



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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St Josemaria Escriva and Ireland

In 1916 the young Josemaría Escrivá avidly followed the events of the Easter Rising in Ireland. “I was then about fifteen and I eagerly read everything in the newspapers about the events of the First World War. Most of all, though, I prayed a lot for Ireland. I wasn't against England; I was for religious freedom.”

“At that time he read in the papers about your struggle for the faith and for the freedom of your country. How much he prayed for you! How he mortified himself – with small mortifications appropriate for a young person: not taking butter and some other acts of self denial... I heard him say it often throughout his life. He offered all this for your country, which used to be called the Island of Saints, because the Lord allowed him to see the special love, the special providence which He always has had for your country. So Ireland deserves the affection and understanding of all Catholics. I have inherited this love of Ireland from our Founder, and so here you have me – happy, full of joy and affection – as if I were in my native country.”

Bishop Alvaro delPortillo (St Josemaría's first successor), Dublin, 4 August 1980

At St Josemaría's request, José Ramón Madurga, a Spanish engineer, came to Ireland in October 1947 to begin the work of Opus Dei. One of the first apostolic undertakings was Nullamore University Residence in Dartry, Dublin. The official opening in 1954 was attended by the Taoiseach of the time, John A Costello; the Leader of the Opposition, Eamon de Valera; the President of UCD, Professor Michael Tierney; the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Alfie Byrne; and the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr John Charles McQuaid.

Following the success of Nullamore, other student halls of residence were set up: Northbrook (Ranelagh) in 1953; Gort Ard (Salthill, Galway) in 1958 and Ely (Hume Street, Dublin) in 1959.

That same year, St Josemaría – called ‘the Father’ by members of Opus Dei and many others – came to spend a few days in Ireland. He encouraged those who had joined Opus Dei and those who were taking part in its formational activities, while he also fostered the development of new apostolic undertakings.

After his visit, other halls of residence were set up: Glenard (Clonskeagh, Dublin) in 1962; Ros Geal (University Road, Galway) in 1972; Cleraun (Mount Merrion, Dublin) in 1982; and Castleville (Castletroy, Limerick) in 1985. Also established were a variety of youth clubs, such as Nullamore and Glenbeag in Milltown, Dublin and the Anchor Youth Club in Artane, Dublin and catering and educational centres such as the Lismullin Hospitality Services Centre (Navan, Co. Meath).

Saturday 15 August

St Josemaría Escrivá arrived at Dublin Airport at about 8pm on Saturday, 15 August, the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady. This was to be his one and only visit to Ireland. He travelled from London where he had been spending the summer. He later remarked that it was no accident that he had come to Ireland on one of the most important feasts of the year.

From the airport St Josemaría went to Ely, the Opus Dei centre in Hume Street, where he was to stay for five days. During his stay he highlighted the core message of Opus Dei, “a way to holiness through daily work and the ordinary duties of a Christian” (from the St Josemaría [prayer card](#)).

He told those he met that they should be very holy, and that they should be “very cheerful, very cheerful, for to be otherwise is not good”.

Sunday 16 August

Addressing some of those who were laying the foundation of Opus Dei's development in Ireland he said: “Give thanks, my sons, to God, because although you don't add up to much, although you are not worthy – I too am an insignificant man – God has chosen you to begin the Work in Ireland and to make you instruments of his marvels.” Thanksgiving after Sunday morning Mass in Ely.

After breakfast in Ely, St Josemaría went to Nullamore, a hall of residence in Dartry where about forty students from various countries were attending an English language course. He was delighted to see so many youngsters from different nations.

During the morning, he visited the women in Crannton who looked after the catering for Nullamore. He remarked to one of those teaching the young Irish girls who had asked to join Opus Dei: “Do you realise, my daughter, that we've put our trust in you, that you would be an example and a help for your sisters.”

In a 1960s interview with a Spanish women's magazine, St Josemaría stressed the important role of women in homemaking: “Through this profession – because

it is a profession, in a true and noble sense – they are a good influence, not only in their family, but also among their many friends and acquaintances, among people with whom they come in contact, in one way or another. Sometimes their impact is much greater than that of other professional people.”

Monday 17 August

In the morning, St Josemaría met the family of Fr Dick Mulcahy. Only one week earlier he had become Ireland’s second Opus Dei priest. He celebrated his first solemn Mass in the convent chapel of the Sisters of Charity in Donnybrook, where his aunt was Superior. The founder jokingly remarked that in a photo of Fr Dick and his family that had appeared in the previous morning’s newspaper, the family had lined up military style.

Fr Dick described how his parents were impressed with this meeting: “I have rarely seen my parents so overcome. My father was complaining that we should have prepared him better to do justice to the great occasion of meeting the Father. He could hardly drive the car on the way home, he was so delighted. He was very taken by the warmth and depth of the Father.”

Later St Josemaría was driven west to Galway to meet a group of married men who were attending a formation course in Gort Ard, the Opus Dei centre in Galway. He encouraged them not to fear having large families, saying that each child brought its loaf of bread under its arm, and that no one should put barriers to life. He emphasised how important it was for them to love their wives very much – just as they did before they were married – and to express that love in many ways. When he heard that one of those present – Jack McGarry – had eight children he gave him a hug and said “May God bless you eighty times – and your wife and your children too”.

When asked by the young Galwegian, Oliver Powell, if he liked Gort Ard, St Josemaría in a light-hearted way made it clear he had come to see people, not buildings: “What interest me are the birds, not the bird cage!”

On Tuesday morning, St Josemaría had a get-together in Northbrook Residence for women in Ranelagh. Here he spoke to a group of women and encouraged them to work for the service of God and the good of the country. He also described the immense panorama that awaited them to spread the teachings of Christ to the entire world.

Later he spoke to a number of students who had travelled from other countries to attend an English language course in Northbrook. He encouraged them to grow in

piety and virtue so as to be instruments of Christ in the middle of the world.

While meeting with those in Nullamore on Tuesday, he wrote a dedication on a large bible: "*Omnia in bonum*, Josemaría, Dublin, 18-VIII-59". "*Omnia in bonum*" was an expression he commonly used to paraphrase St Paul's teaching: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose"(Rom 8: 28).

In the late morning there was a meeting with the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid. Fr Liam Martin, who worked with the archbishop, related many years later that the archbishop said that it had been an occasion of grace to have met the founder of Opus Dei, and that there was something charismatic about him. At the end of the meeting the archbishop went down to open the door of the car for his visitor; this was something that Fr Martin had never seen him do before.

Afterwards there was a trip to one of the historic beauty spots of Ireland: the Rock of Cashel in Co. Tipperary. The visiting party left after lunch and returned in the evening. They dined in Cahir House Hotel.

On 26th June 2009, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin said, "Saint Josemaría met my predecessor, Archbishop McQuaid, at his residence in Killiney. On his way there he most likely drove past what was then a large, striking, newly built church on this Merrion Road, never imagining that this church fifty years later would be a focal point for his followers who dedicate themselves to responding to the call to holiness and of commitment to bring Jesus' message of love to a world which has changed so radically in that space of time" (homily, parish church of Our Lady, Queen of Peace, Merrion Road, Dublin, which he had entrusted to priests of Opus Dei in 2008).

A plaque was mounted in Cahir's market square in August 2009. The text reads: "St Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (1902-1975), founder of Opus Dei, visited the town of Cahir on 18th August 1959 during his one and only trip to Ireland. He was canonised by Pope John Paul II in Rome on 6th October 2002. This plaque is erected in the market square in commemoration of that visit and as a reminder of his message that the secret of happiness is to find God in the street and in the hustle and bustle of everyday life."

Wednesday 19 August

St Josemaría had morning get-togethers in both Northbrook and Ely. In Ely he encouraged those present to be helpful and pleasant and make others happy, not to be against anybody, and never to hold grudges. As for faults and failings: don't

be worried, get up again; for without faults and failings, “what would we have to keep us humble?”

Although St Josemaría needed people to translate from Spanish to English, it was clear that his gift for communication overcame these barriers. As he remarked to the married women in Northbrook: “Do you understand me? You would understand me, my daughters, even if I were speaking in Chinese!” One of them recalls: “My abiding memory of being at the get-together with Saint Josemaría in Northbrook in 1959 is of his warmth and good humour. When he was speaking to us, his face was alight with enthusiasm and I felt that he was truly delighted to see us all there, while he talked about our role as wives and mothers.”

St Josemaría left Ireland at 7.45 on Wednesday evening. The following week in London he told Fr Dick Mulcahy that he was delighted with his visit to Ireland, that he was “as happy as a child putting his finger into a pot of strawberry jam and licking it”.

Download a [booklet about St Josemaria Escriva and Ireland](#) in pdf format.