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The Pope comments on Opus Dei's founder

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In the Paul VI Hall at the Vatican today, the Holy Father received participants in the congress "The Grandeur of Ordinary Life." The international congress, sponsored by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, was held on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaria Escriva, founder of Opus Dei. After a greeting by Opus Dei's Prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarria, the Pope addressed the following discourse to those present.

Dear brothers and sisters!

1. I am happy to meet with you at the end of the Congress organized on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of the blessed Founder of Opus Dei. I greet the Prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarria, and I thank him warmly for the words with which he expressed the sentiments of everyone. He has brought to light the character and the value of the

Congress, which was not so much a celebration as an effort to go deeper into the more relevant aspects of the message of Blessed Josemaria Escriva, especially in what concerns the greatness of daily life as a way towards holiness. I greet the bishops and priests present. I greet each of you, who have come to Rome to take part in such an important anniversary.

2. From the beginning of his priestly ministry, Blessed Josemaria Escriva placed at the center of his own preaching the truth that all the baptized are called to the fullness of charity, and that the most immediate way to reach this common goal is found in the ordinary happenings of each day. The Lord wants to enter into a communion of love with each of his children, in the network of everyday occupations, in the daily context in which a person's existence is lived out.

In light of these considerations, daily activity is understood as a precious means of union with Christ, capable of becoming the setting and the material for sanctification, the terrain for the exercise of the virtues, the dialogue of love which is realized in works. Work is transformed by the spirit of prayer and thus it becomes possible to remain in the contemplation of God, even when one is intent on carrying out various occupations. For every baptized person who wants to follow Christ faithfully, the factory, the office, the library, the laboratory, the workshop, the walls of the home can be transformed into places of encounter with the Lord, who chose to live thirty years in obscurity. Could it be doubted that the time Jesus spent in Nazareth was an integral part of his salvific mission? For us, too, then, daily life, in its apparent grayness, in its monotony made up of movements that seem always to be repeated in

the same way, can acquire the relief of a supernatural dimension and be in that way transformed.

3. In the apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, at the end of the great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I have recalled, in this respect, that the ideal of Christian perfection "must not be misunderstood as though it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few 'uncommon heroes' of holiness," and I added: "the time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living." (no. 31). The Lord grants to every baptized person the necessary grace to reach the summits of divine charity. The small events of the day have within them an unsuspected greatness, and exactly by living them with love towards God and towards one's brethren, it is possible to overcome from the very start any split between faith and

daily life, a split which the Second Vatican Council denounces as one of the "gravest errors of our time" (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 43).

Sanctifying his own work, with respect for objective moral norms, the faithful layperson contributes effectively to building a society more worthy of man and to freeing creation, which groans in travail while awaiting the revelation of the children of God (cf. Rom 8:19-22). He cooperates in that way in shaping the face of a humanity attentive to the requirements of the person and of the common good.

4. Dear brothers and sisters!
Continue following in the footsteps of your Founder, with zeal and faithfulness to your mission. Show with daily effort that the love of Christ can inform the entire range of existence, making it possible to reach the ideal of that unity of life which,

as I stressed in the post-synodal apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, is fundamental for the effort to evangelize contemporary society (cf. no. 17).

Prayer, work and apostolate, as you have learned from Blessed Josemaria, meet and become one, if they are lived with this spirit. He has always encouraged you to "love the world passionately." And he added an important specification: "Be men and women of the world, but don't be worldly men and women" (*The Way*, 939). That way, you will avoid the danger of being influenced by a worldly outlook, which conceives of the spiritual struggle as something that can be reduced to the sphere of private life and thus be irrelevant to public action.

If man does not accept inwardly the grace of God, if he does not pray, if he does not approach the Sacraments

frequently, if he does not strive for personal holiness, he loses the very meaning of his earthly pilgrimage. The world, your blessed Founder reminds us, is a way toward Heaven, and the existence of every believer, even with its burdens and limits, ought to become a real temple in which the Son of God made man dwells.

5. Along this demanding spiritual and apostolic itinerary, may the most blessed Virgin Mary and her spouse Saint Joseph be an example and a protection for you. I entrust all your families to their heavenly intercession. I also entrust to them all of your activities, so that they may be constantly at the service of the Gospel. Work always in fraternal and benevolent communion with all the other members of the people of God and with the various ecclesial institutions.

May Blessed Josemaria continue to watch over you from Heaven, so that you may be faithful disciples of Christ in every circumstance. To that end, I assure you a special remembrance in prayer, while I affectionately bless you and your relatives and all the members of your Prelature.

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