



# Saint Josemaría Escriva

## Founder of Opus Dei

[Home](#) - [Documentation](#) - [Accounts](#) - [Account of St Josemaría's death](#)

## Account of St Josemaría's death

*Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo*

On June 26, 1975, Msgr. Josemaría died suddenly in Rome. The previous month he had made his last visit to Spain, where he received the gold medal of his native town, Barbastro, and visited the nearby shrine of Torreciudad, which had been built at his request, and was about to be inaugurated. His death marked the end of the foundational stage of Opus Dei and, in the words of his successor, the beginning of the “stage of continuity and fidelity”. Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo, then Secretary General of Opus Dei, acted as its head until the elective congress was held. The following is an extract from his recollections of that time, as a front-line witness of events.

On June 26, 1975, the last day of his earthly life, the Father arose at his usual hour. Assisted by Fr. Javier Echevarría, he celebrated holy Mass, a votive Mass in honor of our Lady, shortly before 8:00, in the oratory of the Most Holy Trinity. I celebrated Mass at the same time, in the main sacristy, because that morning our founder wanted to go with Fr. Javier and me to CastelGandolfo, to take leave of his daughters at Villa delle Rose – we were getting ready to leave Rome [for the summer]. He seemed to be in as good health as usual; there was no sign at all of what was about to happen.

When the Father left Villa delle Rose he was tired, certainly, but also happy and serene, attributing his indisposition to the heat. It was almost noon when we drove into the garage of Villa Tevere.

He greeted our Lord in the oratory of the Most Holy Trinity, making (as he always did) a slow, devout genuflection accompanied by an act of love. We then went up to my office – that's where he liked to do most of his work – and a few seconds after crossing the threshold, he exclaimed, “Javi!” Fr. Javier had stayed behind to close the door of the elevator. Our founder repeated more loudly, “Javi!” Then, in a weaker voice, “I don't feel well.” At that point he suddenly fell on the floor.

For us, of course, it was an unexpected death. For our founder, however, it was

something that had been maturing, I would dare to say, more in his soul than in his body, because each day he was more frequently offering his life for the Church and in particular for the Pope.

I'm convinced that the Father had a premonition of his death. In his last few years, he often remarked that his presence on earth was superfluous, and that he could be much more helpful to us from heaven. It really grieved us to hear him speak that way, in that tone of voice of his that was so strong and sincere and humble, for while he considered himself a burden, for us he was an irreplaceable treasure.

In all countries the media spread the news with respect and veneration: it was a reflection of the impression received directly by the journalists who came to Villa Tevere.

In those moments I was greatly consoled by the affectionate response of the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, to the news I had sent him in my capacity as secretary general of the Work. Through Archbishop Benelli, the Holy Father expressed the sorrow he felt, and said that he too was praying, in spirit, beside the body of so faithful a son of Holy Mother Church and of the Vicar of Christ. Before the public Requiem Mass, a telegram arrived at Villa Tevere from the Holy See. In it Pope Paul expressed again his own grief, assured us that he would be offering up prayers for the soul of the founder, and reiterated his own view that the founder was a soul chosen and favored by God; he concluded with an apostolic blessing for the whole Work. As is customary, the telegram bore the signature of the Cardinal Secretary of State: he said he united himself wholeheartedly, on his own behalf, with our sorrow and with the sentiments of Pope Paul, who wanted this message to reach us as soon as possible.

Thousands of telegrams and letters began arriving at our headquarters from all over the world. They all expressed, along with deeply felt grief, the conviction that this person who had died was a saint, that he was one of the great founders raised up in the Church by the Holy Spirit.

**Extracts from: *Immersed in God: Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, as seen by his successor Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, by Cesare Cavalleri, Scepter/Sinag Tala, 1996, pp. 194-207.***