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The Prelate of Opus Dei in Zaragoza

To commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Saint Josemaría Escrivá's ordination to the priesthood, the city of Zaragoza hosted a series of events from 27 to 30 March. These included academic gatherings, liturgical celebrations, and festive family meetings. Similar events took place in Rome and Logroño, locations that played a significant role in the founder of Opus Dei's life and childhood.

03/31/2025

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30 March: Perdiguera, St. Josemaría's first pastoral assignment, pays tribute to its parish priest 100 years later

The bells of Perdiguera rang out joyfully to commemorate a very special occasion: the 100th anniversary of the arrival of a newly ordained Josemaría Escrivá in the town on 31 March 1925. He was sent as an assistant pastor of the parish, where he took his first steps in the priestly ministry. The festive atmosphere was marked by a message from the Archbishop of Zaragoza, concluding with an emotional acclamation: "Long live Saint Beatriz, our patroness! Long live Saint Josemaría, our priest!"

Solemn Mass and tribute at the parish

The commemorative day began with a solemn Mass in the parish where St. Josemaría exercised his ministry. In his homily, the celebrant, Fr. Jaime, recalled that St. Josemaría "began his priestly life here by administering the sacraments:

baptizing, hearing confessions, and celebrating Mass." He added that years later, the saint expressed his gratitude to God for having started his priestly life in that very place.

At the end of the celebration, a message from the archbishop was read, encouraging the faithful to entrust themselves to the intercession of the saint and reminding them that Perdiguera could proudly say: "Saint Josemaría belongs to everyone; *mosén* Josemaría [a title used for priests in Aragon and Catalonia] is ours."

Inauguration of the small square and colloquium

Following the Mass, a small square was inaugurated in honor of Fr. Josemaría. The event was presided over by the mayor, José Manuel Usón, and the deputy mayor, Ana Jaso, whose father was one of the children baptized by the young

priest. Jaso recalled how proudly her father told them that he had been baptized by a saint, and how local memories still preserve testimonies of his dedication and closeness to all the townspeople. The blessing of the new square was conducted by Fr. Roberto, the town's current parish priest.

Later, the Monte Oscuro Hall hosted a colloquium titled "The Heritage of Perdiguera in the Message of Saint Josemaría," attended by around 200 people. Francisco Baltar, professor of legal history at the University of Zaragoza, spoke about the historical context of the saint's time in the town.

Miguel Ángel Murillo, a resident of Perdiguera, shared memories passed down by his father, Teodoro, who had welcomed St. Josemaría on the day of his arrival exactly one hundred years ago. Asun Escuer,

who was born in the town and works in hospitality, spoke about her professional experience as a service to others, complementing her remarks with heartfelt anecdotes.

Cristina de Salas, a historian and daughter of a local resident, spoke about her work in expanding Opus Dei across Europe, particularly in Poland. Meanwhile, biologist Nuria Mata shared her experience in founding schools and hospitals in the Congo, her life in conflict zones, and her current work with the NGO *Profesionales Solidarios* in Pamplona.

The event left attendees with a deep sense of gratitude for St. Josemaría's presence in Perdiguera and understanding of his spiritual legacy and the ongoing relevance of his message, which continues to inspire lives around the world.

28 March: Zaragoza

Mass at the Church of the San Carlos Seminary

The main event of the centenary took place in the very church where Saint Josemaría was ordained a priest on 28 March 1925, exactly one hundred years ago. Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz recalled that Saint Josemaría often spent long hours in prayer in the upper right choir loft of this church. The commemorative Mass was presided over by the Prelate of Opus Dei and concelebrated by nearly 200 priests, including the Vicar General of the Archdiocese, Fr. Rubén Ruiz, and the Rector of the Church of San Carlos, Fr. Carlos Palomero.

During his homily, Monsignor Ocáriz reflected on Saint Josemaría's invitation to seek, find, and love Christ in prayer and the Eucharist.

He also encouraged the faithful to "see Christ in others, with the eyes of Christ." The homily concluded with a prayer to Our Lady of the Pillar, to whom the young seminarian Josemaría often turned in supplication, already sensing that God was calling him to a special mission.

"Mother of God and our Mother, help us to be souls of prayer and Eucharistic devotion, so that we may also be apostolic souls," he prayed.

Floral offering to Our Lady of the Pillar

Following the Mass, Monsignor Ocáriz visited the Holy Chapel of Our Lady of the Pillar, where he presented one hundred roses in thanksgiving for the one hundred years of the founder's priesthood. There, he offered a brief vocal prayer, invoking Our Lady as Mater

Ecclesiae and praying for the health and intentions of Pope Francis, as well as for the needs of the Church and the world. He also cited two invocations beloved by Saint Josemaría: *Ad Iesum per Mariam* ("To Jesus through Mary") and *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam* ("All with Peter to Jesus through Mary").

A festive family gathering

In the afternoon, more than 1,400 people gathered at the Zaragoza Conference Center to meet with the Prelate. The event, marked by a warm and familial atmosphere, combined music, testimonies, and questions from families, young people, and priests.

During the gathering, Monsignor Ocariz emphasized three key aspects of Saint Josemaría's message: the centrality of Christ in everyday life, divine filiation, and the sanctification

of work. In response to questions from married couples and young people, he encouraged them to bring order to their daily lives, live in the present moment, cultivate love within their families, and be joyful witnesses of the faith. He stressed that peace comes from God, who loves us infinitely, and that true and lasting joy is born of love.

The event also included touching moments such as the singing of a traditional *jota-villancico*, vocational and apostolic testimonies, and questions on diverse topics, including raising children, emotional life, transmitting the faith, and commitment to those most in need.

The event concluded with the recitation of the Our Father for Pope Francis. The Prelate took the opportunity to thank all the faithful and friends of Opus Dei for their warm welcome and for making this

anniversary celebration in Zaragoza so special. The final applause expressed the deep affection of the attendees and reflected the true family spirit experienced throughout the day.

28 March: Rome

To commemorate the centenary of St. Josemaría's ordination, a Mass was celebrated in Rome at the Basilica of St. Apollinaris, presided over by Msgr. Mariano Fazio, Auxiliary Vicar of Opus Dei. In his homily, he reflected on the Gospel scene in which St. Peter allows Christ to enter his boat, highlighting three essential traits of St. Josemaría: his availability, his identification with God's will, and his deep sense of mission.

Msgr. Fazio emphasized that from a young age, St. Josemaría showed readiness to fulfill God's will, placing Christ at the center of his life. He often prayed, "Here I am, for you have called me" (1 *Sam* 3:6). He sought to remove all obstacles, both internal and external, so that the Lord could completely fill his heart. He also mentioned that St. Josemaría lived with a profound sense of mission, convinced that every person is worth "all of Christ's Blood." For this reason, he saw the life of a priest as a daily offering in service to others.

Later, in the Aula Magna of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, a video was shown about St. Josemaría's priestly vocation, followed by a discussion between Msgr. Fazio and Prof. Luis Cano.

Professor Cano highlighted the founder of Opus Dei's passion for

diocesan clergy, evident from his early years as a priest. In just four years (between 1938 and 1942), he preached around 20 spiritual retreats to priests.

His concern for the formation of priests led him to consider dedicating himself exclusively to them, even contemplating Opus Dei. However, in 1950, he understood that diocesan priests also had a place in the Work, thus uniting his love for Opus Dei and for the clergy into a single vocation of service to the Church.

28 March: Logroño

On March 28, a commemorative Mass for the centenary was celebrated in the Co-Cathedral of Santa María de la Redonda in Logroño. The ceremony was presided over by Bishop Santos Montoya,

Bishop of Calahorra and La Calzada-Logroño.

In his homily, the bishop emphasized the value of vocational discernment, stressing that it requires listening to God, spiritual accompaniment, and interior freedom. He recalled how St. Josemaría lived this process from his youth, especially from that decisive moment in Logroño when he saw the footprints in the snow of a barefoot Carmelite, which awakened in him the desire to respond to God.

A few months later, at just 16 years old, he decided to enroll as an external student at the seminary in Logroño, where he completed two years of ecclesiastical studies before transferring to the seminary in Zaragoza.

The bishop also recounted the difficulties the young Josemaría faced in his vocational journey, including his family's difficult

financial situation, a rector's discouraging advice, and the death of his father in 1924, just months before his ordination.

Bishop Montoya concluded by stating that this centenary is an opportunity for all Christians to renew their willingness to discover and follow their vocation with generosity and freedom, as St. Josemaría did.

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27 March: Academic symposium and vigil

Academic symposium

The symposium took place at the Casa de la Iglesia, near the Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar and the Cathedral of La Seo. The gathering brought together more than 300 priests from nearly 50 Spanish

dioceses, along with a large audience that filled the conference hall.

Bishop Carlos Escribano, Archbishop of Zaragoza, opened the event with words of welcome, expressing his affection and closeness to Pope Francis and inviting prayers for his swift and full recovery. In his address, he emphasized how Zaragoza preserves the traces of St. Josemaría's vocation: "a moment of grace that, together with the founding of Opus Dei, has become an important charism not only for the Church but also for the whole world."

Full program of events (in Spanish)

Next, Fr. José Luis González Gullón, a member of the St. Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute, delved into St. Josemaría's years in the seminary and his ordination. He highlighted how his interior life grew during this period and how, in his moments of prayer, he felt his heart expand, describing the experience as "as beautiful as falling in love." "I began to have inklings of Love," the saint himself said, "to realize that my heart longed for something great, and that it was love." The session continued with remarks from Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy (since 2021). On his first visit to Zaragoza, the cardinal delivered a speech centered on the identity and mission of the priest.

He recalled Pope Francis' words about priests, which were embodied in St. Josemaría: "The priest is a man of mercy and compassion, close to

his people and a servant to all." He emphasized that "priests are ordained not to command, not to shine, but to give of themselves." Later, he responded warmly to questions from the audience.

Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz concluded the morning session with a conference on the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of a priest. He reminded attendees that the Mass is the primary purpose of priestly ordination and emphasized St. Josemaría's frequent encouragement to celebrate the Holy Mass calmly and with devotion. At the end, he emphasized that the Founder thought of the Mass as his principal Marian devotion.

During the subsequent discussion, a priest asked how to improve in celebrating Mass after 25 years of priesthood. The Prelate encouraged him to ask the Lord for this grace,

knowing that "we always need to improve," but he invited him to do so with joy and confidence that the Lord loves us as we are. Another participant asked how St. Josemaría celebrated Mass. Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz explained that he did not recall any striking gestures, and that what he remembered most was St. Josemaría's deep recollection.

Finally, another priest, recalling St. Josemaría's advice to "make the whole day a Mass," asked how to apply this especially in relationships with others. The Prelate responded that "each person finds their own way, but a practical approach is to see God in every person."

Prayer vigil

The day of Thursday, 27 March, concluded at the church of the Royal Seminary of St. Charles Borromeo with a prayer vigil for priestly vocations, which was especially open

to seminarians, young people, and families. The church was completely full, with an atmosphere of piety and recollection.

One of the most moving moments was hearing St. Josemaría's strong voice resonating through the speakers. Through a recording, the founder of Opus Dei recounted his vocation, and hundreds of attendees (young people, priests, and families) listened attentively in the dimly lit church.

The vigil included testimonies. Notable among them was the account of the parents of a priest from Calanda, and the story of David, a seminarian who shared his conversion journey from engineering school to the seminary in Zaragoza. The event also featured moments of prayer, songs, and words from the cardinal, who concluded with a

solemn benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.

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