



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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Decree on the Cause of Canonization of the Servant of God Josemaria Escriva, Priest, Founder of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei (1902-1975)

On the Question: Whether the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity towards God and neighbor, and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, together with their associated virtues, are established in a heroic degree in this case and for purposes attendant thereon.

All the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father himself is perfect (Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, 11). In proclaiming the vocation to holiness of every baptized person, Paul VI discerned the most characteristic element of the entire teaching of the Council and, as it were, its ultimate purpose (Motu Proprio, *Sanctitas clarior*, March 19, 1969). In making this call resound the Church expresses her awareness of herself as a mystery of mankind's communion with God. In contemplating this mystery the Bride of Christ also sees her historical patrimony confirmed and hears the voice of witnesses to holiness whom the life-giving Spirit has inspired in every age to lead men and women to welcome God's plan of salvation.

The Servant of God Josemaria Escriva is rightly one such witness: not only in the fruitful example of his own life, but also – prophetically anticipating the Second Vatican Council – in the extraordinary vigor with which he sought from the very start of his ministry to address to all Christians the Gospel's call. "Your duty is to become a saint. Yes, even you... To everyone, without exception, our Lord has said, 'Be perfect as my heavenly Father is perfect'"(The Way, 291). "These world crises are crises of saints" (Ibid. 301).

Many are the paths to Christian holiness. The path marked out and followed by the Servant of God reveals with special clarity the radical nature of the baptismal vocation. His vivid perception of the mystery of the Incarnation made him see how supernatural life penetrates all human realities in the heart of a person reborn in Christ. These realities thus become the setting for holiness and the means to that goal. From the late 1920s onward the Servant of God was a true pioneer of the "intrinsic unity of Christian life," proclaiming the fullness of a contemplative life "in the middle of the street," and calling all the faithful to take an active part in the apostolates of the Church from the place each one occupies in the world.

This message of sanctification in and of earthly realities appears to be providentially relevant to the spiritual circumstances of our time, characterized by its concern to exalt human values yet also tending to an autonomy that divorces the world from God. Furthermore, by inviting Christians to seek union with God through their daily work – which confers dignity on human beings and is their lot as long as they exist on earth – his message is destined to endure as an inexhaustible source of spiritual light regardless of changing epochs and situations.

Regnare Christum volumus! "We want Christ to reign!" Here was Monsignor Escriva's program: "to place Christ at the summit of all human activities." His service to the Church helped initiate an upward movement toward God of men and women engaged in temporal affairs in all life's sectors and professions. By so doing he was following that promise of the Savior which the Servant of God regarded as central to Opus Dei's pastoral activity: Et ego si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad me ipsum; "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself" (Jn 12:32). The merit of his contribution to the furtherance of the laity's role is to be found in this Christianization of the world from within.

The Servant of God was born in Barbastro, Spain, on 9 January 9 1902, of devout and God-fearing parents. At about the age of fifteen he began to notice signs of his vocation. Although he did not know exactly what God had in store for him, he decided to become a priest as a way of preparing himself as best he could to fulfill God's will. After his ordination in Saragossa on 28 March 1925, he went to Madrid where on 2 October 1928, he saw that God wanted him to found and extend Opus Dei. For years he had begged God for light, using the words of the blind man of Jericho: Domine, ut videam! "Lord, that I may see" (Lk 18:41). On that day the Servant of God understood fully the mission to which he had been called, a mission that was to be "as old as the Gospel and like the Gospel new." His task

was to open to the faithful of all walks of life a sure way of sanctification in the midst of the world, through the practice of one's professional work or job and the fulfillment of the ordinary duties of every day, without changing one's state in life, doing everything out of love for God. Not long afterward, on February 14, 1930, by God's grace he understood that Opus Dei was meant to develop its apostolate among women as well. He devoted all his energies to the fulfillment of this mission, counting always on the encouragement and blessing of the bishop of the diocese.

From the very beginning he carried out a vast apostolate in every sector of society. He was particularly active in caring for the poor and the sick who often languished neglected in the poor neighborhoods and hospitals of Madrid. During the Spanish Civil War he personally experienced the fury of anti-religious persecution and gave daily proof of heroism in a constant priestly activity seasoned with abundant prayer and penance. It did not take long before many came to consider him a saint. When the war was over many bishops invited him to preach retreats to their clergy, thereby greatly contributing to the renewal of Christian life in Spain. Many religious orders and congregations also requested his pastoral services. At the same time, God allowed him to suffer public attacks. He responded invariably with pardon, to the point of considering his detractors as benefactors.

But this Cross was such a source of blessings from heaven that the Servant of God's apostolate spread with astonishing speed. On February 14, 1943, he founded the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, inseparably united to Opus Dei. This made possible the priestly ordination of lay members of Opus Dei and their incardination for the service of the Work. It also allowed priests incardinated in their own dioceses to share the spirituality and ascetical life of Opus Dei, by seeking holiness in the exercise of their ministry while remaining exclusively dependent on their own bishop. The work the Servant of God carried out in this field, personally or through the Priestly Society, has made him a shining example of zeal for priestly formation.

In 1946 the Servant of God took up residence in Rome. In 1947 and 1960 he obtained Opus Dei's approval as an institution of pontifical right. With tireless charity and active hope he guided the development of Opus Dei throughout the world, promoting a vast mobilization of lay people who became aware of their personal responsibility in the Church's mission. He gave life to numerous initiatives in the work of evangelization and human welfare. Everywhere he fostered vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life. He carried out exhausting journeys through Europe and America, proclaiming the Church's

teaching with most vigorous faith. Above all he devoted himself tirelessly to the task of forming the members of Opus Dei – priests and laity, men and women – so that they would acquire a solid spiritual life, an exemplary adherence to the Church's magisterium, and an ardent zeal for souls expressed in a personal commitment to carry out a far-reaching apostolate. Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam! "All with Peter to Jesus through Mary!" was the aspiration tirelessly preached and practiced by the Servant of God from the beginning of his priesthood.

The salient features of his personality are to be found not only in his extraordinary talents as a man of action, but above all in the life of prayer and constant union with God that made him a "traveling contemplative." Faithful to the gifts he had received, he gave an example of heroism in the most ordinary situations, in a life of constant prayer, in uninterrupted mortifications which were "like the beating of the heart," in assiduous presence of God that could attain to the heights of union amid the hustle and bustle of daily life, and in intense persevering work. Immersed in contemplating the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, he set a sense of divine filiation in Christ as the foundation of a spirituality wherein the fortitude of faith and the apostolic daring of charity are harmoniously united with filial abandonment to the Father.

The Servant of God loved the Eucharist passionately. He regarded the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass as "the center and the root of Christian life." He was an untiring apostle of the sacrament of penance. He practiced a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin, "Mother of God and our Mother," to Saint Joseph, and to the Guardian Angels. He loved the Church with all the strength of his priestly heart and offered himself as a holocaust of reparation and penance for the sins with which all human beings sully her face. The prodigious fruitfulness of his apostolate was there for all to see. Yet he considered himself a "deaf and inept instrument," "a founder without foundation," "a sinner madly in love with Jesus Christ."

The Servant of God died in Rome on June 26, 1975. At his death Opus Dei had more than 60,000 members of 80 nationalities. There were almost a thousand priests incardinated in the Work. Its apostolic undertakings, including schools, universities and social works, had spread the world over. The writings of the Servant of God, with millions of copies published, were already considered spiritual classics.

Even during his lifetime, the Servant of God had the reputation for exceptional holiness. After his death, this reputation spread worldwide. In many countries it has become part of popular piety. The Cause of Canonization was introduced in

Rome on February 19, 1981. It involved two principal processes of equal importance, which were held in Madrid and in Rome to examine the life and virtues of the Servant of God. These concluded on June 26, 1984, and on November 8, 1986, respectively. At their meeting held on September 19th, 1989, the theological consultors, under the direction of the Promoter General of the Faith, Monsignor Antonio Petti, responded affirmatively to the question whether the Servant of God had practiced the virtues in a heroic manner. A like response was given by the Ordinary Congregation of Cardinals and Bishops in session on March 20, 1990, at which Cardinal Edouard Gagnon made the formal presentation.

Having received from the undersigned Cardinal Prefect an accurate and faithful account of all that is related above, and having accepted the vote of the Congregation, the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II ordered that the Decree on the heroic virtues of the Servant of God be drawn up.

That order having now been carried out, and the Cardinal Prefect, the Presenter of the Cause, the undersigned Secretary and others according to custom having been convoked today, the Holy Father has declared in their presence: The theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, toward both God and neighbor, and also the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, with their associated virtues, have been lived to a heroic degree by the Servant of God Josemaria Escriva, Priest, Founder of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei; this is established in this case and for purposes attendant thereon.

The Holy Father has ordered that this decree be made public and be recorded in the acts of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Given at Rome, on April 9 of the year 1990, A.D.

L+ S Angelus Card. Felici, Prefect

+ Eduardus Nowak, Titular Archbishop of Luna, Secretary