



Saint Josemaría Escrivá

Founder of Opus Dei

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Eucharist: Sanctity and Salvation

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If the Eucharistic mystery is the centre of the Church’s life, faith in the Eucharist is perhaps the most authentic sign of Catholic identity, made tangible in the fruits of sanctity that it bears for Christians who build their spiritual life on it. Saint Josemaría Escrivá was a significant witness of that centrality. In his message, the proclamation of the universal call to holiness takes specific shape in the references he made to earthly activities not only as a meeting-place with Christ, but also as a means and material of sanctification. In this theological context, in which the mystery of the Incarnation is perceived in a radical way, faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is decisive both for one’s personal sanctification and for the redemption of the world.

As regards personal sanctification, Saint Josemaría did not hesitate to state that the Eucharist is “the centre and root of the spiritual life” (*Christ is Passing By*, 87), as the Second Vatican Council’s decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* would later repeat. In his lifetime, Saint Josemaría encouraged hundreds of thousands of men and women to bear witness to the centrality of the Mass in their daily lives. He stressed the need (often suppressed today) of preparing to receive our Lord worthily by purifying one’s soul in the sacrament of Reconciliation. Inspired by his love for the Eucharist, close to a thousand men decided to be ordained to the priesthood. He taught people to observe the liturgical norms on Eucharistic worship with exemplary faithfulness, and propagated Eucharistic devotion among the People of God with great effect: visits to the Blessed Sacrament, mental prayer before the Tabernacle, spiritual communions, exposition and benediction, overnight vigils of adoration, and much more.

As for the second aspect, the redemption of the world, in Saint Josemaría we find an anticipation of the developments that the centrality of Eucharistic faith is destined to have in the context of the new evangelisation that awaits the Church in the third millennium. This perspective gives special appropriateness to his message about the sanctification of the world from within, and the apostolic possibilities implied by the presence of lay-people at the nerve-centers of society. This accentuates the Eucharist's dimension as the primary dynamic of Christian life, since the Mass is Christ's sacrifice, taking up into itself, and divinising, all human endeavour. "God has decided to stay in the tabernacle to nourish us, strengthen us, make us divine and give effectiveness to our work and efforts" (*Christ is Passing By*, 151). All human activity has been raised up and sanctified (cf. *Christ is Passing By*, 155); and we should remember that "if we have been renewed by receiving our Lord's body, we should show it. Let our thoughts be sincere, full of peace, self-giving and service. Let us be true and clear in what we say (...). Let our actions be consistent and effective and right, so that they give off 'the good fragrance of Christ,' evoking his way of doing things" (156).

Every Christian becomes, then, a living host, our souls in grace becoming a living tabernacle in the middle of the world, and our work becoming the material of a sacrifice of praise to God which, in union with the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ, transforms the world, raising it up to the Father through the Holy Spirit, and bringing it salvation. Strengthened by the Eucharist, we Christians are capable of setting Christ at the summit of all human activities. In a meditation he preached on the feast of Corpus Christi, Saint Josemaría said, "We also have to discover our Lord in our ordinary everyday activity. Side by side with this solemn procession, there is the simple, silent procession of the ordinary life of each Christian. We are people just like others, who by good fortune have received the faith and the divine commission to act so that we renew the message of our Lord on earth. We are not without defects; we make mistakes and commit sins. But God is with us and we must make ourselves ready to be used by him, so that he can continue to walk among men. Let us ask our Lord, then, to make us souls devoted to the blessed Eucharist, so that our relationship with him brings forth joy and serenity and a desire for justice. In this way we will make it easier for others to recognize Christ; we will put Christ at the centre of all human activities. And Jesus' promise will be fulfilled: 'I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself' (cf. Jn 12:32)" (*Christ is Passing By*, 156).

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