



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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Basilica of Sant'Eugenio, Rome - 2010.6.26

Bishop Javier Echevarria, Prelate of Opus Dei

Homily for the feast of St Josemaria Escriva, given in the Basilica of Sant'Eugenio, Rome, June 26, 2010

Dear brothers and sisters,

1. Today we are celebrating Saint Josemaria Escriva's thirty-fifth "birthday" into eternal life. As we celebrate his liturgical feast-day, filled with joy and gratitude to God, we find special meaning in the first reading, a passage from the book of Genesis. After completing the work of creation, says Holy Scripture, the Lord God took man, made in his own image and likeness, and "set him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and take care of it" (Gen 2:15) – *ut operaretur*, to work!

I am reminded of the words of the Servant of God John Paul II when, on October 6, 2002, in the [Homily for the canonization of St Josemaria](#), recalling his teachings, he said that "Believers acting in the various realities of this world contribute to carry out this divine universal plan. Work and any other activity, carried out with the help of grace, is converted into a means of daily sanctification." (John Paul II, Homily for the canonization of St Josemaria, October 6, 2002.)

We thank our Lord for the fact that this message has now become a reality, not only in theology but also, and especially, in the lives of many people. For many others, however, it is still only a theory, with no actual effect on their daily lives. For this very reason I would like to dwell on some basic aspects of St Josemaria's teaching, which can help us to put it into practice.

Let's ask God to help us in doing so; we can ask him in the words of the Opening Prayer: "O God, who raised up your priest Saint Josemaría in the Church to proclaim the universal call to holiness and the apostolate, grant that by his

intercession and example we may, through our daily work, be formed in the likeness of Jesus your Son and serve the work of redemption with burning love.” (Mass of St Josemaria, Opening Prayer.)

2. In one of the homilies St Josemaria gave about the sanctification of work, he used the words from Genesis that I have just quoted to remind us that the obligation to work “is not a consequence of original sin, nor is it just a discovery of modern times. It is an indispensable means which God has entrusted to us here on this earth. It is meant to fill out our days and make us sharers in God’s creative power. It enables us to earn our living and, at the same time, to reap ‘the fruits of eternal life’.” (Josemaria Escriva, *Friends of God*, no. 57)

The example of Jesus himself, who spent thirty years doing work that was tiring but filled with joy, in the workshop at Nazareth, with Mary and Joseph, proves that our Lord also counts on our work to cooperate with the salvation of the world, to show clearly that it is possible to turn any honest job into prayer and apostolate.

But we need to keep firmly in mind the fact that this activity has to be finished off perfectly in human terms, and done with a pure intention, which means placing it at the service of God and our neighbour, never doing it to satisfy our own selfishness. So “let us ask our Lord Jesus for light, and beg him to help us discover, at every moment, the divine meaning which transforms our professional work into the hinge on which our calling to sanctity rests and turns.” (Ibid., no. 62.)

On this topic, we can ask ourselves some questions, and answer them in the silence of our hearts. Do I do my work in a way that is humanly perfect, paying attention to little things for love of God, or am I sometimes content to finish it badly, leaving a botched job, as people say? Do I make a serious effort to unite my work to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass every day, realizing that only like that can it really become “God’s work”? Do I rectify my intention frequently during the day, and really try to give all the glory to God? Do I make the most of the contact I have with people at work to make real friends with the people around me, desiring to bring them closer to God, serve them, and also learn from them?

3. In the homily for St Josemaria’s Mass of Canonization, Pope John Paul II quoted from a meditation given by the Founder of Opus Dei, which I would like to refer to here. “‘The ordinary life of a Christian who has faith, when he works or rests, when he prays or sleeps, at all times, is a life in which God is always present’ (*Meditation*, 3 March 1954). This supernatural vision of life unfolds an extraordinarily rich horizon of salvific perspectives, because, even in the apparently monotonous flow of normal earthly events, God comes close to us and

we can cooperate with his plan of salvation. So it is easier to understand what the Second Vatican Council affirmed: ‘there is no question, then, of the Christian message inhibiting men from building up the world ... on the contrary it is an incentive to do these very things’ (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 34).” (John Paul II, Homily for the canonization of St Josemaria, October 6, 2002.)

Following the teaching of this holy priest, I repeat, all honest human activities can be offered to God, sanctified, and turned into a means and opportunity for apostolate. Work, ... but also rest, which we need in order to renew our strength so that we can support our families and serve society.

I think this consideration is especially important right now when many of you are preparing to enjoy a well-deserved holiday. Bear in mind that, when we are on holiday, we still need to live with our minds and hearts on our Lord. I will offer some specific suggestions to help you ensure that this time contributes to the spiritual growth of each of us and does not result, as is unfortunately often the case, in a cooling-down of our Christian life.

In the first place, we need to continue to fulfill our ordinary Christian duties: going to Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation; receiving the Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation; keeping up the good habits we have built up during our working year – regular prayer, attendance at Christian formational activities, etc.

Obviously, it is not a good idea to choose holiday destinations in places where a good Christian – or indeed any decent person – should never go, because they are objectively contrary to the dictates not just of Christian morality but basic natural morality. We all need to be firm in taking this kind of decision, swimming against the current whenever necessary. Like that, you will help your relations, and others, to look for healthy relaxation as God’s children should. It isn’t true that in order to enjoy holidays, one has to get away from our Lord. In fact, exactly the opposite is the case.

Finally, I’d like to recall a very specific point from St Josemaria’s teachings about the sanctification of rest. It can be summed up in some words he often said: “Rest means recuperation: to gain strength, form ideals and make plans. In other words it means a change of occupation, so that you can come back later with a new impetus to your daily job.” (Josemaria Escriva, *Furrow*, no. 514.) This view of it is true: just changing one’s work, surroundings, and circumstances, is a substantial help in recovering strength.

As well as this, I think that we have a duty to accompany the Holy Father, by praying for his intentions every day, so that he feels the support of the filial closeness of each and every one of us. Wanting to live our Christian lives well means not separating ourselves from the teachings of the Good Shepherd who is at the head of the Holy Church.

I will end with another of St Josemaria's thoughts: "Lord, give us your grace. Open the door to the workshop in Nazareth so that we may learn to contemplate you, together with your holy Mother, Mary, and the holy patriarch Saint Joseph, whom I love and revere so dearly, the three of you dedicated to a life of work made holy. Then, Lord, our poor hearts will be enkindled, we shall seek you and find you in our daily work, which you want us to convert into a work of God, a labour of love." (Josemaria Escriva, *Friends of God*, no. 72.). Amen.