life of prayer and sacrifice, on professional work done as well as possible. And God will do everything “sooner, more, and better” than we could possibly have imagined.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, April 1, 2010


Letter of February 2010

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

This month we celebrate the 80th anniversary of the moment when St. Josemaría saw that Opus Dei was also intended for women. We know that on October 2, 1928, when he received the foundational light, our Father thought that the Work was only for men. Thus we can imagine his surprise and joy when a few months later, on February 14, 1930, our Lord made him understand that he was also counting on women to carry everywhere—through their example and word—the message of
sanctification in professional work and in all the circumstances of ordinary life. Years later, with deep gratitude to divine Providence, he said that “truly the Work, without that express wish of our Lord and without your sisters, would have been left crippled.”[1] He often made reference to this, my daughters, to show what a great responsibility each one of you has. Although it’s a small digression, I ask you to commend to heaven an intention that will make you very happy.

After February 14, 1930, Saint Josemaría strove to open this path of sanctity in the midst of the world, Opus Dei, to women of all professions, races and walks of life. We raise our hearts in gratitude to the Blessed Trinity, because this work has taken root with depth and extension throughout the world, despite the great difficulties he had to overcome, especially at the start. If St. Josemaría’s preaching about the sanctification of earthly realities encountered so many obstacles in the 30’s and 40’s of the last century, imagine the added difficulties when the invitation to sanctify all noble human work was directed to a feminine public.

Today women, as is only right, have the same opportunities as men in many fields of work, but eighty years ago this was not the case. It was quite rare back then, for example, that women studied at the university or worked outside the home (except for the manual tasks that they had always carried out), and even rarer that they occupied positions of responsibility in civil, social or academic life. Several decades later, the Second Vatican Council proclaimed: “The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to assist mankind in not falling.”[2]

We have come a long way in the past eighty years, thanks to the efforts of countless people who have contributed to ensuring that the dignity of women, their equal rights and duties with men, is recognized, also in civil laws. Among these people, it is only right to recognize, a special role was played by St. Josemaría, who from the first moment encouraged his daughters, and the women who drew close to the Work, to attain the highest goals possible, in the most varied sectors of human activity. I recall
many specific events in this regard: from the strength with which he encouraged those who had the required intellectual conditions to aim high in their professional life (in the fields of culture, science, etc.), to his effort, equally great, to ensure that the immense service women render to society in other areas of work also be recognized. It was due to his direct urging, for example, that many educational institutions dedicated to preparing young women professionally for work in the home were begun all over the world, so that these tasks would receive the recognition they merit, both in civil laws and in society.

I give thanks to God because the Prelature’s faithful, in close union with so many other people of good will, have fostered and continue to foster throughout the world this Christian vision of the feminine condition. Nevertheless, so much still remains to be done! Although in many environments the dignity and role of women is widely recognized, in other places this is still a distant possibility. In any case, we daughters and sons of God have to continue striving to make this a reality, teaching people, as our Founder wrote, that the “development, maturity, emancipation of women should not mean a pretence of equality, of uniformity with men, a servile imitation of a man’s way of doing things. That would not get us anywhere. Women would turn out losers, not because they are better than men or worse, but because they are different. In terms of fundamentals, one can in fact speak of equal rights which should be legally recognised, both in civil and ecclesiastical law. Women, like men, possess the dignity of being persons and children of God. Nevertheless, on this basis of fundamental equality, each must achieve what is proper to him or her. In this sense a woman’s emancipation means that she should have a real possibility of developing her own potentialities to the fullest extent—those which she has personally and those which she has in common with other women. Equal rights and equal opportunities before the law do not suppress this diversity, which enriches all mankind. They presuppose and encourage it.”[3]

As in 2008, when we commemorated the 80th anniversary of the foundation of the Work, it has seemed to me that the best way to channel our thanksgiving is to stay very close to our Lady during these months. Therefore it gives me great joy to convoke a new Marian year in Opus Dei,
from the upcoming 14th of February to the same date in 2011. During these months, let us strive to honor our Mother more and better, above all by putting great care into the prayer and contemplation of the Holy Rosary, and spreading this devotion among our families and friends. And let us give express thanks to God for the work of the women who look after the material care of the centers of the Prelature, which contributes so decisively to maintaining and improving the environment of a home that God infused into the Work, when he inspired it in our Father in 1928.

The first months of this Marian year coincide with the last months of the Year for Priests convoked by Benedict XVI for the whole Church. During this time, I have insisted that, in praying for priests, we should also pray that all the faithful may be more aware of our “priestly soul,” shown by our daily dedication; and that we strive, daily as well, to communicate the joy of this gift—common to all the baptized—to the people we are in contact with.

February 14, is also a new anniversary of the foundation of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, in 1943. On that day, while St. Josemaría was celebrating the Sacrifice of the Altar in the oratory of a center of the women’s branch, our Lord gave him the solution so that priests could be incardinated in Opus Dei. Our Father, a man of deep faith in divine Providence, saw clearly that, by this coincidence of dates, our Lord wanted to reaffirm the profound unity—of spirit, of vocation, and of government—in Opus Dei between men and women, laity and priests. As he himself said, “it was as though our Lord wanted to tell us: don’t break the unity of the Work! Love it, defend it, foster it!”[4]

The priestly soul is nothing else than the common priesthood made a reality in the baptized, to the point of filling every moment of their life. Our Father thanked our Lord for this reality in the life of each and every one of the Work’s faithful. In 1960, for example, he said: “I have often told you that all of us, priests and laity, have a priestly soul. Moreover, I would even tell all my children that they are priests—with that royal priesthood St. Peter speaks of (cf. 1 Pet 2:9)—not only through receiving Baptism, but because vos estis lux mundi, you are the light of the world, and the light should not be hidden: non potest civitas abscondi supra montem posita (Mt 5:14), one cannot hide a city built on a mountain top. Christ has been
raised on the Cross, to draw all things to himself, and my children strive to raise it at the summit of all noble human activities, to bring souls to him.”[5]

In recalling this certainty to us, he urged us to actualize all the potentialities contained in the Christian vocation. He didn't limit himself to presenting this truth theoretically, but taught us how to put it into practice. He advised us to “live” the Holy Mass throughout the twenty-four hours of the day, presenting to our Lord, in the offertory, the tasks of each day, our successes and failures, sufferings and joys. He recommended that, as we carry out our work, we strive to exercise the virtues that every professional activity involves—hard-work, self-denial, service to others, etc.—with a Christian spirit. Thus, he said, the Holy Mass truly becomes “the center and the source of a Christian’s spiritual life,”[6] and we extend the Holy Sacrifice throughout the whole day.

And he liked to get down to details. During a gathering with young people, when asked how to put our priestly soul into practice, he answered: “what do you think a priest should be like? Sacrificed, zealous, smiling, attractive, someone who doesn’t reject people who ask for his services, who knows how to forgive, how to understand, how to advise…. You already know this, and many other things as well, and I'm convinced, my son, that you try to put it into practice: that is why you have a priestly soul.”[7]

And at another moment: “You share in Christ's royal priesthood because you have received the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, and because you also share in the charisms that the Holy Spirit grants, in the sense that you do many good things. A word of yours, at times, will open the eyes of a blind person; your way of behaving will enable someone who was paralyzed, who did nothing for his Christian life, to get up and begin working at your side. And even those who were dead, who were starting to decay, will come to the sacrament of Penance moved by your pleas, by your teachings, by your prayer. They will be purified, cleansed, and become capable of everything great: they will arise.”[8]

In light of these considerations, we can ask ourselves if the Holy Mass is truly the point of convergence of our desires and intentions, the fountain that feeds our zeal for holiness and apostolate. Do we see souls in those we
meet throughout the day? Do we react with acts of love and contrition at seeing the offenses our Lord receives? Also, let us foster solidarity with those who are suffering materially and spiritually because of wars, persecutions, natural catastrophes, etc., and let us try to accompany them with our prayers, and our material assistance whenever possible. Let us strive to ensure that news like the earthquake in Haiti does not become a mere memory.

Apostolic fruit depends on union with our Lord, as the Pope emphasized when referring to the extraordinary pastoral effectiveness of the Holy Curé of Ars. “It was not by virtue of his own human gifts that he succeeded in moving peoples’ hearts, nor even by relying on a praiseworthy commitment of his will; he won over even the most refractory souls by communicating to them what he himself lived deeply, namely, his friendship with Christ. He was ‘in love’ with Christ, and the true secret of his pastoral success was the fervor of his love for the Eucharistic Mystery, celebrated and lived, which became love for Christ’s flock, for Christians and for all who were seeking God.”[9]

On February 19 we will recall in a special way our beloved Don Álvaro, who celebrated his saint’s day on this date. We entrust ourselves to his intercession to traverse this new Marian year with the same filial spirit with which the first successor of St. Josemaría convoked and lived other Marian years, for various anniversaries of the Work. On the following day, February 20, I will ordain two Associate brothers of yours as priests. Let us pray for them and for all priests.

A few days ago, the Holy Father received me in a private audience. I brought him the affection and prayers of all of you, and assured him that we are constantly praying for him and for his intentions. Let us continue doing so, closely united to the Successor of Peter, and also to all the bishops, priests and faithful of the Church. Benedict XVI blessed all the apostolic efforts of the faithful of the Work and each one of you.

There is no need to remind you that I am relying greatly on your prayer for my intentions. Continue being generous.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father
+ Javier

Rome, February 1, 2010


Torna ai contenuti

Homilies

On the fourth Sunday of Lent, Parish of St. Josemaría, Rome (March 14, 2010)

Dear brothers and sisters:

Today is the fourth Sunday of Lent, known as Laetare Sunday from the first words of the Entrance Antiphon: Rejoice, Jerusalem! Be glad for her, you who love her; rejoice with her, you who mourned for her. [1] The reason for this joy is clear: we are close to Easter, and our heart rejoices because we have been redeemed by Christ. Through his total self-surrender to God the Father, he has made us children of God, in Him.
As we approach the feast of Easter, the liturgy urges us, with greater and greater insistence, to convert our heart. In this regard, I would like to encourage everyone to fulfill as well as possible the paschal precept: that is, to receive Communion during Easter time, and therefore to remember the great treasure and duty—which applies to everyone—to confess any serious sins before approaching the Sacrament of the Eucharist. In this way, we will be prepared to receive fruitfully the abundant graces that God our Father wants to give us.

The readings of the Mass speak about the mercy of God, who is always ready to pardon our sins. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20), exclaims St. Paul. This is a cry that is heard insistently throughout the whole of Lent, but that resounds with special force in today’s liturgy.

Let us never forget that God wants our happiness. That is why Jesus instituted the holy Sacrament of Penance; not only to pardon grave sins, but also venial sins, to cure our weaknesses, to fill us with peace and comfort thanks to this sacrament of joy, as St. Josemaría liked to call it. Let us prepare ourselves, then, to make a deeper confession than usual, that is, one made with more love and contrition, and let us try to invite other people to do the same.

2. The parable of the prodigal son—also called the parable of the merciful father—is a vivid image of the love that God has for each one of us. In the Gospel account, Jesus describes in clear terms the path of every conversion. We all recall this expressive story of the human condition and of divine mercy. “Our Lord wanted to engrave this splendid and rich truth not only on our understanding, but also on our imagination, on our heart and on our conscience. How many people down through the centuries,” said John Paul II, “how many men and women of our time can find in this parable the key features of their own personal history?”[2] Let us try then, once again, to apply Jesus’ parable to ourselves.

The younger son, who had all he needed in his father’s house, decided one day to leave: Father, give me the part of the fortune that will come to me (Lk 15:12). Don’t we too act this way at times? When we follow our own desires, instead of following God’s will, clearly shown in the
commandments and the duties of our state, then we too want to leave our father’s house, we too give voice to words that wound God’s heart. This may often not be anything grave; but disobedience to God even in small matters is also an evil for us and an offense to God, our heavenly Father.

Let us pause to meditate on the life of the prodigal son after having left his father’s house. At the beginning of his foolish adventure, perhaps for some months, everything seemed to be going wonderfully. The son felt free of his father’s guidance, happy to be able to do whatever he pleased. Pope Benedict XVI has analyzed the psychology of this person—which is or could be any one of us—in a homily on this Gospel account: “At first,” he said, “everything went smoothly: he found it beautiful to have attained life at last, he felt happy. Then, however, little by little, he felt bored here too; here too everything was always the same. And in the end, he was left with an emptiness that was even more disturbing: the feeling that this was still not life became ever more acute; indeed, going ahead with all these things, life drifted further and further away. Everything became empty: the slavery of doing the same things then also re-emerged. And in the end, his money ran out and the young man found that his standard of living was lower than that of swine.”[3]

Reaching this state, the prodigal son began to reflect. He realized that the path he had taken did not satisfy his desire for happiness, but had made things worse. It is logical that it should be so: the human heart is made for God and only God can fill it completely. The son then decided to begin his journey back to his father: When he came to himself he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.’” And he arose and came to his father (Lk 15:17–20).

3. Isn’t it true that all of us, in one way or another, see ourselves reflected in this poor young fellow? Isn’t it true that we too have been deceived sometimes by the attractions of this world, which hid from us the true joy of remaining in the house of our Father God? In this situation, we have to act in accord with the teaching that we find in the parable of the prodigal son, especially in its happy conclusion. As St. Josemaría wrote:
“Human life is in some way a constant returning to our Father’s house. We return through contrition, through that conversion of heart that means a desire to change, a firm decision to improve our life and which, therefore, is expressed in sacrifice and self-giving. We return to our Father’s house by means of that sacrament of pardon in which, by confessing our sins, we put on Jesus Christ again and become his brothers, members of God’s family.”\[4\]

I don’t want to end without emphasizing that we must never lose hope. The prodigal son knew that he continued to be the son of his father despite the sad situation in which he found himself. The knowledge of this fact gave him the courage to undertake his return journey. For as St. John wrote: by this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything (1 Jn 3:19-20).

John Paul II said that “the confessional spread around the world, in which men and women show their personal sins, do not speak of the severity of God, but much more of his merciful goodness. And those who come to the confessional, at times after many years and with the weight of grave sins, at the moment of getting rid of them, find the comfort they seek. They find the joy and the serenity of conscience that, outside of confession, cannot be found anywhere.”\[5\]

Divine mercy is always waiting for us. Let us not delay in returning to Him, whenever necessary!

I would like to end with some words of St. Josemaría that can serve as an affectionate spur for us, also so that we encourage other people to go to the sacrament of joy. “God is waiting for us, like the father in the parable, with open arms, even though we don’t deserve it. It doesn’t matter how great our debt is. Just like the prodigal son, all we have to do is open our heart, to be homesick for our Father’s house, to wonder at and rejoice in the gift which God makes us of being able to call ourselves his children, of really being his children, even though our response to him has been so poor.”\[6\]

I also invite you also to pray with greater intensity for our Holy Mother the Church, for the Pope, for the bishops and priests, for the entire People
of God, for all humanity. Let us ask Mary, our Mother, who is also the refuge of sinners, that she obtain from her Son the grace of going to the holy Sacrament of Penance in these coming days with a careful examination, with a stronger contrition, with the firm resolution to never again leave the house of our Father God.

Let us also ask our Lady—*Causa nostrae laetitiae*, Cause of our joy—to keep us faithful to Jesus, as she was during her earthly life. Amen.


In the Cathedral of Valencia (February 5, 2010)

*My dear brothers and sisters:*

Deeply engraved on my memory is the affection that St. Josemaría felt for this city of Valencia. He expressed it publicly in 1972, during his last stay among you, when he said that he looked upon Valencia “with a predilection that is not an offence to any other city in Spain or outside of Spain.”[1] This affection has very deep roots. As early as 1936 St. Josemaría had planned to begin the apostolic activities of the Work here and in Paris. But the disasters that we all know about obliged him to postpone those plans. It was only in 1939, once the Spanish conflict had ended, that he was able to carry out the first of them. Thus Valencia was the first city,
outside Madrid, to receive the spiritual message of St. Josemaría. And so, as he said, “it seems that God our Lord wanted me to love Valencia in a special way.”[2]

With these precedents, you can well understand how great is my joy in celebrating the Holy Sacrifice in this Cathedral. I owe heartfelt gratitude to your Archbishop, my beloved brother Carlos Osoro, who invited me.

We are celebrating the votive Mass of St. Josemaría. The texts for the readings were proposed to the Holy See by my predecessor, the Servant of God Bishop Álvaro del Portillo. He chose them because these passages from Holy Scripture contain some of the fundamental points of the spirit that St. Josemaría, spurred by God, set out to preach after October 2, 1928. These texts illumined the mind of that holy priest, who brought them repeatedly to his prayer to draw out all the divine meaning that they contain.

2. The first reading is taken from Genesis. It narrates how our first parents—created by God out of love and loved for themselves—were placed in paradise *ut operarentur* (cf. *Gen* 2:15), so that they would assist in the work of creation.

The sacred author writes that Yahweh walked in the garden in the cool of the day (*Gen* 3:8). With these words, the book of Genesis seeks to express the familiarity with which God followed the steps of Adam and Eve, how much he delighted in them and in their work. Indeed, before original sin, our first parents praised God by faithfully fulfilling the command to dominate the earth (cf. *Gen* 1:26). Work did not involve tiredness or fatigue for them, but rather great joy, since “according to God’s plans work was to be a permanent feature of man who, through work, would cooperate in the immense task of creation.”[3]

Unfortunately, “Adam’s sin destroyed the divine balance of creation; but God the Father sent his only Son to reestablish peace, so that we, his children by adoption, might free creation from disorder and reconcile all things to God.”[4] Let us never forget it: this is why we have to know how to rightly love the world, work, and all noble human realities. Thus we will give glory to God and be happy. As the Founder of Opus Dei preached, we
will find God in our daily life if we seek him; otherwise, we will never find him.

St. Josemaría taught us that Christians shouldn’t carry out their work with the mentality of a hired employee, but rather with a filial spirit, fully convinced that it is a divine task received from their Father God. This is the teaching that underlies the second reading of the Mass, taken from the Letter to the Romans, a song of joyful gratitude for the gift of our divine filiation. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship… [in which] we cry, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:14-15).

This reading is preceded by Psalm 2, the psalm of the kingship of Christ, in which God the Father proclaims the universal dominion of his Incarnate Son—and of us with him—over all creation: Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession (Ps 2:8).

Our Lord wants Christians, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, to finish their work well, working diligently, in order to place Christ at the summit of all noble human activities. Thus we will help to restore his eternal plan for society, which so many persons today are trying to undo. But we should not be cowards. Jesus encourages us to act with absolute trust in his power and his grace, in spite of the empty plans that so many have mapped out on earth, fighting in vain against the Lord and against his Anointed One (Ps 2:1-2), since nothing can succeed that tries to oppose him. Let us pray this Psalm with great confidence, as the early Christians did. And let us bring it to our personal prayer, so that we will always have the supernatural optimism that comes from God. Because God, as St. Josemaría liked to say, does not lose battles.

3. The Church expects of her children, at the present time, a vibrant and hope-filled testimony to their faith. But let us not imagine great exploits, nor think that this endeavor—placing Christ at the summit of all human realities—concerns only a small group of people. We all have to feel ourselves committed to the new evangelization, to this marvelous mission of helping many people discover the Christian roots of the society in which
we live. As Pope Benedict XVI has emphasized on many occasions, it is “indispensable to give concrete, practical content to Christian witness, examining how it can be carried out and developed in each of the great areas of human experience. We will therefore be helped by not losing sight... of the link between faith and daily life, between the Gospel proposition and the preoccupations and aspirations that most people have at heart.”[5]

St. Josemaría called this strong consistency between faith and deeds, between doctrine and one’s behavior throughout each day, “unity of life,” because it is the fundamental demand of the life of a daughter or a son of God. Let us not think, however, that this attitude places limits to the legitimate aspirations of Catholics as citizens and members of civil society. As the Holy Father stressed, “the disciples of Christ recognize and gladly welcome the authentic values of the culture of our time, such as scientific knowledge and technological advancement, human rights, religious freedom, democracy. They do not overlook or undervalue, however, that dangerous fragility of human nature, which is a threat for man’s advancement in every historical context; in particular, they do not neglect the interior tensions and contradictions of our age. Therefore, the work of evangelization is never a simple adaptation to culture, but it is always also a purification, a courageous break that leads to maturation and healing, an openness that brings to birth that new creation (2 Cor 5:17: Gal 6:15) which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.”[6]

4. I would like to say a few words regarding the miraculous catch of fish. St. Josemaría frequently commented on this Gospel text, stressing the urgency with which Jesus invites us to carry out apostolate. Duc in altum! Put out into the deep (Jesus is telling us now, as he did to Peter and his companions) and cast your nets for a catch (Lk 5:4). We all have to feel the responsibility of taking part in the Church’s evangelizing mission: laity and priests, manual workers and intellectuals, students, men and women, married and single, each in the place where God has placed us. In the barque of Peter each of us has a mission to fulfill. Some of us at the oars, others at the nets, or caulking the bottom of the boat, but the task is a common effort. Christ is the Master of this ship that has been sailing the seas of history for twenty centuries and that cannot sink because it is sailing
under the impetus of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps it is the moment to ask ourselves, each in the intimacy of our personal conversation with God, whether we are carrying out responsibly our task within the Church; whether we are really doing everything within our power to assist her journey towards eternity.

Before concluding, I will suggest to you a point to examine yourselves on that the Pope placed before the pastors and faithful of the Diocese of Rome some time ago, and that is perfectly applicable to any place and situation. Benedict XVI emphasized that this is a point that is “supremely important for the Church’s mission and requires our commitment and first of all our prayer. I am referring,” he continued, “to vocations to follow the Lord Jesus more closely.”[7]

This is a topic of great timeliness within the Year for Priests. We all have to ask the Lord of the harvest to send many workers into his fields (cf. Mt 9:38). But not only priests—who are very important—but also men and women who will follow him with full availability for the apostolate, according to each one’s specific circumstances. And the Holy Father concluded: “With delicacy and respect we must address a special but clear and courageous invitation to follow Jesus to those young men and women who appear to be the most attracted and fascinated by friendship with him.”[8]

We shouldn’t think that this is more difficult now than in the past. *Inter medium montium pertransibunt aquae* (Ps 103[104]:10), the waters of grace will pass over all the obstacles if we pray, if we behave in a truly Christian way, if we set forth the teachings of the Church without fear of what others may think or say, if we carry out our work as perfectly as possible and offer it to God.

*Et fui tecum in omnibus, ubicumque ambulasti* (2 Sam 7:9). These are words from the Holy Scriptures that St. Josemaría once heard resounding in the depths of his soul. Our Lord was telling him that he would never abandon him, that he would always be at his side. He is now telling us the same thing. He wants us to act with absolute trust, loving his will, observing his commandments, which are not burdensome duties (although
at times they may be difficult), but a help to overcome our disordered tendencies, wings to fly upwards to heaven.

Our Lord also wants us to discover his Providence in tribulation, in the small or great sacrifices of each day, because sacrifice is the touchstone of true love.

He wants us to love the sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist, and to speak of these gifts to our friends.

In sum, our Lord wants us to realize that in our daily life, in the apparently ordinary happenings of each day, there is hidden a “divine something”—as St. Josemaría assured us—that we have to discover and take advantage of for our own sanctification and that of others.

And pray with affection and perseverance for the Archbishop of Valencia and his intentions: may he be able to count on your help each day. Love him very much.

Let us go to the intercession of our Lady, Mare de Déu dels Desamparats (Mother of God of the Abandoned), asking her to present our petitions to her Son. St. Josemaría used to say that our Lady, like good mothers here on earth, has more love for the children who need her the most. So we shouldn’t worry if we ever feel ourselves to be especially needy. For our Mother will do everything possible for each one of us. Amen

[2] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
At the Mass In Coena Domini on Holy Thursday, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace (April 1, 2010)

My dear brothers, and my dear sons

1. Ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem saeculi (Mt 28:20): Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. Surely the apostles, on hearing these words of Christ moments before his ascension into heaven, did not understand how he was to fulfill this promise. Nevertheless, obeying Jesus’ command, they returned to the Holy City and gathered in the Cenacle, praying together with Mary Most Holy.

A few days later, when the Paraclete descended visibly upon them, they understood what Jesus had told them. There came to their memory, with divine clarity, the teachings of the Master and so many moments lived at his side; among others, the hours spent with him in that same place, the Cenacle of Jerusalem, before the Sacrifice of Calvary. On that first Holy Thursday, our Lord took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24-25). And St. Paul adds: For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes (Ibid, 26).

The Most Holy Eucharist is the divine way by which Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, fulfilled his promise: he went to heaven and he remained with us until the end of time. Only an infinite Love like his could have carried out this miracle. And here we have him, truly hidden beneath the sacramental species: with his Body, his Blood, his Soul, and his Divinity. During this Mass in Cena Domini we commemorate the institution of the Eucharist and we thank him for it in a special way. But
every day the redeeming sacrifice of Calvary becomes sacramentally present on the altar, for our good and our salvation.

Let us now say to Jesus, truly, really, and substantially with us in the Sacred Host: Adoro te devote, latens Deitas. I want to adore you, Lord, like the saints who have adored you most here on earth; and, like them, I want to bring you to all humanity, so that you can heal us, so that you can give us your Life.

2. Jesus came to converse with men, to save them, to give himself to everyone: to you and to me. And now he looks at us with the same concern that he had for the blind, crippled and deaf people whom he cured during his earthly life; with the same forgiveness that he dispensed to Dismas, the repentant thief, and to the sinners who drew close to him with contrition.

We beseech you, Lord, sincerely, that you exchange our heart of stone—which we still so often hold on to—for a heart of flesh, that knows how to love cleanly, with complete generosity, in order to serve you, honor you and praise you more fully and more frequently; and with you, to love and serve all souls.

The Eucharist is a mystery of faith and love. With your help, Jesus, since you want us to be one with you, we will try to be more refined in our Eucharistic life, to become, with your grace, “totally, essentially Eucharistic,” as St. Josemaría wrote. Because our life, Lord, that of each one of us, will come to nothing if we don’t seek you, if we don’t converse with you, if we don’t love you.

3. We are living in the Church the Year for Priests that the Pope convoked on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the death of the Holy Curé of Ars. And precisely today we commemorate the moment when Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Holy Orders. He did so at the same time as the Eucharist, when he said to his apostles—and, in them, to all bishops and priests—those words that we have already recalled: do this in memory of me (Lk 22:19).

Let us give thanks to God for this goodness of his, without which we would not be able to personally receive the fruits of the Redemption. Let us recall some words of the Curé of Ars, which Benedict XVI included in his letter for the Year for Priests: “Without the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we
would not have the Lord. Who put him there in that tabernacle? The priest. Who welcomed your soul at the beginning of your life? The priest. Who feeds your soul and gives it strength for its journey? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, bathing it one last time in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest, always the priest.”

We all have the duty to pray a lot for priests, that they be holy. And we should not let a single day go by without raising our prayer to heaven, asking the divine sower, Jesus Christ, to place in the souls of many men the call to the priesthood.

4. We need to purify ourselves so that our Lord can dwell in our souls. He wants this. *Ecce sto ad ostium et pulso* (*Rev* 3:20), he says to each of us: behold, I am standing at your door and knocking. Let us not turn a deaf ear to his petitions; let us open wide the doors of our heart. If we do this, as St. Josemaría said, “we will feel the need to correspond in what is most important, and that is love. And we will know how to spread that love among other men, with a life of service” (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 94).

Only thus, by allowing Jesus to enter fully into our life, will we be able to look at the world with his eyes, love others with his Heart. Though his self-giving in the Eucharist, he is inviting us to participate in his Life. Thus the Eucharist is what spurs us to be apostolic: zeal for souls is the ripe fruit of one who truly tries to be a Eucharistic soul.

Let us go to our Lady. Mary, as Pope John Paul II wrote, is the Eucharistic woman par excellence, for she was always very close to Jesus on earth. Now, from heaven, she is constantly concerned about us, about our happiness, our salvation. We beseech her: Mother of ours, place us within your immaculate Heart, purify us, fill us with love for your Son Jesus, so that we can spread this love to many other souls. Amen.
Dearest sons who are about to be ordained. Dear brothers and sisters.

1. Just recently we celebrated “Good Shepherd Sunday,” which takes its name from the Gospel texts which are read in that Mass. It is a common practice to celebrate priestly ordinations on the same day and also to pray in a special way for priests. As we begin today’s celebration I entreat all of you to ask our Lord to make these men, as well as all the priests in the world, into true saints. Let us accompany them closely with our prayers and sacrifices.

Today, by means of the imposition of the Bishop’s hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, a new group of well prepared men will be added to the innumerable number of priests who have been ordained before them. From this day forward, they will be able to collaborate with the Bishops, the successors of the Apostles, in guiding the Christian people by means of the ministry of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the pastoral care of the souls entrusted to them.

Let us pause for a moment to consider the divine origin of the sacred ministry. The Apostles, who were chosen directly by Our Lord, were completely normal men. They had the same weaknesses that we do. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ promises them that the Holy Spirit will always be present in the life of the Church. And so it happens that when the apostles unite to resolve certain difficulties after Pentecost, they leave us a wonderful testimony of this presence: “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things” (Acts 15:28).

This reminds me of the admiration that St. Josemaría Escrivá expressed when commenting on this daring expression used by the Apostles. “They reached an agreement and then they drafted their conciliar decrees using that fantastic affirmation: visum est enim Spiritui Sancto et nobis... It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. What boldness!”[1]
2. At the center of the ordination ceremony, we find the gesture of the imposition of hands by the Bishop. This gesture, which is carried out in silence, signifies that Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest, takes possession of the priest in an extremely special way. As Benedict XVI explains, it is as if Our Lord is saying to each candidate: “You belong to me.... You are under the protection of my hands. You are under the protection of my heart. You are kept safely in the palm of my hands, and this is precisely how you find yourself in the immensity of my love. Stay in my hands, and give me yours.”[2]

I now say to you, sons of mine who are about to be transformed into priests: always remain very close to Our Lord by means of prayer and sacrifice. Be sure to carry out your ministerial duties with love, day in and day out. Deal with Our Lord not only when you celebrate the Eucharist but also throughout the day. Be very devoted to the Blessed Virgin, Our Mother, and to St. Joseph. By imitating the example of St. Josemaría, our beloved father, you will always remain well protected in the hands of Jesus.

In addition to the imposition of hands by the Bishop, which together with the consecratory prayer constitutes the sacrament’s essential sign, various priests will also impose their hands on the candidates. This signifies the fraternal reception of the new priests into the priestly order. Indeed, the sacrament creates a strong bond of communion among all priests. The joys and sufferings of some are the joys and sufferings of all the others. Keep this in mind, my sons, so that you may aid your brother priests in all of their needs, so that you may truly be their servants, and so that you may also docilely let yourself be helped by the others.

3. Once they have changed into the priestly vestments for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar, the new priests will have their hands anointed with holy oil. This gesture is also very significant. “The human hand is the instrument of human action, it is the symbol of the human capacity to face the world, precisely to ‘take it in hand’. The Lord has laid his hands upon us and he now wants our hands so that they may become his own in the world. He no longer wants them to be instruments for taking things, people, or the world for ourselves, to reduce them to being our possession, but in- stead, by putting ourselves at the service of his love, they can pass on his divine touch.”[3]
In his mercy God entrusts great treasures into the hands of priests. With their hands they take up the bread and the chalice of wine which are then transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. With the same hands they impart God’s forgiveness in the sacrament of Reconciliation and they anoint the sick with the holy oils. With those same hands they bless the apostolic initiatives of their brothers in the Church, they offer fraternal aid to the needy, and they express their desire to serve all men without exception.

“The Sacrament of Orders”— writes St. Josemaría—“effectively equips the priest to lend Our Lord his voice, his hands, his whole being.”[4] This is the foundation of the incomparable dignity of the priesthood. The Church has defined as a dogma of faith that this dignity does not depend on the personal worthiness of individual priests. St. Josemaría thus used to give the following advice: “If you ever come across a priest who apparently does not seem to be following the teaching of the Gospel—do not judge him, let God judge him—bear in mind that if he celebrates Mass validly, with the intention of consecrating, Our Lord will still come down into his hands, however unworthy they are. Where could you find greater self-surrender and annihilation? Here it is greater than in Bethlehem or on Calvary. Why? Because Jesus’ heart, filled with a desire to redeem, does not want anyone to be able to say that he has not been called. He goes out to meet those who do not seek Him.”[5]

The same thing holds for the other sacraments. “It’s Love! There is no other explanation for it. When it comes to speaking of Christ’s Love, we are lost for words. He has so abased Himself that He accepts everything; He exposes Himself to everything—to sacrilege, to blasphemy and to the cold indifference of so many people—in order to offer even one man the chance of hearing the beating of his Heart in his wounded side.”[6]

4. Today’s ordination takes place within the Year for Priests proclaimed by Benedict XVI to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the dies natalis of the Holy Curé of Ars. As we listen to the words of this great pastor let us thank God for giving the Church the gift of these new priests. “We will only fully understand the priesthood in heaven. If, while
still in this life, we really understood what a priest represents we would die, not from fear but from love.” He goes on to explain, “Without priests none of God’s gifts would do us any good. Of what use to us is a house filled with gold if nobody can open its door for us? The priest holds the key to the heavenly treasures: he is the one who opens the door; he is God’s good administrator, the administrator of his goods.”[7]

There is thus no reason to be surprised if the enemies of God attempt to discredit the institution of the priesthood in an infinite variety of ways. In fact this has happened often in the history of the Church. “When someone wants to destroy religion,” the Holy Curé of Ars rightly affirms, “they begin by attacking the priesthood, because wherever there are no priests there is neither sacrifice nor religion.”[8]

Thanks be to God, this will never happen. As Our Lord has promised us, I am with you always, until the end of the age (Mt 28:20). We are thus filled with confidence: Jesus Christ will never abandon his Church and, as proof of his promise, he has sent the Holy Spirit into the world.

I do not want to conclude without congratulating the parents, the brothers and sisters, the families and the friends of the new priests. They now have more need than ever of your prayers, of our prayers. Let us pray for them and for all priests, that they be holy and that there be enough of them to attend to the needs of the Church in the entire world. Let us ask the Master of the harvest that he send many holy laborers into his harvest (cf. Mt 9:38).

Let us pray in a special way for the Pope, for his collaborators in governing the Church, for the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, and for all of the Bishops in the world. We entrust this prayer to Mary the Mother of priests, asking her to take special care of these sons of hers, helping them to be more and more identified with Jesus Christ, the Eternal High priest. Amen.


[3] Ibid.
At the Mass in suffrage for Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (March 23, 2010)

Dear brothers and sisters!

I keep very much alive the memory of the night between March 22nd and 23rd, sixteen years ago. We had just arrived from the Holy Land, and the Servant of God, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, was filled with supernatural and human happiness after having spent a week in the land where Jesus walked. None of us who accompanied him, nor those who received him in the Holy Land, could have imagined that this trip was going to be the last opportunity to converse with this bishop whose life was so exemplary. Much less did he, the beloved Prelate of Opus Dei and first successor of St. Josemaría, realize that within a few hours he would receive the eternal embrace of the Blessed Trinity. I dare to say that he passed from the supernatural and human happiness that engulfed him in visiting the Holy Places, to the eternal happiness of contemplating God face to face.

This Mass offers us the possibility to reflect on the truth that all of us should live with the realization that God’s lovingly Providence always accompanies us. The current Year for Priests convoked by the Holy Father can spur us to look closely at Don Álvaro’s life, especially from the viewpoint of fidelity. St. Paul, when listing the qualities sacred ministers need to have, put this virtue in first place: This is how one should regard
us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trust-worthy (1 Cor 4:1-2).

Fidelity is a human and Christian virtue of great importance. The solemnity of St. Joseph, guardian of Jesus and Mary, is still quite recent, and we don't want to forget that the holy patriarch “was an ordinary sort of man on whom God relied to do great things. He did exactly what the Lord wanted him to do, in each and every event that went to make up his life. That is why Scripture praises Joseph as ‘a just man’ (cf. Mt 1:19). And in Hebrew a just man means a good and faithful servant of God, someone who fulfills the divine will.”[1]

Those of us that had the good fortune to have frequent personal contact with Don Álvaro can testify that his whole life was deeply marked by fidelity: loyalty to God and to the Church, loyalty to the call he had received from God to Opus Dei, and loyalty to St. Josemaría, with whom he worked very closely.

In the prayer for private devotion, my predecessor is described as an exemplary pastor in the service of the Church and a most faithful son and successor of St. Josemaría. This time of Lent, a time for conversion, is also a time for fidelity. For divine Mercy comes in search of us, sinners that we are. And since God is always faithful, he continually offers us the possibility of responding with supernatural and human loyalty, and he invites all men and women to form part of his people.

2. Bishop del Portillo understood from the first moment of his path in Opus Dei that God, the font of all graces, calls us to be faithful to his requests, in order to attain sanctity and serve souls. Precisely because of his daily effort to be faithful, Don Álvaro was able to become a firm support for the Founder. The circumstances of those times, when the Work was taking its first steps that entailed difficulties of every kind, enabled St. Josemaría to find in him a man of firm character. And he realized that Providence had placed him at his side to help him govern Opus Dei more effectively.

Already from the year 1939, St. Josemaría began to call Don Álvaro saxum, rock, thanks to his human and supernatural strength, and thanks also to his availability. I would dare to say that this word, saxum, was truly
prophetic. For Don Álvaro’s deeds always showed him to be a person who was faithful, strong as a rock, capable of withstanding any storm.

With gratitude to God for having placed him by his side for so many years, St. Josemaría always told the other faithful of Opus Dei that Don Álvaro was an example of fidelity. On one occasion, taking advantage of the fact that he wasn’t present, he spoke about Msgr. del Portillo in these terms: “His fidelity is what yours should be at all times; he has sacrificed his personal concerns with a smile, as do you. He doesn’t consider himself an exception, and I don’t think he is either, nor will he ever be: you should all follow his example, with God’s grace. And if you ask me ‘Has he ever been heroic?’—I would answer ‘Yes,’ he has been heroic many times, with a heroism that seems ordinary.”[2] I was a witness to Don Álvaro’s struggle. He fostered in his own heart and in the hearts of the others a strong love for the Church, for the Holy Father, for priests and all mankind. Imitating Jesus, the Master, he tried to be a friend to everyone.

3. All of us, as Catholics who have been marked by the character of Baptism, and later by that of Confirmation, have been configured to Christ, who, through the Holy Spirit, has made us children of God and sharers in his priesthood. Therefore, ours is the joyful responsibility to be faithful to our Christian vocation and thus offer others a testimony of loyalty. In spite of the fact that many people refuse to keep the commitments they have freely taken on, we are called to give, by our words and deeds, an example of faithfulness in all areas of our life: in our relationship with God, and in our social, professional and family relationships.

Remaining loyal always and in everything isn’t easy and requires sacrifice. We see this in the life of St. Joseph: “St. Joseph’s life was simple, but it was not easy.”[3] As Benedict XVI said: “Life is truly always a choice: between honesty and dishonesty, between fidelity and infidelity, between selfishness and altruism, between good and evil.”[4] We shouldn’t be surprised, therefore, that Christian life can also require a struggle to be faithful, confronting difficulties that can and should be overcome with the help of divine grace; and if we have been defeated, we can begin again with a new fidelity, by having recourse to the sacrament of Confession.
In today’s society, there is a great need to be faithful to one’s Christian vocation, in its various manifestations, both lay and priestly; without forgetting those who have been called to the consecrated life. In all these situations we need to remember that “the school of faith is not a triumphal march but a journey marked daily by suffering and love, trials and faithfulness.”[5] And I would add that it is a path of joy and of peace because our Lord wants us to be happy. We are helped in our efforts by the liturgical time of Lent, which is a new call to be faithful as God’s children, to convert our heart, accompanied by a firm resolution to fulfill all our baptismal commitments. Thus we will share, in all circumstances, in the happiness of heaven.

Let us listen once again to St. Josemaría’s invitation: “Lent should suggest to us these basic questions: Am I advancing in my faithfulness to Christ, in my desire for holiness, in a generous apostolate in my daily life, in my ordinary work among my colleagues?” And he adds: “Each one of us, silently, should answer these questions, and we will see that we need to change again if Christ is to live in us, if Jesus’ image is to be reflected clearly in our behavior.”[6]

Let us pray, then, that all Christians may understand the importance of being loyal to the demands of the Church’s doctrine and morality, so as to witness to Jesus Christ and of Jesus Christ. The liturgy of the Easter Vigil, by inviting us to renew our baptismal promises, seeks to awaken in us the awareness that “the baptism that justifies us is also a call to seek the justice that is a fruit of faith. The path of an authentically Christian life is summed up by being faithful to the promises of holy Baptism.”[7]

Before finishing, there come to my memory the words from a postcard written by Don Álvaro during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, in Lent of 1994. It was addressed to a Prelate of the Roman Curia very close to the Pope, asking that he make John Paul II aware of his union with his August Person. “From these holy places I have prayed—we have prayed—a great deal for you, vir fidelis, and with the petition that you present to the Holy Father our desire to be fideles usque ad mortem, in serving the Holy Church and the Holy Father.”[8]
In this ardent desire to be faithful until death, expressed in a simple and direct way a few days before his pious passage to heaven, I think we can find a summary of the life of this Servant of God and my beloved predecessor. Through our Lady’s intercession, may it be said of each of us that we have been *fideles usque ad mortem*, faithful to our Christian vocation, with a cheerful and unquestioning fidelity that is shown in deeds, and that is renewed each day in the big and little things of ordinary life.

We can also find in these words, I think, an invitation, addressed to each one of us, to help the Holy Father, the Church, and all mankind each day. This is precisely the petition with which the prayer for private devotion to the Servant of God concludes: grant that I too may respond faithfully to the demands of the Christian vocation, turning all the circumstances and events of my life into opportunities to love you and serve the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

And now, turning once more to Mary, we can ask her: help all of us to be people who are truly Christian, as you were. Amen.


Torna ai contenuti

On the Feast of St. Josemaría, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (June 26, 2010)
My dear brothers and sisters:

1. Today we celebrate the thirty-fifth anniversary of the dies natalis of St. Josemaría Escrivá. On celebrating this liturgical feast, with joy and gratitude to God, the passage from Genesis in the first reading seems particularly relevant for all of us. After finishing the work of creation, Sacred Scripture tells us, God took man, made in his image and likeness, and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it\(^1\) — *ut operaretur!*

There comes to mind the words of the Servant of God, John Paul II, on October 6, 2002, in his homily at the Mass of canonization for the Founder of Opus Dei. Referring to his teachings, the Pope said that “believers acting in the various realities of this world contribute to making this divine universal plan a reality. Work and any other activity, carried out with the help of grace, is converted into a means of daily sanctification.”\(^2\)

Let us give thanks to God because this message is already widely accepted, not only in theology but above all also in the lives of many men and women. Unfortunately, however, in so many other people, it is still only present at a theoretical level, without practical consequences in their daily lives. Therefore I would like to make reference today to some fundamental points of the teachings of St. Josemaría that can help us to put this into practice. Let us ask God’s help, with words from the collect prayer: O God, who raised up your priest Saint Josemaría in the Church to proclaim the universal call to holiness and the apostolate, grant that by his intercession and example we may, through our daily work, be formed in the likeness of Jesus your Son and serve the work of redemption with burning love.\(^3\)

2. In one of his homilies dedicated to the sanctification of work, St. Josemaría, making use of the verse from Genesis just cited, recalled that the duty of working “is not a consequence of original sin, nor is it just a discovery of modern times. It is an indispensable means which God has entrusted to us here on this earth. It is meant to fill out our days and make us sharers in God’s creative power. It enables us to earn our living and, at the same time, to reap ‘the fruits of eternal life’ (Jn 4:36).”\(^4\)

Jesus’ own example, who dedicated himself for thirty years to work that was arduous, but filled with joy, in the workshop of Nazareth, with Mary
and Joseph, teaches us that God is also counting on our work to help further the salvation of the world. He wants us to show others clearly that it is possible to turn any honorable profession into prayer, into apostolate.

But we need to always keep in mind that we have to work with the greatest human perfection possible and with a right intention, in the service of God and neighbor, and never in order to satisfy our own selfishness. So let us ask “our Lord Jesus for light, and beg him to help us discover, at every moment, the divine meaning which transforms our professional work into the hinge on which our calling to sanctity rests and turns.”[5]

In this regard, we might ask ourselves some questions in the silence of our hearts. Do I do my work with human perfection, taking care of the small details for love of God, or am I sometimes satisfied with finishing it quickly, in a “slipshod” way? Do I truly strive to unite my work each day to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, knowing that only in this way can it really be turned into God’s work? Do I frequently during the day rectify my intention and try to give God all the glory? Do I take advantage of the opportunities that work offers me to strengthen the bonds of true friendship with the people around me, in order to bring them closer to God, serve them and learn from them?

3. In the homily of the Canonization Mass for St. Josemaría, John Paul II cited some words from a meditation of the Founder of Opus Dei that I would like to repeat here. “The ordinary life of a Christian who has faith, when he works or rests, when he prays or sleeps, at all times, is a life in which God is always present.”[6] “This supernatural vision of life,” the Holy Father said, “unfolds an extraordinarily rich horizon of salvific perspectives, because, even in the only apparently monotonous flow of normal earthly events, God comes close to us and we can cooperate with his plan of salvation. So it is easier to understand what the Second Vatican Council affirmed: ‘there is no question, then, of the Christian message inhibiting men from building up the world... on the contrary it is an incentive to do these very things’” (Gaudium et Spes, no. 34).[7]

According to the teaching of this holy priest, I repeat, all honorable activities of men and women can be offered to God, sanctified, and trans-
formed into a means and opportunity for apostolate. This certainly includes work, but also relaxation, which we need in order to recover the strength spent in supporting our family and serving society.

This consideration seems particularly timely at the moment, when many of you are about to enjoy a well-earned period of vacation. Remember that also during these days of rest we should live with our heart and mind focused on God. I will give you some specific advice that can help make these days a contribution to the spiritual growth of each of us, and not, as unfortunately happens more than a few times, an occasion for cooling off one’s Christian life.

First of all, there is the need to fulfill the regular duties of a Catholic: participation at Mass on Sundays and feast days; reception of the sacraments, especially Penance; and the good habits acquired during the course of the year: praying diligently, attending activities of spiritual formation, etc.

It is clearly not a good idea to choose for one’s vacation places where a consistent Christian—or any moral person—should never go because they are objectively contrary to the principles not only of Christian morality but also the natural law. We all have to be strong when it comes to making decisions of this type, resisting the prevailing current if necessary. In this way you will help your relatives and acquaintances to seek out healthy entertainment, as befits God’s children. There is no need to set God aside in order to have good time on vacation. Rather, the truth is just the opposite.

To conclude, I would like to recall a key point in the teaching of St. Josemaría about the sanctification of rest and relaxation. We can sum it up in words that he frequently voiced: “Rest means recuperation: to gain strength, form ideals and make plans. In other words it means a change of occupation, so that you can come back later with a new impetus to your daily job.”[8] It is certainly true: simply changing our work and daily circumstances helps in a decisive way to recovering our strength.

We also have a duty to accompany the Holy Father, praying every day for his intentions, so that he feels the filial closeness of each one of us. Our Christian life requires never distancing ourselves from the teachings of the
Good Shepherd, who is the head of the Holy Church. I will finish with another quote from St. Josemaría: “Lord, give us your grace. Open the door to the workshop in Nazareth so that we may learn to contemplate you, together with your holy Mother Mary and the holy Patriarch St. Joseph, whom I love and revere so dearly, the three of you dedicated to a life of work made holy. Then, Lord, our poor hearts will be enkindled, we shall seek you and find you in our daily work, which you want us to convert into a work of God, a labor of Love.”[9] Amen.


Torna ai contenuti

**At the Easter Vigil, the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (April 3, 2010)**

1. *My dear sisters and daughters:*

Surrexit Dominus vere, alleluia! Jesus has risen. This is the great announcement that the Church has been proclaiming for twenty centuries. St. Peter told the Jews on the day of Pentecost: God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it (*Acts* 2:24). And St. Paul exclaimed: “O death, where is thy victory? O
death, where is thy sting?” (1 Cor 15:55). As St. Josemaría wrote, commenting on the first glorious mystery of the Rosary: “Life has overcome death.”[1]

The same has to happen with us, for we are members of Christ’s Mystical Body. At the end of time we will participate fully in the victory of our Head, when our bodies arise— through God’s mercy—for eternal life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Rom 6:5). But already now we are granted an anticipation of that glorious resurrection. If we live in Christ by grace, if we try to accompany him and let him accompany us, if we go contritely to the holy sacrament of Penance, if we receive the Eucharist with faith and devotion, the final word will not be our weakness or our miseries. The final word will be that of Jesus Christ, who wants to free us too from sin and death.

Let us often give thanks to our Lord, because he has given us bodily life and, above all, the life of grace, because he has called us to his Church and keeps us there. Thank you, Jesus! We want to live your Life, to identify ourselves ever more closely with you, because that is what gives full meaning to our entire existence.

2. To have Christ’s Life in us, which we received in Baptism, we need to seek him, as the holy women did on that first Easter Sunday. We have heard the narration of St. Luke, who tells us that on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared (Lk 24:1). They could not live without Christ. Without the Master’s company, they feel alone, unable to do anything; therefore they seek him eagerly and hurry to offer him their care, as they had done while he was living among them.

They do everything possible to reach the tomb as soon as possible. Nothing detains them: neither the fatigue of the previous days, nor the night’s lingering darkness, nor fear of the soldiers who are guarding the tomb. And our Lord, seeing their great love, sends them messengers from heaven: Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen (Lk 24:5-6). Those who remained faithful to Jesus, those who didn’t abandon him at the hour of betrayal and danger, became apostles of
the apostles themselves. Jesus himself, as other Evangelists record, appears to them on their way and gives them this message: Go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me (Mt 28:10).

Jesus always goes out to meet those who seek him perseveringly, who overcome the difficulties they are faced with. He calls us too by our name, as he did Mary Magdalene, who sought him eagerly. And, like her, he will give us his joy and peace. Anyone who seeks him, docile to the impulses of grace, will always find him.

Holy Week in the Year of the Priesthood is ending. It is a good moment to ask our Lord to enkindle our priestly soul—which all Christians have; you as well, through baptism and confirmation—so that we always seek Jesus in the ordinary circumstances of our life. Thus there will grow in us the desire that many more people—who yearn for Jesus, perhaps without knowing it—will seek him, find him, and love him.

3. By his death and resurrection, Jesus reminds us that, in order to enjoy the happiness of being with him, we need to lower ourselves, to walk, as he did, along the path of humility. St. Josemaría liked to meditate on those verses attributed to a Spanish mystic: “Lower yourself, if you wish to rise, / lose, if you wish to gain, / suffer, if you wish to rejoice, / die, if you wish to live.”

Thank you, Lord, because by your birth, and by your death and resurrection, you showed that you are mitis et humilis corde (Mt 11:28), meek and humble of heart. Therefore, in the humility of your birth, as well as in that of your death, the angels proclaim that the joy of heaven has come down to earth.

Let us seek Christ more eagerly, imitating him in his self-lowering, so that his greatness may shine forth in our life and reach others. As a reward for his voluntary humiliation, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9-11). With words of Benedict XVI, I tell you: “The Easter proclamation spreads throughout the world with the joyful song of the Alleluia. Let us sing it with our lips, and let us sing it above all with our
hearts and our lives, with a manner of life that is ‘unleavened,’ that is to say, simple, humble, and fruitful in good works.”[2]


Since Jesus goes out to meet those who do not abandon him, it is logical that he went to meet his Mother as soon as he arose. Mary, the Mother of Christ and our Mother, is the teacher of faith. The Second Vatican Council says that she grew constantly in faith, hope and charity.[4]

Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt, Jesus’ passion and death, were steps in our Lady’s firm life of faith, which attained its greatest intensity next to the Cross. Then as well she believed that God would fulfill his promises, the words that his messenger had announced to her many years before in Nazareth: You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God

It is easy to understand why our Lord wanted to have his Mother in heaven, in body and soul, since Mary was always totally God’s, both in body and soul. He had already crowned her on earth, making her his Mother, and then he also does so in heaven, which he has opened to all those who—like Mary—believe in him and love him. We want to crown her by our fidelity in striving to please her Son, and by uprooting our miseries, going to receive divine pardon in the sacrament of Penance. Thus we will be able to make our own the words of St. Josemaría: “the Angels render homage unto her as her subjects... and the patriarchs and the prophets and the Apostles... and the martyrs and the confessors and the virgins and all the saints... and all sinners and you and I.”[5] Amen.


Articles and Interviews

“Priestly Identity, Priestly Piety,” an address to the clergy of Valencia, Spain (February 5, 2010)

With the joyful desire to learn from everyone here, I have accepted Archbishop Carlos Osoro’s invitation to address a few words to the priests of this Archdiocese on the occasion of the Year for Priests. While it is always a joy for me to meet with my brothers in the priesthood, this feeling is strengthened by finding myself here in Valencia, a city that held a special place in St. Josemaría Escrivá’s heart.

There are many reasons for St. Josemaría’s special affection for Valencia. It was here that the first expansion of Opus Dei took place outside Madrid, where it had been born on October 2, 1928. The Founder of the Work frequently traveled to this city, both before and after the conflict that afflicted Spain, to lay the foundations of the apostolic work. It was from here that some of the first men and women called to Opus Dei came. Here he preached various retreats, including some to seminarians and priests, as early as 1939, and he maintained a fraternal friendship with exemplary priests here.

Without going into an exhaustive list, I would like to recall a few of those great servants of the Church. In first place, Archbishop Prudencio Melo y Alcalde, who frequently urged him to begin the stable work of Opus Dei in this archdiocese; then Fr. Antonio Rodilla, Vicar General and later rector of the seminary, who asked him to give retreats to priests, seminarians and university students; also the Servant of God Fr. Eladio España, a priest with great fame as a confessor, who sent to St. Josemaría the young people who wanted to receive a deeper formation in the faith...
and Christian life. There was also Fr. Joaquín Mestre, secretary to Archbishop Marcelino Olaechea, a witness to the reputation for sanctity that the Founder of the Work enjoyed during his lifetime: “If I die before Fr. Josemaría, tell people that I always considered him a saintly priest.” He also dealt with Fr. José María García Lahiguera and the beloved Fr. Miguel Roca. He was especially grateful to Fr. José María for receiving him fraternally when he was the target of misunderstanding on the part of “good people.” While he treated Fr. Miguel, in turn, with fatherly affection and steered him towards the priesthood.

These brief recollections help provide the framework for the aim of my considerations: to show that priestly piety, which comes from knowing ourselves to be alter Christus, ipse Christus, is a necessary condition for the effectiveness of our ministry in the service of souls. We can well make our own some words of St. Josemaría in one of his books: “My God, I see I shall never accept you as my Saviour unless I acknowledge you as my Model at the same time.”\[1\]

1. Christ’s priesthood, the only priesthood in the New Covenant

From its first lines, the decree Presbyterorum Ordinis of the Second Vatican Council stresses that “the Lord Jesus, ‘whom the Father has sent into the world’ (Jn 10:36), has made his whole Mystical Body a sharer in the anointing of the Spirit with which he himself is anointed” (see Mt 3:16; Lk 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38).\[2\] This truth is the foundation of an important teaching on the nature of the Church: the participation by all Christians in Christ’s anointing and salvific work, that is, in his High Priesthood. Commenting on some words from the first Epistle of St. Peter, the Council continues: “In that Body all the faithful are made a holy and kingly priesthood; they offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ, and they proclaim the perfections of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (see 1 Pet 2:5,9). Therefore, there is no member who does not have a part in the mission of the whole Body; but each one ought to reverence Jesus in his heart (see 1 Pet 3:15), and in the spirit of prophecy bear witness to Jesus (see Rev19:10).”\[3\]

I vividly recall the joy with which St. Josemaría welcomed this Conciliar teaching, since, in his priestly ministry, he had been proclaiming
this splendid reality for more than three and a half decades. Therefore I fully agree with those who consider this holy priest to be a precursor of the Council in this teaching, which is so central for lay spirituality in the Church, and in other aspects of Christian doctrine contained in the Council’s documents, such as the universal call to holiness.[4]

The decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* adds immediately that Christ also “established ministers among his faithful to unite them together in one body in which... these ministers in the society of the faithful are able by the sacred power of orders to offer sacrifice and to forgive sins (see Council of Trent, sess. 23, ch 1 and can. 1: Denz. 1764 and ff.), and they perform their priestly office publicly for men in the name of Christ.”[5] I would like to emphasize now some consequences of this reality for our life and our priestly mission.

Let us begin by recalling that all priesthood in the Church is a participation in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ, as is shown admirably in the Letter to the Hebrews. God, when “the fullness of times” had arrived, wanted to bring forth a new priesthood to replace the Levitical priesthood. That older priesthood had been good and proper for the time in which it was established, but it was destined to disappear when it had completed its mission of preparing for the eternal and unchanging priesthood of Christ, a new priesthood “according to the order of Melchizedek” (see *Heb* 5:6-10; 6:20; 7:1-3, 11-17).

The author of the Letter explains the reasons why, already in the Old Law, the priesthood of Melchizedek showed itself to be superior to the Levitical priesthood; and also the intrinsic reasons for the superiority of Christ’s priesthood—perfect, indefectible and eternal—sealed by God with an oath. It concludes by emphasizing that only Christ could incarnate such a priesthood: For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself (*Heb* 7:26-27).

Christ is fittingly the High Priest because he was—and he is in aeternum, as the Son of God—holy and immaculate. If the Letter adds the
phrase separated from sinners, this is not because he had separated himself from us, from mankind, his brothers and sisters (for he came to seek out what had been lost (see *Lk* 15:1ff)), but because he lacked any stain of sin (see *Heb* 4:15). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews insists that Christ by a single offering has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (*Heb* 10:14), alluding to the unique truly redemptive sacrifice, that of the Cross.[6]

The expression “has perfected” contains a deep theological content, for it entails the notions of “perfection,” “plenitude,” consecration,” and “sanctification.” The corresponding Hebrew expression was used for the anointing of the priests of the Old Testament, and for the consecration of the Temple. It is also the “last word” that Jesus pronounced from the Cross: It is consummated (*Jn* 19:30).

In short, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews wants to tell us that Christ carried out a sacrifice of such efficacy—an infinite one—that those who take part with sincerity of heart when he is made present at the altar, can attain perfection, sanctity of life, the pardon of their sins, purity of conscience, and access to God’s intimate life. Thanks to the offering made by Christ, the Eternal High Priest, as St. Josemaría said in a homily given on Good Friday, “The abyss of malice which sin opens wide has been bridged by his infinite charity. God did not abandon men... To help us grasp in some measure this unfathomable mystery, we might imagine the Blessed Trinity taking counsel together in its uninterrupted intimate relationship of infinite love. As a result of its eternal decision, the only-begotten Son of God the Father takes on our human condition and bears the burden of our wretchedness and sorrows, to end up sewn with nails to a piece of wood.”[7] But Christ conquered by his resurrection, as the hope-filled words at the end of the homily affirm: “thus will we earn the name of conquerors: for the risen Christ will conquer in us, and death will be changed into life.”[8]

2. *Coordinates of the priestly ministry*

The priesthood is marked by a profoundly Christological dimension, which is why the whole priestly life has to be a reflection of the holiness, authority and self-surrender without limits of Christ. United to this,
inseparably, is the ecclesiological dimension, by which all priestly activity should be oriented to the service of the people of God, to the sanctification of mankind. Therefore, with deep faith, St. Josemaría insists that the only answer to the question, what is the identity of the priest?, is the following: That of Christ, who wants to perpetuate his priesthood—the only priesthood—through his ministers.\[9\]

a) Christological perspective of the priestly ministry

Since our priesthood derives directly from the priesthood of Christ, all priestly ministry in the Church should be in intimate and immediate relationship with that priesthood: We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us, writes St. Paul to the Corinthians (2 Cor 5:20). The Conciliar decree emphasizes this with the following words: “Through the sacred ordination and mission which they receive from the bishops, priests are promoted to the service of Christ the Teacher, Priest, and King. They share in his ministry.” \[10\] Our Lord makes use of priests to maintain his vital presence in the Church, according to his promise: Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Mt 28:20).

In this sense, it is very significant that, in his first meeting with the clergy of Rome, on May 13, 2005, Benedict XVI insisted: “It is indispensable, therefore, to return ever anew to the solid root of our priesthood. This root, as we well know, is one: Jesus Christ our Lord.” And the Roman Pontiff added: “This Jesus, however, possesses nothing of his own; everything he has is from the Father and for the Father... this is also the true nature of our priesthood. In fact, all that constitutes our priestly ministry cannot be the product of our personal abilities.” The Holy Father continued: “we are not sent to proclaim ourselves or our personal opinions, but the mystery of Christ... We are not charged to utter many words, but to echo and bear the message of a single ‘Word,’ the Word of God made flesh for our salvation.”\[11\]

Thus to fulfill oneself as a priest means to be fully united to Christ, to identify oneself with him in the priestly ministry and in all of one’s conduct. It is a matter of being transparent, so that the faithful can see the Master, the Redeemer, without feeling drawn to fix their gaze on the person of the priest. In this regard, an event that took place here in
Valencia seems highly significant to me. It is narrated by one of the first women of Opus Dei, Encarnación Ortega, whose process of beatification is now underway. She was taking part in a retreat for university women preached by St. Josemaría in Alacuás, where the religious congregation known as the *Operarias Doctrineras* had a retreat house.

Encarnita, then a young woman of 21, had gone to the retreat moved by the desire—perhaps the curiosity—to meet the author of *The Way*, a book that had caused a deep impact on her. After the death of St. Josemaría she wrote a testimony in which she stated how impressed she was by this priest’s bearing, even before hearing him preach. She wrote: “His recollection, totally natural, his genuflection before the tabernacle, the way he put his whole self into the preparatory prayer before the meditation, encouraging us to be aware that our Lord was there and was looking at us and listening to us, made me quickly forget my desire to hear a great speaker. Instead I understood that I needed to listen to God and be generous with him.”[12]

Fully consistent with that behavior are these words of St. Josemaría: “I feel we priests are being asked to have the humility of learning not to be fashionable; of being, in fact, servants of the servants of God and making our own the cry of the Baptist: ‘He must increase, I must decrease’ (Jn 3:30), so as to enable ordinary Christians, the laity, to make Christ present in all sectors of society.”[13]

b) *Ecclesiological perspective*

Let us return to the Letter to the Hebrews, to chapter 5. In the first place, it speaks about the Levitical priesthood, but some of the features depicted there are perennial: “Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, ‘Thou art my Son, today I have
begotten thee’; as he says also in another place, ‘Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek’ (Heb 5:1-6).

These words describe the priest’s mission in the Church, in accord with his being and living in Christ. The priestly ministry is profoundly ecclesial. The priest, chosen from among men by a divine vocation that is made actual in the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, is appointed to act on behalf of men: for the good of all humanity. Not for an earthly good, although he is not unconcerned about temporal happiness. However, this is not what defines a priest’s mission, but rather what is in relation to God. As St. Paul will tell Timothy, the priest is a man of God (1 Tim 6:11). And, as St. Josemaría repeated throughout his life, paraphrasing St. Paul: we have to preach Christ, Christ crucified, who shows us God’s Love for every person.

In the above-cited meeting with the Roman clergy, Benedict XVI emphasized: “Since the priesthood is rooted in Christ, it is by its nature in the Church and for the Church... [It] has a constitutive relationship with the Body of Christ, in its dual and inseparable dimensions as Eucharist and as Church, as Eucharistic body and Ecclesial body. Therefore, our ministry is amoris officium [an office of love] (St Augustine, In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus 123, 5); it is the office of the good shepherd who offers his life for his sheep (see Jn 10:14-15);[14] and he fulfills it joyfully, aware of that marvelous reality, since each one is sacerdos in aeternum: today, now, and forever.

The Pope insists on this duty to be “a good shepherd” following the example of Christ the Good Shepherd, in a homily given during an ordination Mass in 2006. He highlights the “three key statements by Jesus about the good shepherd.” The first is that the shepherd gives his life for his sheep. “We must give it day by day,” says the Holy Father. “Day after day it is necessary to learn that I do not possess my life for myself. Day by day I must learn to abandon myself; to keep myself available for whatever he, the Lord, needs of me at a given moment, even if other things seem more appealing and more important to me.”

The second is that the good shepherd knows his sheep and his sheep know him (see Jn 10:14-15). “First of all, in our hearts we must live the
relationship with Christ and, through him, with the Father; only then can we truly understand people, only in the light of God can the depths of men be understood... going to seek them out, being open to their needs and questions... It must be knowing with the Heart of Jesus, oriented to him, a way of knowing that does not bind the person to me but guides him or her to Jesus, thereby making one free and open.”

The third is: I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd (Jn 10:16). And the Pope concludes: “Obviously, a priest, a pastor of souls, must first and foremost be concerned with those who believe and live with the Church... However, we must also—as the Lord says—go out ever anew ‘to the highways and hedges’ (Lk 14: 23), to deliver God’s invitation to his banquet also to those who have so far heard nothing or have not been stirred within.”[15]

In this context, some words of St. Josemaría seem very significant to me, which point to the error of those who “think that Christians want to see the priest as just another man. That is not so. They want to find in the priest those virtues proper to every Christian and, indeed, every honorable man: understanding, justice, a life of work—priestly work, in this instance—and good manners. But the faithful also want to be able to recognize clearly the priestly character.”[16]

And he went on to specify what is implicit in these words: “they expect the priest to pray, not to refuse to administer the sacraments; they expect him to be open to everyone and not set himself up to take charge of people or become an aggressive leader of human factions, of whatever shade (see Presbyterorum Ordinis, no. 6). They expect him to bring love and devotion to the celebration of the Holy Mass, to sit in the confessional, to console the sick and the troubled; to teach sound doctrine to children and adults, to preach the Word of God and no mere human science which—no matter how well he may know it—is not the knowledge that saves and brings eternal life; they expect him to give counsel and be charitable to those in need.”[17]

These considerations lead us to the third part of our exposition.

3. **Key points of priestly ministry**
In speaking of the ministry of priests, the decree Presbyterorum Ordinis highlights, in relation to the *tria munera Christi*, the ministry of the word, that of the sacraments, and that of governing the People of God.

a) *Ministry of the word*

The Christian community, as the Conciliar decree explains, is “joined together primarily by the word of the living God. And rightfully they expect this from their priests. Since no one can be saved who does not first believe, priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have the primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all.”[18] Priests, therefore, have the essential duty of transmitting the “word of God,” so that the faith can reach all men and women of every race and condition. This duty is founded on Christ’s command to his apostles and to those who have to continue their mission in time, to proclaim the “Gospel,” the “Good News” of the Kingdom established with his coming. The Apostle to the Gentiles understood this very clearly, when he says: If I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (*1 Cor* 9:16).

This is not the moment to consider carefully the way of carrying out the ministry of the word, a task that—depending on the circumstances of persons, places and times—can take quite varied forms, among which the homily has a principal role. But I think it is very important to stress that the priest, as sent by Jesus to announce the Gospel message, needs to foster a “holy restlessness”[19] to bring to all souls the faith and love of God, including whatever gives meaning and direction to human life, in view of eternal happiness, always doing so with attractive language imbued with abundant truth.

I referred earlier to the reputation St. Josemaría had as a good preacher already back in the 1940’s, reflected in the fact that many bishops called on him to preach retreats to the priests in their dioceses.[20] In this regard, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo recalled a comment by Fr. Luciano Pérez Platero who would in time become Archbishop of Burgos. When he was Bishop of Segovia, he attended a retreat for the clergy, and at the end he felt obliged to say a few words of gratitude to the preacher. Among other
things he said: “Fr. Josemaría’s words always leave a wound: sometimes with a Toledo sword, other times with a hand grenade.”

It seems to me that this comment illustrates very well the “holy restlessness” that every priest should stir up in the souls of the faithful by his preaching. It is not a question of eloquence or human wisdom—although one should try to cultivate these—but rather a work of the Holy Spirit. The Paraclete makes use of the interior life and preparation of the priests to produce these good reactions in souls.

Let me return to that retreat in Alacuás to which I referred above. The protagonist of the story tells us that, upon hearing the words of the Founder of Opus Dei, she experienced a deep supernatural uneasiness. She realized that our Lord was inviting her to give her whole life in the middle of the world; but her first reaction was one of self-defense, of wanting to stifle the voice that was reaching her heart through the priest’s words. When the moment came for preaching on the Passion of our Lord, St. Josemaría invited those attending to consider the scenes as though present there personally: “I suffered all of this for you. You, since you don’t want to do what he is asking you, should at least have the courage to look at the tabernacle and tell him: ‘That—what you’re asking of me—I don’t feel like doing.’”[21]

The outcome of that interior battle was clear. That woman decided she too wanted to do Opus Dei and, together with some other young women, formed the first stable nucleus of women of the Work. On February 14 this year, it will be exactly eighty years since the day on which our Lord put that task into St. Josemaría’s soul, and therefore I venture to ask you for your prayers that this ferment of sanctity continue being very effective in the lives of Christians.

We can draw a lesson from these episodes. For the voice of Christ, who speaks in his Church, to resound faithfully in oneself and in others, the priest has to strive to grow constantly in intimacy with God. Therefore, he has to dedicate the time needed to meditating on the word of God and preparing with great care his preaching in its various forms. The transmission of the word of God demands, as St. Josemaría insisted, “interior life: we have to speak to others about holy things; ex abundantia
enim cordis, os loquitur (Mt12:34); out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. And together with interior life, study... Study, doctrine that we incorporate into our own life, and that only thus we will know how to give to others in the most suitable way, accommodating ourselves to their needs and circumstances with the gift of tongues.”[22]

b) **Ministry of the sacraments**

Let us recall how the Second Vatican Council describes the institution of the ministerial priesthood: the Lord appointed “ministers who, within the society of the faithful are able by the sacred power of orders to offer sacrifice and to forgive sins.”[23]

The sanctifying mission of priests is shown principally in the celebration of two sacraments: the Eucharist and Penance. On the altar the Holy Sacrifice of Calvary, source of the Church’s life, is made present, and in sacramental Confession, auricular and secret, there takes place that great encounter of Christ with each soul, for the forgiveness of sins. The celebration of these two sacraments, explained St. Josemaría, “has so important a part in the priest’s mission that everything should hinge on it. Other priestly tasks, such as preaching and giving instruction in the faith, would lack solid foundation if they were not aimed at teaching people to relate to Christ, to meet him in the loving tribunal of penance and in the unbloody renewal of the Sacrifice of Calvary, the Mass.”[24]

This is why many holy priests in the Church—and today they exist too—have made the Holy Sacrifice present every day and have tried to dedicate all the hours possible in their day to the celebration of the sacrament of Penance, as is seen clearly in the life of the Curé of Ars. We should never lose sight of the fact that this holy patron of confessors, although the revolutionary storm of his time tried to eliminate any vestige of religious practice, “sought in every way, by his preaching and his powers of persuasion, to help his parishioners to rediscover the meaning and beauty of the sacrament of Penance, presenting it as an inherent demand of the Eucharistic presence.”[25]

As far as the Eucharistic Sacrifice is concerned, it seems to me very opportune in this context to reread these other words from Benedict XVI: “In the Eucharistic mystery, Christ gives himself ever anew, and it is
precisely in the Eucharist that we learn the love of Christ, and hence love for the Church. I therefore repeat with you, dear brothers in the priesthood, the unforgettable words of John Paul II: ‘Holy Mass is the absolute center of my life and of every day of my life.’ And each one of us should be able to say these words as if they were his own: ‘Holy Mass is the absolute center of my life and of my every day’. 

Yes, the Mass has to be for all of us “the center and root of our interior life,” as St. Josemaría used to tell all the faithful. But we have to carry out an intense work of catechesis, of formation and orientation in what refers to sacramental life, with our example and our words. Together with this, he would add, we have to take great care of the house of God and the liturgical art that enriches it, so that everything is done with the greatest dignity and one carries out a worship worthy of God: His “house,” Scripture tells us, has to be a house of prayer for all nations (Mk 11:17).

We priests also have to put great care into Eucharistic worship outside of Mass, in our relations with Jesus in the tabernacle. There comes to my mind another event in the life of the Founder of Opus Dei, which throws a lot of light on this point. It happened in the year 1974, towards the end of his life on this earth, during a long pastoral visit to various countries in South America. One day St. Josemaría was shown some slides of Peru; among others, there was one that showed the effects of an avalanche, a collapse of earth typical in the Andean countries, which had buried a village. One could only see the upper part of the bell tower of the church. When he was told that the Eucharist was reserved in that small church, since it had not been possible to remove it before the avalanche, St. Josemaría was deeply moved. The thought of that tabernacle buried beneath many feet of mud, in which our Lord was all alone, prevented him from sleeping that night. He spent the night in vigil, accompanying the Most Blessed Sacrament in his heart, making many acts of love and spiritual communions.

c) Governing the people of God

Priests have also received the ministry of governing the people of God, participating in the authority of Christ the Head and Shepherd. This spiritual power is granted for the good of souls (see 2 Cor 10:8; 13:10). In
this task—as the Second Vatican Council reminds us—“priests must treat all with exceptional kindness in imitation of the Lord. They should act toward men, not as seeking to please them, but in accord with the demands of Christian doctrine and life. They should teach them and admonish them as beloved sons (see 1 Cor 4:14), according to the words of the Apostle: ‘Be urgent in season, out of season, reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine’ (2 Tim 4:2).”[28]

This charitable behavior should be shown in many different aspects of a priest’s life. I will recall only a few here: not being concerned about one’s own interests, but those of Jesus Christ (see Phil 2:21); imitating Christ who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28); recognizing and sincerely fostering the role that corresponds to every Christian in the Church’s mission; fully respecting the rightful freedom that all men and women have in human society; discerning with the help of grace the various charisms, accepting them with joy when they come from God and fostering them diligently, especially those that lead to a deeper spiritual life. In short, in words from Presbyterorum Ordinis: “Priests have been placed in the midst of the laity to lead them to the unity of charity, ‘loving one another with fraternal love, eager to give one another precedence’ (Rom 12:10)... They are united by a special solicitude with those who have fallen away from the use of the sacraments, or perhaps even from the faith. Indeed, as good shepherds, they should not cease from going out to them.”[29]

4. Primacy of grace in priestly life

As I begin the last part of this presentation, I would like to read some words of the Pope from another gathering with priests, this time in the diocese of Albano.

“The time we set aside for prayer is not time taken from our pastoral responsibility but is precisely pastoral “work”; it is also praying for others. In the “Common of Pastors,” one reads as a typical feature of the good pastor that “multum oravit pro fratribus.” This is proper to the pastor, that he should be a man of prayer, that he should come before the Lord praying for others, even replacing others who perhaps do not know how to pray, do
not want to pray or do not make the time to pray. Thus, it is obvious that this dialogue with God is pastoral work!"[30]

And referring to the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Altar and the prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours, he added: “The Church gives us, imposes upon us—but always like a good Mother—the obligation to make free time for God with the two practices that constitute a part of our duties: the celebration of Holy Mass and the recitation of the Breviary. However, rather than reciting it, this means putting it into practice by listening to the word which the Lord offers us in the Liturgy of the Hours. It is essential to interiorize this word, to be attentive to what the Lord is saying to me with this word, to listen, then, to the comments of the Fathers of the Church or also of the Council in the Second Reading of the Office of Readings, and to pray with this great invocation, the Psalms, by which we are inserted into the prayer of all the ages... I would say that this time dedicated to the Liturgy of the Hours is precious time.”[31]

Priestly piety entails a deep conversation with God the Father through Jesus Christ in union with the Holy Spirit, nourished at the founts of the word of God and the Holy Eucharist, and imbued with a tender devotion to our Lady, Mother of the High Priest and Queen of apostles. St. Paul understood this very well when, in his letter to Timothy he wrote: Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe (1 Tim 4:7-10).

Certainly, for this spirit of piety to take root interior peace is needed: For God is not a God of confusion but of peace (1 Cor 14:33). The grace of the sacrament of Penance is a marvelous source of this peace, which stems from the holy struggle to avoid what St. Paul calls the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19), and from striving to cultivate the fruits that, as St. Paul also says, the Holy Spirit brings to birth us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23).
Priestly piety, in short, requires strengthening our faith, hope and love, placing all our trust in God, with true filial devotion, for we are really his sons in Jesus Christ. This is a joyful truth that has to guide us continually. Every event in our life comes from God’s goodness; and even when we confront what is humanly painful, when we can’t understand it, we know that God permits it out of his goodness, to bring forth a greater good.

The Second Vatican Council asks us priests to “holily and eagerly, humbly and courageously carry out [our] ministry, in imitation of the eternal High Priest, the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls.”[32] For this we need a strong unity of life, an expression St. Josemaría frequently used. As he liked to repeat, in one way or another: “There is only one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is that life which has to become, in both body and soul, holy and filled with God.”[33] Applying these words to our priestly life, I would say that it is a matter of seeking to grow in love for God and neighbor through the daily exercise of our ministry, at times in humble and hidden tasks, which are always transformed by grace into a joyful path of holiness and service to others.

I want to conclude with some other words of the Founder of Opus Dei, who so loyally incarnated the figure of the Eternal High Priest: “The priest, if he has a true priestly spirit, if he is a man of interior life, can never feel alone. No one can have a heart so much in love as his! He is the “man of Love,” the representative among mankind of Love made man. He lives through Jesus Christ, for Jesus Christ, with Jesus Christ, and in Jesus Christ. I am deeply moved by this divine reality when, each day, holding in my hands and raising the Chalice and the Sacred Host, I repeat slowly, savoring them, these words from the canon: *Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso et in Ipso*... Through Him, with Him, in Him, for Him and for souls I live. I am living from his Love and for his Love, in spite of my personal miseries. And in spite of these miseries, perhaps because of them, my Love is a love that is renewed every day.”[34]

Let us ask Mary Most Holy, Mother of Fairest Love, Mother of Priests, to obtain these sentiments for us from the Blessed Trinity.


Among other testimonies, it is especially gratifying to me to recall some words that the Servant of God John Paul II pronounced during a homily, in the first months after his election to the chair of St. Peter. The Holy Father told a group of faithful of Opus Dei: “Your institution has as its goal the sanctification of life while remaining in the world, in your own work and profession: to live the Gospel in the world, immersed in the world, in order to transform it and redeem it with the love of Christ. This ideal of yours is truly a great one, which from its beginning anticipated the theology of the laity that later characterized the Church of the Council and the post-Council” (John Paul II, Homily, August 19, 1979, in Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, II/2 [1979] 142-147). Many other figures in the Church have expressed similar sentiments, including Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio (in Avvenire, Milan July 26, 1975); Cardinal Josef Frings (Für die Menschen bestellt: Erinnerungen des Alterzbischofs von Köln, Cologne, 1973, pp. 149-150); Cardinal Franz König (Corriere Della Sera, Milan, September 9, 1975); Cardinal Marcelo González Martín (Los Domingos de ABC, Madrid, August 14, 1975); Cardinal Narcís Jubany (ABC, Madrid, April 8, 1979); Cardinal Joseph Höfßner (Mundo Cristiano, no. 201 (October 1979), etc. Also see Amadeo de Fuenmayor, Valentin Gómez-Iglesias, Jose Luis Illanes, The Canonical Path of Opus Dei , Scepter-MTF, Princeton - Chicago 1989, pp. 347-348.

Vatican II, decree Presbyterorum Ordinis, no. 2b.

See Catechism of the Catholic Church , no. 1545.

St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By , no. 95.

Ibid., no. 101.


Decree, Presbyterorum Ordinis , no. 1.

Benedict XVI, Address to the clergy of Rome, May 13, 2005.

Cited in Andrés Vázquez de Prada, The Founder of Opus Dei , Scepter, New York, 2003, vol. 2, pp. 394-395. This episode was cited by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in an address on the 30th anniversary of the
Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, to point out how the personal piety of a priest is very important for bringing souls to God (cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Il ministero e la vita dei presbiteri*, October 27, 1995 (*Studi Cattolici* 423 [May 1996]). [pp. 324-332]).


[17] Ibid.

[18] Decree, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 4a


[20] His biographers relate that there were years in which more than a thousand priests passed through his hands in various retreats. See the partial enumeration of the preaching of St. Josemaría between 1938 and 1946, the date of his move to Rome, in Andrés Vázquez de Prada, cit., pp. 508-513.


[23] Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 2b.


Interview granted to Zenit (March 31, 2010)

“The Mass, a question of love”

by Jesús Colina

What would you recommend to Catholics who say they are bored at Mass?

I would recommend that they participate with sincerity in the Mass, seeking and loving Jesus. In The Way, St. Josemaría wrote: "You say the Mass is long and, I add, because your love is short."

Feelings must not be given too much importance: enthusiasm or apathy, desire or lack of it. The Mass is sacrifice: Christ gives himself out of love. It is an action of God and we cannot fully understand its grandeur, because of our limited condition as creatures. But we must make the effort, not only to be at Mass, but to live it in union with Christ and the Church.
When did you discover the mystery that the Eucharist conceals and reveals?

Thank God, I try to rediscover it every day: in the Liturgy of the Word—which helps to maintain conversation with God during the day—and in the Eucharistic liturgy. We should always be ever more astonished before this reality that surpasses us, but in which the Lord allows us to participate, better said, invites us to participate.

In the Mass, not only is a descendent communication of the redeeming gift of God fulfilled, but also an ascendant mediation, man’s offering of himself to God: his work, his sufferings, his griefs and his joys, everything is united to Christ—through him, with him and in him. I cannot be silent about the deep impact that St. Josemaría made on me when he celebrated the Holy Sacrifice, on contemplating his daily Eucharistic devotion.

It profoundly moves us to think that in the presentation of the gifts, the priest asks God to accept the bread and wine, which are "fruit of the earth (or of the vine) and the work of men." Man can offer his work in any circumstance to God, but in the Mass, that offer reaches its full meaning and value, because Christ unites it to his sacrifice, which he offers to the Father for the salvation of men.

When the Mass is the center and root of the Christian’s day, when all his tasks are oriented to the Eucharistic sacrifice, it can be affirmed that his whole day is a Mass and that his place of work is an altar, where he gives himself fully to God as his beloved son.

In his pontificate, Benedict XVI is stimulating a rediscovery of the greatness of this sacrament. What has most caught your attention in the words and gestures of the Pope on the Eucharist?

Especially important, it seems to me at this time, is his insistence that the liturgy is God’s action and, as such, it is received in the continuity of the Church.

The Pope has written that the best catechesis on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself well celebrated. Therefore, the first duty of piety for the priest that celebrates or for the faithful that participate in the Mass is the attentive, devout observance of the liturgical prescriptions: the obedience of pietas.
Moreover, the Pope also insists that the Eucharist is the heart of the Church: God present on the altar, the close God, builds the Church, congregates the faithful and sends them to all men.

Something more personal. According to your memories, what was the Eucharist for St. Josemaría? What role did it have in his day?

I served Mass many times for St. Josemaría. At these times he would ask me to pray so that he would not get used to celebrating that very sublime and sacred act. In effect, I was able to verify something he once said: that he experienced the Mass as work—at times an exhausting effort, such was the intensity with which he lived it.

Throughout the day, he would recall the texts he had read, in particular the Gospel, and many times he commented on it, in a perfectly ordinary tone, as food for his spiritual and human life.

He was conscious of the fact that in the Mass the protagonist is Jesus Christ, not the minister, and that the faithful fulfillment of the prescriptions enables the priest to "disappear," so that Jesus alone shines. Many people who attended his Mass—also in the difficult circumstances of the Spanish Civil War—commented later that his way of celebrating Mass had something that moved them profoundly, and that they felt invited to grow in their devotion to the Holy Sacrifice. I am convinced that what moved those who participated—those of us who participated—in his Mass was precisely that: that he let Christ appear and not his person.

“Bringing God Near to Us”—on the fifth anniversary of the election of Pope Benedict XVI, published in the newspaper Avvenire, Italy (April 21, 2010)

Today is the fifth anniversary of the election of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as head of the Catholic Church. John Paul II had died on April 2, 2005. The television networks provided unprecedented coverage of the
event. And in the midst of that climate of commotion and of affection for the deceased Pontiff that still pulsed through the streets of Rome, on April 19, we saw for the first time the kindly face of the new Pope on the central balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica.

Among the motives for recognition of Benedict XVI, perhaps the most notable is his constant effort to make people aware of the nearness of God. This expression—taken from the title of a book of Cardinal Ratzinger about the Eucharist—is also an affectionate way of speaking of the Creator, which the faith shows us as loving and near, interested in the state of his creatures, as a modern day saint affirmed. Indeed, St. Josemaría often recalled that in the midst of the bustle of every day, at times we live as though he were far away, in the heavens high above, and we forget that he is also continually by our side. He is there like a loving Father. He loves each one of us more than all the mothers in the world can love their children—helping us, inspiring us, blessing... and forgiving (The Way, no. 267).

God, who is not subject to time, assumes the time of Jesus Christ and presents it to humanity. As the Pope frequently recalls, God became man so that we could more easily have recourse to him and love him. And throughout these years he has indefatigably shown in an incisive way, that God is Love and that that one does not begin to be a Christian as the fruit of an ethical decision or of a great idea, but through an encounter with a person—Jesus of Nazareth who opens a new horizon in one’s life (Deus Caritas Est, no. 1). In a world in which God could seem absent or distant, uninterested in mankind, the catechesis of the Pope brings him close to everyday life, to the path of the man and the woman of the Twenty-first Century.

The apostolic task of the Christian consists precisely in helping others to know Jesus in the midst of their ordinary life, so that they can encounter God and speak with him at every moment—not only in sorrowful circumstances—bringing together a “Thou” and an “I” filled with meaning. A “Thou” that, for Catholics, acquires its greatest contact in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, source of the life of the Church.
For those who try to “live” the Holy Mass, any noble human activity can acquire—so to speak—a liturgical dimension precisely through that union with the Sacrifice of Christ. In this perspective, family, professional, and social duties, which take up the greater part of the day of a citizen, do not separate one from our Lord; on the contrary, the incidents, the relationships, and the problems that those activities bring with them, can nourish one’s prayer. Supported by grace, even the experience of one’s weakness, contradictions, the exhaustion that every human effort brings with it, makes us more realistic, more humble, more understanding, more brothers and sisters to others. And any possible success and joy, for those who walk in God’s footsteps, is an occasion to give thanks and to recall that we have to always be at the his service and at the service of our brethren. To live in this friendship with God, recalls Benedict XVI in his last encyclical, is the way to transform our “hearts of stone” into “hearts of flesh” (cf. Ezek 36:26), making earthly life more “divine” and, therefore, more worthy of man (Caritas in Veritate, 78).

Jesus walked the roads of Palestine and immediately noted the suffering of his contemporaries. Therefore, when one knows and loves the “God who is near us,” the Christian does not remain indifferent to the fate of others. This is the “virtuous circle” of charity: the nearness of God nourishes the nearness to others, provoking openness “towards our brothers and sisters and towards an understanding of life as a joyful task to be accomplished in a spirit of solidarity” (Caritas in Veritate, no. 78).

On the contrary, distance from God, indifference towards our Creator, leads sooner or later to an ignorance of human values, which then lose their basis. “Awareness of God’s undying love sustains us in our laborious and stimulating work for justice and the development of peoples, amid successes and failures, in the ceaseless pursuit of a just ordering of human affairs. God’s love calls us to move beyond the limited and the ephemeral, it gives us the courage to continue seeking and working for the benefit of all” (Ibid.).

How does Benedict XVI conceive his mission as head of the universal Church? In the Mass at the commencement of his Pontificate, he explained that the task of Shepherd could seem heavy, but in reality it is “beautiful and wonderful, because it is truly a service to joy, to God’s joy,
which longs to break into the world.” On that same occasion he noted that “there is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ,” and “there is nothing more beautiful than to know him and to speak to others of our friendship with him” (Homily, April 24, 2005). This is how the Pope understands his mission: to communicate to others the joy that proceeds from God, to arouse in the world a new dynamism of commitment in the human response to the love of God.

In these five years of his Pontificate, there has been no lack of attacks on the Pope provoked by those who are attempting to tear the Creator from the landscape of the society of mankind; nor has there been a lack of suffering in the face of the inconsistency and the sins of some people who were called to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Mt 5:14-16). None of this should surprise us, for these difficulties form part of the ordinary path of the Christian, since the disciple is not greater than his teacher as Jesus proclaimed: “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you” (Jn 15:20). At the same time we should not forget what our Lord added: “If they kept my word, they will keep yours also” (Ibid.).

Here resides the indestructible optimism of the Christian, inspired by the Holy Spirit, who will never leave the Church forsaken. Historia docet: How often in the course of twenty centuries, have not prophetic voices arisen, proclaiming the end of the Church of Christ! However, propelled by the Holy Spirit, once the trials were overcome, it has shown itself younger and more beautiful, more filled with energy to lead mankind along the paths of salvation. We saw this in these years: the moral and intellectual authority of the Pope, his nearness and interest in those who are suffering, his firmness in the defense of the Truth and of the Good, always with charity, has strengthened men and women of all beliefs. The Roman Pontiff continues to be a spotlight illuminating the intricate vicissitudes of the earth.

In the fulfillment of my task as a bishop, thousands of persons of good will—Catholics and non-Catholics, and even many non-Christians—have confided to me that the solid and hopeful responses of Benedict XVI before the various dramatic events of humanity, have meant for them a confirmation of the Gospel, or a motive of drawing nearer to the Church, and, above all, a renewed interest in getting closer to that “God who is near
Interview granted to the magazine Palabra, Spain (June 2010)

At the conclusion of the Year for Priests

1. The Year for Priests convoked by the Holy Father on the anniversary of the Holy Curé of Ars’ death is about to end. You had the opportunity of making a pilgrimage to Ars recently. Since the Church points to him as a model for priests, what do you see as the most important features of the life of St. Jean Marie Vianney?

His humility, his piety, his spirit of joyful penance, among many other things. But I think the most important feature of the life of the Holy Curé of Ars is his complete dedication to his ministry. This is why, at the end of the Year for Priests, Benedict XVI proclaimed him as the patron of all priests (he had already been patron of confessors for some time). The figure of St. Jean Marie Vianney is a strong call for us to be priests through and through: for the good of souls we have to be ready to set aside anything that could hinder, even if only slightly, our pastoral service. As a holy pastor of our own day and age, St. Josemaría Escrivá, used to say graphically, we have to be one hundred percent priests.

2. The work of priests is assisted by many good points in people: for example, the readiness of many young people to take part in volunteer work, and their openness to the faith. But at times it also meets with reasons for discouragement
and resistance: religious ignorance, a secularist mentality, misunderstandings, etc. In spite of all this, can priests work with confidence today?

We not only can but should carry out our priestly work with optimism and confidence. But we need to keep in mind that the effectiveness of our ministry does not come from ourselves—from our preparation, our qualities, etc., although we have to be diligent in all this in order to be better instruments—but from the action of Christ working through each priest. At the same time, we have to overcome any resistance, by spreading the truth with charity.

3. The priestly life revolves, in great measure, around the liturgy. Its highest moment is the celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sunday. Could you make some specific recommendations to priests, to help foster a fruitful celebration?

The Eucharistic Sacrifice, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, is the “center and root of the whole life of the priest” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14). For this to become a reality, it is good to prepare for Mass already from the night before, with acts of love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, with spiritual communions, with desires to accompany him in the tabernacle; and later, after Mass, to extend one’s act of thanksgiving for the Holy Sacrifice throughout the day. This is what I saw in the life of the Founder of Opus Dei, who was a priest deeply in love with Jesus Christ. For a fruitful celebration, it is especially useful to frequently meditate on the texts and liturgical rubrics, in order to penetrate deeply into their meaning. In any case, we have to foster a hunger to lend Christ our whole being in the sacramental actualization of the Sacrifice of Calvary.

4. What makes preaching effective? Do you have any specific advice from your own experience on how to prepare it?

There are many ways to prepare for preaching. As the Synod on the Eucharist explained, the homily has an exhortative and catechetical purpose (c.f. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 46), and should not be confused with a conference or a class. It has to be the fruit of the priest’s own conversation with our Lord. Without interior life, without piety, persuasive words are of little value. St. Augustine counseled the one who preaches to do everything possible to make his words pleasant and agreeable. “But always remember,” he added, “that any beneficial result will be due more to the piety of his
prayers than to his oratorical gifts. Therefore, while praying for those he is speaking to, he should be more a man of prayer than of eloquence” (De Doctrina Christiana 4, 15, 32). This seems to me a very timely piece of advice.

5. In your intervention at the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist, you referred to concelebrations. What is your experience? Is there a way to facilitate the pious participation of all the concelebrants, even though many priests are involved?

In the Synod I spoke about a common experience: in more than a few cases, concelebrations—especially with many concelebrants—make it difficult for priests to participate piously, both during the Eucharistic celebration itself as well as in the necessary personal preparation. In those concelebrations with many priests, it is easy to lose the sense of adoration proper to the Eucharistic mystery, in part because there are so many opportunities for distraction.

Benedict XVI made reference to these difficulties in the Post Synodal apostolic exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis, when he stressed that these types of concelebrations should be something exceptional, while also saying it would be good to study adequate ways of assuring the decorum of the liturgy and safeguarding the full and real participation of the priests and faithful in the celebration (cf. SC 61), with the necessary order and distinction of functions proper to each.

6. A treasure of the priesthood is the administration of divine forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance. You said recently that there is no real crisis of confession, but that, in any case, it would be more correct to speak of a crisis of confessors. To what were you referring?

This is not a phrase of my own, but something that the Roman Pontiffs from Paul VI to Benedict XVI have been saying. This reality is also confirmed by experience. I know of many cases in which the administration of the sacrament of Reconciliation in its ordinary form has received a great spur simply from having confessors in the churches with clear schedules and at times that are favorable for the faithful. I recall, for example, that during the Holy Year of 2000, in Rome, we witnessed a
“rediscovery” of confession among all sorts of people, especially the young, because this practice was carefully followed.

The example of the Curé of Ars is eloquent. A priest with the care of souls cannot remain tranquil if he does not dedicate all the time required for this ministry, if he does not love the confessional and await souls there. And the others priests (I am thinking of those who work in curia offices, in teaching positions, etc.) can also help out in such an important pastoral task, dedicating some time to hearing confessions on feast days, weekends, etc.

7. Ignorance in religious matters is so evident in many places. What importance does catechetical and formative work have here? How can this work be combined with a priest's other occupations?

Giving formation to the faithful is of capital importance, and is absolutely essential nowadays. Formerly, in many places, education in the family and the schools guaranteed that children and young people knew the basic truths of the faith, the fundamental Christian prayers, the difference between good and evil. Today, in many countries, this is no longer the case, and priests need to remedy this lack by making a greater effort, especially if they have been entrusted with the care of souls in parishes, chaplaincies, associations, etc.

If we don't do all we can to teach the younger generations the faith and morality of Christ, everything else that we do, even though good, will be insufficient. Religious instruction is a task that the priest cannot delegate, although naturally he can and should seek people who can assist him. What a great work has been and is being done through catechism classes in so many places.

How to combine this greater dedication with other priestly activities depends on each specific case. Often it is enough to organize very well the classes of preparation for First Holy Communion, Confirmation, and Matrimony, stressing what is truly essential. It can also be useful to have a program that can be developed in the Sunday homilies, with the goal of explaining the fundamental topics of the faith, morality, and the liturgy, following the Catechism of the Catholic Church, as the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist advised (cf. SC 46).
8. Scripture says that a brother helped by another is like a “walled city.” St. Josemaría Escrivá, the Founder of Opus Dei, liked that expression. We priests always need, and owe to others, that strength. Can you speak about fraternity among priests, and the union of each with the bishop?

We can start with the fact that we are all weak. St. Josemaría illustrated the meaning of priestly fraternity—and, more generally, of Christian fraternity—with an image taken from ordinary life. We all recall the houses of cards that we probably built when we were children. The Founder of Opus Dei pointed out that Christians, by supporting one another through charity, are able to build those houses. “If you live that blessed fraternal 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 another” (*The Way*, no. 462).

Just as the first duty of bishops is to care for their priests, so one of the first duties of priests is to help their brother priests to be faithful ministers of our Lord. To do so, we need to pray for one another, and never leave anyone alone in their spiritual or material needs; we need to visit the sick, and offer cheerfully to help anyone who has an excessive workload, etc. In this regard, the Church recommends priestly associations approved by the legitimate authority that offer this attention to the deacons and priests.

Regarding the union of each priest with his bishop, we can recall here that by its very nature the priesthood, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, exists to collaborate with the episcopate in all that refers to the priestly ministry (*LG* 28, PO 4). Moreover, union with one’s own bishop is very important. This union should be wholehearted and involve more than just hierarchical subordination; together with obedience and ministerial availability, it should lead every priest to keep his bishop very present in his prayer and sacrifice.

9. What can be done to awaken many new priestly vocations?

The first step, as always, is to pray to the Lord of the harvest. But we must truly pray, without tiring, explaining to the other faithful in the Church that everyone has the duty to foster vocations to the priesthood. Then, at the same time, we need to examine specific actions we can undertake to foster God’s call among young men. It would not be good to
leave this responsibility exclusively to the person or persons in charge of pastoral vocations in the diocese: we all need to feel the responsibility of leaving at least one successor, who can take our place when we are old, or when God calls us into his presence.

Many priests know by personal experience that it is very effective to dedicate special attention to the altar boys and other young fellows who help out in the parishes, fostering Eucharistic piety in them, teaching them to pray, to serve others, etc. The same can be said of religion teachers, who can find among their students those who have the human qualities suitable for our Lord to sow in them a priestly vocation. And a privileged place is the confessional, to carry out spiritual direction, and to accompany those who show they have the qualities needed for the priesthood.

10. You preside over the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, which is intrinsically united to the Prelature of Opus Dei. What is the purpose of this association of priests

To foster at every moment the full communion of each priest with his bishop and with the presbyterate of the diocese. The members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross strive to live the spirit of Opus Dei, and thus they seek their own sanctification in the exercise of their ministry and in the secular environment proper to their vocation. For this, they are offered—as are many other priests who so desire—the means to improve their doctrinal, ascetic, and spiritual formation by means of periodical gatherings, personal accompaniment, courses of permanent formation, etc.

11. As Prelate of Opus Dei, your role has been to be the successor—after Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, whose reputation for sanctity is widespread—to St. Josemaría, at the head of the Work. What aspect of his life would you like to highlight this year?

Both St. Josemaría and his first successor, the Servant of God Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, were priests one hundred percent. They dedicated themselves to the fulfillment of the mission they had received and carried it out with exemplary fidelity and intense pastoral charity. Both were noted for an ardent love for the Eucharist, shown in many specific details, and a zeal for souls that spurred them to forget about themselves and think only about the good of others. I won’t go into specific details here, which would
go beyond the limits of this interview and can be found in their published biographies.

12. *It seems that the moment is near for the beatification of the Venerable Servant of God, John Paul II. What memories do you have of his priestly example and personality? Could you mention any specific encounter with Pope Wojtyla?*

He was a holy priest and an untiring servant of the Church, concerned only for the good of souls. We all await eagerly the moment when he will be elevated to the altars, because it will be a great good for the whole world.

I bear deeply engraved on my memory an event that shows the generous dedication of John Paul II to his mission as successor of St. Peter. On one occasion I accompanied Bishop Álvaro del Portillo to the Pope’s apartment. It was late in the evening. As we awaited the arrival of the Pope, we heard someone approaching along a passageway as though he was dragging his feet. It was the Holy Father, whom we could see was very tired. Don Álvaro, moved by filial affection, exclaimed: “Your Holiness, how tired you are.” The Pope looked at him and, in a firm voice, answered: “If I was not tired at this hour of the evening, it would be a sign that I had not fulfilled my duty.”

I also can never forget that John Paul II was the instrument God made use of to canonize St. Josemaría, holding him up a model to the whole Church, and to grant Opus Dei its definitive juridical configuration, in full fidelity to its foundational charism, as a personal prelature, organically structured by the Prelate, its presbyterium, and its lay faithful. We are very thankful to him for this as well.

13. *Twenty-five years ago the World Youth Days began. We are now approaching the one that will be held in 2011, in Madrid. How do you view these gatherings, and do you see any way to make them more fruitful?*

The spiritual fruit of these gatherings is clear to everyone. It is not up to me to suggest innovations. My role is to pray—now, for the World Youth Day that will be held in Madrid—and encourage the faithful and cooperators of the Prelature to pray and to help out personally, to the extent that each one can, in making this event a moment of grace in the Church. As Benedict XVI said at the beginning of his Pontificate, the
Church is always young and beautiful, and assists young people in confronting the challenges of the future.

14. In the face of some sad news recently, some people have begun once again to question celibacy. So this could be a good occasion to explain once more the reasons for priestly celibacy and the fruit that should be derived from it.

There are serious scientific studies—including some by non-Catholic specialists—showing that the discipline of priestly celibacy has nothing to do with those lamentable cases that have been recently revealed. Even more, when it is lived as it truly is, as a divine gift, out of love for God and all mankind (although one sometimes has to struggle to faithfully preserve it), celibacy places the priest at the diametrically opposite pole from such deviant behavior.

Yes, at the present moment it is particularly opportune to look once again at and go more deeply into the reasons—which are more than simply practical ones—that closely link the priesthood and celibacy, a double and very great gift of God.

15. The Holy Father has received many signs of affection from people, to try to compensate for the recent attacks against him. With a broader perspective than just the present moment, how can priests live unity with the Pope, and foster it among the faithful?

The best way to support the Holy Father, now as always, is summed up in praying and getting others to pray for him and for his intentions. We also need to read, meditate on, spread and put into practice his teachings, and pray for those who assist him in governing the Church, so that their service to the universal mission of the Roman Pontiff may be very effective.

16. It seems clear that the immense work of the Church for the good of souls is not sufficiently well known and understood. What needs to be done here?

Besides praying—excuse my insistence, but praying with faith is the essential thing—it would be opportune to have well-prepared professionals competent in the communications media at the level of the Bishops’ Conferences, and also in each diocese. “Good will” is not enough to inform adequately about the Church. One needs to know the methods of institutional communication, crisis management, etc., which are especially
needed in the context of the globalization that marks today’s society. In this regard, I am happy to note that the courses in the School of Institutional Communication at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross are very popular. These courses are meant specifically for people who occupy communication posts in the press offices of dioceses, bishops’ conferences and other institutions of the Church.

17. Once the Year for Priests is over, what should we retain from this celebration?

In priests, a deep personal renewal, with specific and daily interior conversions, aimed at living their ministry with a more refined fidelity, and a greater daily love for the celebration of the Eucharist and the administration of the sacrament of Penance. And in the other faithful, a greater awareness—not only with words, but with deeds—that we all make up the Church. The future depends on them as well: on how they fulfill their Christian duties; on how they pray for the Pope, for the bishops, and for priests; on how they raise their children; on how they exercise their priestly soul also in their work, in times of rest; on how diligently they ask our Lord to send many holy laborers into his vineyard.

Interview granted to the weekly Paraula, Valencia, Spain (June 20-26, 2010)

(by Francisco Pastor)

Benedict XVI convoked the Year for Priests that we are now celebrating. What are the great challenges faced by the priesthood in our time? How does the Prelature of Opus Dei view this event?

I think the most important challenge, and the key to all the others, is the need for priests to struggle to be holy: to let God act in us and through our ministry. Benedict XVI, in proclaiming the Year for Priests, exhorted us to a deep interior renewal that will help spread the magnalia Dei, the divine marvels, to all humanity, by our words and deeds.
The message of St. Josemaría invites priests to sanctify themselves in the exercise of their ministry, which is at the service of the common priesthood of all the faithful. Among the many challenges this involves is that of learning each day to celebrate Holy Mass well. We priests need to learn this again, discovering that it is the center of our life, that on the altar we are Christ. Hence the need to be humble, so that only Christ will shine forth.

_**St. Josemaría is known throughout the world as the founder of Opus Dei, but earlier he had worked as a priest in the diocese of Saragossa and later in Madrid. Could you point out some event or experience from that time, which perhaps is less widely known**_

St. Josemaría, shortly after being ordained in 1925, took charge of the parish of Perdiguera, a village near Saragossa. The pastor was absent due to a serious illness. This was the setting for his first pastoral experiences, without the help of a more experienced priest. He put all his human and supernatural enthusiasm into that task. He always remembered that period with a lot of affection and felt a great admiration for the hidden work of so many parish priests in small towns and villages.

From the first day, he saw clearly that he should dedicate time to the confessional and show refined care for the liturgy, as well as for popular piety, through the prayer of the rosary in the evening, and the holy hour on Thursdays. He dedicated special attention to catechism classes for children and preparing them for their first communion. And he showed special concern for the sick. He visited them frequently and, even when their sickness was not serious, if they asked for the sacraments he would always provide them. He also insisted that the parish church be kept clean. God’s house should always be exceptional for its beauty as well. He also worked as the parish priest in another small village, and was grateful to God for these opportunities to serve souls. Also in Saragossa he cared for many people from all walks of life, impressing people by his love for the Church.

When he arrived in Madrid, in 1927, he became closely acquainted with the urban poverty there, in the shacks in the outlying districts. He dedicated many hours to attending to these people, as chaplain to the Foundation for the Sick, often in a heroic way.
Not everyone has the opportunity of having been in close contact with a saint. Could you describe for us some details of your personal relationship with St. Josemaría?

I consider it a blessing from God to have been his personal secretary from 1953 until his death in 1975. I also accompanied him on his frequent trips and saw his great love for everyone. He was a true father, for me and for the other persons he encountered, in first place for those who were closer to him. I could tell you, for example, about his care for me when I was sick, or his concern if he saw I was worried about something. Although he was a man with a great heart, his paternity did not have a merely human explanation: it stemmed from a supernatural participation in God’s own paternity, which led him to feel the sorrows or joys of his children as his own. I was also surprised by his capacity to love those who had attacked him publicly.

You once said that the fact that the Bible continues to be one of the most widely published books in the world shows that people still have an interest in religion in this century as well. The book The Way has also had millions of copies published throughout the world, and is an authentic bestseller. Why do you think The Way has helped and continues to help so many people? What is your favorite quotation from this work?

I assume you know this, but the first edition of The Way was printed right here in Valencia, in 1939.

I think that the interest of so many people and, one might say, its “usefulness” in their lives comes from the short and incisive points, and the fact that the author was very close to God and tried to transmit his own Christian experience. The Way helps one to pray because it is both a very human and a very supernatural work. If one looks carefully, although many of the points don’t say so explicitly, all the points are Christocentric: The Way is an encounter with Jesus, God and man, the true “Way.”

I don’t have a favorite point.

For many readers of The Way, it has been a surprise to later find two other books with a similar structure, The Forge and Furrow. A short time
ago, a friend told me how much The Forge had helped him to get closer to God in prayer.

Within the great diversity of movements and associations in the Church, at times one gets the impression that some put special emphasis on God’s grace, on abandoning oneself in his hands, on divine forgiveness and mercy, while others put more emphasis on the will, on the desire for personal perfection, and on continually overcoming oneself through personal effort in daily demands. Could some people be running the risk of overemphasizing their own personal growth or not trusting enough in the grace of the Spirit? How should one combine the human will and God’s grace?

There are many paths in the Church. All of them have as their goal life in Christ. And they always combine the grace of God and human correspondence, our free response to divine love. There comes to mind some words of St. Josemaría: whenever a light is lit in the service of God, we always have to be filled with joy.

On the other hand, in this small part of the Church which is the Prelature of Opus Dei, erected by John Paul II, formed by the Prelate, his priests and many men and women, laity from all walks of life, the foundation of their spiritual life is rooted in the sense of divine filiation, in knowing ourselves to be God’s children. And at the same time we have to live the personal responsibility of struggling to be saints in the middle of the world, especially in professional work and in the other aspects of ordinary life.

What is your Episcopal motto? Why did you choose it?

Deo omnis gloria (all the glory be for God). This is a phrase that St. Josemaría frequently used and that expresses very well what we all should be striving for.

Your book Getsemani has as its subtitle “Praying with Jesus.” You try to draw out meaning from each of the Gospels’ words about this transcendent moment in Christ’s life. The moment of Gethsemane comes between the Eucharist and the Cross. You find many lessons for us today there, but one seems to stand out: the importance of daily and continual prayer, as Jesus himself told us. Many Catholics who attend Sunday Mass say they don’t have time for daily prayer. What do you have to say to them?
Simply that speaking personally with our Lord every day is a marvelous reality. Moments of prayer are moments of peace and joy, and a requirement for the soul, although at times it demands effort. We need to be alone with Him! All the saints agree on this point. To follow Jesus, we have to get to know him and converse with him. Certainly at times we find our soul dry in prayer, as though mute, or perhaps we are distracted, but our desire to draw close to God is always pleasing to him, also when it is more difficult to do so.

Therefore I advise them to remember that God is always present and wants to speak to us. With this disposition, they should open the Gospel and put themselves into the scene as one more person there, and address Jesus personally.

*If you will permit me a small joke, I would say that your book Getsemani leaves no doubt that you are a person in Opus Dei. For there you often allude clearly to the “sleeping apostles” who despite their good intentions fall into paralysis or inactivity. One of the contributions of Opus Dei, which it shares with other ecclesial groups, is the active attitude of its members. Why are so many Catholics asleep in their life of prayer or in their actions? What advice do you have for pastors who find it hard to move their parishioners to action?

Opus Dei tries to spread the Gospel, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and to help people to live as the early Christians did. Apostolic responsibility is not the same as activism. It stems from contact with God and disinterested friendship, true charity towards others. In the supernatural life, it is difficult to make comparisons. To bring God’s light to souls, the work of the laity in their professional, family and social milieu is essential, striving to be “contemplatives in the middle of the world,” as St. Josemaría said. But also consider, for example, how greatly the hidden prayer and sacrifice of consecrated souls in cloistered convents and monasteries contributes to the sanctification of the world.

We are all in danger of falling asleep, if we are careless in our sacramental life and daily prayer, if we don’t bring our faith into our professional work, our family life and social relationships, if we don’t endeavor to study and live the content of our faith. The advice that I would give to those pastors—and I give the same to myself—is that they follow
the guidelines of their bishop, that they continue to celebrate the Eucharist with piety, that they pray a lot, that they care for the poor and those who are suffering, that they don’t get discouraged, that they have no hesitation in inviting young people to consider a possible call to the priesthood. And always doing so with faith, with hope, with supernatural and human optimism.

Canon Law has established the age of 25 as the minimum age for ordination to the priesthood. However, it seems to be the case that the priests of the Prelature are ordained at a later age. Can you tell us anything about this?

The call to Opus Dei does not take anyone out of his place. A person who receives it, just like any other person, is someone who has to work to earn their living. In addition, they have to strive to convert their work into a path to holiness. This doesn’t prevent some faithful of the Work, after various years, from accepting freely and joyfully the call to the priesthood, to serve ministerially the faithful of the Prelature and all souls; in a word, to serve the Church. The priests of Opus Dei are usually ordained after working professionally for some years. They have been doctors, teachers, office workers, etc., and afterwards, or perhaps in an intermediate phase, they have interrupted for some time their working life, and have dedicated several years also to the formation required for the priesthood.

In recent decades, it seems that many minor seminaries have closed their doors. Nevertheless many older priests who studied in those centers express deep gratitude for the formation they received there. What is your experience in this regard?

Opus Dei has never had minor seminaries, nor will it ever have them, also because of what I’ve just said: the priests incardinated in the Prelature come from its own lay faithful, after some time spent exercising their secular profession. But those kind of seminaries can be very good for the dioceses. That is how St. Josemaría saw it, and he encouraged the bishops in this regard. I recall his advice that the studies provided there should be useful and valid for later work at the university, and that a closed-in atmosphere should be avoided.

I perfectly understand the grateful feelings of many priests, who speak of the minor seminary as the place where they grew in human formation
and in intimacy with God.

*Valencia has a parish dedicated to St. Josemaría and also various educational centers linked to Opus Dei. What relevance does Valencia have for the Work?*

Divine Providence so disposed that Valencia was the first city to which St. Josemaría brought the message of Opus Dei, after its foundation in Madrid. He had great friends here, such as Fr. Antonio Rodilla and the Servant of God Fr. Eladio España. Shortly before his death, in his last visit to Valencia, he stated that he loved this city with a special predilection. He explained that, in 1936, when he was planning for members of Opus Dei to go to Paris and Valencia, the civil war broke out, and unfortunately he had to postpone those plans. But as soon as the war was over, he established the first center of Opus Dei in Valencia, on Samaniego Street, very close to the editorial offices of your own journal.

Publication of the book Vivir la Santa Missa

In the context of the Year for Priests, Bishop Javier Echevarría has published a new book entitled Vivir la Santa Misa (Living the Mass). The book collects and expands on some considerations that the Prelate presented to the faithful of Opus Dei in the pastoral letters he wrote during the Year of the Eucharist, convoked by the Venerable Pope John Paul II in 2004. These were written with the intention of “encouraging a spirit of care in dealing with Jesus, not only in the Mass, but throughout the whole day, and transmitting this to other people.”

In Spain the book is already in its second printing. Counting the editions published in Argentina and Colombia, the number of copies now in print exceeds 20,000.

In his presentation, the Prelate explains the reasons for making the book available. “I published these pages,” he says, “with the intention of seconding the recommendations of the Roman Pontiff, while beseeching the Blessed Trinity, through the intercession of our Lady, that it may be of assistance to its readers … I was moved, in short, by the desire to help
make a reality—in myself and in many others—St. Josemaría Escrivá’s marvelous aspiration: “Before all else, we have to love the Mass, which should be the center of our day. If we live the Mass well, how can we fail to keep our thoughts fixed on our Lord for the rest of the day, with a longing to remain in his presence, to work as he worked and to love as he loved?”

This new publication joins the other books written by Bishop Echevarría: Por Cristo, con Él y en Él (Palabra, 2007), Eucaristía y vida cristiana (Rialp, 2005), Getsemaní, (Planeta, 2005), Itinerarios de vida cristiana (Planeta, 2001) [English translation, Paths to God: Building a Christian Life in the 21st Century (Scepter, 2010)], Para servir a la Iglesia (Rialp, 2001), and Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá (Rialp, 2000).
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Via Crucis as an audio book

On Good Friday, April 2, Radio Programas del Peru transmitted the *Via Crucis* (Way of the Cross) by St. Josemaría in audio-book format. This was a dramatized adaptation of the *Via Crucis* of St. Josemaría produced by the Infobrax Association. Nine actors took part, among them Pepe Sarmiento, as narrator; Bruno Odar, as the voice of Jesus; and Aristoteles Picho, as the voice of Pilate.

The program was produced at the studio of Mario Melgar, who studied musical production in Denmark with the renowned Danish producer Holger Lagerfeldt. He has worked as the assistant technical producer for artists such as Ace of Base, Roxette, Robbi Williams and Bon Jovi. Melgar said that although initially the project did not fit into his business coordinates, when he understood what it was about, he was eager to help so that the message of Jesus could reach many people.

The director of the project was Michael Joan, who received his degree from the School of Theater at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru. He explained that “the goal was that the public, on hearing this adaptation, could close their eyes and see and feel all that Jesus suffered for our sins.”

*Via Crucis* contains commentaries on the fourteen stations of the Cross born from the personal prayer of St. Josemaría. “Msgr. Escrivá used to dwell with special attention and love on those [narratives] which tell of the death and resurrection of Jesus. There... he would contemplate the Sacred Humanity of Christ,” said Bishop Alvaro del Portillo in the prologue to the book. St. Josemaría said that “the Way of the Cross is not a sad devotion... If the Passion of Christ is a way of pain, it is also a path of hope leading to certain victory.”

The first edition of the book *Via Crucis* appeared in 1981. Since then more than 400,000 copies have been printed in 19 languages. Now the audio book (in Spanish) can be downloaded at www.opusdei.org.pe for free.
Devotion to St. Josemaría

Editions of St. Josemaría Prayer Card in new languages

The almost 1,400 million persons who read Chinese will now be able to find and download the prayer to St. Josemaría in Mandarin more easily. The same is true of those who speak Siamese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Bulgarian, or Armenian. These are the new languages in which the prayer card is offered on www.josemariaescriva.info, in addition to the 42 translations that have been available up to now. Since the day of his death, on June 26, 1975, the headquarters of the Prelature of Opus Dei in Rome began to receive reports of favors throughout the world attributed to the intercession of Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá: conversions, decisions to practice the Catholic faith, cures, material favors... Many people have begun to pray to St. Josemaría thanks to an encounter—not infrequently by chance—with a copy of his prayer card.

A portrait in the Philippines and a statue in Brazil

On February 14, the 80th anniversary of the day on which God made known to St. Josemaría the apostolate of Opus Dei with women, a portrait of St. Josemaría was presented and blessed in the Cathedral of Jaro, Iloilo City, the Philippines. Archbishop Angel Lagdameo of Jaro, together with Auxiliary Bishop Gerry Alminaza, officiated at the ceremony. Next to the painting, the faithful could venerate a relic ex ossibus, with the inscription “St. Josemaría, the saint of ordinary life.”

Similarly, in the Brazilian Archdiocese of Goiana, a statue of St. Josemaría has been installed in the parish of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

In Italian cities

During the last few months, various Italian localities have honored St. Josemaría, each in its own way. Noteworthy are the dedication of a park in Verona to St. Josemaría on June 15; the naming of a plaza in the Jardines Naxos, the first Greek colony of Sicily, on May 15; a photographic exhibit
in the Casa dei Carraresi, seat of the Treviso museums, from April 23 to 25; a photographic exhibit in the Galleria Civica de Monza, from January 29 to 31; the installation of a statue of St. Josemaría in the Basilica of San Angelo in Formis (Province of Caserta), on December 5, 2009; and the dedication of gardens situated behind the city hall of Loano (Province of Savona), on November 21, 2009.

Photographic Exhibition “The extraordinariness of the ordinary” (Venezuela)

The Communication and Culture Association sponsored a photographic exposition entitled “The Extraordinariness of the Ordinary,” which invited the spectator to dialogue with the message of St. Josemaría through a series of 26 photographs. The exposition is the work of six young artists, who captured the beauty of daily life with their lenses: Argenis Bellizzio, Jean Herrera, Maryori Cabrita, Trevor Cornilliac, Aaron Sosa and Meridith Kohuth. Each photograph turns the momentary into something special, and makes it extraordinary.

“The Extraordinariness of the Ordinary” was inaugurated in the Daniel Suarez Gallery, in the city of Caracas. Later it would travel throughout the rest of the country: San Cristobal, Merida, Maracaibo, Punto Fijo, Barquisimeto, and Valencia.

This traveling exhibit included the photographs, some texts of St. Josemaría, and reflections of Laureano Marquez (political commentator and humorist) and Alicia Alamo Bartolome (an architect, writer and dramatist).

The coordination was carried out by Kelly Martinez and Jose Luis Omaña. The latter said: “We wanted to produce an exposition where the image is shown as an event, as a flash of light, in which, as if by a chance, the extraordinary and the ordinary merge.”

Fourth volume of Studia et Documenta

The fourth volume of Studia et Documenta (2010), the annual
periodical dedicated to the history of Opus Dei and St. Josemaría Escrivá, appeared in June.

In this volume, Mercedes Montero discusses the beginnings of the first women’s residence opened through the initiative of St. Josemaría: the Zurbarán Residence in Madrid. Constantino Anchel provides information about the first corporate work of apostolate of Opus Dei: the DYA Residence-Academy. And Ramon Pomar looks at another important milestone in the history of Opus Dei that inspired similar institutions throughout the world: the Gaztelueta School in Bilbao.

Jose Manuel Cerda also speaks about a “pioneering spirit” in his article dedicated to Warrane College, in Sydney, Australia. Soon after it opened, it found itself in the “eye of the storm” of student protests in the early ’70s.

In the section Estudios y notas, we find two articles about St. Josemaría and two other prominent figures of the Church’s history in the past century. The first collects and comments on the correspondence between the Founder of Opus Dei and Juan Hervás Benet, bishop of Ciudad Real, and initiator of the Cursillos de Cristiandad. Its author, Francisca Colomer, describes the friendship that united these two great promoters of the spiritual life of the laity. In another article, Aldo Capucci describes the friendship between St. Josemaría and Blessed Ildefonso Schuster, Cardinal-Archbishop of Milan.

Other studies in this section focus on Harvard University and the Andean region of the Prelature of Yauyos, two very different parts of the world. John A. Gueguen continues an earlier article, published in the first volume of Studia et Documenta, about the beginnings of the apostolic work of Opus Dei in Cambridge, Massachusetts. While Esteban Puig writes about the Prelature of Yauyos, which the Holy See entrusted to Opus Dei. He stresses its role both in the growth of priestly vocations in Peru, and in the educational and economic growth of that socially disadvantaged region.

A biographical sketch of Narcisa (Nisa) Gonzalez Guzman, one of the first women of Opus Dei, by Francisca R. Quiroga, completes the Estudios y Notas section.
In the Documentation section, we find two series of letters. The first contains the letters St. Josemaría exchanged with Dolores Fisac, one of the first women of Opus Dei, which aside from their biographical interest, provide a look into the daily life of the refugees in legations and embassies during the Spanish civil war. The letters are edited by Yolanda Cagigas, with clarifying comments. The second group of letters, presented by Francisco Crosas, contains the correspondence between the Founder of Opus Dei and Bishop Javier Lauzurica of Vitoria, in the years 1934-1940. These are of interest not only for the history of Opus Dei, but also for the life of the Church in Spain during those turbulent years.

The section entitled Crónica (News) looks at the popular reception of St. Josemaría in the urban setting of Italy. Its author, Aldo Capucci, speaks about the many streets and squares that have been dedicated to the Founder of Opus Dei in Italian municipalities.

Books about St. Josemaría

Marian visits in the Eternal City

Cosimo Di Fazio is the author of Itinerari di contemplazione: Le visite mariane di San Josemaría nella Città Eterna, published in Rome by the publisher “Iride per il Terzo Millennio.” Following the path of the many Marian visits that St. Josemaría made from the time he arrived in Rome until his death (1946—1975), the reader witnesses the faith and filial affection with which the Founder of Opus Dei put himself into the hands of our Lady.

The itinerary covers some forty places of veneration (shrines, churches, chapels, statues and paintings in Rome and its surroundings) that St. Josemaría visited with trusting love for the Mother of God, beseeching her for the Church, for the Roman Pontiff, for his daughters and sons in Opus Dei....

Some of these shrines or advocations are well known such as the Salus Populi Romani, situated in the Basilica of St. Mary Major, or the Grande
Madre di Dio at the Milvian Bridge. The book contains numerous photographs and illustrations.

Josemaría Escrivá Begegnen

Msgr. Rolf Thomas is the author of Josemaría Escrivá Begegnen, Sankt Ulrich Verlag, Augsburg 2010. This German priest, who for many years worked alongside the Founder of Opus Dei, now offers his personal memoirs of his years in Rome. The author stresses St. Josemaría’s prudence and way of governing, seen as a service to all mankind, and his pedagogical charism in conveying truths of great human and divine depth.

Begegnen is a German word that in English can be translated as “to meet” or “to encounter.” It is a play on words by the author in regard to St. Josemaría’s book Christ Is Passing By, which is translated into German as Christus Begegnen.

Writing the Way: The Story of a Spiritual Classic

The American writer Russell Shaw, in his new book Writing the Way: The Story of a Spiritual Classic, provides key information about the composition, during the tumultuous years of the Spanish civil war, of the most widely read book by St. Josemaría, along with interesting theological and ascetical explanations. The book has been published by Scepter, New York, in 2010.

In the Arms of the Father

I Took You in My Arms: Reflections on Divine Filiation by Josemaría Escrivá. This is the English translation of the Italian book Tra le braccia del Padre, an annotated anthology by the priest Andrea Mardegan, published
in 2010. The new edition, also 2010, is published by the “Midwest Theological Forum” (MTF), in Chicago.

The anthology collects texts of St. Josemaría that show how divine filiation, the basis of the spiritual life of the faithful of Opus Dei and the font of Christian joy, helps us to discover that God is always alongside us, caring for his children with infinite love and mercy.

*Una libertad para ser vivida* (A Freedom to be Lived)

An anthology of St. Josemaría’s writings on freedom, also edited by Fr. Mardegan. Originally the book was published in Italian: *Una libertà da vivere* (Pauline Books 2004). This translation of the book into Spanish was published in May 2010 by Cobel Ediciones.

*San Josemaría y la Universidad* (St. Josemaría and the University)

For the events commemorating its 30th anniversary, the University of the Savannah presented the first Colombian edition of the book *San Josemaría y la Universidad*, in an academic ceremony in the David Mejia Velilla Auditorium. The book was originally published in 1993 by the University of Navarra.

The book includes, in chronological order, various academic addresses by the Founder of Opus Dei between 1960 and 1964. Following these is the homily given by St. Josemaría on the Campus of the University of Navarra on October 8, 1967, entitled “Passionately Loving the World”; and the interview he granted in 1967 to the review *Gaceta Universitaria*, entitled “The University at the Service of Today’s Society.”

The Colombian edition also includes two contributions by Bishop Javier Echevarría, the Chancellor of the University of La Sabana: the prologue and an interview granted to the magazine *Nuestro Tiempo* in February 2000.
Three additional articles conclude this volume: one by Dr. Octavio Arizmendi Posada, the first Rector of the University; the second by the teacher David Mejía Velilla (in whose memory the Auditorium is named); and the last by the Vice Chancellor of the University, Msgr. Hernán Salcedo Plazas.

Multimedia Material on the Internet

www.youtube.com/josemariaescriva: Videos of a Saint on the Internet

As is well known, YouTube is a web page that contains videos of all types: humor, cooking, sports, hobbies, news, religion... Millions of people connect with it every day to view some of these brief films. Since February 2005, St. Josemaría can also be found on YouTube. Fragments of videos of the get-togethers that he held in Spain and Latin America have been available to all net navigators since that time.

Since 2010 a single page has been created with clips grouped into eight different languages: English, Spanish, French, German, Polish, Arabic, Italian and Portuguese. The address is www.youtube.com/josemariaescriva.

Films with priests presented on www.josemariaescriva.info

Between 1972 and 1975 St. Josemaría carried out long catechetical trips throughout the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America. He had numerous gatherings with people of all ages and walks of life, including many get-togethers with priests.

On the occasion of the Year for Priests convoked by Pope Benedict XVI, the St. Josemaría web page prepared a series of extracts from these get-togethers with priests in which the Founder of Opus Dei expresses gratitude for their fidelity and encourages them to be “one hundred percent” priests. He speaks of the need for holy priests, the situation of the Church and contemporary pastoral problems. He also stresses the
importance of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and the other sacraments, and above all the need for charity and fraternity with their brother priests.

As one more person in the Gospel

St. Josemaría tried to pray by placing himself in the Gospel scenes “as one more person there.” This concern is shown by some texts of the Founder of Opus Dei that are offered in audio format, in Spanish, on the web page www.opusdei.org.

The first scene is “The Annunciation.” After the passage from the Gospel of St. Luke (Lk 1:26-27), the corresponding text in his book *Holy Rosary* is read: “Don’t forget, my friend, that we are children. The Lady of the sweet name, Mary, is withdrawn in prayer. You, in that house, are whatever you want to be: a friend, a servant, an onlooker, a neighbor... —I, at this moment, don’t dare to be anything. I hide behind you; full of awe, I contemplate the scene: The Archangel delivers his message...”

Other scenes from the New Testament included in this collection are: “The Birth of Jesus,” “The Beatitudes,” “The Widow of Naim,” “The Passion,” etc.

New editions of the works of St. Josemaría

During this half year the book of homilies *Bozi priatelja* (*Friends of God*) has been published in Slovak. This is the first edition of this book by St. Josemaría in Slovak. The first edition of *Christ Is Passing By* in that language will be available in the near future. In the nineties the following writings of St. Josemaría were translated into Slovak: *The Way, Furrow, The Forge, Holy Rosary, and The Way of the Cross*. However these first translations were made from others in German and in English. Therefore,
new versions are being prepared directly from the original, as were the volumes of homilies just mentioned.

Meanwhile, in January the first Indian edition of The Way in English was published by St. Paul’s.

In addition, during the past half year the publisher Guangqi has published the first edition of Friends of God in simplified Chinese.

Torna ai contenuti

Church of St. Josemaría in Chile

The Bishop of San Bernardo, Most Rev. Juan Ignacio Gonzalez Errazuriz, dedicated the church of St. Josemaría in the district of El Castillo de La Pintana. This is the first church in Chile dedicated to the Founder of Opus Dei.

Construction began in December 2007 and was finished in March of 2009. The Diocese of San Bernardo has asked priests of the Prelature of Opus Dei to take care of the pastoral activities there. The first Rector is Fr. Luis Joannon.

In March 2009, celebration of Mass and the other sacraments was begun along with catechesis for children and adults, visits to families in the area, and the blessing of homes.

The El Castillo district consists of five neighborhoods established between the years 1981 and 1986. Homeless families from almost all parts of Santiago have moved there. Today it is one of the poorest districts in the country, with a population of 200,000.

In 1996 the Nocedal Foundation opened the Nocedal School for boys in El Castillo and, in 1999, the Almendral School for girls. Between the two schools is located the Nocedal Foundation Center for Families, where parents and neighbors can take part in various workshops for professional training. The church is located next to this center.

Generous help from the families has provided the minimum needed for the functioning of the church’s activities.
Eucharistic Celebrations on the liturgical feast of St. Josemaría

The Church commemorates the feast of St. Josemaría on June 26. The Prelate of Opus Dei celebrated Mass in the Basilica of St. Eugene, in Rome, on the day of the feast at 11 in the morning. In the Holy Land there were solemn celebrations in Jerusalem and in Bethlehem and Nazareth.

Noteworthy this year was the first Mass of St. Josemaría in Korea, in the Church of Hannamdong in Seoul, on Monday, June 21. The Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Osvaldo Padilla, celebrated the Mass with some 150 people in attendance. In his homily, Archbishop Padilla said that “St. Josemaría was an instrument of the Word of God,” and that although Opus Dei’s presence in Korea was still a small seed, it would grow, nourished by prayer and good will. He also emphasized that Opus Dei’s challenge “to the contemporary world is a constant reminder of the universal call to holiness and of the Christian virtues that each of the baptized should practice in all the situations of life.”

The Prelature of Opus Dei is carrying out its apostolates in a stable way in 67 countries. The feast of the Founder of Opus Dei is also celebrated in many other countries of the world, including Angola, Thailand, the Arab Emirates, Tanzania, Bulgaria, Greece, etc.

Communicating Africa: the Harambee Prize

The Harambee NGO (non-governmental organization) insists that most of the communications media fail to give a true picture of the African continent. To correct this, it has organized the Fourth International Harambee Prize “Communicating Africa.” The three previous editions of
the prize were in 2004, 2006, and 2008. On this occasion the presentation of the awards will take place in Rome on November 12, 2010.

Rosalinda Corbi, International Coordinator of Harambee Africa International, explains: “It’s a matter of making Africa better known through a journalistic report. The prize has two categories, one for Western journalists, and the other for African journalists. Each can show an aspect of Africa from his or her own point of view.”

The award is for journalists who highlight the greatness of the small histories of this immense continent. The aim is not to give a simplistic view of Africa, but to show that in spite of the wars and the hunger on the content, there is also hope and serious work by many persons and organizations.

This NGO came about through donations gathered at the canonization of St. Josemaría, the Founder of Opus Dei, in 2002. Since then it has financed 28 projects in 14 countries of Africa. Giovanni Mottini, President of Harambee Africa International, says: “We are convinced that education is a priority for Africa because the children of today will be the citizens of these countries within 10 or 15 years, and among them will be those responsible for their nation’s important decisions. This is why education is our priority.”

The word “harambee” means “all together” in Swahili and sums up the NGO’s work. All working together to help build up a continent that has a lot to teach the world.

Torna ai contenuti

Symposium on “St. Josemaría in Theology” (Rome, March 10 to 20, 2010)

From the 10th to the 20th of March a symposium was held at the central seat of Opus Dei in Rome. Its focus was the contribution to theology provided by the charism that God inspired in St. Josemaría on October 2, 1928. The symposium had two phases: the first took place from March 10 to 14, the second from the 16th to the 20th. Some fifty
theologians, historians and students of the sacred sciences took part.

In a letter directed especially to the faithful of the Prelature who work in these areas, the Prelate, Bishop Echevarría, made reference to the spirit of Opus Dei in these terms: “This renewing influence, manifested initially in a new pastoral phenomenon, necessarily has to produce, over time, intellectual repercussions. This has happened already in canon law, and it is also taking place, although more slowly, in theology” (Letter, April 23, 2010).

Bishop Echevarría’s introductory conference (echoed in the letter of April 23 just cited) provided guidelines for the symposium. Afterwards, the question of the influence of the teaching of the saints in theology was addressed. Two professors from the School of Theology at the University of Navarra spoke on this topic: Fr. Josep-Ignasi Saranyana discussed the theme from an historical point of view, while Fr. Antonio Aranda developed it in a more systematic way.

Following this session, some core teachings of St. Josemaría were considered in broad terms: the universal vocation to sanctity, the role of the laity in the Church, sanctification of work, divine filiation, contemplative life in the middle of the world, the common and ministerial priesthoods, the centrality of the Mass in Christian life, unity of life, etc. These conferences were given by Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Vicar General of the Opus Dei Prelature; Fr. José Ramon Villar, Ordinary Professor of Ecclesiology in the School of Theology at the University of Navarra; Father Paul O’ Callaghan, Professor of Theological Anthropology in the School of Theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross; and Msgr. Pedro Rodríguez, Professor Emeritus of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Navarra’s School of Theology.

Following this general overview, Msgr. Jose Luis Illanes, Professor Emeritus of Spiritual Theology at the University of Navarra, as well as a member of the Pontifical Academy of Theology and Director of the St. Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute, spoke about access to the oral and written preaching of St. Josemaría, the publication of which, in a critical-historical edition, is currently underway. The symposium concluded with a conference by Fr. Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, Professor of Fundamental
Theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. He spoke about the areas in theology where the influence of the Founder of Opus Dei’s message can be noted, and where one can expect it will have a greater resonance in the future.

In the letter cited above, Bishop Echevarría also said: “The spirit St. Josemaría transmitted to us through his preaching, his writings, and his example has deeply influenced the life of the Church. Many elements of his message were clearly reflected in the teachings of the last Council—the universal call to holiness, the sanctification of the world from within.” At the same time, the Prelate acknowledged that for the message of St. Josemaría to be fully incorporated into the various branches of theology, serious and diligent research is required. “I will not hide from you,” he wrote to the faithful of the Prelature, “the fact that this is a difficult task, in part because one has to overcome certain molds and mentalities that make it hard to capture and express the newness and richness of the call to Christian sanctity in the middle of the world. We will provide a great service to the Church (this is what spurs our concern) by helping make the lights God granted to St. Josemaría, and the doctrine contained there, to have a deep influence not only on spiritual theology, but also on aspects of dogmatic, moral, fundamental and sacramental theology as well.”
News
New Centers of the Prelature

The Regional Vicars have established new Centers of the Prelature in the following cities: Abidjan, Ivory Coast; Aquascalientes, Mexico; Barcelona, Spain; Culiacan, Mexico; Lima, Peru (two centers); Quetzaltenango, Guatemala; and Vigo, Spain.

2010: a Marian Year in Opus Dei

In the month of February, in honor of the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the apostolic work of Opus Dei with women, the Prelate convoked a Marian Year in the Prelature. Bishop Echevarría explained the reasons in a letter dated February 1, 2010. “As in 2008, when we commemorated the 80th anniversary of the foundation of the Work, it has seemed to me that the best way to channel our thanksgiving is to stay very close to our Lady during these months. Therefore it gives me great joy to convocate a new Marian Year in Opus Dei, from the upcoming 14th of February to the same date in 2011. During these months, let us strive to honor our Mother more and better, above all by putting great care into the prayer and contemplation of the Holy Rosary, and spreading this devotion among our families and friends. And let us give express thanks to God for the work of the women who look after the material care of the centers of the Prelature, which contributes so decisively to maintaining and improving the environment of a home that God infused into the Work, when he inspired it in our Father in 1928” (Letter, February 1, 2010).

During this Marian Year, which will end on February 14, 2011, special importance has been given to certain memories related to the Mother of God and the history of Opus Dei. Specifically, on April 7, it will be 40 years since St. Josemaría went to pray at the Shrine of Torreciudad. “These are the miracles that I desire: conversion and peace for many souls,” he said on that occasion.

Also, on May 16, 1970, the Founder went to Mexico to pray for several days before Our Lady of Guadalupe. It was an especially penitential
pilgrimage, in which he prayed earnestly to our Lady for the situation of the Church in the world (we were then in the post-Conciliar years), and he entrusted to her all his intentions and thanked her for her attentive care for Opus Dei: “We know, our Mother, that you will give us the means to go ahead on this path of charity and love, and to extend it throughout the whole world.”

The Marian year has also been reflected on the website of Opus Dei, which each month has published an article about the life of our Lady accompanied by citations from the Fathers of the Church, the Magisterium, and from the writings of saints and poets.

Some diocesan assignments entrusted to priests of the Prelature

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.

43rd UNIV Forum

The 43rd meeting of UNIV gathered in Rome during Holy Week with 4,000 students taking part. The question that the participants tried to answer during the most recent Forum was: “Can Christianity inspire a global culture?”

The point of departure for the discussion were words spoken by Benedict XVI at the La Sapienza University in Rome. “If our culture seeks only to build itself on the basis of the circle of its own argumentation, on what convinces it at the time, and if—anxious to preserve its secularism—it detaches itself from its life-giving roots, then it will not become more reasonable or purer, but will fall apart and disintegrate” (Address, January 17, 2008).
The students came from thirty different countries, including the United States, France, Spain, Russia, Australia, and Kenya, which helped provide various and complementary perspectives on the same question. Together with the presentations by the university students, the Conference included the collaboration of professors and specialists such as Joseph Pearce, professor of literature at Ave Maria University in Florida, and the author of numerous biographies; Andrew Hegarty, director of the Thomas More Institute in London; and Jeffrey J. Langan, Associate Professor and Chairman of Liberal Studies, Holy Cross College at Notre Dame, Indiana.

The UNIV students gave the following letter to Benedict XVI during the audience that took place on March 31 in St. Peter’s Square, a few days after the fifth anniversary of his pontificate.

_Holy Father,_

We are university students from 30 different countries. We come from diverse cultures, not all of which are Catholic or Christian; but we wish to write the Pope to express gratitude which we all share in common.

Thank you, Holy Father, for these five years of your Pontificate, in a commission of service and search for the truth. Thank you for your gatherings with young people. We thank you in the name of millions of young men and women who have been able to hear your words in Cologne, Krakow, São Paolo, Loreto, New York, Sydney, Paris, Yaoundé, Luanda, Prague… Thank you for your untiring service and for your example of openness and dialogue, which you constantly offer us, to search out the truth of things.

Thank you for having invoked this Year for Priests for the Church and for the world. We notice that many have taken advantage of some episodes that are painful for the Church and for the Pope, to spread doubts and suspicion. To these sowers of doubt we wish to say with clarity that we do not accept their ideology. We hold respect for them, but we demand from them respect for our faith and the recognition of the right that we have to live as Christians in a pluralist society.

Each one of us, including those who do not have the gift of faith, know in a personal way countless priests, university chaplains, parish priests, spiritual directors and confessors. We know them first hand, not by way of
newspapers, and we are grateful to them for their constant presence, availability, self-sacrifice, and openness to everyone. To all of them, and above all to the Pope, we wish to say: thank you!

Thank you, Your Holiness, for the courage with which you invite the faithful of the Church to follow Christ with a total gift of self, without “allowing oneself to be intimidated by the bickering of reigning opinions.” We thank God that He has given his flock a Shepherd who from the very first moment has declared the Church as young and alive as ever.

Also in the name of thousands of our colleagues, we wish to express that we are with you, Holy Father, through our prayer, our affection, and our daily work. We ask you to bless our studies, our families, and the friendships we form with God and with others, in the university, in our volunteer work, in our sports, and in our rest.

Please accept our thanks and our most affectionate congratulations for these first five years as the Vicar of Christ!

Robert Weber (Austria)

President of UNIV Congress 2010

Benedict XVI responded to the students in the Wednesday audience with these words: “Dear friends, you have come to Rome in Holy Week for an experience of faith, friendship and spiritual enrichment,” said the Holy Father. “I invite you to reflect on the importance of university study for the formation of that 'universal Catholic mentality' which St. Josemaría described in these terms: 'a breadth of vision and a vigorous endeavor to study more deeply the things that are permanently alive and unchanged in Catholic orthodoxy.' May there be, in each of you, a growing desire to meet Jesus Christ personally, so as to bear joyful witness to him in all places.”

The first UNIV meetings were organized at the prompting of St. Josemaría, the founder of Opus Dei. Tens of thousands of students and university professors, over the past four decades, have been able to broaden their own cultural horizons in the universal atmosphere of the center of Christianity, thanks to the special audiences granted by Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI to the UNIV participants.
During the Roman meeting the theme for UNIV 2011 was decided upon: “Living Freedom Decisively” (www.univforum.org).

Pontifical Appointments

On March 30, 2010, Msgr. Angel Rodriguez Luño and Msgr. Carlos José Errázuriz Mackenna were appointed as Consultors of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith “in aliud quinquennium (for an additional five years).”

On May 4, 2010, Fr. Eduardo Baura de la Peña, Professor of Canon Law at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, was appointed a referendary of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura “ad quinquennium,” and Msgr. Joaquin Llovell was reappointed as a referendary of the same office “in aliud quinquennium.”

Also on May 4, Josep Ignasi Saranyana Closa was appointed a member of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Science “in aliud quinquennium.”

On June 30, 2010, Msgr. Ignacio Carrasco de Paula was appointed President of the Pontifical Academy for Life; he had been serving as the Chancellor of this entity.

News about publications

In the last issue of Romana we mentioned a new biography of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo written in Portuguese by Hugo de Azevedo. This book has just been translated into Italian under the title Missione Compiuta, and published by Ares (Milan 2010).

Also just translated into English is Itinerarios de vida cristiana, written by Bishop Javier Echevarría in 2001. The book has been published by Scepter Publishers of New York under the title Paths to God: Building a
Masses in suffrage for the soul of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo

Numerous Masses have been celebrated in cities throughout the world for the anniversary of the death of the Servant of God Álvaro del Portillo, which occurred in Rome on March 23, 1994. Ten years later his process of canonization was opened. On June 26 and on August 7 of 2008, the tribunals of the Vicariates of Rome and of the Prelature, respectively, concluded the investigative phase of the process and the records were sent to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints.

Masses in suffrage for the Servant of God were celebrated in churches in many countries. We will record a few of them: the Basilica of St. Eugene in Rome, the Basilica of St. Ambrose in Milan; the church of Santa Generosa in São Paulo, the church of Nossa Señora da Paz in Rio de Janeiro, and the church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Curitaba, Brazil; the church of St. Joseph of Caparra, Puerto Rico; the church of our Lady in Amsterdam; the oratory of St. Josemaría in Lisbon; the parish of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Montevideo, Uruguay; the church of Our Lady of Loreto in Buenos Aires, the churches of St. Rose in Rosario, of St. Cecilia in Córdoba, and the chapel of St. Clement in San Juan, Argentina; the Cathedral Castrense in La Paz Bolivia; the chapel of Strathmore University in Nairobi, Kenya; and in Spain, the birthplace of the Servant of God, in the cathedrals of Seville, Caceres, Valladolid, Salamanca, Leon, Burgos and Santander; and in parishes in many cities such as Vigo, Santiago de Compostela, La Coruña, Ponteveda, Orense, Barcelona, Lleida, Tarragona, Alveria, Granada, Malaga, Marbella, Ronda, Jaen, Madrid, Córdoba, Huelva, Cadiz, Badajoz, Plasencia, Jerez, Algeciras, Mérida, Saragossa, Valencia, Oviedo, Gijón, Palencia, Zamora, etc.

In Cebu, in the Philippines, more than 750 students, professors and alumni from the Cebu Institute of Technology and Enterprise (CITE),
gathered at the parish of St. Isidro Labrador to participate in the Mass for Bishop del Portillo, who had been directly involved in the promotion of that educational initiative. In his homily, Archbishop Cayetano Gelbolingo of Cebu recalled how Don Álvaro del Portillo had encouraged the faithful of Opus Dei living there to begin that institution and promoted the building of the structures that would serve to give formation to the less privileged people in the Visaya Islands region.

Message in regard to the Chilean earthquake (February 27, 2010)

Following the earthquake and tidal wave that affected a good part of Chile and cost the lives of hundreds of people, in addition to major property damage, the Prelate of Opus Dei sent a letter to the faithful and cooperators of the Work in that country, asking especially for their generous suffrages for the victims of the natural disasters and saying that he is asking many other people to do the same. He wrote: “I also pray, and ask everyone to pray with me, for the people who have been injured and have suffered material losses. Let us implore God that those who are suffering not lose hope.”

In a special way, he invited the faithful and cooperators of Opus Dei to put themselves at the service of their fellow citizens, with their own work and their prayers. And whenever possible, to “join in the relief effort” organized by the government, the Church, and social agencies. In this situation of extreme need, the Prelate especially encouraged “young people to help implement whatever measures the country's authorities are taking.”

“I ask our Lord to sustain everyone,” the Prelate wrote, “including the relief workers. Let us see this as a marvelous opportunity to fulfill the mandate of charity that Jesus preached. We must always practice an ardent charity among those close to us, truly loving everyone.”
INITIATIVES

• In Brief
“Training of Trainers” in Kenya

The TOT (Training of Trainers) project started up in 2003 with help from Kianda Foundation and the European Union. The aim was for women from Ngarariga, Riara and Ngong to become promoters and owners of micro-businesses so they could better support their families.

Since then 1,297 women have benefited from the program. Most of them are between 25 and 50 years old, though some are older than 60. The latter are grandmothers who have taken over the upbringing of their grandchildren because the parents have died, often of AIDS, so they need to start earning money again.

The program is taught by women who are studying business or economics at university. The students monitor the women for six months to help them solve any problems that may arise, study initiatives, and evaluate possibilities for future expansion. Additionally, Kianda Foundation then puts them in contact with micro-credit programs and helps them get loans to improve their businesses.

After the initial orientation, in a second phase they begin sessions on how to run a successful business: planning, budgeting, accounts, marketing, viability and savings. Each university student takes charge of helping a small group to plan their own businesses.

The women who attend the TOT program value it highly, because they learn to run their businesses in a professional way, and improve their standard of living. They particularly appreciate the “life skills” that are taught as part of the course—human and Christian virtues—because they discover ways to improve their characters and their way of working, and how to bring up their children well. All of this has a positive effect on the whole family.

Confronting problems with a generous spirit

Both the TOT initiative and the Kianda Foundation are inspired by the teachings of St. Josemaría, the founder of Opus Dei. As he once said: “A university must educate its students to have a sense of service to society, promoting the common good with their professional work and their activity. University people should be responsible citizens with a healthy
concern for the problems of other people and a generous spirit which brings them to face these problems and to resolve them in the best possible way” (*Conversations with St. Josemaría Escrivá*, no. 74).

Susan Kinyua, TOT’s program director, says: “I explain to the volunteers the situation of the local women and our aims. Then they have a series of sessions on development and habits acquisition. During this time the students visit the homes of the 80 women who will take part in the program, and give them a questionnaire to fill out.”

Most of the University students find that participating in the TOT project helps them to work with a professional mentality. They learn to make better use of their time, to work diligently and constantly, and to be responsible about the things they have undertaken. They comment that they would like to give a social dimension to their jobs, for example by introducing specific community development targets in the organizations they will work in after graduating.

**Micro-financing plans**

Education and access to means for economic emancipation are key questions. The women need to be able to obtain credit and acquire the knowledge necessary to improve their productivity. The micro-financing plans are a way of helping the women who have repeatedly shown they can repay loans. Lack of opportunity is one of the characteristics of those who live in conditions of extreme poverty.

“We want women to be at the forefront of economic growth,” says Susan Kinyua. “I remember a woman who had been widowed, lost everything and had to leave her children with their grandmother because they had nowhere to live. She thought that if she were on her own it wouldn’t matter where she lived. Thanks to the Training of Trainers project, she was able to set up a small business and buy a house, where she lives today with her children.”

The Kianda Foundation, which is responsible for the initiative, is a not-for-profit educational organization set up in 1961 to promote the educational, social and spiritual well-being of women in Kenya. Pope Benedict XVI has often referred to the need for genuine solidarity: “There
will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbor is indispensable....For young people, this widespread involvement constitutes a school of life which offers them a formation in solidarity and in readiness to offer others not simply material aid but their very selves" (Deus Caritas Est, 25 December 2005, no. 28 and 30).

Real-life Stories From TOT

Grace Wahu Nding’uri (Limuru): Fabric, flowers for export, and milk for the family

Wahu is married and has two small children. Before joining the TOT project, Wahu had a sewing-machine and repaired clothes, earning less than 1,000 KSh. (Kenyan shillings) per month—about $14. After doing the TOT course Wahu was able to buy fabric and make clothes; this increased the number of her customers considerably. Encouraged by this experience, she decided to embark on flower cultivation, and rented a plot of land. Currently the flowers are earning her 5,000 KSh. per month. With her savings and a loan, which she has already repaid, she and her husband bought a quarter of an acre of land in Kinangop. Then they spent 10,000 KSh. on a calf, and she hopes to have milk by the end of this year. As well as increasing her income she will have milk for the family, and will be able to move her children to a better school. Her comment was “Maisha yangu imebadilika kabisa!” (My life has changed completely!).

Tabitha Wangari Kinyanjui (Ngong): Electricity, hairdresser’s shop and investment plans

Wangari is married and lives with her two sons in a shanty-town called Mathare, in Ngong. When Wangari’s mother went blind her father deserted the family, and her mother had to manage with the children on her own. In 2008 Wangari heard about Kianda Foundation through the TOT project. When she completed the course her husband, who is a carpenter, built her a little shop of corrugated iron, and she set up as a hairdresser. She obtained a loan of 16,000 KSh. to connect electricity in her house and the hairdresser’s. Next she bought a hair-dryer so that she could do styles with braids and extensions, which are more profitable. Now she earns enough to support the family, buy food and clothing and the
other things needed for the house. In her house everything has improved a lot. This year she wants to buy a gas-cooker. Spurred by Wangari's success, her husband set up a carpentry business with two friends.

Agnes Kigondu (Kagonogo): Selling chickens and the right to ask for help

Agnes is a mother of four, and before she did the TOT program she used to wash clothes to earn a little money for the family. She also cultivated a small piece of land, but was dependent on rainwater. When she finished the training course Agnes decided to make use of the water from a local well, and she went to see the local agricultural department to ask for help. Before, it had never occurred to her that poor people had access to government offices, but now she goes there confidently, knowing her rights. She planted potatoes, beans and maize, and the harvests have improved a lot. Over Christmas time she sold chickens, acting as an agent, since they did not belong to her. She would buy a chicken for 230 KSh. from a supplier and sell it at 260 KSh to hotels. Between 12 December and 1 January she earned 6,000 KSh. She now also has ten hens, which give seven eggs a day. She uses some for the family and sells the rest to her neighbors. She makes around 40 KSh. per day from the sale of eggs. The best lesson she learned from the training course was how to draw up a budget so as to cut costs and put her hard-earned income to the best use. She now has a savings account in Kiambu and is thinking of buying a milk-cow and 200 chickens. She is studying the question of whether to take out a loan or to save up enough to fulfill her dreams.

Mary Maithya (Ngong): From cabbages to wholesale bananas

Mary made women's clothing, but her husband walked out and left the family with no house or anywhere to carry on the business. She had four sewing-machines but nowhere to work. They were living off the generosity of neighbors and friends. In 2007 she heard about the TOT program through a friend and decided to take part. When she started the course, her only source of income was from selling sukuma wiki (cabbages), because it did not require much capital, but she only earned 50 or 100 KSh. a day. Since she had the sewing-machines she thought about setting up a dressmaking school, but when, having completed the course, she did the calculations, she realized that she would make more money by selling...
vegetables, grain, paraffin, charcoal, fruit, etc., because these are things that people need every day. She began selling these items, and her life has improved a lot. Now she earns around 500 KSh. a day, because she sells at a strategic spot, quite close to where she lives, and has plenty of customers. She buys unripe bananas, ripens them little by little, and sells them wholesale. Her oldest son has completed his high school studies thanks to the growth in her business, and her second son is attending high school now. Best of all, in 2009 she and her husband got back together.

*Priscilla Wanjiru Njenga (Kamirithu): From KSh. 4,000 to 30,000 per month and accounts all square*

Priscilla is an older woman who lives in Kamirithu. Before she did the basic TOT course she used to sell second-hand clothing in Limuru market, which is open two days a week. She knew nothing about marketing, and would put the items of clothing for sale, dirty and creased, in a pile on the ground. After the training course she opted to open a boutique in her village, Kamirithu, and the results have been excellent. She displays her clothes, sorted, clean and freshly ironed, on hangers according to type—men’s, women’s, or children’s. The display is very inviting. She goes to the central market where second-hand clothing is imported wholesale, and selects what she wants to sell. She has developed good taste in combining blouses, skirts, scarves, etc. Before, with luck she would make 1,000 KSh. per week; now she earns an average of 30,000 per month. This is enabling her to expand her business by renting space beside her stall to have a greater variety of items. She keeps her accounts all square, as she learned on the course. She says that TOT changed her life; now she understands the meaning of things like profit margins, marketing, accounts, and savings, as well as many other things.

*Mary Wambui Wamwenja (Kagonogo): Seven children and a DDO husband*

Wambui is around fifty, mother of seven and a grandmother too. To earn her living, she used to do any casual job that came up: digging, washing clothes, housework. But jobs were scarce, and the worst thing was that some people took advantage of the plentiful labor available to delay paying, or even failed to pay at all. When she filled in the questionnaire to
begin the TOT training course, she replied humorously to the question on “Husband’s job”: “DDO,” standing for “Daily Drinking Officer.” Wambui is very happy to have done the course, because now she grows all sorts of vegetables such as parsley, cabbage, squash, and arrowroots, and sells them in the market two days a week. She brings water from the river to irrigate them. The days she doesn’t go to market she sells them to the neighbors. So far she has managed to save up 5,000 KSh., has bought a tank to collect rainwater (since there is no water supply) which cost her 8,000, and has also bought a table and a table-cloth. Seeing what his wife was doing presented a challenge to her husband, and he sold a small plot of land he had and bought a cow and a goat. He gave Wambui 2,000 KSh.—the first sum he had ever given her since they were married. As well as the management skills Wambui has acquired, she really appreciates what she learned about using time well. She has also improved her relationships with her neighbors, which has also been good for business and helps her live in peace.

Torna ai contenuti

In Brief

Asunción, Paraguay -- Formation during vacations

During the Holy Week vacations, a workshop that included study sessions and social volunteer work was held for young people who frequent the Puntarrieles Study Center and the Ycuá University Center. The 80 students taking part received classes of philosophy and spiritual theology and made visits to the sick at the Hospital de Clinicas. During the workshop they also attended the ceremonies for the Easter Triduum, along with some of their family members.
Valencia, Spain -- Law Club for university students

The Albalat Student Residence Law Club organized a cultural gathering in Strasbourg this past May. Those taking part had the opportunity to visit and have working sessions at the European Court of Human Rights and the European Parliament. The university students took charge of all aspects of organizing the trip: setting up the interviews, drawing up debate topics, etc. During the four days spent in Strasbourg, the students were also able to speak with several television correspondents. One of them decided to make a film report about the activity, which was shown on national television.

The Law Club, run by students at Albalat residence, organizes periodic gatherings with professionals and academics. Recently, for example, a professor of labor law spoke about the effects of the current economic crisis on workers, and a city judge looked at the proposed law on abortion that was being discussed nationally at that time.

Almaty, Kazakhstan -- Family culture

During the 2009-2010 academic year, the Irtysh Cultural Center and the Foundation for Cultural Development sponsored a series of conferences on the family. Each month, specialists in the education of children, in making work and family compatible, in the proper use of the new technologies, etc., provided insights aimed at strengthening the family.

From April 16 to 18 the series focused on married love, through talks given by Professor Javier Escrivá Ivars, Director of the Institute of Sciences for the Family at the University of Navarra. Other sessions dealt with the period of engagement before marriage and offered personalized assistance to some interested couples.
Rome, Italy -- Conference on priestly celibacy

A conference reflecting on the value of priestly celibacy was held at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross on March 4-5. The event brought together hundreds of priests and dozens of lay people and religious, including the prefects of the Congregation for the Clergy (Cardinal Claudio Humes, OFM) and of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints (Archbishop Angelo Amato).

Archbishop Amato outlined a theology of the celibacy of Jesus Christ, while Msgr. Damiano Marzotta (from the Pontifical Gregorian University) discussed the connection between priestly celibacy and fraternity.

Professor Stefan Heid, from the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology, discussed how the Church throughout history had been discerning and assimilating the importance of priests living perfect continence for the Kingdom of God. Father Laurent Touze, professor at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, gave an address entitled “Is Celibacy Linked to the Sacrament of Holy Orders?” in which he presented reflections on a spiritual theology of celibacy.

Other presentations included those by Professor Pablo Gefaell (from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross) on celibacy in the eastern Churches, and by Antonio Malo from the same university, who approached the question of celibacy from the viewpoint of an anthropology of affectivity. Dr. Aquilino Polaino (Professor of Psychiatry at the CEU—San Pablo University in Madrid) spoke, in turn, about personal fulfillment in celibacy. The conference included a round table on formation for a life of celibacy, in which rectors and formation directors at seminaries in several countries discussed their experiences in this regard.
Paris, France -- Starting with Caritas in Veritate

On October 10 the Sixth Seminar for Business Executives was held in Paris, organized by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. Its topic was “The social thought of the Church: challenges in confronting the economic crisis.” The sessions were organized around the presentation of the Encyclical Caritas in Veritate. After an introduction to the conference by the president of Des Prêtres pour Toutes les Nations (DPTN), Archbishop Francesco Monterisi, former Secretary of the Congregation for Bishops (having stepped down on July 3), presented Benedict XVI's Encyclical.

A round table followed, with a former French Minister of Industry, an entrepreneur, and a banker speaking about the current economic crisis. A journalist acted as moderator.

Bishop Dominique Rey, of Fréjus-Toulon, spoke about the Church’s social doctrine and the need to make it known to priests, seminarians, and lay people. The concluding talk of the conference was by Msgr. Martin Schlag, coordinator of the Markets, Culture, and Ethics research center at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

A goal of this annual seminar is to make known the academic work being carried out by the university and to seek financial aid, while going more deeply into the teaching of the Church. The practical organization was handled by the DPTN association, which channels the donations of many people for the formation of the clergy.

Santiago, Chile -- With victims of the earthquake

Students from the University of the Andes showed their solidarity with the victims of the earthquake that caused extensive damage in Chile last March.
500 engineering students traveled to Cerro Navia, a city near Santiago damaged by the quake, to help clean up the rubble, analyze building structures, and offer their help to families. Each student was equipped with a shovel, knife, safety boots and gloves.

In addition, a center for the collection of food, water, clothing, sheets, medication and infant supplies was set up in the University library. The donations were sent to the district of Coelemu where three professors were coordinating the relief assistance.

Similar expeditions were organized by university residences and centers for high school students that are corporate apostolic works of Opus Dei. Cristobal Aguilera, a law student from the University of the Andes and one of the organizers of these groups, said that the work of the young people had been intense. They cleared up rubble from ten in the morning until seven in the evening from houses that were destroyed and from a church that had been in the process of being declared a national monument. “My classmates saw the need to help,” he explained. “We ourselves escaped untouched by the quake and this made us thankful for what we had and sensitive to the needs of those who were suffering.” Other groups dedicated themselves to medical assistance.

Valencia, Spain -- Internet at the service of the person

On February 27, 2010, a conference entitled “The Media and Christian Values” was held in La Lloma, Valencia, Spain. Organized by the COSO Foundation, its purpose was to highlight possibilities offered by the media to transmit sound values to society. Topics discussed included “Communication resources on the web: the classic, the new, and the most effective,” “The communitarian dimension of the web: the special case of the blogs,” and a practical session on web pages.

Among those taking part were Gustavo Entrala, General Director of the public relations agency “101”; Tomas Baviera, telecommunications
engineer and researcher in digital communications; and Jose Miguel Cejas, a journalist and writer. A key idea that kept coming up was: The Internet offers great opportunities to serve others, but to take advantage of the web in order to build up a more human society, an adequate and ongoing formation is required.

Viseu, Portugal -- Family challenges

For the past four years, the “Moinho Club” has organized a Family Conference in Viseu, held in university auditoriums. Its purpose is to confront the principal challenges faced by the family today (raising adolescents, fidelity in marriage, proper use of sexuality, etc.) from a Christian perspective. Each conference has included an invited panel, usually made up of specialists known throughout the country for their contributions in non-governmental organizations, in public life, or in the communications media. Each year, at the end of the conference, the participants say they have found their convictions strengthened and their eagerness stirred up to undertake initiatives of family formation with the assistance of other couples.

Como, Italy -- God in the public sphere

The 30th Conference for University Teachers and Researchers took place from May 28-30 at Castello di Urio, near Lake Como, Italy. The theme, “God in the Public Sphere,” was discussed in the light of the recent encyclical Caritas in Veritate.

Among those taking part was Bishop Aldo Giordano, the Holy See’s Observer at the Council of Europe, who emphasized the importance of the active presence of Catholics in the structures of democratic government in order to strengthen the Christian roots of Europe.
Carlo Cardia, professor of ecclesiastical law, and Alessandro Gisotti from Vatican Radio analyzed some differences between the European and American situation. They pointed out how the special characteristics of the birth of democracy in America—described by Alexis de Tocqueville—have left a deep imprint on the United States. This explains why the relationship between religion and politics is viewed in a less problematic way there than in Europe.

On the last day Professor Mauro Magatti, Dean of the School of Sociology at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan spoke about obstacles to the religious dimension, both in private life and in the public sphere. He stressed the almost invisible conditioning of the exercise of true freedom that is typical, he said, of wealthy societies.

Estoril, Portugal -- Christian consistency in a pluralistic society

The Associação Cultural das Areias, in Estoril, Portugal, organized a series of conferences between January and April 2010 on various questions of current timeliness in the Portuguese national discussion: “Christianity and secularism,” “Education for character,” and “Marriage and homosexuality.” The series also included a talk entitled “From the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith,” aimed at penetrating the thought of Benedict XVI, who in a few weeks was to visit Portugal. The conferences were held in the Cascais Cultural Center, with an average attendance of a hundred people. Each conference was followed by a lively discussion.

The first conference took place on January 22, with two presentations on marriage and homosexuality by the co-authors of the book: Matrimonio homosexual: por qué no? (Homosexual Marriage, why not?), Father Gonçalo Portocarrero de Alamada and Judge Pedro Vaz Patto. On February 19, Professor João Araújo discussed character formation and stressed the need for the active role of parents and teachers in the education of the youngest children, fleeing from the posture of the “passive spectator.”
Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, university professor and television commentator, gave the closing conference on April 23. In light of the upcoming centenary of the Republic (in October 2010), he spoke on the theme “Christianity and secularism.” Reflecting on the relation between spiritual and temporal power throughout history, he defended the thesis that religious freedom is not only freedom to worship but also freedom to live out all the consequences of one’s faith. He explained that Christianity is a path of salvation traveled “with others and for others,” with consequences in the public arena, and therefore it cannot be reduced to a merely private question. He also pointed out that the pontificate of Benedict XVI has strongly confronted the challenge of relativism at a high intellectual level.

Rome, Italy -- Communication and Christian Identity

Some 300 people who work in Church communications offices and professionals in the communications field from all over the world gathered in Rome from April 26 to 28 to discuss the relationship between identity and dialogue in the communication strategies of the Church. This seventh edition of the seminar organized by the School of Institutional Communication at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross brought together representatives of dioceses, bishops’ conferences, and other ecclesial groups from 70 countries.

“The aim of the seminar,” said Professor José Maria La Porte, head of the organizing committee, “was to show that a clearly defined identity, such as that found in the Catholic Church, is not an obstacle but rather a strong facilitator to communication.”

Among the speakers were representatives from local churches, such as Helen Osman, spokeswoman for the U.S. Bishops Conference, and Auxiliary Bishop Giovanni D’Ercole, of L’Aquila. They alternated with professionals from the media including Michele Levy, Founder of Brand
Strategy Consulting, New York, and Marco Pogliani from the communications consulting firm Pogliani and Associates, Milan.

During the seminar, various cases studies were presented, such as the “Catholics Come Home” campaign in the United States (Tom Peterson) and the “Tournée Bioéthique” in France (Tugdual Derville). There were also some practical sessions with experts, including Lorenzo Cantoni from Lugano University, Switzerland, who spoke on “The New Media and Christian Identity,” and Norberto Gonzalez Gaitano, from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, who analyzed the repercussions in American public opinion of the Pope’s recent trip to the United States.


Two round tables were held on the topic “Understanding the Church and Making it Understood.” In one of these, spokespersons of bishops’ conferences from Italy, Slovakia and the United States took part; while in the other, Vatican journalists for various media (the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, The New York Times, De Telegraaf and Corriere della Sera) offered their experiences. The director of the Rome Reports TV News Agency, Juan Boo, spoke on the presence of the Church on television screens, the Internet and mobile devices.

The program included a meeting in the pressroom of the Holy See with the Vatican spokesman, Father Federico Lombardi, and a final intervention by Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. Other sessions dealt with communications crises and aspects of interreligious dialogue.
In the first half of 2010, 327 faithful of the Prelature and 20 members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross passed away.

The suffrages stipulated by Saint 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 and neighbor 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.

In addition to the names of all who have died during this period, we have gathered a few biographical details about some of the deceased, which give an idea of the variety of circumstances and situations in which the faithful of Opus Dei live. For reasons of space, we are not including this data in the other cases, but we must not forget that we have a debt of gratitude towards all of them for the example of fidelity they have left us. These brief sketches will help us live the Communion of Saints better with those who have preceded us to heaven.

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.
A STUDY
Work as “a Mass”: Reflections on the Laity’s Participation in the Munus Sacerdotale in the Writings of the Founder of Opus Dei, by Cruz González-Ayesta

This study has its origin in some words taken from the oral preaching of St. Josemaría. Commenting on a phrase from a traditional prayer to St. Joseph, *et operas innocentia tuis sanctis altaris deservire*, he said that we want “to serve our Lord not only at the altar, but in the whole world, which is an altar for us. All of the works of man are done as if on an altar, and each of you, in that union of contemplative souls which is your day, in some way says ‘his Mass,’ which lasts twenty-four hours in expectation of the Mass to follow, which will last another twenty-four hours, and so on until the end of our life.”[1] I think this reflection contains great theological riches, even though it is formulated, as so often happens with St. Josemaría’s texts, not in theological terms but in what we could call “pastoral” language.

The theological teaching that underlies these words, it seems to me, is the lay faithful’s participation in the “triple office” of Christ. Therefore I will begin this study with a brief consideration of the Magisterium’s teaching in this regard. Then I will consider some key texts from St. Josemaría. The founder of Opus Dei refers in several places to the participation by the lay faithful in the triple function of Christ,[2] but he often synthesized his teaching in a succinct expression: to have “a priestly soul” and “a lay mentality.” Grasping the meaning of this expression will require a brief look at the term “work” and its theological import in the founder of Opus Dei’s writings.

1. Participation by the lay faithful in the munus sacerdotale[3]

The place of the *tria munera* (three offices) of Christ, and particularly the faithful’s participation in them, in the New Testament and in the Tradition handed down by the Fathers and in the liturgy is a question open to theological discussion. Aurelio Fernandez, for example, argues in an extensive monograph[4] that the *tria munera* should be seen as simply a useful theory for systematizing the mission of the Church and that of
Christ, but not as an inflexible schema exclusive of others (for example that of the double power of sacred ministry and jurisdiction): “Nevertheless, as I will try to show in this book, neither the Fathers nor the theologians unanimously agree that Christ’s mission is specified in three powers or functions, and therefore neither do they refer to that triple function as participated in by the ecclesiastical ministry, and even less by the other baptized. And above all, the Church’s early theology is foreign to the theory of the triple munus as it is considered today, that is to say, as an element basic to Christology and, in general, to the conception of the Church, which develops through the fulfillment of these three offices.”[5]

This thesis is opposed to that formulated thirty years earlier by Paul Dabin.[6] This author defends the continual presence of the teaching of the tria munera, both in the teaching of the Fathers and in theology from the medieval period right up to the twentieth century: “The triple office is a sublime reality. Participation in it by the faithful is neither a usurpation nor something imaginary. It is a Catholic truth taught by the Fathers, theologians, the Catechism of the Council of Trent, and universally reflected in the various liturgies.”[7] Since resolving this discussion far exceeds the limits of this work, I have decided to set aside the consideration of the biblical and liturgical foundations and focus on the teaching set forth in the texts of the Second Vatican Council. It is generally recognized that there this teaching is amply used to describe the mission of the Church and its faithful, whether laity or ordained ministers. The Second Vatican Council explicitly stressed for the first time[8] the participation of the faithful in the triple office of Christ: priestly, prophetic and royal. The Council’s teaching closely links this to the common priesthood of the baptized as well as to the carrying out of the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church.

This teaching of the Council, which I will describe briefly below, was preceded by a certain amount of theological discussion, especially in the French-speaking world. To go into the details of these discussions far exceeds the scope of this study. Nevertheless, a very brief consideration of the disputed questions can serve as a framework to introduce the teaching on the participation in the tria munera Christi. I will take as the main authors in this regard F. Mugnier, Yves Congar and Gérard Philips.[9]
These authors use a number of different texts from Scripture to explain the nature of the participation by all the faithful in Christ’s priesthood. Some of these texts are used by all of them, although their interpretation at times differs. I am referring particularly to three passages: 1 Pet 2:5 (“Like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”); Rom 12:1 (“I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”); and Rev 5:9-10 (“Thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God.”)

Perhaps the key question in this discussion is the relation between the priestly, prophetic and royal offices, particularly in the non-ordained faithful. While Congar tends to consider them separately, Mugnier and Philips take the view that the priesthood in a certain manner includes the munus propheticum and the munus regale.

Congar thinks that the notion of priesthood should be considered within the category of sacrifice, although he admits that Catholic tradition has also viewed it from the perspective of mediation. His emphasis on sacrifice is based on the view that not every mediation is priestly. He suggests that the types of priesthood should be distinguished according to the types of sacrifice: thus there is a double sacrifice and a double priesthood in the faithful. On the one hand, interpreting the texts cited above, Conger refers to the offering by the faithful of spiritual victims that come from their life according to the Spirit. This sacrifice and priesthood (which he calls royal-spiritual) is linked to grace and to ordinary life. By union with Christ through grace, the Christian can offer his own life as a spiritual sacrifice in such a way that his very existence acquires a dimension of cult or worship: “Worship, the sacrifices of the faithful, and therefore the priesthood which corresponds to them, are essentially those of a life that is holy, religious, prayerful, consecrated, charitable, merciful, apostolic. This worship, these sacrifices, the priesthood that corresponds to them, is not carried out in a liturgical or sacramental way.”[10]

On the other hand, there is the consecration that the faithful receive
for sacramental worship. This sacramental priesthood is divided in turn into two priesthoods which differ essentially and not just in degree. By the sacrament of Holy Orders some faithful are given the capacity to administer the sacraments and celebrate the liturgy (the hierarchical or ministerial priesthood), while in virtue of the baptismal character every Christian is given the ability to participate in the liturgical sacramental worship of the Church, in particular, the Eucharist (common or baptismal priesthood). Thus Congar separates the royal-spiritual priesthood from the baptismal priesthood. While by the first type of priesthood the faithful participate in the kingly office of Christ; through the baptismal priesthood they participate in the priestly office. Congar explains this division between royal-spiritual priesthood and sacramental priesthood through the Augustinian distinction between res and sacramentum. The royal-spiritual priesthood is in the order of res, that is to say of grace, while the sacramental priesthood is in the order of sacramentum, of the means to attain grace.[11]

Nevertheless, Congar also seems to hold that the exercise of the two priesthoods “unites” in some way when the faithful participates in the Eucharist: “The faithful offer themselves by carrying out a spiritual (moral) immolation of which they themselves are the priests at Mass, as both content and fruit. As content, because the Eucharist is the offering of the members with and in the head; but above all as fruit.... We have to bring to the Eucharist all the truth of our ordinary, daily life.... To put our whole life into the Mass, to include the Mass in our life, has always been the most practical truth preached by the Church to the faithful in the matter of Eucharistic participation. In this way, the spiritual-royal priesthood by which we offer ourselves as spiritual victims, is united to the baptismal priesthood, by which we liturgically offer the sacrifice of Christ. There is a kind of osmosis of one to the other, the presence of one in the other since. Being members of the liturgical assembly, we offer ourselves with Christ, fulfilling the act of interior spiritual priesthood in our baptismal priesthood.”[12]

In contrast to Congar, both Mugnier and Philips defend a unitary vision of the three offices of Christ and, consequently, of the lay faithful’s participation in them. As opposed to the division between priesthood in
the order of life and the priesthood in the order of worship (spiritual-royal priesthood and baptismal respectively), both authors speak of a single priesthood in the faithful. Philips insists that the priesthood of the faithful is an ontological reality, a true participation in the priestly dignity of Christ which is realized in different ways in the ordained minister and in the layman. Mugnier stresses that the priesthood is realized in a strict and formal sense only in the ordained minister and in a derived and analogical sense in the layperson.

Both authors, Mugnier and Philips, also maintain a unitary vision between the royal priesthood by which the Christian offers spiritual sacrifices (cf. 1 Pet 2:5 and 9) and the ability to participate in the sacramental worship that is received with the baptismal character. The basis for participation in the common priesthood is in the sacramental character of baptism. Mugnier points out that the laity participate actively in sacramental worship, especially in the Eucharist, offering themselves in union with the Victim and taking as the matter of their sacrifice their own duties, especially work which is converted into a continuous Mass, as well as suffering and death. Philips also stresses that the full participation of the faithful in the liturgy takes place not so much when they fulfill certain functions or substitute for the priest in what they can do, but that the field of their priestly action includes both the sacramental life and their ordinary life: the action of the sacraments is not momentary in character but is directed to the totality of one’s life.

Thus we have outlined some of the questions that we will have to return to in examining the Magisterium’s teaching: the relation between the priesthood and the prophetic and royal offices as well the characterization of the common priesthood as a royal priesthood, or in other words, the relation between sacramental worship and existential worship.

In the second chapter of Lumen Gentium, the People of God are described as a priestly people. In this context we find the doctrine of the priesthood of the faithful being born from the priesthood of Christ: “Christ the Lord, High Priest taken from among men, made the new people ‘a kingdom and priests to God the Father.’” Immediately following this we find a direct reference to the common priesthood of the faithful: “The
baptized,” says the Council, “by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices.”[16] The priesthood of the faithful is characterized as spiritual worship, that is, as an offering of one’s own life which has sacrificial value precisely in virtue of the union with Christ that the Holy Spirit brings about through baptism. Through the sacraments, first of all baptism, the Catholic makes his own the worship of Christ, which is not a ritual worship (the worship of the Temple), but the offering of oneself in an act of obedience: existential worship. Christ instituted the sacraments precisely to make possible this participation, and with them he introduced a new ritual order, distinct from that of the old Israel, which was thereby abolished. This worship creates a new order of sacredness, so that the existential worship of Christ becomes sacrificial worship in the Church.[17]

Continuing with the text from Lumen Gentium, after stressing that the difference between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood is not one of degree but of essence, the Constitution clarifies how they are linked to one another: “each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ.” The specific description of the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood makes clear that the term “priesthood” is being taken in a broad sense, as mediation, including the three offices: sanctifying, or priesthood in the strict sense, prophetic and royal. “The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches [munus docendi vel propheticum ] and rules [munus regendi vel regale ] the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people [munus sanctificandi vel sacerdotale ]. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments,[18] in prayer and thanksgiving [munus sacerdotale ], in the witness of a holy life [munus propheticum ], and by self-denial and active charity [munus regale ].”[19]

Following the third chapter dedicated to clarifying the hierarchical nature of the Church, which deals, among other things, with how the bishops exercise the triple office of sanctifying, teaching, and ruling, there
comes chapter four dedicated to the laity. There (as in the preceding chapter in regard to the bishops), one finds a description of how the lay faithful participate in the triple office of Christ as priest, prophet, and king (LG, 34-36). It is not possible here to go into all of the theological and anthropological riches contained there, including those related to Christian freedom and the legitimate autonomy of the created order. Rather I want to focus on the close tie that exists between participation in the office of Christ the Priest (munus sanctificandi) and participation in the office of Christ the King (munus regendi).

The priestly office of the laity is described in section 34 in the following terms: “The laity, dedicated to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and wonderfully prepared so that ever more abundant fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit... all these become ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’ Together with the offering of the Lord’s body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God.”[20]

However, to carry out the consecration of the world to God that section 34 speaks of, the lay faithful in any temporal matter have to be guided by a Christian conscience, as section 36, which is dedicated to participation in Christ’s royal office, makes clear.[21] This participation involves two aspects: knowledge and respect for the laws proper to each sector of temporal reality, in which the laity have the same responsibility and freedom as any other citizen; and the ordering of these realities to the glory of God, which requires fulfilling the demands of justice and charity and healing the effects of sin. Both the lay faithful’s participation the royal office as well as their participation in the priestly one entail the characteristic that defines the lay person as such: seularity.[22]

The seularity of the lay faithful is described in this part of the Constitution in close relationship with their participation in Christ’s triple office—royal, prophetic, and priestly. “The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering
them according to the plan of God.”[23] The laity exercise the *munus regale* in their own manner: “They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.”[24] The reference to the spirit of the Gospel, the sanctification of the world, and the image of leaven, call to mind the *munus sanctificandi* that the laity exercise as a result of their reception of the sacraments[25]—not only in the sphere of worship, but also in the totality of their existence. “It is through the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation.”[26] A reference to the prophetic office appears after this. “In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity.”[27] Thus the participation of the laity in Christ triple office is specified by secularity, just as that of the pastors is define by the ministry they receive with holy orders.

The brief affirmation in LG 31—“What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature”—is expanded in number 15 of *Christifideles Laici*. There a distinction is made between the secular dimension that corresponds to the Church (and, consequently to all of its members) in virtue of its mission, and the secular nature that specifically characterizes the lay faithful.[28] This secular nature is an ecclesiological reality and not a mere sociological datum: “The world thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation.” We could say that the world is the place where Christians exercise their royal priesthood. “God... has handed over the world to women and men, so that they may participate in the work of creation, free creation from the influence of sin, and sanctify themselves in marriage or the celibate life, in a family, in a profession, and in the various activities of society.”[29]

This task can only be carried out from the Christian newness that stems from baptism and from the life of Christ received in the other sacraments: “The lay faithful’s position in the Church, then, comes to be fundamentally defined by their newness in Christian life and distinguished by their secular character.”[30] In short, the tie between participation in Christ’s triple office, in his priesthood, understood now in a broad sense, and secularity shows that the sacred and the profane should not be seen as
two water-tight compartments that fail to communicate with each other. As Illanes has shown: “because Christ is the plenitude—and therefore also the plenitude of the priesthood—every Christian, each Christian, is constituted a priest, has access to God knowing that the sacrifice of his own life will be considered as a pleasing offering and well accepted.... All merely external worship, every attempt to offer God something distinct from our very life is lacking in meaning.”[31]

In this relationship between priesthood and secularity, between the priestly office and the royal office, the Eucharist plays a central role. If the root of the common priesthood is found in baptism, it is in the Eucharist where the existential and the sacramental worship converge. The liturgy is the “summit toward which all the activity of the Church is directed and the font from which all her power flows;”[32] the Eucharist is the “fount and apex of the whole Christian life,”[33] which “contains all of the spiritual good of the Church, that is to say Christ himself, our Pasch and the Bread of Life, which gives life to mankind through the action of the Holy Spirit.”[34] Number 10 of Lumen Gentium, already cited, highlights the fact that “the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist.”

The encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia offers valuable suggestions in this regard. The Eucharist is a sacrifice in the proper and strict sense: the self-giving of the Son to the Father given in turn by the Son to the Church. “Christ has also made his own the spiritual sacrifice of the Church, which is called to offer herself in union with the sacrifice of Christ.”[35] This offering brings with it a commitment to transform one’s own life: “Proclaiming the death of the Lord ‘until he comes’ (1 Cor 11:26) entails that all who take part in the Eucharist be committed to changing their lives and making them in a certain way completely Eucharistic.”[36] Linked to the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist, this also entails the transformation of the historical circumstances a Christian is called to live in: “A significant consequence of the eschatological tension inherent in the Eucharist is also the fact that it spurs us on our journey through history and plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us.”[37] Thus the Christian’s life becomes a sacrament, a sign and instrument of Christ’s presence and his salvation: it is leaven and light.[38]
The Eucharist is the source from which Christ’s life flows, which empowers Christians to direct temporal realities to God, and the center towards which temporal activities are directed so that they acquire the value of sacrifice, of existential worship.

2. An approach to the theological concept of work

We now turn to the consideration of the theological meaning of the term “work” in the writings of St. Josemaría. This term is linked in his teachings to other concepts of great theological depth, including vocation, the world, and secularity. At times “work” is used to designate the specific reality of professional work; at other times, however, it serves to combine in a single word all that is included in the lay Christian’s insertion in the world: the totality of circumstances and obligations that determine his or her secularity and that are the path and matter for one’s spiritual life.

As a point of departure I want to consider some words that St. Josemaría, citing St. Paul, proposed as a “motto” for our Christian life:

“It is understandable that the Apostle should write: ‘All things are yours, you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s.’ We have here an ascending movement that the Holy Spirit, infused in our hearts, wants to call forth from this world, upwards from the earth to the glory of the Lord. And to make it clear that in that movement everything is included, even what seems most commonplace, St. Paul also wrote: ‘in eating, in drinking, do everything as for God’s glory.’” We see reflected here the teaching in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: creation “did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator. The universe was created ‘in a state of journeying (in statu viae ) toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained.”

A deep solidarity exists between the world’s destiny and mankind’s destiny. With our fall, the world suffered the consequences of sin, made subject to sin and vanity. Only through the unity between the creative and redemptive plan of God, which is grasped by faith, is the Christian value of the world fully illuminated. Otherwise it is undervalued as a simple background to mankind’s life or even diminished in its goodness by considering only its dark side (the world as one of the three temptations, the world as subject to sin and vanity). The full Christian valuation of the
world consists in realizing that creation, even as it is now after sin, has not only not lost its original goodness but calls for the action of the children of God to free it from its servitude to sin, while awaiting its eschatological fullness at the end of time.[42]

The Christian is called to redirect the world to the glory of God: “Work is man's original vocation. It is a blessing from God, and those who consider it a punishment are sadly mistaken. The Lord, who is the best of fathers, placed the first man in Paradise ut operaretur (Gen 2:15), so that he would work.”[43] In a parallel text he insists: “Make no mistake about it. Man's duty to work is not a consequence of original sin, nor is it just a discovery of modern times. It is an indispensable means that God has entrusted to us here on this earth. It is meant to fill out our days and make us sharers in God’s creative power. It enables us to earn our living and, at the same time, to reap ‘the fruits of eternal life’, for ‘man is born to work as the birds are born to fly’ (Job 5:7 [Vulg.]).”[44] Work is thus a participation in God’s creative power, with both a human and supernatural aim. Human because by it we gain our living and build up the earthly city; supernatural because it brings us the fruit of eternal life, and contributes to the offering of the world to God.[45]

It is through work that men and women insert all noble human activity into the “return” of the world to God, made possible by the redemption: “Any job, no matter how hidden, no matter how insignificant, when offered to the Lord, is charged with the strength of God’s life!”[46] Christ took on the human condition in its fullness, including work,[47] which thus acquires redemptive value: all of Christ’s actions are redemptive. Christians, when they carry out their work with “human perfection (professional competence) and with Christian perfection (for love of God’s Will and as a service to mankind),”[48] help to free creation, which is good in its deepest being because it comes from God’s hands, from its subjection to sin. By revealing the divine dimension hidden in all human realities, even the most ordinary ones, these realities recover the “noble and original meaning” that they received with creation and which has been obscured by sin.[49] “Human work done in this manner... helps to shape the world in a Christian way. The world’s divine dimension [50] is made more visible and our human labor is thus incorporated into the marvelous 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.*[51]

Thus it is clear that the world in its present state possesses a vocational value for Christians. That is to say, the specific circumstances of every man and woman’s life, all that pertains to their life in the world, can constitute and in fact constitutes for the majority of Christians the matter for their Christian life, that is, for their sanctification.[52] It is not sufficient, nor even correct, to affirm that Christians who live in the middle of the world can sanctify themselves in spite of their circumstances; rather we should say that it is precisely through those circumstances that they should strive for sanctity.[53] In other words, all the circumstances of a person’s life in society (condensed at times into one word: work) are a path and means for one’s Christian life.

Work is thus converted into the place of one’s calling by God.[54] “You must understand now, more clearly, that 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.”[55] The true place of the Christian life of the lay faithful is ordinary life.[56] Properly speaking there are no realities that are exclusively “profane” after Christ took on human flesh.[57] “Christ has gone up to heaven, but he has given to all honest human things a specific capacity to be redeemed.”[58]

The lay faithful’s call or vocation entails a mission, that of contributing to the restoration of all things in Christ: “God is urging the Church to fulfill this task, the task of making the entire world Christian from within, showing that Christ has redeemed all mankind.”[59] All of this is related to a divine light that St. Josemaría received on August 7, 1931.[60] “At the very moment when I elevated the Sacred Host, without losing the necessary recollection, without becoming distracted (for I had just made, mentally, the Offering to the Merciful Love), there came to my mind, with extraordinary force and clarity, that passage of Scripture, ‘Et ego, si exaltatus fuiero a terra, omnia traham ad me ipsum’ [Jn 12:32]. (Ordinarily, before the supernatural, I feel afraid. Later comes the ‘Do not be afraid, it is I.’) And I understood that there would be men and women of God who will lift the
cross, with the teachings of Christ, to the pinnacle of all human activities... And I saw our Lord triumph, attracting to himself all things.”[61] Professor Pedro Rodriguez sums up what the Founder of Opus Dei saw that day with an incisive phrase: “He understood the salvific meaning of Christian secularity and, consequently, the path to sanctify it.”[62] The Founder understood that human work, every ordinary situation of the Christian faithful, is part of the redemption, and is a means by which Christ is leading creation back purified to the heart of God.[63].

Placing the cross at the pinnacle,[64] at the summit of all human activities, at the center of secular life, has nothing to do with exterior signs, with a “confessional” state, with nostalgia for past times. The “summit” where the cross of Christ should be raised is the hearts of men and women and not, at least primarily, specific institutions or professions: “a Christian has a full right to live in the world. If he lets Christ live and reign in his heart, he will feel—quite noticeably—the saving effectiveness of our Lord in everything he does. It does not matter what his occupation is, whether his social status is ‘high’ or ‘low’; for what appears to us to be an important achievement can be very low in God’s sight; and what we call low or modest can in Christian terms be a summit of holiness and service.”[65]

Placing Christ at the summit of all human activities requires above all that Christians allow Christ to live in them: that each be *alter Christus, ipse Christus*. To understand this adequately, we need to return to the topic of the Christian’s participation in the priesthood of Christ, which is the focus of the third and final section of this study.

3. With a priestly soul and a lay mentality

The triumph of Christ, which will be fully seen only at the end of the world, is already a reality after his death and resurrection. As a result, placing Christ at the summit of all human activities is closely related to participation in the Eucharist. This relationship between creation, work and the Eucharist is beautifully expressed by the liturgy in the formula of the Offertory of the Mass where, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, “we give thanks to the Creator for bread and wine, fruit of the ‘work of human hands,’ but above all as ‘fruit of the earth’ and ‘of the vine’—gifts of the Creator.”[66] The fruit of the earth and the work of
humanity are converted into Christ himself and thus work becomes a Mass. As St. Josemaría said: “In the Holy Sacrifice of the altar, the priest takes up the Body of our God, and the Chalice containing his Blood, and raises them above all the things of the earth, saying: Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso, et in Ipso —through My Love, with My Love, in My Love! Unite yourself to the action of the priest. Or rather, make that act of the priest a part of your life.”

St. Josemaría liked to refer to the common priesthood of the faithful, as a reality imbuing one’s entire life, by the expression priestly soul. Priestly soul means to live the “holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” This priesthood is exercised to the extent that one’s life is united to the root of grace: “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.” The fount of all grace is the Paschal mystery, at times called simply “the Cross,” the liturgical memorial of which is the Holy Mass. This is why St. Josemaría calls the Mass the center and root of the Christian life: the center toward which all one’s actions converge and the root from which they draw the salvific strength contained in the Paschal mystery.

Thus one’s entire day should be converted into an act of worship, made up of prayer, work, family life and social relationships: “Each of you, in that union of contemplative souls which is your day, in some way says ‘his Mass,’ which lasts twenty-four hours in expectation of the Mass to follow, which will last another twenty-four hours, and so on until the end of our life.” As Derville has written: “Worship and work form a single reality: Escrivá speaks of a Mass that last twenty-four hours! The joining of wills at the altar of work is the glorification of God and of man, as occurred on the Cross.”

The matter of the sacrifice that the Christian offers in union with the sole victim, Christ, is one’s own life. The Christian therefore, incorporated in Christ and sharing in the one salvific sacrifice, that of the Cross, is both priest and victim; the offerer of an offering that is not something exterior but his or her own life. In this sense the Mass is spoken of as “our
It is not a ceremony at which one is an observer, but an encounter in which the one participating receives the gift that Christ makes of himself and is thus committed to returning to him the gift of one’s own life.

The use of the term “altar” in this context needs some clarification. “Everyone in the Work has a priestly soul: altare Dei est cor nostrum (St. Gregory the Great, Moral, 25, 7, 15); our heart is an altar of God.” On this “altar” we offer our Mass, which lasts the entire day. Our everyday, ordinary life thus becomes a place of worship: “Serve him not only at the altar, but in the whole world that is an altar for us.”

Here we encounter an apparent paradox. On the one hand St. Josemaría insists that in the Mass we find all that our Lord expects of a Christian: “We may have asked ourselves, at one time or another, how we can correspond to the greatness of God’s love. We may have wanted to see a program for Christian living clearly explained. The answer is easy, and it is within reach of all the faithful: to participate lovingly in the holy Mass, to learn to deepen our personal relationship with God in the sacrifice that summarizes all that Christ asks of us.” On the other hand, he says with equal force that the “church” is not the place par excellence for our Christian life. “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... 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. Reflect for a moment on the setting of our Eucharist, of our act of thanksgiving. We find ourselves in a unique temple. We might say that the nave is the university campus; the altarpiece, the university library. Over there, the machinery for constructing new buildings; above us, the sky of Navarre... Surely this confirms in your minds, in a tangible and unforgettable way, the fact that everyday life is the true setting for your lives as Christians. 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.”

The paradox, as I just said, is merely an apparent one. In reality, it is precisely by participating in the holy Mass that Christians discovers the true value of the created world, whose care is entrusted to them: the real
possibility of sanctifying it and sanctifying themselves in it. This possibility is closely tied to the exercise of their common priesthood, with their priestly soul. The founder of the Work, whenever he employed the expression priestly soul, usually added “and a lay mentality,” in order to emphasize that the exercise of their royal priesthood does not separate Christians from their responsibility to build up the earthly city.

A “lay mentality” includes a number of characteristics: love for the world, freedom, responsibility, professional preparation and competence. “A man who knows that the world, and not just the church, is the place where he finds Christ, loves that world. He endeavors to become properly formed, intellectually and professionally. He makes up his own mind with complete freedom about the problems of the environment in which he moves, and then he makes his own decisions. Being the decisions of a Christian, they result from personal reflection, in which he endeavors, in all humility, to grasp the Will of God in both the unimportant and the important events of his life.”[83]

As Jose Luis Illanes has stressed, both attitudes—priestly soul and lay mentality—and the ensemble of dispositions that make them up, should be harmoniously blended. Giving primacy to one dimension in detriment to the other will lead either to clericalism or laicism. In contrast, “the union of both gives rise to a balanced Christian outlook: the eagerness to make Christ present in all human activities, which St. Josemaría perceived with special clarity on August 7, 1931; seeing the need to bring the world to God from within the world itself, to which Christians are called in virtue of their royal priesthood.”[84]


[2] “A Christian knows that he is grafted onto Christ through baptism. He is empowered to fight for Christ through confirmation, called to act in the world sharing the royal, prophetic, and priestly role of Christ. He has become one and the same thing with Christ through the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and love. And so, like Christ, he has to live for other men, loving each and every one around him and indeed all humanity” (Christ Is Passing By, no. 106).
This expression has a certain ambiguity, for it can designate both the triple office of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling as a whole, as well as more specifically the munus sanctificandi (role or office of sanctifying). If I have used the term “priestly office” it is precisely to avoid limiting myself to the administration of the sacraments in referring to that office. Although this is its essential content in the case of the ordained ministers, the common priesthood, distinct from the ministerial not only in degree but also essentially, can be defined by its relation not only to participation in worship but also by the connection that such participation has with the munus regale (office of ruling). This is the perspective that will be explored in these pages.


Ibid., pp. 22-23.


“Le triple office est une sublime réalité. Sa participation par les fideles n’est point une usurpation ou un rêve de l’imagination. C’est une vérité catholique enseignée par les Pères, les théologiens, le Catéchisme du concile de Trente, universellement utilise par les diverses liturgies” (Dabin, ibid., p. 39).

“The participation by the faithful in the munera of Christ is one of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council that constitutes an important magisterial pronouncement by reason of its beneficial effects on the life of the Church. The Conciliar declaration on this subject will, in addition, be the first time that the doctrine of the munera in the faithful is set forth by the Magisterium” (J. F. Quingles, *The common priesthood and the participation of the faithful in the Tria Munera of Christ*, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome, 2003, p. 7).


[13] “Faire ainsi de ma journée comme une messe en action, continuant, s’il se peut, la saint messe quotidiennement entendue et pratiquée, ce devrait être la vie normale de tout Chrétien” (Mugnier, Roi, Prophet, Prêtre avec le Christ, p. 215).

[14] “The holiness produced by the sacraments is meant to give us the strength needed to Christianize our entire life” (Philips, El laicado en la época del Concilio [The laity in the time of the Council], p. 85).

[15] The key documents for considering the Magisterium’s teaching on the participation by the laity in the tria munera Christi are the following: Lumen Gentium (nos. 10-11, 31 and 34-36), Apostolicam Actuositatem (no. 2), Christifideles Laici (nos. 14-17), Catechism of the Catholic Church (nos. 901-913).

[16] Vatican Council II, Apostolic Constitution Lumen Gentium, no. 10. From hereon we will use the accepted abbreviation: LG, 10.

[17] In these ideas about existential and sacramental worship, I am indebted to Professor Pedro Rodríguez: “This was to be the structure of worship in the tempus ecclesiae [time of the Church]. If in the tempus Christi worship of God and the sanctification of mankind is expressed in a definitive way in the acta et passa Christi in carne, which were existential, not ritual or sacred; in the tempus Ecclesiae, worship and sanctification would be the permanent presence in history of that surrender to God which Christ carried out once and for all—the ephapax of Christ (cf. Heb 7:27)—a presence which is given through certain sacred realities, certain sacred rites of Christological origin which are the sacraments.... The Christian who in the Eucharist and the sacraments receives the sanctifying and adoring efficacy of the existential worship of Christ, should also make of his or her own life a ‘priesthood,’ a ‘victim,’ and an existential ‘sacrifice’ in the midst of the world.” (The Sacred and the Eucharistic mystery according
to St. Thomas, a conference given at the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas, June 25, 2005, pp. 12 and 14 of the manuscript).

[18] LG, 11 shows how the priesthood is actualized in the different sacraments: “It is through the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation.”


[21] “Because of the very economy of salvation the faithful should learn how to distinguish carefully between those rights and duties which are theirs as members of the Church, and those which they have as members of human society. Let them strive to reconcile the two, remembering that in every temporal affair they must be guided by a Christian conscience, since even in secular business there is no human activity that can be withdrawn from God’s dominion” (LG, 31). This paragraph is cited in no. 912 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which describes the participation of the laity in Christ’s kingly mission.

[22] “What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature” (LG, 31).

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] This aspect is clarified at the end of number 14 of Christifideles Laici: “The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist.”

[26] The teaching the Catechism of the Catholic Church in connection with the participation by the laity in Christ’s priestly mission is significant here: “Parents share in the office of sanctifying by leading a conjugal life in the Christian spirit.” (no. 902; this is a quote from canon 835 of CIC). Thus the priestly mission, while presupposing the sacraments, does not
limit itself to their reception but extends to what has been referred to as existential worship.

[27] LG, 31. Also relevant here is number 2 of the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: “But the laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world. They exercise the apostolate in fact by their activity directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men and to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel. In this way, their temporal activity openly bears witness to Christ and promotes the salvation of men. Since the laity, in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardor of the spirit of Christ.”

[28] “Certainly all the members of the Church are sharers in this secular dimension but in different ways. In particular the sharing of the lay faithful has its own manner of realization and function, which, according to the Council, is ‘properly and particularly’ theirs. Such a manner is designated with the expression ‘secular character’” (*Christifideles Laici*, 15).

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.


[33] LG, 11.

[34] Vatican Council II, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.


[37] Ibid.

Conversations with St. Josemaría Escrivá, 70 (cited as Conversations below).

Conversations, 115.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 302.

Cf. Rom 8:19-23.

St. Josemaría, Furrow, 482.

St. Josemaría, Friends of God, 57.

“Th斯 means it must be a job which contributes effectively towards both the building up of the earthly city—and therefore it must be done competently and in a spirit of service; and to the consecration of the world—and in this regard it must both sanctify and be sanctified” (Conversations, 70).

St. Josemaría, The Forge, 49.

Meditation on the years of Christ’s work in Nazareth was a constant in the writings and in the preaching of St. Josemaría. I cite, as an illustration, two texts: “Of Jesus’ thirty-three years, thirty were spent in silence and obscurity, submission and work.” (Furrow, 485). “I don’t understand how you can call yourself a Christian and lead such an idle, useless life. Have you forgotten Christ’s life of toil?” (The Way, 356).

Conversations, 10.

“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” (Conversations, 114).

The same idea is sometimes expressed in a poetic way: “It is very much our mission to transform the prose of this life into poetry, into heroic verse” (Furrow, 500).

Conversations, 114.

“The Christian does not sanctify him or her self in spite of the fulfillment of the mission that he or she has received during their earthly
life, but precisely through the fulfillment of that mission. And this is valid both for missions or tasks which are directly ecclesiastical or formally religious, as well as for every human task, including those that are purely temporal in content" (Jose L. Illanes, *Ante Dios y en el mundo: Apuntes para una teologia del trabajo*, Pamplona 1997, p. 33). “One's human vocation is a part, and an important part, of one's divine vocation” (St. Josemaría Letter of October 15, 1948; cited by Illanes, *La vocación cristiana*, Madrid 1975, p. 35).


[54] “What amazes you seems natural to me—that God has sought you out in the practice of your profession! That is how he sought the first, Peter and Andrew, James and John, beside their nets, and Matthew, sitting in the custom-house. And—wonder of wonders!—Paul, in his eagerness to destroy the seed of the Christians” (*The Way*, 799).


[57] Cf. *Christ is Passing By*, 88.

[58] Ibid., 120.

[59] *Conversations*, 112.


In a letter referring to that same experience, the founder of Opus Dei spoke of placing Christ at the “summit and in the heart of all human activities” (cf. Letter March 11, 1940, 13 in Vazquez de Prada, op. cit., p. 290; cf. also The Forge, 678).

Christ Is Passing By, 183.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1333.

Cf. Derville, La liturgia del trabajo, p. 852. As St. Josemaría himself relates: “After so many years, that priest made a marvelous discovery: he came to understand that the Holy Mass is real work: operatio Dei, God’s work. That day, when he celebrated Mass, he experienced pain, joy, and tiredness. He felt in his flesh the exhaustion of a divine task” (The Way of the Cross, Station XI, 4).

The Forge, 541.

“The expression priestly soul alludes... to the repercussion at an existential and spiritual level of that ontological-sacramental reality which is the royal priesthood” (Illanes, Existencia cristiana y mundo, Eunsa, Pamplona 2003, p. 292).

Cf. Furrow, 499. This point is found the chapter entitled “Work.” A parallel text can be found in Christ Is Passing By, 96: “Through baptism all of us have been made priests of our lives, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

The Forge, 369.

“Because of the Blessed Trinity’s love for man, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist brings all graces to the Church and to mankind” (Christ Is Passing By, 86).

“To be a Christian, and in particular to be a priest—bearing in mind, too, that all of us who are baptized share in Christ's priesthood— is to be at all times on the Cross” (The Forge, 882).

“The holy Mass brings us face to face with one of the central mysteries of our faith, because it is the gift of the Blessed Trinity to the Church. It is because of this that we can consider the Mass as the center and the source of a Christian’s spiritual life. It is the aim of all the
sacraments. The life of grace, into which we are brought by baptism, and which is increased and strengthened by confirmation, grows to its fullness in the Mass” (*Christ Is Passing By*, 87).

[75] “Keep struggling, so that the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar really becomes the centre and the root of your interior life, and so your whole day will turn into an act of worship—an extension of the Mass you have attended and a preparation for the next. Your whole day will then be an act of worship that overflows in aspirations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the offering up of your professional work and your family life” (*The Forge*, 69).


[82] *Conversations*, 113.


Torna ai contenuti