

St Josemaría's first journey to Rome

Madrid, June 19, 1946 –

Rome, June 23, 1946



St Josemaria left Madrid early in the afternoon of Wednesday June 19. The car, a little Lancia, was driven by Miguel Chorniqué. They spent that night in a hotel in Saragossa.



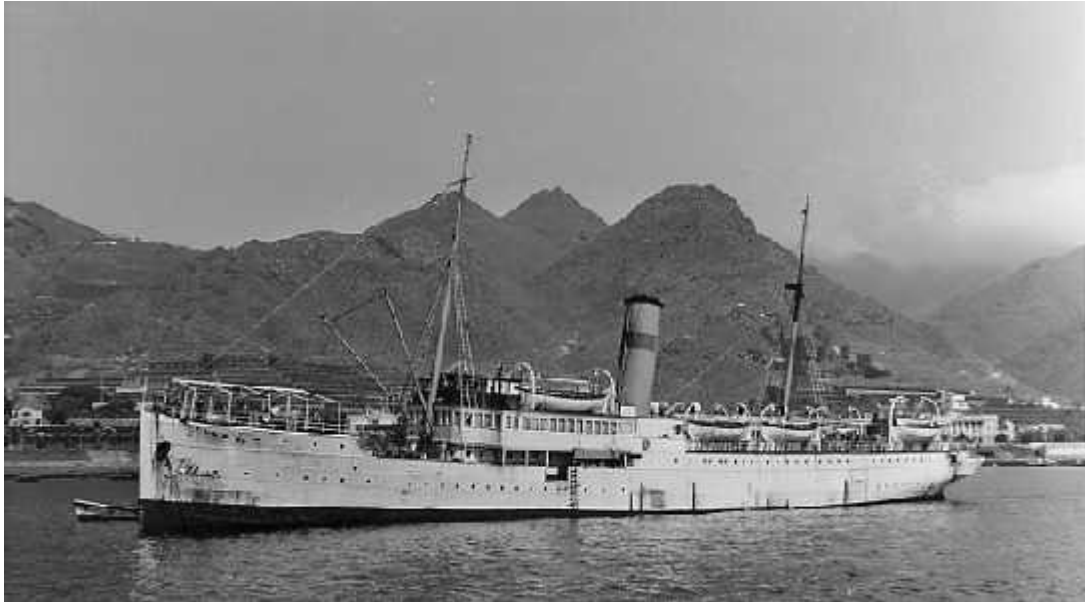
The next day, June 20, was the feast of Corpus Christi. As was his habit, St Josemaría went to pray at the shrine of Our Lady of Pilar.



On the way to Barcelona, that same day, they went to the Monastery of Our Lady of Montserrat to beg her for her protection, and to greet Abbott Escarré, a close friend of St Josemaria's.



In the morning of June 21 St Josemaría visited the shrine of Our Lady of Ransom in Barcelona. It was a visit from a son who sought from his Mother, “almighty in her petition”, all the support, strength and light he would need.



A little before six o'clock that evening, with the cargo loaded, the passengers on board, the post taken in and the documentation checked, the ship, the *J. J. Sister*, began to move out of the harbor. This was a 1000-ton vessel first registered in 1896.



They arrived in port in Genoa, Italy, six hours late, on June 22.



They disembarked at 11.30 p.m. St Josemaría and his companions got through passport control and customs as quickly as they could, while Don Alvaro del Portillo and Salvador Canals awaited them eagerly.



On Sunday June 23, 1946, St Josemaría and Don Alvaro said Mass at 7.30 in the morning in a nearby church, and then set off for Rome in a hired car.



They stopped for lunch at Viareggio.



It rained over the whole of Italy that day. Throughout the journey St Josemaría prayed for the Pope. He felt an ever-growing impatience to reach Rome, the Eternal City. When he caught sight of the dome of St Peter's silhouetted on the horizon in the twilight that evening, he was visibly moved, and said the Creed aloud.



They finally arrived at Number 9, Piazza della Città Leonina, at about 9 o'clock that evening. The apartment, rented by Don Alvaro shortly before St Josemaría came to Rome, was on the top floor of the building and had an open gallery, a sort of roofed terrace, which looked over the Bernini colonnade into St Peter's Square. Close by, they could see the lighted window of the Pope's private library. The sight of it affected St Josemaría deeply and kept him awake: while the others went to bed, exhausted by the long journey, he remained on the terrace all night long in prayer.



In memory of his trip, Pope Pius XII gave St Josemaría a signed photograph of himself, on which he had written: "To our beloved son José María Escrivá de Balaguer, Founder of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, with a special blessing. June 28, 1946. Pius P.P. XII."

On October 21, 1946, St Josemaría went to Barcelona again to thank Our Lady of Ransom personally for her loving intercession on behalf of the canonical path of Opus Dei. He remembered this advocacy, Our Lady of Ransom, with gratitude from then on, and it had a special place in his heart, together with Our Lady of Pilar in Saragossa, where he was ordained to the priesthood, Sonsoles, Loreto, Guadalupe and others. A bas-relief at the shrine now commemorates his prayer there.

