

BLESSED JOSEMARIA

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My dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, just to share a few reflections and thoughts with you, as we join this evening honouring one of those who wasn't afraid to put out into the deep, who wasn't afraid of the challenge that was there in his own life, and was willing to give all to God. As I said at the beginning, the context and the sense of our celebration this evening might have changed somewhat with the joyful news that Blessed Josemaría is to be canonized. And as in all such things in the Church, one has to try and seek the providence and the hand of God that's at work there. But this evening I'd just like to join with you in this act of remembrance, this act of prayer, as we reflect a little bit on what he sought to give to the life of the Church.

The opening prayer of the Mass mentions two particular directions of his life: the call to holiness, the call to apostolate. And it's they that I'd like to concentrate on fairly briefly, but I'd like to put it in the context of what I like to think was probably the most formative experience in my own life, which was the opportunity that was afforded me when a student, and a student priest in Rome, to attend all of the Vatican Council.

It was a watershed in many ways in the life and mission of the Church in the last century. It was fascinating indeed being present there at all the sessions, just to see it evolving, the clash of personalities, the clash of ideas, to see the firm hand, and the gentle hand, of both Blessed John XXIII and Paul VI, guiding it to its conclusion. But a Council doesn't happen without a great deal of preparation, and that preparation went on for a number of years. There were all sorts of commissions

and committees, preparing documents of topics that should be discussed at the Council. I think they went to about 72 documents, and if they wanted to talk about them all, then they'd be there for several years.

But obviously, there are a few key documents that had to be considered. John XXIII was enough of a historian, and had enough insight into the working of the Spirit, to know that when the bishops came together in Council, the Lord was also present, and it would find its own level and find its own direction. And the key document, right from the beginning, if you like, the very foundation document of that Council, was the document on the Church. All sorts of aspects of the Church's life had been prepared, for the Council Fathers decided that they wished to reflect on the mystery of the Church, the Body of Christ, and through it the call that comes to all of us to live and direct our faith. And it evolved over the first couple of sessions of the Council and very many changes took place in it. It began, as I said, rather than condemning errors and condemning heresies, as a very positive reflection on the nature and mystery of the Church.

That was the first chapter. The second one, unusually in documents of the Church, was a chapter on the whole people of God, the whole community of believers called together to walk with Christ. It was only after that reflection that the bishops got a look in, along with the Pope, in chapter three. The two chapters that I think are important to our context this evening, have to be this: chapter four, on the laity, and the chapter on the universal call to holiness. I'm sure many of you are

aware, and we'll probably hear a bit more about it over the next year, that Blessed Josemaría doesn't get a good press from everyone. It ought not be so, but that's part of the promise of Christ, that when people speak all things calumny – against you on my account, rejoice and be glad. He is often accused of being against the Vatican Council and what it proposed to do for the Church. And all I would say [is that] those that make such comment about his relationship with the Council, either haven't read him or understood him, and certainly haven't read or understood the documents of the Council, particularly that on the Church.

I've no doubt, and I'm sure some of those that might have known him would be able to confirm, that he must have got a tremendous sense of fulfilment of his own mission in life when he read that document on the Church. For central to his apostolate was a belief that all are called to holiness of life, and that your commitment to Christ is not something you can compartmentalise, take it out every so often, maybe even every Sunday, dust it down, and put it back in. It's a whole orientation of life, rooted in the Gospel. That was something that he had worked with all his life from the very beginning of the Prelature (it wasn't a Prelature then, but became). Among the laity in a sense he was going against the trend of the Church in the early part of the last century. Because of political and historical reasons, the Church had become very clericalised, and I'm sure those older people among you here will remember that laity weren't exactly encouraged to raise their voices, or otherwise that famous belt of the crossier might be floating around.

He had a different thing: laity have a call to give witness to Christ in all the areas of life, be it politics, be it science, be it learning, be it commerce, be it trade, research, whatever you have. It is in those areas par-

ticularly that there is an immense need in our world for people to have the courage of their convictions, to have a sense of direction and purpose to life, and to live the values that should be rooted in the Gospel.

And if you take the whole area of commerce, in our day it's taken totally over by the market, and in a sense the market dictates everything. And corruption, and concern for the poor, concern for the disadvantaged countries of our world, are generally given a back seat. Take that central theme of our day as well: respect for life, and the whole area of research, driven by commercial interests, the interests of profit, dehumanising the human person. It's there that the Christian voice is needed, especially there, that we need people of courage, people of faith, people of conviction, to give witness to the truth of Christ.

That was the call of the Council to the Church, a call that has yet to be fulfilled and put into practice, but has moved many a way along it, mainly because there were people like Blessed Josemaría, who had had that insight many times before, that was confirmed by a Council of the Church.

So it's right that we give thanks. And his canonisation, in many ways, is canonising, not just the person, but canonising what that person seeks to do in the Church through those who follow his way. We thank God for the gift of his life. We pray that many will find encouragement, and the strength, and the courage they need, not only to seek to walk with Christ; but walking with Christ, to find the courage to witness to Gospel values in all areas of life. May he be with all who seek to promote what he sought to promote, a call to holiness, a call to follow God in all ways of life.

This is the text of a homily given in Lismullin Conference Centre, Navan, January 9, 2002.