



# St Josemaría Escrivá in Ireland

15 to 19 August 1959

# St Josemaría and Ireland

In 1916 the young Josemaría Escrivá avidly followed the events of the Easter Rising in Ireland. "I was then about fifteen and I eagerly read everything in the newspapers about the events of the First World War. Most of all, though, I prayed a lot for Ireland. I wasn't against England; I was for religious freedom."

"At that time he read in the papers about your struggle for the faith and for the freedom of your country. How much he prayed for you! How he mortified himself – with small mortifications appropriate for a young person: not taking butter and some other acts of self denial... I heard him say it often throughout his life. He offered all this for your country, which used to be called the Island of Saints, because the Lord allowed him to see the special love, the special providence which He always has had for your country. So Ireland deserves the affection and understanding of all Catholics. I have inherited this love of Ireland from our Founder, and so here you have me – happy, full of joy and affection – as if I were in my native country."

*Bishop Alvaro del Portillo (St Josemaría's first successor),  
Dublin, 4 August 1980*



**Saint Josemaría Escrivá**  
Founder of Opus Dei

**PRAYER**

Lord God, through the mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, you granted countless graces to your priest Saint Josemaría, choosing him as a most faithful instrument to found Opus Dei, a way to holiness through daily work and the ordinary duties of a Christian. Grant that I also may learn to use all the circumstances and events of my life to love you and serve the Church, the Pope and all souls, with joy and simplicity, lighting up the paths of the earth with the brightness of faith and love.

Through the intercession of Saint Josemaría please grant me the favour I ask of you [here make your petition]. Amen.

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

At St Josemaría's request, José Ramón Madurga, a Spanish engineer, came to Ireland in October 1947 to begin the work of Opus Dei. One of the first apostolic undertakings was Nullamore University Residence in Dartry, Dublin. The official opening in 1954 was attended by the Taoiseach of the time, John A Costello; the Leader of the Opposition, Eamon de Valera; the President of UCD, Professor Michael Tierney; the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Alfie Byrne; and the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr John Charles McQuaid.

Following the success of Nullamore, other student halls of residence were set up: Northbrook (Ranelagh) in 1953; Gort Ard (Salthill, Galway) in 1958 and Ely (Hume Street, Dublin) in 1959.

That same year, St Josemaría – called 'the Father' by members of Opus Dei and many others – came to spend a few days in Ireland. He encouraged those who had joined Opus Dei and those who were taking part in its formational activities, while he also fostered the development of new apostolic undertakings. This booklet recounts what happened during those days.

After his visit, other halls of residence were set up: Glenard (Clonskeagh, Dublin) in 1962; Ros Geal (University Road, Galway) in 1972; Cleraun (Mount Merrion, Dublin) in 1982; and Castleville (Castletroy, Limerick) in 1985. Also established were a variety of youth clubs, such as Nullamore and Glenbeag in Milltown, Dublin and the Anchor Youth Club in Artane, Dublin and catering and educational centres such as the Lismullin Hospitality Services Centre (Navan, Co. Meath).

After his death in 1975, many people all over the world began to entrust their requests, both material and spiritual, to St Josemaría, and discovered he was a very powerful intercessor. After the Holy See confirmed that miracles had been granted through his intercession, he was canonised in Rome by Pope John Paul II on 6 October 2002.





## Saturday 15 August

St Josemaría Escrivá arrived at Dublin Airport at about 8pm on Saturday, 15 August, the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady. This was to be his one and only visit to Ireland. He travelled from London where he had been spending the summer. He later remarked that it was no accident that he had come to Ireland on one of the most important feasts of the year.

From the airport St Josemaría went to Ely, the Opus Dei centre in Hume Street, where he was to stay for five days. During his stay he highlighted the core message of Opus Dei, “a way to holiness through daily work and the ordinary duties of a Christian” (from the St Josemaría prayer card). He told those he met that they should be very holy, and that they should be “very cheerful, very cheerful, for to be otherwise is not good”.



Ely in the early 1960s. The founder of Opus Dei referred to it as “the house of stairs” on account of its four floors and basement.



The halo crowning the statue of the Blessed Virgin was a gift from St Josemaría; having seen that it had none, he promised to send one from Rome.



The Ely oratory in which St Josemaría celebrated Mass during his stay in the country.



Chalice used by St Josemaría when he said Mass in Ely.



## Sunday 16 August

Addressing some of those who were laying the foundation of Opus Dei's development in Ireland he said: "Give thanks, my sons, to God, because although you don't add up to much, although you are not worthy – I too am an insignificant man – God has chosen you to begin the Work in Ireland and to make you instruments of his marvels." *Thanksgiving after Sunday morning Mass in Ely.*

After breakfast in Ely, St Josemaría went to Nullamore, a hall of residence in Dartry where about forty students from various countries were attending an English language course. He was delighted to see so many youngsters from different nations.







During the morning, he visited the women in Crannton (above) who looked after the catering for Nullamore. He remarked to one of those teaching the young Irish girls who had asked to join Opus Dei: "Do you realise, my daughter, that we've put our trust in you, that you would be an example and a help for your sisters."



In a 1960s interview with a Spanish women's magazine, St Josemaría stressed the important role of women in homemaking: "Through this profession – because it is a profession, in a true and noble sense – they are a good influence, not only in their family, but also among their many friends and acquaintances, among people with whom they come in contact, in one way or another. Sometimes their impact is much greater than that of other professional people."



# Monday 17 August



In the morning, St Josemaría met the family of Fr Dick Mulcahy (above). Only one week earlier he had become Ireland's second Opus Dei priest. He celebrated his first solemn Mass in the convent chapel of the Sisters of Charity in Donnybrook, where his aunt was superior. The founder jokingly remarked that in a photo of Fr Dick and his family that had appeared in the previous morning's newspaper, the family had lined up military style (Fr Dick had been a lieutenant and his father was Chief of Staff at the time).

Fr Dick described how his parents were impressed with this meeting: "I have rarely seen my parents so overcome. My father was complaining that we should have prepared him better to do justice to the great occasion of meeting the Father. He could hardly drive the car on the way home, he was so delighted. He was very taken by the warmth and depth of the Father."

**St Josemaría met Dr & Mrs Patrick Burke from Sligo whose son Cormac and daughters Teddy and Máire were among the first members of Opus Dei in Ireland. He also met the parents of Fr Dan Cummings (pictured here before he was ordained).**







When asked by the young Galwegian, Oliver Powell, if he liked Gort Ard, St Josemaría in a light-hearted way made it clear he had come to see people, not buildings: “What interest me are the birds, not the bird cage!”

Later St Josemaría was driven west to Galway to meet a group of married men who were attending a formation course in Gort Ard, the Opus Dei centre in Galway (above). He encouraged them not to fear having large families, saying that each child brought its loaf of bread under its arm, and that no one should put barriers to life. He

emphasised how important it was for them to love their wives very much – just as they did before they were married – and to express that love in many ways. When he heard that one of those present – Jack McGarry – had eight children he gave him a hug and said “May God bless you eighty times – and your wife and your children too”.



**Hayden’s Hotel in Ballinasloe, where the group stopped for lunch on the way to Gort Ard. Serving had not yet started when they arrived, and one of the party, Henry Cavanna, had to hurry the hotel staff by explaining that he had a ‘prelate’ in his party!**



**Shamrock Lodge Hotel, Athlone – the venue for dinner on the journey back to Dublin.**



# Tuesday 18 August



On Tuesday morning, St Josemaría had a get-together in Northbrook Residence for women in Ranelagh (above). Here he spoke to a group of women and encouraged them to work for the service of God and the good of the country. He also described the immense panorama that awaited them to spread the teachings of Christ to the entire world.

Later he spoke to a number of students who had travelled from other countries to attend an English language course in Northbrook. He encouraged them to grow in piety and virtue so as to be instruments of Christ in the middle of the world.





Archbishop McQuaid at the 1954 official opening of Nullamore University Residence

In the late morning there was a meeting with the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid. Fr Liam Martin, who worked with the archbishop, related many years later that the archbishop said that it had been an occasion of grace to have met the founder of Opus Dei, and that there was something charismatic about him. At the end of the meeting the archbishop went down to open the door of the car for his visitor; this was something that Fr Martin had never seen him do before.

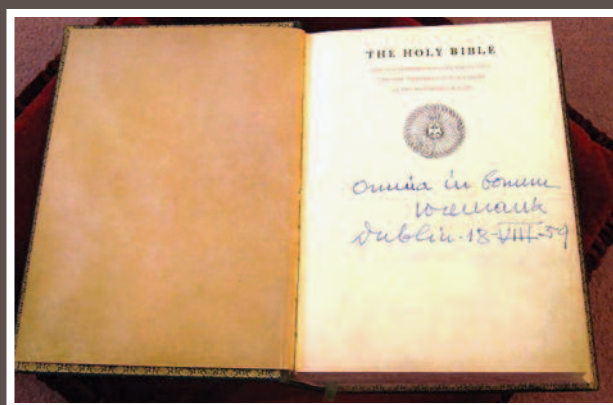
#### Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2009:

"Saint Josemaría met my predecessor, Archbishop McQuaid, at his residence in Killiney. On his way there he most likely drove past what was then a large, striking, newly built church on this Merrion Road, never imagining that this church fifty years later would be a focal point for his followers who dedicate themselves to responding to the call to holiness and of commitment to bring Jesus' message of love to a world which has changed so radically in that space of time" (homily, parish church of Our Lady, Queen of Peace, Merrion Road, Dublin, which he entrusted to priests of Opus Dei in 2008).

Afterwards there was a trip to one of the historic beauty spots of Ireland: the Rock of Cashel in Co. Tipperary. The visiting party left after lunch and returned in the evening. They dined in Cahir House Hotel (below).



Text of plaque mounted in Cahir's market square in August 2009: "St Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (1902-1975), founder of Opus Dei, visited the town of Cahir on 18th August 1959 during his one and only trip to Ireland. He was canonised by Pope John Paul II in Rome on 6th October 2002. This plaque is erected in the market square in commemoration of that visit and as a reminder of his message that the secret of happiness is to find God in the street and in the hustle and bustle of everyday life."



While meeting again with those in Nullamore on Tuesday, he wrote a dedication on a large bible: 'Omnia in bonum, Josemaría, Dublin, 18-VIII-59'. 'Omnia in bonum' was an expression he commonly used to paraphrase St Paul's teaching: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8: 28).



## Wednesday 19 August

St Josemaría had morning get-togethers in both Northbrook and Ely. In Ely he encouraged those present to be helpful and pleasant and make others happy, not to be against anybody, and never to hold grudges. As for faults and failings: don't be worried, get up again; for without faults and failings, "what would we have to keep us humble?"

Although St Josemaría needed people to translate from Spanish to English, it was clear that his gift for communication overcame these barriers. As he remarked to the married women in Northbrook: "Do you understand me? You would understand me, my daughters, even if I were speaking in Chinese!" One of them recalls: "My abiding memory of being at the get-together with Saint Josemaría in Northbrook in 1959 is of his warmth and good humour. When he was speaking to us, his face was alight with enthusiasm and I felt that he was truly delighted to see us all there, while he talked about our role as wives and mothers."



"I remember thinking that the Father was the most deeply cheerful person I had ever met and that he made one feel very much at ease in his presence."

***Reflection of one young person  
after meeting St Josemaría***



"In years to come the people of Opus Dei will ask you, 'What was it like to drive around Ireland with the Father?' And you will tell them that the Father was very happy, exceedingly happy, during his visit to Ireland. I drove around full of joy and singing most of the time. What I ask you to do is simply that: to be happy and to sing. If we are happy ourselves and do not show it to others, are we being fair to them? So you can tell them that the Father was very happy and was singing when he visited Ireland."



Dublin Airport



St Josemaría left Ireland at 7.45 on Wednesday evening. The following week in London he told Fr Dick Mulcahy that he was delighted with his visit to Ireland, that he was "as happy as a child putting his finger into a pot of strawberry jam and licking it".



"Ireland has a mission to the world, especially to the English-speaking world, which is half the world.

Ireland is such a marvel and a consolation to God, with such splendid people..."

St Josemaría, Northbrook Residence, 18 August 1959



The map used by St Josemaría  
showing his two journeys

#### Further information on:

Saint Josemaría Escrivá: [www.josemariaescriva.info](http://www.josemariaescriva.info)

Saint Josemaría Escrivá's writings: [www.escrivaworks.org](http://www.escrivaworks.org)

Opus Dei: [www.opusdei.ie](http://www.opusdei.ie)

Official bulletin of the Opus Dei Prelature: [www.romana.org](http://www.romana.org)

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