



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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## How the Founder of Opus Dei experienced the Sacrament of Reconciliation

*Bishop Javier Echevarría*

In the book-length interview in which Bishop Javier Echevarría relates his memories of Saint Josemaría, founder of Opus Dei, Salvador Bernal says: “Meditating on the Cross also gave rise, in Msgr. Escrivá’s soul, to contrition and a spirit of atonement, culminating in his reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.” Bishop Echevarría’s response was as follows.

In different ways and on very different occasions, Msgr. Escrivá asserted that **“what dirties an eight-year-old also dirties an eighty-year-old.”** He made it very clear that neither age, nor time, nor circumstances justify any relaxation in our personal effort to live facing God.

A very powerful idea in his life was that each of us, as Saint Paul says, is a temple of God. On November 20, 1972, I noted some words of his: **“In your hearts you are like a Tabernacle where our Lord has chosen to take refuge. Our Lord loves us with his infinite Love, he loves us very much; and from us he awaits love, atonement for our own failures to respond, and for the failures of everyone. When there is true love, there can be no coarseness; coarseness and dirt show the opposite of love; coarseness is how soldiers let off steam in their barracks.”**

In this regard, I recall how one day in 1958 at nine-fifteen in the morning, a doctor, who was in Opus Dei, took his blood-pressure, and said, “You are perfectly well. Your blood-pressure is exactly what it should be.” Saint Josemaría answered simply, **“It couldn’t be otherwise, as I’ve already made plenty of acts of atonement. Recommend that to people who are sick, it’s the best medicine! Because as well as saying sorry for our unworthiness, it brings us closer and closer to our Lord, to his mercy, which is always there for us.”** He would joke that we ought to learn from the Italians when they say, about cups of coffee,

that you should have not less than three and not more than thirty-three. He would say, **“Acts of contrition not only can’t be fewer in number than that second figure, they should be very many more! The more the better!”**

As the same time as urging us to avoid everything that could separate us from God, he did not fail to remind us of the fact that each person is a poor sinner, so that we can’t be filled with pride whenever we’ve done a bit of good. One day in 1969, after talking to us about the optimism that comes from being friends with God, he added: **“As long as we correct ourselves and say sorry, we will be very secure. Each day offers us the possibility, not just of a conversion, but of many conversions! Look: every time you correct yourselves, when you realize you’ve done something wrong – even if it isn’t a sin! – you try to divinize your life, and you have achieved a conversion.”**

He used to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation punctually every week. His conscience was so sensitive that, without getting scrupulous, he would go to Confession more often than once a week whenever he considered that he needed it in order to respond to the continual, pressing calls of grace. I could see how happy he was after receiving this Sacrament. He often reflected on its greatness, in public and in private.

When he was still a child, he used to say the prayer “My Lord Jesus Christ”. He knew that he should say sorry for his faults, and he put all his childish efforts into saying this prayer devoutly. When he got to the words “I propose in amendment never to sin again”, he used to mix up “amendment” (enmienda) and “almond” (almendra), and he said that he loved almonds, **“so what could be more natural than to give something that I liked a lot for the resolution of never sinning again, because my parents really taught me not to want to offend our Lord ever, and that sank deep into my soul.”**

On the same subject, he told us in 1968, **“Don’t forget, my children: in this divine undertaking that God has entrusted to us, our Lord will “want” it if you want it. When our Lord has forgive us for our personal errors, don’t tolerate remorse that takes away your peace of mind, because it would be a lack of love, a lack of faith in the Sacrament of Penance and a clear sign of pride. Sorrow for not having loved? Yes! But don’t stay wallowing in your misery, because God has already forgotten about it, and is waiting for your new response with new love.”**

Finally, he advised us to get to know and talk to our Lady to increase our contrition for the failings in our lives. In 1962, he urged us: **“Trust our Lord, who never**

**abandons us if we don't leave him. Don't ever feel beaten, even though you may have lost some battles. In that case, still more urgently, we always have to return to Christ, from the arms of our Lady, in the certainty that then our steps are on the best way."**

**Extract from the book *Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Javier Echevarría and Salvador Bernal, Madrid, 2000.**