



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

[Home](#) - [Documentation](#) - [Articles and studies](#) - Saint Josemaria speaks to doctors and nurses

## Saint Josemaria speaks to doctors and nurses

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When Saint Josemaria talked with healthcare professionals, he always expressed appreciation for their work, and encouraged them to improve their professional training so as to be able to serve their patients more effectively. The following is a selection of quotations from Saint Josemaria, founder of Opus Dei, when talking to doctors and nurses.

His words express his appreciation for the work medical professionals do in the service of others. They also encourage people in this field not to give up on constantly trying to raise the level of their professional training, so that they can serve their patients more effectively. They are calls to shoulder their responsibility as Christians to give spiritual as well as medical help to the sick.

As we should expect, they are nothing other than the words of a priest of Jesus Christ. As a priest, Saint Josemaria was aware of the analogous “priestly character” of healthcare professionals, because of their active, wholehearted dedication to unselfish work in the service of others. He stated this in answer to a question from an orthopedic surgeon, who asked him how to avoid routine and lukewarmness in his daily work. Saint Josemaria replied: “By keeping in God’s presence, as you already do. Yesterday I went to visit a sick person, someone I love with all my heart as a father, and I understand the great priestly work that you doctors do. But don’t get proud about this, because everyone has a priestly soul. We need to activate that priestly soul! When you scrub up, when you are putting on your surgical gown, and your gloves, think about God and about the royal priesthood that Saint Peter talks about; and then you won’t fall into a routine, you’ll do good to your patients’ bodies and to their souls.”

A year and a half later, in a get-together which many of us from the University of Navarre will remember all our lives – it was the last time our Grand Chancellor, Saint Josemaria, came to the University – a nurse from the University Hospital asked him about how she could improve her work. He was happy to have an

opportunity to reiterate the advice he had so often given, and answered: “Nurses from many different countries have often asked me that question or something similar, and it makes me very happy, because there need to be many Christian nurses. Because your work is a kind of priesthood, just as much as or even more than that of doctors. More so, because you have – forgive me for sounding trite – delicacy and finesse; and you have a direct effect, because you are right there with the patient. The doctor comes, and then has to go on to something else; he has his patients in mind, but he can’t have them constantly before his eyes. So I think that being a nurse is a particularly Christian calling. But for this calling to be lived out to the full, you need plenty of high-level training and qualifications, and you also need to have a lot of sensitivity – which the University of Navarre Faculty of Medicine and University Hospital are famous for. God bless you, my daughter!”

These two attributes, sensitivity and a high level of training, were something he demanded equally of doctors. He said, “I am very moved when I hear of something that many of you will have experienced. Doctors can’t help acting like confessors, but on the physical plane; and the doctors here don’t concern themselves with the physical side but also with people’s souls. They have the same concern as you do, and they don’t just order someone, ‘Take off your clothes.’ Everyone tells me the same: ‘They’re so thoughtful! So respectful!’ You can tell that they know what they’re doing, but above all, as well as being great people and great doctors, they’re extraordinarily sensitive and respectful.

Now, the doctors shouldn’t start getting proud, because everyone else does the same, each in their own field. It’s a good thing if people compete to be more helpful, more Christian, every day; not just cleverer and more knowledgeable, but more like disciples of Christ.”

These words, which Saint Josemaria said on the same occasion, that of his last visit to the University of Navarre, stand as a testament, a last wish, that all of us who work in this University should do our best to fulfil.

For a nurse, for a doctor, being a disciple of Christ translates into specific details, of which I can only list a few here: love for the Sacraments, a profound concept of death, a solid sense of the value of life...

**This is a translation of an extract from Miguel Angel Monge (ed.), *San Josemaria y los enfermos*, Madrid: Palabra, 2004.**