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"An enormous contribution to the Church's spiritual life and development"

Homily given by Most Rev Dr Raymond Field, Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin, in the Parish Church of the Guardian Angels, Blackrock, Dublin, on the feast of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, 26th June 2007

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A saint for the whole Church — that is how John Paul II described him on the day following the canonization in 2002. He said: “St. Josemaría was chosen by the Lord to announce the universal call to holiness and to point out that daily life and ordinary activities are a path to holiness. One could say that he was the saint of ordinary life. In fact, he was convinced that for those who live with a perspective of faith, everything is an opportunity to meet God; everything can be an incentive for prayer. Seen in this light, daily life reveals an unexpected greatness. Holiness is truly within everyone’s reach.”

It is my pleasure to celebrate with you, the members of the Prelature of Opus Dei, your family and friends, on this, the feastday of your saintly founder, Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. Following his ordination to the priesthood on 28th March 1925,

he founded Opus Dei in Madrid three years later on 2nd October 1928. In faithful fulfilment of the task which God had entrusted to him, he brought priests and lay people, men and women, to discover that it is in their daily occupations that they can live out their co-responsibility in the Church's mission, with a full dedication to God in the ordinary circumstances of everyday life. "The divine paths of the world have opened up," he exclaimed in his book *Christ is passing by*.

He did not restrict himself simply to describing the pastoral opportunities that were opened up by this evangelizing effort, but he went on to establish it as a stable and organic part of the Church. Today we acknowledge his enormous contribution to the spiritual life and development of the Church universal. But is not just another institution of the Church. It is an all

embracing 'Way'. It is an authentic 'way' of sanctification in daily work and in the fulfilment of the Christian's ordinary duties.

An authentic master of the Christian life

Following an intense life, dedicated entirely to the heroic fulfilment of that ecclesial service and, as we know, which was marked by the profound experience of the mystery of the Cross, and in very close union with the Blessed Virgin Mary, he died in Rome 32 years ago on this day, 26th June 1975. Today, more than ever, he is acknowledged as an authentic master of the Christian life; he reached the heights of contemplation through continuous prayer, constant mortification, and the daily effort to do his work with exemplary docility to the Holy Spirit, always with the aim of "serving the

Church as the Church wants to be served.”

Today, we esteem him as an authentic witness to Jesus Christ, we honour him as a saint of our times. In the words of Pope John Paul II: “A clear manifestation of divine Providence is the constant presence of men and women faithful to Christ down the centuries, who with their life and their message, shed light on various periods of history. Among these distinguished figures, Josemaría Escrivá has an eminent place”.

As Pope John Paul II said on the occasion of his beatification in May 1992: “With supernatural intuition, Josemaría Escrivá preached untiringly the universal call to holiness and to apostolate. Christ calls everyone to be holy through all the circumstances and events of everyday life. Work becomes a

means of personal holiness and apostolate when it is lived in union with Jesus Christ, the Son of God who, through his Incarnation, has in a certain way united himself with the whole reality of man and with the whole of creation (cf. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 50). In a society where the unbridled craving for material things becomes man's sole object, causing him to draw away from God, this Saint of our modern times, reminds us that these same realities, God's creation and fruits of human industry, if used rightly for the glory of the Creator and in service of one's brothers and sisters, can be a way for men and women to meet Christ".

The message of Saint Josemaría Escrivá expresses, in an admirable and most fitting way, the universal nature of the mystery of salvation. In his book *Friends of God*, he wrote: "He calls each and every one to holiness; he asks each and every one

to love him: young and old, single and married, healthy and sick, learned and unlearned, no matter where they work, or where they are” (294). We are here this evening in response to his call, his invitation to lead a life of holiness.

Work is a godlike activity

In our first Reading, taken from the Book of Genesis, we heard: “The Lord God took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it”. It is God who has placed us in this world to cultivate and to take care of it. While the Church has reflected on the significance and importance of human work over the centuries, it was the Encyclical *Laborem exercens* of John Paul II that has given the Church its most weighty and profound reflection on the nature and significance of work for the human person. Work is a godlike

activity. We read in the ***Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*** that through work we participate “not only in the act of creation but also in that of redemption” (263). In a real way we “image God” through participating creatively and responsibly in the ongoing task of creation (275).

How right then that as members of Opus Dei you should strive for excellence in whatever your profession or work you have chosen. In that way, living that ideal, you are indeed fulfilling the command of God to “cultivate and take care of creation”. You are part of His redemptive work. Your calling is to transform the world from within through your work.

The Holy Father John Paul II referred to the saint’s apostolic vision when he said: “To elevate the world to God and transform it from within: this is

the ideal the holy founder points out to you”. Or, as Saint Josemaría himself put it, “Your human vocation is a part – an important part – of your Divine vocation”.

A harmonious unity of life

But we do not lead a double life, keeping work and prayer separate. The Founder of Opus Dei saw clearly the unlimited apostolic possibilities of the ordinary life of the faithful, when guided by the desire to sanctify their ordinary work and all human activities and situations. So, his insistence on the need to blend together, in a harmonious unity of life, one’s prayer, work and apostolate: “There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is this life which has to become, in both soul and body, holy and filled with God ... Our age needs to give back to matter and to the most trivial occurrences and situations their

noble and original meaning. It needs to restore them to the service of the Kingdom of God” (*Conversations*, 114). Some may feel a little overwhelmed by the challenge presented. But when we are part of God’s redemptive work, why should we feel threatened? We are doing God’s work, in His name in the world which He created.

This fundamental Christian truth was a constant theme in his preaching. Indeed, he never stopped inviting his spiritual children to invoke the Holy Spirit to ensure that their interior life, namely, their life of relationship with God and their family, including their professional and social life, is totally made up of small earthly realities, and would not be separated but would form only one life that was “holy and full of God”.

We are called to be his witnesses whatever our role or vocation is — married or single, man or woman, boy or girl, consecrated or priest. We are to follow The Way, a way that leads us to live our lives in the world in accordance with the plan and will of God — the God who formed us in love, who called us by name and who proved his love for us through his sacrificial death on the Cross — a love that is constantly lived out in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Our Christian vocation to transform the world

Before ever the mountains were raised, the seas were filled, the stars emerged in the heavens, and the planets were spun into their orbits, God knew each and every one of us. God had a vision and a purpose for each one of us. It is extremely important to know that. Each one of us is important in God's scheme of

things. Each one of us has an identity, a name in the mind of God. Each one of us has a purpose and, today, we reflect again on the insight and teaching of a spiritual giant who brought us to realise that part of that divine plan is to live our Christian vocation to transform the world in which we live, to sanctify it through our work and through our witness to his love in our lives and in our world.

Doing His Divine will is a source of enormous happiness and fulfilment for us. We are challenged to be His witnesses in the face of media rejection or secular dominance. But think of the Cross and that Jesus the Son of God was not afraid to declare His Love for us, never ashamed of any single one of us, no matter what our sin. He died to save us all in love and in perfect accord with His Father's will.

Those who want to serve the cause of the Gospel faithfully, will certainly encounter misunderstandings and difficulties. The Lord purifies and shapes all those he calls to follow him with the mysterious power of the Cross. But “in the Cross”, the new saint repeated, “we find light, peace and joy”.

In facing the challenge to live faithfully to our commitment today as members of Opus Dei, I call your attention to that passage in the Apostolic Letter *The Beginning of the New Millennium (Novo Millennio Ineunte)*, written by John Paul II at the end of the Jubilee Year, where he stated that we must find ways to respond to the call to promote a “spirituality of communion”. Such spirituality is the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — dwelling within us and whose light we must see shining on the face

of our brothers and sisters — those with whom we share our lives, our families, those with whom we work, but especially the sick, the disabled, the elderly, the most vulnerable and the dying. It is to make room for all — including the stranger to our shores — witnessing to the love of God for each one, helping to bear the burden, to ease the pain and suffering of each one, to the best of our ability.

Put out into the deep

As the Holy Father pointed out: “Any external structures which we promote or seek to implement, while at the same time, neglect this spiritual dimension, will serve little purpose and probably fail, because they become mechanisms without a soul”. It is and should be a communion that extends beyond the immediate needs of any one of us and embraces relationships between

all the People of God, especially those whom we try to serve as followers of The Way.

By promoting such spirituality and embracing all that it involves, we will provide the institutional reality with a soul, the soul of God. Beginning from there, we can now reach out, refreshed, renewed, confident, and well-grounded to face all and any of the challenges which confront us at this time. As Jesus said to Simon who had spent all night fishing and had caught nothing: “Do not be afraid” “Put out into the deep” “Duc in altum!” And Simon replied in that tremendous act of faith: “Master, but at your word I will let down the nets”.

“Duc in altum!” — Josemaría Escrivá accepted Jesus’ invitation to the Apostle Peter, (“Put out into the deep”). He transmitted it to his entire spiritual family so that they might

offer the Church a valid contribution of communion and apostolic service.

Today this invitation is renewed and extended to all of us to “Put out into the deep”, the divine Teacher says to us, “and let down your nets for a catch” (Luke 5, 4). “Communion is the first fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the eternal father and powered out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 42).

The secret of the holiness of all the saints

There is no need to let ourselves be overcome by the materialism of the day and the consumerist culture that threatens to dissolve the genuine identity of Christ's disciples. The Holy Spirit of God is with us. He is with us on every single step of our journey. He has gifted us too with his seven gifts to face the challenges of our age.

Do not be afraid. With the Holy Spirit are the Father and the Son — the Blessed Trinity, the one God. We are temples of the Trinity, and we can speak with God simply. We address him in the centre of our soul, and tell him all that is happening to us: asking, adoring, making reparation, loving. “If we are in God’s grace,” the Saint has told us, “the Holy Spirit is present in our soul, imparting a supernatural character to all our actions”.

To fulfil the mission bequeathed to us by Saint Josemaría, we need constant interior growth, nourished by prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments, especially in the Blessed Eucharist and Reconciliation. He was a master in the practice of prayer, which he considered to be an extraordinary “weapon” to redeem the world. He always recommended: “in the first place, prayer; then, expiation; and in the third place, but

very much in third place, action" (*The Way*, 82). The fruitfulness of the apostolate lies above all in prayer and in intense and constant sacramental life. This, in essence, is the secret of the holiness and the true success of all the saints.

This evening we celebrate the remarkable life and vision of this saint of God, a saint for the whole Church, who was chosen by the Lord to announce the universal call to holiness and to point out that our daily life and ordinary activities are a path to holiness. May he continue to inspire us to seek Him who is our Way, our Truth and our Life.

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