



Saint Josemaría Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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José Llamas Simón

The Augustinian Father José Llamas Simón met Saint Josemaría in 1944, when the founder of Opus Dei was preaching a spiritual retreat to the Community of the Royal Monastery of Saint Lawrence in El Escorial, Madrid. In the testimony he wrote for the Cause of Saint Josemaría's canonization, Father Llamas recalls, among other things, some of the ideas he heard from Saint Josemaría during the retreat.

“He stressed the importance of personal, face-to-face prayer, full of trust in our Lord. To show how easy and simple it was, he talked about something from his own experience. The story figures in most of the biographies of Saint Josemaría. It happened when he was a young priest, working as Rector in a Church which I think must have belonged to the Royal Foundation of Saint Elizabeth in Madrid. He used to go into the confessional first thing in the morning, very early. And every morning, in the middle of hearing someone's confession or while reading the Breviary, he would hear the door of the church being opened quite violently, and then a clatter of metal, followed by the slamming of the door. Curious to know what was going on, because he couldn't see the church door from the confessional, one day he stationed himself at the entrance to the church. When the door flew open he found himself face to face with a milkman, carrying the cans for his milk-round. He asked him what he was doing. ‘Father,’ the man replied, ‘every morning I come up here, open the door [...], and say to him, Jesus, here's John the milkman.’ Father Josemaría was left speechless. He spent the rest of the day repeating the aspiration: ‘Lord, here is this wretch, who doesn't know how to love you like John the milkman’.”

Another thing Father Llamas recalls is from 1948, when Saint Josemaría stayed at the Royal Monastery of Saint Lawrence in El Escorial to make a spiritual retreat there himself, alone. Saint Josemaría told Father Llamas of his desire to see the tabernacle of the main altar. It is constructed in the form of a classical temple, four metres high. It has a monstrance which can be moved backwards and forwards

on little wheels, so that the Blessed Sacrament can be placed in one of the two agate ciboria donated by Ferdinand VII. At the front, the base is covered by a single semicircular piece of glass, so that the Blessed Sacrament is permanently semi-exposed. Two broad flights of steps lead up to it. At the top, the priest can look straight at Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament barely two metres away.

“We went up there,” relates Father Llamas, “and contemplated Him in silence. Then we went down, and before we left, the Father, who was in front, turned back to ask me for a favour: ‘Could you leave me there alone for a little while?’ ‘For as long as you like,’ I replied. ‘I’m not in a hurry, I’ll wait for you in there’ – meaning in the sacristy.

“He went back up and stayed there for some twenty minutes. When he reappeared he said, ‘It’s so good to be there!’ I pretended not to hear, and we continued going round the church. I still haven’t explained what I wanted to say, and I don’t think I can. The only way to explain it would have been with a camera that could catch the expression on the Father’s face when he begged me to grant him that little time alone with Jesus. I could see in his face the indescribable love of that very manly man for Jesus of Nazareth in his Real Presence in the Eucharist.”

Testimonios sobre el Fundador del Opus Dei, n. 9, Ediciones Palabra, Madrid 1991, pp. 71-75.