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Cardinal O'Malley's Homily for Feast of Saint Josemaria

Complete text of the homily
given by Cardinal Seán
O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston,
for the feast of Saint Josemaría.

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*Homily of Cardinal Seán O'Malley,
Archbishop of Boston*

Feast of Saint Josemaría Escrivá

*Given on June 20, 2015, Cathedral of
the Holy Cross, Boston*

Good morning everyone. Welcome to the Cathedral of the Holy Cross. It's a great joy to have Rev. Richard Riemann and all our other brother priests and friends, members, and associates of Opus Dei with us today.

Today we gather anticipating the Feast Day of your Founder, St Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Albás, 40 years after his death. I was privileged to be at his beatification in 1992 and at his canonization in 2002.

And today we gather in memory of his life, his contribution, his witness, his charism, a gift to the whole Church.

His feast day is June 26 and this year that is the 40th anniversary of his death because for a saint we celebrate his birthday into eternal life.

Many years ago I was invited to a state dinner at the White House. On

this occasion the President of Brazil was being honored and the White House called the Bishops' Conference and said "Please send us a bishop who speaks Portuguese."

They were very surprised when an O'Malley showed up! And they put me at a table next to George Bush Senior who was the President at that moment and I recognized him immediately. On the other side was a lovely young lady who introduced herself as Gloria Estafan. I said to her, "Do you work in the White House?" She said "No, Father, I'm a famous singer!" I said "You obviously don't sing many Gregorian chants."

She was a very good sport about it, a lovely person, but she was very surprised that I had no idea who she was. Because we live in a culture that is addicted to entertainment and celebrities, who in some cases are simply famous for being famous.

And others pour all of their talents, their athletic prowess, their good looks into very chaotic and selfish lives.

This is why the church calls up the saints as models of a good life. And I remember as a child (I was raised in an Irish parish) that wherever you would go in the neighborhood, in every house there was a picture of the Little Flower and I'm so impressed by that because she was a saint that people could identify with. When I took possession of my titular church in Rome, Santa Maria della Vittoria, there's a very famous Bernini statue of St Teresa of Avila there which they say is one of the most beautiful statues in the world, and tourists who are part of the Angels and Demons tour stream into my church to visit this statue.

When I told the rector of that Church that I was going to bring the statue

back to Boston, he said "Napolean tried." But the most interesting thing about my church in Rome is it's the Church where the Little Flower went to pray and today the biggest celebration we have in that church is her feast day.

And I attribute a lot of this devotion to the Little Flower to the fact that we have photographs of her. And people could identify with her. So often the Saints seem so distant from us, so ethereal. John Paul II canonized and beatified so many because he wanted to underscore that holy lives are so important.

Actually, John Paul II canonized 483 saints, and beatified 1340. Even in my own life it's been my joy and privilege to have personally known Mother Teresa, Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, Archbishop Romero, and many others who are today Servants of God. I'm sure that many of you

present knew St. Josemaría, Blessed Alvaro Del Portillo, and Joseph Muzquiz. All of this makes holiness more real, more nourishing, more exciting, more accessible and less ethereal. We know them through their witness, their example, their friendship and by their intercession. Today's Gospel speaks to us about the Saints of ordinary life, the apostles who were fishermen.

Fishing is not an easy profession. They tell the story of an American who went fishing in the Lakes of Ireland. He went on one of those two-week fishing vacations. And for two weeks he caught nothing. On the last day of his vacation he caught this little fish and he turned to the Irish guide who was with him and said "This fish has cost me \$3000!" The Irishman said, "Well then thank God that you only caught one!"

I was born on the shores of Lake Erie where fishing was part of our life. In the winters we went ice fishing. It was great fun. But I remember very well from my years of work in Fall River that I presided over the funerals of many fishermen who were lost at sea.

The government classifies fishing as the most dangerous job in the United States. It's always a difficult job, precarious economically and physically.

St Peter braved many a storm in the Sea of Galilee. And many nights he toiled all night and caught nothing. Being a fisherman in the Sea of Galilee was difficult, but being a fisher of men proved to be much more difficult, even fatal: it cost Peter his life, crucified on Vatican Hill.

In today's Gospel Luke describes Jesus who goes into the world of

work to call his first disciples. There, on the shore, a huge crowd had gathered to listen to the word of God. Jesus commands that Simon's boat become the place where he sits and preaches to the crowd. The Barque of Peter, the image of the Church, becomes Jesus' improvised focus. Jesus tells Peter, "Put out into the deep and lay your nets for a catch."

Peter answered, "We have labored all night long and caught nothing," a very sad commentary for a fisherman. I always say that St Peter was a lousy fisherman as he never seemed to catch anything unless Jesus was right there saying "Throw the net here, right now..." But Peter's response was beautiful. He could have said "Listen! I'm a fisherman and you're a carpenter. There are no fish to be gotten here." But with humility, Peter says, "At thy word we will cast our nets again."

Peter's obedience resulted in a huge catch that begins to tear the nets. They filled the boats to the sinking point. This is a temptation. The fisherman often fill their boats as they drift further and further from shore, and find it difficult to return to port. They are at great peril.

But Peter's boats were close to shore, so they filled them to the brim, imaging how much they would get for their great catch. But Peter is oblivious to what is happening, and he throws himself at Jesus' feet and says "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." But Jesus doesn't depart from Peter, but rather stays with him from then on. The Lord's words to Peter echo through the ages and are repeated over and over again: "Do not be afraid. From now on you will be a fisher of men." And Peter left everything and followed Jesus.

St Josemaría often reflected on this Gospel. Like Peter, Josemaría left everything, casting aside fear and followed God's plan. The vocation of the saints changed the course of history. At the Annunciation, God is knocking on the door of humanity. And Mary, in our name, opens that door and allows God to enter our history. Mother Theresa used to always say "Give God permission." That's what the saints do. And in so doing they bring down blessings for the entire Church to be given to all humanity.

St Josemaría's vocation came during a very dark period of history. And his ministry flourished in that terrible civil war that claimed millions of victims. I was delighted that the film *There be Dragons* presented the challenging historical circumstances that surrounded the emergence of the great vocation that showered millions of lives with the grace and

the joy of the Gospel. The world flourishes when we say yes to God and give God permission to change history.

Each of the saints received graces and insights that enrich their own personal lives and at times comes of great benefit to huge numbers of people who share in the saint's charism. The 20th century gave rise to Marxism with its theories of work, alienation and production. St Josemaria gives us a theology of work that comes from his insights into the scriptures and the inspiration of grace. He saw that the world is good. The world is God's creation, and the fruit of his love, as the Holy Father in his latest encyclical underscores.

God so loved the world that he sent Christ into the world to be his merciful face, and to teach us how to love. God has entrusted to us his

children the garden to cultivate and to take care of. Our work is a participation in God's creative love. God left the world unfinished, so that we can be part of the enterprise. Devout Jews speak of the "care of the world." Josemaria understood that the path to sanctity goes through the world of work: the kitchen, the carpenter shop, the nets of the Sea of Galilee. When we perform our work with faith, when our food is to do the will of Him who sent us, then our very work becomes a reconsecration of the work of creation to our heavenly father. Sin made work burdensome. We earned our bread by the sweat of our brow. And thistles and thorns spring up in our fields. But beyond the penitential aspects of our labor is the participation in creation, the solidarity with our brothers and sisters as we repair the world and fill the civilization with love. In *The Way* St Josemaria tells us that it is useless

to diffuse ourselves in so many external works if we lack love. It's like sewing with a needle and no thread. (I love that metaphor!) The Saint's vision attracted so many young people and one of those young men was Fr. Joseph Muzquiz, one of the first three priests ordained in Opus Dei. St Josemaría sent Fr. Joseph (as he came to be known in the United States) along with my dear friend Fr. Sal. It was my joy and privilege to open the cause of Fr. Joseph's canonization.

The second lesson for the Feast of St Josemaria is taken from Paul's letter to the Romans, and it tells us that we who have been moved by the Spirit are children of God. That Spirit makes us cry out "Abba, Father!" This phrase is very significant. It's one of those phrases in the Gospel that scholars refer to as "the very words of Jesus." It's not a translation into the Greek, but rather the very

Aramaic word that Jesus announced when he prayed to his Father. It's a word filled with affection, intimacy, informality, like a child talking to his Dad. For to Jesus, every day is Fathers Day.

This is another very important theme in the spirituality of St Josemaria. One of the chapters of *The Way* is called "Spiritual Childhood" followed by the chapter entitled "Life of Childhood." Like St Therese, St Josemaria hears Jesus' calm word, trusting in God's tender love, aware of how much God loves us, not because we deserve his love, but because we are his children.

Today we thank God for the gift of St Josemaría's life and vocation, a gift to the Church. As the opening prayer of this feast day Mass reminds us, God raised up his priest Josemaría in the Church to proclaim the universal call to holiness and the call to the

apostolate. I am so grateful to all of you, the members of the Work for embracing this spirituality and sense of mission. Your fidelity to the interior life, reception of the sacraments, spiritual direction, acts of mortification, as well as your study and reflection prepare you to help in the great task of the new evangelization.

A few years ago I was invited to the Chestnut Hill residence where a number of young couples had been assembled to share with me some of the marvelous activities they're involved in here in the Archdiocese. The first young man to speak said, "Cardinal, do you know much about Opus Dei?" I agreed enthusiastically "Of course I do. I read the *Da Vinci Code*!" But you know I really did not need to read the *Da Vinci Code* as I've had so many dear friends over 40 years who are members of Opus Dei. For 14 years at the Cathedral in

Washington I heard confessions every Saturday with a priest whom I greatly admired, Fr. Bradley Arturi. And I had great friends at the Heights, in Boston, Honduras, Chicago and in so many places around the world. I've had wonderful friends in Opus Dei who live lives of faith and commitment to the mission of the Church that have both edified and inspired me.

The wonderful film about St Josemaria takes its name *There be Dragons* from the practice of medieval cartographers to write *There are dragons* in the uncertain parts of the map. If one such cartographer were making a map today, he might write that label on our country as we struggle with issues of religious liberty, and the rising culture of death. I often say being a Catholic in Massachusetts is a contact sport.

I know that I can count on all the members of Opus Dei to work with us to evangelize our world, to be that “field hospital” that Pope Francis is always talking about.

I pray that God will continue to bless your work. You are a blessing on our Church.

Happy feast day!

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