



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

## Founder of Opus Dei

[Home](#) - [Documentation](#) - [Accounts](#) - The Rose of Rialp: November 21/22, 1937

## The Rose of Rialp: November 21/22, 1937

*John F. Coverdale and François Gondrand*

In 1936, with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, religious persecution reached new depths of violence, and Fr Josemaria Escriva was obliged to go into hiding, finding refuge in several successive places in Madrid. For the time being he had to lay aside his projects for spreading Opus Dei's apostolate to other countries.

On November 19, 1937, he and some of the other faithful of Opus Dei began the journey that was to take them over the Pyrenees into Andorra, in order to re-enter the part of Spain where the Church was not being persecuted.

It was not an easy decision for Fr Escriva to leave Madrid. His spiritual children urged him to do so, to save his life. He allowed himself to be persuaded, since in the other zone of Spain he would be free to continue doing Opus Dei and would be able to re-establish contact with many students he knew, who were fighting on the front lines. Isidoro Zorzano would stay on in Madrid and keep in touch with the other people of Opus Dei there and with his family. Vicente Rodriguez Casado, Alvaro del Portillo and Jose Maria Gonzalez Barredo would stay in the various embassies where they had taken refuge.

Pedro Casciaro, Francisco Botella and Miguel Fisac, together with Fr Escriva, Jose Maria Albareda and Juan Jimenez Vargas, spent the night of November 21, 1937, in what had been the rectory of the parish church of Pallerols, a hamlet located a mile or two from Vilaro. Both the church and the rectory had been sacked. Their guide led them to a small room on the upper floor whose only window had been boarded up and whose floor was covered with straw.

By the flickering light of a tallow candle, Casciaro saw an anxious, dejected expression on Fr Escriva's face that he had never seen before. Fr Escriva was arguing passionately, but quietly, with Jimenez Vargas. Botella, who was closer and could hear part of their conversation, told Casciaro that Fr Escriva felt he should not abandon the members of the Work who were facing danger in Madrid and that he wanted to return to the capital.

Fr Escriva spent the night in prayer, sobbing quietly, torn between the need for freedom to carry out Opus Dei and exercise his priestly ministry, and the sense that he should share the fate of the members of the Work and his family members who were still in Madrid. Amid extreme inner turmoil, he did something he had never done before – request an extraordinary sign to resolve his dilemma. Moved by his devotion to the Blessed Virgin, who is invoked as the Mystical Rose, he prayed that our Lady would show him which way he should go by means of a specific sign that he laid down for her: he asked her to give him a gilded rose if God wanted him to continue the attempt to cross over to the other zone of Spain.

When the others awakened the next morning, Fr Escriva remained deeply distressed. During the night, when Fr Escriva had protested that he did not have the strength to make it through the mountains, Jimenez Vargas had told him, “We are going to take you to the other side, dead or alive.” But this morning, neither Jimenez Vargas nor anyone else said anything. Fr Escriva left the room alone, probably to pray in the vandalized church. When he returned, his face was radiant with joy and peace. In his hand he held a gilded wooden rose. In 1936, when the militia sacked the church, they had torn down the carved and gilded wooden altarpiece and carried it outside to burn. The rose, which had probably formed part of the frame of roses encircling the image of Our Lady of the Rosary, had survived. Fr Escriva saw it as the sign he had requested.

Straight away he asked the others to prepare what was necessary for celebrating Mass. Seeing the change in him – they had all heard him sobbing during the night – they realized that something extraordinary had happened to him, but none of them asked him any questions. After Mass they resumed their trek towards the Pyrenees. Fr Escriva walked with firm steps, carrying the gilded rose.

Fr Escriva rarely spoke of this event. When asked about the rose, he would usually change the subject or limit himself to commenting that our Lady is the mystical rose. Fr Del Portillo, his closest collaborator and first successor, explained why Fr Escriva did not usually talk about this or the other extraordinary graces he received: “First of all, out of humility, since he was the protagonist of these events, the one who received God’s special graces, his ‘caresses’, of which there have been many in the Work’s history. Second, he didn’t want even his children to know about these spiritual divine favors, so that we would all know and understand that we should do Opus Dei, not because of *miracles*, but because it is God’s will.”

**Extracts from *Uncommon Faith: The Early Years of Opus Dei*, by John F. Coverdale, and *At God's Pace*, by François Gondrand.**