

Opus Dei seen up close

July 2000

10/12/2002

In your daily contact with Blessed Josemaria, how did his holiness make itself seen?

Blessed Josemaria's union with God, which he lived in a natural way, could be seen in a thousand details. It was shown, for example, in his devout genuflections before our Lord in the Tabernacle. One could also see it in his smile, in his orderly work, in

his constant concern for others, in his kindly look, even when he was tired.

To live with a saint is a privilege, an education, and also a constant cause of joy, because, by his generous struggle to exercise all the Christian virtues, he creates around him an atmosphere of cheerfulness, of prayer, of serenity

What characteristics distinguished him from other people? What is his legacy to contemporary society?

The saints always have something about them that is genuine and human, and at the same time supernatural, which attracts people. They don't spend their lives adapting to the world around them but in striving to bring the world to God, and thus they seek to identify themselves with Jesus Christ. In this sense one can say that they are

profoundly free, unclassifiable. The saints have also often been a “sign of contradiction” to those who refuse to accept radical truths.

This was true of Blessed Josemaria. He was very normal, cordial, pleasant. He fled from any kind of eccentricity. He also had a deep love for freedom, which stemmed from his passionate love for God. It was one of his distinctive characteristics. He was convinced that a person who loves is truly free.

I think that his principal legacy are the thousands of persons who have come closer to God through his priestly work, who have discovered that they can find our Lord in their work and in the fulfillment of their ordinary duties. I like to think of Blessed Josemaria's legacy as a seed that is spreading to give fruit in every time and place, within the

great sowing that is the life of the Church.

Blessed Josemaria's process of beatification, by its speed, opened up a new chapter in the history of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. Was it the power and influence some say Opus Dei has within the Church and with the Pope that determined the speed of the process? Or was it, as in the case of St. Anthony of Lisbon, popular veneration and devotion that gave impetus to the declaration of his virtues and his beatification?

I would like to make it clear that in the Church's history, there have been more than a few cases where the sanctity of servants of God have been declared within a few years of their death. During the Second Vatican Council, the council fathers saw the need to present Christians with

contemporary persons as models of union with God. I was filled with joy, for example, to see the heroic virtues of Mother Maravillas and of Padre Allegra proclaimed very shortly after our Lord called them to himself. I could mention other names. In citing these and other examples, I have no doubt that their processes have been a great gift of God to the Church.

As far as the process of beatification of the founder of Opus Dei is concerned, it cannot be explained by any supposed power of Opus Dei, which does not exist, nor is it only a matter of popular devotion, which certainly exists. The Church, in this as in all cases, carries out a very careful investigation. As you know, the Holy See, before it declares any person a blessed or a saint, not only examines in detail whether that person has a reputation for sanctity, but also whether he or she lived the Christian virtues heroically. And it

awaits divine endorsement through a miracle that confirms the holiness of life of the person involved before making a declaration.

Also one must keep in mind the influence of the Second Vatican Council's position, which was put into effect first by Pope Paul VI and, in 1983, by Pope John Paul II, and which has simplified the norms regarding the procedures for the causes of the saints. The new legislation has enabled all of the causes to be investigated in much less time than was formerly the case.

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Like John Paul II, Blessed Josemaria had a deep Marian piety and a special devotion to Fatima. One hears rumors that he met with Sister Lucia and that he is the first person beatified who made a pilgrimage to Fatima during his lifetime....

Blessed Josemaria met Sister Lucia in 1945, when she was living in Tuy. The founder of Opus Dei had gone to that city to visit the bishop, who was a friend of his. The bishop introduced him to Sor Lucia, who encouraged him to cross the border and make a pilgrimage to Fatima. She even intervened to solve the problem of getting visas. Blessed Josemaria had other plans at the time, but he accepted Sor Lucia's suggestion. So one could say that she

was directly responsible for Blessed Josemaria's first trip to Portugal.

Msgr. Escriva was greatly moved by the Portuguese people's devotion to our Lady. He returned to Portugal on other occasions, and always took advantage of these trips to go and pray at the Capelinha. He frequently spent long periods in the esplanade of the shrine, next to the "little chapel." He went there to take refuge in our Mother. He wanted to be very Portuguese in this.

As you know, this is the first time that children have been beatified as confessors (witnesses of the faith). It is something quite new in the Church for two shepherds as young as Francisco and Jacinta to be beatified, without being martyrs. While the process was going on, this fact raised some questions about the legitimacy of the idea that children could

practice the Christian virtues to a heroic degree. What is your opinion on this?

I was extremely happy when the pastorinhos [little shepherds] were beatified. I don't know why, but in some circles children are underrated, including the degree of human maturity and of union with God that they are able to attain. In the Gospel, we find many teachings of our Lord about children. They are God's favorites, examples of simplicity. And we adults have the grave responsibility of not scandalizing them, but rather of teaching them the path of goodness.

I have seen so many cases of children growing in virtue from their earliest childhood! It is very important to offer them models like Francisco and Jacinta.

But children can be models for adults as well. Let us recall the Gospel's

invitation: we have to learn to become like children. This invitation includes a process of maturing that leads us to recover our simplicity and innocence and to hate evil, sin. Only with a purified heart will we be able to speak with God and to hear him, as in those enchanting conversations between the little shepherds and our mother Mary.

The Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints has said that each beatification has its own originality. Could you make a comparison between the originality of Blessed Josemaria and that of the little shepherds?

I would like to emphasize something that they have in common: their unconditional desire to fulfill the will of God. God's will was made known to the "pastorinhos" in an extraordinary manner, through our Lady's apparitions. Blessed

Josemaria came to know it through unexpected lights or in his prayer, after a great deal of asking. God shows each one his path. But it is impressive to see how holiness always consists in placing one's own life totally at the service of God's call, of the vocation one has received. In addition, when you come right down to it, the souls of all the saints possess the transparency of a child's soul. I recall how, on the eve of the golden anniversary of his ordination, Blessed Josemaria said that he saw himself before God as a babbling child.

What are the repercussions of the beatification of the little shepherds and the reality of Fatima for today's Church? What effect might it have on the pastoral care of families and on catechesis?

I consider this beatification an important step for many reasons. Its

deep meaning stems from being directly related to an intervention by God in the history of mankind, an intervention that took place through small, humble children.

In addition, children's virtues often reflect the Christian atmosphere of the home in which they were born. I see this beatification, therefore, also as a valuable stimulus for so many parents of families to try to transmit the faith to their children, which is the best gift they can give them, through acts of piety lived in their families in a natural way. Thus, the Pope's declaration that Francisco and Jacinta can be numbered among the blessed in heaven serves, among other things, as a reminder of the importance of the family for the Church. Families prepare children's souls to receive God's grace throughout their whole lives.

I seem to hear the echo of words
Blessed Josemaria so often repeated:
I bless with both of my priestly hands
the human and holy love of married
couples.

**For some time there has been
speculation about the possibility
that the Church would declare a
new Marian dogma: our Lady,
Coredemptrix. Some theologians
defend the importance of this
dogma while others feel that no
formal declaration on the part of
the Church is necessary. What is
your position?**

This question concerns the
deepening of our knowledge of the
faith. Rightly understood, the concept
of “coredemptrix” is undoubtedly
applicable to the Blessed Virgin, but
declaring it a dogma or not is a
matter solely up to the Pope or an
ecumenical council.

With regard to John Paul II's pontificate, what are its fundamental features and what will its legacy be within the Church? And for ecumenical dialogue? And for the relationship between the Church and society?

From the very beginning, John Paul II's pontificate has revolved around the ideal of opening the doors of the world to Christ. "Do not be afraid!" was the Pope's message from the first day of his ministry. And throughout these years, guided by his hand, the Church has grasped more fully the promising perspectives opened up by the Second Vatican Council, so that Christ might truly become present in all of the realities of human life.

This is an enterprise of great scope that should involve all Christians, especially those who know that we are children of God. During this pontificate, thanks be to God,

Catholics have responded to the Pope's constant call for a new evangelization, which involves opening up human hearts and social structures to Christ. We must pray that, in this common effort to illumine the world with Christ's light, we will follow the path to full unity with all Christians. In recent years there have been very encouraging signs that give one renewed hope.

The document “We are the Church” has received thousands of signatures, especially among Catholics from the countries of northern Europe. One of its central themes is the role of women in the Church. What do you think of this paper and how do you view the future?

It is understandable that some people have difficulty in comprehending that the Catholic priesthood is reserved solely to men.

But, frankly, I think that the role of women in the life of the Church is much richer and broader. It seems to me that it is a great impoverishment to reduce the discussion on the mission of women in the Church to the ministerial priesthood, a question by the way that has already been definitively clarified by the Church's magisterium.

The contribution of women to ecclesial life is, in my opinion, a very important topic. It is something that we will see being developed more fully in the future, above all through the life experience of Christian women.

The Church urgently needs women whose life is consistent with their faith at all times, who carry out evangelizing initiatives, who bring their point of view to many questions, who are valiant witnesses to Jesus Christ. I have no doubt that

in the years ahead we will see a peaceful mobilization of Christian women. This will be an enterprise of holiness and apostolate, of study and doctrinal training, that will have as its fruit the enrichment of the entire Church.

Translated by Opus Dei Communications Office.

Revista Christus (Portugal)

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(02/13/2026)