



Saint Josemaría Escrivá

Founder of Opus Dei

[Home](#) - [Saint Josemaría](#) - [October 6, 2002](#) - Canonization of Saint Josemaría

Canonization of Saint Josemaría

On October 6, 2002, Pope John Paul II canonized the founder of Opus Dei in St Peter's Square, Rome, in the presence of more than 300,000 people from all round the world.

Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving

When Saint Josemaría first arrived in Rome on the evening of June 23, 1946, he took up lodgings in a little apartment at the very top of a building in the *Piazza Città Leonina*, just a short distance away from Saint Peter's Basilica. When night fell, he went out onto the covered balcony overlooking the Apostolic Palace where Pope Pius XII lived. From there he could see the windows of the Pope's apartment. Deeply moved, he began praying for the Holy Father.

On October 6, 2002, from very early in the morning, prayers for the Pope and the Church rose up from the huge crowd that filled not only Saint Peter's Square, but also the *Via della Conciliazione*, and many of the surrounding streets and squares as well. The authorities calculated that a total of 450,000 to 500,000 people had come to celebrate Saint Josemaría's canonization. For many of them it was their first visit to Rome; and for some, it was probably the only time they would be there in their whole lifetime.

From just one person in 1946, to several hundred thousand in 2002 – not a long time in terms of the whole history of the Church. The building in the *Piazza Città Leonina*, hasn't changed, and doesn't even look particularly old. There is a certain continuity between the prayer which Saint Josemaría offered all alone for the Pope on that first night in Rome, and the prayer of the huge, serene, multi-ethnic, joyous and at the same time committed crowd that assembled outside the Basilica. In either case what matters is the individual's union with God; and it is impossible to calculate the fruitfulness of such prayer, because it is always God who gives the increase.

The canonization ceremony took place on Sunday, October 6 at 10 o'clock in the morning. "For the honor of the Blessed Trinity ... we declare and define that

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer is a Saint and we enroll him among the Saints, decreeing that he is to be venerated in the whole Church as one of the Saints,” Pope John Paul II solemnly proclaimed. The formula of canonization was closed by an “Amen” from the whole congregation, and enthusiastic applause broke out all the way down from Saint Peter’s Square to the *Castel Sant’Angelo*. After the Mass was over, the Pope wanted to greet all those present, and in the “Popemobile” he went around the Square and along the whole length of the *Via della Conciliazione*, accompanied by the Prelate of Opus Dei. Along the way, many babies and small children received a blessing and a kiss on the forehead from the Pope.

On the morning of October 7, feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, there was a Mass of Thanksgiving in Saint Peter’s Square celebrated by the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, which was immediately followed by an audience with the Holy Father. The Pope spoke of how the new Saint had always displayed an attitude of unconditional service to all souls: an attitude “plain to see in his dedication to priestly ministry and in the magnanimity with which he pushed ahead so many works of evangelization and of human development to help the poorest.”

At the end of the audience the Patriarch Teoctist, head of the Romanian Orthodox Church, arrived to present his official greetings to the Holy Father. The crowd applauded repeatedly, as a sign of the affection of so many Catholics from all over the world, and of their shared desire for unity.

Thanksgiving Masses

On October 8 and 9, thanksgiving Masses were celebrated in different basilicas and churches in Rome. These Masses were celebrated in 18 languages: Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Czech, Chinese, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish.

Many bishops underlined the universality of the message spread by the new saint. They also expressed their happiness at the fact that Saint Josemaría Escrivá is now numbered among the saints, thus becoming part of the patrimony of the whole Church.

Some 200 faithful from Hong Kong took part in the Mass celebrated by Msgr. Joseph Ti-Kang, Archbishop of Taipei (Taiwan) in the Church of S. Girolamo della Carità. Speaking of the life of the new saint, Msgr. Ti-Kang emphasized that “the Far East was in his heart since his youth.” He also pointed out that the value of

work and love for the family preached by Saint Josemaría are two values that are deeply rooted in Chinese culture.

The church of Trinità dei Monti was the setting for the thanksgiving Mass in the Maronite Rite. The Mass was concelebrated by the Archbishop of Beirut, Paul Youssef Matar, and the Archbishop of Byblos (Lebanon), Bechara Rai. At the end of the ceremony, Msgr. Matar asked the new saint for the grace to “sanctify our lives and the lives of others.” The Archbishop of Byblos pointed out that the message of the founder of Opus Dei, [the universal call to holiness](#), “is not only for the privileged few” but for the whole world.

The thanksgiving Mass in Dutch took place in the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare. It was presided over by the nuncio of the Netherlands, Msgr. François Bacqué.

More than 9,000 people attended the concelebration in the Basilica of Saint Paul outside the Walls for participants in the canonization coming from Spain. The ceremony was presided over by the Cardinal of Madrid, Antonio María Rouco Varela, along with the Archbishop of Toledo and the Primate of Spain, Francisco Álvarez Martínez. Thirty archbishops and bishops and nearly a hundred priests also concelebrated. In his homily, Cardinal Rouco Varela highlighted the fact that Saint Josemaría was a Spanish saint with a universal heart.

Cardinal Poupard, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, presided over one of the concelebrations in French in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere. The Cardinal explained that the call to holiness preached by the new saint invites all to harmonize the interior life with the exterior life, that is to say, the life of prayer with the activities of ordinary life. The thanksgiving Mass, at which some 2,000 people were present, was accompanied by a choir from Ivory Coast and another choir from Cameroon.

Some 2,500 people from the United States came together in Santa Maria Maggiore to participate in the Mass presided over by Msgr. John Myers, Archbishop of Newark, New Jersey. In his homily, Msgr. Myers invited all those present not to live a minimum Catholicism, and explained that holiness is an invitation addressed to all Christians. Msgr. Myers also added that the vocation to Opus Dei was not for élite Catholics, but rather for ordinary Catholics: all that is needed is an urgent availability and a desire to serve. At the end of the ceremony, the participants showed their gratitude to John Paul II with an ovation.

There were two celebrations in Italian presided over by Cardinals Giovanni Battista Re and Camillo Ruini. These took place in the Basilicas of the Holy

Apostles and Saint John Lateran, respectively. During his homily, Cardinal Ruini, the Pope's Vicar for the Diocese of Rome, defined Saint Josemaría as "a contemplative of the face of Christ." His profound union with Christ "explains the sweeping apostolic dynamism that characterized his existence." For this reason, "the Holy Spirit made him an example, and the preaching of Saint Josemaría is a clear reference-point for evangelization."

In Saint Eugene's Basilica

The final thanksgiving Mass was celebrated by the Prelate of Opus Dei, Msgr. Javier Echevarría on October 10. Afterwards, the official celebrations for Saint Josemaría's canonization ended with the solemn transferral of his body from the Basilica of Saint Eugene back to the prelatric Church of Our Lady of Peace.

In his homily, Msgr. Javier Echevarría said that after these unforgettable days of the canonization, Opus Dei begins a new stage: "a time of more profound love for God, of more constant apostolic effort, of more generous service to the Church and all mankind. A time, in short, of greater fidelity to the spirit of sanctification in the middle of the world which our founder left us as his testament." This new period, the Prelate said, is a time "to seek daily personal conversion." At this time "it is natural that we should want to show our gratitude to John Paul II and that we should offer for his person and intentions intense prayers, generous mortifications, and our daily work carried out with human and supernatural perfection."

In the morning of that same day, the Vicar General of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, presided over another thanksgiving celebration, in which he underlined the "positive view of the reality of the world, and in particular of work" that Saint Josemaría had.

Those who have returned to their respective countries, who were in Rome for the canonization, now have before them the example of Saint Josemaría, as the Holy Father pointed out: "Following in his footsteps, spread in society the awareness that we are called to holiness, without distinction of race, class, culture or age. In the first place, fight to be saints, cultivating an evangelical style of humility and service, of abandonment to Providence, and of constant listening to the voice of the Spirit. In this way, you will be 'salt of the earth' and 'your light will shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.'" These words call to mind and give specific content to the "*Duc in altum*" – Launch out into deep water!" which the Pope himself had proposed to the whole Church at the start of the new Millennium.