

asking for forgiveness every day for our own faults and forgiving others whenever necessary. Thus no one in the future will have to ask for forgiveness for our own blindness or hardness of heart.

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"Contemplation in the midst of the world," article published in the special edition of the Vatican newspaper

Saint Josemaría Escrivá: As soon as the canonization takes place, it will be very moving to put the adjective "Saint" for the first time in front of the name of the person to whom I owe more than anyone else on earth. Our Lord granted me the grace of being a witness to his holy life, day after day, for twenty-five years.

Among the characteristics that best describe Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, I would like to consider here just one: "unity of life." Spiritual theology employs this expression to describe the ideal, found in so many of the Fathers of the Church, of uniting the examples of both Martha and Mary, fusing action and contemplation, prayer and work. I use the term "work" here in a broad sense, including professional, family and civic duties. Unity of life stems from the Holy Spirit's action in a soul. It is much more than a purely human goal, the result of an ordered mind or efficient organization. In a certain

sense, it is a synonym for holiness, and therefore, a goal for all Christians.

The apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* underlines its importance in the context of the sanctification of ordinary life (see no. 17). It is only when our daily duties are lived in the light of such unity that they reveal themselves as so many occasions for union with God, as transfigured by grace. However, when we let ourselves be absorbed by the horizontal dimension of life, our daily activity leads to dispersion (among other reasons, because of the rhythm imposed by the very tasks that make it up). We find ourselves overcome by hurry and distraction, by the urgent need to find solutions to problems so pressing that they leave no space for other thoughts. The duties of the workplace try to rob time from family life. The standards of a consumer society seek to extinguish an ideal that calls for austerity and sacrifice. Economic needs absorb all of one's energies to the detriment of higher duties. Thus man's heart, exposed to such formidable pressures, runs the risk of being torn to pieces. On the contrary, when unity of life is present, the tensions to which we are exposed every day are brought into harmony, leaving our heart free to seek God.

To live alongside Josemaría Escrivá was for me a constant lesson in unity of life. All of his gestures and words and undertakings were explicitly directed towards God. They were born of faith and nourished by hope in God's help, seeking

only to serve Him. In Msgr. Escrivá one could see incarnated the goal expressed by these words from *The Way*: “A saying of a soul of prayer: in intentions, may Jesus be our aim; in affections, our Love; in conversation, our theme; in actions, our model.” Josemaría Escrivá stressed that, just as the human and the divine were united in Jesus, so should they be united in the life of each Christian, called to be another Christ, Christ himself: *alter Christus, ipse Christus*.

Consistency between faith and deeds

Besides his personal experience, constant reflection led him to grasp deeply the implications of unity of life. This unity entails above all consistency between faith and deeds, respecting the moral law without compromises in all the situations (family, professional, etc.) in which the Christian finds himself called to act. Deeply aware of the importance of the example of such conduct, the founder of Opus Dei saw in this consistency the key contribution that all the faithful are called upon to make to the building up of the Kingdom of God on earth. Precisely in this context, *Christifideles Laici* (no. 59) recalls the Council’s clear invitation to the laity to overcome any split between faith and conduct, “guided by the Spirit of the Gospel” in the fulfillment of their earthly duties (Pastoral const. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43).

Hence one can better understand why the founder of Opus Dei

insisted that the primary condition for sanctifying work is to work well, that is, not only diligently, but above all with a sense of justice and charity towards one’s neighbors, whether colleagues or clients, subordinates or superiors. “We have to work a lot on this earth and we must do our work well, since it is our daily tasks that we have to sanctify” (*Friends of God*, no. 202). An activity carried out with improvisation or superficiality is of no benefit to the common good, not only because of its intrinsic lack of worth, but above all because it can’t be offered to God. The search for perfection in work is inseparable from an expressly supernatural intention: “Let us never forget to do everything for God’s sake. If we were to do it for ourselves, out of pride, we would produce nothing but leaves; and no matter how luxuriant they were, neither God nor our fellow men would find any good in them.”

True unity between the various spheres in our life is restored when they are elevated, *in actu*, to the order of grace, that is, when they are referred here and now to God. “We Christians cannot resign ourselves” this holy priest wrote, “to leading a double life—our life must be a strong and simple unity into which all our actions converge” (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 126). For Saint Josemaría, attaining such a unity represented “an essential condition for those who are trying to sanctify themselves in the midst of the ordinary situations of their work and of their family and social relationships. Jesus does not allow any division here” (*Friends of God*, no. 165).

A fusion of work, apostolate and prayer

“Uniting professional work with ascetical struggle and with contemplation—something which might seem impossible but which, nevertheless, is necessary in order to contribute to reconciling the world with God—and transforming ordinary work into an instrument of personal sanctification and apostolate. Is not this a noble and great ideal for which it is worthwhile giving one’s life?” This passage, from one of the earliest writings of the founder of Opus Dei, shows the enormous distance that separates his vision of human life from a subjective search for one’s own perfection.

This distance is especially clear in the emphasis he places on apostolate, on reconciling the world with God. The active participation in Christ’s redemptive mission, proper to every baptized person and therefore intrinsic to each of one’s actions, should not only coexist with prayer and one’s normal daily occupations, but should be united with them. Perhaps one could say that these three dimensions, taken together, help to define the notion of secularity, a specific characteristic of the role of the laity in the Church’s mission. Secularity cannot be reduced to the laity’s presence in the world through professional work. In Josemaría Escrivá’s message, work (understood, I repeat, in a broad sense) is joined to apostolate, providing constant opportunities for personal apostolate. And the fusion of both these realities is strengthened by uniting them to ascetical struggle and prayer.

Transforming all one’s activity into prayer

I would like to pause here to consider a vital point: the effective desire to transform all one’s activities and concerns into an encounter with God, into prayer. Without this effort, a Christian’s work becomes indistinguishable from that of a person who is seeking only to obtain efficient results or to fulfill a duty. And it will fail to bear any apostolic fruit: “All that exterior activity is a waste of time, if you lack Love. It’s like sewing with a needle and no thread” (*The Way*, no. 967). Josemaría Escrivá helps us see the need to work with our feet firmly planted on the ground, but with our eyes raised to heaven (cf. *Friends of God*, no. 75).

From here stems the emergence of the contemplative dimension as the truly determining factor in the Christian’s action in the world. Work and apostolate acquire their true meaning through prayer. Their fruitfulness in helping to make the Kingdom of God a reality on earth depends on the fact that they are rooted in prayer and sustained by it: *ut cuncta nostra oratio et operatio a te semper incipiat, et per te coepta finiatur*. Moreover, the very structure of Christian activity requires that these realities be turned into prayer at every moment.

Therefore work and apostolate are prayer. And prayer, in turn, is apostolate and work.

Prayer is apostolate. “Opus Dei’s weapon,” he insisted, “is not work, but prayer” (Alvaro del Portillo, *Immersed in God*). How much Blessed

Josemaría prayed during his life! How much persevering supplication to God for the Church, the Pope, the bishops and priests of the world, for the religious, the seminaries, for all souls! Even reading the paper was for him an occasion to pray continually for the persons and countries mentioned in the various articles. He sowed the highways of Europe with Hail Marys. Whenever he met anyone, he had the custom of first directing a silent greeting to that person's guardian angel. We read in one of his homilies: "Apostolate is love for God that overflows and communicates itself to others. . . . And apostolate is the precise and necessary outward manifestation of interior life. When one tastes the love of God, one feels burdened with the weight of souls" (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 122). In his prayer, adoration was interwoven with invocations for the salvation of souls, with acts of thanksgiving for so many divine interventions in human events, and with contrition for what he considered his own ineptitude.

Prayer, then, is work. I have pointed out already how far his view of Christian life is from any form of subjectivity or sentimentalism. This is especially so in prayer. Prayer has nothing to do with a momentary feeling of pleasant emotions. Effort and fatigue are inseparable from the life of prayer. Josemaría Escrivá was very aware of carrying within him, like all the rest of us, the "old man," and he fought to resist its insinuations. At times he felt that his response had not been completely generous, and he would start over

again through an act of contrition, aware that he could always grow in his love. He never gave into discouragement when he "touched" with his hands, as he used to say, his own nothingness.

The urgent need to seek out Christ is found in all of Saint Josemaría's writings. A point in *The Way* reads: "When I made you a present of that Life of Jesus, I wrote as an inscription. May you seek Christ: may you find Christ: may you love Christ" (no. 382). And in his homily "Towards Sanctity": "I have distinguished as it were four stages in our effort to identify ourselves with Christ: seeking him, finding him, getting to know him, loving him. It may seem clear to you that you are only at the first stage. Seek him then, hungrily; seek him within yourselves with all your strength. If you act with determination, I am ready to guarantee that you have already found him, and have begun to get to know him and to love him, and to hold your conversation in heaven" (*Friends of God*, no. 300).

Many more quotes could be included here. But enough has been said to show that unity of life (like everything that is marked by simplicity, harmony, absence of disintegration) carries with it a reflection of the divine, for God is unity. Therefore unity of life is central to the spiritual life. And in the message of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, this converges on contemplation in the midst of the world. I ask him to help all of us, during these days of grace, to take a decisive step forward in our interior life.