

My memories of Saint Josemaria (IV): A Full Portrait

José Luis Soria was a doctor who first met St. Josemaria in 1953. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1956 and from then until St. Josemaria's death in 1975 he lived and worked with him in Rome. Fr. Soria now exercises his priestly ministry in Vancouver.

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*St- Josemaria with St-Pope John XXIII
and Blessed Alvaro del Portillo - Rome
1960*

Fifteenth-century portraits—take one by Pisanello or Jan van Eyck, for example—may be considered completed pictorial works in their concentration, execution, and distribution of space.

The clear, delicately delineated representation follows every detail of the surface, striving for realism.

The profile, rich in detail, is preferred; resembling relief, it is akin to the medallion with its accented surface.

More interested in the psychological aspects of portraiture, late nineteenth and twentieth-century draftsmen prefer softer pastels that readily follow every artistic impulse.

Mood elements, intellectual tension, and personal engagement are typical features of the modern portrait and thus also of modern portrait drawing. In my attempt as a portraitist I will be eclectic, even if incomplete, but I should start with a point that gives reason for all the other details of my sitter.

As Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, the first successor of Saint Josemaria at the head of Opus Dei, put it “to understand the character of our founder, one must keep in view this basic quality which pervaded everything else: his dedication to God, and to all souls for God’s sake; his constant readiness to correspond generously to the will of God. This was the aim of his whole life. He was a man in love, a man possessed of a secret he would later spell out in point No. 1006 of *The Forge*: ‘With crystal clarity I see the formula, the secret of happiness, both earthly and

eternal. It is not just a matter of accepting the will of God, but of embracing it, of identifying oneself with it—in a word, of loving the divine will with a positive act of our own will. This, I repeat, is the infallible secret of joy and peace.” (*Immersed in God*, Scepter Publishers 1996, pages 31-32).

Strength of character was one of his outstanding features.

“He was endowed with a keen, agile intellect that was complemented by a lively interest in all branches of knowledge, by a remarkable juridical mentality, and by a most refined aesthetic sense. His personality was vibrant and vigorous; his temperament was courageous and impetuous, strong and energetic; and he managed to acquire a remarkable degree of self-mastery”.

I must say that the strongest correction I have received during my

adult life came from Saint Josemaria, as a consequence of my negligence in a particular set of circumstances.

But not even then did I feel less loved.

He had the gift of showing his authentic affection especially when he feared that his words or deeds could have hurt the feelings of some of us.

He was an open and sometimes even blunt man who disliked ceremony and simulation.

He loved sincerity and personal freedom.

His strong character and temper were softened by a keen sense of humor and a smile that would light up his face and make his penetrating eyes sparkle.

Yes, as the Postulator of his Cause of Canonization put it some time ago, “he had an iron will and very great gentleness. He asked for high and demanding goals, but he was able to motivate with his charity (...). He did not ask the impossible.”

This article is part of a series of articles by Fr. Soria. The other articles are available below:

My memories of Saint Josemaria (I)

My memories of Saint Josemaria (II)

*My memories of Saint Josemaria (III) -
The First Time I Heard His Voice*

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