



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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## Joy, Sorrow, Hope

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**“Do you know why the Work has developed so much? Because it’s been treated like a sack of wheat; it’s been beaten and battered about. But the seeds are so small that they haven’t broken. On the contrary, they’ve been scattered to the four winds...”**

From the earliest days of his apostolic work, Saint Josemaría had emphasized the dignity of marriage, strongly pointing out that it is a divine vocation and a call to sanctity. Already in *The Way* he had written: “You laugh because I tell you that you have a ‘vocation to marriage?’ — Well, you have: just that, a vocation. Commend yourself to Saint Raphael, so that he may lead you chastely to the end of the journey, as he did Tobias.”

And in *Christ Is Passing By* we read: “Christian marriage is not just a social institution, much less a mere remedy for human weakness. It is a real supernatural calling. A great sacrament, in Christ and in the Church, says St. Paul. At the same time it is a permanent contract between a man and a woman. Whether we like it or not, the sacrament of matrimony, instituted by Christ, cannot be dissolved. It is a permanent contract that sanctifies in cooperation with Jesus Christ. He fills the souls of husband and wife and invites them to follow him. He transforms their whole married life into an occasion for God’s presence on earth. Husband and wife are called to sanctify their married life and to sanctify themselves in it.”

Hence the Father’s joy when he discovered the canonical way for married people to join Opus Dei. As soon as possible, he organized a retreat at Molinoviejo, not far from Madrid, for the persons who had been waiting for this, so that they could prepare spiritually to form part of Opus Dei.

### Reaction to misunderstandings

In addition to the joys, there were sorrows as well. It was precisely as a

consequence of the approval of Opus Dei in 1950, and in spite of Pius XII's public approval, that a very serious move was made against the Work and its founder. Some persons — with great influence in the Curia — attempted to expel the founder from the Work and to divide his sons and daughters in a way that would denature their path in the Church.

The founder was in the dark about the intrigue. But with the instinct of a father and a mother, he intuited that something very harmful was about to befall him and Opus Dei. He confided to his children in Rome, "I feel like a blind man who has to defend himself, but can only beat the air with his cane: I don't know what is going on, but something is afoot..."

Not knowing whom he could turn to on earth, he had recourse, as always, to heaven. He decided to make a penitential pilgrimage to the shrine of Loreto to consecrate the Work to our Lady. It was penitential indeed due to the torrid heat and the irritations stemming from his poor health. Kneeling in the Holy House after having celebrated Mass, he entrusted Opus Dei to Mary, invoking her motherly protection. On his return he regained his peace and serenity. From that time on he often repeated, and encouraged others to repeat, the aspiration *Cor Mariae dulcissimum, iter para tutum!* ("Most sweet heart of Mary, prepare a safe way for us").

The answer from heaven was not long in coming. A few months later, the archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Schuster (today *Blessed* Cardinal Schuster), who had taken the budding apostolate of Opus Dei in his city very much to heart, called Father Giovanni Udaondo.

"How is your founder doing?"

"He's very well!" he replied, not aware of anything amiss.

"But how does he carry his cross? Doesn't he have to bear the burden of some specific setback, a very heavy cross?"

"Well, if that's the case, he would be very happy, because he has always taught us that, if we stand close to the Cross, we stand very close to Jesus."

"Tell him to be alert. Let him remember his countryman Saint Joseph Calasanz, as well as Saint Alphonsus Liguori... and get moving!"

### **Loreto, August 15, 1951**

The warning was clear. Both saints had endured heavy persecutions. The founder visited many important prelates, but it seemed as if no one knew anything about it. Finally he got Cardinal Tedeschini to bring a letter from him directly to Pius XII.

The Pope read it on March 18, 1952 and stopped the plan dead in its tracks.

Saint Josemaría would eventually come to know who was behind the intrigue. But he did not divulge it; he did not want anything to leak out to his daughters and sons, fearing that it might lead to a lack of charity. He wished only to pardon. He was convinced that these persons, like others who had earlier attacked the Work, had done it *obsequium se putantes praestare Deum*, “thinking they were serving God.” He was convinced that for some people it was not easy to understand the theological and pastoral novelty of Opus Dei and for this reason they should be given the benefit of the doubt even when, in opposing something that they understood poorly or did not understand at all, they acted badly. In short, the Work went ahead defended, but pardoning its detractors.

Many years later he confided to his children: “Do you know why the Work has developed so much? Because they have treated it like a sack of wheat; it’s been beaten and battered about. But the seeds are so small that they haven’t broken. On the contrary, they’ve been scattered to the four winds; they’ve landed wherever there have been hearts hungry and ready for the truth. And now we have so many vocations and we are a very large family, and there are millions of souls who admire and love the Work because they see in it a sign of God’s presence among men, and recognize the inexhaustible riches of his mercy.” Years of voluntary seclusion followed. The founder needed to govern the expansion of the Work, fighting the “battle of formation” of his sons and daughters.

The recourse to supernatural means was a constant characteristic of Saint Josemaría. As a sign of his unshakable faith in God in big and little matters, he wished to consecrate Opus Dei on several occasions besides the one previously mentioned. On May 14, 1951, as a result of the misunderstanding that existed among some parents in Rome, he decided to consecrate the families of the members of the Work to the Holy Family of Nazareth.

“...O Jesus, our most lovable Redeemer,” reads the text of this consecration, “Who in coming to enlighten the world with Your example and doctrine, chose to spend the greater part of Your life subject to Mary and Joseph in the humble house in Nazareth, sanctifying the Family that all Christian homes were to imitate; graciously accept the consecration of the families of Your children in Opus Dei, which we now make to You. Take them under Your protection and care, and fashion them after the divine model of Your holy Family.”