

BLESSED JOSEMARIA, COUNT ME IN

Cardinal John O'Connor, Archbishop of New York

On June 26, feast of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, Cardinal O'Connor reminded us of the universal call to holiness and apostolate. As we celebrate the seventy anniversary of the founding of Opus Dei we should thank God for the perennial youth and vitality of the Church—the work of the Holy Spirit.

LET ME WELCOME all of you to this great cathedral. It is a great privilege for me to be participating in this Mass. I am very grateful for the work all of you do for the Church universal, for society at large, and for the Church in New York. I'm especially pleased to see a number of young people here who are being formed for their future in Opus Dei.

The founder of Opus Dei, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, had this to say, which I find to be immediately applicable to that sentence of the Gospel we just read ['They left all things and followed him']. You have used or frequently seen the Navarre Bible. I often use it in preparing my Sunday homily. If you don't know it, I recommend it to you. Each of the books of the Bible is a separate booklet with beautiful commentaries by Blessed Josemaría. This is what he says about this sentence of this Gospel: 'Perfection is not simply a matter of leaving all things but of doing so in order to follow Christ, which is what the apostles did. They gave up everything in order to be available to do what God's calling involved. We should develop this attitude of availability. Jesus isn't satisfied going halves. He wants the

lot. If we don't give ourselves generously we find it very difficult to follow Jesus. Detach yourselves from people and things until you are stripped of them, for, says Pope St Gregory, the devil has nothing of his own in this world and naked he comes to battle. If you go clothed to find him you will soon be pulled to the ground, for he will have something to catch you by.'

Sounds pretty inclusive to me. Who am I, who believes he will be extraordinarily fortunate to get to Purgatory and then only because of the prayers of his mother and father, to argue with Blessed Josemaría when he gives us this inclusive language? We must leave everything. We cannot fight adequately, victoriously, with the devil if we have clung to anything, because he can grab us by that clothing and pull us to the ground, pull us further into sin.

Perhaps among the most important words spoken within this context, still reflecting on that final sentence of this evening's Gospel are these words of Pope John Paul II, spoken in Rome on October 14, 1993: 'Blessed Josemaría Escrivá reminded the contemporary world of the universal call to holiness and of the Christian value that profes-

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sional work can have in the ordinary life of each person. Blessed Josemaría invited men and women from the most varied social conditions to sanctify themselves and to cooperate in the sanctification of others by sanctifying ordinary life. In his priestly activity, he was deeply aware of the value every soul has and of the Gospel's power to enlighten consciences and to awaken serious and active Christian commitment to defending the person and his or her dignity.'

This is an exceedingly important and wonderful goal for members of Opus Dei. Josemaría Escrivá reminds us: 'Don't take the easy way out. Don't say: I'm no good at this sort of thing. There are others who can do it. It isn't my line. No, for this sort of thing there is no one else. If you could get away with that argument so could everyone else. Christ's plea is addressed to each and every Christian. No one can consider himself excused for whatever reason: age, health, or occupation. There are no excuses whatsoever. Either we carry out a fruitful apostolate or our faith will prove barren.'

We often hear the words in parting 'Keep the faith,' but we are reminded here by Blessed Josemaría that that's not enough. We have to spread the faith, we have to share the faith. As he puts it very aptly, 'unless we carry out a fruitful apostolate our faith will prove barren.' I have read these particular quotations, especially the one from our Holy Father, reminding us, quoting the words of Josemaría and offering us his own reflections on the kind of life Opus Dei offers as an ideal: this is the life of holiness to which

everyone is called regardless of station, race, wealth or poverty; man, woman, child.

I have dwelt on this in these citations because I believe it critical to dispel the notion, a notion with which you are familiar, which borders on calumny, that Opus Dei is concerned only about the wealthy and the well educated. How often I have heard that. How often it has proven to be an obstacle to opening the minds and hearts to the work of the Holy Spirit that we call Opus Dei, the Work of God. Cardinal Bernard Law, my very good friend, was talking to me recently of a wonderful taxi cab driver that he had met in Spain, who was a member of Opus Dei. He was a very unpretentious man, with little formal education, and relatively speaking, a poor man. He was telling me how gentle and sensitive, how kind, generous and helpful he was. When he learned of Cardinal Law's interest in Opus Dei, he made clear that he shared that interest and that he himself was a member of Opus Dei. When he became Archbishop of Boston, some directors of Opus Dei went to see him and asked him what work he would like them to carry out in the Archdiocese of Boston. They put no conditions on this whatsoever. They were prepared to do anything that he would determine would be helpful to the Church in Boston. He asked them if they would open a tutorial centre for the poor, particularly to teach literacy. They were very happy to do so. Many of the college students of Opus Dei go to Mexico each summer, giving up their vacation time to work among the very poor. I wish the myth

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about Opus Dei could be expelled forever. I want it to be clear to all of you that I consider the Archdiocese of New York to be privileged by your presence and have no doubt that you would willingly engage in any work at the request of the Archbishop.

Let me return to the Gospel of St. Luke and read to you portions of the commentary of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. He tells us 'at the sight of this,' that is, of the boats filled with fish, 'Simon Peter fell at the knees of Jesus, saying, 'leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man.' In commenting on this he says 'the same is true today on the part of those who really come to know the Lord. They find the sense of their own unworthiness, they want to fall down on their knees and ask the Lord Jesus to leave them because as with Peter they feel so unworthy.' He pleads with us not to separate ourselves from Jesus. He talks about the fact that Jesus chooses the boat of Simon Peter in which to out with the apostles. There were several boats there. Josemaría says, 'The Father saw in Simon's boat a symbol of the pilgrim church on earth. This is the boat, according to St Matthew, that was in danger of sinking, and according to St Luke was filled with fish. Christ gets into the boat in order to teach the crowds and from the bark of Peter, the Church, he continues to teach the whole world. Each of us can also see himself as the boat Christ uses for preaching.'

This is a very interesting analogy and I find it to be true, Sunday after Sunday, or earlier in the week when I prepare my Sunday homily. I find so many fascinating insights in reading

Josemaría's commentaries and reflections. Each of us can see himself, herself, as this boat Christ uses for preaching. Externally no change is evident in us. What is changed? There is a change inside our soul now that Christ has come aboard, as he went aboard Peter's boat. The horizon has opened up. There is a greater ambition to serve and a irrepressible desire to tell all creation about the marvellous doings of our Lord. If only we let him work.

Blessed Josemaría was totally dedicated to the Eucharistic sacrifice. He reflects upon it extensively. He writes of it movingly, in detail. There was no question whatsoever about what happens on this altar. There surely can be no greater devotion, no more intimacy with Christ the Lord for members of the Work of God than participating in the Eucharistic sacrifice. Our Holy Father reminds us that only the Eucharist can create community. Simply being members of Opus Dei does not of itself create you as a truly loving community, one for the others and for all people made in the image and likeness of God. That is the work of the Eucharist.

I thank you for your work. I thank all of those who do their very best to advance the work of Opus Dei. I am with you unconditionally. I am deeply moved by the writings and thoughts of Blessed Josemaría. So I say, with the deepest reverence, OK Blessed Josemaría, count me in. The door and the hearts of the Church in New York are open unconditionally to Opus Dei and our gratitude each day grows stronger for your being here.