

February 14 in the Prelature of Opus Dei

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Opus Dei was born on October 2, 1928, when God gave young Fr. Josemaria Escriva a glimpse of the institution which he was to found within the Church. Opus Dei (Latin for "Work of God") would be dedicated to helping people in every situation find the fullness of Christian life in their daily affairs. Opus Dei would help Christians in the world be "leaven in the dough," as Jesus had taught; it would be a way for people in every profession to find Christian purpose in the whole of their lives. From the moment this mission became clear to him, Fr. Escriva set about wholeheartedly to bring it to fruition.

Fr. Escriva had not initially seen that Opus Dei would work with women as well as men. About a year later, while he was celebrating Mass on February 14, 1930, it became clear to him that Opus Dei's universality must be reflected not only by embracing people in every sort of profession, but also by including women in its apostolic work. The apostolic work with men and women would be done separately, however, in recognition of the different pastoral needs they have.

All along, it had been clear to Fr. Escriva that Opus Dei needed priests who shared the secular mentality he was promoting among laypersons, but the canonical method of accomplishing this was not immediately apparent. On February 14, 1943, again during Mass just like thirteen years before, God showed him the outline of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, which would be an

intrinsic part of Opus Dei. Laymen in Opus Dei would be ordained and incardinated in the Priestly Society, and would not be tied to any particular diocese. Later, the Priestly Society would also include diocesan priests, who would strive to attain holiness in carrying out their priestly duties, while remaining incardinated in their own dioceses.

February 14 celebrates a unique contribution that Fr. Escriva made to the Church: the pastoral and sociological innovation of having men and women, laypeople and priests, all fully incorporated in one institution within the Church. Initially, the newness of this contribution caused misunderstanding in some quarters. But then Vatican Council II made provision for personal prelatures – jurisdictional entities within the Church's hierarchical structure which are defined by specific

personal pastoral purposes rather than geography, as in the case of a diocese or parish – and Opus Dei became the Church's first personal prelature in 1982. The full name of the prelature is the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei.

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