



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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## The brass chalice

*Salvador Bernal*

One Sunday morning in June 1974, in the Coliseo Theatre in Buenos Aires (Argentina), Msgr. Escrivá had hardly started speaking when a gentleman from that land, with a smile on his lips and a somewhat mischievous gesture, intervened: “When a very close friend of mine was ordained to the priesthood I gave him a present of a gold chalice. Some friends of mine who are Catholics told me my present was socially irrelevant; others, that I was lacking in social conscience. It also happens – please don’t laugh – that we have a very fine pedigree dog at home which costs us quite a lot to keep. None of my friends has told me that I haven’t got a social conscience because I keep the dog. I would like you to tell me what you think about the present of the chalice and the dog.”

The people who filled the theatre were very amused by the question. They became serious, and then laughed once more, when they heard the reply: **As a rule I celebrate Mass with a brass chalice. I would love to use a gold chalice daily and I would think it was little enough. God bless you, because you have given that little bit of your affection to our Lord. You did well! All you have to do is to read what God our Lord laid down in the Old Testament, and how everything had to be made of gold. Everything had to be of gold! Now, in some people’s opinion, anything is good enough for our Lord and nothing is good enough for themselves. They have become egocentric, wretched, thinking only of themselves. To our Lord, they offer the sacrifice of Cain. History is repeating itself. A good son sacrifices the very best he has, gold, whatever he can give, what is precious to him. The others would want to offer mud, wretchedness.**

**As for the dog, remember St. Francis of Assisi. That will console you, and you can carry on being affectionate to your dog. Why should we treat animals badly? If you have a good heart for an animal, I know you have even more heart for your neighbour. Let every needy person find in you an open heart and a generous hand. God bless you.**

It was not the first time that Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer had referred to that brass

chalice. On other occasions he had commented: **I celebrate Mass each day, and have done for many years, with a chalice which cost me three hundred pesetas. It is a bit like me; people see it and say: “It’s made of gold...” But it’s all show. When you dismantle it, you find written on the inside in big letters the simple statement: “Brass”.**

All the charm of this chalice stems from the hands that fashioned it and coated it in a very fine layer of gold. Nevertheless, the craftsman was honest enough to admit clearly that he had made it from base metal. He wrote the fact in a hidden but accessible place. He did his work so well that at first sight no one, not even an expert, would doubt the richness of the sacred vessel. It was necessary to take it to pieces and look inside to discover the truth. Only the cup was of silver, following the rules of the liturgy. It was all a lesson in sincerity, in naturalness, in love for what is genuine and authentic, which in addition moved the Founder of Opus Dei to make an act of humility: **When I raise the chalice in the Holy Mass after the Consecration, I see in that chalice a reflection of my poor life: the struggles, the victories and the defeats. The victories are his, Christ’s; the defeats are mine.**

With confidence such as this in God, defeats can never be an occasion for being disheartened or sad. When one seeks strength in the arms of God Our Father, one begins to understand the lesson of this chalice which **does not want to deceive anyone with its golden appearance, because it shouts aloud, saying: “Brass!”** – and a resolution flows naturally: **Be very sincere, my children. Do not hide your wretchedness when receiving spiritual direction. Only thus will your lives shine like jewels and your hearts will truly become thrones for God, who will triumph in your weakness.**

The Founder of Opus Dei had a lover’s heart and he needed to show his love just as every lover does. As he often repeated, he did not have one heart for loving people with and a different heart for loving God. That is why, for example, in Rome, when there was not even money for essentials, there was always a freshly picked rose for the picture of Our Lady in the room where he worked for many hours each day. It was a way of showing externally the love he had in his heart. Richness in the things of worship – as we see clearly in the anecdotes we have recalled here – was the outpouring of a genuine and tender affection of a lover to whom everything seemed little for the Person he loved: **How little a life is to offer to God!** (*The Way*, 420).

It was his constant teaching. To devote the best things to worship was a specific way of showing real detachment from earthly things, of accepting wholeheartedly

God's dominion over created things and of expressing a spirit of adoration and piety. He deeply appreciated and was very grateful for the efforts which people of Opus Dei made all over the world to practise this refinement of love: **Our Lord is very glad to see that you treat him lovingly, caring affectionately and tenderly for the things of worship, which is where we strive to devote the best our blessed poverty can gather together. And Jesus must be glad also to see each one of you entering into intimate personal dialogue with him. May God bless you!**

**Salvador Bernal, *Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, Dublin: Veritas, 1977.**