

CANONIZATION OF ST JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, FOUNDER OPUS DEI

St Josemaría: God is Very Much at Work in Our World Today

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I have always been impressed by Josemaría Escrivá's explanation of the name "Opus Dei": an explanation which we might call biographical and which gives us an idea of the founder's spiritual profile. Escrivá knew he had to found something, but he was also conscious that what he was founding was not his own work, that he himself did not invent anything and that the Lord was merely making use of him. So it was not his work, but *Opus Dei* (God's Work). He was only the instrument for God's action.

In thinking about this, I remember the Lord's words in John's Gospel: "My Father is working still" (5,17). These are words that Jesus spoke in a discussion with a few experts in religion who did not want to recognize that God can work even on the Sabbath. This is still an ongoing debate, in a certain way, among the men and women — also Christians — of our time. There are those who think that after creation, God "withdrew" and took no further interest in our daily affairs. To this way of thinking, God can no longer enter the fabric of our daily lives. But we have a denial of this in Jesus' words. A man open to God's presence realizes that God is always working and is still working today: we must therefore let him in and let him work. That is how things which give humanity a future and renew it are born.

All this helps us understand why Josemaría Escrivá did not claim to be

the "founder" of anything, but only someone who wanted to do God's will and second his action, his work, precisely, God's. In this regard, Escrivá de Balaguer's theocentrism, consistent with Jesus' words, means being confident that God did not withdraw from the world, that God is working today, and that all we have to do is put ourselves at his disposal, make ourselves available to him, and responsive to his call, is an extremely important message. It is a message that helps to overcome what can be considered the great temptation of our time: the claim, that after the "big bang" God withdrew from history, God's action did not stop with the "big bang" but continues in time, both in the world of nature and in the human world.

Thus the founder of the Opus said: "I did not invent anything; Another is acting and I am merely ready to serve him as an instrument". This is how the name and the whole reality that we call Opus Dei is profoundly linked with the interior life of the founder who, while remaining very discreet on this point, gives us to understand that he was in a permanent dialogue, a real contact with the One who created us and works for us and with us. The Book of Exodus says of Moses (33,11) "thus the Lord used to speak to Moses as to a friend". It seems to me that even if the veil of discretion may hide many of the details from us, nonetheless from those small references one realizes that the words "speaking as to a friend" can very aptly be applied to Josemaría Escrivá, who opens the doors of the world to let God come in, work and transform all things.

In this light it is also easier to understand what "holiness" and the "universal vocation to holiness" mean. Knowing a little about the history of saints, knowing that in canonization processes their "heroic" virtues are investigated, we almost inevitably slip into an erroneous concept of holiness: "It is not for me", we are inclined to think, "because I do not feel able to achieve heroic virtues: it's too exalted an ideal for me". Holiness then becomes something reserved for the "important" [people], whose images we see above the altars, worlds apart indeed from us normal sinners. However, this is an erroneous concept of holiness, a wrong perception which has been corrected — and this seems to me to be the main point — by Josemaría Escrivá.

Heroic virtue does not mean that the saint works out a "gymnastics" of holiness that ordinary people could not tackle. It means, instead, that God's presence is revealed in the life of a person; it is revealed when the person could do nothing by himself or for himself. Perhaps basically, it is a question of terminology because the adjective "heroic" was badly explained. Heroic virtue does not actually mean that someone has done great things by himself, but that situations arise in his life independently of anything he has done: he was simply transparent and available for God's work. Or, in other words, being holy is nothing other than speaking with God as a friend speaks to a friend. That is holiness.

Being holy does not mean being superior to others; indeed, a saint can be

very weak and make many blunders in his life. Holiness is profound contact with God, being a friend of God; it is letting the Other act, the One who really can guarantee that the world is good and happy. If therefore St Josemaría speaks of the common vocation to holiness, it seems to me that he is basically drawing on his own personal experience, not of having done incredible things himself, but of having let God work. Therefore a renewal, a force for good was born in the world even if human weaknesses will always remain. Truly we are all able, we are all called to open ourselves to this friendship with God, not to let go of God's hands, not to give up, turning and returning to the Lord, speaking to him as to a friend, knowing well that the Lord really is the true friend of everyone, even of those who cannot do great things on their own.

All this has enabled me to discern more clearly the profile of Opus Dei, this surprising link between absolute fidelity to the great tradition of the Church and to her faith, with a disarming simplicity and unconditional openness to all the challenges of this world, in the academic world, in the world of work, in the world of economics, etc. Those who have this link with God, those who have this uninterrupted conversation with him, can dare to respond to these challenges and are no longer afraid because those who are in God's hands always fall into God's hands. This is how fear disappears and, instead, the courage is born to respond to the contemporary world.