

Burgos March 4, 2005

*At the 29th international symposium
on the Theology of the Priesthood of the
School of Theology of Northern Spain*

THE SAINT OF
ORDINARY LIFE
ST. JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ
IN THE CHURCH'S MAGISTERIUM

October 6, 2002 was an unforgettable day in Rome. Before a huge crowd of faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square, Pope John Paul II proclaimed Josemaría Escrivá a saint. The Pope has left an affectionate testimonial to this day in a recently published book. "In October 2002," he recalls, "I had the joy of canonizing Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei, a zealous priest, and an apostle to the laity in modern times."¹

These words provide me with the connecting thread for my contribution to this symposium, to which the authorities of the Theological School of Northern Spain have so kindly in-

vited me. I would like to express my heart-felt gratitude for this opportunity to speak about St. Josemaría and his teachings. Some of you here had a chance to meet him and deal with him personally; in my case, this was true over a period of almost three decades.

I don't want to begin, however, with my personal testimony or that of others who were witnesses to his life, but rather with a source of a higher order: the homilies and addresses of the Roman Pontiff, as well as other documents of the Holy See, that refer to the person and teachings of this holy priest whom God has given to the Church.²

Moreover, this city we are now in has seen his footsteps and framed a period of his life, usually referred to by his biographers as "the Burgos epoch."³ In this ancient city, over a number of months, St. Josemaría celebrated Holy Mass every day. He would unite himself intensely to the Sacrifice of the Cross, embracing the arduous privations those years brought

1. John Paul II, *Rise, Let Us Be On Our Way*, Warner Books, N.Y. 2004, p. 117.

2. The homilies, addresses and documents to which I refer are the following (listed in chronological order): John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Ut Sit* by which Opus Dei became a personal prelature, November 28, 1982, in: AAS LXXV (1983) 423-425. Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Decree on the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, April 9, 1990, in: AAS LXXXII (1990) 1450-1455. John Paul II, Apostolic Brief of Beatification of the Venerable Servant of God Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, May 17, 1992, in: AAS LXXXIV (1992) 1058-1060. — Homily at the Mass of beatification of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer and Josephine Bakhita, May 17, 1992, in: AAS LXXXV (1993) 241-246.

— Address to the participants at the beatification of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, May 18, 1992, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XVI/1 (1992) 1479-1483. — Address to the participants in the Theological Symposium on the teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, October 14, 1993, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XVI/2 (1993) 1013-1016. — Address to the participants in the Conference for Reflection on Novo Millennio Ineunte, March 17, 2001, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XXIV/1 (2001) 537-539. — Address to the participants in the Conference The Greatness of Ordinary Life, on the Centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, January 12, 2002, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XXV/1 (2002) 42-44. — Decree of canonization of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, October 6, 2002. — Homily at the Mass of canonization of Josemaría Escrivá, October 6, 2002. — Address to those attending the canonization of St. Josemaría Escrivá, October 7, 2002.

3. In addition to the well-documented biography by Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*,

with them and giving himself generously in prayer and penance. Here he finished writing *The Way*, and did research for his doctoral thesis in canon law, entitled *La Abadesa de las Huelgas*. Along the streets of Burgos he frequently chatted with those who sought him out to receive spiritual direction. “We used to go,” he recalled years later, “for walks along the banks of the River Arlanzon. There we would talk and, while they opened their hearts, I tried to guide them with suitable advice to confirm their decisions or open up new horizons in their interior lives. And always, with God’s help, I would do all I could to encourage them and stir up in their hearts the desire to live genuinely Christian lives. Our walks would sometimes take us as far as the monastery of Las Huelgas. On other occasions we would find our way to the cathedral.

“I used to enjoy climbing up the cathedral towers to get a close view of the ornamentation at the top, a veritable lacework of stone that must have

been the result of very patient and laborious craftsmanship. As I chatted with the young men who accompanied me I used to point out that none of the beauty of this work could be seen from below. To give them a material lesson in what I had been previously explaining to them, I would say: ‘This is God’s work, this is working for God! To finish your personal work perfectly, with all the beauty and exquisite refinement of this tracery stonework.’ Seeing it, my companions would understand that all the work we had seen was a prayer, a loving dialogue with God. The men who spent their energies there were quite aware that no one at street level could appreciate their efforts. Their work was for God alone. Now do you see how our professional work can bring us close to our Lord? Do your job as those medieval stonemasons did theirs, and your work too will be *operatio Dei*, a human work with a divine substance and finish.”⁴

At other times, walking alone along the sunlit paths of this Castilian land, his soul would expand in

3 vols., Scepter, New York 2001–2005, there are numerous sketches and biographies that have appeared during the period 1975–2005. For example Salvador Bernal, *Msrgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. A Profile of the Life of the Founder of Opus Dei*, Scepter, New York-London 1977; François Gondrand, *At God’s Pace. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Founder of Opus Dei*, Scepter, New York 1983; Peter Berglar, *Opus Dei. Life and Work of its Founder Josemaría Escrivá*, Scepter 1994; Dennis Helming (Forward by Malcolm Muggeridge) *Footprints in the snow: a pictorial biography of Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei*, Scepter / Sinag-Tala, New York — London — Manila 1986; H. De Azevedo, *Uma luz no mundo: vida do Servo de Deus Monsenhor Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, fundador do Opus Dei*, Prumo — Rei dos livros, Lisboa 1988; A. Sastre, *Tiempo de caminar: semblanza de Monseñor Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, Rialp, Madrid 1989; J.M. Cejas, *Vida del beato Josemaría*, Rialp, Madrid 1992; P. Urbano, *El hombre de Villa Tevere: los años romanos de Josemaría Escrivá*, Plaza & Janés, Barcelona 1995. M. Dolz, *Saint Josemaría Escrivá*, Ares, Milan 2002. For the content of some of these books see: J. Orlandis, “Biografías del Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. Reseña de las publicadas entre los años 1976 y 1995,” in: *Cuadernos del Centro de Documentación y Estudios Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer* 1 (1997) 675–684. For the bibliography about the founder of Opus Dei in the final years of the past century, see J.L. Hervás, “La beatificación de Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. Apuntes bibliográficos, in: *Scripta Theologica* 27 (1995) 189–218; F. Requena, “Cinco años de bibliografía sobre el Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (1995–2000),” in: *Scripta Theologica* 34 (2002) 195–224; and R. Herrando Prat de la Riba: *Los años de seminario de Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer en Zaragoza (1920–1925). El seminario de S. Francisco de Paula*, Rialp, Madrid 2002.

4. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, no. 65.

contemplative prayer, as we see in a letter to one of the first faithful of Opus Dei: "This morning, on my way to Las Huelgas monastery to do my prayer, I discovered a 'new Mediterranean': the holy Wound in my Lord's right hand. There I was all day long kissing and adoring. How truly lovable is our God's Holy Humanity! Pray that he grant me his Love to completely purify all my other affections. It's not enough to say, 'heart on the Cross!' If one of Christ's wounds cleanses, heals, soothes, strengthens, enkindles and enraptures, what won't the five do, open on the wood? Heart on the Cross! My Jesus, what more could I ask for? I realize that if I continue contemplating in this way (St. Joseph, my father and lord, is the one who led me there, after I asked him to enkindle me), I'll end up crazier than ever. Try it out yourself!"⁵

St. Josemaría taught a great number of souls to take up the path of contemplation in ordinary life, a path he himself tread, guided by the Holy Spirit. The Decree of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints on his heroic virtue calls him "a traveling contemplative."⁶ The Roman Pontiff has pointed to this aspect of his spirit on a number of occasions; in the canonization ceremony, he refers to him as "the saint of ordinary life,"⁷ which I have chosen as the title for my talk.

First of all, I want to consider here the spiritual and pastoral features that

have been most emphasized in the pontifical texts regarding St. Josemaría. Then I will look at some central characteristics of his contribution to the life and sanctity of the Church, as highlighted in those same texts. Finally, I will sketch some lines of theological reflection that are opened up there, and will finish with some considerations about the impact of St. Josemaría's teachings on the present and future of the Church.

1. ST. JOSEMARÍA IN THE PONTIFICAL MAGISTERIUM

Some spiritual features emphasized in the pontifical documents

This holy priest always said that the foundation of his life was the sense of his divine filiation. "My life," he said in one of his homilies, "led me to feel myself especially a son of God, and I have savored the joy of placing myself in the heart of my Father. (Throughout my entire life, I have tried to find my unfailing support in this joyful reality.)"⁸ John Paul II, in his homily during the beatification ceremony in 1992, stressed: "His spiritual and apostolic life was based on knowing himself, by faith, to be a son of God in Christ. His love for our Lord was nourished by this faith, as was his apostolic impetus, his constant joy, even in the great trials and difficulties that he had to overcome. 'To have the cross is to find happiness, joy,' he tells us in one of his meditations; 'to

5. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter*, June 6, 1938, to Juan Jiménez Vargas

6. Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, *Decree on heroic virtues*, April 9, 1990.

7. John Paul II, *Decree of canonization*, October 6, 2002.

8. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, no. 143.

have the cross is to identify oneself with Christ, it is to be Christ and, therefore, to be a son of God.”⁹ As the Pope so clearly states, the deep filial attitude that informed St. Josemaría’s thoughts and affections was shown in his daily embrace of Christ’s Cross.

Ten years later, in the canonization ceremony, John Paul II once again emphasizes the same point: “Certainly there will be no lack of misunderstandings and difficulties for anyone who tries to faithfully serve the cause of the Gospel. Our Lord purifies and shapes with the mysterious power of the Cross whoever he calls to follow him; ‘but in the Cross,’ the new saint repeated, ‘we find light, peace and joy: *Lux in Cruce, requies in Cruce, gaudium in Cruce!*”¹⁰

St. Josemaría prayed on a certain occasion, as the Pope reminds us in his 1992 homily: “You made me understand, Lord, that to have the cross is to find happiness, joy. And the reason, as I see more clearly than ever, is this: to have the cross, is to be identified with Christ; it is to be Christ, and, therefore, to be a son of God.”¹¹ These words present us with a very well defined self-portrait. Commenting on them in 1993, in the framework of a theological symposium on the teachings of Opus Dei’s founder,

the Servant of God Alvaro del Portillo, a privileged witness to his holy conduct every day for 40 years, expressly noted the inseparability, in the spirit of St. Josemaría, between his sense of divine filiation and the Cross. “Blessed Josemaría,” wrote his first successor, “during his whole life followed this path of union between filiation and the Cross, the royal road of Christ, in an ever more intense way. His spiritual teachings, which give voice to his own experience of God and his divine plans, express the living certainty that the Cross is precisely the path that must be traveled by anyone who wishes to follow Christ in all circumstances.”¹²

I have chosen to stress first the close link between a deep sense of divine filiation and identification with the Cross because it lies at the heart of St. Josemaría’s entire spiritual life. All the other characteristics of his human and priestly figure are based on it.¹³ It is from this union that his life of prayer arose and “that assiduous unitive experience”¹⁴ of which one of the first pontifical documents alluding to him spoke, with the following illustration: “Constantly immersed in the contemplation of the Trinitarian mystery, he used the sense of divine filiation in Christ as the basis of a spirituality in which the strength of faith and the

9. John Paul II, Homily, May 17, 1992, no. 3.

10. John Paul II, Homily, October 6, 2002, no. 4.

11. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Notes taken during a meditation, April 28, 1963: AGP, PO1 12-63, pp. 12-13.

12. Álvaro del Portillo, “Reflexiones conclusivas del Simposio sobre las enseñanzas del Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (Rome, Qctober 12-14, 1993),” in: M. Belda (ed.), *Santidad y mundo*, Eunsa, Pamplona 1996, pp. 286-287.

13. Sobre la filiación divina en la vida y enseñanzas de San Josemaría, cf. Fernando Ocáriz, *Naturalize, gracias y gloria*, Eunsa, 2nd ed., Pamplona 2001, pp. 175-221.

14. Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Decree on heroic virtues, April 9, 1990.

apostolic daring of charity are harmoniously combined with filial abandonment into the hands of his Father, God.”¹⁵

St. Josemaría Escrivá left behind him the example of a contemplative soul in the midst of everyday activities, showing us that it is possible, as the same document emphasizes, “to attain the heights of union with God amid the hustle and bustle of daily life and in intense persevering work.”¹⁶ In words of John Paul II, “he was able to attain the peak of contemplation with continuous prayer, constant mortification, the daily effort of a work fulfilled with exemplary docility to the motions of the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of ‘serving the Church as the Church wished to be served.’”¹⁷

A lover of Jesus Christ, this priest, as the Church’s magisterium also points out, was “a passionate lover of the Eucharist.”¹⁸ In the current Year of the Eucharist that the Church is celebrating at the wish of the Holy Father, it is especially pleasing to recall that the daily life of countless men and women throughout the world has shown the deep influence of St. Josemaría’s Eucharistic love: “Be a Eucharistic soul!” he wrote. “If the center around which your thoughts and hopes turn is the Tabernacle, then, my child, how abundant

the fruits of your sanctity and apostolate will be!”¹⁹

Many ordinary Christians today, following the footsteps of the founder of Opus Dei, are imbuing homes, offices, factories, universities and the whole field of honest human work with a deep love for the Eucharist. They see the Holy Mass as “the center and root of their spiritual life,”²⁰ while striving during the day to keep their hearts set on our Lord with an eagerness “to work as He worked and to love as He loved,”²¹ to offer all their work “for Christ, with Him and in Him,”²² giving glory to God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Pastoral features

The spiritual features mentioned above are inseparable from other, more explicitly pastoral ones also emphasized by the Magisterium.

The central characteristic of his pastoral mission was the proclamation, from 1928 right to the end of his life, of the universal call to sanctity, and of sanctification in ordinary life. As the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints observed, St. Josemaría must be counted among the “witnesses to holiness whom the life-giving Spirit has inspired in every

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. John Paul II, Decree of Beatification, May 17, 1992.

18. Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Decree on heroic virtues, April 9, 1990.

19. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, no. 835.

20. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 87.

21, Ibid., no. 154.

22. Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer.

age...by the extraordinary vigor— prophetically anticipating the Second Vatican Council—with which he sought, from the very start of his ministry, to address to all Christians the Gospel’s call: ‘Your duty is to sanctify yourself. Yes, even you...To everyone, without exception, our Lord said: “Be perfect, as my heavenly Father is perfect”’ (*The Way*, no. 291).²³

A well-known homily by St. Josemaría has been published under the title *Passionately Loving the World*.²⁴ Christian love for the world, in the spirit of Opus Dei’s founder, has an essentially supernatural dimension, since it has as its purpose, as John Paul II said, that of “elevating the world to God and transforming it from within.”²⁵ A man with a thirst for God and a great apostle,²⁶ “St. Josemaría,” the Pope stated, “was profoundly convinced that the Christian life contained a mission and an apostolate: we are in the world to save it with Christ. He passionately loved the world, with a ‘redemptive love.’”²⁷

A passionate love for the salvation of the world means, first of all, a passionate love for the salvation of every

man and woman, created in the image of God and called to be in Christ God’s sons and daughters.²⁸ As another papal document says: “Josemaría Escrivá was a saint of great humanity. All who dealt with him, of whatever culture or social condition, saw him as a father, totally dedicated to service to others, because he was convinced that each soul is a marvelous treasure; indeed, ‘Every single person is worth all the blood of Christ.’”²⁹

The affirmation of St. Josemaría cited by the Pope was one of the central features of his permanent priestly zeal. In a homily encouraging priests to be generous in the exercise of their pastoral ministry, we read: “God’s grace comes to the aid of every soul, for every person needs specific, personal help. You cannot treat souls en masse! It is not right to offend human dignity and the dignity of the sons of God by not going personally to the aid of each one. The priest must do just that, with the humility of a man who knows he is only an instrument, the vehicle of Christ’s love. For every soul is a wonderful treasure; every man is unique and irreplaceable. Every single person is worth all the blood of Christ.”³⁰

23. Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Decree on heroic virtues, April 9, 1990.

24. This was a homily delivered on October 8, 1967, before several thousand people on the campus of the University of Navarre; later included in the book *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, nos. 113-123. For a theological analysis, cf. Pedro Rodríguez, “Santità nella vita quotidiana: ‘Amare il mondo, appassionatamente,’” in *Studi Cattolici* 381 (1992) 717-729; A. Aranda, “El bullir de la sangre de Cristo” *Estudio sobre el cristocentrismo del beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, Rialp, Madrid 2001.

25. John Paul II, Homily, October 6, 2002, no. 3.

26. Cf. John Paul II, Address, March 17, 2001.

27. John Paul II, Address, January 12, 2002, no. 4. The expression “redemptive love,” that the Pope uses, refers to no. 604 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

28. Cf. John Paul II, Decree of canonization, October 6, 2002.

29. John Paul II, Address, January 12, 2002, no. 3.30. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 80.

30. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 80.

The origins of Opus Dei are closely tied to the founder's pastoral ministry among the poor and sick of Madrid. In his priestly soul there burned intensely, with the fire of charity, a passion for justice, which means a passion for the dignity, defense and betterment of each human life, created in the image of God. "A man or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them," he wrote, "is still distant from the love of Christ's heart. While Christians enjoy the fullest freedom in finding and applying various solutions to these problems, they should be united in having one and the same desire to serve mankind. Otherwise their Christianity will not be the word and life of Jesus; it will be a fraud, a deception of God and man."³¹

The life of St. Josemaría was entirely marked by a zealous service that was shown, in the words of John Paul II, "in his dedication to his priestly ministry and in the magnanimity with which he brought into being so many works of evangelization and of social development for the most poor."³² The decree on his heroic virtue also points to the same reality: "With tireless charity and active hope he guided the development of Opus Dei throughout the world, promoting a vast mobilization of lay people who became aware of their personal responsibility in the Church's mission.

He gave life to numerous initiatives in the work of evangelization and human welfare."³³

Many of the initiatives given life by his efforts are perhaps little known to public opinion, because the spirit of St. Josemaría included the deep desire to pass unnoticed so that only God would shine forth. He never sought human recognition, striving to ensure that Catholics act on their own personal responsibility, with apostolic zeal and love for the Church. At the same time, while seeking to disappear, he knew how to work in deed and in truth.³⁴ As the above-mentioned decree on his virtues notes, during his whole life "he devoted himself tirelessly to the task of forming the members of Opus Dei—priests and laity, men and women—so that they would acquire a solid spiritual life, an exemplary adherence to the Church's magisterium, and an ardent zeal for souls expressed in a personal commitment to carry out a far-reaching apostolate."³⁵

Teacher of Christian life

Another characteristic emphasized in the pontifical texts is found in the apostolic letter of beatification: St. Josemaría was "an authentic teacher of Christian life."³⁶

More recently, during the canonization, Pope John Paul II once again

31. *Ibid.*, no. 167.

32. John Paul II, Address, January 12, 2002, no. 3.

33. Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Decree on heroic virtues, April 9, 1990.

34. *1 Jn* 3:18.

35. Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Decree on heroic virtues, April 9, 1990.

36. John Paul II, Decree of Beatification, May 17, 1992.

emphasized that same idea in different terms. “St. Josemaría was a master in the practice of prayer, which he considered to be an extraordinary ‘weapon’ to redeem the world. He always recommended: ‘In the first place prayer; then expiation; in the third place, but very much in “third place,” action’ (*The Way*, 82). It is not a paradox, but a perennial truth: the fruitfulness of the apostolate lies above all in prayer and in intense and constant sacramental life. This, in essence, is the secret of holiness and the true success of the saints.”³⁷

Many men and women have discovered this “secret of holiness” through the founder of Opus Dei. “His life and his message,” recalls the Decree of Canonization, “have taught countless Christian faithful, particularly lay people, engaged in the most varied professions, to transform their ordinary work into prayer, service of others, and a path towards holiness.”³⁸ Thus a great number of people have learned the dignity of their baptismal vocation integrated fully into their daily existence, and have strengthened their love for the Church and their joyful service of her evangelizing mission.

The same can be said, with the appropriate differences, of so many secular priests throughout the world who have discovered in St. Josemaría, as the

Pope said, “a shining example of concern for priestly holiness and brotherhood.”³⁹

The “saint of ordinary life”

I want to close this section by looking at some words of John Paul II on the day after the canonization. “St. Josemaría,” said the Pope, “was chosen by the Lord to announce the universal call to holiness and to point out that daily life and ordinary activities are a path to holiness. One could say that he was the saint of ordinary life. In fact, he was convinced that for those who live with a perspective of faith, everything is an opportunity to meet God, everything can be an incentive for prayer. Seen in this light, daily life reveals an unexpected greatness. Holiness is truly within everyone’s reach.”⁴⁰

These words were greeted with spontaneous applause from the multitude of faithful filling St. Peter’s Square, in the Audience the Pope granted on the day after the canonization. Many of them had learned from St. Josemaría to value the beauty and greatness of everyday life, when lived in the light of Christ. For them, and for so many other faithful throughout the whole world, the words of the Pope’s talk expressed the experience of their own struggle, striving to carry out their everyday activities with that spirit.

37. John Paul II, Homily, October 6, 2002, no. 5.

38. John Paul II, Decree of Canonization, October 6, 2002.

39. Ibid.

40. John Paul II, Address, October 7, 2002, no. 3.

The same idea was solemnly included in the Decree of Canonization in the following terms: "He framed this program of Christian holiness in the context of one's normal daily duties and tasks, for which reason he may rightly be called 'the saint of ordinary life.' Indeed, his life and message have taught countless Christian faithful, particularly lay people, engaged in the most varied professions, to transform their ordinary work into prayer, service of others, and a path towards holiness."⁴¹

We can use these words to continue delving deeper into the founder of Opus Dei's teachings and life, always following the thread of the interventions of the pontifical magisterium.

II. A SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION TO THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

The Holy Spirit builds up the Church with the cooperation of men and women. In the case of St. Josemaría, his specific contribution to the Church's mission was his integral faithfulness to the call he received to found Opus Dei. Thus one can read in the Decree of Canonization: "On October 2nd, 1928, the Lord gave him the light to see what He had planned for him: on that day, he founded Opus Dei. Thus, a new pathway of life was opened in the Church, so that all men and

women—without distinction of race, class or culture—might realize that they are called to the fullness of charity and to the apostolate, each in their own place in the world. Indeed, the ordinary circumstances of life are the place where the Lord calls us and the hinge upon which our loving response turns."⁴² From that moment on, St. Josemaría's entire life was placed at the service of the mission God had entrusted to him, for the good of the Church and of all mankind.

"The importance of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá," the Pope pointed out to participants in a theological conference celebrated in the context of the beatification of the founder of Opus Dei, "does not derive solely from his message, but also from the apostolic reality that he began. In the sixty-five years that have gone by since its foundation, the Prelature of Opus Dei, an indissoluble unity of priests and laity, has contributed to making the saving announcement of Christ resound in many environments. As Pastor of the universal Church I hear echoes of that apostolate, in which I encourage all the members of the Prelature of Opus Dei to continue in, in faithful continuity with the spirit of service to the Church which always inspired the life of its founder."⁴³

The Holy Father's words invite us to consider the figure of St. Josemaría in the context of "the apostolic reality that he began," Opus Dei. As the

41. John Paul II, Decree of Canonization, October 6, 2002.

42. *Ibid.*.

43. John Paul II, Address, October 14, 1993, no. 3.

Roman Pontiff pointed out in the Apostolic brief of beatification: “In faithful fulfillment of the task entrusted to him, he brought priests and lay people, men and women to discover that it is in their daily occupations that they can live out their co-responsibility in the Church’s mission, with a full dedication to God in the ordinary circumstances of everyday life. ‘The divine paths of the world have been opened up,’ he exclaimed (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 21). He did not restrict himself simply to describing the pastoral opportunities that were opened up by this evangelizing effort, but rather went on to establish it as a stable and organic part of the Church.”⁴⁴

It is necessary, therefore, to study the message of St. Josemaría alongside the theological and pastoral reality of Opus Dei. The spiritual and doctrinal message is shown through the nature and life of the Prelature, which in turn find its theological and pastoral identity in that divine message. This reality is reflected in some words of the Apostolic Constitution *Ut Sit*, by which John Paul raised Opus Dei to the status of a Personal Prelature. “From its beginnings, this Institution [Opus Dei] has in fact striven, not only to illuminate with new lights the mission of the laity in the Church and in society, but also to put it into practice; it has also en-

deavored to put into practice the teaching of the universal call to sanctity, and to promote at all levels of society the sanctification of ordinary work, and by means of ordinary work. Furthermore, through the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, it has helped diocesan priests to live this teaching, in the exercise of their sacred ministry.”⁴⁵

At the service of the whole Church

“The history of the Church and of the world,” John Paul II pointed out in 1993, “develops under the action of the Holy Spirit, who, with the free collaboration of men, directs all events towards the realization of the salvific plan of God the Father. An evident manifestation of this is the constant presence throughout history of men and women, faithful to Christ, who illuminate the various epochs of history with their life and their message. Among these distinguished figures, an outstanding place is held by Blessed Josemaría Escrivá.”⁴⁶

God acts in history in many ways, and in a special way through his saints. These faithful servants bring to the Church, above all, their love for God, materialized, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in their lives and works. All of them contribute to “letting everyone know better the love of God,”⁴⁷ or what is the same, “letting

44. John Paul II, Decree of Beatification, May 17, 1992.

45. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution. *Ut Sit*, November 28, 1982. On the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, see L.F. Mateo-Seco, “En las Bodas de Oro de la Sociedad Sacerdotal de la Santa Cruz,” in *Romana* 16 (1993) pp. 119-135.

46. John Paul II, Address, September 14, 1993, no. 1.

47. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 21; cf. no. 115.

them know Christ,” announcing “to this world to which we belong and in which we live, the message—old and at the same time new—of the Gospel,”⁴⁸ as St. Josemaría wrote. Each saint fulfills that task in accord with the gifts received, which have forged his personal configuration with our Lord and established the outlines of his vocation and mission in the Church.

The testimony of the saints, a mirror in which Christ is reflected, has always had a strong impact on the Church’s history and action, and opened up paths for theology. “The Spirit,” as Vatican II so marvelously says, “dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple (cf. *I Cor* 3:16, 6:19). In them he prays and bears witness to their adoptive sonship (cf *Gal* 4:6; *Rom* 8:15-16, and 26). Guiding the Church in the way of all truth (cf *Jn* 16:13) and unifying her in communion and in the works of ministry, he bestows upon her varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way he directs her, and he adorns her with his fruits (cf *Eph* 4:11-12; *I Cor* 12:4; *Gal* 5:22). By the power of the Gospel he permits the Church to keep the freshness of youth. Constantly he renews her and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse.”⁴⁹

Nurtured by the warmth and light of the Paraclete’s action, there arises in the Church the mutual influence between holiness and theol-

ogy, both essentially united to the magisterium. As another conciliar passage points out, “the Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes through contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their heart. It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charisma of truth.”⁵⁰

The influence of the saints in the assimilation of the doctrine of the faith in each epoch, and consequently in the development of theology, is decisive for the life of the Church. This was well expressed by the International Theological Commission in a 1988 document, speaking of the Church’s living tradition, which stressed both the perennial nature of revealed truth and its ongoing understanding at each moment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This ongoing grasping of revelation “is not a purely intellectual process, nor solely an existential or sociological one. Nor does it consist solely in a more exact definition of specific concepts, of logical consequences, or of mere changes of formulas or new formulations. It is suggested, sustained and directed by the acting of the Holy Spirit in the

48. *Ibid.*, n. 132.

49. Vatican II., Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4; cf. no. 12.

50. Vatican II., Dogmatic Const. *Dei Verbum*, no. 8.

Church and in the hearts of specific Christians. It takes place in the light of faith, and is driven by the charisms and testimony of the saints that the Spirit of God gives to the Church at particular times.”⁵¹

The name of Josemaría Escrivá will forever be associated with the proclamation of the universal call to sanctity, and the application of that teaching in a specific message of sanctification by means of ordinary professional work. “With supernatural intuition,” the Pope said during the beatification ceremony, “he untiringly preached the universal call to holiness and 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 done 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.”⁵² These words situate us before a central element of the teaching of St. Josemaría, who, as John Paul II pointed out at another moment, “can be a source of inspiration for theological thought. Indeed, theological research, which carries out an indispensable mediation in the relations between faith and culture, progresses and is enriched by going to the source of the Gospel, under the stimulus of the experience of the great witnesses of Christianity. And Blessed Josemaría is, undoubtedly, one of these.”⁵³

III. SOME LINES OF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Let us go on now to look at some perspectives that open up for theological reflection.

An idea untiringly repeated by St. Josemaría, and especially representative of his teaching, can be summed up in these words: “I have repeated it constantly, since the day that our Lord chose for the foundation of Opus Dei! We have to sanctify our ordinary work, we have to sanctify others through the exercise of the particular profession that is proper to each of us, in our own particular state in life.”⁵⁴ I cannot stop now to comment in detail on these rich words, but will limit myself to drawing out a few important aspects.

In the first place, the message presented by St. Josemaría is not the result of his own initiative, but of God’s doing, and is intimately linked to the origin of Opus Dei, born by “divine inspiration,” as we read in the Apostolic constitution *Ut Sit*.⁵⁵ In the second place, the hinge of spiritual life in the teaching of St. Josemaría is found in the sanctification of the ordinary work of the sons and daughters of God, seen as a sanctifiable and sanctifying activity, both of oneself and of others, and therefore with an essential apostolic dimension.

51. Comisión Teológica Internacional, *La interpretación de los dogmas*, BAC, Madrid 1988, p. 447.

52. John Paul II, Homily, May 17, 1992, no. 3.

53. John Paul II, Address, September 14, 1993, no. 4.

54. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 122.

55. “With very great hope, the Church directs its attention and maternal care to Opus Dei, which—by divine inspiration—the Servant of God Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer founded in Madrid on October 2, 1928, so that it may always be an apt and effective instrument of the salvific mission which the Church carries out for the life of the world.” (John Paul II, Apostolic Const. *Ut Sit*, November 28, 1982).

56. John Paul II, Address, September 14, 1993, no. 3.

In words of John Paul II from 1993, St. Josemaría “invited men and women of the most diverse social conditions to sanctify themselves and to cooperate in the sanctification of others, by sanctifying ordinary life.”⁵⁶ The reference to sanctifying work is broadened, without diluting the essence of the message, to sanctifying ordinary life, which also includes one’s family and social duties. “For over thirty years,” said the founder in 1957, “God has been putting into my heart the desire to help people of every condition and background to understand that ordinary life can be holy and full of God. Our Lord is calling us to sanctify the ordinary tasks of every day, for the perfection of the Christian is to be found precisely there.”⁵⁷ As the Pontifical Brief of beatification affirms: “In faithful fulfillment of the task entrusted to him, he brought priests and lay people, men and women, to discover that it is in their daily occupations that they can live out their co-responsibility in the Church’s mission, with a full dedication to God in the ordinary circumstances of everyday life.”⁵⁸

Let us now turn our attention to three central aspects: the sanctity of the Christian in ordinary life, the Christianization of the world *ab intra*, from within, through the sanctification of professional work, and the unity of Christian life.

The sanctity of the Christian in everyday life

In respect to the first point, the Pope emphasizes that St. Josemaría “put at the center of his preaching the truth that all of the baptized are called to the fullness of charity, and that the most immediate way to attain this common goal is found in the normality of everyday life.”⁵⁹ This daily normality involves deeds that are repeated day after day in the habitual relationship with family members or persons from one’s professional and social environment. ⁶⁰ “God wants to enter into a communion of love with each of his children in the context of the occupations of each day, in the ordinary context in which their life unfolds,”⁶¹ said the Roman Pontiff. The theological and spiritual consequences are evident. As John Paul II continues, “daily activities present themselves as a valuable means of union with Christ, capable of being transformed into an environment and means of sanctification, into a terrain for exercising the virtues and into a dialogue of love that is carried out in deeds. The spirit of prayer transfigures one’s work and thus enables one to remain in contemplation of God, even while carrying out various occupations.”⁶²

That daily activities can serve not only as the place for our sanctification but also as the “matter” to be sanctified is a truth that is deeply illuminated by

57. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 148.

58. John Paul II, *Decree of Beatification*, May 17, 1992.

59. John Paul II, *Address*, January 12, 2002, no. 2.

60. St. Josemaría taught with particular depth the vocational character of the married vocation and the sanctification of family duties. Cf., for example, F. Gil Hellín, “La vida familiar, camino de santidad,” in *Romana* 20 (1995) pp. 224-236.

61. John Paul II, *Address*, January 12, 2002, no. 2.

62. *Ibid.*

the light of the mystery of the Word Incarnate. "I never tire of repeating," wrote St. Josemaría, "that the world can be made holy. We Christians have a special role to play in sanctifying it. We are to cleanse it from the occasions of sin with which we human beings have soiled it. We are to offer it to our Lord as a spiritual offering, presented to him and made acceptable through his grace and with our efforts. Strictly speaking, we cannot say that there is any noble human reality that does not have a supernatural dimension, for the divine Word has taken on a complete human nature and consecrated the world with his presence and with the work of his hands. The great mission that we have received in baptism is to redeem the world with Christ."⁶³

The Christian's ordinary activities, when he is united to Christ by grace, and he seeks to join his daily work to the work carried out by Christ, become for him a "sanctifiable and sanctifying reality."⁶⁴ "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."⁶⁵

"For every one of the baptized who wants to faithfully follow Christ," emphasizes the Brief of Beatification, "the factory, the office, the library, the laboratory, the workshop and the home can be transformed into places

of meeting with the Lord, who chose to live a hidden life for thirty years. Can anyone doubt that the time that Jesus spent in Nazareth formed part of his salvific mission? Therefore for us too daily life, apparently gray, with its monotony made up of gestures that seem to always be repeated in the same way, can acquire the relief of a supernatural dimension and thus be transfigured."⁶⁶ "The founder of Opus Dei has reminded us that the universality of the call to fullness of union with Christ means also that any human activity can be converted into a place of meeting with God."⁶⁷ As St. Josemaría expressed this deep apostolic reality: "the divine paths of the earth have been opened up."⁶⁸

This spirit enables one to fully carry out today the mission of "making the Christian spirit a vital energizing force in the temporal sphere,"⁶⁹ as the Second Vatican Council urged, a topic to which we will now turn.

Sanctification of the world "from within," through sanctification of work

With theological depth, St. Josemaría wrote: "There is no way to separate interior life from apostolate, just as there is no way to separate Christ, the God-man, from his role as redeemer. The Word chose to become flesh in order to save men, to make

63. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 120.

64. *Ibid.*, no. 47

65. *Ibid.*.

66. John Paul II, Decree of Beatification, May 17, 1992. 67. *Ibid.*

68. Cf., for example, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 21; *Friends of God*, no. 314.

69. Vatican II, Decree. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 4.

them one with him. This is why he came to the world; he came down from heaven 'for us men and for our salvation,' as we say in the creed.

"For a Christian apostolate is something instinctive. It is not something added onto his daily activities and his professional work from the outside. I have repeated it constantly, since the day that our Lord chose for the foundation of Opus Dei! We have to sanctify our ordinary work, we have to sanctify others through the exercise of the particular profession that is proper to each of us, in our own particular state in life."⁷⁰

This teaching on the interconnection between holiness, work and the Christian building up of the world has now become, by God's grace, the life of a great number of Christians. "Work therefore takes on," says John Paul II, "a central role in Christian sanctification and apostolate. The special connection between the dynamism of human actions and supernatural grace shows clearly how the supernatural life of union with Christ occupies a central place, while it also leads the faithful to make a determined effort to transform the world."⁷¹

The spirit of Opus Dei's founder contains an implicit theology of

work, imbued with its own characteristics.⁷² The Decree of Canonization points out some of them: "Josemaría Escrivá teaches that work, if it is carried out with the help of God's life-giving grace, is a wellspring of inexhaustible fruitfulness. It is a means of lifting up the Cross and placing it on the summit of all human activity, so that the world is transformed, as it were, from within, according to the Spirit of Christ, and reconciled with God."⁷³

The magisterial text just cited implicitly alludes to a specific event that took place in Madrid on August 7, 1931. God made St. Josemaría understand, while celebrating Holy Mass on that day, then the feast of the Transfiguration, that the work of the children of God had to be an instrument to raise the Cross of Christ to the summit of all human activities, thus contributing, from the point of view of temporal realities, to the exaltation of Christ and the drawing of all created realities to him. "There came to my mind, with extraordinary force and clarity," as St. Josemaría later recalled, "that verse from Scripture: *et si exaltatus fuero a terra, omni traham ad meipsum* (Jn 12:32)...And I understood that it would be the men and women of God who would raise the Cross with the teachings of Christ to the summit

70. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 122.

71. John Paul II, Decree of Beatification, May 17, 1992.

72. In regard to this central aspect of the teaching of St. Josemaría, cf., for example, Jose Luis Illanes, *La santificación del trabajo. El trabajo en la historia de la espiritualidad*, Palabra, 10th ed., Madrid 2001.

73. John Paul II, Decree of Canonization, October 6, 2002.

of all human activities... And I saw our Lord triumph, drawing everything to himself.”⁷⁴

The theology of work and the theology of the Cross mutually illuminate one another in grasping the perennial timeliness of Christ’s redemptive action, to which he has wished to associate Christians through the Gift of the Spirit, calling them to transform the earth with the power of their faith and love. “This message” as John Paul II said on one occasion, “has abundant and fruitful implications for the evangelizing mission of the Church. It fosters the Christianization of the world ‘from within,’ showing there can be no conflict between the divine law and the demands of genuine human progress. This saintly priest taught that Christ must be the apex of all human activity (cf. Jn 12:32).”⁷⁵

In every time and place, but especially now when many seem to harbor the prejudice of seeing an irreparable conflict between Christian faith and contemporary culture, the disciples of Christ, as citizens immersed in social and cultural realities, have a particular obligation to make the voice of the Gospel heard. St. Josemaría reminds us that being a Christian brings with it a mission. “Being a Christian is not something incidental; it is a divine reality that takes root deep in our

life. It gives us a clear vision and strengthens our will to act as God wants.”⁷⁶

Our responsibility as Christ’s disciples is great. But the power of the children of God to defend the truth with charity (cf Eph 4:11) is also great, in this stage of history so much in need of Christian life and vigor. “What illuminates our conscience is faith in Christ, who has died and risen and is present in every moment of life. Faith moves us to play our full part in the changing situations and in the problems of human history. In this history, which began with the creation of the world and will reach its fulfillment at the end of time, the Christian is no expatriate. He is a citizen of the city of men, and his soul longs for God. While still on earth he has glimpses of God’s love and comes to recognize it as the goal to which all men on earth are called.”⁷⁷

In the 1990 Decree by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints on the heroic virtue of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, we find a synthesis of all that we have just said: “*Regnare Christum volumus!* ‘We want Christ to reign’ Here was Monsignor Escrivá’s program: ‘to place Christ at the summit of all human activities.’ His service to the Church helped initiate an upward movement toward God of men and women engaged in tempo-

74. Cf., for example, Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei: The Life of Josemaría Escrivá*, vol. I, Scepter, 2001, pp. 286-290. A theological analysis of the text cited by St. Josemaría can be found in the work of Pedro Rodríguez, “*Omnia traham ad meipsum: el sentido de Juan 12, 32 en la experiencia espiritual de Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer*,” in *Romana* 13 (1991) 331-352.

75. John Paul II, Address, October 7, 2002, no. 4.

76. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 98.

77. *Ibid.*, n. 99.

ral affairs in all life's sectors and professions."⁷⁸

A theology of unity of life

From the moment he received the seed of Opus Dei in October 1928, Josemaría Escrivá began to multiply his pastoral activity among people of all conditions. In spite of the difficulties in beginning, he soon found himself surrounded by a group of priests and laity, men and women, students and professionals, healthy and sick, for whom the example of his love for God and the supernatural vigor of his teachings were the path that led them to discover the ideal of Christian sanctity and apostolate in the fulfillment of their professional, family and social duties. They discovered the ideal of living for the glory of God without leaving their own place in the world, carrying with a priestly spirit⁷⁹ the gentle burden of the Cross,⁸⁰ in order to co-redeem with Christ.

By fostering this ideal among Christian faithful of all walks of life, St. Josemaría contributed to forging in the contemporary Church a widespread experience of contemplative life in the midst of daily activities, and an extensive awareness of personal apostolic responsibility. "Christ awaits us," he insists in one of his homilies. "We are 'citizens of heaven' (Phil 3:20), and at the same time fully-

fledged citizens of this earth....Let us persevere in the service of our God, and we will see the growth in numbers and in sanctity of this Christian army of peace, of this co-redeeming people. Let us be contemplative souls, carrying on an unceasing dialogue with our Lord at all hours—from the first thought of the day to the last, turning our heart constantly toward our Lord Jesus Christ, going to him through our Mother, Holy Mary, and through him to the Father and the Holy Spirit."⁸¹

To grasp more deeply the broad pastoral phenomenon God has brought forth in the Church through St. Josemaría, we need to consider the concept of unity of life, so frequent in his teaching.⁸² The Decree of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints on his heroic virtues refers at length to the importance of this concept in his teaching, placing it in its theological context. "Many are the paths to Christian holiness," we read in the document. "The path marked out and followed by the Servant of God reveals with special clarity the radical nature of the baptismal vocation. His vivid perception of the mystery of the incarnation made him see how supernatural life penetrates all human realities in the heart of a person reborn in Christ. These realities thus become the setting for holiness and the means to that goal. From the late 1920's on-

78. Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Decree on heroic virtues, April 9, 1990.

79. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, no. 369.

80. Cf. Mt 11:30.

81. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 126.

82. In this regard see I. De Celaya, "Unidad de vida y plenitud cristiana," in F. Ocariz - I. De Celaya, *Vivir como hijos de Dios*, Eunsa, 5th ed., Pamplona 2000, pp. 91-128.

ward the Servant of God was a true pioneer of the 'intrinsic unity of Christian life,' proclaiming the fullness of a contemplative life 'in the middle of the street,' and calling all the faithful to take an active part in the apostolates of the Church from the place each one occupies in the world."⁸³

As St. Josemaría insisted: "There is no clash, no opposition, between serving God and serving men; between the exercise of our civic rights and duties and our religious ones; between the commitment to build up and improve the earthly city, and the conviction that we are passing through this world on our way to our heavenly homeland. Here too, as I never tire of repeating, we can see that unity of life which is 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."⁸⁴

John Paul II refers to the importance of unity of life for the evangelization of the contemporary world in a talk he gave in January 2002 to the participants in an international congress celebrated in Rome in honor of the centennial of Josemaría Escrivá's birth. "Show by your daily efforts," said the Pope, "that the love

of Christ can animate the whole spectrum of existence, permitting one to attain the ideal of unity of life, which, as I reaffirmed in the post-synodal exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, is fundamental in the commitment to evangelize modern society (cf. no. 17). Prayer, work and apostolate, as you have learned from blessed Josemaría, meet and are fused together if one lives with this spirit. He always encouraged you to love the world passionately. And he added an important consideration: 'Be men and women of the world, but do not be worldly men and women' (*The Way*, no. 939). Thus you will succeed in avoiding the danger of being conditioned by a worldly mentality, which thinks of spiritual commitment as something which belongs exclusively to the private sphere and which, therefore, has no relevance in regard to public behavior."⁸⁵

"We are always doing the same thing," wrote the founder of Opus Dei, "for everything can be prayer, all activity can and should lead us to God, nourish our intimate dealings with him, from morning to night. Any honorable work can be prayer and all prayerful work is apostolate. In this way the soul develops a unity of life, which is both simple and strong."⁸⁶

83. Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Decree on heroic virtues, April 9, 1990.

84. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, no. 165

85. John Paul II, Address, January 12, 2002, no. 4.

86. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 10

IV. THE IMPACT OF THE MESSAGE OF ST. JOSEMARÍA ON THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

We now come to the last topic of this paper.

The organizers of this symposium expressly suggested including some reflections on the impact of this priestly example on the future of the Church and society.

The same documentary sources that I have been citing—that is to say, the various pontifical documents on Josemaría Escrivá and his teachings—are to a great extent exhortations to follow his example and continue his mission. They contain, therefore, frequent allusions to the importance of doing so both at the present moment and for the future of the Church and society.

Permanent timeliness of the message

The supernatural certainty and strength that God grants to those he has chosen, urging them to carry out the mission that he has entrusted to them, constitutes for them, although always in the semi-obscurity of faith, a firm basis for their dedication. This simple idea, easily confirmed in the biographies of the saints, came to my mind as I recalled the sureness with which St. Josemaría, entirely trusting

in God, spoke in his *Apuntes íntimos* of the projection of Opus Dei into the future: “Since it is entirely God’s and he wants it to last until the end, haste is not necessary. The Work began in 1928, on the feast of the holy guardian angels, and will continue forever. As long as people are wayfarers on earth, the Work will exist!”⁸⁷

These deep supernatural convictions of the founder, grounded in faith, in hope and in his intense love for Jesus Christ, have by God’s mercy become a reality in so many corners of the world today. In the homily of the Mass of beatification, John Paul II pointed to “the relevance and transcendence of his spiritual message, deeply rooted in the Gospel, which is shown also by the fruitfulness with which God has blessed the life and work of Josemaría Escrivá. The land of his birth, Spain, is honored by this son of hers, an exemplary priest, who succeeded in opening up new apostolic horizons of missionary and evangelizing activity.”⁸⁸

We find the relevance and transcendence of his message above all in the call to holiness in ordinary life, through sanctified and sanctifying work, carried out for the glory of God and at the service of all men and women. In 1966 a journalist from The New York Times asked Josemaría Escrivá: “How do you visualise the future

87. *Apuntes íntimos*, no. 1609; the passage is dated February 5, 1940. Cf. Andrés Vázquez De Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei: The Life of Josemaría Escrivá*, vol. II, Scepter, 2003, p. 313, note 204.

88. John Paul II, Homily, May 17, 1992, no. 3.

of Opus Dei in the years to come?” In his answer, he states: “our aim is to collaborate with all other Christians in the great mission of being witnesses of Christ’s Gospel, to recall that it can vivify any human situation. The task that awaits us is immense. It is a sea without shores, for as long as there are men on earth, no matter how much the techniques of production may change, they will have some type of work that can be offered to God and sanctified. With God’s grace, Opus Dei wants to teach them how to make their work an act of service to all men of every condition, race and religion. Serving men in this way, they will serve God.”⁸⁹

The entire fabric of daily life made up of one’s professional, family and social obligations has been converted, with Christ’s grace and following his example, into a place for finding God, into a path of holiness and apostolate, a path of freedom, self-giving and happiness. As one of the magisterial documents says: “This message of sanctification in and of earthly realities appears to be providentially relevant to the spiritual circumstances of our time, characterized by its concern to exalt human values yet also tending to an autonomy that divorces the world from God. Furthermore, by inviting Christians to seek union with God through their daily work—which confers dignity on human beings and

is their lot as long as they exist on earth—his message is destined to endure as an inexhaustible source of spiritual light regardless of changing epochs and situations.”⁹⁰

We also find explicit references to various aspects of the timeliness and perpetuity of St. Josemaría’s message in other documents of the magisterium. I will mention here four specific examples:

The first points to the contribution of St. Josemaría to the strengthening of the harmony between faith and culture. It is taken from an address John Paul II gave to those attending the canonization at the audience he granted on the following day, after the first Thanksgiving Mass. These are the Pope’s words: “The message of St. Josemaría impels the Christian to act in places where the future of society is being shaped. From the laity’s active presence in all the professions and at the most advanced frontiers of development there can only come a positive contribution to the strengthening of that harmony between faith and culture which is one of the greatest needs of our time.”⁹¹

The second quote refers to St. Josemaría’s insistence on the need to spread the message of the universal call to holiness, above all with the example of one’s own consistent Chris-

89. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations*, no. 57.

90. Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Decree on heroic virtues, April 9, 1990, p. 1454.

91. John Paul II, Address, October 7, 2002, no. 4.

tian life. In his homily during the canonization ceremony, John Paul II said: "Following in his footsteps, spread in society the consciousness that we are all called to holiness whatever our race, class, society or age. In the first place, struggle to be saints yourselves, cultivating an evangelical style of humility and service, abandonment to Providence and constant listening to the voice of the Spirit. In this way, you will be the 'salt of the earth' (cf. *Mt* 5:13) and 'your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven' (*Mt* 5:16)."⁹²

The third text points to the importance of St. Josemaría's message for recovering the Christian meaning of created goods. "In a society in which an unbridled craving for material things turns them into idols and a cause of separation from God," the Pope said on May 17, 1992, during the beatification ceremony, "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 the things of the earth,' he taught, 'including the earthly and temporal activity of men and women, must be directed to God' (Letter, March 19, 1954)."⁹³

Finally, the Roman Pontiff emphasizes the importance of St. Josemaría's teaching for building up the world in a Christian way. I cite here words from the homily at the Canonization Mass: "'The ordinary life of a Christian who has faith,' Josemaría Escrivá used to say, 'when he works or rests, when he prays or sleeps, at all times, is a life in which God is always present' (Meditation, 3 March 1954). This supernatural vision of life unfolds an extraordinarily rich horizon of salvific perspectives, because, even in the only apparently monotonous flow of normal earthly events, God comes close to us and we can cooperate with his plan of salvation. So it is easier to understand what the Second Vatican Council affirmed: 'there is no question, then, of the Christian message inhibiting men from building up the world...on the contrary it is an incentive to do these very things' (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 34)."⁹⁴

These four brief references point to broad perspectives for the Church's mission in her service of mankind. The Church has "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16), as St. Paul says. She knows herself to be the bearer of the true meaning of man. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, she possesses a patrimony of theological and anthropological wisdom, vital for the happiness of each man and woman, and therefore she has the obligation to proclaim it for the good of all humanity. This procla-

92. John Paul II, Homily, October 6, 2002, no. 3.

93. John Paul II, Homily, May 17, 1992, no. 3.

94. John Paul II, Homily, October 6, 2002, no. 2.

mation will become truly efficacious if the Christian meaning of life is incarnated in daily life, through the example and the deeds of our Lord's disciples. Since the divine Word "has taken on a complete human nature and consecrated the world with his presence and with the work of his hands,"⁹⁵ the march of history calls repeatedly for the salt and light of Christian doctrine. The world needs the active leaven of Christian identity, incarnated in the daily life of all the faithful, and in a special way in the lay faithful, since it is they who more directly bear this specific mission. "A great task awaits us. We cannot remain inactive, because our Lord has told us clearly, 'Trade till I come' (*Lk* 19:13). As long as we are awaiting the Lord's return, when he will come to take full possession of his kingdom, we cannot afford to relax. Spreading the kingdom of God isn't only an official task of those members of the Church who represent Christ because they have received sacred powers from him. 'Vos autem estis corpus Christi. You are also the body of Christ' (*1 Cor* 12:27), says the Apostle, with a specific command to 'trade' right up to the end."⁹⁶

* * *

To conclude these reflections I will return to an idea that I alluded to earlier. I mentioned above that the principal contribution of St. Josemaría to the universal Church was his correspon-

dence to God's grace in founding Opus Dei, which he received in his soul as a divine seed, and his constant effort to ensure it set down firm roots. In his earthly life, it was not granted to him to see the canonical journey of the Work reach its final destination. Our Lord wanted this final sacrifice from him. But he led Opus Dei up to the threshold of the final stretch, and, as Divine Providence so disposed, he bequeathed to the hands of others, especially to his first successor, the Servant of God, Alvaro del Portillo, the task and the joy of reaching, with the Church's blessing, the completion of that long path. By the Apostolic Constitution *Ut Sit*, on November 28, 1982, the Personal Prelature of Opus Dei was established, to which the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross is intrinsically united. It is only natural, then, when considering the permanent timeliness of the message of St. Josemaría in the Church and in society, that one's attention be directed also to the permanent timeliness of the Prelature's service to the local Churches for the holiness of the faithful and the construction of a society worthy of human dignity.

Quite recently, John Paul II told a group of faithful of Opus Dei: "You are here representing the components by which the Prelature is organically structured, that is, priests and lay faithful, men and women, headed by their own Prelate. This hierarchical nature of Opus Dei, established in the Apostolic Constitution by which I erected the

95. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 120.

96. *Ibid.*, no. 121

Prelature (cf. Apostolic Const. *Ut Sit*, Nov. 28, 1982), offers a starting point for pastoral considerations full of practical applications. First of all, I wish to emphasize that the membership of the lay faithful in their own particular Churches and in the Prelature, into which they are incorporated, enables the special mission of the Prelature to converge with the evangelizing efforts of each particular Church, as envisaged by the Second Vatican Council in desiring the figure of personal prelatures.⁹⁷

As the bishops of the dioceses in which the apostolic work of the faithful of Opus Dei is carried out well know, this is the most immediate and, of course, the most important service of the Prelature to the particular Churches. This is what St. Josemaría wanted from the beginning, as he always encouraged the men and women of Opus Dei to foster a great love for the Spouse of Christ, teaching them by his own example to be ready for any sacrifice and to work silently for the Church, without seeking any human recognition. As he wrote in *The Way*: “In that cry *serviam!* you express your determination to ‘serve’ the Church of God most faithfully, even at the cost of fortune, of reputation and of life.”⁹⁸ Here we find the focus of his teaching, and here also, thanks be to God, is the daily reality of the activities of formation and the apostolates of the Prelature all over the world, essentially characterized by the organic cooperation of

the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood.

This organic cooperation is precisely the point emphasized by John Paul II in another part of the address I just cited. “The organic way that priests and laity work together is one of those privileged areas where pastoral activity will take life and be strengthened, activity marked by that ‘new energy’ (cf. Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 15) which has encouraged us all since the Great Jubilee.”⁹⁹

Confronted with the immense and fascinating challenge of the “new evangelization,” there is an urgent need to put into play the apostolic potentialities of all the faithful, fostering in everyone, both priests and laity, as well as in persons in the consecrated life, a profound sense of ecclesial communion. John Paul II pointed out in this respect that “St. Josemaría Escrivá spent his life in the service of the Church.”¹⁰⁰ And he continued: “Dear brothers and sisters, in imitating him with openness of spirit and heart, with a readiness to serve the local Churches, you contribute to strengthening the ‘spirituality of communion’ which my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* points out as one of the most important goals of our time (cf. nos. 42-45).”¹⁰¹

In a Church called to be the soul of the contemporary world, with a “new dynamism” of holiness and of vibrant

97. John Paul II, Address, March 17, 2001, nos. 1-2.

98. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, no. 519.

99. John Paul II, Address, March 17, 2001, nos. 1-2.

100. John Paul II, Address, October 7, 2002, no. 5.

101. *Ibid.*

proclamation of the Gospel, St. Josemaría and his teachings remind us that the power of God has not diminished,¹⁰² “for the Lord has opened up all the divine paths of the earth.”¹⁰³

To close, I would like to recall, in the words of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, that “Opus Dei has never tried to present itself as the final or most perfect development in the history of spirituality. For a person who lives by faith, it is clear that the fullness of time has

already occurred in Christ and that all the spiritualities that maintain their fidelity to the Church and their respective foundational gift are up to date. At times, an ‘historicist’ view of the life of the Church might be inclined to look down on the old and exaggerate the new, or the reverse, for no other reason than mere chronology. Opus Dei loves and venerates all institutions—old and new—that work for Christ in filial adhesion to the Church’s magisterium.”¹⁰⁴

Pastoral Letters

Rome

April 3, 2005

On the death of Pope John Paul II

May Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

My dear children: We have been preparing ourselves for the sad moment of the death of our beloved Pope John Paul II, who — more frequently in these last years and months — has offered to the whole world the serene and joyful witness of his intimate union with God, through suffering.

Since last Wednesday, when the Pope’s health suddenly worsened, the

entire Church has gathered around its supreme Shepherd, praying with faith in every corner of the globe. Once more the scene narrated in the Acts of the Apostles, when King Herod had the apostle Peter imprisoned, intending to put him to death, has become a reality: earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church (*Acts* 12:5).

This prayer for the Successor of St. Peter, aside from having been a source of strength for the Pope in recent days, has united us more firmly to Christ and to his beloved Spouse, the Church. It has helped Catholics to discover once more that we form part of the great family of God’s children, who have a common Father on earth. We have also felt the closeness of many other Chris-

102. Cf. *Is* 59:1.

103. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, no. 314.

104. Alvaro del Portillo, “El Camino del Opus Dei,” in idem, *Rendere amabile la verità*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1995, pp. 256-257.