



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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Ana Sastre

“My dearest daughters and sons: you will have wondered why in these last few years I’ve been going from one shrine of our Lady to another, in a continual pilgrimage over many countries, which also enables me to thank our Lord for the chance to meet thousands of his daughters and sons in Opus Dei.

What is the Father praying for? Well, at the feet of our Lady, our Mother, omnipotent in her supplication, the Father prays for world peace, the holiness of the Church, of the Work and of each of his daughters and sons.”

This passage comes from a letter by the Founder of Opus Dei, written in Rome and dated October 1970. Since 1968 his journeys through Europe to consolidate the paths of Opus Dei, the Work of God, had begun and ended in the spirit of a pilgrim of our Lady. Every time his travels took him near a shrine of our Lady he made a detour to appeal to her heart. He said, “I’m praying all day long, trying to talk to God continually, with our Lady as intercessor. (...) I’ve been doing these journeys with the enthusiasm, simplicity and joy of a pilgrim of old.”

He began one of these trips in September 1968. On his way to Naples he passed Pompeii and visited the well-known shrine of our Lady there.

On October 9, 1968, he went to Madrid. On the way he went through Seville and paid a visit to Our Lady of Macarena.

In Madrid he visited the crowned statue of Our Lady of Almudena, the patron of the city. This statue has been venerated since the eleventh century, and her name evokes the hard-working country folk and their wheaten bread. Tradition tells how all the field-workers who came to sell their wheat-harvest in Madrid would leave a measure (*almud*) of it for our Lady.

On October 16, near Avila, the walled city where St Teresa of Avila was born, he went to visit the shrine of Our Lady of Sonsoles once more. He recalled the pilgrimage he had made there back in 1935. "It wasn't a pilgrimage in the normal sense: nothing noisy or elaborate, just three of us. I respect and love public demonstrations of devotion, but I must admit I prefer to offer Mary the same affection, the same enthusiasm, in private visits or with very few people – a more intimate sort of thing" (*Christ is Passing By*, 139).

Five days later he went to Vitoria and prayed before the white statue of our Lady that presides over the whole Cathedral in its marble shrine. On October 22 he crossed over to France to greet Our Lady of Lourdes.

Ever since the Council of Ephesus, which solemnly proclaimed our Lady as Mother of God, shrines of our Lady have proliferated in the East and West. Popular imagination has expressed its love and affection for her in hundreds of titles. And that trail of love was what St Josemaria sought on his journeys.

In 1971 he went to Portugal again. In April he crossed the great open space in front of the shrine at Fatima and knelt at the feet of the statue, which also traveled from place to place in a petition for peace among nations. He said, "This is the land of our Lady, where she has chosen to show her love for mankind. I have come once more to beg her not to abandon us, to take care of the Church, to take care of all of us."

He also visited the shrine of Our Lady of Loreto, to whose protection he entrusted the Work in especially difficult times. Every time his path took him to that district of Italy he always climbed the hill where laurels still grow. And he smiled and told our Lady "We've come back to thank you yet again."

Extract from the book *Tiempo de Caminar*, Ana Sastre, Madrid: Rialp, 1989, pp. 5-4-508.