

TWO PILGRIMS TO THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF WILLEDEN



ST THOMAS MORE AND ST JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ

by
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TWO PILGRIMS TO THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF WILLESDEN

Thomas More was born in the City of London on 6 or 7 February 1477 or 1478.¹ His family house was at Milk Street, off Cheapside, the main market place of London at the time, not far from St Paul's Cathedral and the Guildhall. His father was a lawyer. Thomas was educated at St Anthony's school near his home and later in the household of Archbishop Morton who at the time was Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor of England. Afterwards More spent two years at the University of Oxford; he returned to London to start preparing for his legal studies and was admitted to Lincoln's Inn at the age of 18. When he had finished his studies and qualified as a barrister, he began practising and lecturing in Law at Furnival's Inn, Holborn. At the same time he learned Greek and spent many years studying the Christian and Classical masters, especially St Augustine, and became aware of the need to search for holiness in his profession as a lawyer and in his family setting, as a husband and father.

In January 1505 he married Joan Colt of Netherhall in Essex. They settled in Bucklersbury Street, not far from his parents' house, across Cheapside in the City of London. They had three daughters, Meg, Elizabeth, Cecily, and a son, John.

¹ The historical sources available are not conclusive as to which of these is the precise date.

Joan died quite young, and very soon afterwards Thomas More married a widow, Alice Middleton. Of the children by Alice's first husband, one, also called Alice, was brought up in More's household. Thomas More also adopted two other children, Margaret Giggs and Anne Cresacre.

The first mention of Willesden that we have in connection with Thomas More is a reference to Alice, his stepdaughter, marrying Sir Giles Alington of Willesden. St Thomas must have been a frequent visitor to the house of the Alingtons; indeed, his two daughters, Elizabeth and Cecily were both married in Alington's private chapel in Willesden on 29th September 1525.

For Thomas More the period between finishing his studies at Lincoln's Inn and his marriage was a time of intense formation which influenced the whole of his life. He studied Latin and Greek literature, and composed poems in English and Latin. But it was also a period of intense prayer and study of Sacred Scripture and the Church Fathers, and of readiness to find out what God's will was for him.

It was probably during this period that he wrote a poem in which it is clear that *he had set his love unto God*. He published it in 1510. It begins:

*So thou that hast thy love set unto God
In thy remembrance this imprint and grave:
As He in sovereign dignity is unique,
So will He in love no parting fellows have:
Love Him therefore with all that He thee gave*



Statue of St Thomas More near Lincoln's Inn where he was admitted to study law on 12 February 1496, aged 18, and called to the bar in 1501.

*For body, soul, wit, cunning, mind and thought,
Part will He none but either all or naught.*²

In the same poem he speaks of trying to remember the presence of God at all times, of keeping his mind in heaven and his feet on the ground – being a contemplative in the midst of world. From then on he had set times of prayer and went to Mass daily.

Before he married, Thomas More had studied the works of St Augustine, and it was probably from St Augustine's commentary on the scene of the Gospel of Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus of Bethany, that he understood the need for a life of service to others based on prayer, as exemplified by Martha's activity and Mary's contemplation, which – according to St Augustine – are not to be considered as two separate lives or practised by two different kinds of people, but as two aspects of the single life of each Christian.³ Thus St Thomas More gave himself fully to the service of others through very active work, first as a lawyer and Under-sheriff of the City of London, and later in the service of the King, but always trying to convert his work into prayer.⁴

At the same time he studied literature thoroughly. As he

² *A Thomas More Source Book*, Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith, editors, Washington, 2004, page 164.

³ *Homilies on the New Testament*, Homily 54 (Luke 10:38ff).

⁴ As will be seen below, Thomas More went back to the example of Martha and Mary in several of his writings, the last time being the *Treatise on receiving the Blessed Body of our Lord in the Eucharist* written in the Tower of London in 1534.

wrote in the epitaph that can be seen on the tombstone in Chelsea Old Church, he “was always engaged in literary matters in one way or another”, fostering the humanism of the European renaissance. His expertise in language and his competence as a lawyer led him eventually to become one of the King’s secretaries and later Lord Chancellor of England, as well as High Steward of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Thomas More had great prestige both in England and on the Continent, and was a most trusted officer of King Henry VIII. When, however, Henry proclaimed himself Head of the Church in England, he resigned as Lord Chancellor (1532). When he refused the oath recognising Henry as Supreme Head of the Church, he was imprisoned in the Tower of London (1534) and later beheaded (6 July 1535).

Thomas More’s love for the Blessed Virgin Mary

St Thomas More’s love for the Blessed Virgin Mary was unostentatious. When he was a member of the King’s Council, and just before he became Lord Chancellor in 1529, he was asked to write a defence of the faith. Later, when he had resigned as Lord Chancellor and was in prison, he wrote a number of books on the Christian life. In these treatises, known as his apologetic and spiritual writings, which form the most extensive part of his English works, Thomas More showed his love and reverence towards Mary.

He refers to her as “our blessed Lady the immaculate

mother of Christ”;⁵ and praises her virginity and her Assumption into heaven – both these truths, he argued, having always been held as part of the tradition of the Church.⁶

The naturalness and spontaneity with which More introduces the Blessed Virgin into his discussions leads one to infer that she was habitually in his thoughts. Thus in his *Treatise upon the Passion* (1534), while speaking of Jesus’ special love for the Apostle Saint John, More does not fail to remind us that it was to John that Christ entrusted “his own dear heavy [sorrowful] mother”.⁷ Again referring to “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20), this time in the *Sadness of Christ* (1535), and alluding to the tradition that this Apostle remained celibate, More describes Saint John standing before the Cross by the side of “Christ’s most beloved mother” as “two pure virgins standing together”.⁸ In the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, also written in the Tower in 1535, he presents the consoling picture of Christ’s “Immaculate mother” together with all the saints inviting us to the joys of heaven.⁹

⁵ *The Complete Works of St Thomas More*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1963-1997, volume 11, page 223.

⁶ *Complete Works*, volume 8, pages 285 and 366; volume 11, pages 58-59; volume 6, pages 150-151.

⁷ *Complete Works*, volume 13, page 82.

⁸ *Complete Works*, volume 14, page 571.

⁹ *Complete Works*, volume 12, page 315. For the full text see James Monti, *The King’s Good Servant But God’s First. The Life and Writings of St. Thomas More*, Ignatius Press, 1997, pages 250-254.



Bust of St Thomas More in the crypt of the church inside the Tower of London where his body is buried. The inscription reads:

THOMAS MORE

Knight scholar writer statesman

Lord Chancellor of England 1529-32

Beheaded on Tower Hill, buried in this Chapel

1535

Canonised by Pope Pius XI 1935

Going on pilgrimage

In the *Dialogue* he published in 1529 – shortly before being made Lord Chancellor of England – St Thomas More wrote that going on pilgrimage to shrines of our Lady and other saints was a practice “in such a way planted by God’s own hand in the hearts of the whole Church – that is to say, not the clergy alone, but the whole congregation of all Christian people – that if the clergy were of the mind to drop it, the laity would not yet allow that.”¹⁰ He knew this from his own experience.

In the same *Dialogue*, he specifically mentioned the shrines of Our Lady of Walsingham, Ipswich, and Willesden.

Thomas Stapleton, one of the first biographers of St Thomas More, wrote that “sometimes he used to go on pilgrimages to shrines distant as much as seven miles from his home, and always on foot.”¹¹ This is in fact the distance from his house in Bucklersbury Street to Willesden.

From this testimony of Stapleton and Thomas More’s familiarity with Willesden, it has always been inferred that the Shrine of Our Lady of Willesden is one of those referred to. Indeed, he made his last pilgrimage here before being imprisoned.

¹⁰ *Complete Works*, volume 6, page 54, lines 20-25, rendered in modern English by Mary Gottschalk in *Dialogue* (1529), Scepter Publishers, New York, 2006, page 77.

¹¹ Thomas Stapleton, *The Life of Sir Thomas More* (1588), edited by E.E. Reynolds, London, 1966, page 64.

The last pilgrimage of St Thomas More to the Shrine of Our Lady of Willesden

Thomas More chose Willesden as the place for what he foresaw would be his last pilgrimage before he lost his freedom. This was in the first week of April 1534. A few days later, on Low Sunday 12 April, after attending a sermon in St Paul's, he was summoned to appear before the King's Commissioners in Lambeth to take the Oath of Succession. That same night he returned to his house in Chelsea, and the following day – after going to confession and attending Mass – he went to Lambeth, where he was detained and taken to Westminster Abbey. After four days, on 17 April, he was sent by river from Westminster to the Tower of London, where he remained until his execution on 6 July of the following year, 1535.

During this last pilgrimage to Our Lady of Willesden, he stayed at the house of Sir Giles Alington, husband to his stepdaughter, and from there, on Easter Sunday, 5 April, he wrote to his secretary about changes to *A Treatise on the Passion* – these changes concerning the timing of some of the events of the Passion on which he had been meditating during Holy Week.¹² A week beforehand, he had arranged

¹² The letter to John Harris (See *Selected Letters of St Thomas More*, edited by E.F. Rogers, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1961, letter no. 48) is dated "From Willesden this present Sunday". The footnote on page 188 suggests that More was there as a pilgrim. Marc'Hadour dates it *circa* March. In the *Complete Works*, volume 6, part II, page 486, line 7, it is dated "in the last week of his freedom". As he went to St. Paul's

for the conveyance of all his lands upon his decease; and he bequeathed to the Ropers – his eldest daughter Meg and her husband William Roper – a portion of his estate. Evidently he was trying to protect the interests of his family, and was no less clearly preparing for his own death.

St Josemaría Escrivá

St Josemaría Escrivá was born in Spain on 9 January 1902 and died on 26 June 1975. He was the second of six children. At the age of 16 he was struck by seeing the footprints of a discalced Carmelite in the snow and realised that God wanted something from him. From then on he tried to correspond to God's will, started going to Mass daily, and practised prayer. He often repeated the aspirations *Domine, ut videam!* – Lord, may I see – and *Domine, ut sit!* – Lord, let what you want from me come to be! When he finished school he joined the seminary in order to be available for whatever God wanted of him, though as yet he did not know what that was. He came to know it three years after priestly ordination, on 2 October 1928, when he saw that God wanted him to proclaim the universal call to sanctity in the midst of world. That vision coincided

Cathedral on Low Sunday, 12 April, it would mean that the letter was written on Easter Sunday, 5 April. It may seem surprising that he did not write "this Easter Sunday". However, the letter deals with the date of the Last Supper which he had previously wrongly fixed on Wednesday instead of Thursday, and now corrected. Therefore, it is fitting that it should be written after the Easter *triduum* when he would have considered again the relevant texts of Scripture.

with the foundation of Opus Dei.

In the case of Thomas More, it seems that it took him at least from 1501 to 1504 to realise his calling to seek holiness as a married man in the midst of the world. Similarly, it took St Josemaría some ten years from his first inklings until he saw clearly at the age of 26 what God wanted of him. In both cases that period was a time of growing on the inside, praying and studying, trying to be docile to the Holy Spirit, and accepting the will of God.



St Josemaría accompanied by Alvaro del Portillo, who succeeded him as head of Opus Dei, and the architect Jesús Gazapo. The photograph was taken in August 1959 in St Paul's Yard in the City of London, not far from Cheapside and the streets frequented by St Thomas More.

Once St Josemaría understood the grace that he had received he spared no effort in meeting many people and making clear to them the need to search for God in every circumstance, whether they were young or old, single or married, students, academics, professionals or manual workers. He developed an extensive pastoral work, first in Madrid and later in Rome, spreading his apostolic work throughout five continents.

In a sense the teaching of St Josemaría Escrivá serves as a key to understanding the holiness of St Thomas More. Of course, they followed different paths; each had his own call from God. But in the case of St Thomas More there are aspects of his life that are not explicitly set out – for instance, marriage as a path of holiness – because he did not write his own spiritual biography. Historians try to infer from his later writings references to his early decision to follow our Lord – and yet in the teachings and writings of St Josemaría we are given a light that helps us understand More's response to God in placing Christ at the summit of all activities, even the most ordinary and apparently mundane, and turning them into prayer.

St Josemaría thought that St Thomas More could well have understood his apostolic work because – St Josemaría said – Thomas More “loved the Church, the Pope, his country, his wife – both the first one and the second – and his children, greatly. He had a universal spirit.” And in the early 1950s St Josemaría made St Thomas More one of the intercessors for his apostolic work.



On 3 September 1958 St Josemaría went to pray at the Church of St Dunstan in Canterbury where the head of St Thomas More is kept. The inscription on the tombstone reads:

*Beneath this floor is the vault of the Roper family in
which is interred the head of Sir Thomas More of
illustrious memory sometime Lord Chancellor of
England who was beheaded on 6 July 1535
Ecclesia Anglicana Libera sit*

Some other lines from the poem of St Thomas More quoted above –

*Lo in like manner the lover of God should [...] bear his body in earth, his mind in heaven.*¹³

– find a resonance in similar words spoken by St Josemaría three months before he left this earth:

*We must be – and I am aware I have reminded you of this many times – in Heaven and on earth, always. Not “between” Heaven and earth, because we are of the world. In the world and in Paradise at the same time! This could be the formula to express how we should go about our life while we remain in hoc saeculo.*¹⁴

St Josemaría as a pilgrim of our Lady

From his parents St Josemaría learnt to love the Blessed Virgin Mary, and once he had understood that God wanted something from him, although without knowing what it was, he added some other aspirations – *Domina, ut videam! Domina, ut sit!* My Lady, may I see! Let it be! – to the ones he was already addressing to our Lord – *Domine, ut videam! Domine, ut sit!*

From May 1935 to the end of his life he undertook many pilgrimages in order to pray for the Church: whether to small nearby chapels dedicated to our Lady or to well known

¹³ Cf. *A Thomas More Source Book*, pages 166-167.

¹⁴ Salvador Bernal, *Josemaría Escrivá, A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, London, 1977, page 342.

shrines such as Lourdes (from 1937), Fatima (from 1945), Loreto (1948), Einsiedeln (Switzerland, from 1956)... He used to say that he loved all the names given to shrines of our Lady around the world. In this his ideas coincided with those of St Thomas More, who in the *Dialogue* he wrote in 1529, spoke among other things of *devotion to saints, veneration of images, and going on pilgrimages*.¹⁵

In August 1958 St Josemaría came to England and on the 15th of that month (the Feast of the Assumption) he went on pilgrimage to Our Lady of Willesden and there renewed the Consecration to the most Sweet Heart of Our Lady which he had first made in Loreto in 1951.

Passing unnoticed

In May of the previous year, 1957, St Josemaría had preached a homily in which he referred to that first pilgrimage he made in 1935:

If we look at the world, at the People of God,¹⁶ during this month of May, we will see devotion to our Lady taking the form of many old and new customs practised with great love. It makes me very happy to see that this devotion is always alive, awakening in Christians a supernatural desire to act as "members of God's household."¹⁷

Seeing how so many Christians express their affection for

¹⁵ *Complete Works*, volume 6, page 3.

¹⁶ Cf 1 Pet 2:10.

¹⁷ Eph 2:19: *domestici Dei*.

the Virgin Mary, surely you also feel more a part of the Church, closer to those brothers and sisters of yours. It is like a family reunion. Grown-up children, whom life has separated, come back to their mother for some family anniversary. And even if they have not always got on well together, today things are different; they feel united, sharing the same affection.

Mary continually builds the Church and keeps it together. It is difficult to have devotion to our Lady and not feel closer to the other members of the mystical body and more united to its visible head, the Pope. That's why I like to repeat: All with Peter to Jesus through Mary! By seeing ourselves as part of the Church and united to our brothers in the faith, we understand more deeply that we are brothers of all mankind, for the Church has been sent to all the peoples of the earth.¹⁸

My own experience and yours are proof of the effects of sincere devotion to our Lady. I remember how in 1935 I went to visit a shrine in Spain, the shrine of our Lady of Sonsoles. It wasn't a pilgrimage in the normal sense: nothing noisy or elaborate, just three of us. I respect and love public demonstrations of devotion, but I must admit I prefer to offer Mary the same affection, the same enthusiasm, in private visits or with very few people – a more intimate sort of thing.¹⁹

Interestingly this last paragraph seems to coincide with the practice of Thomas More. In the *Dialogue* (1529) he also

¹⁸ Cf Matt 28:19.

¹⁹ "To Jesus through Mary", a homily given on 4 May 1957, in *Christ is passing by*, St Josemaría Escrivá, London, 1974, no.139.

seems to defend public demonstrations of devotion, but from the data that has reached us it seems that he went privately:

[...] we see that Thomas More made the point of going to Willesden and even having two of his daughters, Elizabeth and Cecily married there at the chapel in the house of Sir Giles Alington, husband of Thomas More's stepdaughter. I have recently read an author who considers that arranging a marriage outside their own parish would have required permission from More's friend, the Bishop of London, and this author sees it as an abuse of More's position and an example of his vainglory. I would have thought just the opposite. Then as now to marry outside one's parish is not infrequent, even though permission is required. If they had married at Saint Stephen's Walbrook and had celebrated the wedding in his house at Bucklersbury Street, or the Hall of the Mercers or at the Guildhall, More would have been the centre of attention; by marrying at the chapel of Sir Giles Alington, Alington became the host; and even though they were in Willesden, they chose not to use the shrine for the marriage ceremony: this allowed them both the possibility of going to the shrine privately...²⁰

In this same homily preached by St Josemaría we see the relation between St John and Our Lady described by St Thomas More above.

The Gospel passages about our Lady show her as the Mother of Jesus, following her Son step by step, playing a part in his redemptive

²⁰ Frank Mitjans, *Paper delivered at the Thomas More Studies Conference, University of Dallas, November 2007.*

mission, rejoicing and suffering with him, loving those whom Jesus loves, looking after all those around her with maternal care.

Just think, for example, of the marriage at Cana. Our Lady was a guest at one of those noisy country weddings attended by crowds of people from many different villages. But she was the only one who noticed the wine was running out.²¹ Don't these scenes from Christ's life seem familiar to us? The greatness of God lives at the level of ordinary things. It is natural for a woman, a housewife, to notice something was lacking, to look after the little things which make life pleasant. And that is how Mary acted. Notice also that it is John who tells the story of Cana. He is the only evangelist who has recorded this example of our mother's concern for us. St John wants us to remember that Mary was present at the beginning of the public life of our Lord. He alone has appreciated the importance of that fact. Jesus knew to whom he was entrusting his Mother – to a disciple who had learned to understand and love her as his own mother.

St Josemaría returned to London in 1961 and there on 15 August he preached a homily for the feast of the Assumption,²² an event in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary also mentioned by St Thomas More in the *Dialogue* (1529).

Mary leads to the Blessed Sacrament

To Jesus through Mary is the title of a homily preached by St Josemaría in 1957, already quoted. For St Thomas More

²¹ Cf. John 2:3.

²² "The Blessed Virgin, Cause of Our Joy", in *Christ is passing by*.

and for St Josemaría, Mary leads us to Jesus.

This is shown for instance in one of the last works of St Thomas written when he was imprisoned in the Tower of London, in 1534, *The treatise on how to receive the Blessed Body of our Lord in the Eucharist*.²³ There he considered how St Elizabeth received our Lord from our Lady:

St Elizabeth, at the visitation and salutation of our Blessed Lady, having by revelation the sure inward knowledge that our Lady was conceived with our Lord [...] said unto her: Unde hoc, ut veniat mater Domini mei ad me? Whereof is this, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? [...] As soon as the voice of your salutation was in mine ears, the infant in my womb leapt for joy.

But rather than dwelling on the Blessed Virgin Mary, he then encourages the person who has received communion to realise who it is that we have received:

Whereof is this, that my Lord should come unto me? (and not only unto me but also into me), so we may with glad heart truly say at the sight of his blessed presence: Exultavit gaudio infans in utero meo: The child in my womb, that is, the soul in my body, which should be such a child in innocence as was that innocent infant St John, leaped, good Lord, for joy.

St Thomas More recommended – as did St Josemaría – spending time recollected in thanksgiving after Communion:

Now when we have received our Lord and have him in our

²³ The modernised English used here comes from the *Prayer of St Thomas More*, published by the Catholic Truth Society, London, 1979.

body, let us not then let him alone, and get us forth about other things and look no more unto him (for little good could he, that so would serve any guest) but let all our business be about him. Let us by devout prayer talk to him, by devout meditation talk with him. Let us say with the prophet: Audiam quid loquatur in me Dominus (Ps 134:9): I will hear what our Lord will speak within me.

Thomas More advises us to receive our Lord as did Martha and Mary – the two sisters of the village of Bethany:

For surely if we set aside all other things and attend unto him, he will not fail with good inspirations to speak such things to us within us as shall serve to the great spiritual comfort and profit of our soul. And therefore let us with Martha provide that all our outward business may be pertaining to him, in making cheer to him and to his company for his sake ... And let us with Mary also sit in devout meditation and hark well what our Saviour, being now our guest, will inwardly say unto us. Now have we a special time of prayer, while he that hath made us, he that hath bought us, he whom we have offended, he that shall judge us, is of great goodness become our guest and is personally present within us, and that for no other purpose but to be sued unto for pardon and so thereby to save us.

St Josemaría also spoke of Bethany when referring to the Eucharist, and of approaching our Lord in the way that Martha, Mary, and Lazarus did (cf. *The Way* 320).²⁴

²⁴ *Camino-The Way*, St Josemaría Escrivá, Gracewing, Leominster, 2002.

St Thomas went on:

Let us not lose this time therefore, suffer not this occasion to slip, which we can little tell whether we ever shall get it again or never. Let us endeavour ourselves to keep him still, and let us say with his two disciples that were going to Emmaus: Mane nobiscum, Domine: Stay with us, Lord (Luke 24:29).

St Josemaría often contemplated the scene and used the words of the disciples at Emmaus as an aspiration addressed to Christ – *Stay with us, Lord* – and this union with Jesus in the Eucharist also brought him apostolic desires: *I was immediately reminded of that mane nobiscum – stay with us, Lord! And I asked him again with faith that others might “see Him” in each one of us, as companions along “His way”.*²⁵ For St Josemaría this apostolate of companionship was to take place precisely through work:

Nonne cor nostrum ardens erat in nobis, dum loqueretur in via? (Luke 24:32) – Was not our heart burning within us, while he spoke to us on the way?

*These words of the disciples at Emmaus should rise spontaneously, if you are an apostle, from the lips of your professional companions, after meeting you along the ways of their lives (The Way 917).*²⁶

²⁵ *Furrow*, St Josemaría Escrivá, Scepter, London 1987, no.227.

²⁶ See also homily “Christ’s Presence in Christians” in *Christ is passing by*, no.105.



St Josemaría on a Marian pilgrimage in 1974

St Josemaría recalled the encounter again in a 1967 homily called "Towards Holiness", in which he described the path of holiness in the ordinary circumstances of life.

There were two disciples on their way to Emmaus. They were walking along at a normal pace, like so many other travellers on that road. And there, without any fuss, Jesus appeared to them, and walked with them, his conversation helping to alleviate their tiredness. I can well imagine the scene, just as dusk was falling. A gentle breeze was blowing. All around were fields ripe with wheat, and venerable olive trees, their branches shimmering in the soft glowing light.

Jesus joins them as they go along their way. Lord, how great you are, in everything! But you move me even more when you come down to our level, to follow us and to seek us in the hustle and bustle of each day. Lord, grant us a childlike spirit, pure eyes and a clear head so that we may recognise you when you come without any outward sign of your glory.

The journey ends when they reach the village. The two disciples, who, without realising it, have been deeply stirred by the words and love shown by God made Man, are sorry to see him leaving. For Jesus "made as if to go on further." This Lord of ours never forces himself on us. He wants us to turn to him freely, when we begin to grasp the purity of his Love which he has placed in our souls. We have to hold him back ("they pressed him") and beg him: "Stay with us; it is towards evening, and it is far on in the day," night is coming on.

That's just like us. Always short on daring, perhaps because we are insincere, or because we feel embarrassed. Deep down, what we are really thinking is: "Stay with us, because our souls are shrouded in darkness and You alone are the light. You alone can satisfy this longing that consumes us." For "we know full

well which among all things fair and honourable is the best: to possess God for ever."²⁷

And Jesus stays. Our eyes are opened, as were those of Cleophas and his companion, when Christ breaks the bread; and, though he vanishes once more from sight, we too will find strength to start out once more – though night is falling – to tell the others about him, because so much joy cannot be kept in one heart alone.

*The road to Emmaus: our God has filled this name with sweetness. Now the entire world has become an Emmaus, for the Lord has opened up all the divine paths of the earth.*²⁸

*This passage of the Gospel filled St Josemaría with confidence in Jesus, because it is He who seeks us out, just as he did the disciples of Emmaus, whom He went out to meet.*²⁹

St Thomas More finished his Treatise on receiving the Blessed Sacrament by focusing on the scene of Zacchaeus:

Let us, good Christian reader, receive him in such wise as did the good publican Zacchaeus, which when he longed to see Christ, and because he was but low of stature, did climb up into a tree. Our Lord seeing his devotion called unto him and said: Zacchaeus, come off and come down, for this day must I dwell with thee, and very gladly received him into his house [...] With such alacrity, with such quickness of spirit, with such gladness, and such spiritual rejoicing, as this man received our Lord into

²⁷ St Gregory Nazianzen, *Epistolae*, 212 (PG 37,349).

²⁸ *Friends of God*, no.313-314.

²⁹ *Christ is passing by*, no.75.

his house, our Lord give us the grace to receive his blessed body and blood, his holy soul, and his divinity, both into our bodies and into our souls, that the fruit of our good works may bear witness unto our conscience that we receive him worthy and in such full faith, and such a stable purpose of good living, as we be bounden to do. And then shall God give a gracious sentence and say upon our soul, as he said upon Zacchaeus: Hodie salus facta est huic domui. This day salvation has come to this house: which that holy blessed person of Christ, which we verily in the blessed sacrament receive, through the merit of his bitter passion (whereof he hath ordained his only blessed body, in that blessed sacrament, to be the memorial) vouchsafe, good Christian readers, to grant unto us all.

St Josemaría also often preached on the meeting of our Lord with Zacchaeus:

He climbs a sycamore tree like a mischievous boy to try to catch a glimpse of Jesus as He passes by (cf. Luke 19:1-4).³⁰

Zacchaeus uses the means available; he does all he can to catch Jesus' eye and draw close to Him, and our Lord takes care of the rest. In *The Way of the Cross*,³¹ St Josemaría wrote:

"This day has salvation come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:9-10).

Zacchaeus, Simon of Cyrene, Dismas, the centurion...

³⁰ The scene of "Christ passing by" was so dear to St Josemaría that it provided the name for his first set of published homilies.

³¹ *The Way of the Cross*, St Josemaría Escrivá, Scepter, London, 1983.

Now you know why our Lord has sought you out. Thank him... But opere et veritate, with deeds and in truth (Fifth station, point no.4).

Our Lady, Martha and Mary, the disciples of Emmaus, Zacchaeus... are all included in the prayer of Spiritual Communion which St Josemaría used very often and taught to thousands of people:

I wish, Lord, to receive you with the purity, humility, and devotion with which your most Holy Mother received you, with the spirit and fervour of the Saints.

Frank Mitjans

15 August 2008

Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Related articles by the same author:

- Non sum Oedipus, sed Morus: A paper on the Portrait of Sir Thomas More and his Family, in *Moreana*, Nos.169-170 (June 2007), pages 12-67.
- St Thomas More's approach to the veneration of images, devotion to saints and going on pilgrimages, *Thomas More Studies Conference*, November 2007, in www.thomasmorestudies.org.

Sources cited in this booklet

Works by St Thomas More:

- Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith, editors, *A Thomas More Source Book*, Washington, 2004.
- *The Complete Works of St Thomas More*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1963-1997.

Works by St Josemaria Escrivá:

- *Christ is passing by*, Scepter, London, 1974.
- *Friends of God*, Scepter, London, 1981.
- *The Way*, (there are a number of English editions of this book; the bilingual edition, *Camino-The Way*, published by Gracewing, 2002, has a number of annotations on St Thomas More).
- *The Way of the Cross*, Scepter, London.

Further recommended reading

- *Our Lady of Willesden: A Brief History of the Shrine and Parish*, by Reverend Nicholas Schofield, available from the Parish of Our Lady of Willesden, 1 Nicoll Road, London NW10 9AX.
- Cresacre More, *The Life of Sir Thomas More* (1631), edited by Joseph Hunter (London, 1828). Cresacre More was the great-grandson of Thomas More, and based his biography on those of William Roper (1558) and Thomas Stapleton (1588); he also used the *English Works of Thomas More* published by William Rastell in 1557, and family recollections.
- Thomas Stapleton, *The Life of Sir Thomas More* (1588), edited by E. E. Reynolds, London, 1966.
- Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei: The Life of Josemaría Escrivá*, Scepter 2005 (a biography in three volumes; the same author also wrote a biography of St Thomas More in 1962).