



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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## Priestly Holiness and Ministry: Priests that Love the Mass

*Father John McCloskey*

*“A priest's worth can be measured by the way he lives his Mass.”--St Josemaria*

When I was a young man serving Mass at my local parish, I was struck by one particular priest who was resident in the parish. He was a veteran of the Second World War and a trained lawyer and at that time the editor of the local diocesan newspaper at a particularly difficult time, after the issuing of “*Humanae Vitae*.” This would have been just after the Second Vatican Council when there was much confusion regarding the liturgy, priestly identity, and the role of the laity.

This priest, I noticed, always remained after the Holy Mass for some time to give thanks, was meticulous in the care he took with particles of the Host that might accidentally have fallen on the altar or on the floor during the course of Holy Communion. I also would often see him praying before the Blessed Sacrament in the Church.

Many years later, I learned that he was a priest of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross and that, at least in part, he had learned these fine details of priestly piety towards the Eucharist from the example and teachings of the Founder of Opus Dei.

As Saint Josemaria put it: “We are not going to do an irreverent genuflection, like the soldiers did before Christ. We are going to adore! The people notice everything and they will think: my priest, how he loves Jesus! How clearly he knows that he is in the Sacred Host! If they only see you on your knees before the Lord, you will win over their souls. Don't exaggerate but work within the ecclesiastical law putting there your heart and faith. (get-together with priests 10/31/72).”

I do not doubt the example of the priest I used to see was a great help in my finding my own vocation as a single lay member of Opus Dei, and later, inside the

Prelature as a priest.

Some years after knowing this priest, without knowing his connection to Opus Dei, I started to frequent the local center in Washington DC. I believe I saw my vocation in my very first visit when I attended a meditation preached by a priest of the Prelature.

The way he genuflected, the directness with which he addressed the Blessed Sacrament as Jesus Incarnate hidden behind the appearance of bread, and the deliberate way he presided over the exposition and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament left a deep imprint on my mind.

I said to myself this is a priest who truly believes that Jesus is there in the Blessed Sacrament, “Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity” as St. Josemaria used to say. This priest was one of the very first members of Opus Dei in the United States and had spent several years living with the Founder. It was clear where he had learned his liturgical piety. All of this, you must remember was taking place at a time when piety, devotion, silence, and beauty in the liturgy were not common.

Not long afterwards, I joined Opus Dei and began to see how all the lay faithful, including myself, were taught to love and live the Holy Mass as the center and root of their interior life. Over time, I understood that St. Josemaria was striving to live this in his own life and that his teaching, so clearly based on the teachings of the Church and the example of many saintly priests, was reinforced by his own example.

Over time, I saw that the faithful of the Prelature, following his teachings strove to live punctuality in arriving before Mass, to dress well, to follow the liturgy closely, to approach Holy Communion reverently, and often to remain in silent Thanksgiving after Mass. So they, through their example, passed on the Founder's teachings to their parish priests, whose own priesthood was enlivened or even revived as they rediscovered the centrality of the Eucharist in their interior and professional life.

I never knew St. Josemaria in life even though I had several opportunities. Working my way through the university precluded trips to Rome or South America on account of expense. However, like many of you, I did watch the movies. Particularly moving were his get-togethers with hundreds of priests in Spain and Latin America. To hear his teachings on the Eucharist and the holy Mass from his own lips, was powerful. He spoke with clarity, at times almost shouting, in demanding that they live up to their specific vocation to be “another Christ, Christ

himself,” particularly in all that referred to the Eucharist.

Years later, as a young priest myself, I was involved in the yearly “Seminar for Seminarians,” which took place at Easter Time. Over the years hundreds of seminarians from all over the United States came to a conference center near Boston to live fraternity, hear excellent talks on specific magisterial documents, and above all live the liturgical life, Mass, Benediction, and the Liturgy of the Hours together.

I heard dozens of enthusiastic comments on the beauty and cleanliness of the chapel, the dignity of the vestments and liturgical vessels, and the loving preparation for the Mass by the women of Opus Dei. When the priest celebrated Mass, the centrality of Eucharistic worship was manifest. More than one told that those short weeks saved their vocation. I know many dozens of these now ordained priests, who are spread throughout the US. Some are chancery officials; others are seminary professors or university chaplains, but the great majority are pastors of their own parishes.

They are contributing to a great rebirth of liturgical piety, of beauty in Church construction and architecture, and perpetual adoration of the Eucharist. Many now belong to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, but the great majority simply have learned from the priestly example and teaching of St. Josemaria how to make sure that Jesus feels at home, in a “Bethany,” as he put it, in the tabernacles and on the altars of their parish churches.

I presently work at an Archdiocesan agency called “The Catholic Information Center” in downtown Washington DC, two blocks away from the White House. The Center provides a first class Catholic bookstore, rooms for meetings, classes, and spiritual direction, and confessionals that are often in use. There come to the Center each day people from all ethnic and professional backgrounds, from U.S.

Senators, Presidential candidates, well known television personalities, to postal workers and government clerical workers. However, at the heart of it all is the Holy Mass at noon each today, celebrated reverently, to make the Lord present in the heart of our Nation's Capital, so that the people fed by the Eucharist, can give thanks, and gain the spiritual nutrition to be heralds of the new evangelization in the midst of their important professional work, whatever it might be.

After Holy Mass, we expose the Blessed Sacrament for three hours of adoration. Many stop by for minutes, few or many, to adore, give thanks, ask for pardon, or express sorrow. The chapel is the only one in North America dedicated to Saint

Josemaria. His statue, with his smiling visage, looks down upon the people gathered each day from the “bel mezzo della strada” for Mass and adoration of Jesus, whom he now sees face to face.

His teachings have helped them truly to unite their everyday work with the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass. As St. Josemaria put it: “All of you, my sons and daughters, have a priestly soul, rooted in the sacramental character of Baptism and Confirmation. A priestly soul, that you put into action not only when you participate in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, root and center of our interior life ,but also in all the activities of your life.

With a completely lay mentality, you exercise this spiritual priesthood, upon offering to God your work, rest, joys and contradictions of each day, the holocaust of your bodies exhausted y the effort of constant service. All of this is “a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God--your spiritual service.” (Rom.XII, 1/Letter, 5/6/45, n.27)”

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