



Saint Josemaría Escrivá

Founder of Opus Dei

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Dear brothers and sisters,

Once again we joyfully celebrate the liturgical feast-day of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, bringing it forward to June 25 this year, as tomorrow is a Sunday. This means that we are commemorating the Founder of Opus Dei on the anniversary of the ordination to the priesthood of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, my much-loved predecessor, and two more of our Father's sons. That was way back in 1944, and they were the first people of Opus Dei to be ordained to the priesthood. It was the beginning of a long chain of "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1), in the service of the Church and souls. In fact the first link of this chain is Saint Josemaría himself, who is now firmly fastened to our Lord for all eternity, and who from heaven continues interceding for all of us. And so I invite you to thank the Blessed Trinity for the gift of the priesthood granted by God to the Church, and to pray that there may be many vocations to the priesthood throughout the world.

Tomorrow is the thirtieth anniversary of Saint Josemaría's *dies natalis*, his birthday into heaven. To us, immersed as we are in time, thirty years may seem a lot, but it is nothing in comparison with the eternity in which the saints are living.

Today's feast-day is highlighted still more by the fact that it is set in the Year of the Eucharist, which was the last great pastoral initiative of the Servant of God John Paul II. The memory of his passage to heaven, which shook the world so powerfully two months ago, is still very fresh in our minds. When speaking of the meaning of this Year of the Eucharist, the Pope considered it as, in a way, the summit of his Pontificate, which had begun with the desire to set Christ at the centre of the cosmos and history (we can recall his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*); a Pontificate which concluded in Easter Week, in the very heart of the

year when we are invited to adore Jesus, really present in the Blessed Sacrament, still more intensely.

I remind you of his words, taken from the Apostolic Letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine*: “The Year of the Eucharist takes place against a background which has been enriched by the passage of the years, while remaining ever rooted in the theme of Christ and the contemplation of his face. In a certain sense, it is meant to be a year of synthesis, *the high-point of a journey in progress*” (Apostolic Letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, October 7 2004, 10). As we re-read these words it becomes clear that John Paul II wanted to leave us the legacy of his exhortation to love the Holy Eucharist more generously.

I cannot fail to recall that in a few weeks’ time, in August, it will be fifty years since my own ordination to the priesthood. Help me to prepare well for this anniversary. I am deeply grateful to our Lord for having granted me, half a century ago now, the possibility of making him present every day upon the altar, and I ask forgiveness for my faults. I will be very grateful to you for your help.

There are many reasons which impel us to consider that the Eucharist should be the focal point of our meditation today. We are urged on to this by the liturgy of the Mass itself. Echoing some of the teachings of the Founder of Opus Dei, it invites us to pray: “Holy Father, accept these gifts that we offer in memory of Saint Josemaría, so that, through the sacrifice offered by Christ on the altar of the Cross and made present here in this sacrament, you may graciously sanctify all that we do” (Mass of Saint Josemaría, Prayer over the Gifts).

God made Saint Josemaría a herald and teacher of the universal call to holiness. He has taught us that in the family, at work, in the most diverse activities – *nel bel mezzo della strada*, right in the middle of the street, as he used to say – each individual has to do his or her level best to find the divine lights that shine in the most ordinary actions when they are done with Christ and in Christ. This is the material of our sanctification, which becomes possible thanks to Christ’s sacrifice. If we take our daily duties to the Holy Mass together with the bread and wine which are to become the Body and Blood of Christ, we will be in a position to respond to the call which our heavenly Father addresses to us, a call to Christian perfection in life’s ordinary circumstances (cf. Mt 5:48).

Unfortunately, for centuries this was not the idea many Christians had of holiness. Pope Benedict XVI summarised it when he was still Cardinal Ratzinger. He wrote about Saint Josemaría’s canonization: “Knowing a little about the history of saints, and understanding that in the causes of canonization there is inquiry into ‘heroic’

virtue, we almost inevitably have a mistaken concept of holiness: ‘It is not for me,’ we are led to think, ‘because I do not feel capable of attaining heroic virtue. It is too high a goal.’ Holiness then becomes a thing reserved for some ‘greats’ whose images we see on the altars, and who are completely different from us ordinary sinners. But this is a mistaken notion of holiness, a wrong perception which has been corrected – and this seems to me the central point – precisely by Josemaría Escrivá” ([Letting God Work](#), *L’Osservatore Romano*, October 6 2002).

Today there are countless people – Pastors of the Church, spiritual authors, theologians, scientists, and ordinary faithful – who thank God for having used Saint Josemaria as his docile instrument to awaken in their souls the desire to achieve holiness in everyday life. We too raise our thanks to heaven today because Saint Josemaria has taught us to seek God simply in the ordinary, normal situations of our daily lives. I will add some more words of the then Cardinal Ratzinger, underlining the fact that “This, for me, is a message of the greatest importance. It is a message which leads to overcoming what could be considered the great temptation of our times: the pretence, that is, that after the ‘big bang’ God retired from history. God’s action did not ‘stop’ at the moment of the ‘big bang’, but continues throughout time in the world of nature and the world of man” (ibid.).

The Eucharist is the “place” where God becomes present with the greatest intensity in the course of history, from the moment of its institution at the Last Supper. This is so because, under the veil of the Eucharistic species, the whole Christ is there: his Humanity and his Divinity.

The Eucharist is a wonderful synthesis of our faith. It makes present the mystery of our Lord’s Death and Resurrection; it contains, under the appearance of bread and wine, the same Jesus who was born of the Virgin Mary, who worked in Nazareth for thirty years, who preached and worked miracles, who founded the Church, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, who died and rose again on the third day, who ascended into heaven, and who will come to judge the living and the dead to establish his kingdom for ever.

My very dear brothers and sisters, how much we should thank God for entrusting this great mystery to the Church! In Saint Josemaría’s words, “We should be especially grateful to our Lord for instituting the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, by which he has stayed with us. It is marvellous: he had to go away, and he wanted to stay with us; and as he is Almighty, he worked this great miracle of love. We can’t do all that we want: our power does not match our desires; but our Lord can. He went to heaven, and at the same time he has stayed, hidden under

the appearance of bread and wine.

“There are three things that we should thank him for particularly: the institution of this sacrament, its perpetuation through the words of consecration pronounced by the priest, and its administration. These are three marvellous manifestations of God’s goodness, which are designed to meet the needs of our nature. I always think of the love of a good mother, who cleans her little baby, washes him, perfumes him, and then covers him with kisses, and says, ‘I could eat you up!’ Our Lord has said to us too: ‘Take, eat me!’ It couldn’t be more human. “But we don’t make God our Lord human when we receive him. It is he who divinizes us, lifts us up, raises us on high” (Notes taken from a conversation, April 4, 1969).

Saint Josemaría lived by the Eucharist and for the Eucharist. He lavished all possible care on the Blessed Sacrament, as a proof of his love and a sign of his gratitude. Let us listen once more to Benedict XVI, before becoming the Successor of Peter, still talking about Saint Josemaria. “He loved and proclaimed the Eucharist in all its dimensions: as adoration of the Lord who is present among us in a hidden but real way; as a gift in which he gives himself to us again and again; and as a sacrifice, in accordance with the words of Scripture: ‘Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me’ (Heb 10:5)” ([Homily in the Thanksgiving Mass for the beatification of Josemaría Escrivá](#), May 19 1992).

Saint Josemaría was moved, for instance, by the closeness of Jesus in the Sacred Host, waiting for us in our churches. “When you approach the Tabernacle, remember that *He* has been awaiting you there for twenty centuries” (The Way, 537). This is an ever-present truth which should affect us all. How has our personal conversation with, and our devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist grown during this year dedicated to the Eucharist? How do we love and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is necessary before receiving the Eucharist if we have offended our Lord gravely, and to prepare a less unworthy dwelling-place for him? I invite each of you to ask yourselves those questions and answer them sincerely, truthfully and generously. Let’s make the appropriate decisions in order to grow closer to Jesus Christ in the time we spend praying, when we are at Mass, and when we receive him in Holy Communion.

Our Blessed Lady is our Mother. It is a mother’s task to feed and raise her children. Let us ask her to help us always, as a good Mother, to receive this Bread of Heaven every day with greater care, more gratitude, and a love that never stops growing. Amen.