



# Saint Josemaría Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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## Dutch Musician Composes a Mass in Honour of Saint Josemaría

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Peter Soeters, a musician from Maastricht, had spent some time turning over the idea of composing a Mass for amateur choirs. After a serious illness and a period of convalescence, Soeters completed his *Missa Brevis* in thanksgiving to Saint Josemaría. The *Missa Brevis* was sung for the first time on 25 June 2004 in the Basilica of Our Lady of Maastricht, on the occasion of the Mass in honour of the Opus Dei founder.

Peter Soeters wanted to compose a simple sung Mass for church choirs which would combine traditional elements with original features taken from present-day musical trends. Soeters, 56, studied piano and organ at Maastricht and Cologne, and teaches at the Maastricht Conservatory, preparing music students for their final exams. “As a composer I am self-taught, and when I can, I compose religious music. But work, teaching and concert rehearsals left me hardly any time to concentrate on composing something new.”

### Illness and surprising recovery

In 2002 Peter Soeters fell seriously ill, and the diagnosis was unfavourable. “I underwent a complicated operation, followed by harsh but essential postoperative treatment including radiotherapy and chemotherapy. During those days I and many other people began to pray to Blessed Josemaría, as he then was, for my recovery. My wife Els and I wanted to go to his canonization in Rome on 6 October 2002, but unfortunately my illness meant that we had to stay at home.”

Happily the medical treatment was completely successful. Soeters recovered so rapidly in the spring of 2003 that many people close to him saw it as a favour from Saint Josemaría. “As I was not yet able to recommence my teaching I had a lot of free time, and so I was able to compose the *Missa Brevis for Choir and Organ*, partly inspired by the fact of my own recovery. When I completed it, as we considered my speedy recovery as a favour, we decided that I should dedicate it to the new Saint. And so, under the title, I put ‘In honour of Saint Josemaría’.”

## **First performance on 25 June 2004**

Responding to the idea and desire of Pope John Paul II, a great lover of music, that music might be composed broadly based on Gregorian plainchant, Soeters took as the starting-point for his Mass the beginning of the Gregorian *Gloria IV*. His Mass is an arrangement consisting of the *Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus and Agnus Dei*. It is a clearly structured Mass, whose general theme is optimistic and lively. “The aspect of rhythm was of great importance in working out my intention and inspiration. From time to time I thought of the *Missa Luba*, and especially about the fact that that lively music witnesses to the enormous vitality of those African churches.”

In September 2003 Peter Soeters and his wife went to Rome. “We wanted to offer the manuscript of the *Missa Brevis* to the prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría. We couldn't give it to him in person, because he was away in Argentina. But afterwards he sent us a letter thanking us for it, and saying, ‘How much Saint Josemaría will have enjoyed your *Missa Brevis* from heaven!’ When we were in Rome we heard that a Mass had already been composed for Blessed Josemaría, but ours was the first one composed for him as a Saint.” Some months ago the choir of Saint Peter's Church, Maastricht began to rehearse Soeters' *Missa Brevis*. Under the enthusiastic direction of Pierre Willems and with Peter Soeters as organist, the *Missa Brevis for Choir and Organ* was sung for the first time on 25 June 2004, at the solemn Mass in honour of Saint Josemaría which took place in the Basilica of Our Lady of Maastricht.