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Feast of St Josemaría Escrivá – Homily of Archbishop Farrell

Homily at the Mass in honour
of St Josemaría Escrivá, Parish
of Our Lady, Queen of Peace,
Merrion Road, Dublin on 26th
June 2024.

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It can happen anywhere, anytime, to anyone. For certain Galilean fishermen it was when they were going about their normal, everyday lives, casting and catching, cleaning,

chatting. The call to mission—God’s transforming grace—can come to the surface at any moment. These men, like Josemaría Escrivá, were called to witness to the mystery of God’s kingdom, and to the mystery of its unfolding in Jesus; they put themselves at God’s disposal, they were ready and capable of responding to God’s call.

The life of St Josemaría Escrivá reminds us that holiness is not attained by swooning in mystic rapture by those who have little knowledge of, or perhaps even less interest in, the lives of ordinary people. All Christians, *“whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord—each in their own way—to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect.”* (*Lumen Gentium*, 11).

What happens when one experiences a call from God is that the immensity

of the divine holiness, graciousness, and mercy, our own inadequacies and sinfulness loom larger. “Leave me Lord, I am a sinful man”, implores Peter (Luke 5:8).

Engagement with Jesus and with God at work in him always evokes fear. “The disciples’ closeness to Jesus does not absolve them from the need to enter more deeply into the mystery and paradox of God’s [Kingdom]: that death and the power of evil will be the seeming victors, and that even Jesus, who now rescues them, will perish.” (John R. Donahue SJ and Daniel J. Harrington SJ, *The Gospel of Mark*, [Collegeville: Liturgical, 2002], 161).

Such protestations, however, are not God’s horizon. Mission and call are never dependent upon the worthiness of the minister, but upon God’s will, God’s grace. Were we to keep our focus on our own inability and shortcomings, the work of God

would never be accomplished. It is when Peter relinquishes his uncertainty that nothing can be caught, and moves past his fear of what Jesus is asking of him, that he can let himself be seized by grace and bring all his skills to be employed in the service of Jesus' mission.

When one surrenders to grace, the gifts and skills one already has, are often re-focussed under Christ's inspiration. One can imagine Peter's reluctance to follow Jesus' suggestion to put out into the deep water, when he and his companions had worked hard all night without any reward. What would a carpenter know about the work of a fisherman? It is when they put their trust in what Jesus said that the change comes. "If you say so, I will pay out the nets."

Pope John Paul I succinctly expressed the charism of *Opus Dei* about

seeking holiness through the sanctification of work and daily life, whether in the academic world, in field of work, or in matters of the economy: “Msgr. Escriva, with Gospel in hand, constantly taught: ‘Christ ...wants us to attain that sanctity not by doing extraordinary things, but rather, through ordinary common activities. It is the way that they are done which must be uncommon. There, right in the middle of the street—*nel bel mezzo della strada*, in the office, in the factory, we can be holy provided we do our job competently, for love of God, and cheerfully, so that everyday work does not become ‘a daily tragedy’, but rather ‘a daily smile.’” (see *Il Gazzettino*, Venice, 25 August, 1978)

Today, Opus Dei carries out this mission by helping ordinary women and men to live as Christians in the world. In the Second Reading we

heard “for you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear...” (Rom 8:14). We are called to a confidence in with our engagement with the world. The Christian confidence in our call to engagement with the world is rooted in the confidence and goodness of what God has wrought in creation: “God saw all that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” (Gen 1:31). Saint Augustine was right when he said “our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.” The desire for a more meaningful life is a sign that God created us and that we bear God’s “imprint.” God is life, and that is why every creature reaches out towards life. As human beings—made in the image of God—we do this in a unique way. We reach out for love, joy and peace (see Pope Benedict XVI, Madrid WYD, 2011). The call to the Church is to see world and God in the world, to take note of creation, how it is, and what it

reveals, to read the Book of Nature, as Pope Benedict called it.

Coming from an age in the Western world, where the Church had profile in the world that was not to be overlooked, and those in its service, enjoyed significant social esteem, it is understandable that the diminished social relevance of the Church, or the loss of prestige and privilege, would be a cause of insecurity and upset. However, this change may also be seen as a call to be in the world in a new way. For Pope Francis, such a perspective, what some call “secularization” would demand that people of faith reflect on the changes in society that have influenced the way in which people think about and organize their lives. If we consider this aspect of the question, we come to realize that what is in crisis is not the faith, but some of the forms and ways in which we present it. Consequently, secularization

represents a challenge for our pastoral imagination, it is “an occasion for *restructuring the spiritual life in new forms and for new ways of existing*” (see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, Mass., 2007, 437). In this way, a discerning view, while acknowledging the difficulties we face in communicating the joy of the faith motivates us, at the same time, to develop a new passion for evangelization, to look for new languages and forms of expression, to change certain pastoral priorities and to focus on the essentials (see Pope Francis, Homily at Vespers in the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Québec) July 28, 2022).

This is not just a question for Pope Francis: our faith—as Pope Benedict never ceased to underline—is not an intellectual system, a collection of dogmas, or a moralism” (see Homily 24th February 2005). Jesus reaches

much further. Christianity is an encounter, a love story. Jesus' gaze, his name, his Body, which we receive in the Eucharist, constantly draw us further along, in the great movement of the Holy Spirit, into the heart of God. Yes, truly, He is the Son of God.

Since "Christianity is not an intellectual system, a collection of dogmas, or a moralism" (ibid.), Jesus' call to 'faith' for the disciples is not primarily a call to doctrinal or notional assent; much more it is a call, a recognition of, and encouragement towards "confidence" and trust in what God is doing in Jesus—being with us in our fear, disorientation, pain and loss, as we saw so clearly in last Sunday's Gospel (Mark 4:35–41) and will see again in next Sunday's (Mark 5:21–43). The person of faith is the person who trusts—sometimes against all the odds—in God's way, a way which takes flesh with us in Christ who

journeys with us. As the first reading this evening reminds us that the Creator is always at work. Faith has to do with confidence in God's presence even in the darkest moments of human history, some of which we are living through in these days (see Gen 2: 4b-9).

The scene in today's Gospel reading can help us in many different situations. Who does not experience some moments when nothing seems to work anymore, when all the paths are blocked? But, mission always requires an almost superhuman level of patience. The long view is the most important, but because we live in a culture that is not at all in love with long views and likes short-term solutions whether in religion or politics, the Christian committed to patience is a very counter-cultural person and all the more important because of it. Ask ourselves, whether even, or perhaps especially, in times

of great adversity, we are open to being “surprised” or astonished by God. Have we the capacity for astonishment in the life of faith, and about the role this capacity plays in giving us the courage necessary—even in the face of genuinely prudent objections—to say “yes” to whatever God may be asking of us. The example of Peter—who learned in failure the humility of faith—a humility we find mirrored in Josemaría Escrivá encourages us to trust in what Jesus says: “Put out into the deep.” (Luke 5:4).

Archbishop Dermot Farrell
