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
Friendship and Communion

The friendship Christ offers all men and women is a sign of God’s unconditional trust in us. At a distance of twenty centuries, amid our daily life, Jesus tells us everything he knows about the Father in order to draw us into his friendship. But this divine initiative requires our own cooperation, since “we respond to this friendship by uniting our will to His,” as Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz tells us in the pastoral letter included in this issue of Romana.

True friends live in communion. Deep in their hearts they want the same things, and desire each other’s happiness. Sometimes they don’t even need to use words to understand each other; it has even been said that laughing at the same things is one of the best signs of shared intimacy. When our communion is with God, rather than a strenuous effort to fulfill certain requirements (something that doesn’t happen between friends), it means spending time with each other, accompanying each other.

A good example here is St. John, the fourth evangelist. He let Jesus wash his feet, and leaned trustingly on his chest during the Last Supper. And at the end (perhaps without understanding what was happening), he refused to desert his best Friend and accompanied him at the foot of the Cross. The beloved disciple allowed himself to be transformed by Christ, and God gradually removed the dust from his heart.

Jesus at that Last Supper shows us that the secret of friendship is to remain with him. “As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me” (Jn 15:4). Jesus wants to use our heart to love others. Without him we cannot be friends to the end.

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To my Brother Priests

Dear Brothers,

A hundred and sixty years have passed since the death of the holy Curé of Ars, whom Pope Pius XI proposed as the patron of parish priests throughout the world.[1] On this, his feast day, I write this letter not only to parish priests but to all of you, my brother priests, who have quietly “left all behind” in order to immerse yourselves in the daily life of your communities. Like the Curé of Ars, you serve “in the trenches,” bearing the burden of the day and the heat (cf. Mt20:12), confronting an endless variety of situations in your effort to care for and accompany God’s people. I want to say a word to each of you who, often without fanfare and at personal cost, amid weariness, infirmity and sorrow, carry out your mission of service to God and to your people. Despite the hardships of the journey, you are writing the finest pages of the priestly life.

Some time ago, I shared with the Italian bishops my worry that, in more than a few places, our priests feel themselves attacked and blamed for crimes they did not commit. I mentioned that priests need to find in their bishop an older brother and a father who reassures them in these difficult times, encouraging and supporting them along the way.[2]

As an older brother and a father, I too would like in this letter to thank you in the name of the holy and faithful People of God for all that you do for them, and to encourage you never to forget the words that the Lord spoke with great love to us on the day of our ordination. Those words are the source of our joy: “I no longer call you servants… I call you friends” (Jn 15:15).[3]

PAIN
“I have seen the suffering of my people” (*Ex 3:7*)

In these years, we have become more attentive to the cry, often silent and suppressed, of our brothers and sisters who were victims of the abuse of power, the abuse of conscience and sexual abuse on the part of ordained ministers. This has been a time of great suffering in the lives of those who experienced such abuse, but also in the lives of their families and of the entire People of God.

As you know, we are firmly committed to carrying out the reforms needed to encourage from the outset a culture of pastoral care, so that the culture of abuse will have no room to develop, much less continue. This task is neither quick nor easy: it demands commitment on the part of all. If in the past, omission may itself have been a kind of response, today we desire conversion, transparency, sincerity and solidarity with victims to become our concrete way of moving forward. This in turn will help make us all the more attentive to every form of human suffering.[4]

This pain has also affected priests. I have seen it in the course of my pastoral visits in my own diocese and elsewhere, in my meetings and personal conversations with priests. Many have shared with me their outrage at what happened and their frustration that “for all their hard work, they have to face the damage that was done, the suspicion and uncertainty to which it has given rise, and the doubts, fears and disheartenment felt by more than a few.”[5] I have received many letters from priests expressing those feelings. At the same time, I am comforted by my meetings with pastors who recognize and share the pain and suffering of the victims and of the People of God, and have tried to find words and actions capable of inspiring hope.

Without denying or dismissing the harm caused by some of our brothers, it would be unfair not to express our gratitude to all those priests who faithfully and generously spend their lives in the service of others (cf. *2 Cor 12:15*). They embody a spiritual fatherhood capable of weeping with those who weep. Countless priests make of their lives a work of mercy in areas or situations that are often hostile, isolated or ignored, even at the risk of their lives. I acknowledge and appreciate your courageous and steadfast example; in these times of turbulence, shame and pain, you demonstrate
that you have joyfully put your lives on the line for the sake of the Gospel.[6]

I am convinced that, to the extent that we remain faithful to God’s will, these present times of ecclesial purification will make us more joyful and humble, and prove, in the not distant future, very fruitful. “Let us not grow discouraged! The Lord is purifying his Bride and converting all of us to himself. He is letting us be put to the test in order to make us realize that without him we are simply dust. He is rescuing us from hypocrisy, from the spirituality of appearances. He is breathing forth his Spirit in order to restore the beauty of his Bride, caught in adultery. We can benefit from rereading the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel. It is the history of the Church, and each of us can say it is our history too. In the end, through your sense of shame, you will continue to act as a shepherd. Our humble repentance, expressed in silent tears before these atrocious sins and the unfathomable grandeur of God’s forgiveness, is the beginning of a renewal of our holiness.”[7]

GRATITUDE

“I do not cease to give thanks for you” (Eph 1:16).

Vocation, more than our own choice, is a response to the Lord’s unmerited call. We do well to return constantly to those passages of the Gospel where we see Jesus praying, choosing and calling others “to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message” (Mk 3:14).

Here I think of a great master of the priestly life in my own country, Father Lucio Gera. Speaking to a group of priests at a turbulent time in Latin America, he told them: “Always, but especially in times of trial, we need to return to those luminous moments when we experienced the Lord’s call to devote our lives to his service.” I myself like to call this “the deuteronomic memory of our vocation”; it makes each of us go back “to that blazing light with which God’s grace touched me at the start of the journey. From that flame, I can light a fire for today and every day, and bring heat and light to my brothers and sisters. That flame ignites a humble joy, a joy which sorrow and distress cannot dismay, a good and gentle joy.”[8]
One day, each of us spoke up and said “yes”, a “yes” born and developed in the heart of the Christian community thanks to those “saints next door” who showed us by their simple faith that it was worthwhile committing ourselves completely to the Lord and his kingdom. A “yes” whose implications were so momentous that often we find it hard to imagine all the goodness that it continues to produce. How beautiful it is when an elderly priest sees or is visited by those children – now adults – whom he baptized long ago and who now gratefully introduce a family of their own! At times like this, we realize that we were anointed to anoint others, and that God’s anointing never disappoints. I am led to say with the Apostle: “I do not cease to give thanks for you” (cf. Eph 1:16) and for all the good that you have done.

Amid trials, weakness and the consciousness of our limitations, “the worst temptation of all is to keep brooding over our troubles” for then we lose our perspective, our good judgement and our courage. At those times, it is important – I would even say crucial – to cherish the memory of the Lord’s presence in our lives and his merciful gaze, which inspired us to put our lives on the line for him and for his People. And to find the strength to persevere and, with the Psalmist, to raise our own song of praise, “for his mercy endures forever” (Ps 136).

Gratitude is always a powerful weapon. Only if we are able to contemplate and feel genuine gratitude for all those ways we have experienced God’s love, generosity, solidarity and trust, as well as his forgiveness, patience, forbearance and compassion, will we allow the Spirit to grant us the freshness that can renew (and not simply patch up) our life and mission. Like Peter on the morning of the miraculous draught of fishes, may we let the recognition of all the blessings we have received awaken in us the amazement and gratitude that can enable us to say: “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man” (Lk 5:8). Only then to hear the Lord repeat his summons: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be fishers of men” (Lk 5:10). “For his mercy endures forever.”

Dear brother priests, I thank you for your fidelity to the commitments you have made. It is a sign that, in a society and culture that glorifies the ephemeral, there are still people unafraid to make lifelong promises. In effect, we show that we continue to believe in God, who has never broken
his covenant, despite our having broken it countless times. In this way, we celebrate the fidelity of God, who continues to trust us, to believe in us and to count on us, for all our sins and failings, and who invites us to be faithful in turn. Realizing that we hold this treasure in earthen vessels (cf. 2 Cor 4:7), we know that the Lord triumphs through weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12:9). He continues to sustain us and to renew his call, repaying us a hundredfold (cf. Mk 10:29-30). “For his mercy endures forever.”

Thank you for the joy with which you have offered your lives, revealing a heart that over the years has refused to become closed and bitter, but has grown daily in love for God and his people. A heart that, like good wine, has not turned sour but become richer with age. “For his mercy endures forever.”

Thank you for working to strengthen the bonds of fraternity and friendship with your brother priests and your bishop, providing one another with support and encouragement, caring for those who are ill, seeking out those who keep apart, visiting the elderly and drawing from their wisdom, sharing with one another and learning to laugh and cry together. How much we need this! But thank you too for your faithfulness and perseverance in undertaking difficult missions, or for those times when you have had to call a brother priest to order. “For his mercy endures forever.”

Thank you for your witness of persistence and patient endurance (hypomone) in pastoral ministry. Often, with the parrhesia of the shepherd,[11] we find ourselves arguing with the Lord in prayer, as Moses did in courageously interceding for the people (cf. Num 14:13-19; Ex 32:30-32; Dt 9:18-21). “For his mercy endures forever.”

Thank you for celebrating the Eucharist each day and for being merciful shepherds in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, neither rigorous nor lax, but deeply concerned for your people and accompanying them on their journey of conversion to the new life that the Lord bestows on us all. We know that on the ladder of mercy we can descend to the depths of our human condition – including weakness and sin – and at the same time experience the heights of divine perfection: “Be merciful as the Father is merciful.”[12] In this way, we are “capable of warming people’s hearts, walking at their side in the dark, talking with them and even entering into
their night and their darkness, without losing our way.”[13] “For his mercy endures forever.”

Thank you for anointing and fervently proclaiming to all, “in season and out of season” (cf. 2 Tim 4:2) the Gospel of Jesus Christ, probing the heart of your community “in order to discover where its desire for God is alive and ardent, as well as where that dialogue, once loving, has been thwarted and is now barren.”[14] “For his mercy endures forever.”

Thank you for the times when, with great emotion, you embraced sinners, healed wounds, warmed hearts and showed the tenderness and compassion of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-27). Nothing is more necessary than this: accessibility, closeness, readiness to draw near to the flesh of our suffering brothers and sisters. How powerful is the example of a priest who makes himself present and does not flee the wounds of his brothers and sisters?[15] It mirrors the heart of a shepherd who has developed a spiritual taste for being one with his people,[16] a pastor who never forgets that he has come from them and that by serving them he will find and express his most pure and complete identity. This in turn will lead to adopting a simple and austere way of life, rejecting privileges that have nothing to do with the Gospel. “For his mercy endures forever.”

Finally, let us give thanks for the holiness of the faithful People of God, whom we are called to shepherd and through whom the Lord also shepherds and cares for us. He blesses us with the gift of contemplating that faithful People “in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance, I see the holiness of the Church militant.”[17] Let us be grateful for each of them, and in their witness find support and encouragement. “For his mercy endures forever.”

ENCOURAGEMENT

“I want [your] hearts to be encouraged” (Col2:2)

My second great desire is, in the words of Saint Paul, to offer encouragement as we strive to renew our priestly spirit, which is above all the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Faced with painful experiences, all of us need to be comforted and encouraged. The mission to
which we are called does not exempt us from suffering, pain and even misunderstanding.[18] Rather, it requires us to face them squarely and to accept them, so that the Lord can transform them and conform us more closely to himself. “Ultimately, the lack of a heartfelt and prayerful acknowledgment of our limitations prevents grace from working more effectively within us, for no room is left for bringing about the potential good that is part of a sincere and genuine journey of growth.”[19]

One good way of testing our hearts as pastors is to ask how we confront suffering. We can often act like the Levite or the priest in the parable, stepping aside and ignoring the injured man (cf. Lk 10:31-32). Or we can draw near in the wrong way, viewing situations in the abstract and taking refuge in commonplaces, such as: “That’s life…”, or “Nothing can be done”. In this way, we yield to an uneasy fatalism. Or else we can draw near with a kind of aloofness that brings only isolation and exclusion. “Like the prophet Jonah, we are constantly tempted to flee to a safe haven. It can have many names: individualism, spiritualism, living in a little world…”[20] Far from making us compassionate, this ends up holding us back from confronting our own wounds, the wounds of others and consequently the wounds of Jesus himself.[21]

Along these same lines, I would mention another subtle and dangerous attitude, which, as Bernanos liked to say, is “the most precious of the devil’s potions.”[22] It is also the most harmful for those of us who would serve the Lord, for it breeds discouragement, desolation and despair.[23] Disappointment with life, with the Church or with ourselves can tempt us to latch onto a sweet sorrow or sadness that the Eastern Fathers called acedia. Cardinal Tomáš Špidlík described it in these terms: “If we are assailed by sadness at life, at the company of others or at our own isolation, it is because we lack faith in God’s providence and his works… Sadness paralyzes our desire to persevere in our work and prayer; it makes us hard to live with… The monastic authors who treated this vice at length call it the worst enemy of the spiritual life.”[24]

All of us are aware of a sadness that can turn into a habit and lead us slowly to accept evil and injustice by quietly telling us: “It has always been like this”. A sadness that stifles every effort at change and conversion by sowing resentment and hostility. “That is no way to live a dignified and
fulfilled life; it is not God’s will for us, nor is it the life of the Spirit, which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ,”[25] to which we have been called. Dear brothers, when that sweet sorrow threatens to take hold of our lives or our communities, without being fearful or troubled, yet with firm resolution, let us together beg the Spirit to “rouse us from our torpor, to free us from our inertia. Let us rethink our usual way of doing things; let us open our eyes and ears, and above all our hearts, so as not to be complacent about things as they are, but unsettled by the living and effective word of the risen Lord.”[26]

Let me repeat: in times of difficulty, we all need God’s consolation and strength, as well as that of our brothers and sisters. All of us can benefit from the touching words that Saint Paul addressed to his communities: “I pray that you may not lose heart over [my] sufferings” (Eph 3:13), and “I want [your] hearts to be encouraged” (Col2:22). In this way, we can carry out the mission that the Lord gives us anew each day: to proclaim “good news of great joy for all the people” (Lk 2:10). Not by presenting intellectual theories or moral axioms about the way things ought to be, but as men who in the midst of pain have been transformed and transfigured by the Lord and, like Job, can exclaim: “I knew you then only by hearsay, but now I have seen you with my own eyes” (Job 42:2). Without this foundational experience, all of our hard work will only lead to frustration and disappointment.

In our own lives, we have seen how “with Christ, joy is constantly born anew.”[27] Although there are different stages in this experience, we know that, despite our frailties and sins, “with a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, God makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and start anew.”[28] That joy is not the fruit of our own thoughts or decisions, but of the confidence born of knowing the enduring truth of Jesus’ words to Peter. At times of uncertainty, remember those words: “I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail” (Lk 22:32). The Lord is the first to pray and fight for you and for me. And he invites us to enter fully into his own prayer. There may well be moments when we too have to enter into “the prayer of Gethsemane, that most human and dramatic of Jesus’ prayers... For there we find supplication, sorrow, anguish and even bewilderment” (Mk 14:33ff.).[29]
We know that it is not easy to stand before the Lord and let his gaze examine our lives, heal our wounded hearts and cleanse our feet of the worldliness accumulated along the way, which now keeps us from moving forward. In prayer, we experience the blessed “insecurity” which reminds us that we are disciples in need of the Lord’s help, and which frees us from the promethean tendency of “those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules.”[30]

Dear brothers, Jesus, more than anyone, is aware of our efforts and our accomplishments, our failures and our mistakes. He is the first to tell us: “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:28-29).

In this prayer, we know that we are never alone. The prayer of a pastor embraces both the Spirit who cries out “Abba, Father!” (cf. Gal 4:6), and the people who have been entrusted to his care. Our mission and identity can be defined by this dialectic.

The prayer of a pastor is nourished and made incarnate in the heart of God’s People. It bears the marks of the sufferings and joys of his people, whom he silently presents to the Lord to be anointed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the hope of a pastor, who with trust and insistence asks the Lord to care for our weakness as individuals and as a people. Yet we should also realize that it is in the prayer of God’s People that the heart of a pastor takes flesh and finds its proper place. This sets us free from looking for quick, easy, ready-made answers; it allows the Lord to be the one – not our own recipes and goals – to point out a path of hope. Let us not forget that at the most difficult times in the life of the earliest community, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, prayer emerged as the true guiding force.

Brothers, let us indeed acknowledge our weaknesses, but also let Jesus transform them and send us forth anew to the mission. Let us never lose the joy of knowing that we are “the sheep of his flock” and that he is our Lord and Shepherd.

For our hearts to be encouraged, we should not neglect the dialectic that determines our identity. First, our relationship with Jesus. Whenever
we turn away from Jesus or neglect our relationship with him, slowly but surely our commitment begins to fade and our lamps lose the oil needed to light up our lives (cf. Mt 25:1-13): “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me... because apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:4-5). In this regard, I would encourage you not to neglect spiritual direction. Look for a brother with whom you can speak, reflect, discuss and discern, sharing with complete trust and openness your journey. A wise brother with whom to share the experience of discipleship. Find him, meet with him and enjoy his guidance, accompaniment and counsel. This is an indispensable aid to carrying out your ministry in obedience to the will of the Father (cf. Heb 10:9) and letting your heart beat with “the mind that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). We can profit from the words of Ecclesiastes: “Two are better than one... One will lift up the other; but woe to the one who is alone and falls, and does not have another to help!” (4:9-10).

The other essential aspect of this dialectic is our relationship to our people. Foster that relationship and expand it. Do not withdraw from your people, your presbyterates and your communities, much less seek refuge in closed and elitist groups. Ultimately, this stifles and poisons the soul. A minister whose “heart is encouraged” is a minister always on the move. In our “going forth”, we walk “sometimes in front, sometimes in the middle and sometimes behind: in front, in order to guide the community; in the middle, in order to encourage and support, and at the back in order to keep it united, so that no one lags too far behind... There is another reason too: because our people have a “nose” for things. They sniff out, discover, new paths to take; they have the sensus fidei (cf. Lumen Gentium, 12)... What could be more beautiful than this?”[31] Jesus himself is the model of this evangelizing option that leads us to the heart of our people. How good it is for us to see him in his attention to every person! The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is nothing else but the culmination of that evangelizing style that marked his entire life.

Dear brother priests, the pain of so many victims, the pain of the people of God and our own personal pain, cannot be for naught. Jesus himself has brought this heavy burden to his cross and he now asks us to be
renewed in our mission of drawing near to those who suffer, of drawing near without embarrassment to human misery, and indeed to make all these experiences our own, as eucharist.[32] Our age, marked by old and new wounds, requires us to be builders of relationships and communion, open, trusting and awaiting in hope the newness that the kingdom of God wishes to bring about even today. For it is a kingdom of forgiven sinners called to bear witness to the Lord’s ever-present compassion. “For his mercy endures forever.”

PRAISE

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord” (Lk 1:46)

How can we speak about gratitude and encouragement without looking to Mary? She, the woman whose heart was pierced (cf. Lk 2:35), teaches us the praise capable of lifting our gaze to the future and restoring hope to the present. Her entire life was contained in her song of praise (cf. Lk 1:46-55). We too are called to sing that song as a promise of future fulfilment.

Whenever I visit a Marian shrine, I like to spend time looking at the Blessed Mother and letting her look at me. I pray for a childlike trust, the trust of the poor and simple who know that their mother is there, and that they have a place in her heart. And in looking at her, to hear once more, like the Indian Juan Diego: “My youngest son, what is the matter? Do not let it disturb your heart. Am I not here, I who have the honor to be your mother?”[33]

To contemplate Mary is “to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her, we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong, who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves.”[34]

Perhaps at times our gaze can begin to harden, or we can feel that the seductive power of apathy or self-pity is about to take root in our heart. Or our sense of being a living and integral part of God’s People begins to weary us, and we feel tempted to a certain elitism. At those times, let us not be afraid to turn to Mary and to take up her song of praise.

Perhaps at times we can feel tempted to withdraw into ourselves and our own affairs, safe from the dusty paths of daily life. Or regrets,
complaints, criticism and sarcasm gain the upper hand and make us lose our desire to keep fighting, hoping and loving. At those times, let us look to Mary so that she can free our gaze of all the “clutter” that prevents us from being attentive and alert, and thus capable of seeing and celebrating Christ alive in the midst of his people. And if we see that we are going astray, or that we are failing in our attempts at conversion, then let us turn to her like a great parish priest from my previous diocese, who was also a poet. He asked her, with something of a smile: “This evening, dear Lady /my promise is sincere; /but just to be sure, don’t forget / to leave the key outside the door.”[35] Our Lady “is the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives. She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain. As mother of all, she is a sign of hope for peoples suffering the birth pangs of justice… As a true mother, she walks at our side, she shares our struggles and she constantly surrounds us with God's love”.[36]

Dear brothers, once more, “I do not cease to give thanks for you” (Eph 1:16), for your commitment and your ministry. For I am confident that “God takes away even the hardest stones against which our hopes and expectations crash: death, sin, fear, worldliness. Human history does not end before a tombstone, because today it encounters the “living stone” (cf. 1 Pet 2:4), the risen Jesus. We, as Church, are built on him, and, even when we grow disheartened and tempted to judge everything in the light of our failures, he comes to make all things new.”[37]

May we allow our gratitude to awaken praise and renewed enthusiasm for our ministry of anointing our brothers and sisters with hope. May we be men whose lives bear witness to the compassion and mercy that Jesus alone can bestow on us.

May the Lord Jesus bless you and the Holy Virgin watch over you. And please, I ask you not to forget to pray for me.

Fraternally,

Francis

Rome, at Saint John Lateran, on 4 August 2019, Memorial of the Holy Curé of Ars
Spiritual fatherhood requires a bishop not to leave his priests as orphans; it can be felt not only in his readiness to open his doors to priests, but also to seek them out in order to care for them and to accompany them.


Cf. Letter to the People of God (20 August 2018).

Meeting with Priests, Religious, Consecrated Persons and Seminarians, Santiago de Chile (16 January 2018).

Cf. Letter to the Pilgrim People of God in Chile (31 May 2018).

Meeting with the Priests of the Diocese of Rome (7 March 2019).

Homily at the Easter Vigil (19 April 2014).

Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exsultate, 7.


Cf. Address to the Parish Priests of Rome (6 March 2014).

Retreat to Priests. First Meditation (2 June 2016).

A. Spadaro, Interview with Pope Francis, in La Civiltà Cattolica 3918 (19 September 2013), p. 462.

Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 137.

Cf. Address to the Parish Priests of Rome (6 March 2014).

Cf. Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 268.

Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exsultate, 7.


Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exsultate, 50.
[20] Ibid., 134.


[26] Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exsultate, 137.

[27] Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 1.

[28] Ibid., 3.


[34] Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 288.


[37] Homily at the Easter Vigil (20 April 2019).

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Apostolic Letter Issued Motu Proprio by Pope Francis Aperuit Illis Instituting "The Sunday of the Word of God" (September 30, 2019)

1. “He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Lk 24:45). This was one of the final acts of the risen Lord before his Ascension. Jesus appeared to the assembled disciples, broke bread with them and opened their minds to the understanding of the sacred Scriptures. To them, amid their fear and bewilderment, he unveiled the meaning of the paschal mystery: that in accordance with the Father’s eternal plan he had to suffer and rise from the dead, in order to bring repentance and the forgiveness of sins (cf. Lk 24:26.46-47). He then promised to send the Holy Spirit, who would give them strength to be witnesses of this saving mystery (cf. Lk 24:49).

The relationship between the Risen Lord, the community of believers and sacred Scripture is essential to our identity as Christians. Without the Lord who opens our minds to them, it is impossible to understand the Scriptures in depth. Yet the contrary is equally true: without the Scriptures, the events of the mission of Jesus and of his Church in this world would remain incomprehensible. Hence, Saint Jerome could rightly claim: “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (Commentary on the Book of Isaiah, Prologue: PL 24,17B).

2. At the conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, I proposed setting aside “a Sunday given over entirely to the word of God, so as to appreciate the inexhaustible riches contained in that constant dialogue between the Lord and his people” (Misericordia et Misera, 7). Devoting a specific Sunday of the liturgical year to the word of God can enable the Church to experience anew how the risen Lord opens up for us the treasury of his word and enables us to proclaim its unfathomable riches before the world. Here, we are reminded of the teaching of Saint Ephrem: “Who is able to understand, Lord, all the richness of even one of your words? There is more that eludes us than what we can understand. We are like the thirsty drinking from a fountain. Your word has as many aspects as the
perspectives of those who study it. The Lord has coloured his word with diverse beauties, so that those who study it can contemplate what stirs them. He has hidden in his word all treasures, so that each of us may find a richness in what he or she contemplates” (Commentary on the Diatessaron, 1, 18).

With this Letter, I wish to respond to the many requests I have received from the people of God that the entire Church celebrate, in unity of purpose, a Sunday of the Word of God. It is now common for the Christian community to set aside moments to reflect on the great importance of the word of God for everyday living. The various local Churches have undertaken a wealth of initiatives to make the sacred Scripture more accessible to believers, to increase their gratitude for so great a gift, and to help them to strive daily to embody and bear witness to its teachings.

The Second Vatican Council gave great impulse to the rediscovery of the word of God, thanks to its Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum, a document that deserves to be read and appropriated ever anew. The Constitution clearly expounds the nature of sacred Scripture, its transmission from generation to generation (Chapter II), its divine inspiration (Chapter III) embracing the Old and New Testaments (Chapters IV and V), and the importance of Scripture for the life of the Church (Chapter VI). To advance this teaching, Pope Benedict XVI convoked an Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2008 on “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church,” and then issued the Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini, whose teaching remains fundamental for our communities.[1] That document emphasizes in particular the performatory character of the Word of God, especially in the context of the liturgy, in which its distinctively sacramental character comes to the fore.[2]

It is fitting, then that the life of our people be constantly marked by this decisive relationship with the living word that the Lord never tires of speaking to his Bride, that she may grow in love and faithful witness.

3. Consequently, I hereby declare that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time is to be devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the word of God. This Sunday of the Word of God will thus be a fitting part of that time of the year when we are encouraged to strengthen our bonds with
the Jewish people and to pray for Christian unity. This is more than a temporal coincidence: the celebration of the Sunday of the Word of God has ecumenical value, since the Scriptures point out, for those who listen, the path to authentic and firm unity.

The various communities will find their own ways to mark this Sunday with a certain solemnity. It is important, however, that in the Eucharistic celebration the sacred text be enthroned, in order to focus the attention of the assembly on the normative value of God’s word. On this Sunday, it would be particularly appropriate to highlight the proclamation of the word of the Lord and to emphasize in the homily the honour that it is due. Bishops could celebrate the Rite of Installation of Lectors or a similar commissioning of readers, in order to bring out the importance of the proclamation of God’s word in the liturgy. In this regard, renewed efforts should be made to provide members of the faithful with the training needed to be genuine proclaimers of the word, as is already the practice in the case of acolytes or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. Pastors can also find ways of giving a Bible, or one of its books, to the entire assembly as a way of showing the importance of learning how to read, appreciate and pray daily with sacred Scripture, especially through the practice of lectio divina.

4. The return of the people of Israel to their homeland after the Babylonian exile was marked by the public reading of the book of the Law. In the book of Nehemiah, the Bible gives us a moving description of that moment. The people assembled in Jerusalem, in the square before the Water Gate, to listen to the Law. They had been scattered in exile, but now they found themselves gathered “as one” around the sacred Scripture (Neh 8:1). The people lent “attentive ears” (Neh 8:3) to the reading of the sacred book, realizing that in its words they would discover the meaning of their lived experience. The reaction to the proclamation of was one of great emotion and tears: “[The Levites] read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, ‘This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep’. For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, ‘Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to him for
whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh 8:8-10).

These words contain a great teaching. The Bible cannot be just the heritage of some, much less a collection of books for the benefit of a privileged few. It belongs above all to those called to hear its message and to recognize themselves in its words. At times, there can be a tendency to monopolize the sacred text by restricting it to certain circles or to select groups. It cannot be that way. The Bible is the book of the Lord’s people, who, in listening to it, move from dispersion and division towards unity. The word of God unites believers and makes them one people.

5. In this unity born of listening, pastors are primarily responsible for explaining sacred Scripture and helping everyone to understand it. Since it is the people’s book, those called to be ministers of the word must feel an urgent need to make it accessible to their community.

The homily, in particular, has a distinctive function, for it possesses “a quasi-sacramental character” (Evangelii Gaudium, 142). Helping people to enter more deeply into the word of God through simple and suitable language will allow priests themselves to discover the “beauty of the images used by the Lord to encourage the practice of the good” (ibid.). This is a pastoral opportunity that should not be wasted!

For many of our faithful, in fact, this is the only opportunity they have to grasp the beauty of God’s word and to see it applied to their daily lives. Consequently, sufficient time must be devoted to the preparation of the homily. A commentary on the sacred readings cannot be improvised. Those of us who are preachers should not give long, pedantic homilies or wander off into unrelated topics. When we take time to pray and meditate on the sacred text, we can speak from the heart and thus reach the hearts of those who hear us, conveying what is essential and capable of bearing fruit. May we never tire of devoting time and prayer to Scripture, so that it may be received “not as a human word but as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thess 2:13).

Catechists, too, in their ministry of helping people to grow in their faith, ought to feel an urgent need for personal renewal through familiarity
6. Before encountering his disciples, gathered behind closed doors, and opening their minds to the understanding of the Scriptures (cf. Lk 24:44-45), the risen Lord appeared to two of them on the road to Emmaus from Jerusalem (cf. Lk 24:13-35). Saint Luke's account notes that this happened on the very day of his resurrection, a Sunday. The two disciples were discussing the recent events concerning Jesus' passion and death. Their journey was marked by sorrow and disappointment at his tragic death. They had hoped that he would be the Messiah who would set them free, but they found themselves instead confronted with the scandal of the cross. The risen Lord himself gently draws near and walks with them, yet they do not recognize him (cf. v. 16). Along the way, he questions them, and, seeing that they have not grasped the meaning of his passion and death, he exclaims: “O foolish men, and slow of heart” (v. 25). Then, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures”(v.27). Christ is the first exegete! Not only did the Old Testament foretell what he would accomplish, but he himself wished to be faithful to its words, in order to make manifest the one history of salvation whose fulfilment is found in Christ.

7. The Bible, as sacred Scripture, thus speaks of Christ and proclaims him as the one who had to endure suffering and then enter into his glory (cf. v. 26). Not simply a part, but the whole of Scripture speaks of Christ. Apart from the Scriptures, his death and resurrection cannot be rightly understood. That is why one of the most ancient confessions of faith stressed that “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas” (1Cor15:3-5). Since the Scriptures everywhere speak of Christ, they enable us to believe that his death and resurrection are not myth but history, and are central to the faith of his disciples.

A profound bond links sacred Scripture and the faith of believers. Since faith comes from hearing, and what is heard is based on the word of Christ (cf. Rom 10:17), believers are bound to listen attentively to the word of the
Lord, both in the celebration of the liturgy and in their personal prayer and reflection.

8. The journey that the Risen Lord makes with the disciples of Emmaus ended with a meal. The mysterious wayfarer accepts their insistent request: “Stay with us, for it is almost evening and the day is now far spent” (Lk 24:29). They sit down at table, and Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and offers it to them. At that moment, their eyes are opened, and they recognize him (cf. v. 31).

This scene clearly demonstrates the unbreakable bond between sacred Scripture and the Eucharist. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, “the Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she has venerated the Lord’s body, in that she never ceases, above all in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the word of God and the body of Christ” (Dei Verbum, 21).

Regular reading of sacred Scripture and the celebration of the Eucharist make it possible for us to see ourselves as part of one another. As Christians, we are a single people, making our pilgrim way through history, sustained by the Lord, present in our midst, who speaks to us and nourishes us. A day devoted to the Bible should not be seen as a yearly event but rather a year-long event, for we urgently need to grow in our knowledge and love of the Scriptures and of the risen Lord, who continues to speak his word and to break bread in the community of believers. For this reason, we need to develop a closer relationship with sacred Scripture; otherwise, our hearts will remain cold and our eyes shut, struck as we are by so many forms of blindness.

Sacred Scripture and the sacraments are thus inseparable. When the sacraments are introduced and illumined by God’s word, they become ever more clearly the goal of a process whereby Christ opens our minds and hearts to acknowledge his saving work. We should always keep in mind the teaching found in the Book of Revelation: the Lord is standing at the door and knocking. If anyone should hear his voice and open for him, he will come in and eat with them (cf. 3:20). Christ Jesus is knocking at our door in the words of sacred Scripture. If we hear his voice and open the doors of our minds and hearts, then he will enter our lives and remain ever with us.
9. In the Second Letter to Timothy, which is in some ways his spiritual testament, Saint Paul urges his faithful co-worker to have constant recourse to sacred Scripture. The Apostle is convinced that “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (3:16). Paul’s exhortation to Timothy is fundamental to the teaching of the conciliar Constitution *Dei Verbum* on the great theme of biblical inspiration, which emphasizes the Scriptures’ *saving purpose, spiritual dimension* and inherent *incarnational principle*.

First, recalling Paul’s encouragement to Timothy, *Dei Verbum* stresses that “we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures” (No. 11). Since the Scriptures teach with a view to salvation through faith in Christ (cf. 2 Tim 3:15), the truths contained therein are profitable for our salvation. The Bible is not a collection of history books or a chronicle, but is aimed entirely at the integral salvation of the person. The evident historical setting of the books of the Bible should not make us overlook their primary goal, which is our salvation. Everything is directed to this purpose and essential to the very nature of the Bible, which takes shape as a history of salvation in which God speaks and acts in order to encounter all men and women and to save them from evil and death.

To achieve this saving purpose, sacred Scripture, by the working of the Holy Spirit, makes human words written in human fashion become the word of God (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 12). The role of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures is primordial. Without the work of the Spirit, there would always be a risk of remaining limited to the written text alone. This would open the way to a fundamentalist reading, which needs to be avoided, lest we betray the inspired, dynamic and spiritual character of the sacred text. As the Apostle reminds us: “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6). The Holy Spirit, then, makes sacred Scripture the living word of God, experienced and handed down in the faith of his holy people.

10. The work of the Holy Spirit has to do not only with the formation of sacred Scripture; it is also operative in those who hear the word of God. The words of the Council Fathers are instructive: sacred Scripture is to be “read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit through whom it was
written” (Dei Verbum, 12). God’s revelation attains its completion and fullness in Jesus Christ; nonetheless, the Holy Spirit does not cease to act. It would be reductive indeed to restrict the working of the Spirit to the divine inspiration of sacred Scripture and its various human authors. We need to have confidence in the working of the Holy Spirit as he continues in his own way to provide “inspiration” whenever the Church teaches the sacred Scriptures, whenever the Magisterium authentically interprets them (cf. ibid., 10), and whenever each believer makes them the norm of his or her spiritual life. In this sense, we can understand the words spoken by Jesus to his disciples when they told him that they now understood the meaning of his parables: “Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Mt 13:52).

11. Finally, Dei Verbum makes clear that “the words of God, expressed in human language, are in every way like human speech, just as the Word of the eternal Father, in taking upon himself the weak flesh of human beings, also took on their likeness” (No. 13). We can say that the incarnation of the eternal Word gives shape and meaning to the relationship between God’s word and our human language, in all its historical and cultural contingency. This event gives rise to Tradition, which is also God’s word (cf. ibid., 9). We frequently risk separating sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition, without understanding that together they are the one source of Revelation. The written character of the former takes nothing away from its being fully a living word; in the same way, the Church’s living Tradition, which continually hands that word down over the centuries from one generation to the next, possesses that sacred book as the “supreme rule of her faith” (ibid., 21). Moreover, before becoming a written text, the word of God was handed down orally and kept alive by the faith of a people who, in the midst of many others, acknowledged it as their own history and the source of their identity. Biblical faith, then, is based on the living word, not on a book.

12. When sacred Scripture is read in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written, it remains ever new. The Old Testament is never old once it is part of the New, since all has been transformed thanks to the one Spirit who inspired it. The sacred text as a whole serves a prophetic
function regarding not the future but the present of whoever is nourished by this word. Jesus himself clearly stated this at the beginning of his ministry: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:21). Those who draw daily nourishment from God’s word become, like Jesus, a contemporary of all those whom they encounter: they are not tempted to fall into sterile nostalgia for the past, or to dream of ethereal utopias yet to come.

Sacred Scripture accomplishes its prophetic work above all in those who listen to it. It proves both sweet and bitter. We are reminded of the words of the prophet Ezekiel when, commanded by the Lord to eat the scroll of the book, he tells us: “It was in my mouth as sweet as honey” (3:3). John the Evangelist too, on the island of Patmos, echoes Ezekiel’s experience of eating the scroll, but goes on to add: “It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter” (Rev 10:10).

The sweetness of God’s word leads us to share it with all those whom we encounter in this life and to proclaim the sure hope that it contains (cf. 1 Pet 3:15-16). Its bitterness, in turn, often comes from our realization of how difficult it is to live that word consistently, or our personal experience of seeing it rejected as meaningless for life. We should never take God’s word for granted, but instead let ourselves be nourished by it, in order to acknowledge and live fully our relationship with him and with our brothers and sisters.

13. Yet another challenge raised by sacred Scripture has to do with love. God’s word constantly reminds us of the merciful love of the Father who calls his children to live in love. The life of Jesus is the full and perfect expression of this divine love, which holds nothing back but offers itself to all without reserve. In the parable of Lazarus, we find a valuable teaching. When both Lazarus and the rich man die, the latter, seeing the poor man Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom, asks that Lazarus be sent to his brothers to warn them to love their neighbour, lest they also experience his torment. Abraham’s answer is biting: “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them” (Lk 16:29). To listen to sacred Scripture and then to practise mercy: this is the great challenge before us in life. God’s word has the power to open our eyes and to enable us to renounce a stifling and barren
individualism and instead to embark on a new path of sharing and solidarity.

14. One of the most significant moments in Jesus’ relationship with his disciples is found in the account of the Transfiguration. He goes up the mountain with Peter, James and John to pray. The evangelists tell us that as Jesus’ face and clothing became dazzlingly white, two men conversed with him: Moses and Elijah, representing respectively the Law and the Prophets; in other words, sacred Scripture. Peter’s reaction to this sight is one of amazement and joy: “Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah” (Lk 9:33). At that moment a cloud overshadows them, and the disciples are struck with fear.

The Transfiguration reminds us of the Feast of Tabernacles, when Ezra and Nehemiah read the sacred text to the people after their return from exile. At the same time, it foreshadows Jesus’ glory, as a way of preparing the disciples for the scandal of the Passion: that divine glory is also evoked by the cloud enveloping the disciples as a symbol of God’s presence. A similar transfiguration takes place with sacred Scripture, which transcends itself whenever it nourishes the lives of believers. As the Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini reminds us: “In rediscovering the interplay between the different senses of Scripture it becomes essential to grasp the passage from letter to spirit. This is not an automatic, spontaneous passage; rather, the letter needs to be transcended” (No. 38).

15. Along our path of welcoming God’s word into our hearts, the Mother of the Lord accompanies us. She is the one who was called blessed because she believed in the fulfilment of what the Lord had spoken to her (cf. Lk 1:45). Mary’s own beatitude is prior to all the beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus about the poor and those who mourn, the meek, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted, for it is the necessary condition for every other kind of beatitude. The poor are not blessed because they are poor; they become blessed if, like Mary, they believe in the fulfilment of God’s word. A great disciple and master of sacred Scripture, Saint Augustine, once wrote: “Someone in the midst of the crowd, seized with enthusiasm, cried out: ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you’ and Jesus replied, ‘Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it’. As if to say: My
mother, whom you call blessed, is indeed blessed, because she keeps the word of God. Not because in her the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, but because she keeps that same word of God by which she was made and which, in her womb, became flesh” (Tractates on the Gospel of John, 10, 3).

May the Sunday of the Word of God help his people to grow in religious and intimate familiarity with the sacred Scriptures. For as the sacred author taught of old: “This word is very near to you: it is in your mouth and in your heart for your observance” (Dt 30:14).

Given in Rome, at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, on 30 September 2019, the liturgical Memorial of Saint Jerome, on the inauguration of the 1600th anniversary of his death.

Francis

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[2] “The sacramentality of the word can thus be understood by analogy with the real presence of Christ under the appearances of the consecrated bread and wine. By approaching the altar and partaking in the Eucharistic banquet we truly share in the body and blood of Christ. The proclamation of God’s word at the celebration entails an acknowledgment that Christ himself is present, that he speaks to us, and that he wishes to be heard” (Verbum Domini, 56).

Homily of Pope Francis at the Mass Concluding the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region, The Vatican Basilica (October 27, 2019)

The word of God today helps us to pray through three figures: in Jesus’ parable both the Pharisee and the tax collector pray, while the first reading
speaks of the prayer of a poor person.

1. The prayer of the Pharisee begins in this way: “God, I thank you.”

This is a great beginning, because the best prayer is that of gratitude, that of praise. Immediately, though, we see the reason why he gives thanks: “that I am not like other men” (Lk 18:11). He also explains the reason: he fasts twice a week, although at the time there was only a yearly obligation; he pays tithes on all that he has, though tithing was prescribed only on the most important products (cf. Dt 14:22ff). In short, he boasts because he fulfils particular commandments to the best degree possible. But he forgets the greatest commandment: to love God and our neighbor (cf. Mt 22:36-40). Brimming with self-assurance about his own ability to keep the commandments, his own merits and virtues, he is focused only on himself. The tragedy of this man is that he is without love. Even the best things, without love, count for nothing, as Saint Paul says (cf. 1 Cor 13). Without love, what is the result? He ends up praising himself instead of praying. In fact, he asks nothing from the Lord because he does not feel needy or in debt, but he feels that God owes something to him. He stands in the temple of God, but he worships a different god: himself. And many “prestigious” groups, “Catholic Christians,” go along this path.

Together with God, he forgets his neighbor; indeed, he despises him. For the Pharisee, his neighbor has no worth, no value. He considers himself better than others, whom he calls literally “the rest, the remainders” (loipoi, Lk 18:11). That is, they are “leftovers”, they are scraps from which to keep one’s distance. How many times do we see this happening over and over again in life and history! How many times do those who are prominent, like the Pharisee with respect to the tax collector, raise up walls to increase distances, making other people feel even more rejected. Or by considering them backward and of little worth, they despise their traditions, erase their history, occupy their lands, and usurp their goods. How much alleged superiority, transformed into oppression and exploitation, exists even today! We saw this during the Synod when speaking about the exploitation of creation, of people, of the inhabitants of the Amazon, of the trafficking of persons, the trade in human beings! The mistakes of the past were not enough to stop the plundering of other persons and the inflicting of wounds on our brothers and sisters and on our sister earth: we have seen
it in the scarred face of the Amazon region. Worship of self carries on hypocritically with its rites and “prayers” – many are Catholics, they profess themselves Catholic, but have forgotten they are Christians and human beings – forgetting the true worship of God which is always expressed in love of one’s neighbor. Even Christians who pray and go to Mass on Sunday are subject to this religion of the self. Let us examine ourselves and see whether we too may think that someone is inferior and can be tossed aside, even if only in our words. Let us pray for the grace not to consider ourselves superior, not to believe that we are alright, not to become cynical and scornful. Let us ask Jesus to heal us of speaking ill and complaining about others, of despising this or that person: these things are displeasing to God. And at Mass today we are accompanied providentially not only by indigenous people of the Amazon, but also by the poorest from our developed societies: our disabled brothers and sisters from the Community of L’Arche. They are with us, in the front row.

2. Let us turn to the other prayer. The prayer of the tax collector helps us understand what is pleasing to God. He does not begin from his own merits but from his shortcomings; not from his riches but from his poverty. His was not economic poverty – tax collectors were wealthy and tended to make money unjustly at the expense of their fellow citizens – but he felt a poverty of life, because we never live well in sin. The tax collector who exploited others admitted being poor before God, and the Lord heard his prayer, a mere seven words but an expression of heartfelt sincerity. In fact, while the Pharisee stood in front on his feet (cf. v. 11), the tax collector stood far off and “would not even lift up his eyes to heaven”, because he believed that God is indeed great, while he knew himself to be small. He “beat his breast” (cf. v. 13), because the breast is where the heart is. His prayer is born straight from the heart; it is transparent. He places his heart before God, not outward appearances. To pray is to stand before God’s eyes – it is God looking at me when I pray – without illusions, excuses or justifications. Often our regrets filled with self-justification can make us laugh. More than regrets, they seem as if we are canonizing ourselves. Because from the devil come darkness and lies – these are our self-justifications; from God come light and truth, transparency of my heart. It was a wonderful experience, and I am so grateful, dear members of the Synod, that we have been able to speak to one another in these weeks from
the heart, with sincerity and candor, and to place our efforts and hopes before God and our brothers and sisters.

Today, looking at the tax collector, we rediscover where to start: from the conviction that we, all of us, are in need of salvation. This is the first step of the true worship of God, who is merciful towards those who admit their need. On the other hand, the root of every spiritual error, as the ancient monks taught, is believing ourselves to be righteous. To consider ourselves righteous is to leave God, the only righteous one, out in the cold. This initial stance is so important that Jesus shows it to us with an unusual comparison, juxtaposing in the parable the Pharisee, the most pious and devout figure of the time, and the tax collector, the public sinner par excellence. The judgment is reversed: the one who is good but presumptuous fails; the one who is a disaster but humble is exalted by God. If we look at ourselves honestly, we see in us all both the tax collector and the Pharisee. We are a bit tax collectors because we are sinners, and a bit Pharisees because we are presumptuous, able to justify ourselves, masters of the art of self-justification. This may often work with ourselves, but not with God. This trick does not work with God. Let us pray for the grace to experience ourselves in need of mercy, interiorly poor. For this reason too, we do well to associate with the poor, to remind ourselves that we are poor, to remind ourselves that the salvation of God operates only in an atmosphere of interior poverty.

3. We come now to the prayer of the poor person, from the first reading. This prayer, says Sirach, “will reach to the clouds” (35:21). While the prayer of those who presume that they are righteous remains earthly, crushed by the gravitational force of egoism, that of the poor person rises directly to God. The sense of faith of the People of God has seen in the poor “the gatekeepers of heaven:” the sense of faith that was missing in [the Pharisee’s] utterance. They are the ones who will open wide or not the gates of eternal life. They were not considered bosses in this life, they did not put themselves ahead of others; they had their wealth in God alone. These persons are living icons of Christian prophecy.

In this Synod we have had the grace of listening to the voices of the poor and reflecting on the precariousness of their lives, threatened by predatory models of development. Yet precisely in this situation, many have
testified to us that it is possible to look at reality in a different way, accepting it with open arms as a gift, treating the created world not as a resource to be exploited but as a home to be preserved, with trust in God. He is our Father and, Sirach says again, “he hears the prayer of one who is wronged” (v. 16). How many times, even in the Church, have the voices of the poor not been heard and perhaps scoffed at or silenced because they are inconvenient. Let us pray for the grace to be able to listen to the cry of the poor: this is the cry of hope of the Church. The cry of the poor is the Church’s cry of hope. When we make their cry our own, we can be certain, our prayer too will reach to the clouds.

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Apostolic Letter Admirable Signum, on the Meaning and Importance of the Nativity Scene (December 1, 2019)

1. The enchanting image of the Christmas crèche, so dear to the Christian people, never ceases to arouse amazement and wonder. The depiction of Jesus’ birth is itself a simple and joyful proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. The nativity scene is like a living Gospel rising up from the pages of sacred Scripture. As we contemplate the Christmas story, we are invited to set out on a spiritual journey, drawn by the humility of the God who became man in order to encounter every man and woman. We come to realize that so great is his love for us that he became one of us, so that we in turn might become one with him.

With this Letter, I wish to encourage the beautiful family tradition of preparing the nativity scene in the days before Christmas, but also the custom of setting it up in the workplace, in schools, hospitals, prisons and town squares. Great imagination and creativity is always shown in employing the most diverse materials to create small masterpieces of beauty. As children, we learn from our parents and grandparents to carry on this
joyful tradition, which encapsulates a wealth of popular piety. It is my hope that this custom will never be lost and that, wherever it has fallen into disuse, it can be rediscovered and revived.

2. The origin of the Christmas crèche is found above all in certain details of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, as related in the Gospels. The evangelist Luke says simply that Mary “gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (2:7). Because Jesus was laid in a manger, the nativity scene is known in Italian as a presepe, from the Latin word praesepium, meaning “manger.”

Coming into this world, the Son of God was laid in the place where animals feed. Hay became the first bed of the One who would reveal himself as “the bread come down from heaven” (Jn 6:41). Saint Augustine, with other Church Fathers, was impressed by this symbolism: “Laid in a manger, he became our food” (Sermon 189, 4). Indeed, the nativity scene evokes a number of the mysteries of Jesus' life and brings them close to our own daily lives.

But let us go back to the origins of the Christmas crèche so familiar to us. We need to imagine ourselves in the little Italian town of Greccio, near Rieti. Saint Francis stopped there, most likely on his way back from Rome where on 29 November 1223 he had received the confirmation of his Rule from Pope Honorius III. Francis had earlier visited the Holy Land, and the caves in Greccio reminded him of the countryside of Bethlehem. It may also be that the “Poor Man of Assisi” had been struck by the mosaics in the Roman Basilica of Saint Mary Major depicting the birth of Jesus, close to the place where, according to an ancient tradition, the wooden panels of the manger are preserved.

The Franciscan Sources describe in detail what then took place in Greccio. Fifteen days before Christmas, Francis asked a local man named John to help him realize his desire “to bring to life the memory of that babe born in Bethlehem, to see as much as possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he was laid upon a bed of hay.” [1] At this, his faithful friend went immediately to prepare all that the Saint had asked. On 25 December, friars came to Greccio from various parts, together with
people from the farmsteads in the area, who brought flowers and torches to light up that holy night. When Francis arrived, he found a manger full of hay, an ox and a donkey. All those present experienced a new and indescribable joy in the presence of the Christmas scene. The priest then solemnly celebrated the Eucharist over the manger, showing the bond between the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Eucharist. At Greccio there were no statues; the nativity scene was enacted and experienced by all who were present.[2]

This is how our tradition began: with everyone gathered in joy around the cave, with no distance between the original event and those sharing in its mystery.

Thomas of Celano, the first biographer of Saint Francis, notes that this simple and moving scene was accompanied by the gift of a marvelous vision: one of those present saw the Baby Jesus himself lying in the manger. From the nativity scene of that Christmas in 1223, “everyone went home with joy”. [3]

3. With the simplicity of that sign, Saint Francis carried out a great work of evangelization. His teaching touched the hearts of Christians and continues today to offer a simple yet authentic means of portraying the beauty of our faith. Indeed, the place where this first nativity scene was enacted expresses and evokes these sentiments. Greccio has become a refuge for the soul, a mountain fastness wrapped in silence.

Why does the Christmas crèche arouse such wonder and move us so deeply? First, because it shows God’s tender love: the Creator of the universe lowered himself to take up our littleness. The gift of life, in all its mystery, becomes all the more wondrous as we realize that the Son of Mary is the source and sustenance of all life. In Jesus, the Father has given us a brother who comes to seek us out whenever we are confused or lost, a loyal friend ever at our side. He gave us his Son who forgives us and frees us from our sins.

Setting up the Christmas crèche in our homes helps us to relive the history of what took place in Bethlehem. Naturally, the Gospels remain our source for understanding and reflecting on that event. At the same time, its portrayal in the crèche helps us to imagine the scene. It touches our hearts
and makes us enter into salvation history as contemporaries of an event that is living and real in a broad gamut of historical and cultural contexts.

In a particular way, from the time of its Franciscan origins, the nativity scene has invited us to “feel” and “touch” the poverty that God’s Son took upon himself in the Incarnation. Implicitly, it summons us to follow him along the path of humility, poverty and self-denial that leads from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross. It asks us to meet him and serve him by showing mercy to those of our brothers and sisters in greatest need (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

4. I would like now to reflect on the various elements of the nativity scene in order to appreciate their deeper meaning. First, there is the background of a starry sky wrapped in the darkness and silence of night. We represent this not only out of fidelity to the Gospel accounts, but also for its symbolic value. We can think of all those times in our lives when we have experienced the darkness of night. Yet even then, God does not abandon us, but is there to answer our crucial questions about the meaning of life. Who am I? Where do I come from? Why was I born at this time in history? Why do I love? Why do I suffer? Why will I die? It was to answer these questions that God became man. His closeness brings light where there is darkness and shows the way to those dwelling in the shadow of suffering (cf. Lk 1:79).

The landscapes that are part of the nativity scene also deserve some mention. Frequently they include the ruins of ancient houses or buildings, which in some instances replace the cave of Bethlehem and become a home for the Holy Family. These ruins appear to be inspired by the thirteenth-century Golden Legend of the Dominican Jacobus de Varagine, which relates a pagan belief that the Temple of Peace in Rome would collapse when a Virgin gave birth. More than anything, the ruins are the visible sign of fallen humanity, of everything that inevitably falls into ruin, decays and disappoints. This scenic setting tells us that Jesus is newness in the midst of an aging world, that he has come to heal and rebuild, to restore the world and our lives to their original splendor.

5. With what emotion should we arrange the mountains, streams, sheep and shepherds in the nativity scene! As we do so, we are reminded that, as the prophets had foretold, all creation rejoices in the coming of the
Messiah. The angels and the guiding star are a sign that we too are called to set out for the cave and to worship the Lord.

“Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us” (Lk 2:15). So the shepherds tell one another after the proclamation of the angels. A beautiful lesson emerges from these simple words. Unlike so many other people, busy about many things, the shepherds become the first to see the most essential thing of all: the gift of salvation. It is the humble and the poor who greet the event of the Incarnation. The shepherds respond to God who comes to meet us in the Infant Jesus by setting out to meet him with love, gratitude and awe. Thanks to Jesus, this encounter between God and his children gives birth to our religion and accounts for its unique beauty, so wonderfully evident in the nativity scene.

6. It is customary to add many symbolic figures to our nativity scenes. First, there are the beggars and the others who know only the wealth of the heart. They too have every right to draw near to the Infant Jesus; no one can evict them or send them away from a crib so makeshift that the poor seem entirely at home. Indeed, the poor are a privileged part of this mystery; often they are the first to recognize God’s presence in our midst.

The presence of the poor and the lowly in the nativity scene remind us that God became man for the sake of those who feel most in need of his love and who ask him to draw near to them. Jesus, “gentle and humble in heart” (Mt 11:29), was born in poverty and led a simple life in order to teach us to recognize what is essential and to act accordingly. The nativity scene clearly teaches that we cannot let ourselves be fooled by wealth and fleeting promises of happiness. We see Herod’s palace in the background, closed and deaf to the tidings of joy. By being born in a manger, God himself launches the only true revolution that can give hope and dignity to the disinherited and the outcast: the revolution of love, the revolution of tenderness. From the manger, Jesus proclaims, in a meek yet powerful way, the need for sharing with the poor as the path to a more human and fraternal world in which no one is excluded or marginalized.

Children – but adults too! – often love to add to the nativity scene other figures that have no apparent connection with the Gospel accounts. Yet,
each in its own way, these fanciful additions show that in the new world inaugurated by Jesus there is room for whatever is truly human and for all God’s creatures. From the shepherd to the blacksmith, from the baker to the musicians, from the women carrying jugs of water to the children at play: all this speaks of the everyday holiness, the joy of doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way, born whenever Jesus shares his divine life with us.

7. Gradually, we come to the cave, where we find the figures of Mary and Joseph. Mary is a mother who contemplates her child and shows him to every visitor. The figure of Mary makes us reflect on the great mystery that surrounded this young woman when God knocked on the door of her immaculate heart. Mary responded in complete obedience to the message of the angel who asked her to become the Mother of God. Her words, “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38), show all of us how to abandon ourselves in faith to God’s will. By her “fiat”, Mary became the mother of God’s Son, not losing but, thanks to him, consecrating her virginity. In her, we see the Mother of God who does not keep her Son only to herself, but invites everyone to obey his word and to put it into practice (cf. Jn 2:5).

At Mary’s side, shown protecting the Child and his Mother, stands Saint Joseph. He is usually depicted with staff in hand, or holding up a lamp. Saint Joseph plays an important role in the life of Jesus and Mary. He is the guardian who tirelessly protects his family. When God warned him of Herod’s threat, he did not hesitate to set out and flee to Egypt (cf. Mt 2:13-15). And once the danger had passed, he brought the family back to Nazareth, where he was to be the first teacher of Jesus as a boy and then as a young man. Joseph treasured in his heart the great mystery surrounding Jesus and Mary his spouse; as a just man, he entrusted himself always to God’s will, and put it into practice.

8. When, at Christmas, we place the statue of the Infant Jesus in the manger, the nativity scene suddenly comes alive. God appears as a child, for us to take into our arms. Beneath weakness and frailty, he conceals his power that creates and transforms all things. It seems impossible, yet it is true: in Jesus, God was a child, and in this way he wished to reveal the greatness of his love: by smiling and opening his arms to all.
The birth of a child awakens joy and wonder; it sets before us the great mystery of life. Seeing the bright eyes of a young couple gazing at their newborn child, we can understand the feelings of Mary and Joseph who, as they looked at the Infant Jesus, sensed God’s presence in their lives.

“Life was made manifest” (1 Jn 1:2). In these words, the Apostle John sums up the mystery of the Incarnation. The crèche allows us to see and touch this unique and unparalleled event that changed the course of history, so that time would thereafter be reckoned either before or after the birth of Christ.

God’s ways are astonishing, for it seems impossible that he should forsake his glory to become a man like us. To our astonishment, we see God acting exactly as we do: he sleeps, takes milk from his mother, cries and plays like every other child! As always, God baffles us. He is unpredictable, constantly doing what we least expect. The nativity scene shows God as he came into our world, but it also makes us reflect on how our life is part of God’s own life. It invites us to become his disciples if we want to attain ultimate meaning in life.

9. As the feast of Epiphany approaches, we place the statues of the Three Kings in the Christmas crèche. Observing the star, those wise men from the East set out for Bethlehem, in order to find Jesus and to offer him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These costly gifts have an allegorical meaning: gold honors Jesus’ kingship, incense his divinity, myrrh his sacred humanity that was to experience death and burial.

As we contemplate this aspect of the nativity scene, we are called to reflect on the responsibility of every Christian to spread the Gospel. Each of us is called to bear glad tidings to all, testifying by our practical works of mercy to the joy of knowing Jesus and his love.

The Magi teach us that people can come to Christ by a very long route. Men of wealth, sages from afar, athirst for the infinite, they set out on the long and perilous journey that would lead them to Bethlehem (cf. Mt 2:1-12). Great joy comes over them in the presence of the Infant King. They are not scandalized by the poor surroundings, but immediately fall to their knees to worship him. Kneeling before him, they understand that the God who with sovereign wisdom guides the course of the stars also guides the
course of history, casting down the mighty and raising up the lowly. Upon their return home, they would certainly have told others of this amazing encounter with the Messiah, thus initiating the spread of the Gospel among the nations.

10. Standing before the Christmas crèche, we are reminded of the time when we were children, eagerly waiting to set it up. These memories make us all the more conscious of the precious gift received from those who passed on the faith to us. At the same time, they remind us of our duty to share this same experience with our children and our grandchildren. It does not matter how the nativity scene is arranged: it can always be the same or it can change from year to year. What matters is that it speaks to our lives. Wherever it is, and whatever form it takes, the Christmas crèche speaks to us of the love of God, the God who became a child in order to make us know how close he is to every man, woman and child, regardless of their condition.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Christmas crèche is part of the precious yet demanding process of passing on the faith. Beginning in childhood, and at every stage of our lives, it teaches us to contemplate Jesus, to experience God’s love for us, to feel and believe that God is with us and that we are with him, his children, brothers and sisters all, thanks to that Child who is the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin Mary. And to realize that in that knowledge we find true happiness. Like Saint Francis, may we open our hearts to this simple grace, so that from our wonderment a humble prayer may arise: a prayer of thanksgiving to God, who wished to share with us his all, and thus never to leave us alone.

Francis

Given in Greccio, at the Shrine of the Nativity, on 1 December in the year 2019, the seventh of my Pontificate.

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[1] Cf. Thomas of Celano, First Life, 84; Franciscan Sources, 469.

[2] Ibid., 85; Franciscan Sources, 469.

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Addresses and Other Statements

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of IESE, Barcelona (July 5, 2019)

An address given by Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz at a conference entitled “The Company and its Social Responsibilities,” marking IESE’s 60th anniversary, Barcelona (5 July 2019).

IESE and the Role of Business in Society

Taking part in this conference for the sixtieth anniversary celebration of IESE is a great joy for me, and gives me the opportunity to express once again my gratitude to Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, God’s instrument to begin this initiative. My gratitude also goes out to all those who have contributed in the past and to you who are working now to turn this initiative into a Business School with great prestige that is offering an important service to society.

I also want to extend my congratulations to all the associated Business Schools that follow its example, echoing its message all over the world, each according to its specific geographic and social circumstances as well as the constitution its founders freely and responsibly gave it and the course marked by its current directors, a representation of which are here today. I unite myself in a special way to words spoken here at IESE by the previous
Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, with reference to IESE’s work and that of centers inspired by its approach: “It has proven to be a much-needed endeavor for today’s world, and will always be so. For also in this area of professional activity, Christians must be and act as salt of the earth and light of the world (cf. Mt 5:13-14).” [1]

The beginnings of IESE

Sixty years is a considerable amount of time, even for an academic institution that is called to endure over time, which is not the same as the monotonous repetition of the same things year after year. Since that first executive training program launched in November 1958, IESE has undergone significant changes. We notice some of them in the buildings and material resources, and in the people, strategies and policies that have resulted in professional, human and social improvement for the thousands of women and men who have passed through its classrooms and benefited from IESE’s deep and fruitful impact on society.

What motivated the founder of Opus Dei to encourage the opening of IESE was precisely this desire to leave a mark on society. Professor Francisco Ponz, who lived in Barcelona in the 1940s and is a former Rector of the University of Navarra, said that Saint Josemaría when visiting this city “once remarked on the apostolic interest of improving the formation and Christian life of the many people in Catalonia who were responsible for running all types of businesses. He pointed to the spiritual and social repercussions of helping those responsible for the promotion, direction and development of businesses to be exemplary Christians and to act in accord with the faith, with good professional and Christian criteria, following the Church’s teachings and moral principles. He said they should do so with a spirit of service towards their employees and workers and towards society in general, without being led by purely human ambitions, or simply the desire for material enrichment.” [2]

I wanted to cite this long passage because it is a good introduction to the topic I was asked to speak about today: IESE and the social role of a business. I will not try to enter into technical aspects of this area which are not my competence and in which you are the experts. Instead, I would like to offer some reflections based on the Social Doctrine of the Church, as Chancellor of the University of Navarra, in accord with IESE’s mission.
statement: to “develop leaders who strive to have a deep, positive and lasting impact on people, companies and society through professional excellence, integrity and a spirit of service.” [3]

The social role of a business

Right from its beginning, the mission of this school saw a business not just as seeking to generate return on capital, or a locale that provides employment for some people, nor even as a project that provides services to consumers and employees alike, but above all as a community of persons. This in some way anticipated the Second Vatican Council which, grounding all economic activity on the centrality of the human person, stated: “In economic enterprises it is persons who are joined together, that is, free and independent human beings created to the image of God.” [4] A few years later, in the Encyclical Centesimus annus, St. John Paul II stressed that the “the purpose of a business firm is not simply to make a profit, but is to be found in its very existence as a community of persons who in various ways are endeavoring to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the whole of society.”[5]

A business is therefore an expression of the social nature of the human person, who needs relationships with other people to satisfy his or her material and spiritual needs, to give meaning to one’s work, to provide a service to others and to society and, ultimately, to know oneself and thus reach fulfilment as a person and as a child of God. Benedict XVI wrote: “As a spiritual being, the human creature is defined through interpersonal relations. The more authentically he or she lives these relations, the more his or her own personal identity matures. It is not by isolation that man establishes his worth, but by placing himself in relation with others and with God.” [6] As a recent document from the Holy See states, “Every business creates an important network of relations”;[7] in the first place, internal relationships within the organization; and then those oriented outside, with customers, suppliers, investors and society in general. A business is a community of people that serves other people within a society of people. Only after taking this into consideration do capital, facilities, technology and legal realities come into play.
The external mission of a business stems from its social and relational nature: meeting the needs of other people, first by producing goods and services, but also in many other ways including innovation and creativity, developing a culture of work and service, the fulfillment of financial and social duties, the example of dedicated service, and many other things that show how business is a great transformer of society, for good or for bad.

The social role of a business, therefore, stems from the freedom and creative capacity of many people: owners and managers in the first place, but also all the men and women who come together to carry out the business as employees, suppliers, distributors and external collaborators. This is reflected in all its daily activities: in work that is cheerful and varied at times, but also monotonous and difficult, as well as in constant effort and the exercise of the virtues needed to bring it forward each day.

**Human work**

Clearly a business is a privileged sphere in which human work is carried out. Certainly it is not the only one, since the variety of tasks that make up work in the home, politics, public administration, education and so many charitable and social organizations are also important spheres of human work.

John Paul II rightly affirmed that “man’s principal resource is man himself.”[8] This is a bold statement, which clashes with many current positions that perhaps are well-intentioned but that are erroneous or at least incomplete. Some of these emphasize technology, while others focus on organization, efficiency, money or power; others even look at human beings with suspicion, viewing them as predators endangering the survival of our world.

In contrast, the Second Vatican Council taught that “human … proceeds from man, so it is ordered toward man. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered. A man is more precious for what he is than for what he has. Similarly, all that men do to obtain greater justice, wider brotherhood, a more humane disposition of social relationships has
greater worth than technical advances. For these advances can supply the material for human progress, but of themselves alone they can never actually bring it about.”[9]

The social role of a business must be sought in service to the human person, who is at the same time the benefactor, promoter, creator and agent of everything that organizations carry out. At the same time that a person has dominion over nature, produces goods and generates wealth, he in some way forges himself: he develops and fulfills himself. Here again we have all the elements that comprise the social role of businesses: the persons involved, the purpose or objective that motivates them, the management of the project, and insertion in the broad scope of the society the persons participate in and which they serve, nourished by its resources and contributing to its prosperity. When he considered the importance of the work of each person, who in turn is the center of all businesses and markets, Saint Josemaría highlighted three fundamental aspects: sanctifying our work, sanctifying ourselves in our work and sanctifying others through our work.[10]

“If we really want to sanctify our work,” he said, “we have inescapably to fulfill the first condition: that of working—and working well!—with human and supernatural seriousness.”[11] I seem to be hearing his voice when I read, “Your buried talent, dig it up again! Make it yield … it does not matter if in this world the results are not wonders that men can admire. What really matters is to hand over all that we are and all that we have, striving to make our talent yield, and constantly exerting ourselves in order to produce good fruit.”[12]

Business, a positive reality

These words focus our attention again on the community of persons making up any business. All those who go to work for a company each day do so for quite varied reasons, often not fully aware of them: seeking to earn a living and support a family; wanting to feel fulfilled as a person; the desire to learn and develop skills; to enjoy career opportunities; to make friends; to help others; to feel useful; to participate in the progress of society... Some of these aims are included in the worker's contract but not all of them. In any case, a constant exchange of goods occurs every day in the workplace. A person receives a lot: not just a salary, a pat on the back for their
performance or promotion possibilities, but also knowledge, skills, relationships, friendships... At the same time, each person gives a lot: time, effort, attention, enthusiasm, knowledge, experience... Workers give all this to the company and its owners, but also to the other managers and employees, to customers, suppliers and distributors, to the neighboring community, to their families and to society in general... and one receive back much from them. This includes private goods and also common goods, which form part of the common good of a business, through which it contributes to the common good of society. And both private and common goods are received, the latter being goods created by everyone’s efforts and from which everyone benefits.

So even the most selfish people, those who perhaps view their work exclusively as a means to satisfy their own personal interests, end up serving clients, helping their colleagues, striving to improve their God-given talents. But the most important thing is not the results but the change and growth that each person experiences. Business is, without a doubt, a great transformer of persons, as I already mentioned: for good or for bad.

St. John Paul II said that businesses are established as communities of persons sharing the same goal: in its very existence a business is a community of persons coming together to provide a service to society.[13] Goods generated by that human community are not only those based on commercial relationships. As Benedict XVI stressed: “the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must find their place within normal economic activity.”[14]

This might seem like a utopian vision: commercial businesses today have a poor reputation and the media constantly remind us of their mistakes. Certainly, reasons exist for this pessimistic view; we know very well the weaknesses and errors we human beings are capable of. But that is not the last word.

When Saint Josemaría met with teachers, staff, students and alumni of IESE in November 1972, he told them, “People look at you with suspicion because you handle money. But I don’t. Society owes you all the jobs you create, and the country owes you its prosperity. So many people are in debt to you for what you contribute to the life of your country. The work you do,
therefore, is very Christian. I admire your work, the jobs you carry out ... My children, your business endeavors are immersed in the Gospel. Our Lord looks at you with affection, and I too look at you with special affection.”

But that conversation didn’t end there, with praise for people engaged in business and managers. Rather Saint Josemaría reminded them of their duties: “Don’t forget the Christian meaning of life. Don’t rejoice in your success. And don’t despair if some undertaking fails.” In other words, he reminded them that it is legitimate to try to achieve good returns on capital, but always shunning the temptation to seek money, power, and personal success above all else.

During that same 1972 meeting, when a former student asked about the first virtue an entrepreneur should strive for, Saint Josemaría responded right away, as something very clear to him: “Charity, because justice alone is not enough. Justice alone is dry, and leaves many holes to fill.” And he added, “But don’t talk about charity: live it!” Some years later, in the Encyclical Caritas in veritate, Benedict XVI expressed it this way: “Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is ‘mine’ to the other; but it never lacks justice ... I cannot ‘give’ what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice ... charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving.”[15]

The terms people use in the business world today are probably different: justice and charity have given way to social responsibility, solidarity and sustainability. But the change in terminology should not hide the reality. Sometimes ideologies and the media try to present Christian morality as a set of prohibitions, burdens and obligations that end up suffocating us. Or as something private that each person can live at home behind closed doors, but not out on the street because it has no place in public life. And for some people today, economic problems are merely technical problems requiring technical solutions alone, without an appeal to people’s consciences.

But if a business is a community of persons, it is not valid to judge it only on one aspect of its results: financial benefits, profitability, efficiency, or market share. As we said earlier, persons need to be the protagonists and beneficiaries of a company’s efforts. Let us listen once again to Saint
Josemaría: “God is calling you to serve Him in and from the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life. He waits for us every day, in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all the immense panorama of work. Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.”[16]

This “something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations” is, in its deepest reality, God’s love, which precedes us, accompanies us and always watches over us; it is God himself, because “God is love” (Jn 4:8). The call to discover God’s love in everything and to respond to that love is ultimately the universal call to holiness, which God made Saint Josemaría see clearly in 1928, when He inspired Opus Dei. He wanted Saint Paul’s message to reach every man and woman: “This is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess 4:3): seeking holiness in work and ordinary life, because “while being fully involved in his everyday work, among other men, his equals; busy, under stress, the Christian has to be at the same time totally involved with God.”[17] “Only in this way can we set about this great undertaking, this immense, unending task of sanctifying all temporal structures from within, bringing to them the leaven of redemption.” [18]

Perhaps in professional work, a person first seeks to fulfil what is spelled out in a work contract, in order to have a right to the agreed-upon salary. But soon one realizes that work changes us on the inside, generating knowledge and skills and giving our efforts a new meaning. One discovers the value of serving others, collaborating in shared tasks, with the awareness that one forms part of something greater than oneself. And this in turn opens up new horizons... until the person becomes aware of God, as the ultimate goal of our life.

I return to some other words of St. Josemaría, from a homily he delivered on 8 October 1967 on the campus of the University of Navarra: “There is no other way. Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find Him. That is why I can tell you that our age needs to give back to matter and to the most trivial occurrences and situations their noble and original meaning. It needs to restore them to
the service of the Kingdom of God, to spiritualize them, turning them into a means and an occasion for a continuous meeting with Jesus Christ.”[19]

A Christian business manager

But let us return to the community of persons that is each business, which we said transforms society because it transforms persons. Now I want to address especially the students and alumni here who run these companies, as well as the teachers and staff of the Business Schools whose main task is to develop and guide the skills, knowledge and virtues of those who run these businesses.

I will take as a starting point some words from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church: “The roles of business owners and management have a central importance from the viewpoint of society, because they are at the heart of that network of technical, commercial, financial and cultural bonds that characterizes the modern business reality.”[20] What at first sight seems like a highly technical approach immediately points to personal responsibility, and especially care for persons. Pope Francis expresses it more directly: “Business is a vocation, and a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life; this will enable them truly to serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all.”[21]

What is the primary task of a business executive? Forgive me for interfering in what falls to you. Certainly, to convene, train, guide, demand from, encourage, nurture, and sometimes heal the human team that will carry out the company's activities. Naturally, one person alone cannot oversee all these functions, unless it is a microenterprise. But especially if we’re talking about a human team, where tasks are shared among various managers, no one – no matter how technical their job may seem – can neglect their responsibility towards other persons. Of course, we shouldn't forget other essential tasks usually entrusted to a manager, such as planning, organizing, directing, coordinating and evaluating. But these tasks are also always carried out through interpersonal relationships. A business is ultimately a place where life is shared with others, and everyone is responsible for making life there agreeable, but especially the managers. Hence the need for managers to be very aware of the importance of each
person, not only or mainly because of what he or she contributes to the company but because of who that person is. And, more generally, in the words of St. Josemaría: “A person or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ’s heart.” [22]

In any case, let’s not be utopian. A good manager will always have defects, like everyone else; he or she will make mistakes but should recognize and rectify them, starting over without becoming discouraged. “A Christian is not a neurotic collector of good behavior reports.”[23] and always acts with freedom. God “does not want the forced service of slaves; he prefers to have children who are free.”[24]

It is important that business managers have a spiritual dimension in their lives, which is not simply adding some pious practices to their busy schedule each day but requires a truly Christian way of being and acting. One important aspect here is “unity of life,” which means having clear principles and criteria for making decisions, and being coherent in applying them. Another key aspect which every Christian should strive for is the positive effort to sanctify one’s professional work, which means not only doing it well technically, but offering it to God in service to others.

The future

In a society frequently dominated by secularism where the only value seems to be the accumulation of wealth and power; in an individualistic and utilitarian environment where the prevailing ethical framework ultimately leads to relativism... is there room for a School of Management like this one, inspired by the Christian message from its very start? Clearly, the answer is yes. IESE’s sixty years of existence show clearly that a Christian view of life is not only compatible but is an excellent foundation for a proper understanding of business and its role in society, guiding the training and growth of managers who aspire to technical and human excellence.

As part of the University of Navarra, IESE does not have its own economic or social theories; there are many theories in this area that, to a greater or lesser degree, are compatible with the anthropological and ethical guidelines of the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church. The mission
statement of IESE simply states that “the ethical and moral values of the school are based on the Christian tradition. These values highlight the inherent rights and dignity of each person, who we consider the most important element in any organization and in society in general.” And in another place we read: “We seek to foster integrity, a spirit of service, professional excellence and a sense of responsibility in all those who pass through our school.” These values, based on Christian truth, can be shared by people of any creed, including those with no religion at all.

In any case, the humanistic and ethical content of what is taught at IESE is not a substitute for the professionalism you promote among managers and executives, but rather forms part of it. In fact, the lack of certain virtues and values often indicates poor professional quality, when this is measured not exclusively by external results (income, profits, sales, reputation, social recognition, etc.), but also by internal learning (virtues), the ability to transform persons and their influence on other people (colleagues, employees, etc.).

For those of you working in IESE or in other institutions inspired by its ideals, and for all those who will come in the future, these words of Saint Josemaría about the role of the university in general are very timely also today: “A university does not have its back turned to any uncertainty, worry or need of people today. Its mission is not to offer immediate solutions. But in studying problems with scientific depth, it also moves people’s hearts, overcomes passivity and awakens sleeping forces, educating citizens eager to build a more just society. With its all-embracing work it helps to break down barriers that hinder mutual understanding between men, to diminish the fear of an uncertain future, and to foster—with love for the truth, justice and freedom—true peace and concord among hearts and nations.”[25] How timely these words are today, spoken more than a quarter of a century ago!

This is the task that falls to you, professors, managers and employees, students and former students of IESE, as well as those taking part in this anniversary celebration and who carry out your work in other Schools and Universities.

I said at the beginning that sixty years was already a respectable age for an academic institution. IESE has done a good job, and I congratulate you
for it. But much remains to be done: new generations reach your classrooms every day, your programs multiply, you are present in ever more countries, your research work receives well-deserved praise... Having reached this point, I remind you once again of what Saint Josemaría said to those business people and managers present at that meeting in November 1972: “Don't forget the Christian meaning of life. Don't rejoice in your success. And don't despair if some undertaking fails.” With this outlook you can – we can – always undertake our work “joyful in hope” (Rom 12:12), as Saint Paul wrote to the Romans.


[3] See https://www.iese.edu/about/mis...


[12] St. Josemaría, Friends of God, no. 47


On the Occasion of the Inauguration of the Academic Year of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (October 9, 2019)

On the occasion of the inauguration of the 2019-2020 academic year at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (October 9, 2019)

The Statutes of this University establish that “through the research, study and teaching of Ecclesiastical Sciences ... the University seeks to serve the Church in full and faithful union with its Magisterium, thus cooperating with the Roman Pontiff in the concern for all the Churches.”[1] During these days, when a synod is being held about the Church’s mission, it is fitting to consider that all the University’s efforts are closely linked to the evangelizing mission of the Church, called to go forth not only geographically but also to the depths of each person and the heart of every culture.[2]
Collaborating in this commitment of service to the Church is the bedrock of the teaching activity and all the work carried out by the University’s various offices. The educational purpose of the University is to carry out, through its double mission of research and teaching, an intellectual and formative project in the light of Christian Revelation, to enable people to effectively pass on the faith in today’s cultural and social context.

The Pontifical University of the Holy Cross has accepted the indication of the Pope – expressed in the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium* – to foster a renewal in ecclesiastical studies, in accord with the Church’s needs today. To achieve this goal, some basic criteria are necessary, which the document underlines. In the first place, the invitation to reinforce the dialogue between the different disciplines: between those that are properly ecclesiastical as well as between these and the other disciplines of human knowledge. The document refers to an interdisciplinary effort, understood as a true enlightening and enriching of all human knowledge, through the light that proceeds from Divine Revelation.[3]

This is an important contribution that ecclesiastical schools can offer the academic world, as well as society and culture in general.[4] Today, in the face of the increasing fragmentation of knowledge, we see how postmodern thinking has renounced “great narratives” or “comprehensive visions.” What is needed is a wise vision that encompasses all disciplines, including the search for solutions to the problems afflicting humanity today. In this context, a decree recently signed by the President of the Italian Republic regarding recognition by the State of the titles issued by institutions of higher education erected or approved by the Holy See, seems to open the way for a more fruitful relationship between Pontifical institutions in Rome and the other Italian universities, in order to offer even more opportunities for lay people who wish to pursue a course of study in the Pontifical schools.[5]

All this can have very positive effects on the relationship between the university and society, between the world of studies and research and the world of work and production. This is the third mission, besides research and teaching, that is characteristic of every university. The University of the Holy Cross takes up this challenge, putting at the service of the Church’s
evangelizing mission especially the central message of Opus Dei: the search for the fullness of the Christian life in secular realities and in everyday life. It is an opportunity, therefore, to intensify a fruitful dialogue with contemporary culture. The professors in the different departments have already launched several initiatives of this type. These include the Center for Legal Studies on the Family, and the Center for Markets, Culture and Ethics, which strives to go deeper into the cultural and moral foundations required for the functioning of markets that respect the dignity of the human person, in the light of reason and faith. Other projects include the Higher Institute of Interdisciplinary Education, whose goal is to increase the humanistic and philosophical and theological culture of young graduates, as well as the Science, Theology and Ontological Search initiative, which in collaboration with other Roman universities seeks to foster dialogue between science and faith, through study and research programs. There are also other research groups, such as Family and Media, the Working Group on Relational Ontology Research, etc.

The University’s contribution to society does not depend solely on the teaching staff; it is the result of the harmonious work of all those who make it up. In particular, together with the various aspects of formal education, the educational impact of what is called the “hidden curriculum” is seen as being every more relevant. That is, the informal communication, apparently invisible and difficult to conceptualize, which belongs to the entire university community. This pedagogical action, composed of words, gestures and attitudes, creates a family environment rich in human encounters and acts as a source of teaching and learning that synergizes with the academic dimension. It is not uncommon for students to stress how, together with the beauty and depth of their intellectual experience, they have become deeply involved in the human and spiritual formation that takes place here through friendship and the unity of apostolic life shared by the academic community. The family tone and the high academic level are part of the precious legacy that we have received from Saint Josemaría and that has been continued by the first two Chancellors of this University, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo and Bishop Javier Echevarría.

We give thanks to God for the work done so far and beseech the Holy Spirit for help to continue our university mission. I entrust to the maternal
Pastoral Letters

Pastoral Letter on Friendship (November 1, 2019)

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

In the first long letter that I wrote to you, which contained the conclusions from the General Congress, I said that “the current situation of evangelization makes it more necessary than ever to give priority to personal contact with people. This relational aspect is at the heart of the mode of doing apostolate that Saint Josemaría found in the Gospel narratives.” [1]

In many of my get-togethers with people from various countries, there have arisen spontaneous remarks and questions about friendship. Saint Josemaría frequently reminded us of the human and Christian importance of this great good. There are also abundant testimonies of how he personally formed many friendships that he kept up throughout his lifetime. As we well know, he insisted to us that the principal apostolate in the Work is that of friendship and confidence. In this letter, I would like to remind you of some aspects of our Father’s teachings about this topic.
The friendship of Jesus

Jesus Christ, a perfect man, lived out fully the human value of friendship. In the Gospels we see how, from a young age, he formed friendships with the people around him. Already when He was twelve, Mary and Joseph, on returning from Jerusalem, assumed that Jesus was traveling with a group of friends and relatives (cf. Lk 2:44). Later, during his public life, we see our Lord often in the homes of his friends and acquaintances, whether visiting them or sharing a meal: in Peter’s house (cf. Lk 4:38), in the house of Levi (cf. Lk 5:29), of Simon (cf. Lk 7:36), of Jairus (cf. Lk 8:41), of Zacchaeus (cf. Lk 19:5), etc. We also see him attending a wedding in Cana (cf. Jn 2:1) and in places of worship alongside other people (cf. Jn 8:2). On other occasions, he dedicated time exclusively to his disciples (cf. Mk 3:7).

Jesus takes advantage of any situation to begin a relationship of friendship, and we so often see him stopping to spend time with specific people. A few minutes of conversation were enough for the Samaritan woman to sense that she was known and understood. And hence she asked: “Can this be the Christ?” (Jn 4:29). The disciples from Emmaus, after walking alongside and sitting at table with Jesus, recognize the presence of the Friend who made their hearts burn with his words (cf. Lk 24:32).

Our Lord often dedicated longer periods of time to his friends. We see this in the home at Bethany. There, in long days spent in family intimacy, “Jesus shares words of affection and encouragement, and responds to friendship with his own friendship. What marvelous conversations in the home at Bethany, with Lazarus, Martha and Mary!” [2] In that home we also learn that Christ’s friendship produces a deep trust (cf. Jn 11:21) and is filled with empathy, especially the ability to accompany others in their suffering (cf. Jn 11:35).

But it is at the Last Supper that our Lord shows most deeply his desire to offer us his friendship. In the intimacy of the Cenacle, Jesus tells the apostles: I have called you friends (Jn 15:15). And in them he has said this to all of us. God loves us not merely as creatures but as children to whom, in Christ, he offers true friendship. And we respond to this friendship by uniting our will to his, by doing what our Lord wants (cf. Jn 15:14).
“Idem velle atque idem nolle—to want the same thing, and to reject the same thing—was recognized by antiquity as the authentic content of love: the one becomes similar to the other, and this leads to a community of will and thought. The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God’s will increasingly coincide: God’s will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself. Then self-abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy (cf. Ps 73 [72]:23-28).” [3]

Realizing that we have a true friendship with Jesus fills us with confidence, because He is faithful. “Friendship with Jesus cannot be broken. He never leaves us, even though at times it appears that he keeps silent. When we need him, he makes himself known to us (cf. Jer 29:14); he remains at our side wherever we go (cf. Jos 1:9). He never breaks his covenant. He simply asks that we not abandon him: Abide in me (Jn 15:4). But even if we stray from him, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself (2 Tim 2:13).” [4]

To respond to this friendship of Jesus is to love him, with a love that is the soul of the Christian life and tries to manifest itself in everything we do. “We need a rich interior life, the sure sign of friendship with God and the indispensable condition for any work with souls.” [5] All apostolate, all work for the good of souls, stems from this friendship with God, which is the source of true Christian love for others. “By living in friendship with God, which is the first friendship we have to foster and strengthen, you will be able to make many true friends (cf. Sir 6:17). The effort our Lord has made and continues making to keep us in his friendship is the same effort that He wants to make for many other souls, making use of us as instruments to do so.”[6]

The human and Christian value of friendship

Friendship is a very rich human reality—a form of reciprocal love between two persons that is built on mutual knowledge and communication. [7] It is a form of love that is directed “in two directions
and that seeks the true good of the other person, a love that produces union and happiness.” [8] Hence Sacred Scripture says that there is nothing so precious as a faithful friend, and no scales can measure his excellence (Sir 6:15).

Charity raises the human capacity to love to the supernatural level, and therefore friendship as well. “Friendship is one of the noblest and highest human sentiments, which divine Grace purifies and transfigures.” [9] This sentiment can sometimes arise spontaneously, but in every case it needs to grow through personal contact and consequently through dedication of time. “Friendship is no fleeting or temporary relationship, but one that is stable, firm and faithful, and matures with the passage of time. It is a relationship of affection that makes us feel united and a generous love that leads us to seek the good of our friend.”

God often makes use of an authentic friendship to carry out his saving work. The Old Testament recounts the friendship between David, still a youth, and Jonathan, heir to the throne of Israel (cf. 1 Sam 18:4). Jonathan did not hesitate to share with his friend all his possessions (cf. 1 Sam 18:4), and in trying moments he reminded his father, Saul, of all the good David had done (cf. 1 Sam 19:4). Jonathan even reached the point of risking his succession to the throne by defending his friend, for he loved him as he loved his own soul (1 Sam 20:17). This sincere friendship led both of them to be faithful to God (cf. 1 Sam 20:8,42).

The example of the early Christians is especially eloquent in this regard. Our Father remarked that “they loved one another, through the heart of Christ, with a love both tender and strong.” [11] Love for one another has been, right from the Church’s start, the distinctive sign of Jesus’ disciples (cf. Jn 13:35).

We find another example from the first centuries of Christianity in Saint Basil and Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. The friendship they formed in their youth kept them united throughout their whole life, and even today they share the same feast day in the general liturgical calendar. Saint Gregory says that “our single object and ambition was virtue, and a life of hope in the blessings that are to come.” [12] Their friendship, rather than distancing them from God, led them closer to him: “With this end in view we ordered our lives and all our actions. We followed the guidance of God’s
law and spurred each other on to virtue.” [13]

“In a Christian, in a child of God, friendship and charity are one and the same thing. They are a divine light which spreads warmth.” [14] One could even say, with words Saint Augustine addressed to Our Lord, that for Christians “true friendship exists only between those You unite through charity.[15] Hence, since charity can be more or less intense, and since the time a person has is limited, friendship can be more or less deep. And thus people often talk about being “great friends” or having a “great friendship,” although this does not exclude the existence of true friendships that are not as great or intimate.

At the start of the new millennium, Saint John Paul II said all the apostolic initiatives that arise in the future will become “mechanisms without a soul” if they are not grounded on a sincere love for every person, on being “able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship.” [16] Our centers, which are destined to carry out a great catechesis, should be places where many people find a sincere love and learn to be true friends.

Christian friendship does not exclude anyone; with a big heart it needs to be intentionally open to every person. The Pharisees criticized Jesus, as though being a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt 11:19) were something bad. Striving to imitate Our Lord, within our own littleness, “we too do not exclude anyone; we do not refuse any soul a place in our love for Christ. Therefore you need to foster a firm, loyal and sincere friendship—that is, a Christian friendship—with all your professional colleagues. And, what is more, you have to do this with everybody, regardless of their personal circumstances.” [17]

Christ was completely immersed in the social setting of his place and time and thereby gave us an example also in this regard. As Saint Josemaría wrote, “Our Lord does not limit his dialogue to a small, restricted group. He speaks with everyone: with the holy women, with the large crowds; with representatives of Israel’s upper class like Nicodemus and with publicans like Zacchaeus; with persons viewed as pious and with sinners like the Samaritan woman; with the healthy and with the sick; with the poor, whom he loved tenderly; with doctors of the law and with pagans, whose
faith he praised above that of Israel’s; with the elderly and with children. Jesus refuses no one his words, words that heal, console and enlighten. How often I have meditated and had others meditate on Christ’s way of doing apostolate—human and divine at the same time—based on friendship and confidence!” [18]

**Manifestations of friendship**

Friendship is especially valuable for that necessary sign of charity which is understanding others. “True friendship also means making a heartfelt effort to understand the convictions of our friends, even though we may never come to share them or accept them.” [19] Thus our friends help us to understand ways of viewing life that are different from our own, that enrich our inner world, and, when the friendship is deep, that enable us to experience the world in a different way. This is, in the end, a true sharing in others’ sentiments, which is sharing in their life and in their experiences.

Loving others means seeing and affirming them just as they are, with their problems, their defects, their personal history, their social surroundings, and their own times for drawing close to Jesus. Hence, to build a true friendship, we need to develop the capacity to look at other people with affection to the point where we see them with the eyes of Christ. We need to cleanse our way of looking of any prejudice, learn to discover the good in each person, and renounce the desire to remake them “in our own image.” For friends to receive our affection, they don’t need to fulfill any conditions. As Christians, we see each person above all as someone loved by God. Each person is unique, as is each relationship of friendship.

As Saint Augustine said, “All should not be given the same medicine, although all need the same love. The same love provides light for some and shares in the suffering of others … it is gentle to some, stern to others; an enemy to none, and a mother to all.” [20] Being a friend means learning to treat each person as Our Lord does. “In creating souls, God does not repeat himself. Each person is as they are, and we need to treat each person in accord with what God has done and with how He is leading them.” [21] Since it is a question of discovering and loving the good of the other person, friendship also means suffering with our friends and for our friends. In difficult moments, it is a great help to renew our faith that God acts in a
person’s soul in his own way and in his own time.

Friendship, moreover, has an incalculable social value, since it fosters harmony among family members and the creation of social environments more worthy of the human person. “By divine vocation,” our Father writes, “you live in the middle of the world, sharing with your fellow men and women—your equals—joys and sorrows, efforts and dreams, hopes and adventures. In walking along the countless paths of the earth you will have striven, because our spirit leads us to do so, to get along with everyone, to be welcoming with everyone, in order to help create an environment of peace and friendship.” [22]

This environment of friendship, which each of us is called to carry with us, is the fruit of many efforts to make life pleasant for others. Growing in cordiality, joyfulness, patience, optimism, refinement and in all the virtues that make living with others agreeable is important for helping people to feel welcomed and to be happy: *A pleasant voice multiplies friends, and a gracious tongue multiplies courtesies* (*Sir* 6:5). The struggle to improve our own character is a necessary condition for facilitating relationships of friendship.

In contrast, certain ways of expressing oneself can disturb or hinder the creation of an environment of friendship. For example, being overly emphatic in expressing one’s own opinion, or giving the impression that we think our own viewpoints are the definitive ones, or not taking an active interest in what the others say, are ways of acting that enclose a person in himself. At times, these types of behavior show an inability to distinguish what is a matter of opinion from what is not, or the failure to give a relative value to topics that don’t necessarily have only one solution.

Our Christian concern for others stems precisely from our union with Christ and our identification with the mission to which He has called us. “We are called to serve the crowds. We are never closed in on ourselves, but live facing the multitude of men and women. And deep in our heart are those words of our Lord Jesus Christ: I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat (*Mk* 8:2).” [23]
Strengthening bonds with our friends requires time and attention, and often means avoiding comfort-seeking or setting aside our own preferences. For a Christian it means in the first place prayer, with the assurance that there we find the authentic energy capable of transforming the world. “For this world of ours to move along a Christian path—the only worthwhile one—we have to exercise a loyal friendship with all men, based on a prior loyal friendship with God.” [24]

Sincerity and friendship

“A true friend can never be two-faced with his friend: Vir duplex animo inconstans est in omnibus viis suis (Jas 1:8), a double-minded man is unstable in everything. If it is to be loyal and sincere, friendship demands sacrifice, integrity, an exchange of favors and of services that are noble and licit. A friend is strong and sincere in the measure in which, following supernatural prudence, he thinks generously about other people even at the cost of personal sacrifice.” [25]

Friendship is mutual: it is a sincere, two-way communication in which the friends each share their own experience, so as to learn from one another.

Friends share their joys, like the shepherd who found his lost sheep (cf. Lk 15:6) and the woman who found her lost drachma (cf. Lk 15:9). In addition, they share their hopes and plans, and also their sorrows. Friendship is shown especially in readiness to help, as we see in the case of the man who came to Jesus asking him to cure a servant of his friend the centurion (cf. Lk 7:6). And above all, the highest friendship will tend to imitate the greatness of the love of friendship of Jesus Christ: No one has greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (Jn 15:13).

It may sometimes happen that out of a certain reserve or shyness, a person does not manage to show others all the affection he or she would like to. Overcoming this obstacle, losing this fear, can be a great opportunity for God to pour out his love on those friends. “True friendship entails sincere mutual affection, which is the true protection of reciprocal freedom and intimacy.” [26] Similarly, Saint Thomas says that genuine friendship has to be shown externally: it requires “a certain reciprocity in the loving, since friendship is between friend and friend.” [27]
At the same time, genuinely offering our friendship entails being willing to take a risk, since there is always a possibility that it may not be returned. This is something Our Lord experiences in his own life, when the rich young man prefers to take a different path (cf. Mk 10:22) or when, coming down from the Mount of Olives, he weeps over Jerusalem at the thought of those whose hearts are hardened (cf. Lk 19:41). After experiences like that, which will arise sooner or later, we have to overcome the fear of taking that risk again, just as Jesus also does with each of us. In other words, we need to accept our own vulnerability, to keep taking the first step without expecting anything in return, with our eyes on the great good that may come into being: a genuine friendship.

To bring about the sort of environment in which fruitful friendships can grow, we need to foster personal spontaneity and encourage the initiative of each person in family life and social life. These two qualities, spontaneity and initiative, will not grow by inertia in just any surroundings: they have to be nurtured and people have to be encouraged to show themselves as they really are. This naturally gives rise to pluralism, which “should be loved and fostered, although someone may find this diversity hard to accept at times. A person who loves freedom manages to see the positive and attractive aspects of what others think.” [28] His or her attitude of valuing people who are different, or who think differently, denotes inner freedom and openness, both of which are aspects of genuine friendship.

From another angle, friendship, like love (of which it is one expression), is not a univocal reality. There is not the same sharing of one’s own intimacy with all of one’s friends. For example, the friendship between husband and wife and the friendship between parents and children that was so strongly recommended by Saint Josemaría and the friendship between siblings or that between co-workers are not identical. In all of these there is a shared inner space which is specific to that particular relationship. Respecting this diversity in the ways we show our intimacy to others does not imply any lack of sincerity or any deficiency of friendship, but just the opposite: generally, it is a condition for maintaining the true nature of that relationship.

Friendship and fraternity
Blessed Alvaro del Portillo wrote that “for those who love God, being his children and being his friends are two inseparable things.” Similarly, there is a very close connection between fraternity and friendship. Beginning with the simple relationship of being children of the same parents, fraternity becomes friendship through love and affection among the siblings, with all that implies of shared interests, understanding, communication, attentive and perceptive service, material help, etc.

Similarly, the fraternity that arises from a shared vocation to the Work also needs to be expressed in friendship, which achieves maturity when the good that is desired for the other person is their happiness, their faithfulness and their holiness. At the same time, this friendship is not “particular” in the sense of being exclusive or excluding other people, but is always open to others, even though limitations of time and space prevent us from having equally intense communication and dealings with everyone.

“With exquisite charity, which is characteristic of the Work of God, we help one another to live and love our own sanctity and everyone else’s. And we feel strong with the strength of playing-cards which cannot stand up alone, but by supporting one another can be built up into a castle.” Thus the love that unites us with each other is the same love that keeps the whole Work united.

Friendship is a constant support and stimulus for the mission we all share. With our brothers or sisters we also share our joys and our plans, our worries and our hopes, although obviously there are aspects of our personal relationship with God which, normally at least, we keep for spiritual direction alone. The same thing happens in the friendship between husband and wife, between parents and children, and, in general, between good friends.

The effort to make life pleasant for others is a joyful commitment that forms part of our daily life. In this area, as long as we act with common sense and supernatural sense, it would be hard to go too far. On the contrary, it is a fundamental part of the path to holiness. “I don't mind saying this often: everybody needs affection, and we in the Work need it too. Make sure that, without doing anything maudlin, your affection for one another grows continually. Anything that affects another of my
children must—genuinely!—be of great concern for us.” [31] For those who lived with our Father, what they especially remember is his affection. This was an affection that led him to try to obtain the best for each of his daughters and sons, and at the same time impelled him to have a deep love for their freedom.

Fraternal affection, which is charity, leads us on the one hand to see others through Christ’s eyes, always rediscovering their value. And on the other hand it impels us to want them to be better and holier. Saint Josemaría encouraged us: “Always have a very big heart for loving God and for loving others. I often ask Our Lord to give me a heart to the measure of his. I do this, in the first place, to be more full of him, and then to love everyone without ever complaining. I am able to be understanding and forgive other people’s defects, because I cannot forget how much God has put up with from me. This understanding, which is true affection, is also shown in fraternal correction, whenever necessary, because it is a totally supernatural way of helping the people around us.” [32] Fraternal correction is born of affection; it shows that we want the others to be happier all the time. Sometimes it can be hard to do, and that is another reason we are grateful for it.

Our personal happiness does not depend on the successes we achieve, but rather on the love we receive and the love we give. The love of our brothers and sisters gives us the security we need in order to continue “fighting a most beautiful war of love and peace: \textit{in hoc pulcherrimo caritatis bello!} We try to bring Christ’s charity to everyone, without any exceptions based on language, nation, or walk of life.” [33] We know how much our Father liked the phrase in Scripture, \textit{Frater qui adiuvatur a fratre quasi civitas firma}: a brother helped by his brother is like a walled city (Prov 18:19).

In the last get-togethers he had with us, Don Javier frequently repeated, “Love one another!” It was a cry which, as always, echoed our Father’s intentions. “How very insistent the Apostle Saint John was in preaching the \textit{mandatum novum}, the new commandment that we should love one another! I would fall on my knees, without putting on any act—it is what my heart calls for—and ask you, for the love of God, to love one another, to help one another, to lend one another a hand, to know how to forgive one another.
And so, reject all pride, be compassionate, show charity; help each other with prayer and sincere friendship.” [34]

**Apostolate of friendship and confidence**

From the earliest years of Opus Dei, Saint Josemaría taught us the specific way by which God invites us to announce the Gospel in the middle of the world. “You are to bring souls closer to God by your timely words that open up apostolic horizons; by the wise advice that helps someone take a Christian approach in facing a problem; through your friendly conversation, which teaches others how to practice charity: that is, through an apostolate that I have sometimes called the apostolate of friendship and confidence.” [35]

True friendship—like charity, which raises the human dimension of friendship to the supernatural plane—is a value in itself. It is not a means or an instrument for gaining any social advantage, even though it may bring such advantages (as it may also bring disadvantages). Our Father, while encouraging us to cultivate friendship with many people, warned us at the same time: “You will act like that, my daughters and sons, not indeed to use friendship as a tactic for social penetration (that would make friendship lose its intrinsic value), but as a requirement, the first and most immediate requirement, of human fraternity, which we Christians have the duty to foster among men, no matter how different they are from one another.” [36]

Friendship has an *intrinsic value* because it denotes a sincere concern for the other person. Thus “friendship is itself apostolate; friendship is itself a dialogue in which we give and receive light. In friendship plans are forged as we mutually open up new horizons. In friendship we rejoice in what is good and support one another in what is difficult; we have a good time with one another, since God wants us to be happy.” [37]

When a friendship is like that, loyal and sincere, there is no way it can be instrumentalized. Each friend simply wants to pass on to the other the good they experience in their own life. Normally we will do this without even realizing it, through our example, our joy and a desire to serve that is expressed in a thousand little ways. Nevertheless, “the importance of witness does not mean that our words are not needed. Why should we not
speak of Jesus, why should we not tell others that he gives us strength in life, that we enjoy talking with him, that we benefit from meditating on his words?” [38] And then, naturally, friendship ends up in personal confidences, full of sensitive respect for freedom, as a necessary result of the genuine character of that friendship.

Naturally, the relationship of friendship leads to many shared moments: talking together while on a walk or around a table, playing a sport, enjoying the same hobby, going on an outing, etc. In short, friendship requires spending time on mutual interactions and confidences. Without these confidences there is no friendship. “When I speak to you about the ‘apostolate of friendship,’ I mean a personal friendship, self-sacrificing and sincere: face to face, heart to heart.” [39] When friendship is real, when our concern for the other person is sincere and fills our prayer, there are no shared moments that are not apostolic: everything is friendship and everything is apostolate, without being able to distinguish them.

“Hence the enormous importance, not just human but divine, of friendship. I will tell you once again, as I have been doing since the beginning of our Work: be friends to your friends, sincere friends, and like that you will carry out fruitful apostolate and dialogue.” [40] It is not a question of having friends in order to do apostolate, but of making sure that the Love of God fills our friendship so that it is genuine apostolate.

The birth of a friendship comes like an unexpected gift, and for that very reason it also requires patience. Sometimes certain bad experiences or prejudices can mean that it takes time before the personal relationship we have with someone close at hand turns into friendship. Fear, human respects or certain preconceptions can also make it difficult. It is good to try and put ourselves in the other person’s place and be patient. We need to be like Jesus Christ, who “is ready to talk to everyone, even people who don't want to know the truth, like Pilate.” [41]

There are many good ways of evangelizing. In the Work, however, the main apostolate is always that of friendship. This is what our Father taught us: “It can truly be said, my dearest children, that the greatest fruit of Opus Dei’s work is what its members obtain personally by their apostolate of example and loyal friendship with their colleagues at work: in a
Without neglecting the tasks we have in hand, we need to learn how to look after our friends at all times.

In addition, our friendship with them will often be complemented by the corporate apostolate done in our centers and apostolic initiatives. “That friendship, that relationship with one of you is afterwards broadened, first by affection and understanding, and then by that person’s regular attendance at an Opus Dei house, where they start to go and are soon taught to consider as something of their own, as their home. All of this, clearly, is afterwards united to their friendship with the people they meet and get to know in that house of ours.” [43]

Also within the apostolate of friendship falls our apostolate _ad fidem_ with people who do not share our faith. “My daughters and sons, have faith, a sturdy faith, a living faith, a faith that works through love, _veritatem facientes in caritate_ (Eph 4:15). Keep this spirit when dealing with our separated brethren and with non-Christians. Love everyone, be charitable to everyone, offer friendship to everyone. No one who has approached any of our corporate apostolates has ever been poorly treated because of his or her religious convictions, and we never speak to anyone about our faith if that person does not want us to.” [44]

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In these pages I have wanted to remind you how we all need friendship, that gift of God that brings us consolation and joy. “God has made human beings in such a way that we cannot help sharing the feelings of our hearts with others: if we have received some cause for happiness, we feel an inner force that makes us sing and smile, that makes us in one way or another bring others to share in our happiness. If it is sorrow that fills our soul, we want to have a quiet atmosphere around us, that shows us that the others understand and respect us. As human beings, my daughters and sons, we all need to be supported by one another, in order to travel along life’s path, to make our hopes into realities, to overcome the difficulties, to enjoy the fruit of our labors. Hence the great importance, both humanly and supernaturally, of friendship.” [45]
The first young people who came in contact with the Work in the 1930's found around our Father a genuine atmosphere of friendship. That was the first thing that attracted them, and it kept them united in very difficult times. Friendship multiplies our joys and offers comfort in our sorrows. A Christian’s friendship desires the greatest happiness—a relationship with Jesus Christ—for those close to him or her. Let us pray, as Saint Josemaría did, “Jesus, gives us hearts to the measure of Yours!” [46] That is the path. Only by identifying ourselves with Christ’s hearts feelings—let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5)—will we be able through our friendship to bring that full happiness to our home, our work, and every place we find ourselves.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,
Rome, 1 November 2019
Solemnity of All Saints

[13] Ibid.


[29] Blessed Alvaro, Foreword to *Friends of God*.


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Activities of the Prelate

Barcelona, Spain, July 5 to 6

On Friday, July 5, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Chancellor of the University of Navarra, participated in the conference on “The Company and its Social Responsibilities,” which concluded the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the University of Navarra’s IESE Business School.

IESE Dean Franz Heukamp opened the congress by welcoming the participants. The Prelate of Opus Dei then gave a lecture entitled “IESE and the Social Role of Business.”

The Prelate also met with the directors of the schools of the Institució Familiar d'Educació, whose pastoral care is entrusted to the Prelature. This institute is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

In the morning of Saturday, July 6, the Prelate met with a number of families. He asked them to pray for Pope Francis and reminded them that the Church is a large family open to the whole world, and encouraged them to transmit the great joy of Christianity.

Msgr. Ocáriz then met with representatives from the 16 business schools associated with IESE. He stressed that these schools should “be forgers of human progress, not only materially but also spiritually.” During the meeting with professors and directors of these schools, they shared experiences and anecdotes on ways to transmit their Christian identity. In regard to this concern shown by all those present, Msgr. Ocáriz reflected on friendship: “Personal contact, treating people with affection, that is what transmitting the Gospel involves.” And he added that a “business school that wants to be Christian must live charity, and prior to that, justice.”

On the 6th, the Prelate spent time with student volunteers from the Bonaigua University Residence who had been involved in a recent traffic accident in Ivory Coast, in which Teresa Cardona, a member of the board of directors of the Residence, had lost her life. Families of the volunteers and Teresa’s relatives were also present. During the encounter Msgr. Ocáriz offered them words of encouragement: “You have suffered and we
have all suffered with you. I have also suffered for Teresa and for all of them, for the families... One wonders why these things happen. Humanly we can’t understand it. But we need to have faith that God's love accompanies us, precedes us, and always follows us closely. The loss of Teresa is great, but with faith we know that she has completed her journey and reached her goal.”

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**United States July 7 to August 8**

During his first visit as Prelate to the United States, Msgr. Ocáriz had the opportunity to greet many of the Prelature's faithful and their families and friends. He also visited several educational and welfare initiatives.

The Prelate arrived at New York's JFK airport on July 7. The next day he visited IESE's New York campus. There he took part in a colloquium with professors from various universities organized by the Witherspoon Institute. In a social environment often beset by sentimentality and arbitrariness, he reiterated the importance of a Christian understanding of the meaning of love and freedom.

On Tuesday afternoon, July 9, Msgr. Ocáriz went to St. Patrick's Cathedral to pray and meet with the Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Timothy Dolan.

On the 10th, the Prelate visited St. Agnes Parish, which is entrusted to priests of the Prelature. He then spent a few minutes praying at Ground Zero, where the Twin Towers were destroyed in the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, and where a memorial has been erected with the names of the victims.

Msgr. Ocáriz had several get-togethers with young people and with faithful of the Prelature who traveled to New York from other cities in the East including Boston, Washington D.C., Pittsburgh, Atlanta, and Miami. Among other topics, he spoke about the communion of saints: “All the good we do, our prayer and our work, not only has a direct, immediate impact on what we have in our hands. It affects, gives impetus to, and helps
the whole Work and in reality the whole Church, because the Work is a small part of the Church.” Quoting words of Pope Francis, he encouraged them to “transmit the joy of the Gospel, which is to transmit the knowledge of Christ.”

Upon his arrival at Chicago's O'Hare Airport on July 12, Msgr. Ocáriz greeted several families who had come to welcome him. On the 13th and 14th he met with people from Northridge Prep and The Willows Academy schools. Quoting St. Josemaría he reminded them that “the Church is Jesus Christ present among us, with his grace, his word, his sacraments, and He himself in the Eucharist. This is the Church, and this is what is permanent, this is what gives strength to everything else, even though we see a lot of weakness in ourselves and in many other people.” He spoke at length about married life and the education of one's children and the importance of “reconquering one's own freedom,” realizing that “we are free only when we love.” He also addressed a few words to those suffering from illnesses, reminding them that their prayer can reach the whole world.

In a get-together with young people, he reminded them of the great importance of friendship: “when there is true friendship we can transmit what we carry inside, our thoughts and desires, and even our difficulties.”

On Monday, July 15, he visited Metro and Midtown Centers, two social initiatives run by faithful of the Prelature in Chicago that offer supplemental educational programs for girls and boys respectively. Since both were holding summer sessions, the Prelate was able to speak with students and teachers. On the same day, he visited St. Mary of the Angels parish, which is entrusted to priests of the Prelature. There he had an informal meeting with other diocesan priests involved in formational activities of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross.


The Prelate arrived in Houston on the afternoon of July 20. That day was the 50th anniversary of the Apollo XI moon landing. In a get-together with faithful of the Prelature and their friends, one of the those present who works at NASA presented him with a plaque commemorating the date.
During these days he resided at Westcott Study Center, a recently opened center of Opus Dei that offers educational activities for young people.

On July 21, during a get-together at the Intercontinental Hotel, the Prelate encouraged those present by pointing to the immense panorama of evangelization before them, how much has been done and how much remains to be done, and how God has wanted to count on them. “We have to be people of great hope, founded firmly on our faith,” he said.

He also spent time with a group of people from Venezuela who had to leave their country due to the difficult circumstances there. He encouraged them to continue praying and not to lose hope, because the whole Church is accompanying them.

On the morning of Monday the 22nd, the Prelate visited Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston. He then visited Holy Cross Chapel, located in the commercial center of the city, whose spiritual care is entrusted to priests of the Prelature.

That day he also met with students coming mainly from Houston, Dallas and San Antonio. In response to a student's question about how to work well without falling into perfectionism, the Prelate reiterated that “we need to work hard, putting in many hours, but if we understand that the meaning of our work is supernatural, we will know when to stop to dedicate time to our family, to rest and to care for others.” In the afternoon get-together he reminded people that prayer is the best way to help the apostolic work of Opus Dei.

On the morning of Tuesday the 23rd, Msgr. Ocáriz visited Western Academy, a school for boys, and blessed a magnolia tree on the site where the Magnolia school for girls will be located. At Western Academy he had an opportunity to speak with teachers and students. That same day he spent time with a group of families who organize activities to help strengthen families in Family Enrichment programs.

The family that received the Prelate at the Los Angeles airport on July 24 carried a large sign reproducing the legendary Hollywood sign on the hillside above the city, a reminder of its close tie with the movie industry.
On Thursday the 25th, Msgr. Ocáriz visited the cathedral and had lunch with Archbishop José Gómez of Los Angeles.

On Friday the 26th, the Prelate met with young people at the Caruso Catholic Center in the University of Southern California. In response to a question about the possible beginning of the Prelature's apostolic work in mainland China, Msgr. Ocáriz reminded them of the importance of prayer.

The topic of the cinema and the media was present during the days the Prelate spent in Los Angeles. During a get-together on Saturday the 27th, he encouraged those who work in this field to be good friends of their co-workers, and to try to produce films that are of high technical quality and communicate a positive message. He also recalled St. Josemaria's dream that one day there would be a shrine here dedicated to our Lady, Mother of Fair Love, and said he hoped the shrine would help spread to many people “the beauty of Fair Love, the beauty of marital fidelity and purity.”

That afternoon Msgr. Ocáriz met with women who take part in the Prelature's work of formation. In response to a mother from Silicon Valley who expressed her concern about the negative impact of material wealth on her children, he encouraged her to show by her example that it is possible to be happy without being attached to material possessions: “Detachment makes us free to love people. If we are attached to things, our strength to love others diminishes. The heart can expand enormously, but it can also shrink.”

As in the other cities that he visited in the United States, Msgr. Ocáriz received many families of Opus Dei faithful, cooperators, and friends to whom he conveyed a message of hope and optimism and urged them to serve God and the Church with generosity and love. In all the groups he met with, the Prelate insisted on the importance of supporting the Pope with their prayer, thus responding to the Holy Father’s continuous request for prayer.

After a few days of rest, on August 8 Msgr. Ocáriz left from San Francisco for Vancouver, Canada.
Canada, August 8 to 16

Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz arrived in Vancouver early on the afternoon of August 8. He was received by Msgr. Frederick Dolan, regional vicar of Opus Dei in Canada, and by some families who welcomed him.

On the morning of the 9th, he met with a group of priests who are members and cooperators of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. He then went to the Chancery where he had a meeting with Archbishop J. Michael Miller of Vancouver, who accompanied the Prelate to visit the St. John Paul II Pastoral Centre. In the afternoon, Msgr. Ocáriz went to Crestwell, a women’s center of Opus Dei, where he met with a group of students. At the end of the day, he had a lively get-together with university and high school students at Glenwood, a center for men.

On August 10, the Prelate met with several groups of men and women, faithful of Opus Dei and cooperators, at Vancouver College, a Catholic high school. The people there came from Vancouver, Victoria, Calgary, Edmonton, and Seattle, Washington. After each get-together, the Prelate spent time greeting the families who wanted to chat and have their picture taken with him, and tell him about their joys and concerns and ask for his prayers.

On Sunday, August 11, he traveled north by car along the Howe Sound Fjord of the Pacific Ocean to Britannia Beach where Copper Ridge is located, the future Conference Center where spiritual retreats, theology courses, etc. will be offered. The Prelate looked over the site and blessed what will be the last stone. He also planted a dogwood tree whose flower is the emblem of the Canadian province of British Columbia.

On Monday, August 12, he flew from Vancouver to Toronto, and arrived at Pearson International Airport in the late afternoon.

On the 13th, the Prelate visited Ernescliff College, a university residence located on the campus of the University of Toronto, and met with a group of young men. Msgr. Ocáriz then went to the Hawthorn School for girls, where he greeted the students and faculty. In the evening, a get-together was held at the Fairview Library Theatre with a group of faithful and cooperators of Opus Dei from Toronto and the surrounding area. At
the end, the Prelate encouraged those present to pray for the Pope and to be very joyful thanks to their union with Christ. Afterwards, some families had the opportunity to greet him.

On August 14, he had a get-together in Wilson Heights Junior High School with a group of faithful of the Prelature. Afterwards he went to visit Cardinal Thomas Collins, the Archbishop of Toronto and was shown through the newly restored St. Michael's Cathedral. In the afternoon, several families came to Wilson Heights to greet the Prelate. In the evening, Msgr. Ocáriz had another get-together at the Fairview Library Theatre in Toronto with a group of women and cooperators of Opus Dei.

The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary was celebrated on August 15th, which was also the anniversary of Msgr. Ocáriz's ordination to the priesthood. The Prelate went to Kintore College, a student residence, and there he celebrated a solemn Mass in which many faithful of the Prelature took part. In the afternoon, he left with Msgr. Frederick Dolan for the airport, where they took a flight to Montreal, the next stop on the trip.

The Prelate stayed near Montreal at the Manoir de Beaujeu retreat house, located in the town of Coteau-du-Lac. On August 16, he met there with the regional directors of Opus Dei in Canada. In the afternoon, he preached a meditation to a group of faithful of the Prelature from Montreal, Quebec, and Ottawa.

On Saturday, the 17th, two get-togethers were held with faithful of the Prelature in the L'Entrepôt de Lachine hall on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, between Montreal and Coteau-du-Lac. Opus Dei’s apostolic work in Canada began fifty years ago in Montreal and has since spread throughout the country. In the two gatherings Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz used the well-known motto of the Canadian nation, A mari usque ad mare, to encourage their work of evangelization from sea to sea, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from south to north.

On August 18, Msgr. Ocáriz received a group of girls and then a group of boys at the Manoir de Beaujeu. Later, he received a group of families at the Manoir and, at the end of the day, he was received by Bishop Noel Simard of Valleyfield, the diocese where the Manoir de Beaujeu is located.
On Monday the 19th, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz went to the airport to take the plane back to Europe.

Sanctuary of Torreciudad, Spain, August 29-September 1

Shortly after arriving and greeting Our Lady, he prayed before the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe, accompanied by many young people. During those days he met with families and young people from various countries.

On the afternoon of the 29th, he met with friends and the staff of Torreciudad, whom he encouraged to “give thanks to God for the possibility of helping out.” Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz expressed his gratitude to the employees of the shrine, directors of the board and collaborators.

One of the architects who was part of the team that built the shrine between 1970 and 1975 recalled that at that time “he saw much love for God, difficulties and human enthusiasm,” and that St. Josemaría said that our Lord would be merciful to those who put love into sites for divine worship. The Prelate responded with words of St. Josemaría: “the only weapon for everything is prayer,” and encouraged him to “transform work into prayer. “And the first and fundamental prayer is the Eucharist, since all strength comes from the Cross of Christ, made sacramentally present at Mass.”

Torreciudad has been carrying out a fundraising campaign for a long-term renovation project. One of the persons assisting the Board of Trustees to raise money said he feels fortunate to work for Our Lady of Torreciudad: “Although sometimes one suffers a bit, it is always worthwhile.” The Prelate encouraged him to consider that “when you ask for help, you do a favor” to people.

At the end of the day, he met with a group of priests who were taking part in a workshop of formation. He recalled some events from his pastoral trip to the United States and Canada, his meetings with many families and
with the bishops of the cities he visited. At the end, Msgr. Ocáriz knelt down to receive the blessing of all the priests.

Students were the protagonists on the morning of Friday the 30th and the afternoon of Saturday the 31st, in two gatherings in which more than a thousand young people took part. Some of them asked questions about Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*. One university student said that she thinks it is a wonderful document, and she “would like to read it and reflect on it in my prayer, because I think it could be very useful for me.”

When speaking about the Apostolic Exhortation in his dialogue with the students, Msgr. Ocáriz stressed that “God calls everyone” and that “each person has to see how God's love is made specific” in his or her life. Each person needs to freely seek the light of God's call and ask for the strength to want to say yes. He stressed the importance of personal freedom in the response to one's own vocation: “You decide,” he said to a student. “You have to be the one to decide, because He doesn't impose himself. Ask for light and strength, although there will always be a margin of uncertainty. Ask in your prayer, and seek advice.”

In response to another question about vocational discernment, Msgr. Ocáriz pointed out that “*Christus Vivit* speaks a lot about discernment. We all have a Christian vocation but our Lord does not make us see it clearly at first because he wants us to be very free to choose.”

Concern for those who are suffering was very present in the Prelate's words. A young Syrian woman who is now studying for a master's degree in engineering in Barcelona asked how to continue helping her country. Msgr. Ocáriz encouraged her not to feel far away from Syria, since with her prayer and work she can directly help to improve the situation: “We are all praying for your country. As Catholics, we need to have a universal spirit. We shouldn't see the news from other countries or cities as something foreign to us. Sometimes we lack the heart to feel compassion for others, to suffer with those who are suffering—in Syria, Venezuela, etc.—and also to rejoice with the good news of others as well.”

The Prelate received several families who shared with him their hopes and challenges. He greeted each one, giving them a photo, a rosary and
He also attended the organ concert that is held every Friday in August at Torreciudad, and met with several groups of professionals who were spending some days of formation there. He devoted special attention to the staff that lives there and works directly in the daily management of the shrine, stressing the importance of their work. The rector of the shrine, Fr. Pedro Díez Antoñanzas, and other priests and staff members showed the Prelate the improvements that have been made to the Shrine since his last visit a year ago.

Kenya, December 14 to 20

Pastoral trip to Kenya and Uganda, December 14 to 22

Msgr. Ocáriz landed in Nairobi on Saturday, December 14, where he was met at the airport by Msgr. Silvano Ochuodho, the Vicar for East Africa. As on other trips, Msgr. Ocáriz had the opportunity to see many people of the Prelature, cooperators, friends, and those involved in Opus Dei’s means of Christian formation.

On Sunday the 15th, the Prelate went to Strathmore University to meet with a group of the Work’s faithful, some of whom came from Tanzania.

One of those present asked him for advice on how to deal with the corruption he sometimes encounters in his work. Msgr. Ocáriz recalled that the country’s Conference of Catholic Bishops had recently launched a campaign to encourage Catholics not to give in to corruption: “You, on your part, should fulfill your professional duties to the best of your ability and encourage others to do the same. If you encounter someone who seems corrupt, despise the corruption, but not the person. Don’t look at him as someone worse than you; think of how to help him, for his sake and for the sake of the country.”

In the afternoon he visited Kianda School, where he was received with African greetings and dances. Some of the young women, wearing traditional garments and carrying gifts, greeted him in local dialects. The
Prelate mentioned that this reception had made him think of the joy we should have in Advent, since it is a time of spiritual preparation for the celebration of Christ’s birth – a joy that we should spread to others, even in times of trial.

Mention was made during the get-together of several social development initiatives some of those present were helping out in. One woman spoke about the “Crisis Pregnancy Center” for young women in Kibra, a slum area of the city, and about the lives of babies and women who had been saved through their work there.

On December 16, the Prelate preached at Kianda School to a group of women of Opus Dei. “Each and every one of us can be God's co-worker. This is something that goes beyond our own abilities and talents, and requires overcoming internal and external obstacles. Let us do as St. Josemaría did: with great faith, let us look to the future with supernatural optimism.”

This optimism, he said, is based on God's love for us: “‘If God is for us, who is against us,’ says Scripture. God our Father has given us the means to win out in our personal struggle and to be fruitful in our apostolate. As our Founder often emphasized, the only path for us is prayer: we have to pray! If we pray constantly, we will be able to see with God's eyes, to see Him in every task and person.”

The rest of the day was spent working on matters of the governance of the Prelature in East Africa and meeting with other faithful of Opus Dei in small groups.

On Tuesday, March 17, Msgr. Ocáriz went to greet Cardinal John Njue of Nairobi. Later he chatted with a group of families from various cities of the country. He also greeted some young women receiving Christian formation at the Faida youth club.

He then visited Kibondeni College of Catering and Hospitality Management, a professional training center in the hospitality sector that was celebrating its 50th anniversary. To celebrate the anniversary, the Prelate, the college’s directors and some of the students went to a chapel and sang a hymn to Our Lady in Kiswahili.
On December 18, Msgr. Ocáriz visited Eastlands College of Technology, where he was welcomed by a group of students. Eastlands is a vocational training center located in one of the most deprived neighborhoods of Nairobi. On arriving, the Prelate was received by Godfrey Madig, chairman of the board of directors. He then met with the staff of the center, encouraging them to do their work as well as possible and to strive to overcome obstacles. He was shown a model of how the Eastlands College complex will look once it is completed, and visited some of the workshops with students from the center.

In the afternoon, the Prelate made his way to Kianda School for a get-together with young women from all over Kenya who take part in the Prelature's apostolic activities. He encouraged them to take advantage of the spiritual formation they receive and reminded them that “with Jesus, you can all bring people closer to God, like the apostles and saints.” He also asked the young women to pray for Pope Francis, reminding them that the previous day had been his birthday.

One of the young women there presented the Prelate with a walking stick, explaining that every father in her community (Samburu) owns one. The walking stick is a symbol that the father is the head of the family and provides for and protects his family. The young woman took the opportunity to ask how to show their gratitude to their parents for all they do for them. Msgr. Ocáriz answered that an important way was to pray for them daily and to appreciate all the sacrifices they make for them. In response to a question from a young Sudanese woman, the Prelate spoke about the need to forgive: “A clear sign that one has forgiven is the determination to pray for those who have offended us.”

On the 19th, after meeting with the governing bodies of Strathmore University, Msgr. Ocáriz, as Chancellor, had a get-together with the staff and students. He was welcomed by the Strathmore choir. The Prelate recalled how the founder of Opus Dei had thought of the university many years before it was started. He encouraged professors and students to work in an interdisciplinary way, and stressed that the students should be aware of their responsibility to take good advantage of classes and to use their knowledge in service to society.
The dialogue with the Prelate was also centered on how to use academic research to promote the growth of the whole country in every sector of society. Afterwards, Msgr. Ocáriz blessed the image of St. Joseph in the shrine of the Holy Family and planted a tree commemorating his visit.

Finally, he met with a group of married couples working in family development programs. He encouraged them in their efforts to help other families to be more closely united, so that they in turn can provide stability to the society around them.

That day he had lunch with Archbishop Philip Anyolo, president of the Kenyan Bishops Conference.

Uganda, December 20-22

The Prelate of Opus Dei arrived in Uganda on Friday the 20th. The following day, he held a meeting with a group of university students and young professionals at the Tusimba study center. He began by sharing his reflections about the short pilgrimage he made that morning to Munyonyo Martyrs Shrine and the meaning of martyrdom, which is to give witness to the faith. For those martyrs, the youngest of whom was 14 years old, it was worthwhile giving their lives to remain faithful to Christ. “We too can be saints and give witness, especially in our ordinary Christian life, in our prayer, in our work, in our family, in our sports, in our rest, in everything,” he said.

He said that holiness in ordinary life doesn't mean becoming perfect, without any defects, “but in growing in love for God and in service to others, in personal, sincere friendship with others.”

From the martyrs’s shrine the Prelate also sent Christmas greetings in a video that was posted on the Opus Dei website.

On the morning of the 22nd, the Prelate met with a group of faithful of the Prelature. In view of the approaching feast of Christmas, he encouraged
those present to look at the child Jesus and see reflected in Him the infinite love that God has for each one of us.

In the afternoon, Msgr. Ocáriz visited the Archbishop of Kampala, Cardinal Cyprian Kizito Lwanga, who thanked him for the work of the faithful of the Prelature in his diocese. The Prelate, in turn, thanked him for his affection for the Work and assured him of his prayers for all the efforts of the diocese.

In another get-together with faithful of Opus Dei, he reminded everyone of their responsibility to pray for the Holy Father and for the Church. People asked questions about the means of social communication, generosity in the family, professional and social ethics, apostolate with priests, etc. At the end, a tree commemorating his visit was planted to mark the end of the Prelate of Opus Dei’s pastoral trip to Kenya and Uganda.
incident that is relevant for everyone, including those of us gathered here: all those present there heard the disciples speaking about the “mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11).

Today a new academic year is beginning: the thirty-fifth for this pontifical university. We could say that, like the people gathered back then in Jerusalem, we come from every nation under heaven. We could also say that, like the disciples, we too want to speak about the mighty works of God. Therefore we are celebrating the votive Mass of the Holy Spirit; because as Jesus tells us in the Gospel we have just read, the Paraclete is the one who “will teach you all things” (Jn 14:26), so that we, in turn, may pass them on to others.

I recall some words of Saint Paul who, when a prisoner in this city of Rome, wrote to Timothy: “what you have heard from me … entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). Our Lord is addressing the same words to all of us here at this Eucharistic celebration. Today our Lord is calling us—each and every one of us—to form part of this group of faithful people entrusted with passing on the faith, with a deep grasp of its content, each in our own environment: in seminaries, parishes, religious congregations, and in many ordinary occupations in the world.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, the patron of our faculty of Theology, stressed the apostolic value of those who dedicate themselves to studying and teaching others about the “perfections of God.” Although this effort might seem somewhat distant from pastoral concerns, the reality is that those who “form formers” carry out a very important role in making possible the announcement of the Gospel to many others (cf. Quodlibet I, q. 7 a. 2 cor). In reality, many more people are present in our classrooms than might at first sight seem to be the case. The deep study carried out there later becomes nourishment for many souls, who perhaps we will never meet personally.

To carry out this apostolate of announcing the “mighty works of God,” an indispensable condition, as Pope Francis reminded us, is “getting down on our knees before the altar of reflection” (Video message to theological congress, 1-3 September 2015). This is not simply a question of saying a brief prayer before beginning to study. Rather both study and prayer should
be fused in our heart: “Doing theology on your knees is daring to think while praying and pray while thinking” (Ibid.).

When we focus on intellectual pursuits without relating them to love for God and the life of our fellow men and women, we run the risk of our efforts becoming a discourse that, in Saint Paul’s words, “puffs up” and does not “build up” (cf. *I Cor* 8:2). Therefore, when recommending that we strive to acquire a good grasp of “theological doctrine,” Saint Josemaría always stressed the need to combine it with the “piety of children,” which is equally important (cf. *Christ is Passing By*, no. 10). Let us ask our Lord to grant us a contemplative soul, because only thus will we be able to discover the true depth and beauty of his doctrine.

The study of theology, philosophy, canon law and Church communication cannot be separated from the problems and questions of the daily life of the people around us. On the contrary: our study should be undertaken as a service to the Church. Benedict XVI, when speaking about the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas, said that he carried out his intellectual work “in an encounter with the true questions of his time” (Audience, 23 June 2010).

Let us never separate ourselves from the people around us, out of inertia or comfort-seeking. The aspirations and concerns of our world today should also enter into our study, research and prayer. We see this in Jesus’ life. He listened to the spontaneous questions of those who sought Him out (cf. *Mt* 19:27; *Mk* 12:18). He went to the homes of many people (cf. *Lk* 19:5), and shared in their joys (cf. *Jn* 2:2) and in their sorrows (cf. *Lk* 8:42).

So let us ask the Holy Spirit to remind us, as we read in today’s Gospel, of everything our Lord said, and to spur us to follow his example.

It is often said that the saints are the true theologians, in virtue of their knowledge of God attained through love. The life and writings of Saint Josemaría are a very rich source for academic reflection. I encourage you to get to know him better during your years of study in this university, which he himself was eager to see become a reality. And you will discover, as in other saints of the Church, a harmony between a life of prayer, deep study and apostolic zeal.

Like the disciples who, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed Christ’s
message in every language, we too ask the Paraclete to illumine our hearts in this new year of study to get to know Jesus better. And in this endeavor we cannot fail to go also to our Lady, our Mother. Mary is the one who, filled with the Holy Spirit, best knows her Son.

Amen.

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Articles and Interviews

In Iglesia en Aragon (June 26, 2019)

*Interview published in Iglesia en Aragón (June 26, 2019).*

This interview took place during the Prelate's visit to Saragossa (Spain) in April 2019.

What are the Prelate of Opus Dei’s thoughts when visiting the city where St. Josemaría was ordained a priest?

Visiting Saragossa leads me to give abundant thanks to God for the fruits of Christian life and holiness that this city has witnessed: from the first centuries of Christianity, as witnessed by the martyrs venerated in the Basilica of St. Engracia, to the present day. This stay in Saragossa evokes very special memories of St. Josemaría's years as a seminarian. These were years of intense prayer (with his daily visits to Our Lady the Pillar), of formation, and of asking for light to see the vocation of service that God wanted for him. It gave me special joy to be able to celebrate Holy Mass in the church of San Carlos, where St. Josemaría received his ordination to the diaconate and priesthood, and where he spent so many hours in prayer.

What was St. Josemaría's family like in Barbastro, where he was born?

St. Josemaría's family was a Christian family like so many others. And it was in the heart of his family that he began to prepare for his first
communion. His mother, Dolores, personally prepared him for his first confession. In addition, he received help to prepare for his first communion in the school of the Piarists in Barbastro. A Piarist religious, Father Manuel Laborda de la Virgen del Carmen (Father Manolé, as the students called him) was in charge of preparing him. This religious taught him a prayer to enkindle his desire to receive our Lord. St. Josemaría continued to use this prayer his whole life, with great gratitude to Father Manuel, and he spread it throughout the world.

What mark did his pastoral mission in small rural parishes like Fombuena and Perdiguera leave on St. Josemaría?

St. Josemaría said that his time spent in those parishes left a deep mark on his soul and did him great good. Many years after this period in his life, which he never forgot, he recalled those experiences in rural parishes with great affection. I remember him saying: “They did me a colossal good – colossal, colossal! How eagerly I remember that experience!”

How did St. Josemaría live friendship and carry out apostolate at the University of Saragossa?

When he finished his fourth year of theology, he also began to study at the law school, then located in the Plaza de la Magdalena. There he made friends with his classmates, who fondly called him the “curilla,” the little priest. He formed friendships with them in a very natural way. His behavior was both very priestly and deeply human. Perhaps that is the reason why, when he was ordained a priest, some of them chose him as their regular confessor.

What did Our Lady of the Pillar and Torreciudad mean in St. Josemaría’s life?

Devotion to Our Lady of the Pillar began in St. Josemaría’s life when his parents, with their “Aragonese piety,” as he liked to say, instilled it in him. This is something quite natural in so many families in Aragon. Later, when he lived in Saragossa, this piety was expressed in daily visits to the holy chapel, like so many people in Saragossa. Our Lady of Torreciudad is closely linked to his own life, as is well known, by a favor granted by our Lady in the first years of his life.
How does the work of the members of Opus Dei contribute to the good of the dioceses where they live?

The people of the Work, like other Catholics, are faithful of the dioceses in which they live. With their defects and limitations, they strive, like so many others throughout the world, to do their work well, to take care of their families, to create a healthy environment around them, to assist those most in need, to help their friends discover God’s love. All this enriches Christian life in the diocese, as do the actions of all Christians who try to live their faith wherever they are. At the same time, quite a few faithful of Opus Dei collaborate in parish and diocesan associations to the best of their abilities.

Does Opus Dei have something of its founder’s Aragonese character?

That is an interesting question. As an institution of the universal Church, we can’t say that there is something, so to speak, strictly “Aragonese” about it. But there is no doubt that, since St. Josemaría was from Aragon, this influenced his way of explaining things, his constancy and determination. He sometimes used Aragonese idioms, although he tried to keep them to a minimum, since his message had to be understandable to people all over the world.

The current Metropolitan Seminary of Saragossa is the institution that inherited the seminary of St. Francis of Paola – and also the Conciliar Seminary – where St. Josemaría was formed. What intuitions of the saint do you think are important for the formation of our seminarians?

Perhaps more than intuitions we can speak of the lights that St. Josemaría received from God to carry out his mission: to remind men and women that they are called to holiness and to a personal relationship with Jesus, also through their daily work. From this perspective, it seems important to awaken, also in those preparing for the priesthood, the awareness that our Lord is calling them to be holy, both as seminarians and later as priests. The goal that St. Josemaría liked to set forth can also be helpful for seminarians: to have the piety of children and the doctrine of theologians.

St. Josemaría is a person from Aragon open to the whole world, just as the call to holiness that he always preached is universal. Does his message continue
being relevant?

I think the relevance of his message has been clearly highlighted by the Second Vatican Council and by the recent apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, in which Pope Francis reminds us that God “wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence,” and in which he encourages us to strive “for all that is great, better and more beautiful, while at the same time being concerned for the little things, for each day’s responsibilities and commitments.”

Messages

**Message of July 12th**

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

During these days, since leaving Rome, I have especially thanked our Lord for the marvel of the Communion of Saints. With the certitude of faith, we know that we are even closer to one another than when we are physically nearby.

When I arrive somewhere, it seems as though all of us there have always been close to one another. And the same thing happens when I leave that place: saying goodbye is simply another way of accompanying one another. We are always in our home and can always carry out the Work and serve the Church in whatever place we may be.

Also in trying moments, we draw strength from this reality that intimately unites us and that is a result of our personal union with Christ.

I recall some words written by Saint Josemaria in the Honduran Consulate, at a time when he could hardly go anywhere: “I am always hundreds of miles away from the place where I am physically present” (30
April 1937). He could say this because he knew he was closely united even with those who weren’t physically nearby.

I know that I can rely on the support of your prayer and your joy during this trip to the United States and Canada. I am also accompanying all of you: we are close to one another each day especially in the Holy Mass.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

New York, 12 July 2019

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Message of August 10th

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

How often we have meditated on our Lord’s words that we “ought always to pray and not lose heart” (Lk 18:1).

When the apostles asked Jesus to teach them to pray, our Lord answered, “When you pray, say: Father…” And Jesus started his own prayer by directing himself to the Father: with praise and thanksgiving (cf. Mt 11:25-26; Jn 11:41); at the Last Supper (cf. Jn 17:5); in Gethsemane (cf. Lk 22:42); and on the Cross (cf. Lk 23:34&46). St. Josemaria wanted everyone to pray “genuinely, as God’s children.”[1] In union with Jesus Christ—through Him and in Him—we reach God the Father (cf. Jn 14:6) with simplicity, sincerity and confidence in his omnipotent love.

To take up a life of prayer every day is to allow ourselves to be accompanied, in the good moments and the bad, by him who best knows and loves us. Our dialogue with Jesus Christ opens up new perspectives for us, new ways to see things that are always more filled with hope. “Now you see,” our Father wrote to us in 1967, “that this is the only means we have to do everything: prayer.”[2]

I ask the Holy Spirit to constantly renew—and now in a special way—the manner in which we pray. The initiative is his: “the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer.”[3] Continue to accompany me during my trip through the United
States and Canada. Its spiritual effectiveness depends on the prayer of each of you.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

Vancouver, 10 August 2019


Message of September 9th

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

On the upcoming 14th, the Church’s Liturgy leads us to reflect on the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and, the next day, on the Sorrows of our Lady.

In conversations and encounters with a great variety of people (as also happens to you), spontaneous remarks sometimes come up about situations that are difficult or cause suffering or leave us in interior darkness. On these occasions, words of Saint Josemaria about the Mother of Jesus often come to mind. God wished to fill our Lady with the fullness of grace, but “it is equally true that he did not spare her pain, exhaustion in her work, or trials of her faith” (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 172).

Although we will never fully understand this fact, if we look at Mary, above all at the foot of the Cross, we will enter a bit more deeply into the experience of suffering. And we will discover little by little the meaning of those words of Saint Paul: “In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church” (*Col* 1:24). Thus suffering can become a place where we find light, peace and even joy: “*Lux in Cruce, requies in Cruce, gaudium in Cruce.*”

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

Rome, 9 September 2019
Message of October 1st

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

During September in Rome we dedicated some days to reflecting on the need for and challenges of Christian formation in our day and age. Among other aspects, we recalled our Father’s conviction that the formation given in Opus Dei should be aimed at “forming Christians filled with optimism and drive who are capable of living their divine adventure in the world” (Letter, 2 October 1939).

Let us live—and help others to live—with the hope-filled optimism of knowing that we are not relying only or mainly on our own poor strength, but on God’s grace (cf. Mt 28:20). Let us act with drive, not giving in to inertia, and being ever attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:6). Thus we can set forth each day, with holy daring, on the adventure of bringing Christ’s friendship to all men and women in the context of ordinary life (cf. Mk 16:15).

Now as we draw near to a new 2nd of October, these considerations can help us to continue fostering in ourselves and in many other persons optimism and drive in undertaking the adventure of putting Christ at the summit of all human activities.

Finally, I ask you to pray for the fruit of the Extraordinary Missionary Month that Pope Francis has convoked and for the Synod of Bishops which will begin within a few days in Rome.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

Rome, 1 October 2019

Christmas Message

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!
The night on which we celebrate the birth of the Child Jesus is drawing near. These are days when the surrounding environment reflects our interior joy. The sign given to the shepherds at Bethlehem to recognize the Messiah was that they would find “a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (Lk 2:12). There the Son of God was waiting for them. Let us draw close to the simplicity and silence of Bethlehem! May we let ourselves be wrapped in that recollection of the heart which our Father called “the door-keeper of the interior life” (The Way, no. 281). In the silence of Bethlehem, led by the hand of Mary and Joseph, our joys, our desires and our sufferings find their place, with renewed clarity.

With my most affectionate blessing, your Father wishes you a very happy and holy Christmas.

Rome, 16 December 2019
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
The 80th Anniversary of Camino [The Way] at the Albalat Student Residence, Valencia, Spain (November 23, 2019)

Young people who take part in Opus Dei’s activities of Christian formation in Valencia held an event commemorating the 80th anniversary of *The Way*, St. Josemaría’s best-known work, which was first published in Valencia in 1939.

The event took place in the auditorium of the Albalat university residence. Several people spoke about how reading *The Way* led to their conversion and helped them draw closer to God. Funds were also collected for volunteer activities that this university residence has been carrying out for some years now in Gambia, West Africa. In addition, a video with testimonies about the impact of this small book on young people was shown for the first time.

*The Way* contains short, incisive points that St. Josemaría used in his preaching as a young priest during the early 1930s, and that he shared with those in contact with him to help foster their life of prayer. The purpose of *The Way* can be summed up in point 382: “May you seek Christ. May you find Christ. May you love Christ.”

Presentation of Relics at the Shrine of St. Jack in Legnicy, Poland (July 2, 2019)

On Tuesday, July 2, Rev. Stefan Moszoro-Dąbrowski, regional Vicar of Opus Dei in Poland, celebrated Mass at 6:00 p.m. and venerated the relics of St. Josemaría Escrivá in the shrine of Saint Jacek.

During his homily, Rev. Moszoro referred to the importance of the Eucharist and the value our life takes on each day when it is united with
the Holy Mass. “I think,” he added, “that St. Josemaría would have been happy to see that there is perpetual adoration here and a group of people seriously committed to leading a Eucharistic life.”

The parish priest, Rev. Andrzej Ziombra, was the one who took the initiative to bring the relics to the shrine. At the end of the ceremony, he reminded those present of the importance of accompanying Jesus in the Eucharist.

Blessing of the First Stone of the Church of St. Josemaría Escriva, San Salvador, El Salvador (September 9, 2019)

Carlos Torrijos, Vicar of Opus Dei in El Salvador, blessed the first stone of the future church of St. Josemaría in the city of San Salvador. The event took place on the afternoon of Monday, December 9.

The Dueñas Herrera Foundation will build the church with a capacity for 200 people; it will also have an office area, a multipurpose room and a parking area.

“We give thanks to God and to the family members of the Dueñas Herrera Foundation who with their generosity have made possible this project that begins today. When we make an offering to God, especially one like this that is destined to give him public worship, he rewards us generously. God is a generous giver. He doesn’t allow himself to be outdone in generosity,” Rev. Torrijos pointed out.

Dedication of a Section of a Square in La Spezia, Italy (September 27, 2019)
On Friday, September 27, a section of St. Augustine’s Square in La Spezia was dedicated to St. Josemaría in the presence of the mayor Pierluigi Peracchini, Bishop Luigi Ernesto Palletti, and the Vicar of Opus Dei in Italy, Rev. Normann Insam.

This city welcomed St. Josemaría several times during his lifetime. The first was on June 23, 1946, a few hours after disembarking in Genoa after the long voyage from Barcelona on the ship J. J. Sister. And then, in 1947 and 1949, on his way to Milan and Central Europe, respectively.

During the ceremony, the mayor spoke about St. Josemaría’s message on the sanctification of work and the numerous initiatives he encouraged for the good of society. He concluded his speech by highlighting the spirit of openness found in Opus Dei and its founder towards those with different outlooks and beliefs.

Before blessing the plaque, Bishop Palletti pointed out that dedicating a space in the city to a saint is a positive gesture of witness and communion.

At the end of the event, Pippo Corigliano presented his latest book Il cammino di San Josemaría: Il fondatore dell’Opus Dei e i giovani [The Way of St. Josemaría: The Founder of Opus Dei and Young People], published by Mondadori.

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A Relic in the Church of the Addolorata Alla Pigna in Naples, Italy (September 14, 2019)

Since September 14, a relic of St. Josemaría in the Church of the Addolorata alla Pigna, a parish in the heart of a busy neighborhood in Naples, has been available for public veneration.

The parish priest, Don Vittorio, came to know the message of Opus Dei thanks to some of his parishioners. His growing devotion to its
founder led him to have a relic placed in the church so it could be venerated publicly and the saint would become better known.

On September 14, after a Mass celebrated by Archbishop Armando Dini, Archbishop Emeritus of Campobasso-Boiano, the relic was placed near the altar.

Blessing of a painting in the Church of San Nicolás, Orihuela-Alicante, Spain

The Bishop of Orihuela-Alicante, Jesús Murgui Soriano, blessed a painting of St. Josemaría, the work of the artist José Antonio Ochoa, and had it placed at the entrance to the church of San Nicolás to encourage devotion among the faithful.

New Printings of Works of Saint Josemaría

Camino, Bogotá, Procodes, 2019, 15th Colombian printing, 360 pages.

Camino, Mexico City, Minos Tercer Milenio, 2019, 73rd Mexican printing, 449 pages.

Caminho, São Paulo, Quadrante, 2019, 12th Brazilian printing, 349 pages.

Camino, Madrid, Rialp, 2019, 89th printing, 369 pages.

Cammino, Milan, Ares, 2019, 61st Italian printing, 366 pages.

Camino, Surco, Forja, Madrid, Rialp, 2019, 10th printing, 1148 pages.

El triunfo de Cristo en la humildad, Minos, Mexico City, 2019, 4th printing.

En diálogo con el Señor: Textos de la predicación oral, Bogotá, Procodes, 2019, 1st Colombian edition, 387 pages.
En diálogo con el Señor: Textos de la predicación oral, Madrid, Rialp, 2019, 1st, 2nd and 3rd printings, 387 pages.

In dialogo con il Signore. Testi inediti della predicazione. Edited by Luis Cano and Francesc Castells, Milan, Ares, 2019, 1st Italian edition, 460 pages.

Es Cristo que pasa: homilías, Madrid, Rialp, 2019, 45th printing, 520 pages.

Homilías eucarísticas, Minos, Mexico City, 2019, 6th printing, 64 pages.

Surco, Madrid, Rialp, 2019, 26th printing, 355 pages.

Solco, Milan, Ares, 2019, 23rd Italian printing, 411 pages.


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Writings About Saint Josemaria


NEWS
The Auxiliary Vicar

Conference in San Salvador (El Salvador), September 3, 2019

Monsignor Mariano Fazio, Auxiliary Vicar of the Prelature, gave a conference in San Salvador on “The Challenges of Today's Culture for the Contemporary Church.” The event was organized by the “Priestly Formation Program” for priests of San Salvador. Addressing the large group of priests who took part, Monsignor Fazio stressed the need to follow Christ closely and draw out all the spiritual and social teachings present in the Gospels in order to overcome the dictatorship of relativism and the throwaway culture today, in harmony with the teachings of Popes St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis.

Interview in The Tablet (September 5, 2019)

The English weekly magazine The Tablet published an interview with the Auxiliary Vicar conducted by the writer and journalist Austen Ivereigh. Among other topics, Monsignor Fazio speaks about the Christian value of many of the classic works of literature, the role of the Prelature of Opus Dei in the Church, the pontificates of Pope Francis and Benedict XVI, as well as the criticisms of some Catholics. The interview is available on the weekly’s website.

Some trips

During this half-year, among other trips, Monsignor Fazio carried out two service commissions, in central-southern Italy and in Sicily, from October 6-15 and October 16-21, respectively. These service commissions are described as follows in the Statutes of the Prelature: “He (the Prelate) shows his pastoral solicitude ... also by means of visits carried out personally or through his delegates in the Regions and centers, and in the churches of the Prelature or those entrusted to it” (Statutes, chap. II, 132, § 5).

Between October 3 and 5, he also traveled to Ireland, where he held meetings with the directors of that region.

He also met with faithful of the Prelature and friends in Buenos Aires and in Salta (Argentina) in November.
New Centers of the Prelature

The Vicar of the region of Poland has erected Jozefów, a new center in Warsaw.

Some Diocesan Assignments Entrusted to Priests of the Prelature

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

Ordination of Deacons in the Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (November 9, 2019)

Bishop Philippe Jourdan, apostolic administrator of Estonia and titular bishop of Pertusa, conferred the diaconate on 29 faithful of Opus Dei from 13 countries in the Roman Basilica of St. Eugene.

The names of the new deacons are:

Santiago Altieri Massa Daus (Uruguay); Alejandro Armesto García-Jalón (Spain); José Luis Benito Roldán (Spain); Guillermo Jesús Bueno Delgado (Spain); Juan Luis Orestes Castilla Florián (Guatemala); José Luis Chinguel Beltrán (Peru); José de la Madrid Ochoa (Mexico); Andrew Rowns Ekemu (Uganda); Pablo Erdozáin Castiella (Spain); Felipe José Izquierdo Ibáñez (Chile); Kouamé Achille Koffi (Ivory Coast); Santiago Teodoro López López (Spain); Martín Ezequiel Luque Marengo (Argentina); Andrej Matis (Slovakia); Carlos Medarde Artime (Spain); José Javier Mérida Calderón (Guatemala); Claudio Josemaría Minakata Urzúa (Mexico); Andrés Fernando Montero Marín (Costa Rica); Ignacio Moyano
Gómez (Spain); Miguel Agustín Mullen (Argentina); Miguel Ocaña González (Spain); Ricardo Regidor Sánchez (Spain); Antonio Rodríguez Tovar (Spain); Manel Serra Palos (Spain); Juan Esteban Ureta Cardoen (Chile); Giovanni Vassallo (Italy); Roberto Vera Aguilar (Mexico); Juan Ignacio Vergara (Holland); José Vidal Vázquez (Spain).

Here is the complete homily of Bishop Philippe Jourdan:

First of all, my deepest gratitude to the Father, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Prelate of Opus Dei, for his invitation to come and ordain 29 of his sons as deacons. Besides the family joy that they feel — that all of us who are members of the Work feel on a day like today — you can imagine what it means for me, as a bishop from northern Europe, to ordain more people in a single day than we ordain over the course of several years in all the “cold villages of northern Europe,” as Saint Josemaría used to say. May God allow an abundant harvest to be reaped there as well. At the same time, we give thanks for these new laborers in the Lord’s vineyard.

“You are my friends, if you do what I command you.” Today’s Gospel shows our Lord urgently asking his disciples for help. I was fortunate this summer to spend some time at the Saxum center in the Holy Land, which Bishops Alvaro del Portillo and Javier Echevarría so longed to see become a reality. I noticed how dry and arduous the road is from Jericho to Jerusalem, along which our Lord and his disciples so often traveled. It was not an easy path to walk along, which perhaps helps us to better understand those words of His: “You are my friends, if you do what I command you.” This is not a beautiful theoretical principle or a pious lesson, but a demanding call and a reality to be lived out: it is a difficult path.

Allow me to recall what Pope Francis said during Holy Mass at the Freedom Square in Tallinn (Estonia): “See how the eagle helps its chicks learn to fly: she flies with them and under them, to protect them from falling. This is how you have to live, accompanying everyone, especially non-believers who make up the majority of your country.”

Serving, serving: this is the key, my dear brothers. For a priest or deacon, serving is like breathing. A priest who doesn't like to serve is like a doctor who is afraid of blood. A doctor who is afraid of blood might try to
study the history of medicine, for example, but generally we can say that being a doctor does not seem like the ideal path for that person.

Dear brothers, serving is like the blood of our priesthood. You might be afraid of blood, but blood is the price to pay in order to be useful. Saint Josemaría gave us this joyful motto: “In order to be useful, serve.” This can be understood in many different ways. For me, it simply means that you are never as useful as when you are serving in exactly what has been asked of you, without seeking personal programs or goals.

Throughout his life, Saint Josemaría instilled in his children — with his word and actions — that we have to serve the Church as the Church wants to be served. How important are those words! Today, it is not that people are lacking who are willing to serve the Church or to serve humanity. They want to serve, but in the way they want, not in the way the Church wants. What has true value is to serve as the Church as she wants to be served and, within the Church, the priests of the Work serve as our Prelate wants us to serve.

Now allow me to share a personal memory. When I arrived in Estonia for the first time, I had prepared myself to answer all the questions that the people there were going to ask me, the deep ones and the not-so-deep ones. But I hadn’t prepared for the only question they ended up asking me: “Do you want to play a game of soccer?” I really didn’t want to. I was tired and I was never a very good soccer player, but I told myself that I couldn’t say no to the first and only question they asked me. I thought, “Wow, these Estonians are really devoted to soccer!” So I said yes, I would play. Later on I learned that Estonians don’t like soccer very much. I may have been the first French person they had met and they didn’t know how to connect with me. It was around the time of Zidane and Platini, and they thought: “Surely a Frenchman would like to play a game of soccer, even if it is dark, raining, and cold.” So no one actually wanted to play, but we all went to play in order to serve the others as we thought they wanted to be served. And the match was wonderful, even though I accidentally broke the leg of a woman who was playing goal-keeper.

Finally, I will remind you of these words of Saint Josemaría, so appropriate for our time and particularly for the country where I come from, and that I have the honor of sharing as a motto with the Prelate of
Opus Dei: “Offer your prayer, your atonement, and your action for this intention: *ut sint unum!* So that all of us Christians may share one will, one heart, one Spirit. So that *omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam* — that we may all go to Jesus, closely united to the Pope, through Mary.”

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**Publications of Interest**


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Presentation of the book *Rozhovory s Monsignorom Escrivá*, Slovak translation of *Conversations*.

On November 6, 2019, the presentation of *Rozhovory s Monsignorom Escrivá*, the Slovak translation of *Conversations*, took place in Bratislava. The dean of the School of Communication at the Pontifical University of
the Holy Cross, Rev. Jose María Laporte, was present for the event. The
moderator was Rev. Martin Kramara, press officer and spokesperson for the
Slovak Bishops’ Conference, who said: “In my work as spokesman I often
encounter similar concerns as those addressed in this book. And I have
found in it answers that help me to clarify my ideas.” The edition,
published by LUČ, has a first run of 1,000 copies and is the sixth book by
St. Josemaría translated into Slovak.

Volume 13 of *Studia et Documenta*

The *Istituto Storico San Josemaría Escrivá* has published volume 13 of
*Studia et Documenta*.

The volume opens with three articles on the first steps of Opus Dei in
some North and South American countries.

In the first article, Federico M. Requena describes the beginning of
Opus Dei’s apostolic activities in the United States. Between February
1949 and the fall of 1957, Opus Dei grew from a small group of five
pioneers, established in Chicago, to a membership of some one hundred
and fifty men and women with centers in six cities in the Midwest and on
the East Coast.

The second article, by Manuel Pareja, talks about the first center of
Opus Dei in Colombia, opened a few months after the arrival of Teodoro
Ruiz Jusué in Bogota in 1951. In response to requests from the nuncio and
the archbishop of the Colombian capital that Opus Dei begin activities
there, St. Josemaría asked Teodoro to move to Colombia.

The third study, by Ana María Sanguineti, is entitled “Instituto de
Capacitación Integral en Estudios Domésticos.” It deals with the genesis
and evolution of a school aimed at promoting the dignity of women and
the value of service in the area of domestic work.

The *Studi e Note* section includes four articles. In the first, Chris
Noonan recounts the beginnings of Opus Dei in Ireland, from the arrival of
the first faithful to the establishment of the first corporate apostolic works
in the country (the first of which was the Nullamore University Residence
in Dublin). The article covers the years 1947-1954.
In the second, Alfredo Méndiz recounts “The First Steps in the Work of St. Gabriel,” a history of the development of Opus Dei’s apostolic activity with married people between 1928 and 1950, with reference to the founder’s earliest writings on this subject. It also deals with the birth, evolution, and dissolution of the “Society for Intellectual Collaboration” and the entrance into Opus Dei of the first supernumeraries around 1948.

The authors of the third article, María Hernández-Sampelayo and María Eugenia Ossandón, in “The first women associates of Opus Dei (1949–1955),” tell how the the first women associate members requested admission to Opus Dei, from 1949 to 1955. A brief biography is presented of these sixty-two women.

The fourth article, authored by Martín Aurell, contains a biography of José Orlandis (1918-2010) and his work as a historian. He joined Opus Dei in 1939 and was ordained a priest in 1949. The article recounts his participation in the Spanish Civil War, his relationship with St. Josemaría Escrivá, his years in Rome during the Second World War, his extensive career as a university professor and his written work.

In the Documenti section, Francesc Castells presents the correspondence between St. Josemaría Escrivá and Bishop Manuel Fernández Conde (1942-1970). From their earliest meeting in 1942, Escrivá and Fernandez Conde, who became Bishop of Cordoba (1959-1970), shared a close friendship, reflected in frequent correspondence, especially on important feast days and other anniversaries.

In the same section, María Jesús Coma writes about “A Bulletin during the Spanish Civil War: Noticias. The first issue, March 1938.” During the Spanish Civil War, St. Josemaría wrote thirteen issues of Noticias in Burgos, the city where he resided from January 1938 until the end of the conflict. Noticias was a monthly family bulletin that he sent to the young men who had taken part in the activities of the DYA Academy-Residence in Madrid, and who he was able to get in touch with again in December 1937, when he left the Republican zone of Spain.

The Sezione Bibliografica closes the volume. In it, José Mario Fernández Montes and Santiago Martínez compile a bibliography of writings by and
about Bishop Alvaro del Portillo and writings published by Bishop Javier Echevarría from 2010 to 2013.

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New publications on Blessed Guadalupe


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INITIATIVES

• In Brief
IESE and the Social Responsibility of Businesses, Barcelona, Spain

The initiatives described in this section are educational, social, and cultural activities brought forward by faithful of the Prelature and cooperators together with many other people, both Catholics and non-Catholics. Those who undertake and direct these activities (taking on full responsibility for them, including their financial aspects) are trying to respond to specific local needs without any discrimination regarding race, religion, or social condition.

The Prelature of Opus Dei, through agreements with the organizers, or through the guidelines established by the statutes of each entity, contributes to the development of these social initiatives by providing Christian doctrinal and moral orientation, and priestly service, always with full respect for the freedom of people’s consciences.

IESE and the Social Responsibility of Businesses, Barcelona, Spain

On July 5 and 6, 2019, IESE Business School organized an ethics conference in Barcelona on “The Company and its Social Responsibilities,” coordinated by Professor Antonio Argandoña. This school of the University of Navarra has been training business managers for 60 years through an ethical and humanistic approach to business. The conference reflected on the social, economic and technological changes that are forcing business leaders to rethink the roles and responsibilities of companies and managers, and the impact business schools can have in this regard.

IESE Dean Franz Heukamp opened the conference by welcoming the participants who filled the Aula Magna – IESE alumni, executives, members of partner schools, employees – and those connecting by videoconference from Madrid, New York and Munich, where the school has local campuses. He expressed his gratitude to Blessed Alvaro del Portillo and Bishop Echevarría, who during previous trips to Barcelona had encouraged them to “contribute to the improvement of society,” keeping in mind that “every person is important.”

Fernando Ocáriz, Chancellor of the University of Navarra and Prelate of Opus Dei, gave the opening address, in which he thanked St. Josemaría Escrivá for having been “God’s instrument to begin this initiative.” The
main theme of his address was that “a business is a community of people that serves other people within a society of people. Only after taking this into consideration do capital, facilities, technology, and legal realities come into play.”

The conference was attended by representatives from other business schools associated with IESE, all of whom share a Christian vision of work. The Prelate encouraged them to “be builders of human progress, not only materially but also spiritually.”

During the days of the conference, professors and directors of these business schools shared experiences on strengthening the Christian identity of their colleagues, students, alumni, and others taking part in their activities. Referring to this eagerness shown by those present, Monsignor Ocáriz offered some reflections on friendship: “Personal contact, treating people with affection, that is how to transmit the Gospel.” And he added that a “business school that wants to be Christian must live charity, and first of all justice.”

Luis Romera, Prefect of Studies for the Prelature, thanked the participants for “the social initiatives they are carrying out and their impact on the betterment of society. Continue forward with this endeavor that helps so many people and contributes to the spread of the Gospel.”

**In Brief**

**Nairobi, Kenya - 50th anniversary of Kibondeni College**

In 1961, in the English colony of Kenya, a group of young women from the United States, Ireland and Spain, encouraged by St. Josemaría, started the Kibondeni vocational school in Nairobi, with six African
students enrolled in the first class. In 1969, six years after independence was declared, the government officially recognized it and pointed to its important contribution in improving the quality of life of women in Kenya. In 2016, the *Swiss Social Impact Evaluation* highlighted Kibondeni’s positive influence on the economic and social advancement of women with limited resources. In 2019, 50 years after taking its first steps, Kibondeni College has transformed the lives of more than 3,000 young women, including those who have benefited from courses for women in rural areas. Currently, more than 350 young women are enrolled each year.

The activities for Kibondeni’s 50th anniversary began with a Mass of thanksgiving celebrated by the Apostolic Nuncio to Kenya, Archbishop Charles Balvo. In June 2019, Archbishop Anthony Muheria of the diocese of Nyeri consecrated a new shrine of Our Lady in the college garden.

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**San Pedro de Sintra, Portugal - Friendship in the Digital Era**

Why do we find friendship so fulfilling? How can we foster it in the digital era? The two seminars on “The Strength of Friendship,” held in São Pedro de Sintra (November 16 and 17) and in Arcozelo (November 23 and 24), were dedicated to answering these questions. The seminars, aimed at women seeking to integrate dedication to their family with an outside job, highlighted the anthropological foundations of friendship in Jewish and Hellenic cultures, and especially the importance of generosity and empathy for strong friendships. Other topics included the characteristics of the current generations, the relationship between friendship, loneliness and the internet, and friendship in the family and at work.

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**Warsaw, Poland - Rock the Holidays**

*Rock the Holidays* is a social project promoted by university students...
who benefit from the Christian formation offered at the Przy Filtrowej center of the Prelature in Warsaw. Most of them are graduates of the Warsaw Polytechnic University, the School of Mathematics and Mechanics at the University of Warsaw, and the Łódź Film School. The project seeks to foster the interest of young people with limited financial resources and broaden their horizons by offering specialized subjects provided by the university students at that center. The classes took place in Siennica, near Minsk Mazowiecki, where some thirty boys aged 9-19 from that region learned about programming, journalism, filmmaking and English for a week.

Bogotá, Colombia - Eradicating Corporal Punishment for Children

In recent months, the School of Psychology at the University of La Sabana (together with the “Alianza por la Niñez” and other government agencies) provided support for a bill to eliminate physical punishment of children in Colombia. A comprehensive research project piloted by the School of Psychology, in which 928 children from different parts of the country were interviewed, revealed that almost half the children in Colombia are subject to some form of physical punishment. The School’s findings, which were presented in June at the “First Congress on Physical Punishment,” were aimed at: a) promoting a law that prohibits physical punishment, along with intervention strategies to inform parents of different alternatives for educating their children; b) showing how physical punishment gives rise to other forms of violence; and c) helping to generate a cultural change in the education of children.

Nairobi, Kenya - Macheo Program at Strathmore University
Macheo means sunrise in Swahili. This Strathmore University program targets boys and girls between the ages of 15 and 17 who live in the Nairobi slum district. It complements the work of secondary schools to help young people finish their studies and continue their education after high school, while strengthening their human virtues. Most of the activities take place on the university campus on Saturday afternoons. The program started in 2012 with about 20 students from Kibera, an impoverished area not far from the university campus. Thanks to the support of several benefactors, about 150 students from eight schools now take part each year.

Students form Strathmore University plan and carry out most of the activities; they teach the classes, organize sports and field trips, and conduct character-building sessions. Each high school student has a university tutor to offer advice on their specific needs.

In the 2018 exams at the end of secondary school, 43% of the Macheo students passed the university entrance exam (the national average was 13%). Many of the students from Macheo want to study at Strathmore University, which continues to assist them to the best of its ability to continue their education with scholarships and student loans. To date, about 100 young men and women have been successful in gaining admission to a university to pursue a degree or diploma. In almost all cases, they are the first in their family to undertake university studies.

Helsinki, Finland - Urban Solidarity Camp

High school students from Finland, Spain and the UK organized an Urban Solidarity Camp in Helsinki last summer. In the morning their efforts were directed at carrying out service activities, and in the afternoon they attended talks and workshops at the Tavasttähti student residence. The young men taking part helped distribute food to underprivileged families, visited homes for the elderly and assisted the homeless. They also organized sports competitions for refugees from the Middle East. A similar project is now being planned for next year in Budapest, Hungary, where students will help out in a palliative care facility for children with Down
syndrome and carry out other social projects. The next solidarity camp will also include students from Ireland, Hungary and Sweden.

Bethlehem, Palestine - A Breast Unit in Beit Jala

On December 9, the first facility in Palestine for the treatment of breast cancer was inaugurated near Bethlehem, in the Beit Jala public hospital. This project is being carried out thanks to the collaboration of ELIS, the Campus Bio-Medico University in Rome, and the Italian Agency for Developmental Cooperation, which has already helped many women in the area. The lack of knowledge among the local people about this disease causes fear and a widespread tendency to hide it.

The vice-president of the ELIS Center Association in Rome, Daniele Maturo, says that “ELIS was born in the Tiburtino district of Rome, but our mission spurs us to help those outside Italy, all over the world, regardless of the ethnicity, religion or culture of the people in need. As St. Josemaría, who has inspired and continues to inspire our work today, used to say: there is only one race, the race of the children of God.”

La Guajira, Colombia - Training Teachers in La Guajira

Since 2016, the University of La Sabana (together with the Ministry of Education and the local and departmental Secretaries of Education) has initiated a special training program for 69 teachers in one of the regions with the most negative educational quality indexes. Twenty-three educational institutions in the Upper, Middle and Lower Guajira region were involved, and more than 14,000 children were reached. In 2019, after
three years of programs, the University of La Sabana reinforced its commitment to transform education in these regions and reaped its first fruits. This year 43 teachers graduated with a Master's Degree in Pedagogy, the first in this region. Carlos Barreto, coordinator of the program, says that the long working days and more than 30 trips to La Guajira have been “an extraordinary professional and social challenge for the entire university.”

São Paulo, Brazil - Contemporary Dialogues

In 2019, the Centro de Estudos Universitários do Sumaré organized a philosophical and anthropological course for students from several universities and young professionals from the Brazilian capital. The sessions, taught by professors from various universities, took place at the Law School of the University of São Paulo. Topics addressed included freedom, happiness, social inclusion, and the importance of open dialogue. The program ended with a volunteer activity, so that attendees could put into practice some of what they had heard. Specifically, they visited and actively assisted an institution that cares for drug addicts by trying to instill in them hope and encourage a change in lifestyle.

Sydney, Australia - Life after the Classroom

Creston College is a women's university residence located near the University of New South Wales in Sydney. In April it organized a conference on “The Transformative Power of Work,” which included several encounters with young professional women who have found new meaning in their work after passing through the university classrooms.

Dr. Angelica Merlot, cancer researcher and 2019 New South Wales Young Person of the Year nominee, recounted her personal successes and failures, and the path that led to her becoming, at 25 years of age, the youngest recipient of a prestigious research grant from the Australian
government. Another speaker, Dr. Rachel Carling, a former political activist and current director of Right to Life NSW, discussed helping women through her work in the pro-life movement. Another event was a meeting with young professional women (one single, one recently married, and a third expecting her first child), who shared experiences about life after the classroom. They talked about their love for their work, their efforts to attain a balance between work and family, and the beauty of raising a family.

Nagasaki, Japan - A Youthful Welcome For the Pope

Whenever Pope Francis plans a trip to the Far East, the host country makes every effort to accommodate as many university and high school students as possible from other countries who wish to accompany the successor of Peter. In Japan, two university residences – Seido Cultural Center in Ashiya and Yoshida Student Center in Kyoto – organized an activity in Nagasaki to coincide with the Pope’s stay.

As the dates for the trip approached, groups from Hong Kong, Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan expressed interest in taking part in the events. The first attendance forecasts were exceeded time and time again. On Saturday, November 22, a welcome party for all the groups was held at the Seido Mikawadai School, a corporate work of Opus Dei. Students from the above-mentioned countries were joined by a large group from Shanghai, and some representatives from Macau. To help the participants prepare well for the meeting with the Pope, two meditations before the Blessed Sacrament were offered, one in Japanese and the other in English. This was followed by a traditional Japanese dinner, during which the different groups were able to get to know each other and share experiences. After dinner, an international festival was held, with performances by people from a great variety of cultures.

The next day, all the groups went to the city’s baseball stadium, where the Mass was to be celebrated by the Pope. The Mass and the singing were endowed with a special beauty, which drew the attention of those present,
many of them non-Catholics. One of the young men who came from Ashiya said: “I was moved to see at the beginning of the Mass everyone praying together, acknowledging their faults and sins, and asking for the prayers of the others. If everyone did this, the world would be a much better place.”

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IN PACE
The Faithful of Opus Dei Who Died During the Second Half of 2019

In the second half of 2019, 541 faithful of the Prelature died and, besides the priests incardinated in it, 20 members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. 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—their pastoral ministry in the case of the priests—their family lives, and their social relationships 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.

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

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A study
Saint Josemaría’s Friends: 1902 - 1927 by Constantino Anchel, University of Navarra

Constantino Ánchel

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At the beginning of his 1 November 2019 pastoral letter on friendship, the Prelate of Opus Dei wrote: “Saint Josemaría frequently reminded us of the human and Christian importance of this great good. There are also abundant testimonies of how he personally formed many friendships that he kept up throughout his lifetime.”[1] These words have brought to mind many memories about Saint Josemaría’s friendships with a wide variety of people. Some come from books and articles I have read.[2] Others are the result of years spent researching documentation and stories about Saint Josemaría, which has led me to speak with quite a few people who considered themselves friends of the founder of Opus Dei. The following article focuses on these friendships during the years of Saint Josemaría’s life prior to arriving in Madrid in 1927. It is not my intention here to offer a theological reflection on friendship, but rather to present, on the basis of existing documents, testimonies of his strong and abundant friendships.[3]

The Barbastro and Logroño Years

The biographies of the founder of Opus Dei show us that, from his childhood and adolescence, he was a sociable person who found it easy to relate to others. This quality was assisted partly by his family environment, where children and cousins abounded. In fact, his grandmother Florencia Blanc’s home was known in Barbastro as “the house with all the children.” Moreover, his social interaction outside his own family began at an early age: at the school of the Daughters of Charity, from the age of three, and at the Piarist School, from the age of six. Childhood friendships formed during these years in Barbastro lasted his whole lifetime, despite the fact that he left his hometown at the age of thirteen. Correspondence with Esperanza and Adriana Corrales (who were sisters), José Mur, Martín Sambeat and his wife Lola Lacau, Miguel Cavero, and Cándido Baselga, together with the accounts written by some of them, confirm this for us.

The Prelate says in his letter: “Strengthening bonds with our friends
requires time and attention, and often means avoiding comfort-seeking and setting aside our own preferences.”[4] In Logroño, Saint Josemaría’s ability to make friends grew as he matured. What at first was the expression of a natural disposition, became a manifestation of the virtues needed to form strong friendships that were consolidated over time. Already during these years, we see clear traits of these specific qualities: the ability to listen, to put oneself in the other person’s shoes, the role of justice in personal relationships, a sense of service, readiness to help, and joy. As a result, the friendships forged in Logroño became more solid, as reflected in the memories and letters of José Luis Mena, José María Millán, Pedro Baldomero Larios, Vicente Sáenz de Valluerca, and Isidoro Zorzano.

This picture would be incomplete without mentioning that he also formed friendships with older people. This fact has its origins in the years spent in Barbastro and in his family’s interest in history. The people of Upper Aragon have a deep tie to the deeds and traditions of their land, and like to talk about them. He would have heard at home and in the homes of his cousins and other families stories about the legendary Kingdom of Sobrarbe and the Aragonese epics, ancient and modern. And not only in Barbastro, since in Fonz, where he spent the summers, he had the opportunity to attend gatherings in the home of his grandmother Constanza, where the famous Arabist scholar Francisco Codera y Zaydín, a close relative of the Escrivás, was often present.

From this opportunity to meet and listen to his elders there arose strong relationships, although naturally with characteristics different from friendships with his contemporaries.[5] Saint Josemaría often recalled the conversations and anecdotes of Daniel Alfaro, a military priest who helped him defray the expenses of his father’s funeral. Calixto Terés, his high school philosophy teacher, was another person with whom he shared mutual admiration and affection. We can also mention here Xavier de Lauzurica, seminary professor and later bishop, and Gregorio Fernández Anguiano, vice-rector of the seminary, who was quick to stand up in defense of Saint Josemaría.[6]

*At the San Francisco de Paula Seminary*
In the fall of 1920, Saint Josemaría moved to Saragossa to continue his priestly studies at the Pontifical University of San Valero and San Braulio, and later to obtain a law degree. There he formed many friendships with seminarians, university students and professors. In the seminary of San Francisco de Paula[7] he encountered a new situation: living with young people coming from a quite different social and cultural background. Very few of them came from middle-class and urban families. Initially, he got on better with the latter. His great friend during these years was Francisco Moreno, whose father was a doctor. Moreno’s recollections of his seminary days reflect their deep friendship and are the best record of Saint Josemaría’s stay at San Francisco de Paula. Their mutual appreciation and affection, despite many challenges and differences, lasted right to the end of their lives. In the final years of his life, Moreno acknowledged that some of the advice Josemaría gave him about his personal situation bothered him, but at the same time he said that he was the only one who always nobly told him the truth to his face.[8] It was the greatest proof of sincere friendship.[9]

His friendship with Francisco Moreno did not prevent him from forming friendships with the other seminarians. As Agustín Callejas recalls, “Josemaría was very attentive and tried to form friendships with all his companions.” In 1922 he began to have special responsibilities when he was named Inspector. The function of this position was to maintain discipline among the seminarians when the Rector was absent. As the Inspector was also a seminarian, his interaction with the other seminarians had to follow somewhat narrow and limited channels. Callejas says that in carrying out this assignment “his spirit of companionship and understanding was evident. I think that the sense of friendship with everyone was as strong as that of his responsibility to fulfil his assignment: he never let any seminarian look bad before the Superiors.”[10] Years later Saint Josemaría wrote: “This concern of mine [for the formation of others] is not something I’ve had only now; since the age of 21 I have been preaching it and I have tried to live it with all my strength.” And he added: “It is possible that in the Seminary of San Carlos there are papers of mine (because I have always been a friend of putting things down in writing) from when I was Superior, with observations filled with understanding, praising the changes for the better in the seminarians, speaking about charity and the need to give an
example of charity.”[11] As a testimony to these efforts, we have his “Reports on the conduct of the seminarians in the Seminary of San Francisco de Paula,” which are kept in the diocesan archives of Saragossa.[12]

One could point to many aspects of his ability to form friendships and get along with the other seminarians, but I will limit myself to mentioning one that is especially indicative and that, technically, is called tolerance, but in colloquial language is known as “turning a blind eye.” Agustín Callejas describes it graphically in an account that, despite its length, is worth quoting in full: “When we went to class or for a long walk, he pretended not to notice if someone moved away from the others to smoke unnoticed because he understood that this was of no great importance and was only natural for young boys like us. At that time I had a great love for soccer—which I have never lost over the years. I not only liked to play it but also to go see the games played on Sundays at Iberia’s field, my favorite team. This interest of mine was known and tacitly tolerated at the Seminary. In order to attend these games, when the seminarians went for a walk I stayed in my room and went out later. At dinner Josemaría would say to me with an affectionate smile that was very characteristic of him: ‘What, Agustín, today too you were feeling sick and couldn’t come with us?’ These were small things, not expressly authorized but allowed in fact, and that didn’t harm anyone. This shows what a great companion Josemaría was for everyone, his friendship and understanding; it also shows his love for forming people in freedom, which he later practiced all his life.”[13]

At the university

When studying law at the university, the friendships he formed with his classmates were enduring and the mutual affection lasted a lifetime. Right from the start, he interacted with the other students as an equal and without hiding his clerical status. It should be kept in mind that, in intellectual circles, members of the clergy were generally considered to be reactionary and not sufficiently well-educated to understand the great questions of modernity. One of his colleagues recalls that the university student environment “was not an easy environment for a priest. Most of the students were not very religious and viewed the priest with respect, yes, but not with affection or admiration but rather with coldness and indifference.
They were seen as distant from us and we unconsciously tried to keep that distance."[14]

For many of his classmates, meeting Saint Josemaría meant the beginning of an authentic friendship that they would always consider alive, even after many years without direct contact. When the news of his death reached them, their affection often turned into devotion.[15] This esteem sprang from a spontaneous sympathy for Saint Josemaría’s demeanor and personality, for his human qualities.[16] And it strengthened as they became aware of the consideration he showed and the interest he took in their affairs. His dealings with them were not restricted only to academic topics or those arising from his stay at the university. In his conversations he also covered more personal matters of a spiritual nature. He never excluded from his affection those who, because of their ideas, were far from the faith. For example, the magistrate Pascual Galbe, who was a judge in the Barcelona Court during the civil war, had a warm friendship with Saint Josemaría despite their quite different outlooks. In the autumn of 1937, he received Saint Josemaría in Barcelona with great affection and even offered to help him if he encountered problems in his flight from the Republican zone.[17]

Some characteristics of his relationship with his classmates and colleagues

From the testimonies of those who knew him at the University, the following characteristics of Saint Josemaría’s interactions with others can be highlighted:

— The first was that he didn’t hide his clerical status, as mentioned above.[18] His way of dealing with those he met at the University could be seen by some as surprising in those years. He didn’t use his status as a claim to be above others when interacting with the professors and students at the university. When speaking with a professor, he was always a disciple, and a fellow disciple with the other students. He assimilated with great respect the human values and virtues of the university world and acquired an authentic juridical mentality.[19] Luis Palos recalls his regular attendance at the classes,[20] and Juan Antonio Iranzo, Fernando Vivanco, and Arturo Landa remember him as a good student who obtained good grades.[21]
— The second characteristic was the simplicity and humility that marked his relationships with others. Many people emphasize his naturalness and lack of affectation, his simplicity, openness, warmth and joy. Juan Antonio Iranzo recalled that, despite being a clergyman, everyone wanted to speak with him. Some people, on seeing him dressed in a cassock, felt a certain misgiving at first. But his trusting and open spirit soon won them over. He behaved with everyone in the same way.[22]

— A third distinctive trait was his understanding and refinement with others. Saint Josemaría’s innate qualities, which had developed over the years, made his personality stand out in the university environment. He possessed a special attractiveness that spontaneously won him the esteem of the other university students. But they also discovered in him an uncommon human quality that contrasted with the idea then held of the behavior of a clergyman. They noticed his remarkable ability to communicate, along with an extraordinary refinement that kept him from imposing himself on others, but that, in turn, did not alienate him. He found it easy to get along with everyone, because he knew how a university student was supposed to act. He had an open spirit, with a great understanding for others’ ways of thinking. There are many testimonies about his openness to everyone. For example, Luis Palos says that “Josemaría entered the university with his extraordinary gift for people that quickly led him to form many friendships. Undoubtedly all of us were drawn to him. He had an open mentality, a universal spirit.” [23] Other classmates testify to the same fact: “He was an excellent classmate for everyone. He was loved by everyone, whether they were believers or not, and despite the fact that some classmates were clearly anticlerical,” Fernando Vivanco says.[24]

Arturo Landa is the one who gives us the fullest description of these qualities: “He was very friendly. He always had his characteristic smile on his lips. As soon as someone spoke to him about any topic, a smile would appear. It was not, certainly, the smile of a person who wants to make himself attractive to others artificially. Josemaría’s smile was spontaneous. He was truly a person it was easy to get close to. Despite his youth, Josemaría already had a serene gravity. He treated everyone equally and did not shy away from dealing with someone who thought differently from
him. Josemaría Escrivá respected others’ viewpoints and opened his friendship to everyone. I remember some persons in our class who, trying to be funny (and also to annoy him), would tell some inappropriate jokes in front of Josemaría. Not that there was anything especially offensive about them, and they could even be considered natural among students, but they detracted from the consideration due to a priest. He kept quiet, and it seemed to me that it made him a bit angry, because it had to be annoying for him. He kept quiet, as I said, and elegantly moved on to another topic.”[25]

— A fourth quality was the apostolic zeal shown in his relationships with his companions. From the moment he began attending classes, his classmates (although at first what attracted their attention was his great human stature) soon realized how deeply he loved Christ and was trying to identify himself with Him. They felt themselves challenged both humanly and supernaturally.

Almost all his companions in the seminary and at the university retained a clear memory of Saint Josemaría. Those in the seminary realized that he rose above the normal pattern of the seminarian of the time, but, in most cases, they didn’t see further than that. That is, they didn’t grasp his spiritual depth and remained only with the perception that he was somehow different. However, those at the Law School not only noticed that he was a priest far above the average, but also often recognized his inner strength and deep spiritual restlessness.

Perhaps this explains why his fellow classmates in Law School always treated him as if he were already a priest, even before he was ordained. Some of them, because of their strong friendship, shared with him a special trust. Several testimonies tell us that Saint Josemaría’s closest friends were David Mainar, Domingo Fumanal and Luis Palos. These are the ones who have left the clearest written account of his piety and apostolic zeal.[26] Mainar speaks about his own surprise on seeing Saint Josemaría’s way of relating to those around him. He didn’t see him carrying out his apostolate as a cleric, but rather as a friend. Saint Josemaría, he tells us, “didn’t speak to his companions about religion. He didn’t like to ‘sermonize,’ but tried simply to be a good friend.” [27] Fernando Vivanco says that although he doesn’t remember him speaking with him about specific apostolic concerns,
later when Saint Josemaría was ordained he decided to go to him for confession: “I liked to go to confession with him, once he was already a priest. And I did go very often. My friends who found out about it asked me if it caused me any embarrassment and shame to do so, since we shared so much trust and friendship. To me it seemed the most natural thing in the world and even the ideal thing to have that friendship in order to go to confession more easily.”[28]

— A final quality, which in a way sums up the previous ones, was his readiness to help and serve his friends. The first exchange of letters that has been preserved was between Saint Josemaría and Francisco Villellas, a law student. In this correspondence they talk about academic matters such as borrowed notes and programs, but they also mention material favors far removed from the university context. Villellas, for example, asks him to inquire in a car accessory store about a retreaded tire he had left there before finishing the semester and going to his family home outside Saragossa.[29]

The Augustinian friar José López Ortiz recalls his first meeting with Saint Josemaría. It was in June 1924. He had gone to the Law School in Saragossa to take his exams. As soon as Josemaría saw him enter the building, he came over and asked if he could assist him. “Josemaría was very well prepared and knew an environment that was unfamiliar to me; generously, and with great naturalness, he gave me valuable guidance on topics related to my studies.”[30]

A final example. One of the professors who taught Canon Law, Juan Moneva, was known to require that his students, since they had all studied Latin in high school, should be able to translate correctly in class the canons of the Code of the Church, and recite them in Latin when asked. Some of the students found this requirement quite demanding. As Domingo Fumanal recalls, “we found ourselves in a tight spot to be able to take the exam. Josemaría volunteered to give us classes.”[31] And Juan Antonio Iranzo relates: “we went three days a week to the Seminary of San Carlos to receive an hour-long class.”[32] And Fumanal adds: “he was giving us classes (Juan Antonio Iranzo, someone else and I) at the Seminary of San Carlos, in his room. I don’t recall him charging anything even though he was not very well off.”[33]
Relationship with teachers

His university experience provided another opportunity to make new friendships, namely with the professors he met in the classrooms. Some were relatively young, such as Miguel Sancho Izquierdo, born in 1890 and Professor of Natural Law and Philosophy of Law. He recounts his first meeting with Saint Josemaría, who went to see him in his office and told him “that he wanted to study law, and since he was a seminarian still engaged in theological studies, he would enroll as an unofficial student. He wanted, however, to attend classes and get to know, from the inside, the university atmosphere.”[34] Thus a relationship was born that lasted his whole life. And he concludes: “He knew how to understand people, love them and make himself loved, respecting the personality of each one without ever being exclusive, but on the contrary valuing and appreciating what was proper to each one.”[35]

Carlos Sánchez del Río, future professor of Roman Law and only five years older than Saint Josemaría, recalls the moment when he asked permission to attend his classes as an unofficial student: “It was in the early 1920s when I met Fr. Josemaría Escrivá in Saragossa. He was still a seminarian at the time and came to consult me about the classes he wanted to take at the Law School of the university, where I was Secretary-General. From that first meeting I was left with the impression—which was later confirmed—of his distinguished personality, his elegant appearance, and his naturalness, without any affectation, since he was in no way—not in the slightest—pretentious, but on the contrary, simple and cheerful.”[36] The acquaintance extended beyond the period of university studies. As the years went by, when Sánchez del Río was appointed Delegate of the Government in the Navarra Institute of General Studies, their meetings became more frequent. As he says in summary: “he was very sociable with everyone. He had the right word for everyone. He was also very humble. The most striking characteristic of Father Josemaría was certainly his cheerfulness and cordiality. His answers to any question were spontaneous and quick, and showed great mental agility.”[37]

Other professors were older, such as Juan Moneva, Inocencio Jiménez, and José Pou de Foxá. Moneva, born in 1871, was professor of Canon Law. Right from the first moment, a special rapport and deep friendship
developed between professor and student, and in fact, he was one of the few people present at his first Mass.[38] In the speech that Saint Josemaría gave at the University of Saragossa upon receiving an honorary doctorate, he dedicated some heartfelt words to the memory of his teacher: “Of all my professors at that time, he was the one I dealt with most closely, and from this relationship a friendship was born that lasted until his death. Don Juan showed me on more than one occasion a marvelous affection, and I was always able to appreciate the treasure of strong Christian piety, rectitude of life, and a charity that was as discreet as it was admirable, hidden under the cover (which some people were deceived by) of his sharp irony and the jovial graciousness of his wit. My heart is truly moved by memories of Don Juan and my other teachers.”[39]

Finally, we turn to the priest José Pou de Foxá, professor of Roman Law. Their first meeting “took place in the 1923-24 academic year, when Pou de Foxá had just taken over the Chair of Roman Law at the University of Saragossa. Josemaría Escrivá enrolled in this course that year, and as he had done in the first years of his studies, he attended the classes as an auditor or free student. After the summer, he took the exams, and Pou de Foxá gave him the highest grade possible in Roman Law.[40]

The General Archives of the Prelature contain a letter that Pou addressed to José Escrivá Corzán (the father of Saint Josemaría) on November 18, 1924. It reads as follows: “In due time I received the pleasant letter from you dated the 26th of last month. It would have pleased me very much if you had come here so I could have had the pleasure of meeting you. For from getting to know your son and his character, all the members of your family have already endeared themselves to me.”[41] As can be deduced from this letter, “very soon he discovered the special qualities of his disciple, and his attitude developed into admiration. Despite the difference in age, a strong friendship arose. At first, their conversations focused on academic topics, but over time they began speaking with great mutual trust about more personal matters related to the priesthood and the ecclesiastical environment in Saragossa.”[42]

When Saint Josemaría moved to Madrid, Pou followed closely his first academic steps and also helped him resolve some matters with the diocesan curia of Saragossa. They kept up an extensive correspondence, of which
more than a hundred letters are preserved. In 1933 Saint Josemaría, when recalling the priests who “gave warmth to my incipient vocation,” includes José Pou de Foxá, and describes him as “the loyal, noble and good friend who has always stood up for us.”[43]

By way of corollary

The above is a brief summary of Saint Josemaría’s friendships during the years prior to the founding of Opus Dei. In the light of what we have seen, some concluding considerations can be offered.

Most of those who knew and dealt with him saw his capacity for friendship as the result of his humanly attractive way of being: his simplicity, warmth, etc. However, some were also able to grasp his apostolic concern. Various documented sources testify to the fact that Saint Josemaría began attending classes at the Law School with an apostolic intent.[44]

His fellow students also testify to his special apostolic concern for the young people at the university, in whom he perceived a void in their religious formation. But they also realized that he didn’t see his role as merely teaching those who were ignorant, but that he sought to win friends so that, through personal contact, he could foster their responsibility and enable them to carry out the apostolic enterprises that their university formation would make them capable of later on.[45]

These characteristics of his apostolic way of acting, shown already during his years in Saragossa, continued and were consolidated in the following years, when he moved to Madrid.


The existing documentation is made up mainly of eyewitness accounts of Saint Josemaría’s life, although some involve memories of people who were unable to write them down before they died. As regards letters during this first period, until his arrival in Madrid these are quite scarce, with less than ten surviving. During the following years the letters preserved are much more abundant.

Pastoral Letter, 1 November 2019, no. 10.

In no. 13 of the 1 November 2019 Pastoral Letter we read: “friendship, like love (of which it is one expression), is not a univocal reality. There is not the same sharing of one’s own intimacy with all of one’s friends. For example, the friendship between husband and wife and the friendship between parents and children that was so strongly recommended by Saint Josemaría and the friendship between siblings or that between co-workers are not identical. In all of these there is a shared inner space which is specific to that particular relationship.”


In Saragossa, ecclesiastical studies were carried out at the Pontifical University of San Valero and San Braulio, but candidates for the priesthood resided in two seminaries: the seminary of San Valero and San Braulio, which was attached to the Pontifical University, and the seminary of San Francisco de Paula, which occupied two floors of the Royal Priestly Seminary of San Carlos. Sometimes the seminary of San Francisco de Paula was called the seminary of San Carlos, because of the building that housed it.

Florencio Sánchez Bella, who knew and dealt with him, recalls him saying that Saint Josemaría “had been his most faithful friend and the
instrument God used to bring him back to the Church” (Testimony Florencio Sánchez Bella, AGP. A.5, 244-1-1).


[14] Testimony of Arturo Landa Higuera, AGP, A.5, 331-1-3. Bishop José López Ortiz met Josemaría Escrivá in June 1924, when he went to take his law school exams in Saragossa. He recalls: “In the school I noticed that everyone knew him, and also that owing to his communicative and cheerful character he was clearly very well liked” (Testimony of José López Ortiz, AGP, A.5, 224-3-2).

[15] I am a witness to the following fact. One day in 1988 I had the opportunity to talk with David Mainar. He was in Rome and had gone to pray before the remains of Saint Josemaría. He was visibly moved. When he finished, he began to evoke memories of his university years and said forcefully several times: “Josemaría and I were very close friends.” And he added: “What’s more, I was his closest friend.” Listening to him, I was reminded of similar expressions from other university classmates of his, who wanted to assert how strong their friendship with Saint Josemaría had been.

[16] A colleague, Juan Antonio Iranzo, recalls: “Josemaría was very cheerful and had a great sense of humor. In his dealings with others he was straightforward and simple, not at all conceited or vain. He was a great
companion, very open and frank” (Testimony of Juan Antonio Iranzo Torres, AGP, A.5, 220-2-3).


[18] It was not very common for clerics to be seen in university classrooms during those years. However, in the same year that Saint Josemaría began to attend university classes, a priest and three seminarians also enrolled (cf. publication of the seminary of San Valero and San Braulio, Nuestro Apostolado, Saragossa, June 29, 1924, no. 11, p. 75). But in the testimonies referred to, his university companions only mention their acquaintance with one cleric: Saint Josemaría.

[19] The testimony of Professor Miguel Sancho Izquierdo is quite interesting when he recalls his first conversation with Saint Josemaría: “Recalling that conversation later on, which even then made a deep impression on me, more than once it seemed to me that he was already pointing to secularity, the appreciation for human realities that was to be a characteristic of his spirituality and apostolate” (Testimony of Miguel Sancho Izquierdo, AGP, A.5, 245-1-9).


[21] Relations of Juan Antonio Iranzo Torres, AGP, A.5, 220-2-3; of Fernando Vivanco Soto, AGP, A.5, 351-3-1; and of Arturo Landa Higuera, AGP, A.5, 331-1-3.

[22] See Testimony of Juan Antonio Iranzo Torres, AGP, A.5, 220-2-3. See also Testimonies of Arturo Landa Higuera, AGP, A.5, 331-1-3; of Fernando Vivanco Soto, AGP, A.5, 351-3-1; and of Juan Antonio Iranzo Torres, AGP, A.5, 220-2-3.


[26] “He was very pious,” Mainar writes, “with a piety that struck me powerfully. It wasn’t a piety that I would call maudlin or somehow sad. It was a warm, cheerful, attractive piety, which was not only compatible with
but helped foster his constant sense of humor and positive vision of life” (Testimony of David Mainar Pérez, AGP, A.5, 226-1-6).


[28] Testimony of Fernando Vivanco Soto, AGP, A.5, 351-3-1.

[29] Letter from Josemaría Escrivá to Francisco Villellas Orensanz, Saragossa, July 27, 1925; and from Villellas to Escrivá, Sos del Rey Católico, August 5, 1925.


[33] Testimony of Domingo Fumanal Borruel, AGP, A.5 212-3-9. The other classmates were Antonio Redondo and Manuel Marraco, as Juan Antonio Iranzo recalled in an interview on August 3, 1975.

[34] Testimony of Miguel Sancho Izquierdo, AGP, A.5, 245-1-9.

[35] Testimony of Miguel Sancho Izquierdo, AGP, A.5, 245-1-9. He adds: “How often he spoke to me with affection about my ‘Franciscanism’! He knew that my greatest title of honor was to be a Franciscan tertiary, and he praised it.”


[37] Testimony of Carlos Sánchez del Río Peguero, AGP, A.5, 245-1-5.

[38] In the Testimony of Pilar Moneva y de Oro, AGP, A.5 228-4-2, we read: “I remember that one day (of which I would not even know the precise year, if it were not for the prayer card that I keep) my mother told me: ‘Tomorrow we are going to attend the first Mass of one of your father’s pupils, whom he loves very much and is very concerned about, since his father died recently.’ When he finished the Mass, he knelt at the feet of the statue of our Lady and remained there silently for some time. Then he went to the sacristy. My father went to the sacristy and my mother and I left.”


[41] Letter from José Pou de Foxá to José Escrivá Corzán, Saragossa, November 18, 1924. A few days later, on November 27, Saint Josemaría’s father died.


[44] As we know from other sources, Saint Josemaría studied law at the request and on the advice of his father. This was the reason he enrolled at the university. But in addition to this first intention, he wanted to take advantage of the apostolic opportunities this new situation provided.

[45] We have no written record of how Saint Josemaría approached his apostolic activity during these years. But in *Christ is Passing By*, no. 99, he tells us how he always viewed his work as a priest and pastor of souls: “If my own personal experience is of any help, I can say that I have always seen my work as a priest and shepherd of souls as being aimed at helping each person to face up to all the demands of his life and to discover what God wants from him in particular—without in any way limiting that holy independence and blessed personal responsibility which are the features of a Christian conscience. This way of acting and this spirit are based on respect for the transcendence of revealed truth and on love for the freedom of the human person. I might add that they are also based on a realization that history is undetermined and open to a variety of human options—all of which God respects.”
Reflections on the Administration in Opus Dei: Richness and Perspectives

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INTRODUCTION

This document is the result of work sessions held in 2020, involving an interdisciplinary and international group of women of the Prelature.[1] During those days they studied in depth the identifying features and the apostolic potential of the reality of the Administration[2] in Opus Dei, starting from what Saint Josemaría saw and wrote, and taking into account the experiences gained over the years.

The methodology applied in this work is based on three elements: the study and understanding of a selection of texts from the founder of Opus Dei referring to the Administration in order, to understand his conception and perspective of this reality; reflection on the historical evolution of the Administration; and the articulation of a dialogue integrating the perspective of different disciplines and professional profiles to reach the most complete view possible of its nature. The aim of the resulting document is to offer reflections that help to penetrate the identity and apostolic projection of the Administration, throwing light on its essential features, which profile it as “a professional work, an apostolic method and means of sanctification”.[3]
We realize that, as years have passed, the Administration might have come to be understood in a reductive manner, as the combination of services offered by women of the Work, in the centres where numerary men and women live, in order to make the family spirit and fidelity to one’s vocation possible and enkindle the sense of mission. Furthermore, these tasks are expected to be carried out with professional excellence. These considerations taken together could lead to understanding the expression “apostolate of apostolates”, as the founder of Opus Dei referred to the Administration[4], mainly in an instrumental sense: as a reality that enhances the dedication of the people of the Work to other apostolic fields. However, we think that this merely functional approach impoverishes the reality of the Administration as understood by St. Josemaría, providing alternative ways of perceiving their work, eventually more functional, but distanced from its original meaning.

In fact, one result of understanding the Administration only in its functional or instrumental sense, as a much appreciated provider of services, could be, given social, cultural and economic situations of different countries, that alternative ways of organizing these services arise. This might in some cases alter the nature proper to the Administration.[5]

This could happen where for various reasons people do not see the Administration in its role as creating the atmosphere of home and family but rather from the point of view of the cost incurred.

Nevertheless, this kind of evaluation, however understandable given a markedly utilitarian social context, differs from the conception of the Administration as backbone[6], as the founder of Opus Dei defined it. Such a discrepancy is not a minor matter, because it could easily lead to thinking that this apostolate and the formation that upholds it, would not be able to adapt to contemporary times, nor lead the way in social and cultural changes, as the very spirit of the Work requires. In short, it would seem that the spinal column had lost something of its flexibility and its strength, slowing down the agile movement of the whole Work.

The foregoing considerations contrast, nevertheless, with the conviction that, by its own charisma, the Work and its apostolates are always up to date as shown by the living witness of many numeraries and assistant
numeraries who not only deeply understand their mission but have penetrated through experience the grandeur of the vision St. Josemaría had of the Administration. As shown in his writings it always appears as an attractive, modern and fruitful reality. The question can then arise: when and how has the brilliance of this vital and dynamic reality that the Administration is, and is called to be, been blurred? How best can its intrinsic potential be freed, so that it energizes the progress of all the apostolates of the Work?

This study proposes to seek new perspectives from which to penetrate the supernatural and human dimension of what St. Josemaría did not hesitate to call “apostolate of apostolates”.

1. THE ADMINISTRATION AS “APOSTOLATE OF APOSTOLATES”

On many occasions, St. Josemaría defined the Administration as apostolate of apostolates. Among many possible texts, we select as an example this passage from Letter no. 36, of 1965, known as Verba Domini, about the sanctification of the work of the women of Opus Dei, and particularly the care of the centres of the Work: “Yours is the task of looking after the Administration of all our Centres, of both Sections: apostolate of apostolates, I write again, with the firm conviction of not exaggerating; a task which is a service to the whole Work and true professional work.”[7] We could ask ourselves what exactly St. Josemaría meant with this expression and what scope he gave to these words.

We think that, to fully appreciate what the Administration is, it would help to penetrate deeper into his concept of specific apostolate; that is, an apostolic sap, that vivifies the three branches of apostolate in the Work.[8]

But where do we start for a deep understanding of the mission proper to the Administration?

THE EVANGELICAL ROOT OF THIS APOSTOLATE

St. Josemaría found in the Gospel the hermeneutic key and the source that vivified the whole apostolate of the Work: “as I have always written to you, our spirit is (…) old as the Gospel and, as the Gospel, new (…). Then let us gather up the treasure of the Gospel with youthful spirit to make it reach all the
corners of the earth”[9]. And elsewhere: “We are new wine and our spirit is the doctrine of the Gospel, and our way of acting, the way of acting of the first Christians”.[10]

Applying these words to the reality of the Administration, we can begin from the fact that God, on becoming incarnate, wished to be born, to grow up and be cared for in a family, first that of Nazareth, later that of the apostles and now in the Church. Mark’s Gospel relates the vocation of the first apostles “Jesus called the Apostles to be with him and to send them out to preach” (cf. Mk 3, 14). The good news that Jesus taught reveals something novel: our filiation in the Son; that is, the message that God is our father, that he is with us and cares for us like a father cares for his children. Part of the vocation of the first disciples was to be with our Lord and be transformed by Him, and then be launched out for the mission. Joseph Ratzinger explains it in a suggestive way in his book Jesus of Nazareth: “In all the stages of Jesus’ activity that we have considered so far, it has become evident that Jesus is closely connected with the “we” of the new family that he gathers by his proclamation and his action. It has become evident that this “we” is in principle intended to be universal: It no longer rests on birth, but on communion with Jesus, who is himself God’s living Torah. This “we” of the new family is not amorphous. Jesus calls an inner core of people specially chosen by him, who are to carry out his mission and give this family order and shape”.[11]

At the same time, the Gospel also shows us some women who accompanied Jesus and served him with their goods (cf. Lk 8, 3). The women who accompany him look after both our Lord and his disciples (cf. Lk 8, 1-3; Mt 27, 55; Lk 23, 49) and they follow him to the Cross.[12] This is how the sisters in Bethany also behaved in the same way (Lk 10, 38-42) and before that the Blessed Virgin in Nazareth.

There were certain women who enjoyed a special intimacy with the Master (Lk 10, 39). Beside our Lady they experienced the great privilege and joy of looking after Christ himself and his apostles. And Jesus showed his gratitude with special attentions: he calls them by their name (Lk 10, 41), he lets them interact with him with great simplicity and confidence; he demands great faith of them and makes them share in his mission. The evangelists have transmitted to us the important role they have at the time of the Resurrection of Jesus, an indication of their responsibility regarding
the life of the Christian community and the propagation of the faith (Mt 28, 8 and Lk 24, 9). The presence of the Blessed Virgin among them sets a high spiritual and human tone. (Jn 19, 25). The role of these women is lived in a context that is clearly biblical: the community of disciples that Jesus gathers together is his “true family”. [13] This community constitutes the seed and beginning of the Church as family of God on earth and mystery of communion.

Our Lady gave human life to God, helped him to grow and cared for the Son of God as man in his human and spiritual needs. Jesus Christ entrusted mankind to the Virgin as her children (cf. Jn 19, 26) and the specific mission of Mary is precisely that of being Mother of Christ and of men. Those holy women shared a particular mission with our Lady: that of caring for Christ and his intimate circle.

HISTORICAL FACTS OF THE WORK: THE ORIGIN OF THIS APOSTOLATE

The founding message that St. Josemaría received leads to the transformation of the world through work and with a family dimension in the Church, which is the family and people of God. Work ordains the world to God when it is well done and centres on the needs of persons, that is, when the one working focuses on the personal dimension, that of service, which every work entails.

St. Josemaría soon wanted to count on a house from which to carry out his apostolic work and to reserve our Lord in the Eucharist, a home from which to radiate an atmosphere of Christian family. This also required looking into the material aspects. For the first residence therefore, he employed people who could run the services of cleaning, cooking, etc., giving professional importance to these tasks. However, even though the services were done, they did not manage to create a real family atmosphere, a home where everyone could feel cared for and loved and at the same time protagonists responsible for the home. [14]

For this reason, he opened his mother’s home to his sons and, meditating on that experience, he realized how decisive this care had been – a family atmosphere – for the assimilating of the formation and for the fidelity of his sons. Gradually his mother, Dolores Albás, familiarly called
the Grandmother, and his sister Carmen –Aunt Carmen for all–, took over the Administration, providing a warm and attractive family atmosphere, where each one’s personality could unfold in a harmonious and dignified way.

It was clear how the feminine element, epitomized in the persons of his mother and sister, contributed to the development of the apostolate. With their own life and professional work, they were not simply the solution to a practical problem, but part of the apostolic and family project of Opus Dei. From 1942 onwards, the women of the Work took over this specific apostolate, which does not consist of a series of jobs –that could be equally well done by men, as had been the case before–, but in caring for their brothers or sisters, from a profession which especially highlights service to the person.

**THE ADMINISTRATION AS INSPIRATION FOR ALL WORK**

The mission of the Administration, as a specific apostolate, can be understood as a professional dedication to the care of people, capable of inspiring and empowering the work of all the faithful of the Prelature in their respective spheres of society. The Administration is called to show with very specific deeds what it means to work to serve and to serve with work, sanctify work and sanctify oneself with that work: to make life pleasant, look after little things, convert one’s tasks into prayer, live without seeking to shine, giving God all the glory. The presence of the Administration rebounds in this on the physiognomy and the spiritual tone of the entire Work, and each and every one of its members, because it is a constant reminder in a vivid way that the dimension of service is proper to every Christian existence. This richness is not accidental, but **backbone**, as St. Josemaría defined it. Without it the Work is not sustained, it is not sustainable.

In addition to this subjective and person-centred dimension, the *apostolate of apostolates* is done through sanctified work, and therefore it has to be a work with the perspective of the current time, that is to say: a creative, innovative, and sustainable work. Working in this way contributes to strengthening the Christian way of being in the world that is proper to a person of Opus Dei. In the case of the Administration, this also entails
enriching the educational task itself, being open to the positive values that, as part of the Providence with which God governs the course of history, society emphasises more at each historical moment. In our precise historical moment, for example, it makes sense that values such as cooperation, equality, justice, acceptance, inclusion, or ecological responsibility find an echo in the ordinary task of the Administration. Thus, through its work, the Administration can facilitate more or less the contemporary situation of those it serves. When the Administration places the highest professional competence directly at the service of people and shows how the same spirit can materialise in different historical circumstances, it becomes a vanguard factor of humanisation of culture, and therefore, of inspiration for the professional work of all.

These two aspects, recognizable in the work of the Administration, strengthen the sense of belonging and the adhesion of the people of the Work.

**THE ADMINISTRATION CONTRIBUTES TO THE SUSTAINABILITY OF ALL APOSTOLATE**

Another matter of interest, regarding this being a support for all work, is to consider that the Administration contributes to the sustainability of all apostolate in three areas: the care of the individual person in his or her environment, the care of the centres of Opus Dei –where financial sustainability is needed– and stimulating, from its special formative position, the care of society on the part of all.

Regarding the person, the Administration contributes to the bodily and spiritual health of the faithful of the Work by making the house where they live an authentic family home; one to which each faithful contributes in a decisive way, offering support and relying on the support of others, so that everyone goes on fulfilling their mission with renewed energies. From this domestic sphere, the Administration ensures that Opus Dei is assured as a communion of persons, more than an organization.

_Maintaining the centre of Opus Dei_ requires good financial management of properties, which guarantees the apostolic work over time. Etymologically, “economy” (from ὠἶκος, oikos, “house” and νέμειν
(némein), “administer”) refers mainly to the care, the administration, of the house in its more material aspect.

Finally, for the development of Opus Dei over time, it is indispensable to guarantee its anchorage in reality in all its facets: material (financial resources, buildings, maintenance, etc.), social (relation to surroundings, labour laws, environment) and cultural. A correct understanding of the foundational spirit requires a steady and lively dialogue with the society around one, because from this dialogue, rooted in one’s own work, the Christian transformation of society will emerge, always in an original form. All these facets are present in a more or less immediate way in the work of the Administration.

SOME FEATURES OF THE NATURE AND MISSION OF THIS APOSTOLATE

The Administration, as St. Josemaría saw it, is an apostolate of the women: this is a foundational issue[15], the ultimate meaning of which we can only guess at. Somehow, St. Josemaría foresaw that the Administration would reproduce the mission of caring for the apostles that our Lady and the holy women put into practice: to take care of the other members of the Work, to strengthen their communion with Christ and contribute thus to the apostolic dynamism of a Church “which goes forth”[16]. The following text, for example, illustrates this: Those holy and courageous women –about whom the Gospel speaks– loved our Lord, they bought spices, emerunt aromata (Mc 16, 1), to anoint his Body. My imagination goes again to Bethany, to that house of Martha and Mary and Lazarus, where our Lord would come, tired out, and let himself be cared for: how well I understand it! He was perfect God, but also perfect man; he needed to recover strength, to find the peace and affection of a home (...). This is what you do, too, when, out of love for Jesus Christ, you give to the atmosphere of our houses the fragrance of a bright and cheerful home: I tell you truly that as often as you behave like this with the least of your brethren –says the Lord– you have done it to me”.[17]

The Administration is also responsible for the care of our Lord in the Eucharist, because the Eucharist is the heart of the Church and the source from which spring her life and mission.[18] If the Work is in the Church[19], the Eucharist must necessarily have a central place in her life and mission. Starting from the strength conferred by that love, the
Administration takes on the crucial role of caring for people, providing the environment in which formation and apostolate can flourish. Still more, on caring for our Lord, hidden sacramentally in the Tabernacle of each centre of Opus Dei, they highlight his Presence: the “invisible God is made visible” and that is the most apostolic action that exists. On numerous occasions St. Josemaría referred to the Administration as “light lit before the Tabernacle”.[20]

The Administration is also entrusted with watching over unity of vocation, of spirit and of mission.[21] And this at least in two ways: on the one hand, materializing a family spirit, which makes it possible to unite people coming from very different backgrounds and whose previous family experiences are different; on the other, watching over separation, a foundational feature of the apostolates of Opus Dei.[22]

The Administration safeguards the Christian family spirit that God wanted for Opus Dei, helping the faithful –numeraries, associates, supernumeraries– to spread it outwards to the professional and social environments in which they live their lives.[23] If the home is “the place one returns to”[24], the Administration creates a home, where the members of the Work renew themselves spiritually and then go back to their responsibilities and ordinary tasks with renewed strength.

As we have seen, the Administration contributes to the sustainability of every apostolate in this triple dimension: personal, of the centres and of society.

We conclude that an integral, not merely functional or instrumental, understanding of the expression apostolate of apostolates is key to arriving at the identity of the Administration and why it is to the women of the Work that it is entrusted. As with all apostolic work, some numeraries assume its direction and impetus.[25] Later on we will go deeper into this issue which, we believe, originates here.

2. THE CENTRAL IMPORTANCE OF WORK AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
As can be seen from the previous considerations, reflecting on the nature of the work of the Administration is crucial for properly expressing the human dimension of the divine vocation of the numeraries and the assistant numeraries, and for situating it on the horizon St. Josemaría indicated: as *the apostolate of apostolates*, as the *spinal column of the Work*. In fact, part of the difficulty found in appreciating the Administration from this perspective in some places comes from holding on to old habits (structures, organization, jobs, etc.) which belittle rather than show up the true nature of the Administration; and limit the human and professional development of those who carry it out.

Some of these difficulties derive from the legislation applicable in some countries, which only recognize the figure of “domestic employee” to refer to the work carried out by those working in the Administration –both numeraries and assistant numeraries–, a generic term that does not correspond to the perception that they themselves have of the human and professional projection of their task. A consequence of this discord between legislation and personal lived experience is the difficulty these people have in explaining their professional and life project in a way that can be understood by their contemporaries. The little legal and social recognition given to these tasks represents an obstacle to show more effectively the value and beauty that the care of persons has in an intrinsic manner. In order to overcome this obstacle, we need to reflect on the very nature of professional work.

**A PROFESSIONAL WORK WITH ALL ITS CONSEQUENCES**

It is important to start from a realistic view of both work itself, and the contemporary world of work. To speak of *professional* work means –as implied in the word “profession”– a dedication that affects and shapes one's whole life, as distinct from a job, that is received and taken on for a time, even if it is carried out with a “professional mentality”.

The panorama of work today is very heterogeneous and changing: there are few predetermined professional careers, apart from the professions regulated by their particular social mission (health, education, social work, etc.). Now people enter and leave the work force with great facility –or
difficulty-, and work is often organized like a “projects file”; the highly hierarchical pyramid organizations of work, very slow in negotiating change due their structural rigidity, are giving way to smaller, more flexible organizations.

In this context of volatile and changing work, what is most valued is innovation and creativity to generate ready and appropriate solutions for different social needs. Therefore, it is especially important for everyone entering the work force to have vision so as to pick up the needs and opportunities, and be able to justify the position freely occupied in the world.[26]

In the case of the numeraries and assistant numeraries working in the Administration this personal reflection, which is particularly necessary, cannot be taken for granted. The fact that they have a vocation to Opus Dei does not automatically produce—as self-evident—a deep understanding of their work that shows their secular condition. Indeed, St. Josemaría left in writing that on coming to the Work one continues to do the same work one would have done without being in the Work, and this continues being the case for supernumeraries, associates and some numeraries and assistant numeraries. Nevertheless, this expression of St. Josemaría has to be contextualized on applying it to the field we are studying, since there is a growing majority of women all over the world for whom discovering the path of assistant numeraries, that is, their vocation to care for the Work, means to change their original professional plan. They are no different in this from any person in the world who may change profession due to changing circumstances of life. However, though the discovery of their vocation leads them to shape a specific, personal, professional dedication, which does not necessarily coincide with the work they would have done had they not met the Work, nevertheless it propels them to a real personal and professional development. From here it can be seen in a special way that work is the hinge of our search for sanctity and of our place in the world.[27]

From their specific mission to take care of the Work as their own family, the people of Opus Dei dedicated to the Administration, like any person today, forge their professional development with personal initiative and creativity. Therefore, a standardized, narrow, and limiting view of what
the work of the Administration is called to be, would seriously jeopardize the personal and vocational development of the numeraries and assistant numeraries involved in it. Besides, given the centrality of this work in Opus Dei, it would have a negative impact in the apostolate of the whole Work. Safeguarding and empowering a deep, rich and appropriate vision of the Administration in its professional dimension is key, both in the formation given to all the people of the Work—men and women—, as well as in making the relevant decisions that correspond to the government of the Prelature.

Overcoming a standardized view of the work of Administration, while at the same time keeping faithfully to what is essential according to the spirit of the Work, opens up a wide spectrum of specific professional itineraries. In short, there can be as many profiles in the work of the Administration as facets required by people’s different needs, kinds of centre and their own talents.

**A TASK THAT REQUIRES SOME SPECIFIC TALENTS**

The work of the Administrations in general terms consists of “making tangible an intangible reality”: care and centrality of the person in the family. As one can appreciate, such an important mission requires, more than any other professional tasks, personal talents and a specific training which enables them:

- to assimilate and materialize this spirit, which is a family spirit;

- to grasp the depth and impact of their work on the people for whom it is done and for society in general;

- to facilitate the development and projection of the human personality of the men and women of the Work who benefit directly from this work, as well as of those who come into contact with its apostolates; and

- to be trained in the skills and abilities required to materialize the care of people, maintenance of buildings, control of finances, etc.

In view of what has been previously said, those who work in the Administration are aware of making ambitious plans with a broad view of their own formation and dialogue with other professionals with whom to exchange knowledge and experience.
In this work, as in any other, professional ambition is not incompatible with the expression “hide and disappear that only Jesus may shine”[28] which St. Josemaría used often: professional prestige does not compromise humility.[29]

EDUCATIONAL (OR EXEMPLARY) DIMENSION OF THE WORK OF THE ADMINISTRATION

Finally, the professional work of the Administration has an educational dimension, because by materializing a spirit, it most effectively communicates that spirit: through constant, concrete actions. Neither the spirit nor the values communicated through the work of the Administration are limited to the virtues of punctuality, order, temperance or care of details. Sensibility towards the needs of contemporary men and women leads the Administration to incorporate –embody– and promote in its turn the positive values to be found in present-day society such as, nowadays, sustainability, equality, responsibility for the environment, austerity, etc. In so far as every authentically human value is also Christian, it is logical that the care of people and houses in the centres of Opus Dei includes and facilitates this kind of timeliness, led by the Administration.

From this point of view, the potential for transforming the world contained in the work of the Administration is enormous. We could say, from a certain perspective, that by the projection of their work, the Administration introduces the feminine factor beyond the walls of our centres of Opus Dei to the whole of social life. Indeed, beyond any stereotypes that vary by culture, the way of acting historically denoted as “feminine” can be recognized today in a style of work that fosters collaboration over competitiveness, care over efficiency, attention to people over negotiating things, the concrete over speculation, tenacity over brilliance… The well-known list of “feminine qualities” that St. Josemaría put together in Conversations, no. 87, sheds light on that key factor, without obviously preventing these qualities being present among men, or the opposite ones among women.

3. ASSISTANT NUMERARIES AND NUMERARIES IN THE
ADMINISTRATION

After delving into the meaning of the expression apostolate of apostolates and explaining the importance of professional work, we now centre on the identity and mission of the assistant numeraries and numeraries dedicated to the Administration.

It is established that the shared life of numeraries and assistant numeraries develops harmoniously when there is mutual admiration and appreciation, shared work and a deep and simple understanding of what corresponds to each one. However, should this not be the case, situations could arise that make relations difficult. These difficulties may sometimes spring from a hierarchic view of the Administration, which is rigid and formalistic, or, on the contrary, from a superficial view which underestimates the human and supernatural depth of this work, which constitutes the value and the strength of the Administration.

It seems advisable to look deeper into this matter so as to be able to answer in what way the mission of the assistant numeraries and the numeraries who work in the Administration is the same, and in what matters their respective differences are manifested.

IDENTITY OF THE ASSISTANT NUMERARIES

When an assistant numerary discovers her vocation, she understands that God is calling her to sanctify her ordinary work and that at the same time she is called to care for the people of the Work and to make of each centre a family home: in the words of the current Prelate: With your work you care for and serve life in the Work, setting each person as focus and priority of your task. Certainly this mission corresponds to all the faithful of the Work, but in the case of the assistant numeraries it shapes, determines and embodies their professional dedication, at the same time as it serves as stimulus and inspiration for everyone.

This is how the current Central Secretary expressed it in an interview: “In the case of Opus Dei, men as well as women are called to care for the things of the Work. All are responsible for the cleanliness, order, and different tasks necessary to ensure that this place can be recognized as a home. But God has wanted to commit himself to never lacking someone with the self-giving of a mother and excellent professional competence, who promotes and watches over the
family atmosphere, seeing to it that no one is like an anonymous number, but someone loved, known in their tastes and looked after in their needs. This is the specific mission that God has left in the hands of women who choose this as their profession”.[32]

The Statutes state that “the Assistant Numeraries with the same availability as the other women Numeraries, dedicate their lives principally to manual work or domestic tasks, which they take on voluntarily as their professional work, in the Centres of the Work”. [33] Despite the fact that everything in the spirit of the Work underlines the equal dignity of all work, certain cultural prejudices regarding manual work make the very expression of this idea seem to be a manifestation of classism. Naturally, this was not St. Josemaría’s view. In his teaching and practical indications, he instilled in the Work, the Father always spoke out energetically to the contrary.[34]

In a similar way, it may be useful to explain the professional projection that the Founder wanted for the work of the Administration, and specifically for the assistant numeraries, seen in many of his texts. One example is the professional horizon that St. Josemaría presents in the letter, Carta no. 36, speaking of the work of the Administration. He indicates, among other things, financial responsibility, control of expenses, adjustment of budgets, the perfection of a laboratory, motherly affection, knowledge of dietetics, constant learning, avoidance of improvisation and monotony, care of the sick, qualifications, specialization, dedication of time to formation…

The current Prelate in no. 14 of the Pastoral letter of 28 October 2020, also reflects on the reach of this work: “As you know, it is not just a question of carrying out a series of material tasks which between us we can do and must do in one way or another, but of planning, organizing and coordinating them in such a way that the result is precisely a home where everyone feels at home, welcomed, affirmed, cared for, and at the same time responsible. This task, which is of great importance for every human person, has repercussions on the physiognomy and spirituality of the whole Work, of each and every one of its members”.

As the vocation of the assistant numeraries is directed from its origin to the care of their family through the work of the Administration, the
professional training they have or acquire is oriented towards carrying out this mission better. Their work, like all work, is the place of their meeting with God, of personal development, of meeting with others and contributing to the common good.

To evaluate the reach of the mission of this specific vocation, we can bring to mind words of the Father in his letter 28 October 2020. Referring to the mission of his assistant numerary daughters—which he calls awe-inspiring—he points out that it has to “transform this world—so full of individualism and indifference today—into a real home. Your task, when it is carried out with love, can reach all environments. You are building a more human and a more divine world, because you are dignifying it with your work turned into prayer, with your love, and with the professionalism you put into looking after people in their entirety”.

If an assistant numerary had another profession before discovering her vocation to the Work, she will obviously retain the mentality of the first, which will enrich the way she carries out her work in the Administration and the different aspects of her life. Like anyone who changes profession, she will try to learn and to improve the way she carries out her new occupation. On the other hand, she will try to keep up to date with her first occupation and cultivate other talents and hobbies, in so far as the care of the family and the apostolate allow. Of course this also applies to the numeraries who work in the Administration.

As the Prelate says in the letter of 28th October 2020, “it is a wonderful reality that you, the assistant numeraries, come from all walks of life. In fact, people are sometimes unsure whether God is asking them to be a numerary or an assistant numerary”.[35] St. Josemaría foresaw what happened years after his death: assistant numeraries with higher studies and culture and training similar to that of the numeraries would ask for admission to the Opus Dei.[36] This has already been a reality in many countries for some years.[37]

In fact, it happens more and more frequently that assistant numeraries have a sound professional preparation that equips them to take over tasks that for years were done by numeraries. This might lead to asking whether numerary administrators are still needed. To answer these questions, within
the framework of the foundational spirit, we need to take a good look at the mission and identity of women numeraries.

THE MISSION OF THE NUMERARY IN THE ADMINISTRATION

The numeraries are called to an exciting and special mission of service. It is a point very clear in the mind of St. Josemaría, as reflected in Statuta nos. 8 & 1: the numeraries “look after the specific initiatives of the Prelature with all their energy and with total personal availability to work (...) and care for those apostolic initiatives and to dedicate themselves to the formation of the other faithful of the Prelature”. In a letter of 1957, St. Josemaría elaborated on this matter:

“In the heart of the Work, the Numeraries – called to a special mission of service – know how to put themselves at the feet of all their brothers and sisters, to make the way of sanctity pleasant for them; to look after them in all their needs of soul and body; to help them in their difficulties, and make possible, with their dedicated sacrifice, the fruitful apostolate of all, keeping in mind those words of our Lord: the greatest among you will be as the least, and the one who commands as the one who serves. Because who is greater, the man who sits at table, or the man who serves him? Yet I am here among you as your servant (Lk 22)”.

This setting can help to understand the context and the meaning of St. Josemaría’s expression about the role of the numeraries in the Administration, when he says they have to be assistants of the Assistants. This includes facilitating the formation and spiritual accompaniment of the assistant numeraries so that they can carry out their mission. On the other hand, the totally free availability with which the numeraries dedicate themselves professionally to the Administration highlights the dignity of this work and eliminates any appearance of classes in Opus Dei.

As with all work, a specific professional development is required that needs time and training. Moreover, in the case of the numeraries who are responsible for directing, it is indispensable that they develop specific professional skills that enable them to have an overall view in directing the work, fostering teamwork, empowering the formation and professional development of those working in the Administration, etc. In fact, it can be
said that this is one of the aspects of their mission as “assistants of the Assistants”. [40]

The words “don’t leave them alone” [41] are also directly related to this. In this point it is especially important not to interpret this in a paternalistic way; in the mind of St. Josemaría ‘not to leave them alone’ does not mean to take over decisions from the assistant numeraries, or prevent them from assuming responsibilities. All that would be tantamount to belittling people, when the formation – all formation - is oriented precisely to fostering growth. To appreciate the meaning of these words it is necessary to keep in mind the full quote: St. Josemaría emphasized on the need – calling it a duty of justice – that the numeraries should work with the assistant numeraries in manual tasks as well as directing the same work. [42] This is understood in the sense of “do not leave them alone in the mission of care, which is shown especially in work”.

St. Josemaría points out that those numeraries dedicate themselves professionally to the Administration, “who are inclined that way, those who have this professional vocation, and want to sanctify this work and, with it, sanctify themselves and help the others to become saints”. [43] It follows from all this that not every numerary is capable of being an administrator. These words are complemented by other words in which he also underlines the formative value of the Administration for all numeraries, even though it may not be their profession. “All my numerary daughters should work for a time at these tasks. Afterwards those who have special aptitude will dedicate themselves specifically to this activity, but everyone should learn because you all need this formation”. [44]

It seems important, then, to emphasize that the numeraries – especially as directors or if they are more directly in charge of the formation of assistant numeraries – should have a deep understanding of the specific vocation of the assistant numeraries and the formative aspect of the administration. Only in this way can they encourage and empower their identity and their mission.

From all the above, in relation to the work of the Administration, it follows that:
- The Administration, being an apostolic task, requires the presence, direction and formative leadership of the numeraries. These numeraries should have conditions for formation and government and, moreover, professional competence in the work of the Administration.

- This is compatible with other numeraries being there who may not take on responsibilities for directing the Administration. This could be because they are at the start of their professional formation which requires a period of training, because they do not have special aptitude for directing this work, because they need a break from those responsibilities, etc.

- There would be no problem, therefore, in an Administration with several departments, for a numerary or assistant numerary to direct a team made up of assistant numeraries, numeraries or other people, as in fact, is already happening in some cases. In short, the direction of each department corresponds to the person best able to do it.

After deepening and widening horizons, perhaps it may be understood in a wider way that the specific mission of the numeraries are tasks of formation and government, and that the assistant numeraries collaborate with the numeraries in all the apostolates of the Work.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Up to this point, we have tried to present a conceptual frame making possible a better understanding of the reality of the Administration in its essence and topicality seen from the foundational inspiration. This conceptual development leads to highlighting several issues, which mark the frame of reference in which this reflection has taken place:

1. On coming to study the Administration, we have found that at times there can be a self-awareness within the Work that diminishes this reality and makes it difficult to face the questions and challenges that arise. In any case, it is necessary to foster a wide and deep understanding that permits giving the right answers.

2. St. Josemaría’s view of the Administration shows us a reality wanted by God and called to manifest itself in a way that fits its times. For this it is
necessary to distinguish in his texts what refers to the spirit, and the examples that respond to the historical context. It is key to recognize that being up to date means above all this: fidelity [45], and that as we change “the substance remains”[46], so as to face up to the challenges of a world in continuous evolution, where God awaits us: “Because just as the identity of a person remains the same throughout the different stages of growth: childhood, adolescence, maturity…; so there is evolution in our development: otherwise we would be something dead. The core, the essence, remains unchanged, but the ways of speaking and acting evolve, always old and new, always holy. And it is your mission to make sure that there is no wagon parked on dead tracks.” [47]

3. The driving force of the Work is not us, but God himself, who also speaks to us in and through the world.[48]

4. The Administration is called to enlighten the realities of its time from the spirit transmitted by St. Josemaría. It will do so insofar as we deepen in the human implications of something as powerful as the sanctification of work.

5. The people working in the Administration owe their position in society, no more nor less than anyone else, to their professional work carried out with passion, on-going specific training, initiative and creativity.

6. In order to fulfil its specific mission with the projection that St. Josemaría saw (to be apostolate of apostolates), the Administration has to be in touch with the world through work. It cannot become a self-referential reality, isolated from its context. In so far as work situates us in the world, it brings with it a lively dialogue with the realities of our time and roots us in the present age. An up-to-date Administration (aggiornata, as St. Josemaría liked to say, using the Italian word), permits the persons of the Work who live in the centres, to be “up to date” (aggiornate).

7. From this perspective, the work of the Administration has an enormous potential for transforming the world: in the supernatural order, through its constant flow of prayer, and in the human order, by introducing feminine talents into social life as a humanizing force, against the logic of dominion, confrontation, productivity as supreme norm, individualism, success at all costs or asphyxiating materialism.

8. A right understanding of the expression apostolate of apostolates as
The apostolic hub of the whole Work is the key to understanding the identity of the assistant numeraries and the mission of the numeraries in the Administration.

9. The Administration is indispensable for the sustainability of the Work, understood as the virtue of maintaining the spirit—especially family, unity and separation—, such that it contributes to the members of the Work being faithful to the call and to the mission, and for the good material administration of resources without compromising the future.

10. Certain behaviours (structures, leadership styles, etc.), understandable at the time, and maintained with inertia beyond what was reasonable, may have been the cause later on, in some cases, of a poor understanding of the proper identity of the Administration. These inertias are only shaken off by going back to the foundational spirit. Therefore, it is the responsibility of each generation of members of the Work to give shape, with words and deeds, to a style of work and a narrative that brings out the reality of the Administration exactly as St. Josemaría saw it.

5. PROPOSED DEFINITION OF ADMINISTRATION

The foregoing reflections allow us to return to the starting point: draw up a definition of the Administration, in contemporary terms, that reflects its identity just as St. Josemaría saw it, throw light on the challenges presented, point out ways to solve the existing problems, and free the formative and apostolic potential that it contains. We propose the following as a possible definition:

The Administration is an apostolate of Opus Dei, headed by women in a professional and financially viable way, necessary for communicating to the faithful of the Work and those who come into contact with its apostolates, a spirit of family and of sanctification of ordinary realities deeply rooted in the Gospel, which makes the centres of the Work into real homes and energizes the entire work which its faithful carry out in the middle of the world.

This expression is a synthesis that requires the conceptual frame we have presented in order to be correctly understood.
In conclusion, when the Administration reflects its nature and mission, and these different aspects are harmonized, this is reflected in the apostolic development of the Prelature.

[1] The result of the document incorporates contributions from different disciplinary perspectives: history, philosophy, sociology, theology and communication; as well as from professionals of the Administration and government of the Prelature.

[2] As in every home, the people living in the centres of the Work need a care that contributes to the family atmosphere, proper to the formative and apostolic task carried out by the Prelature. With the term Administration, in a general sense and with capital letter, reference is made to this task and the people who carry it out. When referring to particular instances, and specific administrations, a small letter is used. For a brief description of the birth and evolution of this reality, cfr. “Administration of the Moncloa Residence”, in Dictionary of Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. Burgos, Mount Carmel Publications 2013.


[5] Looking at the Administration from a merely instrumental point of view, it would be reasonable to not only propose alternative solutions for the ordinary running of the centres, but also to consider a more direct involvement in these tasks by the residents, both men and women, as part of their formation for life, to the point of questioning the very need of the Administration itself. Due to of the scarcity of numeraries and assistant numeraries in some places, the same instrumental approach could motivate the thought of completely outsourcing these services, leaving them in the hands of third parties, so that the numeraries and assistant numeraries can dedicate themselves to other jobs. Or as well, to see in the development of technologies that lighten and facilitate the organization and realization of
these care taking tasks, mainly as a chance for all of them, like many fathers and mothers in families, to make their dedication to the home compatible with other professional tasks. Similarly, this same instrumental approach would explain why, seeing the good professional preparation of the assistant numeraries and in some cases the lack of numeraries prepared to direct and carry out this work, a question could arise about the need or role of numerary administrators. We shall deal with all this in the last part of this article.

[6] “We must make the work of the Administration loved, because it is like the backbone of all the apostolic action of the Work”, in SAINT JOSEMARÍA, Letter no. 36, 29 July 1965, no. 11.

[7] ST. JOSEMARÍA, Letter no. 36, 29th July 1965, no. 9

[8] We refer to the works of Saint Michael, Saint Gabriel, Saint Raphael and also the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, because the Administration affects all of them and also reverberates in the apostolate of public opinion. There is a significant reference in the introduction to the critical edition of the book “In dialogue with the Lord” on explaining the origin of the magazines Crónica and Noticias. It says:

“In 1949 Saint Josemaría had written a long list –seven handwritten pages– of initiatives he proposed to initiate. Negotiations were underway and moving for obtaining the final approval of Opus Dei by the Holy See –it would come in the middle of 1950–, and the founder was already thinking about promoting further initiatives and activities. Among them, under the title “Publications”, were the following:

One general internal magazine,
One for each work, in duplicate: Saint Michael, Saint Gabriel, Saint Raphael, with news, outlines for study circles, doctrinal and practical topics. A special page for the administrations
Family letters: termly newsletter (…)”

The list goes on, but it is interesting to note that the page for the administrations is situated beside the other apostolic branches; not on a separate section, or as “family news”.

[9] St. JOSEMARÍA, Letter no. 6, 11th March 1940, no. 31


“In the opening verses of chapter 8, he (Saint Luke) recounts to us that Jesus, as he was making his way with the Twelve and preaching, was also accompanied by women. He mentions three names and then adds: ‘and many others, who provided for them out of their means’ (Lk 8:3). The difference between the discipleship of the Twelve and the discipleship of the women is obvious; the tasks assigned to each group are quite different. Yet Luke makes clear –and the other Gospels also show this in all sorts of ways– that ‘many’ women belonged to the more intimate community of believers and that their faith-filled following of Jesus was an essential element of that community, as would be vividly illustrated at the foot of the Cross and at the Resurrection”, in *idem*, pgs. 180-181.


[15] Statuta, no. 8 § 2: “Numeraries besides take care of the family administration or domestic care of all the Centres of the Prelature”.

[16] FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 24: “The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice”

[17] St. JOSEMARÍA, Letter no. 36, 29th July 1965, no. 16.


[19] St. JOHN PAUL II, Bull *Ut sit*: “With very great hope, the Church directs its attention and maternal care to Opus Dei, which – by divine inspiration – the Servant of God Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer founded in Madrid on October 2, 1928, so that it may always be an apt and effective instrument of the salvific mission which the Church carries out for the life of the world”.

[21] Cf. for example, OCARIZ, FERNANDO, Pastoral letter, 28th October 2020, nos. 2-7.

[22] Cf. Statuta, no. 4, § 3. In both Branches of Opus Dei equally, i.e. that of men and that of women, there is the same unity of vocation, of spirit, of aim and of governance, though each Branch has its own apostolates.

[23] It is interesting to see that among the group of holy women there is a permanent nucleus of mothers: that of Jesus, Salome (mother of James and John), Mary of Cleophas (mother of the other James). By analogy, through the Administration, God displays and offers us a “motherhood” in the Work which serves as a stimulus for the centres and for other homes of people of the Work.


[25] OCARIZ, FERNANDO, Pastoral letter 28th October 2020, no. 11

[26] “Your human vocation is a part and an important part of your divine vocation. That is the reason why you must strive for holiness, giving a particular character to your human personality, a style to your life; contributing at the same time to the sanctification of others, your fellow men; sanctifying your work and your environment: the profession or job that fills your day, your home and family and the country where you were born and which you love.” (Christ is Passing By, no. 46).

[27] In fact, the divine vocation does not of itself confer our position in the world: only the professional vocation does that. The vocation gives us light, strength to focus our position in society and develop a professional dedication in which to carry out our apostolic mission.

[28] St. JOSEMARÍA, Letter with occasion of the golden jubilee of his priesthood, 28th January, 1975. This sentence was often used by St. Josemaría in his preaching and writings.
One example among many is that of Gloria Gandiaga, the first assistant numerary of Bilbao, who in 1970 won the National Award of Cooking. She wrote a cookery book prefaced by Pedro Subijana (chef awarded with the three stars Michelin), who recognized the professional prestige and human category of Gloria.

On using the term ‘shared life’, we refer indiscriminately to the administrations in which the numeraries and assistant numeraries coincide only at work and to those in which they also share family life because they are also centres where they live.

OCÁRIZ, FERNANDO, Pastoral Letter, 28 October 2020, no.15

Words of Isabel Sánchez, in SÁNCHEZ LEON, ALVARO, En la tierra como en el cielo, p. 136.

Statuta, no. 9

Otherwise, for many years now, certain manual tasks are being revalued. See, for example, CRAWFORD, MICHAEL, The Case for working with Your Hands, New York, Viking, 2009; SENNET, RICHARD, The Craftsman. New Haven. Yale University Press, 2008.

OCÁRIZ, FERNANDO, Pastoral Letter, 28th October 2020, no. 16

In 1982 Blessed Álvaro del Portillo wanted to recall some of the Founder’s ideas close to the date of his death: St. Josemaría had declared (the words are not textual) that ‘if, because of the development of a country it becomes common for almost all the girls to obtain a professional qualification or university degree, there will obviously be university graduates and doctors who will be assistant Numeraries in the Opus Dei: and they will find in this divine vocation the happiness and honour of their life’ (not (17/82, AGP, Q.1.3, file 08, folder 53).

GONZÁLEZ GULLÓN, JOSÉ LUIS; COVERDALE, JOHN F. Historia del Opus Dei, Madrid, Rialp, 2021, pg. 560-561

St. JOSEMARÍA, Letter no. 27, 29th September 1957, no. 8
Which means that the other Numeraries are also in fact assistants of the Assistants” (St. JOSEMARÍA, Letter no. 36, 29th July 1965, no. 25).

“It has been my constant teaching that the other Numeraries must know how to serve the Assistants. (…) In this way they are splendid instruments: they can see themselves reflected in the mirror of your behaviour and reflect the light that you can and should give (…). As our Lord served his disciples, so should you serve the Assistant Numeraries”. (St. JOSEMARÍA, Letter no. 36, 29 July 1965, no 30)

Don’t ever leave them alone: it would be contrary to our spirit. And this is not a manifestation of lack of trust, but a proof of affection and a duty of justice, because they have the right to constantly feel the warmth of your manual work; the right to be helped by you, guided by you” (ibidem).

St. JOSEMARÍA, Letter no. 36, 29th July 1965, no. 18.

Ibid.

St. JOSEMARÍA, Letter no. 27, 29th September 1957, no. 27.

Cf. Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer, no. 1.


Cf. Paula Hermida Romero - Fernando Ocáriz, Cristianos en la sociedad del siglo XXI: conversación con Monseñor Fernando Ocáriz, Prelado del Opus Dei, Ediciones Cristiandad, Madrid, 2020, p. 25: “We cannot forget that, without ignoring the problems proper to each era, God is the Lord of History; He is the one who has given us this world to look after and direct to his glory, he gave it to us as inheritance and counts on our effort to make it better each day”. St. Josemaría explain it in this way: “Charity is not something abstract. It entails a real, complete, self-giving to the service of that God and all men; to the service of God who speaks to us in the silence of prayer and in the hubbub of the world and of those men whose existence is interwoven with our own”. (Conversations with Monsignor Escriva de Balaguer, no. 62. Cf also Dar al mundo su modernidad [https://opusdei.org/es/article/dar-al-mundo-su-modernidad]