



# Saint Josemaría Escrivá

## Founder of Opus Dei

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*Bishop Javier Echevarría*

2003.10.6

Dear brothers and sisters,

A year has gone by since the happy day of the canonization of Saint Josemaría Escrivá. I cannot fail to recall how, in the long months of spiritual preparation for that grace-filled event, my thoughts dwelt especially on one point: that the canonization ought to mean a new meeting with God through the mediation of this holy priest, and thus a true and deep personal *conversion*.

And that is what happened. On 6 October 2002 in Saint Peter's Square, we were all strengthened in the conviction that Heaven is our final harbour, the place where God is waiting for us, the goal of our lives. From the tapestry which hung from the façade of Saint Peter's, the smiling face of Saint Josemaría, looking at each of us, communicated to us the nucleus of his message: the universal call to holiness.

The Holy Father's invitation in the homily of the Mass helped us to reaffirm a sincere resolution: "To raise the world to God and transform it from within: this is the ideal that the holy Founder indicates to you (...). He continues to remind you of the need not to allow yourselves to be frightened in the face of a materialist culture, which threatens to destroy the most genuine identity of the disciples of Christ. He liked to reiterate with vigour that the Christian faith is opposed to conformism and interior inertia.

Following in his footsteps, spread in society the awareness that we are all called to holiness, without distinction of race, class, culture or age. In the first place, make every effort to be saints yourselves, cultivating an evangelical style of

humility and service, of abandonment to Providence and of constant listening to the voice of the Spirit. In this way, you will be “salt of the earth” (cf. Matt 5:13) and “your light will shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (*ibid.*, 5:16)” (1).

If we are to fulfil this resolution, we must start by expressing it in acts of contrition for the big and little defects present in our deeds, for the inadequacy of our response to God’s gifts. That is the daily, practical aspect of conversion. In this sense, today I would like to formulate, for all of us, the wish that 6 October may be a date that never fades from our memory. We cannot forget that one of the most frequent themes in Saint Josemaría’s preaching was: “Your interior life has to be just that: beginning and beginning again. (2)”

Another thought that came to my mind during the months of preparation was this: 6 October was going to be a feast for the whole Church. Saint Josemaría belongs to the patrimony of holiness which forms the unfathomable riches of the mystery of the Church. His teaching and his example show us a path which all of us, men and women, young and old, priests and lay people, intellectuals and manual workers, healthy and sick, married, single or widowed – all of us are called to travel along: “To raise the world to God and transform it from within,” as the Pope put it.

*A Saint for the whole Church.* This idea comes through clearly in Pope John Paul II’s words on the day after the canonization: “Saint Josemaría was chosen by the Lord to proclaim the universal call to holiness and to indicate that everyday life, its customary activities, are a path towards holiness. It could be said that he was the saint of the ordinary. He was really convinced that, for whoever lives with an outlook of faith, everything offers an opportunity for a meeting with God, everything becomes a stimulus for prayer. Seen in that way, daily life reveals an unsuspected greatness. Holiness is really put on everyone’s doorstep. (3)”

So many things, big and small, which have happened in this past year, have provided practical proof of this fact. We have received countless testimonies from all over the world and from all sorts of people, showing how many people are having recourse to his intercession before God and receiving spiritual and material favours – sometimes real miracles – through it. Devotion to Saint Josemaría has spread even further in recent months, stimulating us to live up to our Christian faith without slackening.

I would like to add a further point, something that is both consoling and demanding. This saint, this priest who has such a great power of intercession

before God, continues to exercise over each of us the same paternity as he did on earth, the paternity which was such a prominent feature of his human and spiritual personality. Let's listen to the Holy Father's words again: "Escrivá de Balaguer was a saint of great humanity. All those who came in contact with him, of whatever level of education or social condition, felt him to be a father, totally dedicated to the service of others, because he was convinced that each soul is a marvellous treasure; in fact each person is worth all the Blood of Christ. (4)"

We can, therefore, have the certainty that from Heaven he is concerned for us, he watches over us, and prays for us to be faithful to God's plans. With God's grace, in spite of our limitations, any spiritual goal can be achieved. Holiness is not a Utopian ideal. To let ourselves be guided by that hope is not an impossible dream. It's true: holiness is achieved in daily life, Saint Josemaría taught; but ordinary things don't make holiness something trivial. Holiness is the fullness of love. And love leaves no room for mediocrity or routine. Christians *ought* to fly high.

But this certainty of ours brings a commitment with it. The filial bond which unites us to Saint Josemaría is inseparable from himself and his life – the life of a man who sanctified himself by fulfilling unreservedly the mission that God entrusted him with. The Pope referred to this aspect also in his address. "In the founder of Opus Dei," he said, "love for the will of God was an outstanding characteristic. Here is a sure criterion of holiness: faithfulness to the fulfilment of the divine will, even to the last consequences. For each one of us the Lord has a plan, to each one he entrusts a mission on earth. The saint cannot even conceive of himself outside God's plan: he lives only to carry it out. (5)"

Hence Saint Josemaría speaks to us of faithfulness to the vocation God has given each of us; he speaks to us of perseverance, of the duty of responding to God's grace, which comes to us from Heaven in every circumstance. In the life of Christians, gift and personal effort are inseparably intertwined.

A few days ago we commemorated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of Opus Dei. For an institution that is to last for centuries, seventy-five years are only a beginning. Our holy founder was convinced that when God our Lord makes a project, he chooses absolutely disproportionate, inadequate instruments, so that the whole work can be seen to be his.

We, and the many souls throughout the world who are nourished by the spirit of the Work, are those instruments. We have to beg God persistently for his help, conscious of our littleness, and thank him for the fruits he grants us. The best way of expressing that gratitude will be to love the Sacraments more every day, and to

guard zealously, together with all our brethren in the faith, the treasure with which God has freely enriched his Church.

Allow me to recall at least one aspect of that treasure: the close union, the real filial devotion to the Pope, which Saint Josemaría taught us. That union is a bulwark of the Christian faith against the secularizing influences which aim to bring it to nothing.

In a few days' time, on 16 October, in union with all Catholics and with very many other men and women of good will, we shall celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the election of John Paul II as successor of Saint Peter. On that day, I would like us all to feel bound to offer our prayer, our mortification and our work for the Pope, for his intentions and his health. But that is not all: I would also like us to feel directly involved in the witness of his union with the Cross, which becomes daily more apparent. In the Holy Father today we see, very clearly, the face of Christ who suffers, who bears along the way to Calvary the burden of the whole of mankind, which is so much in need of redemption. Union with the Pope, here and now, above all means being generous enough to bear our personal sufferings together with him, uncomplainingly, lovingly, with holy stubbornness and with dignity, sharing in Jesus Christ's Cross every day.

Let's ask our Blessed Lady, who stood firm on the summit of Golgotha, to watch over the Pope with motherly affection and love, and to keep him here for us for a long time, for the good of the Church and all mankind. Amen.

### Notes

- (1) Pope John Paul II, Homily at the Canonization of Saint Josemaría, 6 October 2002
- (2) Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, 292
- (3) Pope John Paul II, address during the audience for Saint Josemaría's canonization, 7 October 2002
- (4) Pope John Paul II, *ibid.*
- (5) Pope John Paul II, *ibid.*