

La Razón October 6, 2002

"A sowing of holiness," an article published in Madrid on the day of the canonization of Saint Josemaría

I met Josemaría Escrivá on November 2, 1948, in Madrid. He was surrounded by university students, in a family style get-together. I was a young student at the time, and I was surprised at his cheerfulness, his enthusiasm and his good humor. He spoke about various topics of ordinary life, and also about the need for Christians to pray and to be faithful to their status as God's children. And he encouraged us to convert our daily life into a sowing of holiness and apostolate.

When the get-together ended, he asked three of us if we would like to take a ride with him to Molinoviejo, a retreat house near Segovia. At one point during the trip, after having spoken about many different things, he began to sing, with the naturalness one would find in a family. I recall that I was quite surprised. The songs were popular love songs, like those heard on the radio. One that I'll never forget went: "I have a love that fills my heart with joy..." Between songs he would ask questions and make comments. He told us that we should always be very happy, since we are children of God. And he encouraged us to speak with God with these songs of human love, directing them to our Lord and to our Lady.

Two years later in Rome, when our paths crossed one day, he asked

me for something that caught my attention. I saw his constant effort to keep the presence of God, his eagerness to live united to the Heart of Christ while working, resting or chatting with us. Nevertheless, for a soul so deeply in love as his, as for anyone with a clean human love, this seemed insufficient to him. He wanted to love God with all the strength of his soul. "My lack of piety today makes me ashamed," he confided to me with simplicity. (I wasn't even twenty at the time!) "Help me to make reparation."

Our prayer, our praise for God, he taught us, has to be raised to heaven constantly, "like the beating of our heart." He suggested that we treat God with the ardent love that we saw in many of our friends who thought constantly about the girl they love and did everything possible to please her. He said that "it shouldn't bother us when, as often as necessary, we act like the prodigal son, asking for forgiveness with sincere sorrow and returning. This pleases our Father God because he knows the poor material we are made of. Therefore always return, and return with love, because God is waiting for us."

At times people ask me how this holy priest managed to carry out the immense task that God asked of him, spreading the message of the universal call to holiness to the far reaches of the globe. For it is obvious that God blessed his faithfulness with abundant fruit. Thousands of souls on every continent, from every social group and profession, healthy and sick, young and old, have begun to live their Christian life with new

vigor and to participate more assiduously in the means of grace thanks to his preaching. His teachings have helped stir people's consciences in many cultural, artistic, educational and social environments throughout the world. His message on the sanctification of work has opened up inspiring horizons to so many people. His priestly zeal has helped countless priests, religious and lay people to respond more generously to God, to collaborate actively in the needs of their parishes, to support the teachings of the Pope and the bishops, to defend the culture of life, and to foster justice and charity towards the most needy. He taught people to work well, with responsibility, with the conviction that work can and should be prayer, conversation with the Blessed Trinity and service to mankind.

How was he able to do all this? He did it through his abandonment to God the Father, through his trust in grace and his constant dialogue with our Lord, and through recourse to the intercession of the Mother of God, the all-powerful supplicant. And he did it through his union with the Cross, and his continuous struggle in little things that led him to begin and begin again day after day: a smile, an act of love, a small service, a door closed carefully, the determination to repeatedly rise above the small annoyances that crop up every day.

And together with this, was his joyful acceptance of illness—he suffered for years from a severe case of diabetes—and of the suffering that comes from being misunderstood. I am not idealizing his life, because I have witnessed his struggle, his

exhaustion, his first reactions of anger at times when confronted by something that pained him. But he always strove to convert these incidents of daily life alongside others into an epic poem, into heroic verse that he directed towards God.

Some words of his, as I reread them now in a new light, especially console me: "I will always pray for you." And he continued: "Let us serve God, who has so few people serving him. Let us serve him in the middle of the street, each one in his own activities, loving everyone, giving clear doctrine and knowing how to forgive, because God is continually forgiving each one of us. And to learn how to forgive, go to confession, with love and devotion. There you will find peace and the strength needed to win out in your struggles and to love."

"I will always pray for you." During these days I haven't stopped giving thanks to God and asking the Holy Spirit that his canonization might move the hearts of many thousands of people, Christians and non-Christians, believers and non-believers, urging them to undertake an interior conversion that will bring about a new sowing of justice and peace.

Yes, this is the miracle that I am asking from him: the miracle of peace, peace among nations, in social relationships, in families, in each soul. Above all, peace with God, because otherwise peace will never take root in man's life.

And I also ask Saint Josemaría to help us to keep carrying out, shoulder

to shoulder with so many people of good will, a joyful sowing of holiness and apostolate, just as he smilingly encouraged us on that day back in 1948, a day that seems so recent in my memory, when I first met him.

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"A saint who loved the world," an article published in Barcelona.

People from all walks of life have come to Rome to be with Pope John Paul II during the canonization of Josemaría Escrivá. I must confess that I find this very moving. During these weeks I have heard many stories of generosity, of service, of help offered to those who are sick or poor. I have heard of indigenous people from Cañete, in Peru, farmers from Nigeria and Cameroon, non-Christian families from Hong Kong; people of all social levels and from all parts of the world, who have felt personally called to come to Rome. Their number and diversity, reflecting those who could not come, show that this priest, whom the Pope has now decided to solemnly proclaim a saint, is a living and active model of holiness. He is one of the gifts granted by the Spirit to the Church in our time.

I met Saint Josemaría on November 2, 1948, in Madrid. I was sixteen years old at the time. We were in a family get-together, and he invited me and two others to accompany him by car to visit a conference and retreat house that was

being renovated, near Segovia. The trip was a joyful and pleasant conversation with him. He told us that we should always be joyful, since we are sons of God. I was surprised by his cheerfulness and naturalness. At one point, I got car-sick. He came to my assistance as though we had known each other for a long time, like a father who is not repelled by something that happens to one of his children.

Later God willed that I should live and work at his side for twenty-five years, from 1950 until his death in 1975. I am very thankful for this great gift. His daily life taught me that being close to God fills one's soul with joy. From the first moment, I realized that he truly loved God at every moment, without waiting for special occasions. I was surprised at how his love seemed to grow each day. I saw in his reactions (and his life contained abundant suffering, sickness and misunderstanding) that he found God's mercy at every moment. I think God wanted to make use of Saint Josemaría to remind the world with new emphasis of this consoling truth of the Christian faith: that God is our Father. This conviction, which fills one's soul and leads it along paths of peace and interior freedom, was the foundation of his daily life, lived minute by minute. He strove, and at times it cost him real effort, to have a constant dealing with God that was filled with tenderness. This direct and simple relationship is the exact opposite of the false idea, as common today as in the past, of an abstract, distant God. His constant concern was that everyone might freely experience the joy of God's fatherly