

Sixth, the Work encourages women and men to live a responsible, balanced life with God, spouse, and children as the first priorities. This includes any working arrangement that benefits the spouse and family. With a popular cartoon strip devoted to the life of a stay at home husband, this arrangement is no longer a rarity. Wherever they work, men and women need to try to sanctify what they are doing.

Seventh, in the Work, one is very free to choose profession and state in life. There are women such as myself in traditionally male occupations as well as women who want to be wives and mothers. But in Opus Dei there is only one vocation – a universal call to sanctity. For those who wish to remain single, Opus Dei offers a tantalising possibility: An unmarried person can be completely dedicated to God while doing their professional work and maintaining their lay status. Without a spouse and children, they live a warm family life in the Centres of the Work.

Eighth, and finally, all vocations are demanding. There are no easy ways to get to heaven. Whether we live married life, or the celibate life, God always asks something of us. He also rewards us far beyond our small sacrifices. That is just here on this earth. What awaits us in heaven is rather delicious to think about but impossible to imagine.

In summary, becoming a member of Opus Dei has changed my world dramatically. What I was looking for, without realising it, was a greater meaning to my life. I have certainly found it. It has introduced me to the writings of the popes and saints of the church and given me a better understanding of my faith. It has enriched my marriage, helped to convert my husband to Catholicism, helped in the character development of my children through the various clubs and camps, and made me understand the beauty of my vocation to marriage. It has also made me appreciate the permanent value of family. As a result of the teachings of St. Josemaria, I try to be a more loyal friend and more grateful for the friendship that others extend to me. I have better respect for the freedom of others and view differences as just that, differences, and not barriers or arguments to be won.

This did not happen overnight. I am not a saint. My husband, children and family are here and they will attest to that. There are no saints on earth. However I am one hundred percent sure that if I persevere in Opus Dei, I will eventually get to heaven. In the meantime, life is happier and more meaningful than it was. Every aspect of life presents challenges. I don't know what lies ahead but I do know that whatever happens, there will always be joy. I feel privileged to be here to tell you about some of these things. Everyone's life is different but the grace and joy of God awaits us all.

THE HOMILY GIVEN BY POPE JOHN PAUL II AT THE MASS OF
CANONIZATION FOR ST. JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA, OCTOBER 6, 2002,
WITH A REPORT OF THE CEREMONY FROM
L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO

On Sunday, 6 October, in St Peter's Square, before one of the largest and most orderly groups of pilgrims, the Holy Father canonized St Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, founder of Opus Dei, and called his message of sanctifying daily life valid for all believers. Police said that at least 300,000 people were packed into St Peter's Square and nearby streets, where huge speakers and video screens allowed them to follow the Mass. The crowd was silent while the Pope read the Latin formula of canonization, but as soon as he finished the trumpets sounded, the choir sang a series of Alleluias and the crowd erupted in cheers that bounced off the buildings around the square. After the proclamation, the Pope received a relic of St Josemaria that was placed on a stand near the lectern for the singing of the Gospel. A huge portrait decorated with flowers adorned the facade of St Peter's and there were magnificent floral tapestries covering the steps in front of the main altar. The canonization came 27 years after St Josemaria's death in 1975. Beatified in 1992, the saint was approved for canonization after the Holy Father accepted a miracle attributed to his intercession. It involved the medically unexplainable 1992 cure of a Spanish physician, Manuel Nevado Rey, suffering from a progressive skin disease resulting from years of exposure to radiation from X-ray machines. High level government delegations from Spain, Italy, Kenya and more than a dozen South American countries were present at the Mass, as well as non-Catholic delegations and representatives of other ecclesial movements. Organizers said the canonization was attended by people from at least 84 countries. Pilgrims from Spain and Italy formed the largest groups followed by those from Mexico, South America, Germany, United States and France. Many Italian commentators remarked on the orderliness and prayerfulness of the pilgrims. Many pilgrims knelt on the cobblestones during the consecration. Young persons carrying white umbrellas accompanied the priests to their communion stations and kept the umbrellas over the priests while they distributed communion to the pilgrims. At the end of the Mass, before the Angelus, the Holy Father greeted the pilgrims in their own languages. After the blessing, to greet the pilgrims, the Holy Father traveled the length of the Via della Conciliazione in an open car.

THE HOMILY

1. "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Rom 8,14). These words of the Apostle Paul, which we have just heard, help us understand

better the significant message of today's canonization of Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer. With docility he allowed himself to be led by the Spirit, convinced that only in this way can one fully accomplish God's will.

This fundamental Christian truth was a constant theme in his preaching. Indeed, he never stopped inviting his spiritual children to invoke the Holy Spirit to ensure that their interior life, namely, their life of relationship with God and their family, professional and social life, totally made up of small earthly realities, would not be separated but would form only one life that was "holy and full of God." He wrote, "We find the invisible God in the most visible and material things" (Conversations with Josemaria Escriva, n. 114).

This teaching of his is still timely and urgent today. In virtue of the Baptism that incorporates him into Christ, the believer is called to establish with the Lord an uninterrupted and vital relationship. He is called to be holy and to collaborate in the salvation of humanity.

2. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Gn 2,15). The Book of Genesis, as we heard in the first reading, reminds us that the Creator has entrusted the earth to man, to "till" it and "keep" it. Believers acting in the various realities of this world contribute to realize this divine universal plan. Work and any other activity, carried out with the help of grace, is converted into a means of daily sanctification.

"The ordinary life of a Christian who has faith", Josemaria Escriva 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" (Meditations, 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, n. 34).

3. To elevate the world to God and transform it from within: this is the ideal the holy founder points out to you, dear brothers and sisters, who rejoice today to see him raised to the glory of the altars. He continues to remind you of the need not to let yourselves be frightened by a materialist culture that threatens to dissolve the genuine identity of Christ's disciples. He liked to repeat forcefully that the Christian faith is opposed to conformism and interior inertia.

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 of 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" (ibid., 5,16).

4. Those who want to serve the cause of the Gospel faithfully will certainly encounter misunderstandings and difficulties. The Lord purifies and shapes all those he calls to follow him with the mysterious power of the Cross; but "in the Cross," the new saint repeated, "we find light, peace and joy: *Lux in Cruce, requies in Cruce, gaudium in Cruce!*"

Ever since 7 August 1931 when, during the celebration of holy Mass, the words of Jesus echoed in his soul, "when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself" (Jn 12,32), Josemaria Escriva understood more clearly that the mission of the baptized consists in raising the Cross of Christ above all human reality and he felt burning within him the impassioned vocation to evangelize every human setting. Then, without hesitation, he accepted Jesus' invitation to the Apostle Peter, which we just heard in this square: "Duc in altum!" (Put out into the deep). He transmitted it to his entire spiritual family so that they might offer the Church a valid contribution of communion and apostolic service. Today this invitation is extended to all of us: "Put out into the deep," the divine Teacher says to us, "and let down your nets for a catch" (Lk 5,4).

5. To fulfill such a rigorous mission, one needs constant interior growth nourished by prayer. St Josemaria 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, n. 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 the holiness and the true success of the saints.

May the Lord help you, dear brothers and sisters, to accept this challenging ascetical and missionary instruction. May Mary sustain you, whom the holy founder invoked as "*Spes nostra, Sedes Sapientiae, Ancilla Domini!*" (Our Hope, Seat of Wisdom, Handmaid of the Lord).

May Our Lady make everyone an authentic witness of the Gospel, ready everywhere to make a generous contribution to building the Kingdom of Christ! May the example and teaching of St Josemaria be an incentive to us so that at the end of the earthly pilgrimage, we too may be able to share in the blessed inheritance of heaven! There, together with the angels and all the saints, we will contemplate the face of God and sing his glory for all eternity.