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Australians in St Peter's Square

The canonisation of St Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, took place five years ago. Peter and Yvonne Harris, who were among the hundreds of thousands of people from around the world who attended the canonisation, share their memories:

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Sunday October 6, 2000 dawned in Rome a glorious sunny day, destined

to be among the most remarkable in our lives.

My wife Yvonne, my brother Lindsay and I were three among several hundred Australians gathered for the Canonization of St Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, founder of *Opus Dei*, along with 350,000 fellow pilgrims from more than 80 countries in an atmosphere of expectation, emotion and international camaraderie.

To be present in the midst of such a jubilant gathering, overflowing from St Peter's Square and Via della Conciliazione into the surrounding streets as far as the eye could see, was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

We will never forget the scene; the flags of many nations were flying, the young folk were singing, waving placards and playing guitars and the very young and the very old and all ages in between combined in an

atmosphere of great anticipation under the bright blue Roman sky.

As would be expected, the canonization itself was uplifting and emotional, set against the massive backdrop of St Peter's Basilica with the attendant cardinals, bishops, VIP's and clergy arranged left and right behind the altar, with Pope John Paul II in centre stage.

Throughout the ceremony the massed choir set the scene with music that swelled and echoed off the colonnades surrounding the square. Unforgettable!

Standout memories of the canonization were many; the highlight was the presence of Pope John Paul II and the overwhelming love that radiated from the masses as he weaved through the square in the Popemobile, stopping frequently to engage the crowd or to hold a baby passed up to him to the shouts of

“Papa! Papa!” or the familiar chant
“John Paul II – we love you”!

Receiving the Eucharist from one of the hundreds of white robed priests was unforgettable, particularly when fate dictated that our queue delivered us to a friendly face – Sydney-based Opus Dei priest Father John Flader – now that provided a memorable touch!

Of special significance to me personally, our pilgrimage delivered what I believe to be a minor miracle when my wife, Yvonne, who up to that stage did not really understand my commitment to *Opus Dei* and accompanied me more out of a sense of duty, had her very own “Damascus moment”.

In her own words, spending time 24/7 with fellow pilgrims and seeing their embracing of *The Spirit of Opus Dei* and the members’ “supportive, loving and unselfish commitment”

convinced her of the true worth of St Josemaria's "plan of life" philosophy in striving to sanctify each daily activity, no matter how small.

In the years following our return to Sydney, Yvonne acknowledges that the growth in her spiritual life is far richer than she could have believed possible, reinforced by a handful of special friends that were made in Rome and continue to support her today.

What more could I ask of The Saint of Everyday Things?

By William West

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