

the beatific vision. His whole being exuded the joy of someone who knows he will receive a treasure because his Father has it prepared for him. He spoke through his clear, penetrating, serene eyes, as well as through his tone of voice, which was warm and persuasive, and conveyed a great sense of security. And he spoke through his gestures, which seemed to show that he had already begun to enjoy the union with God that he so deeply desired and that the Pope declared solemnly at St. Peter's Square on May 17, 1992.

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"It is especially necessary for us to direct our thoughts to the future which lies before us. Often during these months we have looked towards the new millennium which is beginning, as we lived this Jubilee not only as a remembrance of the past, but also as a prophecy of the future. We now need to profit from the grace received, by putting it into practice in resolutions and guidelines for action."¹ Thus spoke John Paul II as he concluded the Jubilee of the year 2000, inviting

us to begin the new millennium with this perspective. And it is with this perspective that we have to live all the events of the Church's history, discovering in each circumstance, with the light of faith, motives for giving thanks and prophecies for the future.

The present symposium is a response to this spirit, bringing to our memory certain saints with whom God has blessed his Church in the 20th century, so that, as its title indicates, they might be "teachers of the 21st century." On various occasions, in connection with the recent commemoration of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, I pointed out that this anniversary should not limit itself to recalling his life and rich personality, but that it should lead us above all to feel challenged by the message that God is addressing to us through his example and teaching.

Similar words could be said about all the saints we are considering today, among whom are included, I am happy to point out, some whose lives were intertwined with that of Blessed Josemaría. These include John XXIII, whom he had the opportunity of meeting several times during his pontificate, and Father Manuel Gonzalez, to whom he was deeply united by their mutual love for the Eucharist and their sincere personal friendship. The 20th century has been, like every period in the Church's history, rich in saints, in witnesses to God. Turning our glance towards them should fill us with hope for the future, awakening in us a sin-

1. John Paul II, Apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 6, 2001, no. 3.

cere desire that the seed God planted through their lives and struggles may take root in many hearts.

What was the seed that God planted in history through the preaching and example of Blessed Josemaría? Among other aspects that we might consider, I would like to focus on the content of one of his homilies, “Passionately Loving the World,” which has also provided the title for my talk. Loving the world. Loving it passionately. Loving it in God and for God. Here is one of the fundamental ideas of his message, which he often spoke of as “old as the Gospel, and, like the Gospel, new.” This deeply Christian attitude towards the world, together with the universal call to holiness with which it is intimately related (central points that unfortunately more than once have been forgotten) blossom forth from the same Gospel as the “good news” of heaven for the men and women of our time and of all times.

1. The call to sanctity and passionate love for the world.

“Just think,” writes Blessed Josemaría in *The Forge*, “there are so many men and women on earth, and the Master does not fail to call every single one.” “He calls them,” he adds, “to a Christian life, to a life of holiness, to a chosen life, to life eternal.”² The founder of Opus Dei dedicated his whole life to spreading this “news,” right from that second of October,

1928, when God let him see his will.³ He spread it both by word and by his writings. Above all, he did so by encouraging Christian decisions, aspiring to see this message transmitted contagiously through the witness of those who, in striving to sanctify their own lives, show that all human life can be made holy.

It is the Church’s mission, says the Holy Father in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, “to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium.”⁴ And to bring this about, he adds, through each and every Christian, since “the men and women of our own day—often perhaps unconsciously—ask believers not only to ‘speak’ of Christ, but in a certain sense to ‘show’ him to them.”⁵

Our era hungers for Christ’s presence, although often unconsciously. The desire for a world in which peace reigns, the condemnation of violence and crime, the anxiety and bitterness reflected in so much of today’s literature, the wavering between generosity and escape seen in many young people, are some of the signs of that deep unrest. The men and women of our day, immersed in a constantly changing world, urgently need to contemplate Christ’s face. And to do so tangibly, through those who are at their side. Precisely for that reason, the universal call to holiness is an ever-timely message of hope for the world.

2. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, no. 13.

3. For biographical aspects, cf. A. Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 1, Scepter, Princeton 2001. See also J.L. Illanes, “Dos de octubre de 1928: alcance y significado de una fecha,” in *Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei*, Eunsa, Pamplona, 2nd ed., 1985, especially pp. 96-101.

4. John Paul II, Apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 6, 2001, no. 16.

5. *Ibid.*

God has come to seek us right where we are. He has taken on a body, a human nature, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and accepted all the consequences of a life like our own, culminating in the supreme self-giving on the Cross. And he wants to continue doing so throughout history through Christians as well, whose lives should be a mirror in which others, their brothers and sisters, can find the face of our Lord.

Like the disciples from Emmaus, many people today are walking without a goal, Christians who let themselves be overcome by the apparent defeat of Christ. But Christ continues to come out to meet us. He comes to us through the action of the Holy Spirit who moves hearts. He comes to us through the sacraments and the preaching of the Church. And he wants to reach everyone, making use of our example, our joy and our hope. When we truly live our faith, we Christians show the world that God's absence and Christ's defeat are illusions. Christ has conquered. Sin and death no longer enjoy full power over man, although they have not completely disappeared and at times their action may seem to some to be universal. But the love of God the Father, the power of Christ, the grace of the Holy Spirit are, and always will be, the definitive driving force of history and the north star that inspires mankind's true life.

This profound conviction, this faith, is what distinguishes the Chris-

tian, who knows how to base his joy even on pain, his optimism on affliction. The message of the universal call to holiness impels us to undertake a re-evangelization that should embrace everyone. It is striking that the Holy Father has placed holiness "as the foundation of the pastoral planning in which we are involved at the start of the new millennium."⁶ And he emphasized that "to place pastoral planning under the heading of holiness is a choice filled with consequences. It implies the conviction that, since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: 'Do you wish to receive Baptism?' means at the same time to ask them: 'Do you wish to become holy?' It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (*Mt* 5:48)."⁷

Blessed Josemaría not only reminded us of the importance of the divine call to be saints, but he also traced out a path to attain it. The affirmation of the universal call to holiness, as preached by the Founder of Opus Dei, was intimately united to his affirmation of the value of secular realities and, consequently, of the world as the place where men and women attain maturity and strive for sanctity.⁸ His preaching and his

6. *Ibid.*, no. 31

7. *Ibid.* On holiness as the participation of a created person in the uncreated holiness of God and as the perfection of the person, cf. L. Scheffczyk, "La santidad de Dios, fin y forma de la vida cristiana," in *Scripta Theologica* 11 (1979), pp. 1021-1036.

8. Cf. Alvaro del Portillo, *Una vida para Dios. Reflexiones en torno a la figura de Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, Madrid 1992, pp. 69-73.

apostolic and priestly activity were not directed solely towards affirming that ordinary Christians can be saints, but that it is precisely their ordinary, everyday life that offers abundant matter for sanctification. The world is “not only... the background of man’s life; it is a means and path of holiness. It is something to be sanctified and something which sanctifies.”⁹

This doctrine is opposed both to naturalism and to a disembodied spirituality. Indeed naturalism, which demands the autonomy of the world with respect to God, and, in its extreme form, presents the natural world as the only existing reality, proposes a materialism that is closed to the spirit. Spiritualism, on the other hand, by conceiving the spirit as a reality totally separate from the material, or even opposed to it, ends up in a spirituality that is closed not only to the material, but also to history. In the words of Blessed Josemaría, spiritualism considers “the Christian way of life as something exclusively *spiritual*, proper to *pure*, extraordinary people, who remain aloof from the contemptible things of this world, or at most tolerate them as something necessarily attached to the spirit, while we live on this earth.”¹⁰ If naturalism closes man up in the world and rejects any opening to God, spiritualism encourages one to isolate himself from the world in order to attain this encounter. Either of these paths excludes a relationship between the world, man and God.

Spiritualism tries to understand man from the point of view of a God who has only a tangential relationship with the world, because all of one’s life of contact with the Creator takes place in an interior space foreign to the world. Therefore, spiritualism ends up distancing oneself from temporal realities and from history, closing oneself up in a world that is supposedly pure and uncontaminated. What this comes down to in the end is a “bad” clericalism. As Blessed Josemaría wrote “churches become the setting *par excellence* of the Christian life. And being a Christian means going to church, taking part in sacred ceremonies, being taken up with ecclesiastical matters, in a kind of segregated *world*, which is considered to be the ante-chamber of heaven, while the ordinary world follows its own separate path.”¹¹

Naturalism aspires to understand man from the point of view of an autonomous world in which God should not get involved; even more, in which he has no place. The response to this mistaken focus cannot, however, be based on the mistaken vision that Christians, all Christians, should separate themselves from the world in order to find God. Certainly God calls some to separate themselves from secular activities, and even to center their response to him within the walls of a monastery. But even in that case, the world is not negated or canceled out. Those who are called to this vocation do not sever their influence in the world; on the contrary,

9. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 47.

10. *Ibid.*, “Passionately Loving the World,” in *Conversations*, no. 113.

11. *Ibid.*

they realize that they are invited by Christ to contribute to the salvation of all mankind with their self-giving and prayer. For his part, the ordinary Christian, called by God to sanctify himself in the middle of the world and in the midst of secular activities, understands that the place in which he finds himself, and the activities to which he is dedicated, form a part, and "an important part," as the Founder of Opus Dei liked to say, of his vocation.

All Christians should love this world of ours, as a reality created by God and therefore endowed with goodness. The ordinary Christian should especially love the world and all the noble realities it contains: professional work, family duties, social relationships... As Blessed Josemaría said so forcefully: "My children, your ordinary contact with God takes place where your fellow men, your yearnings, your work and your affections are. There you have your daily encounter with Christ. It is in the midst of the most material things of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves, serving God and all mankind."¹²

The world, that is "the whole human family seen in the context of everything which envelops it,"¹³ should be for Christians the environment and matter with which they build up their sanctity and carry out apostolate. The children of God, aware of the greatness of their calling,

love the world, seeing it as the setting for their relationship with God. For the lay faithful, this means loving their own vocation, having a full appreciation for the place where God has placed them, in order to seek and serve him. "Be men and women of the world," wrote Blessed Josemaría in a point in *The Way*, "but don't be worldly men and women."¹⁴

2. *The world, place of our encounter with God*

"We must love the world and work and all human things. For the world is good."¹⁵ The affirmation of the world's goodness is born of a profound understanding of the central truths of Christian dogma. "I have taught this constantly using words from holy Scripture. The world is not evil, because it has come from God's hands, because it is his creation, because Yahweh looked upon it and saw that it was good (cf. *Gen 1:7ff*)."¹⁶ Therefore, God himself, not man, declares the goodness of the world. Strictly speaking, we can say that God doesn't love it because it is good, but that its goodness is based on the fact that God loves it. Mankind's sins, although they can make it ugly, are never enough to rob the world of its goodness as a creature of God. Therefore this world distorted by sin can be regenerated, returned to its original goodness. Let us listen once more to Blessed Josemaría: "We must love the world and work and all human things. For the world is good. Adam's sin de-

12. *Ibid.*

13. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 2.

14. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, no. 939.

15. *Ibid.*, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 112.

16. *Ibid.*, "Passionately Loving the World," in *Conversations*, no. 114.

stroyed the divine balance of creation; but God the Father sent his only Son to re-establish peace, so that we, his children by adoption, might free creation from disorder and reconcile all things to God.”¹⁷

God transcends creation. But, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, this is precisely “because he is the free and sovereign Creator, the first cause of all that exists, God is present to his creatures’ inmost being.”¹⁸ Our God is not a distant God. He remains very close to us, continuing granting being and life to everything that exists. As St. Paul says, “in him we live and move and have our being.”¹⁹ This intimate and mysterious presence, joined to the creative act and stronger than man’s sins, is what grounds the goodness of all creation. “For all things are yours,” the apostle to the gentiles says in another place.²⁰ The world, a gift of God to each of us, has been given to us by God, who has given us the capacity to possess it through knowledge and love. And in Christ and the Holy Spirit, he has given us the power to conquer evil and sin.

“Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.”²¹ In our daily life in the

world, we are called to discover God’s love for us, and to correspond to his perfect charity not only in thought and desire, but also with deeds. It is this divine charity that moves God to bestow on us the world as our heritage; only by recognizing this gift can we realize its implications in regard to how we have to live and work, and how we have to sanctify all that we are and all that surrounds us.

With the power and persuasiveness of St. Paul, we have to recall to the men and women of our time that “what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”²² “The firmament,” comments St. Athanasius, “through its magnificence, its beauty, its order, is a privileged herald of its maker, whose eloquence fills the universe.”²³ “The silence of the heavens,” says St. John Chrysostom, “is a voice more powerful than that of a trumpet. It cries out to our eyes and not to our ears, showing us the greatness of all he has made.”²⁴ God “speaks to us in the silence of prayer and in the hubbub of the world,”²⁵ said Blessed Josemaría, in a phrase that alluded not only to the beauty of the material universe, but to the events of history

17. *Ibid.*, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 112.

18. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 300.

19. *Acts* 17:28.

20. *1 Cor* 3: 21.

21. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, “Passionately Loving the World,” in *Conversations*, no. 114.

22. *Rom* 1:19-20.

23. Saint Athanasius, *Expositiones in Psalmos*, XVIII (PG, 27, 124).

24. Saint John Chrysostom, *Ad populum antiochenum hom.* IX (PG 49, 105).

25. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations*, no. 62.

that man forges with his freedom. Indeed, man's free action contains a natural goodness superior to that of all other creatures in this world, and an openness to the gift of supernatural life.²⁶

God shows us his face through the world that we see. This is the ultimate reason why creation presents itself to us as something true, good and beautiful. We discover it through the spectacle of nature, the immensity of the boundless spaces that surround us. But we also find it in human history, marked by sin certainly, but also by the greatness of the human spirit and, above all, by the love of our God, who as all-powerful Father draws good even from evil.²⁷

Creation speaks to us of the God who transcends it. Even amid its shadows and at times darkness, it reveals the God who sustains all things in existence. The Eternal Word is "the Word of God, in which is enclosed the meaning of the world, its truth."²⁸ Thus to speak of a "sacramentality of the world,"²⁹ as John Paul II has done, is to recognize there the presence of the mystery of a God who comes in search of man. Here creation is called a "sacrament" by analogy with the seven sacraments, in which the saving power of Christ is made present through the Holy Spirit.

But to speak of the "sacramentality" of the world is more than a mere metaphor. The world brings us to God and helps us to rise up to the Creator. Perhaps we could say that God's gifts to his creatures in the sacraments complement in a new way, with a full and unexpected gratuity and freedom, his seeking out of each person through the world he has created. To separate the two paths would be to forget the marvelous continuity (within the radical newness) between man's creation, his elevation to supernatural communion with the Trinity and his later liberation from sin. Our encounter with God in the world prepares us for what is later verified in the sacraments, which enable us to discover and love God better in the activities of each day.

Blessed Josemaría, in encouraging us to "materialize" the spiritual life, to discover God in the most material and ordinary realities, said: "Don't you see that each Sacrament is the Love of God, with all its creative and redemptive power, giving itself to us by way of material means? What is this Eucharist which we are about to celebrate, if not the adorable Body and Blood of our Redeemer, which is offered to us through the lowly matter of this world (wine and bread), through the 'elements of nature, cultivated by man?'"³⁰

26. For Blessed Josemaría's teachings on freedom, cf. «El primado existencial de la libertad," in *Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei*, cit., pp. 341-356. See also A. Llano, "La libertad radical. Homaje al Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer," in *Discursos en la Universidad*, Pamplona 2001, pp. 95-104.

27. Cf. *Rom* 8, 28.

28. J. Ratzinger, *Teoría de los principios teológicos*, Herder, Barcelona 1985, p. 406.

29. "In man, created in the image of God, there has been revealed, in a certain sense, the sacramentality of the world," John Paul II, *General audience*, February 20, 1980, no. 5, in *Enseñanzas al Pueblo de Dios*, 5 (1980), p. 142-142.

30. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, "Passionately Loving the World," in *Conversations*, no. 115.

3. *The world as a task*

Let us now turn to the second point I would like to consider: the world as a task. No human being can live only for himself. He needs to live alongside others, making use of these relationships in his encounter with God. He also knows that his origin and destiny are profoundly linked to creation. Thus, in seeking his own identity, he looks at the cosmos and investigates its origins. Trying to attain his plenitude, he works to perfect the milieu in which he lives. Zeal for science and technology hide the yearning to know man's own origin and destiny. For this reason, this search contains, although often unconsciously, a yearning for God.

The world, as a natural revelation, is a word that God directs to the human creature. It is not a word launched into empty space, but one addressed to the concrete beings who populate the earth, so that we can, through his creation, recognize and love the One who is our beginning and end. Thus John Paul II urges us to "see in visible things the message of the invisible God who created them."³¹

But man was not created only to contemplate the cosmos, to marvel at the vastness of the universe, but also to imprint there, with the language of his work, his reply to God's love.³² In entrusting the world to man, God offered him the material upon which to write his filial response to the divine love that brought him into existence

Therefore, the world is both the place where we encounter God and a task we have to carry out. The march of history, the evolution of societies and civilizations, the development of science and culture, family relationships and all that makes up man's milieu, forms part of the task God places before his creature, entrusting it to him so that he make it fruitful through the gifts has had granted. This truth can be considered from many points of view. Here I will concentrate on the importance of work, taking as a guide an expression that Blessed Josemaría used frequently: "sanctifying one's work, sanctifying oneself in one's work and sanctifying others through one's work."³³

a) Sanctifying work

"The Lord wants his children," wrote the Founder of Opus Dei, "those of us who have received the gift of faith, to proclaim the original optimistic view of creation: the *love for the world* which is at the heart of the Christian message. —So there should always be enthusiasm in your professional work, and in your effort to build up the earthly city."³⁴ This moral obligation impels us to enrich the world, to devote our time and effort to this noble effort, in a true service towards others.

Man knows he is called to work. Usually he is strongly drawn to his work, with a noble passion. Although at times his efforts lead to failure, he also knows the joy of work well done.

31. John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, May 1, 1991, no. 37.

32. Cf. *Gen* 2:15.

33. See, for example, *Conversations*, no. 70, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 46 and *Friends of God*, no. 9.

34. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, no. 703.

He wants to understand ever better the laws governing the part of nature upon which he exercises his activity, so that he thus can more fully develop the techniques needed to guide it. All of this can be summed up in one phrase: professional eagerness. A sound and upright commitment to one's own task, which forms part of one's love of the world.

Professional eagerness not only refers to knowledge and techniques but, also and above all, to persons. It requires not only a noble ambition to grow personally but also a responsible aspiration to serve, to contribute more effectively to the good of those around us. "Man's great privilege is to be able to love and to transcend what is fleeting and ephemeral. He can love other creatures, pronounce an 'I' and a 'you' which are full of meaning... This is why man ought not to limit himself to material production. Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love."³⁵ Professional eagerness is not merely egoistic. We love our profession both because of the enrichment it brings our own personality as well as because it contributes to the betterment of the society in which we live.

Man, capable of pronouncing "an 'I' and a 'you' which are full of meaning," is also able to reach God, to love the God "who opens heaven's gates to us, makes us members of his family and allows us also to talk to him in friendship, face to face."³⁶ Thus, for it to be humanly noble, our professional enthusiasm has to make room

for God's love. While engaged in cultivating the earth and perfecting it, we want to offer it to God as a sign of our gratitude. Man, who was created to work, *ut operaretur*, as Genesis puts it,³⁷ is called to dedicate himself to his occupations for the glory of God. With his work, the creature enriches the world that he received from God, to present it later to him as a sacrifice of praise.

We should always work with our sight fixed on heaven, persuaded that, by acting in this way, we are not separating ourselves from work and all that it demands, but on the contrary we are impelled to fulfill our obligations better, with a greater professional sense and with greater effort. This is what Blessed Josemaría taught those college students who came to him for advice in Burgos during the Spanish civil war. While walking with them they came to the cathedral and climbed up one of the towers, "so that they could look closely at the stonework, a real tracery of stone, the fruit of patient and costly work." And he would tell them: "This is God's work, this is working for God! To finish your personal work perfectly, with all the beauty and exquisite refinement of this tracery stonework.' Seeing it, my companions would understand that all the work we had seen was a prayer, a loving dialogue with God. The men who spent their energies there were quite aware that no one at street level could appreciate their efforts. Their work was for God alone. Now do you see how our professional work can bring us close to

35. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 48

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Gen* 2:15.

our Lord? Do your job as those medieval stonemasons did theirs, and your work too will be *operatio Dei*, a human work with a divine substance and finish.”³⁸

To sanctify one’s profession involves the daily effort to turn one’s work into a holy task, dedicated primarily to God. This means working professionally, producing a finished job, infused from beginning to end with love and a spirit of service.

b) Sanctifying oneself in one’s work

Pope John Paul II says that “*the primary basis of the value of work is man himself, who is its subject*. This leads immediately to a very important conclusion of an ethical nature. However true it may be that man is destined for work and called to it, in the first place work is ‘for man’ and not man ‘for work.’”³⁹ A responsible person should always ask himself whether he is contributing in a real and effective way to the good of others, and conduct a healthy examination of conscience based on the criteria and suggestions of the social doctrine of the Church.

The consideration of man as the subject of work has implications that are not only social but also individual. By our work we are called not only to perfect the world and to do good to those around us, but also to enrich ourselves as persons. The effort to perfect the world, to turn it into a home that is always inviting for mankind,

has its impact on us as well. “Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity—because through work man *not only transforms nature*, adapting it to his own needs, but *he also achieves fulfillment* as a human being and indeed in a sense becomes ‘more a human being.’”⁴⁰

By sowing good, one becomes good. By sanctifying one’s work, seeking to fulfill one’s task very well, with a Christian spirit, one grows as a Christian, one becomes holy. When our love for our work is both an expression of our human condition and of our Christian faith, dedication to work becomes a sacrifice pleasing to God. By offering God our daily occupations, we joyfully offer him our life, the noble yearnings of love and service that move us. We present ourselves before God, as St. Paul says,⁴¹ as a fragrant oblation.

In trying to fulfill our tasks heroically each day, we put into play the most varied human virtues: laboriousness, justice, strength, perseverance, integrity, fortitude, prudence. And along with these, the theological virtues: faith, which leads us to perceive the nearness of God and the final meaning of our efforts; hope, which encourages us to trust deeply in God and to persevere in our efforts despite difficulties; charity, which leads us to a joyful love and dedication, shown with sincere deeds. Thus a Christian’s hopes and longings are transformed into a sincere prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God, who

38. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, no. 65.

39. John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, September 14, 1981, no. 6.

40. *Ibid.*, no. 9.

41. Cf. *2 Cor* 2:15.

has entrusted us with the world and its right ordering as a sign of his predilection, and of petition for our fellow men and women. A prayer that is often expressed in words, but that does not always need them, because it is expressed in the work itself: in its order, punctuality, care for little things.

Thereby the love with which we want to serve God and others is purified, the joyful charity which impels us to be "contemplatives in the middle of the street," as the founder of Opus Dei liked to repeat. Acting in this way, he said: "wherever we are, in the midst of the noise of the street and of human labors, in the factory, in the university, in the fields, in the office or in the home, we find ourselves in simple filial contemplation, in a constant dialogue with God."⁴²

c) Sanctifying others through one's work

Our work contributes to bringing those around us closer to God when, carried out with professional competence and a spirit of service, it redounds to the good of society, improving family conditions, the environment, human relationships, etc. Thus the world gradually becomes more fit for the dignity of man, for his condition as a child of God. But this attitude of service to society, which is always necessary, does not exhaust the apostolic dimension connatural to the Christian spirit, for we would impoverish that intention if we failed to also foster the personal friendship of each soul with God.

In carrying out our daily work, we establish relationships with many specific people: the members of our own family, our companions and colleagues, bosses and employees, clients and suppliers, those we come across along the street or on the bus.

Faith impels us to recognize those around us as sons and daughters of God. And charity strongly urges us to treat them as such, sharing in their joys, being interested in their problems, and transmitting to them, together with the human help that we can provide, the greatest good we possess: our faith. The human contacts forged by one's work gives rise spontaneously and naturally to friendship and, through this friendship, to apostolate, to a holy zeal to encourage them to find Christ, to get close to Christ. Citing once more Blessed Josemaría: "The apostolic concern which burns in the heart of ordinary Christians is not something separate from their everyday work. It is part and parcel of one's work, which becomes a source of opportunities for meeting Christ. As we work at our job, side by side with our colleagues, friends, and relatives and sharing their interests, we can help them come closer to Christ."⁴³

4. The great liturgy of the universe

God, who has no need of anything, created the world out of an act of supreme generosity, purely out of love; as St. Bonaventure said: "not to

42. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter, March 11, 1940*, no. 15.

43. *Ibid.*, *Friends of God*, no. 264. Among the authors who have written about Blessed Josemaría's teachings on work, cf. J.L. Illanes, *La santificación del trabajo*, Ed. Palabra, tenth ed., Madrid 2002. See also, J. M. Aubert, "La santificación del trabajo," in *Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei*, cit., pp. 215-224.

augment his glory, but to manifest it and communicate it.”⁴⁴ The world points beyond its own existence to the unfathomable mystery of God’s life and love, to the immeasurable infinity of God the Father who eternally communicates his entire being to the Son, to the infinite union of love between the Father and the Son who is the Holy Spirit. The “current of love”⁴⁵ coursing in the bosom of the Trinity overflows into the creation of man and the angels, called to participate in his intimacy.

“All things have been created through and unto him [Christ]... and in him all things hold together,” said St. Paul. “For it has pleased God the Father that in him all his fullness should dwell, and that through him he should reconcile to himself all things.”⁴⁶ The eternal Son, through whom the whole universe subsists, took on human nature, taking on our condition even to the extreme of dying. Rising in “the spirit who gives life,”⁴⁷ he communicates to all creation the Holy Spirit, of whom He himself is full. By their powerful action, the Son and the Spirit lead all creatures to the Father. Thus the world is seen as a reflection of God’s eternal intra-Trinitarian love, as a gift or offering which the Son and the Holy Spirit continually receive from the Father and continually return to him.

The Blessed Trinity and our supernatural relationship with the Father, in the Son and through the Holy Spirit, is a reality that we can never fully grasp with our intellect. But it should be a central focus in our prayer, because it is the basis of the whole Christian life. And it grounds our love for the world, which involves the commitment to not leave the place we occupy, precisely in order to return it to its Creator. Seeing the world as a gift of heaven, we touch the paternal love that underlies our divine filiation.⁴⁸ “The heavens proclaim the glory of God,” sings the Psalm.⁴⁹ How can we fail to recall those words of Jesus that lead us to discern in that glory the sign of God’s infinite goodness towards us? “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”⁵⁰

Anchored in this awareness of our divine filiation, our aspiration is that not only the heavens, but also history, the development of peoples and societies, equally express the greatness of God, as a manifestation and reflection of his goodness and love. On his path to his ultimate end, man is called to perceive and develop the potentialities impressed by God on the realities that have come from his divine hands. Thus we should see ourselves as invited to continue the

44. *In secundum librum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, p. 2, a. 2, q. 1; cited in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 293.

45. Cf. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 85.

46. *Col* 1:16-17, 19-20.

47. *1 Cor* 15:45.

48. Divine filiation is one of the central themes in the teaching of Blessed Josemaría. Cf. F. Ocariz, *Naturaleza, Gracia y Gloria*, Eunsá, 2nd ed., Pamplona 2001, pp. 175-221.

49. *Ps* 18 (19):2.

50. *Mt* 6:26.

work of creation. As John Paul II has put it: "The word of God's revelation is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth that *man*, created in the image of God, *shares by his work in the activity of the Creator.*"⁵¹

Created in the likeness of the second Adam, Christ, who as the eternal Word upholds all creatures and directs them to the Father, and guided by God the Holy Spirit, who vivifies everything with his love, we men are called to discover in our work God's paternal face, while striving to collaborate as sons in the Son in the great work of creation. Thus our work takes on infinite horizons, as infinite as God's love, with a constant awareness of the great gift of our divine filiation. Working in this way, our task will be transformed into an expression of filial gratitude and contribute to the song of glory to God that the whole universe should intone.

As Pope John Paul II wrote: "Awareness that man's work is a participation in God's activity ought to permeate...even the most ordinary everyday activities."⁵² And he continues: "while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women . . . can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brothers and sisters, and contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan."⁵³

Blessed Josemaría preached this same truth tirelessly. In *Furrow* he wrote graphically: "You are writing to me in the kitchen, by the stove. It is early afternoon. It is cold. By your side, your younger sister—the last one to discover the divine folly of living her Christian vocation to the full—is peeling potatoes. To all appearances—you think—her work is the same as before. And yet, what a difference there is! —It is true: before she *only* peeled potatoes, now, she is sanctifying herself peeling potatoes."⁵⁴ Through one's daily duties, each of us, every man and woman, offers God the whole world. By carrying out our tasks in imitation of Jesus and in union with him, we actively participate in the praise that the eternal Son directs to the Father and we feel the joy of being in communion with the Trinity.

5. *Christians and the redemption of the world by Christ*

These great Christian perspectives would lack solidity if we failed to take into account an important element in our daily experience: the presence of evil and sin in the world.

At the dawn of history, before our first parents' grave offense, communion with God in the midst of the world was a daily reality. Genesis, using poetic language, tells us that "they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden."⁵⁵ Material creation was not an ob-

51. John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, no. 25.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, no. 498. Blessed Josemaría liked to contemplate the sanctification of daily activities seen in the life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph at Nazareth: cf. A. Aranda, *El bullir de la sangre de Cristo*, Rialp, Madrid 2000, pp. 153-201.

stacle to the creature's union with his Creator. On the contrary, conversation with God arose in a spontaneous and natural way.

Original sin, and later our personal sins, have obscured our vision and weakened our will. Our domination over the earth has become arduous and frequently painful. In fatigue and misunderstandings, in sickness and the harsh experience of death, the world seems turned against man.

We experience this wound, this difficulty to attain proper self-dominion, also as a rebellion of the body against the soul. We are assaulted by inclinations that are in radical opposition to the good we want to do.⁵⁶ Sometimes the world, which should be a means to draw closer to God, becomes an occasion for separation from him. The world escapes not only from man's dominion, but also seemingly from God's, raising itself against its own Creator.

But then is the world still something good, loved by God? Christian faith responds with a strong and decisive Yes. Sin has wounded it, but has not completely destroyed its goodness. Scripture says: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."⁵⁷ God so loved the world. . . . Even after sin, after all the sins witnessed by history, and all the evils occasioned by these wounds, God did not abandon

humanity to its fate, but went out to meet us, sending his Son into the world.

Upon taking on our nature, the eternal Son of God accepted the world marked by sin, with the commission of salvation the Father had entrusted to him. Accepting and loving the world, Jesus reconciled it with God.⁵⁸ For thirty years he experienced the exhaustion of work. Then abandonment, persecution, treachery and derision. And finally a horrible death on the cross. Thus God made man concluded the work of creation, redeeming the world from sin. If God loved his creatures so deeply, even when they rejected him, how much ought we to give ourselves, loving this world passionately, to bring it, with Him, to the Father?

"The world awaits us," said Blessed Josemaría. "Yes, we love the world passionately because God has taught us to: *Sic Deus dilexit mundum*. God so loved the world. And we love it because it is there that we fight our battles in a most beautiful war of charity, so that everyone may find the peace that Christ has come to establish."⁵⁹ The love of God manifested in Christ is redemptive; it frees the world from sin. It is a love that, one might say, creates the world anew and entrusts it to us once more.

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?"⁶⁰

55. Cf. *Gen* 3:8.

56. Cf. *Rom* 7:14-23.

57. *Jn* 3:16.

58. *Deus erat in Christo mundum reconcilians sibi* (2 *Cor* 5:19).

59. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, no. 290.

60. *Rom* 8:32.

This “entrusting creation to us anew” on God’s part includes, in virtue of the grace of Christ through the Holy Spirit, a new capacity to possess it, to accept it, with love and self-giving, and thus to sanctify it and offer it to God the Father. Upon granting us his grace, Jesus illuminates us with his light to know the world as his heart knows it, and he fills us with his strength to love it with rectitude and with an attitude of service. God’s unrestrained love for his creatures, fully shown in Christ’s paschal mystery, is the source which, by overcoming sin, enables Christians to love the world.

From here stems Christian joy, the echo of that first cry of the holy women as they returned, overjoyed and astonished, from the empty sepulcher: Jesus, the Lord, has risen! ⁶¹ In listening to the word of God and in receiving the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, a Christian nourishes his soul with the power of Christ’s complete self-giving. Thus his involvement in the world, in his family, his work and his social relationships, takes on a deeper and more generous tone, overflowing with faith, hope, and charity.

And when weariness, pain, misunderstanding or rejection come, along with discouragement and the temptation to waver, we can look upon the Cross and recover our strength. As Blessed Josemaría taught: “When you see a poor wooden Cross, alone, uncared-for, and of no value... and without its Crucified,

don’t forget that that Cross is your Cross: the Cross of each day, the hidden Cross, without splendor or consolation, the Cross which is awaiting the Crucified it lacks: and that Crucified must be you.” ⁶² Christ’s Cross is the only path uniting heaven and earth.

Let us never forget it: Christ has brought us victory and invites us to take part in his mission, to cooperate with Him in the task of redemption. Loving the world with Christ’s heart, in joy and in sorrow, in great events and in the ordinary course of daily life, we collaborate with him in the task of preparing the new heavens and new earth that the Book of Revelations speaks of. It is there, the Second Vatican Council teaches, that “we will find . . . once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured” ⁶³ all the fruits of freedom, fraternity, justice and peace that we have yearned for and sought during our earthly passage.

6. Conclusion

“In a society in which an unbridled craving for material things turns them into idols and a cause of separation from God, the new *Beatus* reminds us that these same realities, creatures of God and of human industry, if used correctly for the glory of the Creator and the service of one’s brothers and sisters, *can be a way for men and women to meet Christ.*” ⁶⁴

In all that has been said above, I have tried to take as my unifying

61. Cf. *Lk* 24:8 and its parallels.

62. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, no. 178.

63. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 39.

64. John Paul II, *Homily at the beatification ceremony of Josemaría Escrivá*, May 17, 1992.

thread these words spoken by John Paul II on May 17, 1992, in his homily during the solemn rite of beatification of the founder of Opus Dei. In this symposium, we have turned our eyes to “witnesses of the 20th century,” presenting them as “teachers of the 21st Century,” persons we can imitate in this new stage in history.

Every Christian is called to participate in Christ’s mission. Some do so by retiring to the isolation of a

monastery, thus giving public testimony to God’s transcendence. Others, by dedicating themselves to the priestly ministry, so indispensable for the Church. Others, the majority, by sanctifying from within the vast gamut of earthly realities and occupations. To everyone the Church directs, also through the words and life of Blessed Josemaría, an invitation to discovering and make known, each in his or her own situation, the good news of the love of God, Creator and Redeemer of the world.

Articles and interviews

Pamplona, Spain January 2002

Article published in the magazine Redacción, of the University of Navarre, under the title “A Universal Legacy”

As we commemorate the centennial of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá’s birth, there comes to mind, along with other aspects of his holy life, his continual solicitude for this university, which held such a deep place in his heart and which he now protects from heaven.

He always wanted it to be a powerful focus of science and culture, which would contribute to imparting a deep Christian formation to young men and women from all over the world. He never saw this *Alma Mater* as a defensive bastion, but dreamt that its influence would become truly

universal and that it would gain the high prestige needed to serve effectively the Church and all mankind, especially the most needy, at the same time as it fostered among its staff a sincere desire to learn from others.

When in October of this year we celebrate the University’s golden anniversary, we might be tempted to think that many of those dreams have already become a reality. But fifty years are scarcely the first steps for an institution that measures its history by centuries. The University of Navarre is beginning its path, although the wisdom of its first Grand Chancellor and the intensity of its five first decades—including the difficulties it has had to confront—have conferred on it a splendid maturity, thanks be to God and to the work of so many thousands of people: professors, employees, students, benefactors from throughout the world. Now it is a question of advancing further on the