

Other presentations

Buenos Aires
June 26, 2001

Message to the Congress "The Centennial of the Birth of Josemaría Escrivá," organized by Austral University

Your Excellency, the Rector of Austral University:

Although unable to be in Buenos Aires during these days, I want to send you this message and unite myself wholeheartedly to your efforts in this congress to foster dialogue and reflection on the Founder of Opus Dei's work and teachings.

The university forum in which you are meeting has brought together intellectuals from all over South America, and forms part of the preparation for the international Congress that will take place in Rome on and around January 9, 2002, the centennial of Blessed Josemaría's birth. These hundred years, spanning the entire twentieth century, provide an illuminating historical framework for evaluating the significance of the Founder of Opus Dei's holy life, in light of God's plans for the Church and humanity.

The century we have just lived through is filled with stark contrasts. Along with great progress in the fields of science and in the clarification of human rights, it has also been the setting for many heart-rending events, the bitter fruit of sin, which gravely offend the dignity of the human person. No one has synthesized its paradoxical character better than the Roman Pontiff himself. In the universal language of prayer, asking for our Lady's assistance in the new millennium, Pope John Paul II said: "We are men and women of an extraordinary epoch, as exciting as it is rich in contradictions. Humanity today possesses instruments of unheard-of power: it can transform this world into a garden or reduce it to a pile of rubble. It has attained an extraordinary capacity to intervene in the very sources of life, a capacity it can use for good, within the framework of the moral law, or with the myopic pride of a science that accepts no limits."¹

Alongside these objective and undeniable facts, the century we have just lived through presents us with marvelous signs of God's mercy, which can nurture our Christian hope and overcome any temptation to pessimism. The memory of these divine gifts is already an act of thanksgiving. But above all, these gifts represents a call to our responsibility, because God grants his gifts so that we may make them bear fruit through the good use

1. John Paul II, Act of dedication to the Blessed Virgin for the new millennium, delivered in Rome on December 8, 2000, at the end of the Jubilee of the Bishops.

of our freedom. The graces that the Creator is always granting us mark out for us the direction we must take in this new epoch that is beginning. Although risks and worries abound, it is also an epoch with special divine demands, offered so that we Christians may respond with determination and bring to fulfillment God's plan for humanity.

Among the gifts the Blessed Trinity has granted the world in the past century we find, undoubtedly, the life of Blessed Josemaria Escrivá. As participants in this congress, you have set yourselves the pleasant and enriching task of going more thoroughly into the significance of this great priest's unique life. I ask the Holy Spirit to bestow his light on the work you are undertaking, or more exactly, continuing, since these sessions have been preceded by a lot of dedicated work and effort. This preparation has centered on topics that illumine all fields of human activity, reflected in the program drawn up for these days.

Blessed Josemaria's impact on the lives of millions of men and women can only be fully appreciated in the supernatural light of faith. His passage on earth had no other meaning than the faithful fulfillment of God's will, corresponding with complete dedication to a precise call of God in the service of the Church and of souls, a call that filled every corner of his intellect, will and heart. The work this Congress has undertaken looks above all to the future; for this reason too its interventions can help us to be magnanimous. The treasure of doctrine, spirituality and apostolic

impetus carved out by Blessed Josemaria's life, humanly so attractive and positive, requires that we deepen our insight into its conceptual and practical implications. Thus it will be ever more active and operative, impacting the future with results that transcend anything we can imagine.

Josemaria Escrivá's life can only be fully understood, as I noted above, when seen as a gift of the loving providence of God, who never ceases to bring forth in the Church exemplary persons, holy souls who, docile to the Spirit's prompting, extend through time Christ's mission in the world and bring his inexhaustible vigor to the changing circumstances of history. Therefore the efforts of the saints always have a universal reach and fruitfulness, and their spiritual riches overflow any attempt to encompass them in human studies and analyses, although these also are necessary and useful.

We can never fully fathom the influence of the life and teaching of men of God like Blessed Josemaria, from a scientific and cultural perspective as well. The upcoming commemoration of the centennial of his birth constitutes an opportunity to direct a broader and more penetrating view into the times we have to travel through, the years and decades of the century now beginning. The Pope invited us to do so as we ended the Jubilee, in which we have commemorated the bi-millennium of the incarnation of the Son of God. In the barque of the Church, guided by the firm hand of the successor of the prince of the apostles, we have heard

Christ's words sound out with renewed force: *duc in altum!* Put out into the deep.² Our Lord's command, so often meditated on and preached by the Founder of Opus Dei, is an imperative invitation to launch ourselves into the immense task of evangelizing the whole world. Stressing the reality of apostolate in ordinary life and in professional work, Blessed Josemaria saw that the participation of the ordinary faithful in the Church's mission is truly a "*sea without shores*." Faced with this immense sea, even the oceans and beautiful pampas of this blessed Argentina, to which he alluded in his paternal benedictions during his pastoral visit to Buenos Aires in 1974, seem small.

In the apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, recalling the chapter of the Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution on the Church dedicated to the universal call to holiness, Pope John Paul II expressed his thankfulness to God for having been able to beatify and canonize many Christian faithful in the years of his pontificate.³ One of these is precisely Josemaria Escriva, venerated on the altars since 1992. It is significant that in the same section of that Apostolic Letter, the Holy Father insists especially on the search for sanctity in ordinary life. "The time has come," he wrote, "to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living: the whole life

of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction."⁴

Here is centered the nucleus of the message that Blessed Josemaria, as an instrument of God's providence, strove to remind all mankind of. This divine light was made specific in Opus Dei, founded on October 2, 1928. From that date on, Blessed Josemaria affirmed everywhere with great strength and conviction that the Christian vocation consisted in "making heroic verse out of the prose of each day."⁵ In 1967, during the homily in a Mass celebrated in a university environment such as this, the campus of the University of Navarre, he told us: "Heaven and earth seem to merge, my children, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives."⁶

Innumerable persons have made Blessed Josemaria's program their own and are trying to achieve holiness "in daily work and in the fulfillment of the Christian's ordinary duties,"⁷ as millions of men and women all over the world pray each day as they seek his intercession. In this context, I would like to recall Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, a most faithful son and first successor to Blessed Josemaria in guiding Opus Dei, and first Honorary Rector of Austral University, which he did so much to encourage in the first years of its existence. His

2. Lk 5:4; cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 6, 2001.

3. Cf. Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 6, 2001, nos. 30 and 31; Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, Ch. 5.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter of March 24, 1931*, no. 19.

6. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations*, no. 116.

7. Prayer for devotion to Blessed Josemaría.

memory, unforgettable to all of us, will always be an example and stimulus to undertake and carry out initiatives in the university, filled with a Christian spirit and with broad ramifications for all levels of society. The presentations and papers in this congress all touch in some way upon ordinary life, upon one's family, professional and social life. Our daily work, and the ordinary events of each day, if we behave as God wants, weave a great tapestry, the tapestry of holiness. The results of this congress will provide rich material to continue penetrating more deeply, in the light of faith, into Blessed Josemaria's teachings. Your efforts will benefit people all over the world, who will also feel impelled to "launch out in to the deep, as the Pope is urging us."

Blessed Josemaria always had a deep interest in the university world, and followed closely developments in human culture and knowledge. Above and beyond the academic studies produced by this congress, the principal fruit of these days has to take root in the heart of each of the participants, and from there be passed on to many other men and women.

I thank all those who have worked to make this congress a reality, as well as those who are now about to participate in its sessions. Although physically absent from this meeting, I will not fail to be very much present in spirit, because I am following your efforts very closely and supporting them with my prayers.

Let us commend to Blessed Josemaria the fruit of these days of reflection and study, so that he obtain for us

God's light and grace. And let us place ourselves once more under the protection of our Lady, *Ancilla Domini* and *Sedes Sapientiae*, Handmaid of the Lord and Seat of Wisdom.

Rome, June 26, 2001, Feast of Blessed Josemaria.

Rome September 12, 2001

Letter to the Regional Vicar of the United States on the occasion of the September 11 terrorist attacks

Dear Arne: May Jesus watch over my sons and daughters in the United States!

We received your fax while we were praying for the United States, and just as I was about to write you to let you know that I am united to your sorrow with all my soul. Be assured that many are praying for that beloved country of yours at this moment, asking our Lord especially for the victims and those, such as their relatives, who are suffering the consequences in a special way. I do not have the slightest doubt that God will heed these prayers. This is a most opportune time, on the one hand, to foster the Communion of Saints (being very close to those who are suffering) and, on the other, to fulfill our duties offered as service to others. I truly wish I could be there with you and help everyone!