



# Saint Josemaría Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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## Saint Josemaría's love for the Eucharist

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Saint Josemaría often talked about the need for Christian life to be essentially Eucharistic. He summed it up in a classic phrase: having a “Eucharistic soul”. He liked to make explicit acts of faith in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament: “I believe that you are present: your Body, your Blood, your Soul and your Divinity.” Bishop Javier Echevarría, now the Prelate of Opus Dei, recalls in the book *Memoria del Beato Josemaría* different ways in which Saint Josemaría showed his love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

When, in the 1940s, he finally got a room of his own (in the Diego de Leon Centre in Madrid), he was very happy that it was the room next to the oratory, with the tabernacle just on the other side of the wall. Like that, in the solitude of many nights, and for many hours a day, he was able to pray and work facing our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. This idea led him to arrange for a balcony to be constructed in the room where he later worked in Rome, giving on to the oratory there. As he also spent a lot of time there he had a little old-fashioned pocket-watch hung on the wall, so as not to risk being late for things which were part of the timetable of the Centre.

He never went into any Church without greeting our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament first thing. He would spend a few moments recollected in prayer and renew his burning desire to keep Jesus company in every tabernacle in the world. Something I found very moving happened in a large city when we went into the Cathedral, which was under repair. He asked the sacristan where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved, and the man answered that he didn't know, because it was reserved in a different place every day and by that stage nobody knew where it was. So he started to look for our Lord all over the Cathedral, and finally found Him, after catching sight of a half-hidden sanctum lamp. He knelt down there and prayed. He told us afterwards that he had said: “Lord, I'm no better than anyone else, but I need to tell you that I love you with all my strength; and I beg you to hear me. I love you for all the people who come here and don't tell you so. I love

you for all the people who will ever come here and not tell you so.” And he also told us: “Wouldn’t you do something similar if your parents, who have such good qualities, had spent themselves for other people and those people weren’t even grateful? And we owe God far, far more. He, who is total happiness, total beauty and true Life, has put himself entirely at our disposal, everyone’s, so that we can all share in that Life. It’s only right for us to be grateful!”

Any spare moments he had, he used to go to the oratory, even when that meant going up and downstairs. He’d make a genuflection and say an aspiration, or make a spiritual communion, or an act of adoration. He never failed to tell people: “As often as you can, escape to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to keep him company, even for just a few seconds. And tell him with all your soul that you love him, that you want to love him more, and that you love him for all the people on earth, including those who say they don’t love him.”

On one occasion Saint Josemaría received some visitors. They had lunch, and then, with his characteristic naturalness, he suggested, “Shall we go and greet the Owner?” They were devout Christians, but they were taken by surprise at his words, because his tone of voice made it clear that he was speaking of someone very much higher than himself, and they wondered who they could go and greet as the owner of the house, if the owner was himself. They understood when he took them into the oratory.

Saint Josemaría often insisted to Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo and myself that we should “never pass the tabernacle without telling our Lord that you love him with all your soul, that you want to cherish him in your hearts, that you thank him for his Real Presence in the tabernacle, where he consoles us and helps us with his strength.” And after making these recommendations, he added, “That’s what I do.”

With his passionate, all-consuming love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, he asked us, on 26 February 1970, “Unite yourselves to my constant prayer. I pray all day and at night as well. Unite yourselves to the Holy Mass I celebrate. Make many acts of faith and love in our Lord’s Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist. And make many acts of atonement. Tell our Lord that you love him with all your soul, that you don’t want to make him suffer, that you want to make reparation constantly.”

He recommended priests to keep the Blessed Sacrament company as much as they could. He wanted all of them to increase their devotion to the Eucharist, and he pointed out to them: “Don’t do it for your parishioners to see, but don’t worry if they do see you. If you are centered on our Lord, and people notice how you love

him, they'll ask you why, and then you can tell them about this love that should fill your whole life."

Saint Josemaría repeated constantly: "Thank you, my God, because ever since I was young you have made me glimpse the marvel of Love of this mystery of the Eucharist." In 1973 he urged his spiritual daughters and sons to have an ever-growing love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. "God has made us capable of loving him, looking at him, falling in love with him. How? By fulfilling the plan we have for our day with loving care. 'Father,' you'll ask me, 'how can we get to know him better and talk to him more?' By getting into his life, because we belong to his family; by going to find him where he is, in the tabernacle, and in your own souls. And tell him that you are relying on him, on his strength."

These words, which he said in the last years of his life, are a continuation of what he always practised and preached. So, for example, in 1958 he urged us: "We have to stress, to other people and to ourselves, that we should never leave him alone in his voluntary imprisonment in the tabernacle, the prison of love, where he has chosen to stay, hidden in the Host, defenceless, for you and for me." And in 1962 he said: "For a long time now, every time I genuflect in front of the tabernacle, after adoring our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, I also thank the Angels, because they are continuously paying court to God. Paying court – that's where the word "courting" comes from, which means the loving attention paid to the person you are in love with, and which is used in ordinary language to say that a man loves a woman."

On the feast of Corpus Christi, June 10 1971, Saint Josemaría said to us: "Today I am especially happy to thank the Angels for paying court to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in all tabernacles, whether or not it is a feast in honour of the Blessed Sacrament. It's a habit I always have, but today it gives me a still greater awareness of God's presence."

At another point that same day, he added: "While I was celebrating Mass this morning I said to our Lord in my heart: 'I am there keeping you company in all the processions in the world, in all the tabernacles where people honour you, and in all the places where you are and they don't honour you'."

At the same time, his devotion to the Eucharist also led him, during his last years, to increase his spirit of atonement. He was hungry to come into the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to adore him, to keep him company, to make atonement, as he said in his humility, 'for my own wretchedness and for the wretchedness of all mankind, so that he's not left alone, now that in so many

places our Lord finds himself unaccompanied, although all of us, everyone in the world, should be keeping him company.”

In 1960 Saint Josemaría spoke to us again about “the mystery of the Eucharist, where Jesus is the ‘Great Solitary One’ because people have left him alone. They know nothing about love, understanding or self-giving. How could they, if they refuse to go to the source! I am praying to our Lord that everyone, my daughters, my sons, and I myself, may learn how to treat Christ in the Eucharist. Go to him with faith, constantly, attentively. Our personal wretchedness doesn’t matter if we have the grace of God. The more we are aware of our weaknesses, the more we will feel the need for God in our lives. For the past few days, my prayer of adoration for the Eucharist has been filled with atonement and supplication that I may not abandon him: *peto quod petivit latro pœnitens*, I ask you what the repentant thief asked: I see my own weakness, and I am filled with trust in the power of God, who never ignores anyone who turns to him humbly and trustingly.”

And he went on: “We priests have to love the priesthood so much that we place it continually there before our Lord in the tabernacle, and turn our whole life into a spiritual apostolate. But our work has to be, like other people’s, an offering to God. I mean that our *operatio Dei*, our working for God, is a Mass that begins at twelve o’clock at night and finishes twenty-four hours later.

He often prayed and sang the hymn *Adoro te devote*, “O Godhead hid”. He advised his spiritual children, in order to increase their faith in the Eucharist, to say it and meditate on it every Thursday, asking our Lord to increase the piety of all Christians.

These ways of living his faith were so deep-rooted that on journeys, or when he went out, and caught sight of a church tower, one of the verses of this hymn would rise to his lips; it was a quick interruption in the conversation which helped his Eucharistic devotion and ours too. He would also say an aspiration that came from the very depths of his heart: “Lord, you have healed so many souls, make me see you as the Divine Doctor in the Sacred Host!”

I have heard him encourage people from all walks of life to go to Communion with the best possible dispositions, not letting themselves be overcome by scruples. At the same time he would remind people very clearly of the conditions for receiving Communion worthily: “Don’t go to Communion if you have a well-founded shadow of doubt that you might have offended God seriously. Never let yourself be ruled by mere scruples, but don’t receive our Lord with a shadow of doubt.”