

Blessed Josemaría's example helps us to find in the Gospel the strength to transform the world, to which all Christians are called. The saints bear witness to the reality that the Gospel is always up-to-date. Through them we understand that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (*Heb 13:8*).

+ Javier Echevarría
Prelate of Opus Dei

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Interview published in the newspaper La Repubblica, on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá

Bishop Echevarría, this has to be a great moment for Opus Dei, since soon its founder will be raised to the altars.

When that takes place, it will mean that the Church will have definitively recognized the holiness of a man who reached the fullness of charity, perfect union with God. Christian holiness consists in the ability to love God above all things and to transmit that love to others. I can assure you that Blessed Josemaría had a huge heart, amply capable of suffering with whoever suffered and of rejoicing with whoever rejoiced. And he did so whether the affected party was an entire nation, a group of people, a friend or a stranger.

Some have said that Escrivá was hard to get along with, that he was temperamental.

I don't think that one can say that, although he himself wasn't bashful in saying that he had a forceful character. God made use of his strong character to open a path for Opus Dei in the world, in the Church, in so many places. He knew how to say the right things, at times energetically, but without leaving resentments. And if he realized he'd made a mistake, he would immediately apologize.

Opus Dei has covered a lot of ground: more than 80,000 members all over the world, close to 2,000 priests, so many undertakings in all six continents. What would you say to a young person today to encourage him to join?

Let me clarify that I wouldn't urge anyone to join Opus Dei. To follow our Lord in the Work, there is one pre-condition: a freedom that is exercised each day. One should do what God wants, telling him: I do so because I want to. I'd only advise such a person: Be attentive to God's voice and do whatever he tells you.

And if someone wishes to leave Opus Dei? Is there any pressure?

None at all. Never.

But weren't there some unpleasant instances in the past?

No, never. The doors are wide open for whoever wishes to leave, yet whoever wishes to enter needs to do a lot of pushing and shoving. If you

were a parent and your child was about to choose a mistaken path, would you let him follow his whim without batting an eye? No, you would offer some advice. The only kind of pressure is paternal, fraternal advice. We tell people: Listen, you can do what you like, but think it over, because it's your life that's in play.

For years some people have complained about excessive proselytizing, even among minors, or about psychological pressure to go to confession with only Opus Dei priests.

Frankly, such criticisms have never been demonstrated, and it seems to me that they are now things of the past. As far as the duty to confess only with our priests, I must say that it's simply not true. Such a policy runs counter to the freedom the Church recognizes for all Christians. Moreover, doesn't it make sense that the prelature's faithful naturally want to go to confession with a priest who can help them better, because he lives the same spirit as they do? Yet, they are always free to go to whichever Catholic priest they want.

Don't you accept any blame? Even the Pope has been known to ask forgiveness.

I accept that we are all imperfect, that we all ought to correct each other and that we all must examine our conscience to be better children of God. And let me add that we don't see ourselves as better than others. We know that we are only poor human beings, who must learn from others. We try, with the help of grace, to act responsibly by working well, by

leading a good family life and caring for our social duties.

In the nearly 75 years since its founding, where does the Work's particular vitality stem from?

Our specific mission is not to develop specific apostolic undertakings; rather we strive to help men and women at all social levels, who carry out many different kinds of work, to sanctify their lives, and thus to give witness to the Gospel's universal values. We currently have centers in more than 60 countries, the most recent being in South Africa, Kazakhstan and Lebanon. Wherever they are, the prelature's faithful try to live sincere Christian lives, earnestly carrying out, in our founder's words, an apostolate of friendship and trust in their daily family and professional settings. Some of them, seeking to meet the needs of a specific community, bring forward larger undertakings of an educational or beneficent nature. They do so with the collaboration of others, often non-Catholics. It's no secret that the founder began his apostolate among Madrid's poor and sick.

As a man of faith, what concerns you the most?

The loss of a sense of the sacred in the world: letting worldliness get the upper hand.

How do you see the Church of the third millennium? How should its Pope be?

Opus Dei has no corporate line as to how the Church or papacy should be. The Pope, whoever he

might be, gives unity to the Church and is guided by the Holy Spirit. Personally, I think tomorrow's Church will look both to the future and to its Christian roots. It will look at Christ and at the world in which we live. In this sense I think the word "communion," employed so often by the Pope in his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, can supply the key to analyzing both the Church's problems and its mission in the world.

You were Escrivá's personal secretary from 1953 until his death. How do you recall him?

With his word and writings but above all with his example, he taught us how to live fully the Gospel ideal. He showed us by his life that this ideal is neither utopian nor limited to privileged persons, but rather a call addressed to all Christians. It is an invitation to live the Gospel in every environment and occupation, since every kind of work can be turned into an encounter with Christ.

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Article on the University of Navarre, published in the weekly Alfa y Omega

To be faithful to the etymology of "university," the University of Navarre fosters all fields of human knowledge, seeking both to augment them and to render society a real and effective service, a service to the truth

that frees, that saves: *Veritas liberabit vos*. We want to help construct a rigorous and balanced body of knowledge, tested in its work of synthesis, free of reductionist attitudes, far from ideological deformations and the prejudices of intellectual fads.

Each discipline contributes in its own way to perfecting the individual and society. This common purpose means that all fields of knowledge can and should be interrelated, without losing their particular characteristics and methods. The University of Navarre wants its students to attain a professional training that will permit them to competently serve society and to benefit from an interdisciplinary dialogue. We want them to be imbued with a university and Christian spirit, acquiring an authentic ideal of human excellence that can help them live their life with rectitude and a spirit of service.

In these moments of history, humanity is particularly conscious of its limits and aspires towards profound and radical changes. The most recent experiences of this century show that events not based on a sincere search for the truth are not only futile, but in the end tragic. In the face of all this unrest, the present generation refuses to resign itself to disillusionment, seeking a foundation and a path for real hope. That foundation and path can be none other than the sincere search for the truth, because, in the words of Blessed Josemaría, founder of Opus Dei, "truth is always, in a certain way, something sacred—God's gift, a divine light that leads us towards the One who is the fullness of light."