

"Passionately Loving the World", Forty Years On

Forty years ago St. Josemaría celebrated Holy Mass in Pamplona before a large crowd and gave the homily known as "Passionately Loving the World." Professor Antonio Aranda reflects on its significance.

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The solemn liturgy, which took place during the Second General Assembly

of Friends of the University of Navarre, was held on the university campus, on the library esplanade. The Mass was without doubt the most important event during those days.

A comparison of a photograph of the locale at that time with a present-day picture shows many changes. What first catches the eye now are the beautiful trees adorning that part of the campus, whose branches provide shade to a large section of the esplanade.

The University of Navarre has also grown greatly since 1967, like so many other apostolic initiatives that St. Josemaria started, and that he blessed and loved. Opus Dei as a whole, which at that time had already spread its sanctifying efficacy to the four corners of the earth, has also experienced a great expansion during these forty years in

its universal service to the Church and society, thanks to God's grace and the loving guidance of St.

Josemaría, Don Alvaro del Portillo, and the current Prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarría.

The homily that St. Josemaría read in a forceful and measured voice, with the authority that stemmed from his position as Founder and Pastor of Opus Dei, has over the years drawn many souls closer to God.[1] At the end of the Mass, the first printed edition was distributed among the authorities and other invited guests. Subsequent editions (whether of the homily alone or as part of the book *Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá*) have now passed the hundred mark, in a dozen languages. The seed of love for God, sanctified daily life, apostolic generosity, service to the Church, and Christian love for the world, sown generously by St. Josemaría among the

thousands of people present there, continues to bear fruit today in all corners of the world.

Words born in a climate of prayer and zeal for souls

Those taking part in the Second Assembly of Friends of the University of Navarre waited with joyful expectation for the Chancellor to begin celebrating Mass on the library esplanade. To be close to St. Josemaría and, even more, to take part in the Holy Sacrifice celebrated by him, meant a lot to the people gathered there, among whom were so many daughters and sons of his and cooperators and friends. Many of them—perhaps the majority, especially the young people—had not met our Father personally, and only a few had had the opportunity to attend a Mass of his, a privilege they kept in their hearts as a gift of Divine Providence. They were happy and

grateful to find themselves with the Founder of Opus Dei, above all to take part with him—and in a certain way, through him—in "the most sacred and transcendent act which man, with the grace of God, can carry out in this life." [2]

It is hard to put into words the spiritual power of that moment. There it was evident what it means to "live the Holy Mass!" [3]—words so many people have learned to make their own following the teachings of St. Josemaría. In that "unique temple," as St. Josemaría described it in his homily, the prayerful faith and piety of the large crowd was evident to all: "the nave is the university campus; the altarpiece, the university library. Over there, the machinery for constructing new buildings; above us, the sky of Navarre." [4] Both the dialogues and the liturgical silences could be clearly "heard." With eyes fixed on the

celebrant and the altar, the congregation lived out the Sacred Rite with great intensity.

After the readings of the Mass came the homily, which was followed with attention and respectful interest. Don Javier Echevarría, who handed the pages of the homily to the Founder, stood quietly next to him. Standing in front of the altar with the pages of the homily in his hands, St. Josemaría read the words with the cadence and modulation required in order to be heard well in that open space. He vigorously proclaimed the central aspects of the spirit that God had given to him with the attractive conviction his preaching always had. He read the text as though simply speaking it, and one could see that he knew it very well. He had prepared it carefully in the previous weeks during his stay at Casa Láriz, in Elorrio (Vizcaya), and he had put the finishing touches to it in Molinoviejo

a few days earlier. Each paragraph, each word of that homily was the fruit of his personal prayer and desire to help everyone, spreading his good spirit by the handful.

That homily and all the pastoral writings that St. Josemaría left as a legacy to his children and to the whole Church possess an important common quality. They were all born in a climate of prayer, of dedication to his mission and foundational spirit, of full fidelity to the teachings of the Catholic Church, and of zeal for souls. Originating in the heart and mind of the Founder, they are an indispensable means for coming to know and assimilate the spirit of Opus Dei. As is now a tradition in the Work, we need to approach them with gratitude and veneration, reading and meditating on them with the same attitude with which they were written: prayer, commitment to

the apostolic task entrusted to us, and fidelity to the Church.

Isn't it true that, when we read the homily *Passionately Loving the World* in an atmosphere of prayer and zeal for souls like that in which it was written, we are always struck by the spiritual power it contains? A few days before giving it on the Navarre campus, St. Josemaría wanted to have it read to the small group of his sons who were with him in Molinoviejo. The impression that it made on them was an anticipation of the effect it would have on those who were to hear it from his lips in Pamplona a few days later, and that it continues to have on the hearts of those who have read it in the intervening years.

Seeking holiness in daily life

The phrase heading this paragraph is the *leitmotif*, as it were, of the entire homily. It sums up its content very

well, and can even serve as a brief and accurate summary of the core of St. Josemaría's foundational message: ordinary life can be a path to holiness. God calls us to seek sanctity there. "How forcefully God has made this truth resound by inspiring his Work! We have come to say, with the humility born of knowing ourselves to be sinners and of little worth—*homo peccator sum* (Lk 5:8), we say with Peter—but with the faith born of letting ourselves be led by God's hand, that sanctity is not just for the privileged few. God calls all of us, he expects Love from us all; from everyone, wherever we may be; from everyone, in whatever situation, profession or job. For our normal, ordinary life, apparently unimportant, can be a path to sanctity. To seek God, there is no need to abandon our place in the world, if our Lord hasn't given us a religious vocation. All the paths of

the earth can be an occasion for an encounter with Christ."^[5]

The homily stresses this fundamental teaching and brings to the fore its principal spiritual and theological notes. Thus right from the beginning it highlights the fact that ordinary life is the true "setting" for our Christian life.^[6] The term "setting" here refers to the whole range of realities that make up our everyday life: circumstances, desires, actions, personal concerns, relations with others, events, etc. All the material and spiritual vicissitudes of our life as ordinary people during the twenty-four hours of each day make up the necessary framework of our Christian life, which consists simply in living our daily life in reference to Christ, as God's children. "Christian life" adds nothing to "daily life" other than the intention of living it, with the help of grace, "in Christ,"^[7] that is to say, allowing ourselves to be

guided by the Holy Spirit;[8] with a supernatural outlook, with charity and truth, a sensitive conscience, and sound moral criteria. In short, as daughters and sons of God. "Heaven and earth seem to merge, my sons and daughters, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives."^[9]

The humble greatness of Christian life is rooted in the gift of filial adoption that God grants us through Christ's merits, in the call that he addresses to us to behave as his sons and daughters in everything, strengthened by grace. This way of acting is an immense focus of light in the midst of society—as long as we don't hide it by unsuitable actions. *You are the light of the world.*[10]

St. Josemaría's voice resonated with extraordinary determination on that morning back in October 1967: "No,

my children. There is no other way. Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find him."^[11] That same affectionate and fatherly voice continues to remind all Christians that we have the duty to show our fellow men and women the true face of Christ, lovable and merciful, to make our Lord known in and through our life. *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*^[12]

Seeking holiness in daily life

—"without fuss, with simplicity, with truthfulness"^[13]—is, as our own life has taught us, an immensely attractive ideal. But we fully understand its greatness, "the greatness of ordinary life,"^[14] only when our life is imbued each day with an apostolic spirit, with zeal for souls. "Sanctity in our ordinary tasks, sanctity in the little things we do,

sanctity in our professional work, in our daily cares... sanctity so that we may sanctify others."^[15]The firm foundation stones that God wants for the pathway of Opus Dei continue to be laid day by day throughout the whole world through our faith. For "without faith, we lack the very foundation for the sanctification of everyday life."^[16] With naturalness and daring, with humility and without fear, we need to put our freedom into practice. "You would not be able to carry out this program of sanctifying your everyday life if you did not enjoy all the freedom which proceeds from your dignity as men and women created in the image of God and which the Church freely recognizes."^[17]

A phrase from the homily that the Founder spoke with special force has become the title by which it is known: *Passionately Loving the World*. The actual words read as

follows: "I am a secular priest: a priest of Jesus Christ who is passionately in love with the world."^[18] When the homily first came from St. Josemaría's pen it did not have a title, nor did the copy that was given to those attending the ceremony, nor the first editions in Spanish. Only when it was translated and published in other languages (it came out in French and Italian that same year) did it receive, with our Father's approval, a title of its own. The Italian title (*Amare il mondo apassionatamente*), taken from the sentence mentioned above, was used in the editions and translations that followed. It was under this title, now definitive, that the homily was included in the book *Conversations*.

The love for the world that the homily refers to is not simply a natural love, as might spring up in someone who admired its harmony and beauty from a perspective

devoid of any religious feeling, or even from a vaguely religious attitude that admitted some reference to God. Rather, our Father is speaking here about *Christian love for the world*, contemplated not only as God's creation—from the viewpoint of faith—but as the "setting" for a personal encounter with Christ, as the place where Christians are called to seek sanctity. The world that our Father loved and taught others to love is lovable "because it has come from God's hands, because it is his creation, because *Yahweh looked upon it and saw that it was good* (cf. *Gen 1:7 ff.*)."^[19] In St. Josemaría's love for the world we see reflected St. John's sublime words: *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.*^[20] This is the world that St. Josemaría contemplated and loved with his priestly love: the world that, eternally loved by its Creator, has been redeemed and sanctified by

Christ through his life, death, and glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven.

St. Josemaría's passionate love for the world burns forever in a flame of love for Christ and his redeeming work. It is an apostolic love, a redeeming love, and therefore a love that is also priestly, involving mediation and self-sacrifice, sharing in the love for the world of the Eternal Priest, Christ our Lord. By virtue of the common priesthood of the faithful, one of the intrinsic dimensions of Christians' contact with the world—of their daily activities and relationships—is that of mediation. In souls that are open to grace, this stirs up the desire to bring all things to God, to direct them towards their final end, the glory of God. *"All things are yours, you are Christ's and Christ is God's (1 Cor 3:22-23).* We have here an ascending movement which the Holy Spirit,

infused in our hearts, wants to call forth from this world, upwards from the earth to the glory of the Lord."^[21] These words bring to mind those others in which our Father spoke of the "current" of Trinitarian love for mankind that is "made permanent in a sublime way through the Eucharist."^[22] The current of God's love that has descended on us and on all creation, perpetuated in the Sacrifice of the Altar, calls for the response of the ascending movement of our love for God and all created things—enkindled each day in the Eucharist—in order to bring all creation back to its Creator. This is a passionate ideal, as is the love that fosters and sustains it in us.

In all the immense panorama of work

"God is calling you to serve him *in and from* the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life. He

waits for us every day, in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all the immense panorama of work."^[23]The thousands of people who listened attentively to that homily on October 8, 1967, were a small representation of all of those who, since 1928 and until the end of time, will find light in his message of holiness. On the campus in Pamplona, the Founder of Opus Dei was addressing, as it were, a synthesis of *the immense panorama of the world of work*—the world of ordinary men and women in their daily lives. God in his mercy had brought forth for them this permanent source of light and Christian orientation that is the spirit of Opus Dei.

Look at the birds of the air... Consider the lilies of the field..., Jesus said to

those listening to his Sermon on the Mount, pointing to God's gracious presence among us, to his fatherly providence.[24] Through the warmth of the spirit of the Work, so many people have learned to give importance to the Christian significance of daily happenings. "Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it."[25] That *quid divinum*, that "something holy," which it is up to each of us to discover, while also helping others to discover it, is simply "the will of God in both the unimportant and the important events of life."[26] That is, it means discovering what gives transcendent value to them: what God is saying to us *in and through* them, what God's fatherly love—*in and through* them—expects of us.

"Light is shed upon many aspects of the world in which you live, when we start from these truths,"[27] St. Josemaría stressed in that homily of his. Above all, it is our own soul, our mind and conscience that is illuminated by these truths, our view of the world and its events that is purified and filled with new light. The world in which we live and act "as citizens in civil life,"[28] when viewed with the eyes of a son or daughter of God, reveals to us through its beauty the beauty of its Author, the greatness of Creative Love.

The world that God lovingly created and redeemed in Christ for us his children, this real world of daily happenings that has been entrusted to us so that we might sanctify it and place it at the feet of its Lord, awakens our" love, calls forth our work, urges on our apostolic zeal. It calls us, in short, "to seek holiness in

daily life" with generosity and daring, with an apostolic spirit, with determination: "A holy life in the midst of secular reality...Is this not today the most moving manifestation of the *magnalia Dei* (Sir 18:5), of those prodigious mercies which God has always worked, and does not cease to work, in order to save the world?"[29]

NOTES

1. Homily *Passionately Loving the World*, in *Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá*, nos. 113–123.
2. *Conversations*, no. 113.
3. *The Forge*, no. 934.
4. *Conversations*, no. 113.
5. *Letter* 24 March 1930, no. 2.
6. *Conversations*, no. 113.

7. Cf. *Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 13:5; Rom 8:10; Col 1:27; Eph 3:17*; etc.
8. Cf. *Rom 8:14*.
9. *Conversations*, no. 116.
10. *Mt 5:14*.
11. *Conversations*, no. 114.
12. *Mt 5:16*.
13. *Conversations*, no. 123.
14. Cf. *Friends of God*, nos. 1–22.
15. *Friends of God*, no. 18.
16. *Conversations*, no. 123.
17. *Conversations*, no. 117.
18. *Conversations*, no. 118.
19. *Conversations*, no. 114.
20. *Jn 3:16*.

21. *Conversations*, no. 115.

22. *Christ is Passing By*, no. 85.

23. *Conversations*, no. 114.

24. Cf. *Mt* 6:26-28.

25. *Conversations*, no. 114.

26. *Conversations*, no. 116.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Conversations*, no. 123.