

help us to assimilate this truth, the core of his spiritual message. Let us ask him to help us see the fatherly face of God, who looks for a little more love from us in each of our actions, teaching us to turn our whole day into prayer, into a dialogue with God.

In this context, I would like to read a rich text about a virtue that he considered so important for Christians: naturalness. *Naturalness means that the supernatural, the life of God present in us, shows itself in what is most simple, in ordinary things, in everyday life.*<sup>7</sup> The conclusion of this reflection seems especially relevant to me: *To act*

*naturally is a virtue that requires effort, assiduous practice and determination.*<sup>8</sup>

One who acts with the awareness that God is not only a spectator, but also the one to whom our acts are directed, realizes that he is called to heroism, to the plenitude of love, in the most ordinary situations.

May the intercession of Mary Most Holy, the Mother of Christ and our Mother, obtain for us from the Blessed Trinity the grace needed for a new and deeper conversion, a new beginning on the path towards sanctity in all the circumstances of our life. Amen.

## Other addresses

### Rome January 8, 2002

*Inaugural Address of the Congress "The Greatness of Ordinary Life," under the title "Teacher, Priest, Father. A human and supernatural profile of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer"*

A Christian understanding of the world assures us that divine providence governs physical and human events without destroying the legitimate autonomy of the temporal order.

This truth applies, in a special and mysterious way, to the human person. In God's activity—traditionally described as reaching "from end to end mightily" and governing "all things gently"<sup>1</sup>—his omnipotence becomes compatible with the greatest respect for freedom. In short, human beings are not ruled by blind fate. Rather, whether we notice it or not, it is God our Father's loving solicitude that guides us towards what is best—both for his glory and for ourselves.

More specifically, part of the Christian understanding of life is that one's very existence is evidence of a loving design on the part of God, who

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

1. *Wis* 8, 1.

"chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love."<sup>2</sup> This universal invitation to holiness acquires in each person the form of a special and irrepeatable calling, which one discovers gradually during life, and which becomes clear if one sincerely and unselfishly seeks to fulfill the Will of God.

Naturally, the vocational condition of human life implies that God in his fatherly solicitude grants each person gratuitously the natural and supernatural gifts needed to fulfill God's designs perfectly, that is, to fulfill a mission in the world. Therefore, the vocation—with all its demands and necessary graces—cannot be attributed exclusively to a few select or privileged persons. On the contrary, it extends in a universal way to all persons, created by God in his image and likeness. At the same time, nothing about this divine plan contradicts the fact that the vocational nature of human existence can become more evident in persons who have received an explicit mandate from God that associates them in a singular way with the redemptive mission of his Son, as instruments chosen to spread effectively God's kingdom among souls. This reality is seen most clearly in the lives of the saints.

The outstanding personality of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá is particularly relevant as regards this evangelical teaching of the universal call to holiness and apostolate, which, since

the teaching of Vatican II, is well known to the faithful of the Catholic Church.

First of all, this holy priest is one of the most outstanding contemporary apostles of the spread of the universal call to holiness, above all among the laity. Msgr. Escrivá was a pioneer of this message by recalling clearly—right from the foundation of Opus Dei in 1928—that God's will for all souls is their sanctification.<sup>3</sup> All men and women are called to the fullness of Christian life in the ordinary circumstances in which divine Providence has placed them, and specifically through their professional work, which is thus converted into a means and instrument of holiness and apostolate.

Secondly, Blessed Josemaría's life is a convincing example that God grants all the graces needed to carry out the mission one receives. And since his calling, to which he responded so faithfully, holds extraordinary significance in the history of the world and the Church, we should not be surprised that we see in his life certain human and supernatural gifts that he always tried to hide in his desire to disappear and pass unnoticed, moved by his deep humility.

This is how the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, expressed it in a homily given in St. Peter's Square, in thanksgiving to the Most Blessed Trinity, the day after Josemaría Escrivá's beatification: "The holiness achieved by Blessed

2. *Eph* 1, 4.

3. Cf. *1 Thess* 4:3.

Josemaría does not represent an impossible ideal; he is an example not only for certain chosen souls, but rather for countless Christians, called by God to sanctify themselves in the world: in their place of work, in their family and social life. His life is a clear example that daily occupations are not an obstacle to one's spiritual life; rather they can and should be transformed into prayer. He wrote in his personal notes that he had been surprised to find himself overcome with God's Love precisely *in the street, amid the noise of the traffic and trams and people; even while reading the newspaper* (Josemaría Escrivá, January 26, 1932, in *Intimate Notes*, no. 673). Many of those present here knew Blessed Josemaría personally. He shared in our struggles and concerns; and it was precisely in the work of every day, in the faithful fulfillment of his daily duties in the Spirit of Christ, that he reached holiness."<sup>4</sup>

### 1. Human virtues

The hundredth anniversary of Friedrich Nietzsche's death took place near the end of August 2000. Many books and articles were published on that occasion. They make clear that the German thinker—in spite of his unbalanced mind and philosophical shortcomings—had a profound influence on the mentality of the last century. One of his best known criticisms of Christians is that they seek exclusively heavenly goods (an attitude that he labels hypocritical and opportunist) while scorning hu-

man values, and thus they become "enemies of life."

Nietzsche's unjust accusation here is, like so many of his views, confused and exaggerated. For two thousand years Christians have appreciated more than anyone the dignity of the human person. In large measure they have been the ones who have fostered the development of science. They have inspired cultures and civilizations from which have arisen geniuses of art and thought, personalities of extraordinary caliber with a great capacity to lead. And this has been possible because the Church has been faithful to the central dogma of the Incarnation of the Word: Jesus Christ was and is and always will be true God and true man,<sup>5</sup> who restores all things in the light of his Truth.

Blessed Josemaría's life and teaching show his deep appreciation for the human virtues as the basis for the supernatural ones, a truth not always sufficiently emphasized in the traditional ascetical books used in his first Christian and priestly formation. In a homily he gave in 1941, he affirmed clearly: "If we accept the responsibility of being children of God, we will realize that God wants us to be very human. Our heads should indeed be touching heaven, but our feet should be firmly on the ground. The price of living as Christians is not that of ceasing to be human or of abandoning the effort to acquire those virtues which some have even without

4. Álvaro del Portillo, *Homily at the Mass of Thanksgiving and in honor of Blessed Josemaría*, Rome, May 18, 1992. Cf. *Prayer for the Mass in honor of Josemaría Escrivá* (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Prot. CD 537/92).

5. Cf. *Heb* 13:8.

knowing Christ. The price paid for each Christian is the redeeming blood of our Lord and he, I insist, wants us to be both very human and very divine, struggling each day to imitate him who is *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*.”<sup>6</sup>

The founder of Opus Dei liked to speak about the “integral formation of young people.”<sup>7</sup> But the first persons who received its spirit from his lips—and the multitude of souls who have later followed this path—did not learn this way of living through a moral theory or a set of teachings. They saw it incarnated in the daily life of that priest who guided them in their Christian life. The testimony of his pastoral work, right up to his death in 1975, confirm that Josemaría Escrivá was a person in whom teaching and life formed an indissoluble unity. He wasn’t a theoretical teacher of ethics and Christian morals; nor was he an enthusiastic leader who drew others after him by appealing to their sentiments. He was a priest in love with Jesus Christ, and out of love for Christ dedicated to the service of souls. His was a strong personality in which the human and the supernatural elements were harmoniously interwoven. His personality, simple and energetic, attracted people by its unmistakable genuineness, by his loyal commitment to what he taught, by his perfect consistency.

God endowed him with special qualities, cultivated by his parents’ Christian teaching and example. In a natural way, he gradually learned the

necessity of living the human and Christian virtues, which would form the foundation of his interior life as a young child, as an adolescent, and as a university student. His powers of observation and intuition were truly exceptional. He didn’t see the world around him as imposing itself on him or simply favoring or helping him. Observing how things were done at home and at school, he drew out the consequences for his own life.

He never forgot the friendly smile of his father, who never lost his peace and took a sincere interest in the concerns of everyone around him. I heard from him many stories about Don José Escrivá’s friendship and loyalty, so evident in his dealings with his wife and children. Josemaría discovered in his father the human and divine meaning of friendship and justice. From the moment he began to be aware of his surroundings, he noticed the punctuality and responsibility with which his parents worked. He saw that they carried out their tasks with generosity and joy, never wasting time; that they strove to always finish them well, for the sake of both God and neighbor.

Their diligence went hand in hand with a deep sense of freedom. He later transmitted the climate of trust he acquired at home to all the places he would live. He also discovered in his family’s atmosphere the need to be completely sincere, and he acquired the uprightness of character that shielded him from critical spirit or murmuring, as well as from resent-

6. *Friends of God*, no. 75.

7. Cf. *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la Universidad*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1993, p. 77.

ment or grudges. In the measure that he himself grew in freedom, he learned how to give it to others without ever distrusting them.

He grew up in a family atmosphere marked by good manners and modesty. Living alongside others, he learned how to care for and help them, as well as how to listen to and learn from them. He observed how the elderly, the sick and the poor were treated with respect and understanding. He stored up these experiences and learned that no one should be treated with indifference. He learned from his parents that the persons who help out in the home also form part of the family; thus he showed gratitude and respect towards them and didn't allow them to serve him unless it was truly necessary. As time went on, many people found themselves freed from the bonds of sadness and loneliness when they experienced how Blessed Josemaría treated them in a brotherly way, with sincere friendship. Not a few acknowledged that in their meetings with this priest, they had nothing to offer him; instead, they found themselves enriched by the charity with which he treated them. I don't exaggerate when I say that by his friendship and priestly fatherhood he filled many people with spiritual riches and hope. These included many poor people and countless sick persons, persons whom others had abandoned or rejected, workers with humble jobs, and others who had never experienced the security of a family.

His strong character led him to take seriously—as a Christian and a priest—his own life and that of others. Right to the end of his life here on

earth, he showed a great eagerness to learn from everyone that he met, in all the countries that he visited.

He was a very grateful person precisely because he focused on the good that others did and appreciated how much it enriched him. He showed a great capacity to appreciate the goodness and noble ideals, as well as the needs, of others. From childhood, he had a growing desire to deepen his knowledge of doctrine as well as his human, cultural and professional formation.

His naturalness—noble, elegant, normal—shone through his rich personality. He never played the comedian or actor. Yet he was a consummate performer, without trying to be one, when in public or in front of the camera. He didn't play-act, but he was gifted with a deep capacity to communicate. His constant smile and his penetrating, intelligent and understanding gaze drew people. His words were reinforced by his gestures, by the movement or stillness of his hands. A lively person with a quick mind, he directed all his human gifts to the service of the mission God had entrusted to him.

Those who knew him as a child recall his cheerful and winsome bearing. This too he directed to the mission received from God; he was always a cheerful apostle, who transmitted the need for an operative faith, the firmness of a sure hope and the treasure of a capacity to love God and others for God's sake. In the final years of his life on earth, he reached out to the hearts of people in many countries to unveil for them the richness of friendship with God.

## 2. *Optimism and hope*

Blessed Josemaría's capacity to attract others cannot be ascribed to a single character trait. The heroic virtues that he lived, recognized as such by the Church, blend together to form a single, well-harmonized temperament.

Nevertheless, among his distinctive character traits, there always stands out his positive spirit, his contagious joy and optimism, with an unshakeable hope that combined human cheerfulness and deep theological roots. This cheerful optimism contrasts greatly with a cultural background so often dominated by pessimism or the somber introversion of a person closed within himself. He knew that any optimism not based on the recognition of man's transcendent origin and end would never be securely grounded. Thus the optimism of the founder of Opus Dei is at the antipodes of the modern faith in progress, in its anthropocentric and secularist version. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer's strongly positive vision of man—"the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake"<sup>8</sup>—has an unmistakable Pauline foundation. All men and women are called to become identified with Christ<sup>9</sup>: to be *alter Christus*, *ipse Christus*, as he liked to put it.<sup>10</sup>

Underlying Blessed Josemaría's positive and optimistic personality is his profound understanding of the

mysteries of Creation and the Incarnation. This attitude is clearly evident in his invitation to "love the world passionately." These words form the title of a homily he gave on the campus of the University of Navarre, on October 8, 1967, speaking to thousands of persons attending the open air Mass that day: "God is calling you to serve him in and from the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life. He waits for us every day, in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all the immense panorama of work. Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it. . . . There is no other way. Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find him. That is why I can tell you that 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, to spiritualize them, turning them into a means and an occasion for a continuous meeting with Jesus Christ."<sup>11</sup>

Employing a daring expression, he then referred to "a *Christian materialism*, which is boldly opposed to that materialism which is blind to the spirit."<sup>12</sup> His rich humanity and deep faith in the saving presence of Christ in the faithful spurred him to con-

8. Second Vatican Council, Const. past. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24.

9. cf. *Ga*/2, 20.

10. cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 104.

11. *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*, no. 114.

12. *Ibid.*, no. 115.

front in his preaching the areas in which Catholicism was being most attacked at that time. When materialism, in its different forms, was attempting to eradicate the spiritual dimension of reality, Blessed Josemaría warned that a materialism closed to the transcendent impoverishes man, reducing him to a hollow mechanical existence fraught with sadness.

Thousands of persons, including some who were not Christian or who had stopped living their faith, discovered—after meeting this simple and holy priest overflowing with good humor—the optimism and joy that moved them to change their life. And this continues happening today to those who approach him through books about his life and teachings.

His ability to help people to “materialize” their spiritual life<sup>13</sup> by means of graphic images; his facility to give examples that shed light on daily life and to offer realistic and demanding advice; his capacity to raise the spirits of his listeners and readers and to clarify their confusions—all these reveal a person imbued with a genuine, living hope, a hope that has its origin in his deep union with Christ. That is why his message conveys—as much then as now—the unmistakable impression of *newness*, drinking from the fountain of living waters that flows from the God who makes all things new.<sup>14</sup>

Such is the effect of the transforming power of hope. As the *Cate-*

*chism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men’s activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of Heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity.”<sup>15</sup> A loyal follower of the spirit God gave him to found Opus Dei, a path of holiness in the middle of the world, Blessed Josemaría based his human expectations always on the supernatural virtue of hope, measuring all events in the light of the definitive happiness of contemplating God face to face. When, especially during the last years of his life, he prayed continually *vultum tuum, Domine, requiram*,<sup>16</sup> Lord, I seek your face, he was not giving in to a desire to escape the hardships of life here on earth. Rather he was giving voice to his uncontainable desire to find in heaven the happiness that God had already granted him on earth and that he strove to spread to those around him.

The interior peace that God granted him as a reward for his detachment and upright intention contained not the slightest shadow of stoicism. Rather it was the profound peace of a son of God, founded on the deep conviction that “in everything God works for good with those who

13. Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 114.

14. Cf. *Rev* 21:5.

15. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1818.

16. *Ps* 26(27):8.

love him.”<sup>17</sup> At a time when a Marxist utopian concept of life and a fallacious liberation theology had penetrated the minds of intellectuals and even of Christians, the founder of Opus Dei promoted social justice through the professional action of lay people. At the same time, he encouraged numerous apostolic initiatives for the human development of the most needy, while reminding people that the true liberation—that which Christ won for us with his Blood—is above all liberation from sin, especially through the sacrament of Penance.

The profound unity in his life moved him to place a high value on earthly realities, to refer them to their Creator and Redeemer, and to try to convert them into an instrument of apostolate: “God did not create us to build a lasting city here on earth (cf. *Heb* 13:14), because ‘this world is the path to the next life, a dwelling place free from care’ (Jorge Manrique, *Coplas*, V). Nevertheless, we children of God ought not to remain aloof from earthly endeavors, for God has placed us here to sanctify them and make them fruitful with our faith, which alone is capable of bringing true peace and joy to all men and women. Since 1928 I have constantly preached that we urgently need to Christianize society. We must imbue all levels of mankind with a supernatural outlook. Each of us must strive to raise his daily duties, his job or profession, to the order of supernatural grace. In this way all human occupations will be lit up by a new hope that

transcends time and the inherent transience of earthly realities.”<sup>18</sup>

### 3. *Unity of Life*

While divine filiation (knowing and sensing that one is a child of God<sup>19</sup>) constitutes the support of the founder of Opus Dei’s spiritual life, its external distinguishing mark is unity of life. That is, the interweaving of the cultural, professional, and social dimensions in one’s life with the spiritual and apostolic ones, since God is interested in every corner of our life. This is not simply a matter of combining our work and daily activity with ascetical struggle and apostolate. Rather unity of life entails a deep and radical unity, in which all the dimensions in one’s life interweave and work together to achieve the fullness of life that is holiness, which we never fully attain in this world.

This is how Blessed Josemaría expressed it: “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. We discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things.”<sup>20</sup>

In informal meetings with persons from every walk of life, he was frequently asked for advice on how one can make compatible the demands of professional work with one’s family, civic and religious obligations. In one way or another, his replies always centered on unity of

17. *Rom* 8:28.

18. *Friends of God*, no. 210.

19. *1 Jn* 3:1.

20. *Conversations...*, no. 114.



life as the key to solving the ever increasing complexities generated by today's society.

Here too one can see his positive and optimistic temperament as the defining feature of his intellectual and human profile. He always advised people to take an active role in confronting life's difficulties, and never to simply resign themselves passively. For example, once a university student complained to him that, especially on exam days, he found it difficult to make his intense study compatible with prayer. Blessed Josemaría advised him that, besides striving not to neglect the times especially set aside for prayer, "an hour of study, for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer."<sup>21</sup> A worker or businessman with an exhausting timetable will also find light in his practical advice: "Add a supernatural motive to your ordinary work and you will have sanctified it."<sup>22</sup>

Another problem very relevant today is how women can make their growing presence in professional activities outside the home compatible with their indispensable work in the family. "Firstly," Blessed Josemaría answered in an interview in 1968, "let me say that I do not think there need be any conflict between one's family life and social life. Just as in a man's life, but with particular shades of difference, the home and the family will always occupy a central place in the life of a woman. For it is obvious that when she spends time on her family

she is fulfilling a great human and Christian role. Nevertheless, this does not exclude the possibility of her having other professional work—for housework is also professional work—in any worthwhile employment available in the society in which she lives. I can understand why you state the problem the way you do. But I think that if we systematically contrast work in the home with outside work, retaining the old dichotomy which was formerly used to maintain that a woman's place was in the home but switching the stress, it could easily lead, from the social point of view, to a greater mistake than that which we are trying to correct because it would be more serious if it led women to give up their work in the home."<sup>23</sup>

It is significant that in this same interview, Blessed Josemaría expressly mentions the new technical aids<sup>24</sup> as instruments for saving time and carrying out a variety of tasks. The "new technologies" reflect one of the best known characteristics of our time, and the founder of Opus Dei recognized the possibilities that they opened up for the effective realization of the Christian's unity of life.

Msgr. Álvaro del Portillo, in his homily on May 18, 1992, echoed what Blessed Josemaría had preached since 1928: "Yes! It is possible *to be* of the world without being worldly; it's possible for each person to remain in his place, and at the same time to follow Christ and remain in Him. It's possible *to live in heaven and on earth*,

21. *The Way*, no. 335.

22. *Ibid.*, no. 359.

23. *Conversations...*, no. 87.

24. Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 89.

*to be contemplatives in the middle of the world*, transforming the circumstances of ordinary life into an occasion for meeting God and for bringing other souls to God, imbuing human society with the spirit of Christ, offering to God the Father all our work in union with the Sacrifice of the Cross, which is renewed sacramentally in the Eucharist.”<sup>25</sup>

A promoter of centers of research and higher education, Blessed Josemaría encouraged intellectuals, professors and students to work as a team in fostering an interdisciplinary approach to the different fields of human knowledge, combining scientific depth with Christian inspiration. As Grand Chancellor of the University of Navarre, he emphasized in October 1967 that “the university’s highest mission is to serve men, to be a leaven of the society in which it lives. That is why it should investigate the truth in all fields, including theology—the science of the faith, called to examine truths that are always relevant—and all the human and natural sciences.”<sup>26</sup> He sketched the outlines of the *Universitas scientiarum*, which should continually respond to the new realities and demands of society. “Conscious of this inescapable responsibility, the university opens itself in all countries to new areas, until recently unknown, incorporating into its traditional body of knowledge sciences and teachings of very recent origin, and imprints upon them coherence and intellectual dignity, which are the hallmark of university work.”<sup>27</sup>

In the *Furrow* he describes the characteristics that a Christian intellectual seeking unity of life should strive for:

“Since you want to acquire a Catholic or universal mentality, here are some characteristics you should aim at:

—a breadth of vision and a deepening insight into the things that remain alive and unchanged in Catholic orthodoxy;

—a proper and healthy desire, which should never be frivolous, to present anew the standard teachings of traditional thought in philosophy and the interpretation of history;

—a careful awareness of trends in science and contemporary thought; and a positive and open attitude towards the current changes in society and in ways of living.”<sup>28</sup>

Blessed Josemaría gave great importance to the human formation of the faithful of Opus Dei, so that they would conduct themselves in a loyal and noble way with others, without neglecting the most needy, materially as well as spiritually. He established a plan of intense formation, giving special attention to philosophical and theological studies. He took special care of the human and doctrinal dimensions of formation, blending them harmoniously with the ascetical, apostolic and professional dimensions, respecting the ut-

25. Álvaro del Portillo, *op. cit.*

26. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la Universidad, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

28. *Furrow*, no. 428.

most freedom of each of the faithful in matters of opinion. He advised that they should never give up reading, but rather that day by day they deepen their secular and religious culture, by a diligent study of the classics of literature and Christian thought.

He saw that, to exert a Christian influence in civil society, one needs a broad, unified formation that deepens and matures over the course of one's life. That's why he maintained that *one's formation never ends*. Only in this way could Christians spread the fire of Christ among their companions, relatives and friends, or, at least, elevate the temperature of their surroundings. In particular, he liked to repeat that Opus Dei "is a great catechesis." Strictly speaking, it limits itself to forming its members so that afterwards it is they who, in a personal and free way, live according to its spirit wherever they might find themselves.

#### 4. Love for freedom

Blessed Josemaría saw in man's capacity to decide freely the clearest sign of the dignity that enables him to respond voluntarily to God's requisites, and to undertake a trusting dialogue with God and his fellow men, without discriminating on the basis of race or culture. He points to the reality of a liberation incomparably more radical than that dreamt of by utopian thinkers, because it is the freedom for which Christ has freed us<sup>29</sup>: the liberation Christ won for us on the Cross.

The founder of Opus Dei trusted fully in the free responsibility of the faithful of the Work; he preferred to run the risk that one of them might fall into a mistake than to exercise a suffocating control over them. He was pleased that the members of Opus Dei were very different from one another, even though in all of them one could perceive "the flow of Christ's clean, supernatural blood, the family blood." He avoided any show of protocol. He carried out his daily work with the simplicity of an ordinary family, where honorific titles are out of place. He allowed others to call him "the Father" only as a sign of affection and trust, and as a manifestation of the spiritual fatherhood that all of us experienced in him. He granted a great autonomy to all those who carried out tasks of government and formation within Opus Dei. And precisely because of that autonomy, these persons strove in everything *sentire cum Patre*, to unite themselves to the mind of the Father, who gave them simple and practical indications, far from any casuistry. He did not interfere in any way with the professional or social or political actions of his children, who enjoyed and enjoy, as do all Christian faithful, the greatest freedom in their public and private activities, always with fidelity to the faith and morals of the Church.

One might fear that such an affirmation of freedom could be incompatible with ordinary Christians giving themselves to God. However, Blessed Josemaría avoided falling into this mistaken view, insisting that it is precisely freedom that makes such

29. Cf. *Gal* 4:31.

self-surrender possible: "It is utterly false," he said, "to oppose freedom and self-surrender, because self-surrender is a consequence of freedom."<sup>30</sup> He places the capacity for self-determination at the very root of the highest demonstration of freedom, by which a person, freeing himself from the chains of selfishness, surrenders himself trustingly into the hands of his Father God. The gift of freedom granted by God in creating man, and which He restores and strengthens through the Redemption, becomes at the same time the gift that the creature offers to his Creator and Redeemer as the offering of a son to his Father. Blessed Josemaría proclaimed boldly that the best supernatural reason for my choice to serve God is *because I feel like it*.

Cornelio Fabro has pointed out the originality of this insight: "A new man for the new times of the Church of the future, Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer has grasped by a kind of connaturalness—and also, without doubt, by a supernatural light—the original notion of Christian freedom. Immersed in the evangelical proclamation of freedom understood as liberation from sin, he trusts in the person who believes in Christ. After centuries of Christian spirituality based on the priority of obedience, he makes obedience a consequence of freedom, like the fruit of its flower, or, more precisely, of its root."<sup>31</sup>

God accepts the risk and the adventure of our freedom. He does not want our life on this earth to be a

work of fiction composed beforehand, as if this world were merely a "theater" in which shadows without autonomy pretend they are free. The founder of Opus Dei's realism led him to the conviction that man's daily life is a *genuine history*, composed of real opportunities and challenges, of successes and failures, always under the loving protection of divine providence. This implies a certain margin of unexpected happenings, of trials and rectification: the deeply human demand of living out one's days between the security of God's omnipotence and the uncertainty of man's weakness. The Christian is the person who possesses the greatest, the most genuine freedom. He is the "aristocrat" of freedom in this world.

This primacy of free will is at the root of the greatness of ordinary life, which is one of the central points of the message of Opus Dei. The decisions that a person makes each day, in ordinary things as well as extraordinary, overflow with human and supernatural transcendence. It is within this setting of ordinary life that the beautiful drama of personal holiness and apostolic efficacy unfolds. In the vicissitudes of daily life, joy alternates with sorrow, apparent success with no less apparent failure. But when a child of God confronts these situations with supernatural outlook and human competence, he is contributing to the good of his fellow men and to the *new evangelization* to which the Holy Father John Paul II is constantly urging us. Faith then is not just something to speak about, nor even to proclaim and

30. *Friends of God*, no. 30.

31. Cornelio Fabro, «El primado existencial de la libertad», in *Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei*, EUNSA, 2nd ed., Pamplona 1985, p. 350.

confess, but a virtue that the Christian must exercise every day in fulfilling his ordinary duties. Those who do so, the founder of Opus Dei used to say, will be “like an intravenous injection in the bloodstream of society.” They will be “God’s consolation,” giving a tired world reasons for hope.

“Some of you listening to me,” he said in 1970, “have known me for a long time. You can bear out that I have spent my whole life preaching personal freedom, with personal responsibility. I have sought freedom throughout the world and I’m still looking for it, just like Diogenes trying to find an honest man. And every day I love it more. Of all the things on earth, I love it most. It is a treasure which we do not appreciate nearly enough.”<sup>32</sup> Authentic freedom is indeed hard to find in this world of ours. Closed circles of power often dictate public opinion and cultural trends. Many people, young and not so young, fall prey to a feverish consumerism and shallow amusements. That is why Blessed Josemaría gives such importance to an education that facilitates the harmonious and complete unfolding of the person, both humanly and supernaturally. His pedagogy of emphasizing freedom seeks to form “true Christians, men and women of integrity, capable of facing all life’s situations with an open spirit, of serving their fellow men and women and helping to solve the problems of mankind, of carrying the testimony of Christ to the society of which they will be a part.”<sup>33</sup> Every educational institution should be a

school of responsible freedom, which teaches its students to love freedom and to use it worthily, and to foster it in society.

In *Furrow* he defends the importance of a healthy freedom for the right exercise of authority in society: “If authority becomes dictatorial authoritarianism, and this situation is extended in time, historical continuity is lost. People without experience in government reach the top and the inexperienced and excitable young want to grab hold of the reins. How many evils and how many offences against God—their own and those of others—are to be blamed on the ones who abuse authority so badly!”<sup>34</sup>

Certainly the different forms of authoritarianism (including the fearsome totalitarianisms of the twentieth century) have at times originated largely from citizens’ own irresponsibility. If a person is not ready to fulfill his own civic duties, to participate actively, in accord with his possibilities, in civic life, he can hardly complain later that others have not respected his rights or haven’t taken into account his personal opinions. Blessed Josemaría gave great importance to the duty of Catholics to be present—each one according to his or her own convictions—in places where public opinion is formed. He was not referring only or principally to the activity of professional politicians, but rather to the great variety of associations and communities that form the fabric of society, from sports leagues to international agencies. By free and active par-

32. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 184.

33. *Ibid.*, no. 28.

34. *Furrow*, no. 397.

ticipation in these forums, the Christian defends the dignity of man, as a person and a child of God; he defends human life from its beginning until its natural end; he upholds justice, the rights of the person and of families, and the great causes of humanity.

One of the tangible consequences of freedom is *pluralism*. An atmosphere that encourages individuals and social groups to form their own ideas and convictions fosters an open dialogue. This dialogue should respect contrary opinions, but without yielding on the fundamental principles that stem from human nature itself, which form the foundation of society. Thus one avoids the error of confusing pluralism with relativism, freedom with irrational spontaneity, democracy with the absence of any firm point of reference.

Genuine pluralism cannot be founded upon relativism, because then convictions would be treated as mere conventions, with the resultant danger of not respecting diversity. Views that are considered to be in the minority (although frequently they are not) find themselves smothered by those who control the sources of public opinion and power. This is especially true today as regards scientific research, particularly in questions of biotechnology. The obvious ethical implications of some of this research must move scientists of good will—in the first place Christians—to take a clear stand in defense of human life. As Blessed Josemaría said in an academic discourse in 1974, “true scientific

objectivity justly rejects all ideological neutrality, all ambiguity, all conformism, all cowardice. Love for the truth binds the scientist’s entire life and work, and sustains his upright character in the face of what may be uncomfortable situations, when the uprightness to which he is committed does not always bring with it a favorable image in public opinion.”<sup>35</sup>

Blessed Josemaría pointed out clearly that the faithful of Opus Dei can, and in fact do defend, positions that are different and even opposed to each other, in all that is open to opinion in society: “Because the Work’s aims are exclusively supernatural, its spirit is one of freedom, of love for the personal freedom of all men. And since this is a sincere love for freedom and not a mere theoretical statement, we love the necessary consequence of freedom which is pluralism. In Opus Dei pluralism is not simply tolerated. It is *desired and loved*, and in no way hindered.”<sup>36</sup> Anyone with a minimal knowledge of the Prelature of Opus Dei can attest to this fact in all the countries where it carries out its work.

In this way, a positive attitude of dialogue and openness is encouraged in society. Blessed Josemaría constantly strove to “foster everywhere a genuine ‘lay outlook,’ which will lead to three conclusions: be sufficiently honest, so as to shoulder one’s own personal responsibility; be sufficiently Christian, so as to respect those brothers in the Faith who, in matters of free discussion, propose solutions which differ from those which each

35. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la Universidad, pp. 106-107.

36. *Conversations...*, no. 67.

one of us maintains; and be sufficiently Catholic so as not to use our Mother the Church, involving her in human factions.”<sup>37</sup>

Freedom is essential for the Christian’s task. Only by rightly valuing the freedom inseparable from the dignity of men and women created in the image and likeness of God, can one truly grasp Blessed Josemaría’s message: living ordinary life in a holy way.

### 5. *The Greatness of Ordinary Life*

A constant refrain in the teaching of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer is that it is possible for Christians to attain the fullness of holiness in the midst of the world, precisely through their normal circumstances and daily tasks. His preaching has opened up to countless persons—not only to the thousands of faithful that form part of the Prelature of Opus Dei—broad and varied paths for finding our Father God in ordinary situations. Holiness is then understood no longer as something reserved to those called to carry out the priestly ministry, nor only for those chosen by God to serve him in a consecrated life, both of which are vocations which will always be needed in the Church. Rather, holiness is something God requires of all his daughters and sons.

The renewal of the message that all are called to holiness, is a clear sign of the open and positive character of the human and ecclesial personality

of Opus Dei’s founder. This is so because it places a high value on each person—whatever his academic background, job or profession—and acknowledges that all noble human desires, including those that can seem trivial and unimportant, have a role to play in the soul’s journey to God.

Thanks, to a great extent, to the wide-reaching apostolic activity generated and sustained by Blessed Josemaría, this teaching about the greatness of ordinary life has reached millions of persons all over world. However, when his apostolic work began—now almost seventy-five years ago—it came as a surprise to many Catholics. The pontifical decree on his heroic virtues describes that reality in the following terms: “Already from the late 1920s, Josemaría Escrivá, a true pioneer of solid *Christian unity of life*, felt the need of bringing the fullness of contemplation to all the paths of the earth, and he moved all the faithful to take an active part in the apostolic work of the Church, each one remaining in his own place and in his own state in life.”<sup>38</sup> The same document calls this great servant of God and of men a “traveling contemplative.” His life reflects an intimate union with God within a tireless apostolic activity, carried out among a great variety of persons, whom he encouraged to struggle joyfully to be “contemplatives in the middle of the world,” that is, women and men who walk the paths of the earth seeking intimacy with Christ, in order to reach, in Him, the Father, through the Holy Spirit.

37. *Conversations...*, no. 117.

38. Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum, Romana et Matriten., *Decretum super virtutibus heroicis in causa canonizationis Servi Dei Iosephmariae Escrivá de Balaguer*, April 9, 1990; AAS82 (1990) 1450-1455.

The founder of Opus Dei rejoiced when the Second Vatican Council promulgated its teaching about the value of the secular character proper to the laity. As the dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* expresses it: "By reason of their special vocation, it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit of the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they must manifest Christ to others. It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer." <sup>39</sup>

The cultural environment in the 1920s and 30s was not receptive to young Father Josemaría Escrivá's message. Nor in the Catholic world was the call to unite ordinary life and the faith taken seriously. The Second Vatican Council acknowledged, rather, a drastic division: "This split

between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age." <sup>40</sup> Pope Paul VI went so far as to say that the rupture between the Gospel and contemporary culture is the drama of our age. <sup>41</sup>

The Holy Father John Paul II, in his homily during the beatification of the founder of Opus Dei, said: "With supernatural intuition, Blessed Josemaría untiringly preached the universal call to holiness and the apostolate. Christ calls everyone to become holy in the realities of everyday life. Hence, work too is a means of personal holiness and apostolate when it is lived in union with Jesus Christ, for the Son of God, in the incarnation, has united himself in a certain way with the whole reality of man and with the whole of creation (cf. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 50). In a society in which an unbridled craving for material things turns them into idols and a cause of separation from God, the new *Beatus* reminds us that these same realities, creatures of God and of human industry, if used correctly for the glory of the Creator and the service of one's brothers and sisters can be a way for men and women to meet Christ. 'All things of the earth,' he taught, 'including the earthly and temporal activity of men, must be directed to God' (*Letter*, 19 March 1954)." <sup>42</sup>

Consequently, the goal of "sanctifying one's work, of sanctifying one-

39. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

40. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43.

41. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhort. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975, no. 20; AAS68 (1976) 19.

42. John Paul II, *Homily at the ceremony of beatification of Josemaría Escrivá and Josephine Bakhita*, Rome, May 17, 1992.



self in one's work and of sanctifying others through one's work" implies a profound renewal of the concept of human work, as understood by much of the contemporary world. Such an undertaking would make little sense if work were an exclusively economic reality, carried out to augment one's wealth, through the manipulation or interchange of products through the mediation of financial agencies. This stunted view of work is merely a version of practical materialism, also found in ideologies that give scant importance to freedom or have a biased idea of it. The ultimate meaning of the human condition does not lie in the selfish pursuit of profit on the part of the individual, even though the generating of such wealth—thanks to the action of a kind of "invisible hand"—may be for the welfare of all. One cannot do away with the classic idea of the *common good* (brought up to date in our day by the Church's social teaching) which is more than simply the sum total of particular interests. If solidarity, true service to one's neighbor, is lacking, the human dimension of work is truncated. In the same way, the dignity of everyday tasks is diminished if the function of those who carry them out is simply that of a material instrument that can be replaced by a machine.

A text from Blessed Josemaría on the true Christian value of work is worth quoting at length. It is from a homily given on the feast of St. Joseph in 1963: "It is time for us Christians to shout from the rooftops that work is a gift from God and that it makes no sense to classify men differently, according to their occupation, as if some jobs were nobler than

others. Work, all work, bears witness to the dignity of man, to his dominion over creation. It is an opportunity to develop one's personality. It is a bond of union with others, the way to support one's family, a means of aiding in the improvement of the society in which we live and in the progress of all humanity.

"For a Christian these horizons extend and grow wider. For work is a participation in the creative work of God. When he created man and blessed him, he said: 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth.' And, moreover, since Christ took it into his hands, work has become for us a redeemed and redemptive reality. Not only is it the background of man's life, it is a means and path of holiness. It is something to be sanctified and something which sanctifies.

"It is well to remember that the dignity of work is based on Love. Man's great privilege is to be able to love and to transcend what is fleeting and ephemeral. He can love other creatures, pronounce an 'I' and a 'you' which are full of meaning. And he can love God, who opens heaven's gates to us, makes us members of his family and allows us also to talk to him in friendship, face to face.

"This is why man ought not to limit himself to material production. Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love. We see the hand of God, not only in the wonders of nature, but also in our experience of work and effort.

Work thus becomes prayer and thanksgiving, because we know we are placed on earth by God, that we are loved by him and made heirs to his promises. We have been rightly told, 'In eating, in drinking, in all that you do, do everything for God's glory' (1 Cor 10: 31)."<sup>43</sup>

In striving to sanctify our work and other daily tasks, we imitate the thirty years of Christ's hidden life, spent alongside Mary and Joseph, luminous examples of how the highest holiness requires the humility of not seeking to shine in the eyes of the world.

Perceiving the deep value of ordinary life moves one to put loving care into the details of each day, those "little things" that at times we pass over without noticing their eternal dimension. Christians are called to sanctify the world in the place where they find themselves, helping to repair the disorder caused by sin, and carrying out a direct apostolate with relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers. Their life of prayer, manifested in deeds, is a hidden treasure, a precious spiritual strength that upholds their brothers and sisters working in the various fields that form the complex of human life.

A core virtue for the founder of Opus Dei was his love for order, a virtue that he strove to live heroically throughout his life: finishing each task well and on time, including times for rest. He was convinced that, to carry out great undertakings, great

human gifts aren't required. All one need do is to fulfill with perfection the human and supernatural demands of the task at hand, seeking to draw the greatest possible good out of the qualities the Creator has granted to each person.

Therefore, nothing should distinguish ordinary Christians from their peers, with whom they live shoulder to shoulder in the city of men. However, this is not because they hide their union with God; on the contrary, they make it known to those around them—without timidity but at the same time without boasting—trying to draw them to the marvels of divine grace. Although not "like the rest," they are "equal to the rest," without any mentality of being elite, sharing in all the hopes and challenges that life on this earth brings with it.

In this way, *lay mentality* is linked harmonically with *priestly soul*, with the practical awareness of the royal priesthood of the faithful,<sup>44</sup> endowed with the prophetic mission of announcing the kingdom of Christ in every situation and circumstance. Blessed Josemaría devoted himself wholeheartedly to living his priestly vocation, and he strove to conduct himself always and only as a priest of Jesus Christ. At the same time, he loved and exercised his lay mentality, which moved him to fulfill civil laws with care and not to seek for himself any material gain, not even the smallest, that might derive from his condition as a priest.

43. *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 47-48.

44. Cf. 1 Pet 2:9.

He never sought privileges. And he encouraged us all, by his example and words, to fasten ourselves to the Cross, knowing how to discover it not in imaginary situations but in the incidents of every day and in serving others with deeds: "Many who would willingly let themselves be nailed to a cross before the astonished gaze of thousands of spectators won't bear the pinpricks of each day with a Christian spirit! But think, which is the more heroic?"<sup>45</sup>

Christian joy "has its roots in the shape of the Cross."<sup>46</sup> This truth explains why Blessed Josemaría was an extraordinarily joyful person. He always drew attention to the positive side of persons and events, even when at first sight there did not seem to be much that was positive. I noticed this at once when I began to work at his side in the 1950s. As I have described on other occasions, I had the clear awareness of being with a *person filled with many good human qualities*, which made him friendly, affable, affectionate. He was a person who thought about others, with a gift for noticing their needs and fulfilling them, realizing when they were having a hard time. I was very much aware that I was with a *good teacher* who knew how to teach, to encourage, to correct, to trust completely in those working with him. And above all, that I was with a priest and a father, who, day in and day out, moment by moment, devoted himself through his work entirely to serving God and souls, immersed in a very intense prayer.

His unity of life moved him to be both human and supernatural: "We must be very human, for otherwise we cannot be divine."<sup>47</sup> In synthesis, let me repeat that he was a strong, understanding and optimistic person who lived charity to a heroic degree. He always behaved in a responsible, generous way, full of zeal for souls. He had a holy intransigence when it came to guarding the deposit of the faith, but he showed a holy understanding towards people. He was a persevering worker, a good, sincere and loyal friend. He showed to everyone, without distinctions of any kind, a spirit of service that was courageous and full of affection.

To these virtues one must add those proper to a good priest: He was a great lover of the Eucharist, and lived the liturgy with an extraordinary refinement. He was pious, learned, fully identified with his ministry, a great preacher and director of souls: studious, mortified, detached from himself and his activities. He was a well-ordered person with a deep supernatural outlook: humble, prayerful, passionate about anything that had to do with God, Mary or the Pope. He was obedient in doctrine, and lived heroically the theological and cardinal virtues. Every day he fell more in love with his vocation in order to come closer to God and, for God's sake, to souls.

He had an ardent temperament. I think this was particularly evident when he spoke about our Lady, and when he revealed his desire to attain

45. *The Way*, no. 204.

46. *Forge*, no. 28; cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 43.

47. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 166.

the beatific vision. His whole being exuded the joy of someone who knows he will receive a treasure because his Father has it prepared for him. He spoke through his clear, penetrating, serene eyes, as well as through his tone of voice, which was warm and persuasive, and conveyed a great sense of security. And he spoke through his gestures, which seemed to show that he had already begun to enjoy the union with God that he so deeply desired and that the Pope declared solemnly at St. Peter's Square on May 17, 1992.

## Seville April 8, 2002

*Discourse at the Symposium  
"Witnesses of the Twentieth  
Century, Teachers of the  
Twenty-First Century" orga-  
nized by the Academy of the  
Ecclesiastical History of Spain  
and America*

"It is especially necessary for us to direct our thoughts to the future which lies before us. Often during these months we have looked towards the new millennium which is beginning, as we lived this Jubilee not only as a remembrance of the past, but also as a prophecy of the future. We now need to profit from the grace received, by putting it into practice in resolutions and guidelines for action." <sup>1</sup> Thus spoke John Paul II as he concluded the Jubilee of the year 2000, inviting

us to begin the new millennium with this perspective. And it is with this perspective that we have to live all the events of the Church's history, discovering in each circumstance, with the light of faith, motives for giving thanks and prophecies for the future.

The present symposium is a response to this spirit, bringing to our memory certain saints with whom God has blessed his Church in the 20th century, so that, as its title indicates, they might be "teachers of the 21st century." On various occasions, in connection with the recent commemoration of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, I pointed out that this anniversary should not limit itself to recalling his life and rich personality, but that it should lead us above all to feel challenged by the message that God is addressing to us through his example and teaching.

Similar words could be said about all the saints we are considering today, among whom are included, I am happy to point out, some whose lives were intertwined with that of Blessed Josemaría. These include John XXIII, whom he had the opportunity of meeting several times during his pontificate, and Father Manuel Gonzalez, to whom he was deeply united by their mutual love for the Eucharist and their sincere personal friendship. The 20th century has been, like every period in the Church's history, rich in saints, in witnesses to God. Turning our glance towards them should fill us with hope for the future, awakening in us a sin-

1. John Paul II, Apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 6, 2001, no. 3.