

at such opposition, but seek to overcome it with the great Gospel remedy for all opposition: love. "The world is very small," writes Blessed Josemaría, "when love is great."

It is also here that we are reminded of those words of Our Lord Jesus Christ: "if anyone wants to be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). When in 1943, Josemaría Escrivá founded a society for priests, he gave it the title of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. He certainly knew the meaning of those words of Our Divine Lord, in the harsh contradictions he had to face as well as in his own poor health and suffering. But he knew that it was through the cross that salvation has come into the world, and he never failed to grasp that cross as being the instrument that would bring him to his place in that great multitude from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

It is to be with him there, dear brothers and sisters, that we are called. There is a place there marked out for each one of us. The Lord has gone ahead to prepare a place for us. It is reserved for us and the wonderful thing is that no-one can take it from us. The only one who can deny me that place is myself! Blessed Josemaría has shown us all a way to live that makes sure we do not deny ourselves this heritage which is ours from baptism, a way to holiness in the midst of our daily life, whatever our social status or calling, a way to be in this world, but not overcome by it, of making known to others what we have seen and heard, awakened, and inspired by the Holy Spirit, under the guidance of the Magisterium of the Church, serving the truth in love.

Let me conclude with the words of Blessed Josemaría himself: "Jesus is not satisfied with a wavering assent. He expects, and has a right to expect, that we advance resolutely, unyielding in the face of difficulties . . . You will convince me that you sincerely want to achieve your goals when I see you go forward unwaveringly. Do good and keep reviewing your basic attitudes to the jobs that occupy you each moment. Practise the virtue of justice, right where you are, in your normal surroundings, even though you may end up exhausted. Foster happiness among those around you by cheerfully serving the people you work with and by striving to carry out your job as perfectly as you can, showing understanding, smiling, having a Christian approach to life. And do everything for God, thinking of his glory, with your sights set high and longing for the definitive homeland, because there is no other goal worthwhile." (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 211).

We are not alone as we seek to walk this way. Our Lord is always with us; our heavenly mother Mary, whom Josemaría loved so much, watches over us tenderly; and now we have Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer to intercede for us. Let us walk then with faith and love towards that heavenly home which Christ our Lord has prepared for us, unworthy servants though we are: "In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us." (*Eph 1:7-8*)

Given in the Basilica of St Mary Major, Rome, 19th May 1992

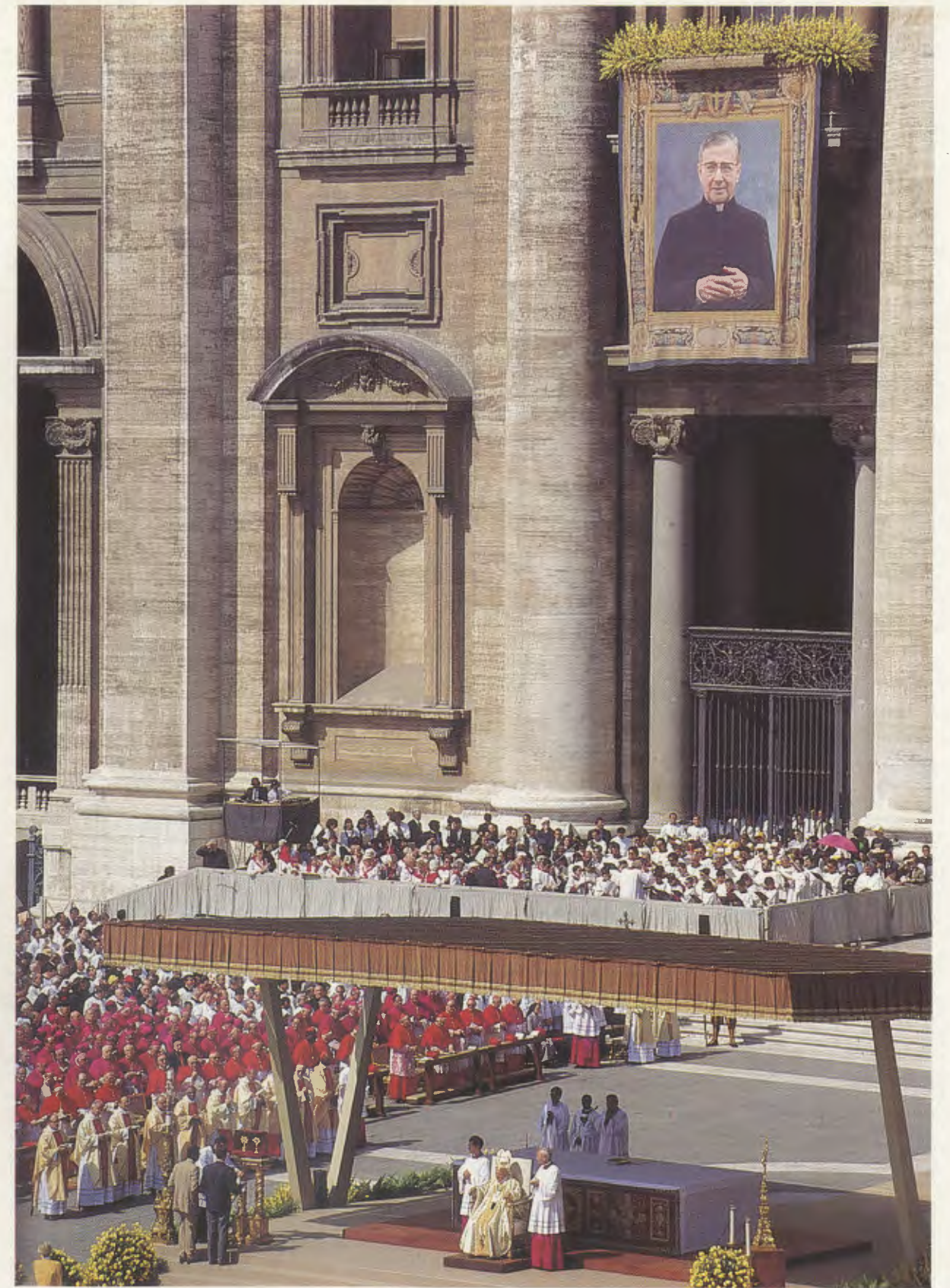
PRAYER

O God, you granted countless graces to your priest Blessed Josemaría, choosing him as a most faithful instrument to found Opus Dei, a way of sanctification in daily work and the fulfilment of the ordinary duties of a Christian. Grant that I also may learn to turn all the circumstances and events of my life into opportunities to love you and serve the Church, the Pope and all souls, with joy and simplicity, lighting up the paths of the earth with faith and love. Deign to grant the canonisation of Blessed Josemaría and, through his intercession, grant me the favour I request . . . (here make your petition). Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father.

Office of the Vice-postulator of Opus Dei in Britain, 6 Orme Court, London W2 4RL

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Blessed JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ Founder of Opus Dei

Josemaría Escrivá – a special charisma

Mgr William Gordon Wheeler, Emeritus Bishop of Leeds, England

The 26th of June 1993 was the eighteenth anniversary of the passing of the Founder of Opus Dei, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. Masses in celebration of his dies natalis were celebrated all over the world.

In this special English language issue of the Newsletter we include a moving homily by Mgr Gordon Wheeler, Emeritus Bishop of Leeds, which is notable for the value of its personal testimony. It was delivered in Westminster Cathedral on that day to about two thousand people.

Testimonies

The newly proclaimed Blessed has a special significance for the whole Church . . . He brings superabundant and irresistible joy in the faith, because he not only transmits a doctrine but an inspiration of faith and love, a fire that burns in him and this is the same fire that Christ came to bring to this earth.

*Cardinal J Willebrands
Emeritus President of the Pontifical Council
for the Promotion of Christian Unity
and Chamberlain of the College of Cardinals*

For those of us who have known the Work for a long time, this has been but a confirmation of the spirit which we have always known to be holy. The Church has ratified it by placing our Father on the altars. It is like a piece of Heaven to see this event. I feel truly impressed by it all, despite all the discomforts. These do not seem to bother us.

*Marie Flynn
Ireland*

I am very grateful to Monsignor Escrivá: we have seven children, and five of them are members of the Work. This is something that makes us very happy. All of them are present here. Seeing this multitude, perceiving sanctity and all the love of God. This is truly inspiring! At least several hundred of us have come from the United States. We even appeared on the news. The ABC network did a survey in the streets and they stopped to ask me; they wanted to know the reason behind the criticisms. I explained to them that saints were always persecuted: the Devil is always angry each time God chooses a person from whom the world and the Church can benefit.

*Charlotte Sands
United States*

He invited many university students to a meeting, but only three of us showed up. At the end he invited us to attend Benediction, and as he was raising the monstrance to give us the blessing, without taking his eyes away from Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, Monsignor Escrivá—as he himself told us later—he saw three thousand, three hundred thousand, three million . . . people of all races and colours though we were only three then. Comparing the two events, what I have witnessed today seems to be a reward for his gigantic and heroic faith.

*Juan Jiménez Vargas
Spain*

Since preparing this Newsletter, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, died in Rome on 23rd of March 1994. We ask readers of the Newsletter to pray for the repose of his soul, and wish to put on record here our deep appreciation and gratitude to Bishop Alvaro for playing such an important part in promoting the Cause of Blessed Josemaría.

Welcome to the special Mass of Thanksgiving which rounds off the anniversary of the Beatification of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei which took place on May 17th last year.

Today is the 18th anniversary of his death. He has played a great part in the lives of vast numbers of people. And today we ask his intercession for our perseverance in striving to Christianise the civilisation of our time. And so, dearly beloved, let us in a moment's silence ask God's forgiveness for all our sins as we prepare to offer this Holy Sacrifice.

May 17th 1992, will always be remembered for the Beatification of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá and Blessed Josephine Bakhita (a Canossian nun) by His Holiness Pope John Paul II. Doubtless there are many here today who were in Rome on that memorable occasion when the relentless sun poured down on us and that smiling portrait of Blessed Josemaría looked down from the façade of St Peter's. For the hundreds of thousands present the outdoor Mass on the steps of the basilica was the only solution.

I had flown to Rome, like so many others, because I had long intended to be present at the beatification of this man whom I had been privileged to meet on a number of occasions. I think our first get-together was right here: in the Administrator's quarters at the back of this Cathedral, in 1959. I still have—and greatly treasure—a leather-bound volume of *The Way* which he gave me and in which he wrote in his own hand. Later on, in Rome, he gave me one of those little iron donkeys, saying: "Put that on the mantelpiece in your study, and every time you look at it, it will remind you to pray for me."

Another get-together which I remember during the last two years of the Second Vatican Council was a luncheon party of bishops in the Viale Bruno Buozzi. Some of them were tackling him on a number of points. He broke down any resistance or misunderstanding by the joyful love he radiated. I felt I had met a very holy person who was a very human person.

As we waited for the entry of the Holy Father and the beginning of the Mass, I could not help recalling all these little memories of being with him: his great love for the Church and his great love too for the priesthood. He had a special affection in that regard for the Curé of Ars and St John Bosco, the Founder of the Salesian Order.

It was a time also to think of the many happenings which guided his life. He had been born the second

of six children: a united family of deep devotion to their Faith. It was however a childhood marked by many sorrows of death and a certain poverty. At the age of sixteen Josemaría experienced a kind of experience which was to lead him to the priesthood and after years of study he was ordained priest in March 1925. His first appointment was as curate in a poor country parish. From the beginning he loved his pastoral duties especially the catechism classes and the teaching and helping of the poor. At the same time he continued studying Law but also gave classes in Latin and Canon Law.

Two years later he was in Madrid for further studies but also a new pastorate all over the city in the service of the sick and the poor. At this time he prepared thousands for First Confession and First Holy Communion. And from the start he had an ardent devotion to the Blessed Virgin. I think today of the Shrine he created in Torreciudad. Then came that moment, on the 2nd October 1928, when during a retreat God made clear to him what he was to do with the rest of his priestly life. "He was to urge men (and later women too) in all walks of life to seek holiness and carry out an apostolate in the midst of the world, through the exercise of their profession or trade, without a change of life." At first the new apostolate had no name, until somebody said to him: "How is that work of God coming along?" And so it became Opus Dei.

Then there were all those years of the Civil War in Spain: the escape from the Republican zone and the new beginning in Burgos. And all the time Opus Dei was developing. The war in Spain and the Second World War impeded its growth in other countries. And it was only in the postwar period that the phenomenal growth began.

He followed the beginnings in each country very closely and in 1946 moved to Rome so that he could do so more easily. Opus Dei received a welcome in the Eternal City. Pope Pius XII appointed him a Domestic Prelate. And he lived close to John XXIII and Paul VI. Opus Dei, under his inspiration, was to play an important part in the true understanding of Vatican II. In March 1975 he kept his Golden Jubilee of Priesthood and three months later, on June 26th he suddenly died. Already Opus Dei was in all five continents and comprised 60,000 members of eighty nationalities.

The whole atmosphere of the Beatification Mass was one of a joyful tranquility and a deepening of

Faith despite the presence of great evils in our times. That lovely moment of the singing of *Christus Vincit* and the universal applause that followed it, made one think of Our Lord's words in St John's gospel (16:33) "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Next morning, I am told, the Holy Father said: "You are filled with joy at the beatification of Josemaría because you trust that his being raised to the altars will be of great benefit to the Church. I too share that confidence." And he went on to quote from the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (17) the following words: "the entire people of God, and the lay faithful in particular, can find at this moment new models of holiness and a new witness of heroic virtue lived in the ordinary everyday circumstances of human existence." He was referring to the Prelature of Opus Dei but also to movements like Chiara Lubich's inspiration in the Focolare Movement.

It was a great sorrow to me, because of other engagements, I had to fly back to London that night. And so I missed the remarkable celebrations which followed next day and for many days to follow. I had long known Monsignor Alvaro del Portillo as the Founder's closest aide who was unanimously chosen to succeed him. He has indeed been in Opus Dei since 1935 and was one of the first three priests ordained in 1944. When the present Holy Father made Opus Dei a personal prelature, he appointed Mgr. Portillo its first Prelate. It was fitting that next day he was the chief concelebrant of the great Mass on the steps of St Peter's.

If I were asked to underline the outstanding influence of Blessed Josemaría and of Opus Dei on the universal Church in our time, I think I would approach it like this. In the 13th chapter of St Matthew's gospel, and following His discourse on the Parables, Our Lord commended the householder who brings out from his storeroom, new things as well as old: the *Nova* and the *Vetera*. For Blessed Josemaría, the *Vetera* were the great unchanging fundamentals of the Faith: the Faith once delivered to the Saints: Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption and Church (with the Holy Spirit as the principle of its life and Christ's Mother, now become its Mother), the Petrine endowments, the Scriptures, the early Fathers, the 21 Councils of the Church. In other words all that the new Universal Catechism proclaims today. The *Vetera*.

And now for the *Nova*. Blessed Josemaría lived through the 21st General Council of the Church. Those of us who took part in it know that it was a great spiritual experience. We knew the almost

tangible presence of the Holy Spirit. But we also knew that it was founded on the wisdom of the ages. A lot of people, however, seemed to regard it as the only Council that ever happened. But we knew that it could not have happened at all unless Vatican I and Trent and all the other 18 Councils of the Church going back to the Acts of the Apostles and the first Council of Jerusalem, had gone before it and indeed prepared the way for it. Blessed Josemaría knew that it grew on this *Vetera*. And he together with Opus Dei have played quite a notable part in the right understanding of Vatican II, and continue to do so. And that is a great enrichment to the Universal Church.

I think also of three other contributions that Blessed Josemaría, and Opus Dei, have made to the life of our Church in our time, which I would place under the heading *Nova*. The first is your Founder's anticipation of the great new emphasis in Vatican II on the role of the laity in the life of the Church, and the responsibilities of each one of the People of God to proclaim the Good News. This inspiration was the very heart of his apostolate. Doubtless it played its part in the Council's decree and inspired the Synod which debated the whole subject and the magnificent Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World, known as *Christifideles Laici*.

Secondly, Blessed Josemaría gave a new understanding of the meaning of "Work", yes, of manual work and all other forms of work, professional and otherwise. You will doubtless recall one of his homilies *Working for God*. Let me quote a few lines of it:

"From the beginning of creation man has had to work. This is not something that I have invented. It is enough to turn to the opening pages of the Bible. There you can read that, before sin entered into the world, and in its wake death, punishment, and misery, God made Adam from the clay of the earth, and created for him and his descendants this beautiful world we live in, ut operaretur et custodiret illum, so that we might cultivate it and look after it."

"We must be convinced therefore that work is a magnificent reality, and that it has been imposed on us as an inexorable law which, one way or another, binds everyone, even though some may try to seek exemption from it. Make no mistake about it. Man's duty to work is not a consequence of original sin, nor is it just a discovery of modern times. It is an indispensable means that God has entrusted to us

here on earth. It is meant to fill out our days and make us sharers in God's creative power. It enables us to earn our living, and at the same time, to reap 'the fruits of eternal life', for 'man is born to work as the birds are born to fly'."

And thirdly, your Founder enriched the Church with a new understanding of holiness, based upon and following from the lay vocation and the new valuation given to work. And this is the very heart of all his teaching. For it is no longer to be thought of as something unattainable. It can be and is achieved in all the ordinary aspects of life. "Holiness is a goal everyone can reach." Work too is a means of personal holiness and apostolate. It takes on a central role in Christian sanctification and apostolate. As the Secretary of State, Cardinal Sodano, wrote in the Apostolic Brief: "The Founder of Opus Dei saw clearly the unlimited apostolic possibilities of the ordinary life of the faithful, when guided by the desire to sanctify their ordinary work and all human activities and situations. Hence his insistence on the need to blend together, in a harmonious unity of life, one's prayer, work, and apostolate. *'There is just one life made of flesh and spirit. And it is this life which has to become in both soul and body, holy and filled with God . . . Our age needs to give back to matter and to the most trivial occurrences and situations their noble and original meaning. It needs to restore them to the service of the kingdom of God'* (Conversations, 114)." This is a spirituality which should lead to contemplation of the highest degree.

Over the years I have followed with great interest the development of Opus Dei in our own country but also in other places too. I first met a member of Opus Dei here in Britain about forty-five years ago. He is now a priest of the Prelature in Seville. At that time he was a layman studying at the University of London. I saw him on a number of occasions at the Newman Centre on Portland Square. When I became chaplain to London University in 1950-54, I saw much more of him and learned a great deal about Opus Dei from him. So when Netherhall House, a residence for students was started, I used to recommend students to go there. This was my first contact with a house of Opus Dei, but since then I have seen similar houses in many different places.

A few years ago I was in Peru and visited a house of the Work in Lima. I was interested to see how Opus Dei had penetrated to such very remote parts of the world and taken root in peoples of such different backgrounds. This adaptability, I think, is part of the

genius of the Founder.

The thing that always pleases me about Opus Dei houses is the spirit of civilisation—the right kind of civilisation. There is no excessive grandeur; there is always a tasteful understatement, and yet a real Christianising of the civilisation of our time. All over the world these houses stand out most notably in this way.

A family spirit is always noticeable. This is something I appreciated too. It is a spirit of great personal discipline and integrity. The Founder of Opus Dei had got the right balance. Blessed Josemaría once took me into his private Chapel in his Roman house. I was very surprised to see that the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the most beautiful hanging Pyx I had ever seen, which was very unusual in those days despite many centuries of tradition. I asked him how he had been given permission for this. His reply was that the Holy Father had given him a special privilege. I have often wondered since whether it was Pius XII, John XXIII, or Paul VI who had accorded him that privilege? It was executed with great reverence as well as good taste which is something that is mirrored in the Opus Dei houses in which I have stayed. Nothing is too good for the Lord and in the other furnishings there is good taste without triumphalism.

To you, the members of the Prelature of Opus Dei in our country today, I recall the message which our Holy Father Pope John Paul II proclaimed in his homily at the Mass of Beatification. You will remember that he began with the text (*Acts 14:22*): "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." That was an indelible ingredient of the life of Blessed Josemaría as it has been of all the saints. After all, Our Lord has called us to follow Him and to take up our cross to follow Him. And the Holy Father later on spoke of "the hidden suffering by which God purifies and sanctifies his chosen ones." You will remember how he quoted also from the "Meditations" of your Founder: "*To carry the cross is to identify oneself with Christ, to be Christ, and therefore to be a son of God.*" Remember nonetheless that Blessed Josemaría was one of the most joyful persons we have ever encountered. We need to develop that special charisma of his life: that wonderful smile and overwhelming embrace which sprang from his love of God and all creation.

Blessed Josemaría, make us joyful.

Given in Westminster Cathedral, 26th June 1993

Christ in the Heart of Human Activities

Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy,
President of the Pontifical Council
for the Promotion of Christian Unity

“He was astonished, and all that were with him at the catch of fish which they had taken.”
(Luke 5:9)

We are gathered here this morning from many parts of the world: from the United States of America, Great Britain, Ireland, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand and several other countries—a large gathering, yet just a small part of that vast multitude of pilgrims from every nation and people who filled to overflowing St. Peter’s Square last Sunday for the beatification of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer and Blessed Josephine Bakhita.

It seemed to me—and I am sure that you also were well aware of this—that last Sunday the gathering in St Peter’s Square was a vivid reflection of that wonderful scene described for us in the book of Revelations, when St John saw before the throne of God: “a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They were crying out in a loud voice, saying: Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev 7:9-10)

This is that same multitude of whom St John speaks later in the Book of Revelations, Chapter 19:6-7, whose voice “was like the sound of many waters as they cried: Hallelujah . . . the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory.”

Yes, let us give him the glory, for this great multitude is not there through their own merits, but because of the Lamb, the lamb who was slain, the Lamb in whose blood they have been cleansed. They are that multitude symbolised in the gospel of St Luke, Chapter 5, who are brought to shore in the net which Peter has let down at the word of the Master, who is none other than the Lamb of God. O blessed indeed those who are invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb! (Rev 19:9)

And among those so blessed—we have it now on the Apostolic Authority itself—is the founder of Opus Dei, Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, and we have come here this morning to give thanks to God for this solemn declaration. To give thanks and to reflect for a moment on what this means for us, who are called to be part of that same multitude before the throne of God, to take our place with Blessed Josemaría and all the saints at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The Church places before us, in this authoritative manner, men and women like Josemaría Escrivá and Josephine Bakhita, to be for us models of holiness and sources of strength on our pilgrim way. Each one of us has a story to tell, an example to give; each one encourages us by the way in which they responded to the same call that is now ours.

Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer has a message especially for the lay men and women of the world, a message that is at the very heart of the Second Vatican Council, but which he was spreading already before the Council. There has for long been in the Church the call to leave this world and dedicate oneself entirely to the search for holiness in the religious life, a vocation that still retains all its validity and beauty.

But of course not everyone is called to such a life. The world must go on; there are other vocations given by God and there is above all a vocation that comes from the very sacrament of baptism itself, a vocation to sanctity and to mission.

We read, in fact, in the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*): “In the Church there is diversity of service but unity of purpose.

Christ conferred on the apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. But the Laity, too, share in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own role to play in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world. They exercise a genuine apostolate by their activity on behalf of bringing the gospel and holiness to men, and on behalf of penetrating and perfecting the temporal sphere of things through the spirit of the gospel” (no. 1).

In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, the Council Fathers remind us that this call to apostolate is intimately linked with the call to holiness or sanctity. Let me quote just a few lines of chapter 5 of that document, one of the most inspiring of all the Council statements: “The followers of Christ are called by God . . . They are justified in the Lord Jesus, and through baptism . . . they truly become sons of God and sharers in the Divine nature. In this way they are really made holy. Then, too, by God’s gifts they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness which they have received. They are warned by the Apostle to live ‘as becomes saints’ (Eph 5:3), and to put on ‘God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience’ (Col 3:12) and to possess the fruits of the Spirit unto holiness” (no. 40).

This same vision, which comes to us from the Council Fathers guided as they most certainly were by the Holy Spirit, was already seen in 1928 by Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, when he realised that what God wanted of him was to open up a new vocational path within the Church, aimed at promoting among people of all social conditions the search for holiness and the carrying out of apostolate through the sanctification of their ordinary work in the midst of the world, without changing their state in life. As we have read recently, Divine Providence “has reserved for this century, nearing its end, the presence of a priest and founder who fully embodied one of the fundamental teachings of Vatican Council II, the universal call to sanctity” (Declaration of Cardinal Angelo Felici and Archbishop Edward Novak—Vatican Information Service, 12th May 1992).

It was in this desire “to put Christ in the heart of all human activities” that Blessed Josemaría found the key to a life of holiness in the midst of ordinary daily life. On the one hand, he stressed that the zeal for eternal salvation—one’s own and that of others—was not to be a disengagement from the world. On the other hand, his vision of Christianity rejected this as being “simply a collection of devout practices which fail—he says—to realize the connection between them and the circumstances of ordinary life, including the urgency to meet the needs of other people and remedy injustice” (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 98).

In an age when more and more followers of Christ are educated and often have the possibility of professional and university training, this vision has come as a special grace. Men and women see themselves in their work as cooperating with the Creator in His work; their work is in many ways their life; their sanctity cannot be divorced from this activity, but must be deeply related to it and find its perfection therein. I think that it is this balance of work and holiness, being in the world and yet being saints in the world, that is at the heart of the teaching of the founder of Opus Dei and which has had such an appeal to the men and women of our time: to be contemplatives in the midst of the world.

While this has been a vision for our time, it has not always been understood by the men and women of our time. Indeed the very idea has often been the object of severe criticism. The world in general accepts the priest as part of life, though often would want him to be about his Father’s business mainly in the sacristy. It doesn’t seem to mind too much if the lay man or woman goes to Mass on Sunday. It is content to see the disappearance from homes and public places of the Crucifix and other sacred images.

It is obvious then that it is going to react negatively, even violently, to the idea of men and women who seek to bring Christ into the heart of human activities, who seek to sanctify themselves and others by the witness they give in their daily lives. We should not be surprised