

Patrimony for the entire Church

An interview with Bishop Javier Echevarría three months after the canonization of St. Josemaría.

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At the three-month mark, how would you assess the significance of Josemaría Escrivá's canonization for the Church and the world?

One German cardinal said that the canonization signifies the "de-

privatization" of the founder of Opus Dei. His teaching and example now belong to the whole Church, not just to the faithful of the Prelature. This seems to me an apt image. At the same time, it could be said that this reality dates back to the first years of Josemaría Escrivá's priestly ministry. Since that time, he has inspired many people to take their Christian life seriously, to give themselves entirely to God, to serve the Church.

Obviously this reality takes on new characteristics now. Many people have remarked that St. Josemaría's teachings on the sanctification of work and ordinary life are now a patrimony for the entire Church. The hundreds of thousands of people in St. Peter's Square, the millions of persons all over the world who followed the ceremony by radio, television or internet, the interest of the media, the statements by numerous public figures – all these

are signs that holiness is not a forgotten concept. The Church has and will always have an important message for the world.

The last centuries were marked by a process of secularization that removed the supernatural dimension from people's lives, "as if God did not exist." But in our times we are observing the reverse process. "Secularity," when properly understood, stands in opposition to "secularization," and is a deeper way of understanding the relationship between faith and ordinary life. The new saint's message is situated in this context of the beginning of the new millennium, the perennial renewal of the Church, the presentation of Christ who never "goes out of fashion."

Does the fact that Msgr. Escrivá has been canonized mean something special for the Work?

Without doubt the canonization represents an important moment for the Prelature of Opus Dei. For each of the Prelature's faithful, the canonization is another confirmation of their aspirations, and a holy challenge to live up to everything God is asking of them. The spirit taught by St. Josemaría is not only a promise, but a specific and effective path for reaching holiness. Therefore the canonization also represents a call to responsibility: what this priest taught is meant to lead to holiness, to living the virtues, to giving oneself to God and others.

Many cardinals and bishops said in the Thanksgiving Masses following the canonization that the Church expects the faithful of the Prelature to render specific service to the local churches and to the societies in which they live. In particular, as the Pope never stops emphasizing, everyone should feel urged to serve

those in greater material or spiritual need, and also (which is very important) to learn from others.

Looking towards the future, what steps should Opus Dei take now that its founder is canonized?

The Prelature exists to serve the Church. It does not have any goals of its own. John Paul II has set out the priorities for the whole Church, at this moment in history, in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. All Catholics should keep these goals in mind when striving to effectively bring forward the pastoral work of the Church, and therefore also the work of the Prelature of Opus Dei. In this context, the faithful of Opus Dei have a particular responsibility, for evident reasons, in fostering the search for holiness in ordinary life. And they strive to make clear that when Catholics endeavor to seek holiness,

it is not just a “spiritualistic” ideal, so to speak, but also brings about justice and peace.

Msgr. Escrivá, on considering the situation of mankind and society in the 20th century, said that “these world crises are crises of saints.” What can you say on this topic? Does that hold true for the 21st century?

Yes, it continues to be valid. I would even affirm that each day the truth of those words becomes ever more evident. One need only consider so many world events today that are marked by violence, corruption or injustice. I am not referring only to wars and international terrorism. I allude also to situations that are very close to home, that we read about every day in the local newspapers. These stories attest that there are no limits to man’s aggressiveness when he forgets God, moral norms, respect

for life and human dignity. And evil cannot be fought solely with the threat of punishment. Everyone needs to sow and proclaim goodness and truth, through deeds of charity and justice both small and large, even though it requires going against the current.

In order for peace in the world to abound, peace must first take root in hearts, said St. Josemaría. And interior peace is not obtained by a callous and selfish life, but rather by sacrifice, by renouncing one's selfishness. A saint is precisely the person who, following the model of Jesus Christ, converts his life into an offering to God and to others. Paradoxically, by declaring "war" against himself, against the "old man," he finds tranquility for his own conscience, interior peace, which he then inevitably transmits to his surroundings.

You already know the difficult situation occurring in our country. What message would the founder of Opus Dei give to the people of Argentina, if he were among us now as he was in 1974?

During a meeting with a large group of people on that 1974 trip, he was asked a similar question. The historic moment was different, but I think his answer is also relevant for the present situation. I know it myself almost by memory: “May you sow peace and joy on all sides. May you not say a disturbing word to anyone. May you know how to walk arm-in-arm with those who do not think as you do. May you never mistreat anyone. May you be brothers to all and sowers of peace and joy.” And he never failed to point out that this Christian coexistence does not mean yielding to error, to false doctrine.

I recall that he repeated (I think deliberately) “be sowers of peace and joy.” Whoever lives in this manner, striving to spread peace and joy to those around them, is able to overcome the humanly difficult moments – working hard, of course, but discovering in their work the loving presence of Jesus Christ. Therefore, I think that in the present circumstances St. Josemaría would say the same thing to all the men and women of Argentina. In moments of crisis, fraternity is especially important.

Paulina Lo Celso (Argentina)
