



PRAYER

*O God, you granted countless graces to your priest
Blessed 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 grant the canonisation of Blessed 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.

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 cheque or postal order to the address below.

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 of Blessed Josemaría.

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Blessed
**JOSEMARÍA
ESCRIVÁ**

Founder
of Opus Dei

HIS LIFE

How Blessed Josemaría lived the Jubilee Years

INITIATIVES

In the poor areas of Kinshasa

DOCUMENTARY

A video programme on devotion to Blessed Josemaría around the world

Newsletter

Nº 19

2000



**Be not afraid,
open the doors to Christ**

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Further information on Blessed Josemaría and Opus Dei can be found on www.opusdei.org. A free news service is also available via e-mail.

Cover photo: Jubilee 2000, opening of the Holy Door

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá was born in Barbastro, Spain on 9 January 1902. He was ordained to the priesthood in Saragossa on 28 March 1925. In Madrid, on 2 October 1928, by divine inspiration he founded Opus Dei, which has opened up to the faithful a new way of sanctification in the middle of the world, through the exercise of their ordinary daily work and the fulfilment of their family, social and personal obligations. On 14 February 1930 Blessed Josemaría Escrivá understood, by the grace of God, that Opus Dei should also develop its apostolate among women. On 14 February 1943 he founded the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, inseparably united to Opus Dei. Opus Dei received definitive approval from the Holy See on 16 June 1950; and on 28 November 1982 it was established as a personal Prelature, the legal framework desired and foreseen by Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. When he rendered up his soul to God, Opus Dei had spread to five continents, with over 60,000 members of 80 nationalities, serving the Church in that spirit of total unity with and veneration for the Pope and the Bishops which Blessed Josemaría Escrivá had always practised and taught his sons and daughters.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was the root and centre of the interior life of the Founder. This deep sense of divine filiation moved him to seek in all things the most complete identification with Jesus Christ. He developed a tender and deep-rooted devotion to Our Lady and Saint Joseph, together with a continual and confident friendship with the holy Guardian Angels; and he sought to be a sower of peace and joy along all the paths of the earth. That offering was accepted: and on 26 June 1975, in the room where he worked in Rome, he gave his soul up to God in a truly saintly way.



His body now rests in the prelatic Church 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 through the example and teaching of the Founder of Opus Dei. His cause of canonisation was opened in Rome on 19 February 1981. On 9 April 1990 Pope John Paul II declared the heroic nature of his Christian virtues; and on 6 July 1991 the Pope declared the miraculous nature of a cure attributed to his intercession. The Founder of Opus Dei was beatified by His Holiness John Paul II in Rome on 17 May 1992.

The Jubilee Years in the life of Blessed Josemaría

Bishop Javier Echevarría recalls the four Jubilee Years during the life of Blessed Josemaría

Blessed Josemaría lived through the four Jubilee Years of 1925, 1933, 1950 and 1975. The first coincided with his priestly ordination which took place on 28 March 1925. The second, in 1933, found him in Madrid but without the financial resources to travel to Rome as a pilgrim. However, in his *Intimate Notes* we find two comments which show his interior dispositions. First, on 5 January 1933, the eve of the Epiphany, he wrote: *I am expecting so much from my God during this Holy Year.* Later, on 18 April, he commented on the Paschal Mystery which the Jubilee was commemorating: *I am thankful to my Father for the sentiments of contrition he gave me during the night between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, when I was in St. Elizabeth's rectory. And then... I don't deserve, my God - mine! -, the joy you have placed in my heart.*

A STATUE OF ST PETER

Meanwhile Isidoro Zorzano, one of the first members of Opus Dei, was able to go to Rome for the Jubilee. At that time he worked as an engineer in Malaga. As Blessed Josemaría wrote in *The Way*:



Catholic, apostolic, Roman! I want you to be very Roman. And anxious to make your "pilgrimage" to Rome, "videre Petrum" - "to see Peter." On that occasion he entrusted Isidoro with a number of tasks. One of them was to buy the biggest statue he could find of St Peter, seated.

Isidoro was able to obtain it, had it blessed by the Pope, and brought it back to Spain.

I WANT YOU TO BE VERY ROMAN

Those of us who were close to him in 1950 and 1975 can bear witness to the veneration Blessed Josemaría had for indulgences: a veneration which you might say became more intense on such occasions. On the very first morning of both Jubilee Years, he visited the Roman Basilicas to obtain the indulgence, in the company of some of his spiritual children. He made the same trip on many other occasions, with a penitent spirit. His piety while praying and his way of living the communion of saints were very striking.

During the summer of 1950 I spent some weeks in Castelgandolfo with other members of Opus Dei. Blessed Josemaría often came from Rome to visit us. I remember how affectionately he spoke to

us about the Pope. He went with us to the roadside to see Pius XII returning to Castelgandolfo from Rome, where he held the Holy Year audiences. He accompanied him with prayer and filial affection.

On that occasion he suggested I spend a couple of days in Rome to gain the Jubilee indulgence and visit the four Basilicas before returning to Spain. He asked me to pray with a lot of faith, especially in St Peter's, and to be very united to the Pope, asking God that everyone in the Church might grow in holiness, and that there might be an increase in conversions everywhere. He didn't want these trips to be mere tourism but an experience of prayer and formation. This is what he told the people he met.

As a good shepherd he urged the faithful of Opus Dei to redouble their efforts during the Holy Year to bring many souls to the sacrament of Penance. He encouraged priests to be happy to make a great effort in administering the sacrament generously, that is, for many hours daily. I can't fail to mention his priestly zeal since he took it

upon himself personally to urge the priests of Opus Dei to be totally available for this service.

JOY AND HOPE

His joy in regard to the Jubilee indulgence was striking. He saw it as a sign of God's mercy, which would purify his children of every stain and give them new life. In family get-togethers, in conversations with those who came to Rome seeking his advice, and in his copious correspondence, what was clear was his firm conviction that the Holy Year was a special time of grace and therefore a splendid opportunity for a new beginning in our spiritual lives.

In addition to joy, hope was the virtue he emphasised most. In January 1950 he wrote to his children in various countries saying that if they struggled more sincerely in their interior lives *this Holy Year will be fruitful*, as a reward for their efforts. He asked them to make a particular effort in their struggle for holiness and in their endeavours to sow the Christian seed along the divine paths of the earth. "Every sound tree bears good

fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit" (Mt 7:17-18). Nobody gives what he does not have. A Christian is effective only if he truly struggles for sanctity.

Indulgences are intimately related to the doctrine of the Mystical Body. The good of a healthy member of the Church is a source of spiritual benefits for all others. Blessed Josemaría wrote in this vein in 1931: *When a childlike soul lets God know of his desire for forgiveness he can be sure that this desire is rapidly attended to. Jesus forcefully removes all the filthy traces the soul carries from its previous wretched state. He takes away its dead weight, the result of all the impurity which causes it to remain stuck to the ground. He will remove from this child all its heart's ties with the earth so that it can rise into God's majesty and fuse itself with Him in a living flame of love.* Within a few days he followed this up with a request to God: *I want Jesus to forgive me everything. May all the holy souls in Purgatory be purified in less than a second and rise up to rejoice in our God.*

The Founder of Opus Dei repeatedly stated during the Holy Year that God our Lord, in this period of grace, pours out his mercy on every Christian, provided we make the effort to respond. At the end of November 1974, close to the opening of the 1975 Holy Year, in a get-together in Rome he said: *The Holy Year is about to happen. It won't be holy unless we pray a lot; more and more each day.*

A few days later he sent a letter to all his daughters and sons in which he exhorted them to respond generously to the divine call of the Jubilee. *I pray, in this Holy Year which is beginning and which demands*

more prayer and personal holiness from us, that Our Lord may fill you with his graces and that his most holy Mother Mary, our Mother, together with St Joseph, our Father and Lord, may accompany you at every moment with their all-powerful intercession.

TO BEGIN AND BEGIN AGAIN

In 1975 Blessed Josemaría celebrated his golden jubilee as a priest. Fifty years had passed since he was ordained in Saragossa on 28 March 1925.

On 27 March, the eve of that anniversary, he prayed aloud in the presence of a group of his children. He told us: *Fifty years have gone by, and I am still like a faltering child. I am just beginning, beginning again, as I do each day in my interior life. And it will be so to the end of my days: always beginning anew. Our Lord wants it that way, so that none of us may ever have any reason for pride or foolish vanity. We are to live waiting upon him, upon his words: our ear attentive, our will alert and ready to follow his divine inspirations... My Lord, thank you for everything. Many, many thanks! I have given you thanks; I have been habitually thankful to you. Before repeating just now that liturgical exclamation - gratias tibi, Deus, gratias tibi! - I was already saying it to you in my heart.*

During the Holy Years, God our Lord always heard his requests, and abundant fruits followed: in 1925, Blessed Josemaría received his priestly ordination; in 1933 his apostolic activity expanded considerably; in 1950, on 16 June, the Holy See granted its approval to Opus Dei; and in 1975, God received his soul into the eternal glory of heaven.

+ Javier Echevarría
Prelate of Opus Dei



Rome, 1 April 1933
Pius XI being carried in the sedan chair in St Peter's Basilica



Rome, 24 December 1949
Pius XII, after opening the Holy Door, kneels at the threshold before entering St Peter's Basilica



Rome, 26 December 1974
Paul VI in the Basilica, before the Holy Door

A question of faith

Devotion to Blessed Josemaría

Documentaries should be seen on screen, not read. However, we are making an exception in this case because the latest video by Alberto Michelini does not lose any of its extraordinary freshness when its content appears in printed form. In fact reading it allows us to get even more out of the simple but significant stories which the documentary presents. They are personal encounters, one to one, between Blessed Josemaría Escrivá and a wide range of people from all over the world, who have learned and "obtained" a great deal from him. Amid the variety of testimonies and personal circumstances, we can identify a common feature: that of genuine identification with the teaching of Blessed Josemaría. The programme was first broadcast on Channel 1 of Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI) on 27 June 1999. The following are some of the personal accounts contained in the video.

A MOSCOW PHYSICIST

It is striking to note that in a place where atheistic materialism had tried to eradicate God from people's hearts, a deep understanding was nevertheless achieved of the

"Christian materialism" described by Josemaría Escrivá. Yuri Antonovich Simonov is professor of theoretical physics and director of the laboratory of nuclear physics at the ITEP Institute in Moscow. He was baptised in 1989, after having come across the message of Blessed Josemaría.

"An important aspect of the teachings of Josemaría Escrivá is the call to humility and peace. In opposition to certain tendencies among Christians, Josemaría Escrivá, who personally suffered in the Spanish Civil War and saw many people die, makes a call for peace. He tells us: 'We must bring people together, we must understand others, we must make allowances. Never put up a cross just to keep alive the memory that some people have killed others. Such a cross would betoken the devil'.

"We should all strive for peace. This desire of uniting everybody under the shadow of the Cross seems to me particularly important today especially in our country. I often thank God that our country did not experience events similar to those in Yugoslavia. That could be because of the Christian attitude of people who had suffered a lot, it could be the fruit of the prayer of the saints, of the prayer of Blessed Josemaría for us and naturally of the prayer of the Mother of God. We have been saved from frightening things".

Yuri Antonovich Simonov

A RUSSIAN POET

In Moscow, until the end of the eighties, the only religious literature available, with enormous risks for those who possessed it, were carbon copies of typed manuscripts.

The first copy was the most expensive. Among this "samizdat" literature was *The Way*. Alexander Ivanovich Zorin, a poet, and member of the Writer's Union since 1979, is an Orthodox Christian. During those years he found *The Way* a valuable source of poetic inspiration. He had only a "fourth-hand" copy!



"Escrivá says our life can be holy. For me it was important to hear Escrivá say you can find God in your work. In our country many people think that work is a yoke or a chain which you cannot remove. But Escrivá says that your work can be like a revelation of God to each person. I had been thinking along these lines myself for some time now, but Escrivá had expressed it more precisely. Afterwards I began to notice that my encounter with God happens here as I sit at my desk. A poet prays with his poetry, a poet prays in verse.

"What I am going to say may seem blasphemous. However, I think priests will understand me, as also will my spiritual director. God is no less present at my work table, in my profession, than in the church

even though I go often to visit him in church. This I have learned from Escrivá".

Alexander Ivanovich Zorin

A YOUNG WOMAN FROM PARIS

Among the hundreds of thousands of young people who filled the Champ-de-Mars on the morning of 21 August 1997, the 12th World Youth Day, was Aude Mircovic, a young French woman. She was chosen to greet the Pope along with 69 other young people. As she held John Paul II's trembling hand for a good few moments, she managed to express the love for the Pope which she learned from Josemaría Escrivá.

"The example of Monsignor Escrivá is one of a life completely given to the service of the Church, from beginning to end. I think I remember him saying to his children, although I am not sure if



these are the exact words: 'There is one thing you can say of the Founder of Opus Dei and that is that he loved the Pope a lot'. 'He taught us what he lived, namely, to pray every day for the Pope and try to offer up to God something for him. All the people of Opus Dei all over the world do the same. This is what we have learned from Blessed Josemaría'.

Aude Mircovic

PERU, 26 June
procession
with statue of
Blessed
Josemaría

A BRAZILIAN PIANIST

João Carlos Martin is an internationally renowned pianist, who in a newspaper interview declared himself to have great devotion to Blessed Josemaría.

He revealed how through Blessed Josemaría's intercession he recovered his full artistic capacity after a serious head injury which he suffered in 1995 in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. After a long convalescence he managed to play the piano again. However, he hadn't sufficient

strength in one of his hands. He was due to give a concert at the Carnegie Hall, New York. With two weeks to go and having prayed intensely to Blessed Josemaría Escrivá he asked God for a sign.

"I have a Maltese pup at home in Miami who never pays any attention to my music. He never sits under the piano during my practice sessions. But one day as I was trying to find a posture that would give power back to my hand (I had to go subsequently to hospital to have it checked) the pup jumped up on the piano stool and began to lick my hand. He had never done this before and has never done it since. I felt that this was the sign. Two weeks later I played the most important concert of my life at New York's Carnegie Hall. To this day I still can't use my hand properly: I cannot write. I cannot eat with my right hand. But I can play the piano at a speed of up to

twenty notes per second. Even though it is a strong way of putting it I consider this the miracle of my life".

João Carlos Martin

A GERMAN FAMILY

Petra and Rolf Herold live in Forcheim, near Nuremburg. They are graduates in Physics and Mathematics and are married with four children. Before getting to know the message of Josemaría Escrivá through a Newsletter which they found in a church and through reading a book, Rolf was an Evangelical Protestant. They give the following testimonies:

"I was quite distant from the Church at that time. When I read Berglar's book on Blessed Josemaría I sensed the great enthusiasm which the Founder of Opus Dei had for the Church. He was very much in love with the Church and that got across to me. I was able to say with all my heart: 'Yes to the Church, yes to the Pope'. Thanks to him I understood how to sanctify work and how to turn work into prayer. It doesn't matter what type of work it is or whether it is more or less important, but rather it is the love and effort with which it is done that matters. It doesn't even have to be successful".

Petra Herold

"There is an event in the life of the Founder where he is showing a visitor around the central house in Rome. The person asks him to indicate his favourite oratory. He then opens a window onto Viale Bruno Buozzi, a very busy street, and says: 'This street is the oratory I like most'. I often think about this story when I am distracted at prayer, when I

am in the street or travelling, or pausing between one thing and another. I try to think of God in this way. Also, in the street or wherever I am, when annoying things occur, I can try to bear them well. Blessed Josemaría's example helps me understand that each situation is not something that separates me from God but leads me to him".

Rolf Herold

A CHINESE PAINTER

Many cooperators of Opus Dei, especially in the Far East, are non-Catholics or non-Christians. They appreciate the friendly and joyful atmosphere they find in Centres of the Work.

One such case is the painter Gary Chu. His father was a refuse collector. He himself has a large, poor family. He was not able to study art, but nevertheless used to draw things at school unnoticed, while his classmates were studying Chinese characters. He has done some portraits of the Founder of the Work.



"I am putting the final touches to a painting of Our Lady and the Child and an angel playing with a kite. It is in the style of the Tang dynasty.

"I am not yet a Catholic but I think I will be baptised one day. I love Jesus, the Virgin Mary and St Joseph and enjoy painting them. I have painted them over a hundred times and the paintings are all over the world. When I paint them I talk to them, I pray. This is one of the first portraits I have made of Blessed Josemaría. I have been told he is adoring the Eucharistic God and so I thought I should show him concentrating, happy and filled with love".

Gary Chu

AN AMERICAN CARDINAL

The Archbishop of Washington, Cardinal James Hickey, puts a particular value on divine filiation which is one of the key aspects of the message of Josemaría Escrivá, to whom he has devotion. He has given details of two important favours he has obtained.

At the Second Vatican Council he was deeply impressed by the debate on chapter five of Lumen Gentium regarding the universal call to holiness. However, he says that only after becoming Archbishop of Washington did he fully understand this call, when he noticed the different ways the people who had devotion to Blessed Josemaría were putting it into practice.

"That gave me a great appreciation of Blessed Josemaría, deepened my interest in him, deepened my love for what he was all about. And then, of course, because of his



reputation for holiness and the fact he was being considered at that time for beatification, I gave him a few, little chores to do. He helped me out in a couple of very important decisions. Something that I thought would never happen and it happened. It was not the kind of miracle that can be documented for the canonisation, but it's the kind of a favor, two favors, that make me turn to him whenever the going gets rough and say, yeah, I got something else for you to do! I never had the opportunity to meet him when I was in Rome. That bothers me. I feel that I've come to know him very, very well through his sons (...) It's second-hand knowledge. Let's hope that in heaven it will be first-hand knowledge".

Cardinal James Hickey

A SPANISH MOTHER

María Victoria Troncoso is a university lecturer with four children, two of whom are

handicapped. She works with the Down's Syndrome Foundation of Cantabria. Her personal experience led her to make every effort to help those affected by this syndrome and their families.

At a certain point she left her teaching post and decided to acquire the necessary knowledge to place herself at the service of others. She was convinced that for those who love God everything turns out for good, as Blessed Josemaría recalled.

"My devotion to Blessed Josemaría is above all a way of thanking him for all he has given me and also a request that he keep it up. It happens most of the time that whenever I have to resolve certain matters his outlook, or phrases of his, come to mind. They help me to solve the problem on the spot. It is usually the case that when new situations arise I entrust them to him in order to see the best way of tackling them both supernaturally and from the human and technical points of view. I can state that he helps me very often".

María Victoria Troncoso



BOLIVIA - Mount Blessed Josemaría

In Bolivia one of the Andes mountains has been named after Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. Likewise in many places in Europe and America there are hospitals, streets, schools and other institutions named after the Founder of Opus Dei.

Since his beatification, devotion to Josemaría Escrivá, already part of popular devotion in many countries, has spread even further and reached every type of environment.

An intimate biography

A new biography of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá by Andrés Vázquez de Prada launched in several Italian cities.

"At the beginning of the 20th century few scientists or people from the world of culture could claim a special place in history. And at the end of the 20th century, perhaps the only candidate is John Paul II". With these words Leonardo Mondadori, president of *Leonardo International* publishing house, explained why they were launching a new biography of Blessed Josemaría. In the course of his presentation of "The Founder of Opus Dei: a biography of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá", by Andrés Vázquez de Prada, he said: "That is why our publishing house, which does not normally publish religious books, decided to publish a number of books which help people reflect on true values and topics".

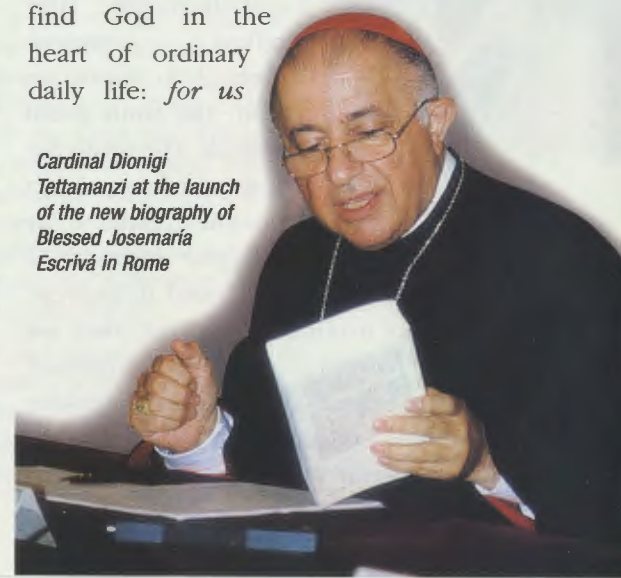
First published in Spanish in 1997, this biography appeared in Italian in 1999, with book launches across Italy. It was very well received and attracted many appreciative comments. Some of these are featured below.

At the book launch in Rome **Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi**, Archbishop of Genoa, referring to the beginning of the third millennium, said the book fitted perfectly into the spirit of the Jubilee, whose principal aim is "to inspire in all the faithful a true longing for holiness. I think that reading a book about the journey of a saint is a beautiful inspiration to follow him

on the path he marked out with his interior life".

Andrea Riccardi, founder of the Community of San Egidio, and Professor of the History of Christianity at the Third University of Rome, said that reading this book was his first encounter with Blessed Josemaría. He praised the quality of the author's historical research and the richness of the documentary sources he consulted. Referring to a quotation from Blessed Josemaría, Riccardi said: "The valuable diary notes and other direct testimonies shed light on the events of 2 October 1928: *Madrid has been my Damascus, because here the scales have fallen away from the eyes of my soul...*". He later summarised one of the central aspects of the spirit of Opus Dei: "The Founder responds to the marginalising of God with the proposal to find God in the heart of ordinary daily life: *for us*

Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi at the launch of the new biography of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá in Rome



the extraordinary is the ordinary: doing what is ordinary with perfection".

Regarding the style of the book, Prof. Riccardi went on to say: "You can see that the author is very conscious of the fact that he is dealing with something that is not his own and therefore he treats the matter in a simple way, without unnecessary or sentimental embellishment. Similarly, Blessed Josemaría's own notes on his spiritual life, or *catalinas* as he called them, are very valuable documents".

The writer **Marta Brancatisano**, in Sicily, also spoke about the literary style of Blessed Josemaría "who wrote a lot, from a very young age, but without any professional literary pretensions. The beginning is marked by the *catalinas*, brief considerations of a spiritual nature written to express an interior experience. There is no attempt at literary craftsmanship, nor is

there any self-indulgence. The style is that of a diary. Thoughts are expressed spontaneously and accurately, without embellishment. They reflect someone seeking to know, in God, the truth about himself. The result has a tremendous impact on the reader. The thoughts expressed in

the *catalinas* are not intended to impress. They are not maxims or precepts. They are more the footprints on a path followed, with head bowed like a donkey, seeking the truth: self-effacing and deeply sincere marks of a soul with only one certainty -



Joaquín Navarro-Valls,
Director of the Vatican Press Office

the need to seek holiness".

At the Ambrosian Library in Milan, **Giorgio Rumi**, Professor of Modern History at the State University of Milan, said that Blessed Josemaría's vision of work was "a sort of Copernican revolution. He recognised the dignity of work, even of the most ordinary kind. Therefore work is not something awaiting rescue from its servile condition. What you do is not servile. It is the way you do it that makes it servile or ennobling. This is a very important development".

Monsignor Gianfranco Ravasi, Prefect of the Ambrosian Library, also referred to work in the teaching and life of Blessed Josemaría: "One can see how Escrivá highlighted the possibility of turning ordinary everyday work into *opus Dei* (work of God), realising that it forms part of the great project of Creation".

In his commentary on the book **Father Ennio Apeciti**, director of the Office for the Causes of Saints in the diocese of Milan, spoke of the significance and usefulness of biographies of saints, which present a challenge to the reader: "This book has been carefully researched and introduces us very effectively into the social, political, cultural and indeed, the ecclesiastical and spiritual context in which

Josemaría Escrivá lived. The book achieves this by having recourse, among other things, to abundant autobiographical documents. It is a new model of hagiography, in the literal sense of 'the writings of saints', or 'holy writings'. The book covers the first period of the life of a saint and provides abundant material to encourage readers of good will to emulate the path of sanctity in the Augustinian mode: *If it is 'yes' for these and for others, why is it 'no' for me?* This is precisely the significance of causes of beatification and canonisation", Apeciti went on to say. "Their purpose is not to grant a sort of heavenly monsignorial status, but rather to provide the people of God with a model, another way among the infinite possible ways, of living the Gospel".

At the University of L'Aquila the speakers highlighted Blessed Josemaría Escrivá's personality. **Umberto Farri**, President of the Institute for University Cooperation,

referred to the years he spent with the Founder of Opus Dei: "Blessed Josemaría's habitual smile was an authentic sign of peace of soul and of great abandonment in God. It also had a very winning effect on the people he was speaking to, whatever their background or origin." The Director of the Vatican Press Office, **Joaquín Navarro-Valls**, commented on Blessed Josemaría's ecclesial significance: "He was a genuine precursor of the Second Vatican Council, which put forward holiness as the duty of all the baptised". Finally the journalist Mario Narducci said that the life of Blessed Josemaría "leads us to see sanctity as the most fascinating of all adventures".



Leonardo Mondadori,
Publisher



Vázquez de Prada, Andrés, *Il Fondatore dell'Opus Dei. La biografia del Beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Leonardo International, Milan 1999, pp. 687.

The book, published in Italian in 1999, is the first of three volumes which make up the biography. It covers the period between Blessed Josemaría's birth (1902) and the beginning of the Spanish civil war (1936). The other two volumes will cover the years 1936 to 1945 and 1946 to 1975. One of the notable features of the book is its rigorous reliance on biographical sources from the archives of the Opus Dei Prelature. These include official documents, written testimonies, letters, and other material. A special mention must be made of Blessed Josemaría's intimate notes, part of which are published here for the first time. These are personal notes handwritten in copybooks. They give a picture of the development of Blessed Josemaría's interior life from 1930 onwards and also tell us of the circumstances of the birth and early growth of Opus Dei, which he founded under divine inspiration on 2 October 1928.

The author. Andrés Vázquez de Prada worked as a historian in London for many years, and has published studies on other figures of note in the history of Christianity, such as Cardinal Newman ("The dream of an old man", 1954) and Saint Thomas More, Chancellor of Henry VIII of England ("Sir Thomas More", 1962). He first met the Founder of Opus Dei in 1942 and had frequent contact with him, particularly between 1958 and 1962, when Blessed Josemaría made several visits to England.

The conversion of the children of God

The following text written by Blessed Josemaría may be of help in living the Jubilee Year to the full.

examination of conscience, asking our Lord for his help, so that we'll know him and ourselves better. If we want to be converted again, there's no other way.

"Here is the time of pardon; the day of salvation has come already" (2 Cor 6:2). Once again we hear the voice of the good shepherd calling us tenderly: "I have called you by your name" (Is 43:1). He calls each of us by our name, the familiar name used only by those who love us.

Our Lord, who is asking us to change, is not a tyrannical master or a rigid and implacable judge: he is our Father. He speaks to us about our lack of generosity, our sins, our mistakes; but he does so in order to free us from them, to promise us his friendship and his love. Awareness that God is our Father brings joy to our conversion: it tells us that we are returning to our Father's house. Human life is in some way a constant returning to our Father's house. We return through contrition, through the conversion of heart which means a desire to change, a firm decision to improve our life and

Books by Blessed Josemaría have been translated into more than 40 languages.

It is not enough just to be in the Church, letting the years roll by. In our life, the life of Christians, our first conversion - that unique moment which each of us remembers, when we clearly understood everything the Lord was asking of us - is certainly very significant. But the later conversions are even more important, and they are increasingly demanding. To facilitate the work of grace in these conversions, we need to keep our soul young; we have to call upon Our Lord, know how to listen to him and, having found out what has gone wrong, know how to ask his pardon.

Conversion is the task of a moment; sanctification is the work of a lifetime. The divine seed of charity, which God has sown in our souls, wants to grow, to express itself in action, to yield results which continually coincide with what God wants. Therefore, we must be ready to begin again, to find again - in new situations - the light and the stimulus of our first conversion. And that is why we must prepare with a sincere

which, therefore, is expressed in 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 Jesus Christ again and become his brothers, members of God's family.

God is waiting for us, like the father in the parable, with open arms, even though we don't deserve it. It doesn't matter how great our debt is. Just like the prodigal son, all we have to do is open our heart, to be homesick for our Father's house, to wonder at and rejoice in the gift which God makes us of being able to call ourselves his children, of really being his children, even though our response to him has been so poor.

Each one of us needs to consider what God is asking of him, what resolution, what decisions grace wants to encourage in him. And as you note these supernatural and human demands of self-giving and continuing struggle, remember that Jesus Christ is our model. And that Jesus, being God, allowed himself to be tempted, so that we might be in better spirits and feel certain of victory. For God does not lose battles, and if we are united to him, we will never be

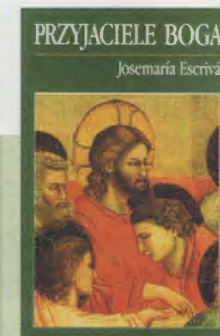
overcome. On the contrary, we can call ourselves victors and indeed be victors: good children of God.

Let us be happy. I am happy. I shouldn't be, looking at my life, making my personal examination of conscience. But I do feel happy, for I see that the Lord is seeking me again, that the Lord is still my Father. I know that you and I will surely see, with the light and help of grace, what things must be burned and we will burn them; what things must be uprooted and we will uproot them; what things have to be given up and we will give them up. Mary, our Mother, "help of Christians, refuge of sinners": intercede with your Son to send us the Holy Spirit, to awaken in our hearts the decision to go ahead confidently, making us hear deep in our soul the call which filled with peace the martyrdom of one of the first Christians: "Come, return to your Father" (St. Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Romans 7:2), he is waiting for you.

Text of a homily given on 2 March 1952, published in *Christ is Passing By* (Veritas Publications, Dublin, 1974).



FURROW
in Hungarian



FRIENDS OF GOD
in Polish



THE WAY
in Slovak



HOLY ROSARY
in Chinese

"Tradition and development are not in conflict"

Nelly Tshela explains the Programme of Social Action being carried out in Kimbondo

In the interior of the Democratic Republic of the Congo life is very hard. It therefore comes as no surprise that most of the people who live in Kimbondo, and many more of the suburbs of Kinshasa, are families who have come to the capital from the countryside to earn enough to live on or to bring up their children. Unfortunately, the situation in the capital city is not as wonderful as they had imagined before they arrived. The last ten years have been particularly unstable, and unemployment has spiralled out of control. The resulting poverty has been worsened by the civil war.

These are the circumstances surrounding the birth in 1995 of the Programme of Social Action, a social project which is carried out and helped by Kinshasans from various different backgrounds and occupations. Although the project started off small, right from the start it aimed to raise the standard of living of the people living in Kimbondo by giving them basic job

skills plus training and development on the human, educational and religious level. It was no mere chance that the people who set up the Programme of Social Action found the inspiration for the project in the teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá on the sanctification of the structure of society through ordinary work. He said, for example: "A man or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ's heart" (*Christ is Passing By*, 167).

Nelly Tshela, a young Congolese



Nelly Tshela, a Congolese lawyer, manager of a social project inspired by the teachings of Blessed Josemaría.

with a degree in Law who is currently the project manager, explains more fully how and why the project started.

How did this programme of social development start?

We were particularly shocked by the situation of women

here. We felt it was urgent to help women who live in such precarious conditions, and whose lives are ruled by ancestral customs which place them in a position of inferiority.

Something had to be done to improve the standard of living of the twelve thousand people living in this quarter. We had very little ourselves, but we had a bit of common sense and Christian sense too. So the background to the whole programme is the idea of passing on not only job skills but

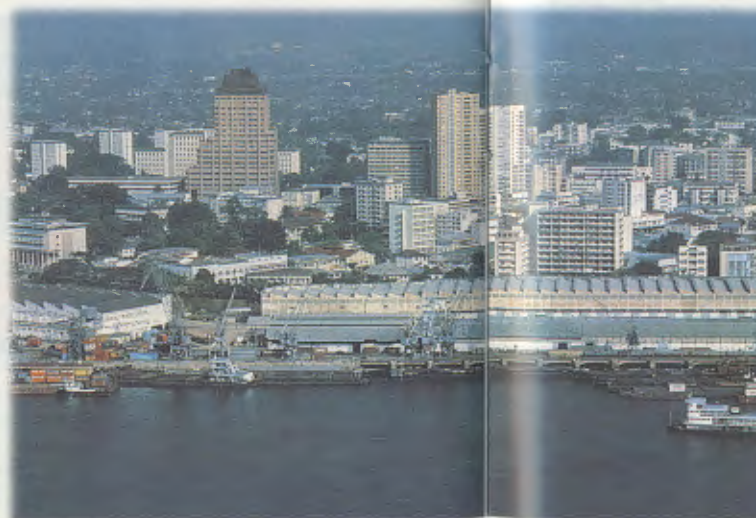
also an attitude of optimism and openness to everything human, an attitude that comes from knowing that everyone, each with their own individuality, is loved by God and that God counts on the help we can give one another.

How did people react?

People here have reacted well, though it didn't happen all at once. You have to realise that three-quarters of the women living in this area have received, at best, only a very basic education. First they have to realise the need and importance of learning new things - in many cases, learning to read - and the practical benefits of spending time and effort on improving. As they are accustomed to spending all their energy on working in the fields for their family's basic survival, it's difficult for them to understand the value of the training that's being offered to them. But as soon as a first group realises how much they benefit from it, the path lies open

The Prelature of Opus Dei is working in eight African countries. Apostolic work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo began in 1980.

The striking contrast between Kinshasa city centre and its suburbs.



INITIATIVES

for the rest. Once they begin to acquire skills they can put to good use, they develop an appetite for a better standard of living.

How will you reach all the six thousand or more women in this district?

We're not aiming to reach all of them, but to reach more and more of them. In the first years I was at university I got to know the writings of the Founder of Opus Dei, Blessed

first group that worked on the initial activity was made up of a small number of women, including some with degrees or diplomas in various subjects. From the moment we began, we accepted help from university students and everyone who was interested in development. We were aiming at every kind of Congolese woman, regardless of their age or social group. We wanted to make them understand that this kind of action, as well as helping people who live in poverty, is also a means of personal enrichment.

What methods do you follow?

Common sense: awakening common sense in each individual. By teaching them to engage in dialogue we can then teach them how to work and open up new horizons for them. What we offer are courses in dressmaking and crafts. We've also gone into agricultural training. And for anyone who wants, we set up classes on the teaching of the Catholic Church and on moral questions; and the women who come can always receive pastoral care from the priests of the Opus Dei Prelature.

Development in Kimbondo is possible, but the women have to be committed. That has been our message from the beginning. Development isn't something to study, it's something to do, by giving yourself to others. At least, that's the way we see it.

Josemaría Escrivá, and I was especially interested in reading what he said about women and their function in society. This is now our point of reference for the work we are doing. We need to learn to dream and be daring. "More" was a word Blessed Josemaría used frequently. To be specific, we could see from the start that we needed to find women from this district who had the right qualities to become "coordinators" for the project. The

Blessed Josemaría said that a man or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ's heart.



The dressmaking course is one of the main activities of the Lycée Professionnel Kimbondo.

Women in the area do not always realise the need to learn new things, but once they begin to acquire skills which they can put to good use, they develop an appetite for a better standard of living.

What do you provide for young people?

The average age of the people who live here is very low. The longest-running project for young girls so far is the one which started in September 1997. It's a dressmaking school, called the *Lycée Professionnel Kimbondo*, for girls from this district. The school was officially inaugurated in February 1998 by the Minister for National Education and other notables. The school's aim is to qualify young girls to do a job so that they can make progress in their lives. While following courses in dressmaking, they train to be project coordinators in the villages, so that they can help us to reach more people, starting by improving their own surroundings.

The first year there were very few

pupils at the school, but now, in its third year, several dozen girls have applied. Many of the pupils are the daughters of women who have come to other Programme of Social Action activities.

What other projects do you run?

In 1999 we set up a new programme, still with the aim of awakening a desire for improvement and development: we are training a good group of people to head projects themselves in the countryside and villages. The Congolese Minister for Social Affairs, who is a woman, came to the project presentation on 13 July. People taking part in this new programme exchange ideas in a very friendly atmosphere, discussing how to pass on their own enjoyment of life to people in outlying villages and the various districts of this suburb. We talk about how to teach the women there to work, to work hard and well, in a Christian spirit. That readiness to accept a challenge is something we also owe to Blessed Josemaría.

I would find it impossible to estimate the spread of this social project. But today over a hundred women are committed to looking for solutions to the problems that exist. And looking for solutions is a sign of improvement, wouldn't you agree?

Omy Mundala

Photographs: M. Flavien Nzazi
Project address: Parcelle 12945, Localité Kimbondo, quartier Telecom, Mont-Ngafula, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.
e-mail: virunga@raga.net

She came back to the Faith

This story goes back to 1986. A friend of mine joined a sect and invited me along.

I began to go, and continued to go more and more frequently. One day I met a friend of mine from my primary school days. She advised me to leave the sect, because it was incompatible with my Catholic faith. Instead, she suggested I could come to activities organised by a club she belonged to. I began to develop my practice of the Catholic faith, and realised why I had been wrong to take part in the meetings of the sect. My other friend, however, still went to those meetings, and was even given positions of responsibility in the sect.

From then on I prayed for her conversion through Blessed Josemaría's intercession. Some years later, when I came back from a stay in Rome, I met her, and to my surprise she told me that she had left the sect and returned to the Catholic faith. What was more, she offered to help me persuade my mother to enrol for some catechism classes.

I attribute my friend's return to the Catholic faith to the intercession of Blessed Josemaría.

K.V., Abidjan, Ivory Coast

Alabaster sculpture of Blessed Josemaría at the shrine of Torreciudad, Spain.



A VERY SERIOUS PROBLEM

My husband was on Croagh Patrick in 1994. He was desperate burdened with a very serious problem. A priest gave him this prayer to Blessed Josemaría and we said it every day. Thank God everything turned out right for him more so than we ever imagined. I am now saying this prayer for another very special intention for a friend which seems impossible but as I said before things that seem impossible can change. I had never heard tell of Blessed Josemaría until this happened and I would like to spread devotion to him.

M.D., Co. Antrim, Ireland

A JOB IN MY HOME TOWN

For the past two months I have sought the intercession of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá in effecting a job transfer, namely, whilst I enjoy the duties and responsibilities of my profession, my current work environment has caused me to be deeply frustrated.

I should mention that it was the first time I

had availed myself of Blessed Josemaría's prayer card. In short, I was amazed by the speed and strength of the response! From "out of the blue" - and in an ultra-competitive market - I received a phone call from a senior parliamentarian offering me a job on his staff in my hometown.

In accepting the offer, I sought again the intercession of the Blessed Josemaría to provide the employee I was replacing with a new job - the very next day the aforesaid received a job offer in a senior Government office.

I give thanks to both Our Lady and Blessed Josemaría for interceding on my behalf and delivering a new and challenging job as well as enabling me to be reunited with family and friends.

S.R., Hobart, Tasmania

A FULL RECOVERY

My son Stephane was involved in a car accident on July 4 last year. He was given the Last Rites the following day. I prayed to

Out of the many letters we have received, we publish here accounts of favours coming from Australasia, Africa, Europe and America.

Blessed Josemaría for help either for a full recovery for my son or to accept the Will of the Lord.

Last week we returned to the hospital for a check up for Stephane. The doctors were amazed by his recovery. Needless to say we were delighted to hear that news. However, I feel that without the intervention of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá my son Stephane would not be with us today.

I have prayed to Blessed Josemaría Escrivá for three years or so now and I have found that I have received blessings and internal strength which has given me a true sense of direction.

M.D., Birmingham, UK

HE WENT TO CONFESSION BEFORE HE DIED

I was really worried about a neighbour, who had been seriously ill for over a year and didn't want to be reconciled to God. He had had operations on his heart and his kidneys, but the wounds didn't heal because he had diabetes. I said to a friend of mine, "Let's pray to Blessed Josemaría for him not to die without first being reconciled to God". He took a turn for the worse, and he was offered the chance to go to Confession, but he refused. We went on praying the novena. Then his mother arrived, and she told him to go to Confession because he was so ill; he went into a coma, and we prayed harder than ever. On the last day, he came round for a little while, asked for a priest, made his Confession and died straight afterwards. Father Josemaría Escrivá had answered our prayers.

E.L.R., Zapopan, Mexico.



SET OF STAMPS

Blessed Josemaría was featured on a series of Venezuelan stamps in 1992.

ALL I COULD SEE WAS MY MEDALLION

I was given a medallion of the Blessed Josemaría Escrivá (founder of Opus Dei). Well, I have to tell you that whilst I accepted the medallion graciously, it did not have a lot of significance to me, given that we of the Presbyterian faith have had little exposure to such things. (I should also add that God and I have not always been on the same team!) I have seen similar things on dashboards of cars, so I thought that would be as good a place as any to put my medallion.

Well, you guessed it! Driving to work a while ago a driver went through a red light and hit me at full speed in my driver side door. Impact was so great that her engine was dislodged from its mountings. I saw nothing, I felt nothing, and I was unconscious. As I regained semi-consciousness with rescue people cutting my door open, all I could see was my medallion!

Actually, for me all was quite peaceful. Each time I came around, there it was again, looking me squarely in the eye. When I realised I wasn't

actually dead, I felt at that time "a message", something like "well you really are not too bad, and we owe you one".

The medallion is now in place in my new car. I have suffered no permanent injury. I don't know if "the boss" can still hear me, but just in case, would you please thank him again for me.

I. J., Sydney, Australia

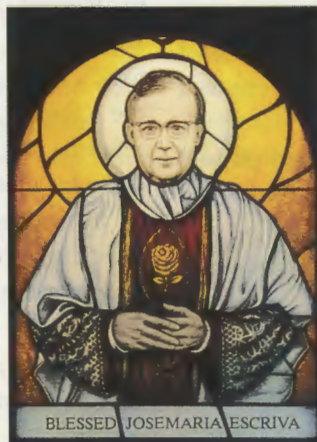
A MISSING CHILD FOUND

I am so elated to write this testimony of what God has done again in my life. I had reported a case of a missing child to all the media houses I could possibly go to, and finally resigned myself to prayers.

On one of my visits to a company in the city, while discussing the missing child to a friend a staff of the company walked into the discussion and immediately asked me if I believed in prayers. I told him I did. Then he said, "You will find the child. I have this prayer on this card that you must say, and I bet that you will find him. There is nothing I ask through this prayer that I do not get. But first you must believe that it works".

I started with the prayer card of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, and four days into it I got a message from my mum that the missing child was with his father. I was the happiest person on earth. The prayers to Blessed Josemaría worked. At this point I did not want to know how he got there, I must sing the praise of the Lord Almighty for he made it possible.

My sincere thanks also to the people of the media houses



Stained-glass window in the parish church of Hereford, UK.

and all those others that assisted me during this trying period.

U. I., Lagos, Nigeria

THE CURE WAS NOT JUST SKIN-DEEP

A friend's husband had been suffering from the skin disease, psoriasis. In spite of treatment from several doctors, the pain continued. Although there is no known cure, both my friend and I began praying the prayer card to blessed Josemaría, asking daily for help with her husband's condition. A few weeks later her husband consulted yet another doctor, who prescribed a new type of treatment: the avoidance of certain foods. When the man followed the doctor's advice the results were amazing, the relief wonderful!

In retrospect, I see other cures that have taken place since I sent my friend the prayer card: the husband has returned to Sunday Mass, the

couple are trying to have their marriage made valid, their eldest son wants to become a priest, mother and son pray the Rosary together daily, and the husband has been instrumental in his brother's and sister-in-law's returning to the Church.

V.M., Greenwich, U.S.A.

We would like to express our thanks for the many letters we receive. They are a witness to the devotion of very many people who, in all parts of the world, pray to God through the intercession of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. In this *Newsletter*, for reasons of space, we can only print paragraphs from some of them, which give significant events or straightforward accounts.

Since it is impossible for us to thank everyone by name, we would also like to express our thanks here for the donations people send us to help cover the costs of producing and distributing this *Newsletter*, and to help with the development of apostolic projects which take their inspiration from Blessed Josemaría's love for souls.

IN THE PRESS

"Escrivá taught many sportsmen and women that the efforts they make in training and contests, their relations with their fellow-sportsmen and women, their respect for their competitors, their humility in success and their serenity in defeat, are all a specific way for them to reach God and serve all people".

Il Giornale Della Toscana, 19 Jan 1999

Giovanni Trapattoni, Italian football coach and former international player, who as manager has won the Italian and German Leagues, the Champions League, the UEFA and the Cup Winners Cup.

BLESSED JOSEMARÍA AND SPORT

Tackling serious matters in a sporting spirit gives very good results. Perhaps I have lost several games? Very well, but - if I persevere - in the end I shall win.

(Furrow, 169)

The ascetical struggle is not something negative and therefore hateful, but rather a joyful affirmation. It is a sport. A good sportsman doesn't fight to gain just one victory, and that at the first attempt. He has to build himself up for it, training over a long period of time, calmly and confidently. He keeps trying again and again, and if he doesn't succeed at the first attempt, he keeps on trying with determination until the obstacle is overcome.

(The Forge, 169)

