

# An Offering Pleasing to God: Morning Offering and "Serviam!"

Serving and glorifying God: these words encapsulate the saints' aspirations. Each morning, when we wake, we have the opportunity to offer our entire day to the Lord, allowing this desire to guide our life.

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"The Christian begins his day, his prayers, and his activities with the Sign of the Cross: 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.' The baptized person dedicates the day to the glory of God and calls on the Savior's grace which lets him act in the Spirit as a child of the Father. The sign of the cross strengthens us in temptations and difficulties."<sup>[1]</sup> From the very first centuries, Christians have had the custom of starting the day by turning to God. "As soon as you wake up, before facing the hustle and bustle of life again, before allowing any impression to form in your heart, before even remembering your family responsibilities, consecrate the birth and beginning of your thoughts to the Lord," Cassian wrote, in the 5th century.<sup>[2]</sup>

Centuries later, a German saint from the 13th century recorded the words she heard from God in her prayer:

"When you wake up in the morning, let your first act be to greet my heart and offer me yours. (...) Whoever breathes a sigh towards me from the depth of their heart when they wake up in the morning and asks me to work within them throughout the day will draw me to them. (...) Because never does a person sigh with longing aspiration towards me without drawing me closer than before."<sup>[3]</sup> —

Don Álvaro, in an interview, explained how St. Josemaría practiced this custom: "As soon as he woke up, he embraced the 'heroic minute': he jumped out of bed, kissed the floor, and pronounced the prayerful *serviam!* He offered his entire day to the Lord and made the sign of the cross on his forehead, lips, and chest while repeating: 'All my thoughts, all my words, and all the works of this day, I offer to you, Lord, and my entire life, out of love.' He

would also kiss the crucifix and the image of the Virgin that he kept on his bedside table."<sup>[4]</sup> St. Josemaría said that he recited a prayer learned from his mother at the beginning and end of the day: "I still renew, morning and evening, and not just occasionally but habitually, the offering I learned from my parents: 'O my Lady, my Mother! I offer myself entirely to you, and in proof of my filial love, I consecrate to you this day my eyes, my ears, my tongue, my heart...'"<sup>[5]</sup>

The morning offering expresses the intention to give God glory with a grateful spirit in everything we do, from what we consider most important to what seems insignificant and goes unnoticed by others. St. Paul advises the Colossians: *Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col 3:17).*

And in his letter to the Corinthians, he tells them: *Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God* (1 Cor 10:31).

This pious practice helps us cultivate an interior attitude of always wanting to be close to God, to feel his constant presence, and to give Him the things we do. Sometimes we will express it explicitly ("Jesus, I offer you this hour of work") and at other times, words will not be needed because we feel God's closeness in our gestures and thoughts, due to our habits of "acting out of love, especially in the effort to follow what God is asking of us in each circumstance."<sup>[6]</sup>

## **Offering what does not go well**

During his early years in Madrid, St. Josemaría often had trouble with his watch. Since he could not afford to repair it at the time, he turned to his guardian angel to wake him up at the

set time. And “Little Watchmaker” — as he decided to call his angel — did not fail him: he woke up at the set time each morning. But this was only part of the favor. The real challenge was the first battle of the day, which he knew he could not face relying on his own strength alone: getting out of bed. In his *Intimate Notes*, the founder of Opus Dei recorded his approach to this moment one day:

"As always happens when I've asked this with humility, regardless of what time I've gone to bed, this morning I woke out of a deep sleep as if I had been called, totally sure it was time for me to get up. And sure enough, it was a quarter to six. Last night, also as usual, I had asked the Lord to give me strength to overcome my laziness at wake-up time, because—I confess this to my shame—something so small is enormously hard for me and there are plenty of days when, in spite of that supernatural call, I stay

in bed a while longer. Today, when I saw what time it was, I prayed, I struggled... and I stayed in bed. Finally, at six-fifteen according to my alarm clock (which has been broken for some time), I got up. Full of humiliation, I prostrated myself on the floor, acknowledging my fault, and then—with a *Serviam!* ["I will serve!"]—got dressed and started my meditation. And then, somewhere between six-thirty and a quarter to seven, I saw, for quite some time, that the face of my Virgin of the Kisses was filled with happiness, with joy. I looked very carefully. I believed she was smiling, because it had that effect on me, even though her lips hadn't moved. Very calmly, I said to my Mother a lot of sweet things.<sup>[7]</sup>

This small defeat became an occasion for joy because St. Josemaría knew how to see things not only from his perspective but also from Jesus' and

Mary's viewpoints. Jesus, God made man, fully understands that for many, this is a particularly challenging moment. We can therefore imagine that Christ is moved when, despite the disorientation and fatigue of that early hour, we remember to renew our desire to serve and glorify Him, offering everything that we are about to do. We want the new day to be *a living, holy, and pleasing offering to God (Rom 12:1)*.

At the same time, the founder of Opus Dei saw that moment as an invitation to surrender our weaknesses into God's hands and seek his help. Indeed, there may be times when, for various reasons, we feel the burden of struggle and our mistakes more acutely. "A time may come when he sows doubts in our minds, tempting us to think that we are slipping sadly backwards and are making scarcely any progress. The

conviction may grow upon us that, in spite of all our efforts to improve, we are getting worse."<sup>[8]</sup> Disappointment might come over us at the end of the day, when we reflect on the gap between what we aspire to be and what we actually achieve, between our plans and what we managed to do. This is the time to "reset" the day with an act of filial contrition, look forward to tomorrow with new hope: God the Father generates us every day — as we pray, applying Psalm 2<sup>[9]</sup> to ourselves — renewing us and granting us new graces daily, enabling us to face the things we failed to achieve today tomorrow.

Every day God grants us is an opportunity to start anew, because "unless we are reconciled with our own history, we will be unable to take a single step forward, for we will always remain hostage to our expectations and the disappointments that follow."<sup>[10]</sup> At

the beginning of the day, we have the chance to renew our "resolution not to give in, not to give way to laziness or idleness; to face up to [our] duties with greater hope and more optimism, convinced that if we are defeated in some small skirmish we can overcome this setback by making a sincere act of love,"<sup>[11]</sup> for Jesus fully "understands our weakness and draws us to himself on an inclined plane."<sup>[12]</sup>

## **A restless desire to serve**

St. Josemaría wanted members of Opus Dei to start their day with a deep bow, touching or almost touching the ground with their heads while saying *serviam!*<sup>[13]</sup> It is an external manifestation of humility and total commitment to God's service, which he also intended to be observed at another point during the day: during the recitation of the Preces (prayers). In fact, the first

collective act of Opus Dei was this norm of piety: the founder and the three members of the Work at that time knelt, kissed the ground, and recited these prayers together.

The expression *serviam!* does not appear verbatim in Scripture. However, the book of Jeremiah recounts Israel's *non serviam* when they chose to break their covenant with the Lord (cf. *Jer 2:20*). The context of this verse is the prophet's first speech, in which God accuses his people of unfaithfulness. The accusation is not only of ingratitude but also of irrationality, as the people had forsaken sources of living water to build cracked cisterns. This imagery, capturing Israel's desert experience, is mirrored in the scene of Christ's temptation, which, in a sense, encapsulates the history of Israel's trials. When Satan tells Him, *I will give you all this if you bow down and worship me*, Jesus responds,

*Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only' (Mt 4:9-10).*

The *non serviam* is the epitome of rebellion against God. For this reason, St. Josemaría interpreted the mission God entrusted to him as one of service, seeing it as "a continued and magnificent affirmation: to the '*non serviam*,' '*SERVIAM!*'; to 'we do not want this man to reign,' '*Regnare Christum volumus*'; we want Christ to reign;' to human glory, '*Deo omnis gloria*'; and finally, the great declaration of salvation for everyone: '*Omnes, cum Petro, ad Iesum per Mariam.*'"<sup>[14]</sup> Little by little, our Father articulated the essence that was already present in 1928. One of the handwritten texts closest to the date of the Work's foundation reads, in two columns: "*Omnes, cum Petro, ad Iesum per Mariam Deo omnis gloria* [lower line:] Action –

Prayer – Expiation" and under both columns: "*Serviam.*"<sup>[15]</sup>

The symbolic gesture of returning to the ground by bowing down and exclaiming *serviam!* recalls the original mission to cultivate and care for creation (cf. *Gen* 2:15). The first of these two verbs, *abad*, in the original Hebrew, also means to serve or to place oneself at someone's or something's service. This term expresses the condition of man as a servant who, nonetheless, has the capacity to choose whom to serve: God or a creature, be it Satan, Pharaoh, or oneself. Ultimately, this is the great choice that the cry *serviam!* seeks to resolve: to return to living according to the truth that marked the origin of humanity.<sup>[16]</sup>

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From the very beginning of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría taught that the vocation to the Work was a divine call "to

render a unique service to [God's] Church and to all souls. The sole ambition, the only desire of Opus Dei and of each of its children is to serve the Church as She wants to be served, within the specific vocation that the Lord has given us."<sup>[17]</sup>

The desire to serve and give glory to God, which marked the beginnings of the Work, is renewed by each of the faithful when they start their day.

The fact that the *serviam* and morning offering are done first thing in the morning has strong symbolic value, expressing a deep truth: we heartily desire to imitate the lifestyle of Jesus, *who did not come to be served but to serve (Mk 10:45)*. And this statement of intent is meant to illuminate all our activities. "The value of a person does not depend any more on the role they have, the work they do, the money they have in the bank... Greatness and success in God's eyes are measured

differently: they are measured by service. Not on what someone *has*, but on what someone *gives*. Do you want to be first? Serve. This is the way."<sup>[18]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2157.

<sup>[2]</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, 21.

<sup>[3]</sup> St. Mechtilde of Hackeborn, *The Book of Special Grace*.

<sup>[4]</sup> Álvaro del Portillo, *Entrevista sobre el fundador del Opus Dei*, Rialp, Madrid, 1993, pg. 52 (our translation).

<sup>[5]</sup> St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 296.

<sup>[6]</sup> From the Father, Pastoral Letter, 9-I-2018, no. 5.

<sup>[7]</sup> From our Father, *Intimate Notes*, no. 701; in Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 1, Scepter, New York, 2001, Chapter 7 note 139, pg. 404-405.

<sup>[8]</sup> *Friends of God*, no. 217.

<sup>[9]</sup> *You are my son, this day I have begotten you* (Ps 2:7).

<sup>[10]</sup> Pope Francis, *Patris corde*, no. 4.

<sup>[11]</sup> *Friends of God*, no. 217.

<sup>[12]</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 75.

<sup>[13]</sup> Cf. *De spiritu*, no. 117.

<sup>[14]</sup> Notebook IV, no. 386, 11-XI-1931, cited in *The Way*, critical-historical edition prepared by Pedro Rodríguez, no. 226.

<sup>[15]</sup> *Ibid*, no. 227.

<sup>[16]</sup> For a deeper understanding of *serviam*, see Juan Rego, “The *Preces*

of Opus Dei: A Historical-Theological Commentary,” *Studia et Documenta*, vol. 16, 2022, pg. 247-249.

[17] From our Father, Letter 8, no. 1.

[18] Pope Francis, Angelus, 19-IX-2021.

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