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The Servant of God
JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ
Founder of Opus Dei

NEWSLETTER No. 5

The Sacrament of Forgiveness

Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Albás was born in Barbastro (Spain) on 9 January 1902. He attended school in Barbastro and Logroño and did his ecclesiastical studies in the Pontifical University of Saragossa, where he was awarded a licenciante in Theology. He was later to obtain a doctorate in Theology in Rome.

He studied civil law at the University of Saragossa and subsequently gained a doctorate at the University of Madrid. In 1960 he received an honorary doctorate in Philosophy and Letters from the University of Saragossa. He was the first Chancellor of the Universities of Navarre, Spain and of Piura, Peru.

After being ordained on 28 March 1925, he began his work as a priest in country parishes and, from 1927 onwards, he worked among the poor and the sick of the outlying districts and hospitals of Madrid. Some years later he was appointed Rector of the Real Patronato de Santa Isabel in Madrid, a task which he carried out until 1946 when he moved to Rome.

He was a Consultor to various Pontifical Commissions and Congregations of the Holy See, a Domestic Prelate to the Holy Father and a member of the Pontifical Roman Theological Academy.

On 2 October 1928, in Madrid, he had founded Opus Dei, a way of sanctification in the middle of the world and a leaven of fervent Christian life in every environment. On 14 February 1930, Monsignor Escrivá founded the Women's Section of Opus Dei, and on 14 February 1943, within Opus Dei, the Sacerdotal Society of the Holy Cross. Opus Dei received the definitive approval of the Holy See on 16 June 1950; and on 28 November 1982 it was established as a personal Prelature. This legal framework, introduced into Church Law by the Second Vatican Council, had been desired and foreseen by Monsignor Escrivá.

Through a life of constant prayer and penance, with a continuous and unconditional self-surrender to the will of God, the Father – as he is called by his sons and daughters in Opus Dei and by many other thousands of people from all walks of life – for forty seven years fostered and directed the expansion of Opus Dei throughout the world. At the time of the Founder's death, Opus Dei had spread to the five continents, with over 60,000 members, of 80 nationalities, serving the Church with the same spirit of complete union with, and deep veneration for, the Pope and the Bishops which Monsignor Escrivá had always practised and instilled in his sons and daughters.

The Holy Mass was the root and centre of the interior life of the Founder of Opus Dei. A deep sense of his divine filiation moved him to seek in all things the most complete identification with Jesus Christ, to have a tender and strong devotion to Our Lady and St Joseph and a continual and confident friendship with the Holy Guardian Angels, and to be a sower of peace and joy along all the paths of the earth.

On repeated occasions, Monsignor Escrivá had offered his life for the Church and for the Roman Pontiff. Our Lord accepted that offering and the Father, in a truly saintly way, gave up his soul to God in Rome, on 26 June 1975, in the room where he worked, with the same simplicity which characterized his entire life.

His body lies in the Crypt of the Oratory of Our Lady of Peace, Viale Bruno Buozzi 75, Rome, continually accompanied by the prayer and gratitude of his sons and daughters, and of the countless people who have come closer to God, drawn by the example and teaching of the Founder of Opus Dei. The Cause of Beatification and Canonization of Monsignor Escrivá was opened in Rome on 12 May 1981.

Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer received from God the mission to found Opus Dei, which has come to remind men of the universal call to holiness. The Founder of Opus Dei taught that the way to holiness lies precisely in the daily battle that everyone must wage with himself **against all those things, in his life, which are not of God**, (1) so as to become filled with the charity of Christ. **I have never liked those biographies of saints which, ingenuously, but also with a lack of sound doctrine, describe to us their great deeds as if those men had been confirmed in grace from their mother's womb. No. The true biographies of the Christian heroes are like our own lives: they fought and won, and fought and lost. And then, contrite, they returned to the fray** (2). God wants us to be saints, but he knows our frailty and he offers us the means to overcome it: **Jesus understands our weakness and he draws us to himself, as it were along an inclined plane, willing us on to insist in our effort to climb a little, day by day** (3).

This effort requires humility on the part of the Christian: the knowledge of one's own insufficiency, together with a deep trust in God's grace. The Founder of Opus Dei insisted tirelessly, in his preaching, on the importance and need of the sacrament of Penance in the task of sanctification. By his word and example, he contributed most effectively towards helping many thousands of people all over the world to have a living faith and deep love for this sacrament, which is a real treasure of God's mercy that has been entrusted to the Church.

It is inevitable that, as we walk along our way, we will raise dust. We are creatures and we are full of defects. I would say that they are bound to be there always: they are the shadow which, in our soul, helps to bring out more clearly, by contrast, the grace of God and our resolve to respond to God's favour. And this contrast, this chiaroscuro, will make us more human and humble, more understanding and generous (4). Our experience of having so many personal failings should not lead us to be pessimistic, but to trust more in the mercy of God the Father: **God is not wearied by our infidelities. Our Father in Heaven pardons any offence, when his child returns once more to Him, when he repents and asks for pardon. Our Lord is so much a Father that he anticipates our desires to be pardoned and comes forward to us, opening his arms with his grace** (...).

Human life is, in a certain way, a constant returning to our Father's house. We return through contrition, that conversion of heart which implies a desire to change, a firm decision to improve our life and which,

Cover: *Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer greets a sick person in Islabe, near Bilbao (Spain), on 12 October 1972.*

therefore, is expressed in deeds of sacrifice and self-giving. We return to our Father's house by means of that sacrament of pardon in which, by confessing our sins, we put on Christ and thus become his brothers, members of God's family (5).

There can be no such thing as discouragement for someone who knows he is a son of God: **Forward, no matter what happens! Cling tightly to Our Lord's arm and remember that God does not lose battles. If you should stray from him for any reason, react with a humility that will lead you to begin again and again; to play the role of the prodigal son every day, and even repeatedly during the twenty-four hours of the same day; to correct your contrite heart in Confession, which is a real miracle of God's Love. In this wonderful Sacrament Our Lord cleanses your soul and fills you with joy and strength to prevent you from giving up the fight, and to help you keep returning to God unwearied, even when everything seems dark and gloomy** (6).

The Servant of God encouraged everyone to go to Confession with a lively faith, knowing that, as it is a sacrament, it is not a merely human means, an outpouring of our psychological problems, but a divine reality, a childlike and trusting opening of ourselves to God Our Lord: **Sacramental Confession is not a human dialogue, but a divine colloquy; it is a tribunal, of justice that is both sure and divine, and, above all, of mercy** (7). It is a most tender expression of God's goodness, of the mercy of Jesus Christ, who is a father and a brother, who knows how to find excuses for us, who knows how to forgive. It is wonderful to kneel down, and listen to Our Lord – for the priest is Christ himself: **I absolve you from your sins, I forgive you** (8).

The Servant of God used to remind people that **sanctity is personal and sin is personal: therefore the medicine must be applied personally** (9), in that intimate person to person encounter with Our Lord, which should be carefully prepared for. Monsignor Escrivá explained time and again each of the acts which make up the sacrament of Penance: examination of conscience, sorrow for our sins, a firm purpose of amendment and a resolution to avoid occasions of sin, personal auricular confession, and sacramental penance. And he assured people that whoever strives to go to Confession with proper dispositions, obtains an ever deeper and more intimate knowledge of the tenderness with which God follows our steps on earth: **How grateful we should be to God Our Lord, for this Sacrament of his mercy! I am amazed; I am moved. To me, a God who forgives seems both so fatherly and so motherly, that I could break into tears of thanksgiving and joy. What would we do without his forgiveness?** (10).

From his lips came a constant invitation to go frequently to Confession, which the Servant of God used to do weekly, and sometimes more than once a week, moved not by scruples, but by a refined love. **God purifies us, cleanses us, raises us up . . . ; doesn't this move you? Go to Confession, because it exists not just to forgive sins, serious or venial, or faults: but also to strengthen us, to fill our souls with grace, to move us forward, so that we can run our course more quickly; and to make us more able to struggle and be victorious; and to behave in such a way that we may live with virtue and detest sin** (11). If instead a person stops going to Confession, his soul becomes dull and his conscience clouded, till he is unable to distinguish good from evil. Faith and love grow weaker, and he is left defenceless against the assaults of his passions.

Monsignor Escrivá laid special emphasis on sincerity: **When making your Confession, get to the point right from the start. Prepare your Confessions so that they are concise, concrete, clear and complete** (12). As soon as we open our hearts and give them a good cleaning, saying what's in the way, what we wouldn't like to be known, with contrition and a good resolution – what peace, what joy! (13)

He invited people not to forget the close relationship that exists between the sacrament of Penance and that divine food of the soul, the Eucharist: **Don't stop receiving frequent Communion; but if there's something in your soul that worries you, go first to Confession. If you are without clear ideas, without a clean conscience, don't go to Communion, ever; it would be horrible** (14).

Many people remember the reflections of the Servant of God on the fruits of peace and optimism that God grants to those who seek his forgiveness in this sacrament. Every shadow disappears and the soul becomes filled with serene peace: **Afterwards you must forget, because God Our Lord also forgets** (15). **God triumphs in this poor flesh of mine, in this poor soul of mine, in this poor heart of mine** (16). Those who haven't approached the confessional for some time will see how happy they are when they have been cleansed; they will understand that life has a different meaning, that they are on earth for something greater (17).

With the grace of God in their souls, Christians can become **sowers of peace and joy** (18) among men. The apostolate, that duty we all share of leading others to meet Christ, finds its sure guarantee of effectiveness and a very precise objective in the sacrament of Penance. Indeed, one of the great favours a Christian can bestow upon a friend is to help him, or her, to go to sacramental Confession, where we experience the joy of being forgiven by God.



The Servant of God at the age of fifteen.

(1) *Christ is passing by*, 73.

(2) *Ibid.*, 76.

(3) *Ibid.*, 75.

(4) *Ibid.*, 76.

(5) *Ibid.*, 64.

(6) *Friends of God*, 214.

(7) *Christ is passing by*, 78.

(8) RHF (Historical Records of the Founder) 20760, p. 672.

(9) *Ibid.*, p. 674.

(10) *Ibid.*, p. 669.

(11) *Ibid.*

(12) RHF 20101, p. 19.

(13) RHF 20760, p. 667.

(14) RHF 20771, p. 284.

(15) RHF 20161, p. 419.

(16) RHF 20760, p. 418.

(17) RHF 20771, p. 290.

(18) *Christ is passing by*, 168.

The Light of Christ's Teaching

Let us drink to the last drop from the chalice of pain in this poor present life (. . .) what does it matter to suffer if we suffer to console, to please God Our Lord, in a spirit of reparation, united to Him on his Cross, in a word: if we suffer for Love? (1). When the Founder of Opus Dei wrote these words, in December 1932, or perhaps even earlier, he had already been devoting himself generously to the poor and sick of Madrid for several years. This facet of the work undertaken by the Servant of God with the desire to unite himself to Our Lord's Cross in alleviating the sufferings of the most abject, has been described in previous issues of this Newsletter. With a deep sense of Christian brotherhood he suffered much when he felt at close hand pain and loneliness in its sharpest form. He made it his special concern to bring to these people, who were short of everything, the treasure of the sacraments, his priestly consolation and the warmth of charity expressed in deeds of service.

He indicated at the same time that there were even greater miseries to remedy: religious ignorance, a coldness of heart towards God and one's fellow men, and a lack of awareness of the dignity and demands of the Christian vocation. **One could well say that the chief enemy of God – since one comes to love God after getting to know him – is ignorance, which is the origin of so many evils and a great obstacle for the salvation of souls** (2). The Servant of God saw the need to take the light of Christ's teaching to all places, as **a basic duty of charity for any Catholic with a conscience** (3). He devoted himself to this

task, from his earliest years as a priest, and carried it out tirelessly.

From June 1927, when he began working as chaplain to the Patronato de Enfermos (a home for the sick), he went frequently to the poorest quarters of Madrid to bring priestly care also to the children of the schools run by the Damas Apostólicas del Sagrado Corazón (Apostolic Dames of the Sacred Heart). Some four thousand children made their First Communion each year and Fr Josemaría used to give them talks and to chat with each one. He sought especially to prepare them to receive the sacrament of Confession very well.

In 1975, the Founder of Opus Dei looked back with joy on his work during those years: **I have on my conscience – and I say it with pride – having dedicated many, many thousands of hours to hearing children's confessions in the poor districts of Madrid. I would have liked to have gone to hear confessions in all the saddest and most abandoned slum areas of the whole world. They used to come with runny noses. First you had to clean their noses, before cleaning their poor souls a little** (4).

In July 1931, after leaving the chaplaincy of the Patronato de Enfermos, he continued and deepened his work of sowing sound doctrine in all parts. For example, by 1932 he was already going to the Porta Coeli Home for children in García de Paredes Street in Madrid. There he heard confessions and spent long hours instructing the children. He would go wherever a spiritual need called him, without a thought for the sacrifice or hours of work it might entail.



The Porta Coeli Home. Here, in the early thirties, the Servant of God carried out part of his extensive catechetical work.

In March 1932 or thereabouts, religious instruction was suppressed in all state educational establishments in Spain. In those circumstances, some families approached Fr Josemaría to teach their children catechism.

A girl who worked in the home of one of those families – she is now a nun of the Servants of Mary – attended the classes which the Servant of God gave in 1932 and 1933 to eight children in that house. "I seem to recall that Fr Josemaría came twice weekly, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, between five and six o'clock in the evening. The catechism classes were held throughout the year, except in July and August (. . .). He was very lively and cheerful, and the children, some of whom were very young, enjoyed themselves a lot during the classes and we did not want him to stop. The time flew and we complained that he had to go so soon (. . .). We felt very happy by his side, and he helped us understand the catechism by means of illustrated cards. The children would gather round to get a good look at them: they were on the Commandments, the Sacraments, etc." (5).

At about the same time the Founder of Opus Dei intensified his apostolate among the more educated and began to hold some

spiritual formation meetings for university students. The first of these took place on 21 January 1933 in a room in the Porta Coeli Home, which he had the use of thanks to the nuns who ran the home.

Only three came, all medical students. As Monsignor Escrivá remarked in 1975: **Only three came. What a calamity! you'd have thought. Well, no! I was very optimistic, very happy, and I went to the nuns' oratory. I placed Our Lord in the monstrance and gave Benediction to those three. It seemed to me that the Lord Jesus, Our God, was blessing three hundred, three hundred thousand, thirty million, three thousand million . . ., whites, blacks, yellow races, of all the colours and combinations that human love can produce. And I have fallen short, because after half a century it is a reality. I have fallen short, because Our Lord has been much more generous** (6).

From the first day, the Founder of Opus Dei wanted a picture of the Blessed Virgin to preside over the class, a picture with a story. It was the cover of a torn catechism which he had found on the ground at the foot of a tree in the Los Pinos district, during one of his journeys through the suburbs of Madrid. In reparation he had the small drawing framed, with some fine tissue as a backing.

The students used to come to chat with Fr Josemaría in his mother's house. His spiritual direction helped them enter upon the interior life in a very natural way. At that time, in fact since the end of 1932, he was living in an apartment in Martínez Campos Street. In those conversations, he opened their eyes to discover the wonder and depth of the Christian vocation lived amidst one's daily occupations. He encouraged them to serve others generously, and enabled them to rise above that narrow vision which sees Christianity as no more than a set of pious practices added on to one's daily life.

To further the formation of these young men and their friends, he got them

to study Christian doctrine more deeply, so that they too in their turn could teach others. With them he organised catechism courses for children from the outskirts of the capital. The first of these courses began two weeks after the first meeting at the Porta Coeli Home. It took place in the Los Pinos district, exactly where he had found the little page of the catechism. A few days before commencing, and in spite of a heavy snowfall (an unusual event in Madrid), Fr Josemaría went to the College of the Divine Redeemer to arrange the classes. One of the eight nuns who ran the College at that time recounts: "One morning, which I remember very well because there had been a very heavy fall of snow and everything was covered in white, we saw, from the Community recreation room which was on the upper floor, two priests in soutanes and cloaks approaching the College. It was early, because everything was still white and clean; later it became like a mud pond. It was Fr Josemaría, accompanied by another priest called Fr Lino, who had come to ask us to allow him to organise catechism classes in the College" (7).

The first Sunday they went to teach catechism it rained heavily. This, combined with the snow of the previous days, made it almost impossible to pass through the muddy streets of the district.

Fr Josemaría had sought out and chosen the most needy and difficult quarter he knew. One of the girls who attended the school explains: "The College of the Divine Redeemer was a new foundation (1927) of the Sisters of Christian Doctrine (...). It was situated in the district of Los Pinos. They had tried to find the most deprived place to attend to the needs of many families who were very poor. The whole neighbourhood was wretchedly poor. It consisted mainly of huts made out of sheets of metal, taken from old tin cans. The College was in a hollow and so when it rained, the water ran down the slopes forming a small brook. The people of the neighbourhood therefore nicknamed it 'Brook College'. I mention this to show that it was a difficult

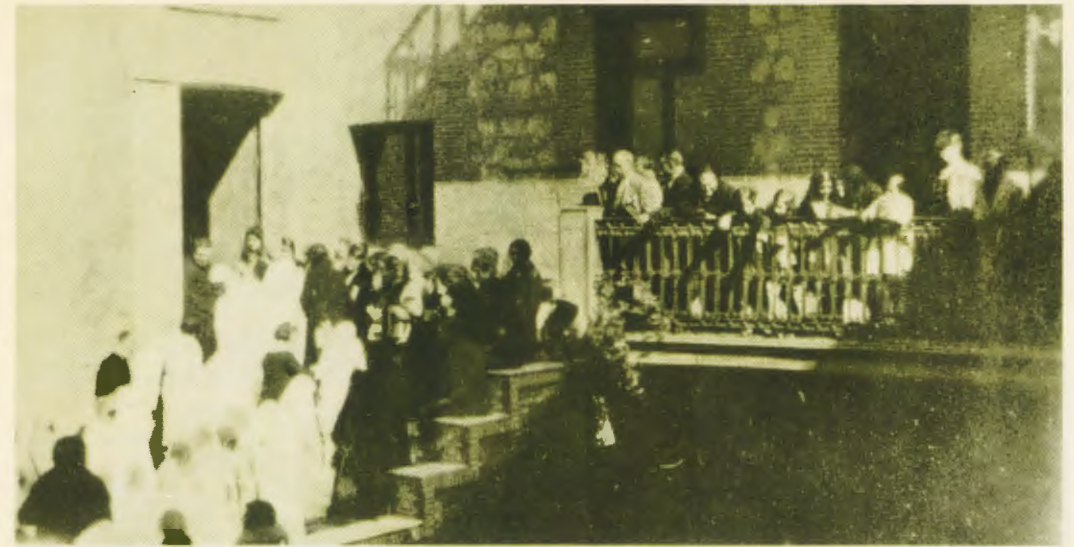
place to get to, and even to find. You could not get there by car, and the last stop of the Metro was far away" (8).

Other difficulties were harder to overcome than the material ones. The nun previously quoted goes on: "The atmosphere of the locality of Los Pinos was very hostile, so much so that (...) to pass through that neighbourhood was an act of heroism for a priest because of the mockery and threats" (9).

Fr Josemaría used to be there on Sundays at eleven o'clock sharp and would stay a couple of hours. During the Mass, which was said by the College chaplain, he would expound some points of doctrine. This explanation continued after Mass and the students who accompanied him – nearly all of them medical students during that first year – gave the lessons they had prepared during the week. Apart from the good it did for the young ones approaching the light of the faith, undoubtedly the chief beneficiaries were the students themselves, because, as well as increasing their own knowledge of the faith, they grew in generosity and in their desire to do apostolate.

The Servant of God encouraged them to invite their friends to the catechism classes and thus the number who helped in the work increased greatly during the next year. And so, the Father (for this is how Don Josemaría's students called him) looked for new places similar to the first. On 12 August 1934 he wrote as follows to Don Francisco Morán, the Vicar General of the Madrid diocese: **I request you, Father Vicar, to reserve us another catechetical course; better if it is in a bad place, which requires a sacrifice to attend, because the boys will happily offer up the discomforts to the Lord. Of course, as in Los Pinos, it could only be on Sundays: we mustn't forget that these lads are the sort of students who really study** (10).

In this way, other catechism classes were started with the Father's encouragement, in those far off days of the thirties, when Opus Dei was taking its first steps. Amongst them was the course



In this photograph (taken in 1929), the Servant of God may be seen – in the doorway on the left – on a First Holy Communion day at the Patronato de Enfermos.

that commenced in March 1935 in the "Colonia Popular", following a suggestion of the Vicar General in response to Fr Josemaría's request.

These were the beginnings of a fruitful work in the service of the Church, initiated personally by the Founder, which Opus Dei now carries out in all the parts of the world where it operates. The life of Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer can be seen as a great deployment of Christian formation, an unceasing sowing of the doctrine of Christ, to which he devoted his energies unsparingly. Through his preaching, the seed of the Love of God took root in many hearts: **Giving doctrine is our great mission. Herein lies the great apostolate of Opus Dei: to show to the multitude who await us the path that leads straight to Our Lord** (11).

The result of his heroic example is a most varied range of apostolic activities undertaken by his daughters and sons amongst all sections of society. In these apostolic activities, the teaching aspect always stands out, because **the Christian apostolate – and I'm talking now about that of an ordinary Christian, that of a man or woman who lives as one more among his or her equals – is a great catechesis, in which, through personal contact, through loyal and genuine friendship, one awakens in others a hunger for God and helps them discover new horizons: with naturalness, with simplicity as I've said, with the example of a faith well lived, with words that are kindly but full of the strength of divine truth** (12).

(1) *The Way*, 182.

(2) Letter, 11-III-1940.

(3) Letter, 28-III-1973.

(4) RHF 20591, p. 452.

(5) Testimony of Sister Benita Casado Yagüe, Servant of Mary.

(6) Salvador Bernal, *Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, London and Dublin 1977, p. 176.

(7) Testimony of Sister San Pablo Lemos, Missionary of Christian Doctrine.

(8) Testimony of Sister Pilar Angela Hernando Carretero, Missionary of Christian Doctrine.

(9) Testimony of Sister San Pablo Lemos.

(10) Letter, 12-VIII-1934.

(11) Letter, 24-III-1930.

(12) *Christ is passing by*, 149.

Under his spiritual influence

With heroic faithfulness to the Will of God, with constant prayer and penance, with the practice of the human and supernatural virtues and working full of hope, Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer inspired and guided the growth of Opus Dei throughout the world for forty seven years.

The principal task of the Work is the formation of its members so that each one, individually, may carry out his Christian apostolic work in the world and in society.

The essential apostolate of Opus Dei, in the words of its Founder, is the apostolate each member carries out in his own place of work, with his family, among his friends – an apostolate which does not attract attention, which cannot easily be expressed in statistics but which yields holiness in thousands of souls who keep on following Christ, quietly and effectively, during their ordinary everyday work. (*Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer, n.71.*)

Nevertheless, as he himself replied when asked by a journalist: **Opus Dei, as a corporation, with the help of very many people who do not belong to the Work and who often are not Christian, also fosters 'corporate' activities through which it seeks to contribute towards solving the many problems which face the world today: educational institutions, welfare centres, schools for professional development and advancement, and so forth.** (*Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer, n.84.*)

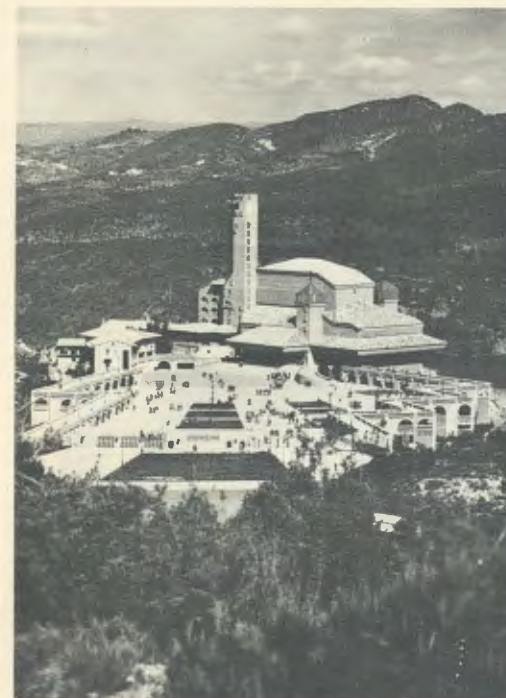
We shall be describing here, very briefly, some of the many apostolic works (each with its own characteristics, springing from the needs of a particular place and time) which have arisen through the inspiration of the Founder of Opus Dei.

TORRECIUDAD A Shrine to Our Lady

The town of Barbastro, Spain, is now behind us. The road follows the right bank of the river Cinca, to climb to the Somontano uplands; the scene is agricultural. Beyond the dam at El Grado, the Cinca turns into a lake enclosed within the jutting walls of rock. On its left bank and crowning a spur of rock, may be seen an ancient hermitage and nearby, half-ruined, a fortified outpost-tower. Beyond and above these, can be seen the new Shrine and its buildings, where the spiritual work dreamt of by the Founder of Opus Dei takes place. In the distance the impressive contours of the Pyrenees of Aragon stand out against a clear blue sky.



An interior view of the Shrine at Torreciudad.



A deep silence draws one to contemplation. Something happened here which is part of the history of Opus Dei. It was in 1904, when the Servant of God was two years old. He became seriously ill, so much so that the doctors had given up hope of his recovery. But his mother prayed fervently to Our Lady and, a few days later, was able to take the child, who was by now cured, much to everyone's astonishment, on a pilgrimage of thanksgiving to the shrine of Our Lady at Torreciudad. It was an event the Servant of God often recalled: **I was taken there by my parents. My mother carried me in her arms to Our Lady. She was on horseback, not side-saddle but in a chair, as they used to do in those days, and she got quite frightened because the road was very bad** (1).

Torreciudad has long been a centre of Marian piety for the people of the Somontano region of Aragon. Tradition, backed up by historians, tells us that this popular devotion commenced back in the 11th Century. Thousands of people have knelt at the feet of Our Lady of Torreciudad in these last nine hundred years.

Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer wished to make his own contribution to this long history and, *under his spiritual influence*, the necessary steps were taken to raise a Shrine where, with the approval of the relevant ecclesiastical authorities, the

restored statue of Our Lady of Torreciudad would be placed and become a place for conversion under the protection of the Blessed Virgin.

I am very happy to see the devotion there is to Our Lady in Fatima and Lourdes; it fills me with joy that our heavenly Mother is honoured with such love. We would also like to contribute to an increase in this love (2).

What did the Servant of God hope to obtain from this Shrine built in honour of Our Lady?

Here is what he wrote in a letter: **I am hoping for an outpouring of spiritual graces, which Our Lord will want to give to those who visit his Blessed Mother portrayed in this little image, which has been so greatly venerated for centuries. For this reason I would like there to be lots of confessionals, so that people can purify themselves in the holy sacrament of penance and, with their souls renewed, can confirm or renew their Christian lives, learning to sanctify and love their work, and bring to their homes the peace and joy of Jesus Christ: peace I give you, peace I leave you. Thus they will receive with gratitude the children that Heaven sends them, making noble use of married love, which makes them share in God's creative power: and God will not fail in those homes, when He honours them by choosing souls to dedicate themselves, with a dedication both personal and free, to serve the interests of God** (3).

The Servant of God visited Torreciudad as a pilgrim on two occasions, after that journey in 1904 when he went in his mother's arms.

The first was on Tuesday 7 April 1970. The building of the new Shrine had recently begun. On that day, referring to the time that had passed since his mother had carried him to Torreciudad, he said to Our Lady: **O Mother, forgive me! From the age of two to the age of sixty-eight. How feeble of me! But I love you a lot, with all my heart. It gives me great joy to come and kiss you, and it gives me great joy to think of the thousands of souls who have venerated you and have come to tell you that they love you, and of the thousands of souls who are going to come** (4).

Towards eleven o'clock in the morning he halted his journey at exactly one kilometre from the hermitage, where a



The Servant of God saying the Rosary, with a group of his sons, on the way to the Shrine of Torreciudad on 24 May 1975.

wayside cross now marks the spot. Taking off his shoes and socks, he walked the last part of the journey barefoot. The road had not yet been surfaced and the stones cut his feet. He made his way slowly, in the inclement weather.

Monsignor Escrivá walked deep in prayer, saying the fifteen mysteries of the Holy Rosary. Now and then he halted. At the end he was heard to say: **I love God the Father, I love God the Son, I love God the Holy Spirit. I love the Most Holy Trinity. I believe in God the Father, I believe in God the Son, I believe in God the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Most Holy Trinity. I hope in God the Father, I hope in God the Son, I hope in God the Holy Spirit. I hope in the Most Holy Trinity. I love my Mother the Virgin. I believe in my Mother the Virgin. I hope in my Mother the Virgin** (5).

The walk had lasted almost an hour: **After sixty-six years what I am doing now for Our Lady is really very little (. . .). I am not doing anything out of the ordinary** (6). At the hermitage he intoned the *Salve Regina* and, on his knees, said a

popular prayer that begins "Blessed be thy purity . . .".

His second visit was on 23 May 1975. By then the Shrine was almost completed and was shortly to be opened for worship. Monsignor Escrivá went first to the ancient hermitage and, as he contemplated the new buildings, he commented: **Out of humble material, out of earth, you have made divine material** (7). And later on: **You have put so much love into this . . .** (8).

A month later, on 26 June, the Servant of God was to render his soul to Our Lord. A few days later, on 7 July 1975, the Shrine of Torreciudad was opened for worship with a Solemn Mass celebrated for the repose of his soul. A vast crowd took part. Everyone knew that a new stage was beginning in the life of this centre of Marian devotion.

Some years have passed since then. The Shrine, and especially the Crypt where the confessionals are situated, have already witnessed many conversions and the renewal of many lives, and countless spiritual *miracles* such as the Servant of God had asked of Our Lady of Torreciudad. **They will be many and very frequent, and they will pass unnoticed, being unrecordable in statistics** (9).

(1) RHF 20582, p. 120.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 129.

(3) *Ibid.*

(4) RHF 20159, pp. 501–502.

(5) *Ibid.*, p. 504.

(6) *Ibid.*, p. 505.

(7) RHF 20164, p. 819.

(8) *Ibid.*, pp. 820–822.

(9) *Ibid.*, p. 1307.

Letters received

INEXPLICABLE

For eleven years I had a pain in my eye caused by a thick membrane which had formed in front of the retina inside the eye. It was attached to the lower part of the retina and pulled it downwards. I went to Bogota to be operated on for a clot which obstructed the retina's artery and which was the cause of the pain. However, nothing could be done about the membrane adhering to the retina. It could not be removed without running the risk of rupturing the retina.

The doctor told me that the pressure of the membrane on the retina was such that any exertion on my part could cause a complete detachment of the retina and a total loss of vision. He added that, in any case, it would be better to wait until advances in surgical techniques were such that an operation could be performed without endangering the retina.

In 1971 all medical treatment was discontinued. For ten years I went for a periodic check-up to the ophthalmologist who always warned me against making any violent movements, and kept alive my hope that an operation would be possible some day. A little over a year ago he told me that they were now doing this type of operation, but that it would be better to wait until they had developed the technique further.

On the 5th of October a friend of mine suggested I entrust the cure of my eye to Mgr. Escrivá. I did so the next day. It would have been about eight o'clock in the morning when I said the prayer for private devotion and then touched my eye with the prayercard. In my office that evening at 6 o'clock, I realised that the membrane had just broken and that I could see almost perfectly. I am sure it was a miracle worked through Mgr. Josemaría Escrivá's intercession.

The doctor couldn't explain why the membrane broke, but he told me that the folds which had formed on my retina would not go away. He prescribed no drugs and asked me to come back in a month. When I visited him again, he told me that the retina had recovered its normal condition and there was no longer any danger of its coming loose, and also that the folds had disappeared.

S. C., Guayaquil (Ecuador)

TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS LATER

I am a 27 year old Ugandan, now living in Kenya. On coming here in June 1981 I heard about favours which Mgr. Escrivá had granted to so many souls all over the world.

My uncle and my family joined me in a novena to ask Mgr. Escrivá to help me get over a serious problem of daily asthmatic attacks.

No sooner had we finished the novena, on the last day of July, when my health greatly improved. For the first time in 27 years of suffering I could take a daily shower without asthmatic attacks coming on during the night.

I am very grateful for Mgr. Escrivá's intercession. My family and I are praying for a complete recovery.

P. M-A., Nairobi (Kenya)

WEDDING DIFFICULTIES

I wish to put on record the following favour received through the intercession of Mgr. Escrivá. Some months ago, a relative of mine who comes from a humble enough background, was engaged to be married to a wealthy farmer's daughter. The girl's parents were totally opposed to the marriage; instead they wished her to marry a wealthy elderly bachelor whose holding bounded theirs, thus creating between the two families a big farm of very many acres. The bride-to-be's parents threatened that they would cut her off completely if the marriage went ahead, and would not allow their names to appear on the wedding invitations and would refuse to attend the wedding. The couple were determined that their wedding plans would go ahead. My brother spent quite some time with her parents just prior to the wedding trying to make them change their minds. This effort was in vain. They were implacable.

A colleague of mine gave me a copy of the prayercard to Mgr. Escrivá and suggested that I do a novena for the intention that the parents would attend the wedding. On the seventh day of the novena, just a few days before the wedding, I heard that the bride-to-be's parents objections to the marriage had literally 'melted' away and they had decided to attend the wedding and to wish the couple every blessing and happiness. I attribute this tremendous change of heart to the intercession of Mgr. Escrivá.

N. N., Munster (Ireland)

REUNITED

I was in a desperate situation. I have a son, married with two children, and I don't know why but my daughter-in-law stopped talking with me and refused to let my son visit me for a year. I was so desperate and was crying every day and night.

One day my friend, Mrs X, came to see me. She saw me crying and asked me why. I told her and she said, "Don't worry, I am going to give you a card of Josemaría; pray everyday and you will see what Josemaría is going to do." She started telling me all the miracles Josemaría did for her, and I started to pray.

Last week my son rang me up and told me, "Mum, you and my brother are invited to my place for dinner on Sunday." I couldn't believe my ears, and I asked, "What is your wife going to say?" He said, "Mum, it is unbelievable, but it is my wife who asked me to invite you". We went there and she was nice with us. I was so happy I couldn't believe my eyes. I asked myself how it happened and then I remembered my friend and the miracles Josemaría did for her children, and I said, "This is a miracle from Josemaría."

I send a donation for the magazine of Josemaría and I thank him very much.

Mrs Y. Y., Sydney (Australia)

THANKS TO THE PRAYERCARD

My husband has been suffering for some time from a spinal infection. Recently, on a number of occasions, he has had bouts of throbbing sensations accompanied by asphyxia, leaving him breathless and turning black and blue. The last two incidents took place within the space of a fortnight. The doctor advised against drugs and he has not taken any.

One night at about 12.30 he began to choke (this was the last time it happened). In desperation to help him breathe again, I went to my sister-in-law's home close by to seek help and dragged her over as quickly as I could. When she saw the state he was in she said: there is no time to get a doctor, all we can do is to go to Fr Josemaría. She took out a prayercard for private devotion and applied it to his chest, while at the same time with great faith we both said the prayer. On finishing the prayer he breathed out and stopped choking. Since then it has not happened again.

We still continue to pray to Mgr. Escrivá with great faith and entrust to him any problems which arise.

I wish to express my thanks to Father Josemaría for this favour.

C. de M., La Ceja (Colombia)

THE PROBLEM OF THE HOUSE

We were looking for a house in the outskirts of London, in the Wimbledon area, where my wife had already got a job as a teacher in a school. After several attempts had failed, we entrusted this now urgent matter to Mgr. Escrivá. That very day I telephoned a number of estate agents to enquire about the possibilities.

The following day we received in the post details of three possible houses. On visiting what seemed to be the most appropriate one, we got to know the owner, a widow who lived on her own. She had been trying to sell the house for some time before returning to her own country. As she showed us around the house we got to like it more; we liked particularly the crucifix and several pictures of Our Lady. And so we were not especially surprised when we noticed that on the bedside table there was a prayercard for private devotion to Mgr. Escrivá which was well worn. My wife exclaimed:

"We have been praying to this priest so that we could find a house!"

"And I, to sell this one" replied the lady immediately.

I don't have to add that we came to an agreement immediately.

A. S., London (England)

TWELVE MONTHS TO LIVE

My wife complained of a pain in her left hip, for about two weeks. It became so severe that I brought her to a doctor, who after a long examination could not pinpoint the cause of the pain and advised me to take her to the hospital. I brought her to the Casualty Dept, where she was examined and X-rayed for an hour and a half. At midnight the doctor came and said that she would have to stay as it was more serious than first thought.

Over the next few days she underwent different checks. She was sent to the operating theatre some days later. After the operation I met the surgeon, who told me the bad news: my wife had an aggressive malignant tumour in the hip. I was completely stunned and could not believe it. I asked him what it meant. He informed me that if she responded to treatment, she could last twelve months, but if not it was only a matter of weeks. I left the hospital and drove home not knowing what I was doing or where I was going, thinking that in a few weeks, possibly months, my wife would be dead and buried.

Letters received

Then on the Thursday I met a priest of Opus Dei, who told me about Mgr. Escrivá. I prayed to him continuously over that weekend. I circulated some of the prayer cards to my family and friends and people who were concerned.

The following Wednesday, I went to see my wife at mid-day and she was sitting up in bed, very cheerful, which amazed me. She told me that the doctor wanted to see me. I met him and he said to me: "I have great news for you. Your wife has not got cancer. You are to meet the consultant this afternoon". I kept the appointment and was told that my wife's condition was caused by a blood clot, which may have caused what looked like a tumour.

My own belief, however, is that the surgeon, an experienced man in his field and who I believe would seldom make mistakes, did in fact see a tumour. I believe that over those few days a miracle did happen. I think that meeting the priest of Opus Dei in the hospital, the abundance of prayers and Masses, and the prayers of my family etc., to Mgr. Josemaría, were the reasons for my wife's recovery.

C. B., Co. Dublin (Ireland)

My uncle was found to have cancer. He had not practised the Faith for over twenty years, and my family prayed continually that he might return to the Church; my mother and I prayed through the intercession of Mgr. Escrivá.

My uncle began to take an interest in the things of religion, and spoke to a priest of Opus Dei. Some time later, he agreed to receive the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. After over a year of great suffering and painful treatments, he asked for a priest to celebrate Mass at his home, as he could no longer go out. He recited the Creed slowly, received Holy Communion and felt at peace. The following day, Sunday, the priest celebrated Mass for him again, and shortly afterwards my uncle went into a coma. Two days later, on his 38th birthday, he died of a brain tumour.

The sadness of his death was surpassed for us all by the joy of his return to the Faith, thanks to the intercession of Mgr. Escrivá.

P. C., Oxford (England)

For about a year my boss had it in for me. There was nothing I did right. Even the messenger heard absurd stories about me. Things got so bad, that going to work became an ordeal, life became miserable for my family and I started to drink. I was advised to see a psychiatrist but that did not help much. Then I received the prayer card in the mail, together with the Newsletter. I said the prayer for a few days and there was a sudden change. My boss suddenly started to talk to me. He would even tell me personal stories about himself and his family. I cannot say that I have the best relationship with the boss, but I do believe that the great change was due to the intercession by Monsignor Escrivá.

X. X. Enugu (Nigeria)

My cousin had not been to confession for 35 years. Some time ago my parents lent him a copy of 'A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei'. After reading it he decided to change his life. He went to a priest, made his confession, then received Holy Communion. I attribute this grace to the intercession of Mgr. Escrivá who moves people by the example of his holy life.

X. X., Curitiba (Brazil)

For some time I was troubled by attacks of light-headedness and a tendency to feel that I would black-out; this I found disturbing as, for family reasons, I really need to be fit and I do not want to cause worry and anxiety at home.

I was already praying that things might improve when I was given a copy of the prayer of Mgr. Josemaría Escrivá and told to say it and ask his intercession. This I have done and I must claim a distinct, almost total improvement. Over a period of months I have experienced no serious attacks of light-headedness and daily I feel greater assurance and surety. I feel that Mgr. Escrivá has indeed listened to my prayers.

For all these blessings I offer my thanks to Monsignor Escrivá and pray that his cause may proceed apace. I enclose a cheque which may be of some little use somewhere.

F. S., Glasgow (Scotland)

My son was out of work for three months. He received a negative reply everywhere he tried. This happened a number of times. He was very discouraged until one day a friend gave me the Newsletter of the Servant of God Josemaría, the Founder of Opus Dei. I resolved to pray to him for my son. It didn't need long as my son found a job which was almost impossible to get. It happened in a most unexpected and totally fortuitous way. For this reason I am very grateful to Mgr. Josemaría.

J. P., Chojnice (Poland)

In August 1982 I prayed to Mgr. Josemaría Escrivá to intercede for my family living in Melbourne, Australia, who were faced with a "quit" notice to vacate their flat in Glen Iris by September 1982. Although they had tried very hard for over two months to obtain alternate accommodation, they were unsuccessful. When I came to hear of their predicament through my mother-in-law, I immediately prayed to Mgr. Josemaría. Within three days, my wife informed me that the landlord had withdrawn the notice and had allowed them to stay on. It had all been a misunderstanding between the landlord and his agents.

J. M., Ratmalana, (Sri Lanka)

NEWS ON THE CAUSE OF BEATIFICATION OF MONSIGNOR JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ

On 12 May 1981 the Process of inquiry into the life and virtues of the Servant of God began in the Vicariate of Rome. In the Archdiocese of Madrid, on the 18th of the same month, the first session took place of the Tribunal set up to receive testimonies from Spanish speaking witnesses.

The Postulator of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá has produced a large number of witnesses who knew the Founder in person and whose memories cover the whole lifespan of the Servant of God, from his early childhood to his holy death. By summer 1982 about half the witnesses invited to these proceedings by the Postulator had given their testimonies.

Also in Madrid, from 21 January to 3 April 1982, a Process of inquiry was conducted into an extraordinary cure, attributed to the intercession of the Servant of God, of a nun who had been cured instantaneously of a tumour. The Tribunal collected the testimonies and the appropriate medical documents and sent them for study to the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of the Saints.

Published works of Mgr. Escrivá de Balaguer

The Way

"Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer has written something more than a masterpiece; he has written straight from the heart, and straight to the heart go the short paragraphs that make up *The Way* . . . there is none of the formal rigidity of a code in the warm brotherly understanding of the author, in the paternal concern with which he sees, understands and corrects, persuading, not threatening" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 24 March 1950).

The first edition of this book was published in February 1934 (Cuenca, Spain) entitled *Consideraciones Espirituales*. Ever since then, the number of editions has steadily increased: over 3,000,000 copies have been published in 179 editions in thirty-five languages. English editions currently published by Scepter (London and New York).

Holy Rosary

A book of meditations on each of the fifteen mysteries of the life of Christ and of the Blessed Virgin which one contemplates when saying the Holy Rosary.

The first edition also appeared in 1934. A total of 375,000 copies in 60 editions have been published in twelve languages. English editions by Four Courts Press (Dublin) and Scepter.

Conversations with Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

A number of magazines and newspapers put specific questions to Monsignor Escrivá, dealing with the topics of greatest interest to their respective readers. Monsignor Escrivá answered the questions fully in writing. The book brings together the complete text of those interviews.

The first edition was published in 1968. From that time 32 editions have been published in seven languages and a total of 258,000 copies. English edition by Sinag-Tala (Manila).

Christ is passing by

The book is a collection of some of the many homilies given by Monsignor Escrivá throughout his life. They constitute a profound and attractive exposition of Christian doctrine and life. His style combines theological depth with clarity of exposition.

The first edition was published in March 1973. Since then 40 editions have appeared in eight languages and a total of 296,000 copies. Published in English by Scepter.

Friends of God

A second collection of eighteen homilies in which the author's warm and friendly conversation with God is centered on the theme of the Christian virtues. This book is in the same intimate and direct style as the earlier collection of homilies. First published in 1977, it has so far seen 24 editions, with a total of 215,000 copies in six languages. English editions published by Scepter.

The foreword is by Monsignor Alvaro del Portillo, who succeeded Monsignor Escrivá as President General of Opus Dei in September 1975.

The Way of the Cross

A new posthumous work of Mgr. Escrivá, fruit of his meditation on the scenes of the Passion of Our Lord. It has been prepared to help us with prayer, and to increase our spirit of sorrow for our sins and of thanksgiving to Christ who has redeemed us with the price of his blood. The first edition was published in February 1981. To date, 12 editions in 5 languages have been published with a total of 129,000 copies. Published in English by Scepter.

La Abadesa de las Huelgas

A penetrating study of an extraordinary case of quasi-episcopal jurisdiction exercised by the abbess of a famous convent in Burgos, utilizing the original sources and documents.

First published in 1944; a second edition appeared in 1974.

(All the above are available from booksellers or through Scepter Ltd., 1 Leopold Road, London W5 3PB.)

Prayer

for private devotion

*O God, you granted countless graces to your servant and priest Josemaría, choosing him as a most faithful instrument to found Opus Dei, a way of sanctification in daily work and in the fulfilment of the ordinary duties of a Christian. Grant that I also may learn to turn all the circumstances and events of my life into opportunities to love you and to serve the Church, the Pope, and all souls, with joy and simplicity, lighting up the paths of the earth with faith and love. Deign to glorify your servant Josemaría and, through his intercession, grant me the favour I request . . . (here make your petition).
Amen.*

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father.

In conformity with the decrees of Pope Urban VIII, we declare that with this *Newsletter* there is no intention of anticipating in any way the judgement of the Church, and that this prayer is not intended for public use.

This *Newsletter* is issued free of charge. Those who wish to give alms to help its publication and the development of the apostolic activities stemming from the spiritual influence of the Founder of Opus Dei, may send donations by crossed cheque or postal order to the *Office of the Vice-postulator of Opus Dei in Britain*, 6 Orme Court, London W2 4RL.

We would be grateful if our readers would send us names and addresses of others who might be interested in receiving this *Newsletter* or the prayer card with the prayer for private devotion.

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