



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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Building the Future

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Looking at things from saint Josemaria's point of view, if he were asked what youth is, or better still, what it should be, he would certainly answer that youth is the time for discovering and freely affirming the meaning of one's existence; a time for discovering the deepest human and supernatural values, and a time for bringing to life the great loves which every human heart seeks instinctively.

Youth is the right time for searching for the truth and genuine ideals, and undertaking adventures that surpass our wildest dreams, with a generous heart, without any meanness or calculation. Young people are imprudent – imprudent enough to embrace sacrifice with a smile, to love self-giving, and to realise that this can only be achieved through firm, total commitment.

In saint Josemaría's teachings, youthfulness is not measured by years, though being young in age may well make it easier to face life in the spirit outlined above. But youthfulness is, above all, an attitude of openness, of cheerful and generous dedication, a calling to live a life which is genuine and meaningful.

But is any meaning that we may give to life as good as any other? Is any ideal, any love, any truth, any adventure as good as any other? Obviously not. As saint Josemaría taught, the only ideal for which it is worth giving our life is not an earthly ideal, even though we should love the world passionately. Neither would it be worth giving our life just for a set of spiritual ideals, however Christian they may be. The stakes are about something which is much more valuable and which gives all other values and ideals their worth. Furthermore, this is not 'something', but 'Someone', a person: Jesus Christ, true God and true Man. The nucleus, then, of Saint Josemaria's teachings is 'the same as always': the Gospels, the doctrine of the Church, which invite us to stand face to face with Christ, as the Founder of Opus Dei invited us, and to follow Christ closely, to identify ourselves with Him.

Being close to Christ is unquestionably very attractive at any age. However it is especially relevant in youth, the age of ideals and great ambitions, the age of the

quest for a love that is worth the total gift of oneself.

A common feature underlined by all those who reflect the way Saint Josemaría helps them to form their characters is that taking our Christian life seriously, as he proposes, involves ‘key performance indicators’: firstly, the effort put into building up a relationship with God, involving both the mind and the heart. And then, study, unselfish friendship, acts of service for those around us, and hard work – to give just some examples.

Young people seek consistency and authenticity, reflected in a Christian life lived in its fullness in specific deeds. All the energies of youth converge on this point, in a desire to live a ‘useful’ life, as suggested in the first point of *The Way*: “Don’t let your life be barren. Be useful. Make yourself felt. Shine forth with the torch of your faith and your love. With your apostolic life, wipe out the trail of filth and slime left by the corrupt sowers of hatred. And set aflame all the ways of the earth with the fire of Christ that you bear in your heart.” When people’s eyes are opened to life’s horizons, especially the horizons of a life lived in Christ, they naturally feel a healthy desire to be useful. This is a desire not simply to make their mark on the world, but to reach even further by giving light and sowing goodness abundantly and generously.

This sowing is characterised by the desire to share and to give of oneself, because “A Christian cannot be selfish. If he were, he would betray his vocation.”

Another point from *The Way* refers to study: “An hour of study, for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer.” This consideration has a double dimension. First, it is about an occupation shared by many young people, and highlights the idea of being responsibly aware of the need to learn a skill, a profession or an art well, to be able to be *useful* to society; and secondly, it shows the way to acquiring a more profound knowledge about God and the reality of human existence. In this way, we become men and women of discernment and deep convictions, and avoid superficiality, which would be inappropriate for a Christian.

This point about study ties in with another feature: an ‘attitude of surprise’ towards holiness, marveling at the daily adventure of turning a normal day into something divine. This ‘attitude of surprise’ is accompanied by a contagious happiness: the joy that comes of knowing that God is watching over each individual, an awe that increases as we realise that God is not far away, up where the stars shine (cf. *the Way*, 267), but at our side, so close that we can almost touch him, with the love of a Father who is constantly waiting for us to talk with him, wanting our love. This positive meaning, of being happy to live one’s life in God’s hands, is present in the

writings and teachings of saint Josemaría as a deep joy that shows in his good humour and optimism.

Saint Josemaría understood young people and dialogued with them, since, just as there are some young people who are apathetic because they lack motivation, there are also some older people who are interiorly young, and saint Josemaría's spirit was anchored in the joy of God, and in a youthfulness that did not depend on his age.

Saint Josemaría had a reason for living, for giving himself, and always looked ahead with optimism and love. "Youth dreams of love. A great and pure love that never deceives, that never ends. Saint Josemaría found it in Jesus Christ and spent his whole life in helping others to discover it too", says Maria Casal. Because of his own experience of love, he knew how to speak to young people and to those who have a heart ready to love despite their greater age.

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