



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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Today we are offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass to God in the liturgical commemoration of St Josemaria Escriva, whom God our Lord “raised up in the Church to proclaim the universal call to holiness and apostolate”.

We do so in union with thousands of people throughout the world who are thanking God for the gift He made to the Church and the whole world in this exemplary and holy priest. Countless men and women of every age, country and walk of life have learned to love and follow Jesus thanks to St Josemaria’s teaching and example.

Love’s design

Thirty-four years have now gone by since St Josemaria’s death. During this time his influence has increased constantly, and steadily growing numbers of people turn to his intercession. This confirms how relevant today is the message which God entrusted to him. God had called him while he was still a teenager, and by his own generous response to that call, St Josemaria was to make that message bear fruit for the benefit of the whole Church. On several occasions he spoke of the time when God first made him sense the existence of a loving plan and a special mission for his life. He was then 15 or 16, and he responded with an act of generous openness to God’s Will, a total, unconditional response of love that led him to become a priest, as a sign of his absolute readiness to fulfill a calling whose precise details were not yet clear to him. From that time on, for the whole of his life, St Josemaria was a man in love with God, who also passionately loved the world and the people of all times, and passed on that same passionate love to them in his turn. Today’s feast reminds us that God takes up a similar loving dialogue with every person He has created. Let us turn to the intercession of this holy priest and ask him to help us respond generously and joyfully to the plan God has for each of us.

Priestly soul in the Year for Priests

When St Josemaria exhorted the faithful to pray for the holiness of priests, he used to say, “a priest doesn’t go to Heaven alone: he always goes in company with many more souls” – those he has brought to God through the Sacraments, by his preaching, prayer, priestly zeal and pastoral charity. This is why it is so necessary to pray every day that the Holy Spirit will raise up many holy priests in the Church, and that we may all become continually more aware of our priestly soul. This is a duty that falls to all of us: men and women, young and old, sick and healthy... all of us have to have this intention constantly. We have to pray for it and offer up for this intention life’s setbacks and small mortifications, also offering up our ordinary work, done well, with the right intention, in God’s presence. Like that we will be responding to Jesus Christ’s recommendation: “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Mt 9:37-38)

That petition, which is always necessary, takes on particular relevance with regard to vocations to the priesthood. A week ago the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI inaugurated a “Year for Priests”, whose purpose is to obtain from the Lord the gift of many holy priests all over the world. How are we praying for this intention? Are we convinced that no-one else can replace us in fulfilling this very personal obligation?

Living sacrifice

2. Christian life is always a priestly life, as we learn from the Apostles Peter and Paul, Patron Saints of Rome and the universal Church, whose liturgical solemnity we will shortly be celebrating. St Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, expressed it like this in his first Letter: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Pet 2:9) And in the Letter to the Romans, St Paul wrote: “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Rom 12:1)

All Christians share in Christ’s priesthood by our Baptism. We have received the “common priesthood”, essentially different from the ministerial priesthood that belongs to ordained ministers, but no less necessary. The priesthood of the faithful and that of the clergy are both indispensable, in their different ways, for fulfilling the mission that Christ entrusted to his Church for the salvation of the world. This teaching of the Magisterium, which was proclaimed in an especially solemn way by the Second Vatican Council, was preached and spread by St

Josemaria from the moment of the founding of Opus Dei on October 2, 1928.

Courageous fidelity

In the Church, then, priests and laity form the single family of God's children. In this way, as St Josemaria said, "A priest is no more a man or a Christian than any ordinary lay person." (1) Configured to Christ by virtue of Baptism, we are all equally members of the Mystical Body and equally responsible for fulfilling the Church's mission, which we each carry out in our own specific way. So "in those who have been ordained, the ministerial priesthood is added to the common priesthood of all of the faithful. Therefore, although it would be a serious error to argue that a priest is more a member of the faithful than an unordained Christian is, it can, on the other hand, be said that he is more a priest: like all Christians he belongs to the priestly people redeemed by Christ, and in addition to this he is marked with a character of the priestly ministry."(2)

By the very strength of his ordination, the priest dedicates himself completely to the service of the People of God through the acts specific to the priesthood: preaching the Word of God, administering the Sacraments, especially the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, and giving spiritual guidance to souls. Without the priesthood, without priests, there would be no Church.

St John Mary Vianney, the Curé of Ars, said that "the priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus". And Pope Benedict XVI comments, "This touching expression makes us reflect, first of all, with heartfelt gratitude on the immense gift which priests represent, not only for the Church, but also for humanity itself. I think of all those priests who quietly present Christ's words and actions each day to the faithful and to the whole world, striving to be one with the Lord in their thoughts and their will, their sentiments and their style of life. How can I not pay tribute to their apostolic labors, their tireless and hidden service, their universal charity? And how can I not praise the courageous fidelity of so many priests who, even amid difficulties and incomprehension, remain faithful to their vocation as 'friends of Christ', whom he has called by name, chosen and sent?" (3)

Lay outlook

3. Let us return to the texts of today's Mass. The Opening Prayer says that St Josemaria was raised up by God to proclaim the universal call to holiness and apostolate in the Church, and then goes on, "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."

Daily work and life's ordinary circumstances are the specific field where the laity are to seek holiness and do apostolate. This brings us to a very important point in the spirituality proposed by St Josemaria: doing everything with "a priestly soul and a lay outlook". In other words, the lay faithful are asked to work, and to fulfill their family and social commitments, with the outlook of people who are called by God to work in the middle of the world, and at the same time, with the priestly spirit which derives from the Christian calling.

I invite you to meditate on something else St Josemaria said, referring particularly to lay-people. "All of you have a priestly soul, arising from the sacramental characters conferred by Baptism and Confirmation. This priestly soul is not only brought into play when you take part in liturgical worship, especially in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the center and root of our interior life. It is brought into play in all the activities of your life." (4)

In *The Forge*, St Josemaria offers some specific advice. "Live and work for God, with a spirit of love and service, with a priestly soul, even though you may not be a priest. Then all your actions will take on a genuine supernatural meaning which will keep your whole life united to the source of all graces." (5)

Fullness of love

St Josemaria preached this message tirelessly right up until June 26, 1975, when, about an hour after he had spoken about these very matters in a small gathering, God called him to himself. We too have an obligation to pass on this message, revealing its full beauty to very many friends and colleagues: that we are all called to holiness, which is union with Jesus Christ and the fullness of love, and which can be achieved in every walk of life, age and place.

We will soon be repeating this in the words of the liturgy: "Holy Father, accept these gifts we offer in memory of Saint Josemaria, so that, through the sacrifice offered by Christ on the Cross and made present here in this sacrament, you may graciously sanctify all that we do."

We entrust all these aspirations to Our Lady, in close union with the Holy Father and his intentions. Mary, our Mother, obtain for us from your Son an abundant harvest of holy priests, forged in the Heart of Christ, who, by their ministry, example and prayer, will open wide the doors of eternal life to many souls. Amen.

1. Homily [A Priest forever](#) 13 April 1973, published in *In Love with the Church*.
2. Ibid.
3. Benedict XVI, [Letter proclaiming a Year for Priests](#), 16 June 2009.

4. St Josemaria, *Letter*, 6 May 1945, no. 27.
5. St Josemaria, [The Forge](#), no. 369.