

Saint Josemaria's First Holy Communion

Saint Josemaria's First Holy Communion took place on 23 April 1912, the feast of Saint George, patron saint of Aragon and Catalonia, and the traditional day for First Communion ceremonies.

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Saint Josemaria made his First Communion on April 23, 1912, exactly ten years after his

Confirmation. It was the feast of Saint George, patron saint of Aragon and Catalonia, and the traditional day for the First Communion ceremonies in the church of the Piarists' school. At the moment of Communion, Josemaría prayed for his parents and sisters and asked Jesus for the grace of never letting him lose Him.

He would always observe with unabashed fervor the anniversaries of that wonderful day on which our Lord, as he put it, "chose to come and take possession of my heart." [1]

In Spain, as in many other countries, children had not, as a rule, been making their First Communion before the age of twelve or thirteen. By a decree issued in 1910 by Pope Saint Pius X, the age requirement was lowered to when the use of reason is acquired, "which is at about the age of seven." [2] The timing of

this ruling coincided with preparations for the International Eucharistic Congress to be celebrated in Madrid in June 1911. An intense catechetical effort was launched in all the parishes of Spain, so that the greatest possible number of children could receive Holy Communion.

A Piarist priest named Manuel Laborda de la Virgin del Carmen, or “Padre Manole,” as he was affectionately called by his students, prepared Josemaría for his First Communion. Some time before the long-awaited day arrived, he taught the boy a prayer to use to keep his hunger for the Eucharist ever alive: “I wish, my Lord, to receive you with the purity, humility, and devotion with which your most holy Mother received you; with the spirit and fervor of the saints.”[3] From that time on, Josemaría recited this prayer very often.

On the evening before the appointed day a hairdresser was called in to give him a nice, elegant look; but while gathering up some hair to make a curl, he burned the boy's scalp with the hot curling iron.

Josemaría suffered it in silence, to avoid the hairdresser being taken to task or anyone getting upset. His mother did eventually find out about it, but only much later, when she discovered the scar left by the burn.

[4]

Thereafter he would find that on his special days, our Lord would announce his presence with a touch of pain or a twinge that felt sweet, "like a caress."^[5]

Excerpts from *The Founder of Opus Dei. The Life of Josemaría Escrivá*. Volume I, by Andrés Vazquez de Prada. New York: Scepter Publishers.

Notes

[1] See Alvaro del Portillo, Sum. 42; see also AGP, P011969, p. 116. Here are some entries from his personal journal:

"April 23, 1931: Saint George. It is nineteen years ago that I made my First Communion" (no. 194).

"Feast of Saint George, 1932: Today it is twenty years since I received Holy Communion for the first time. Saint George, pray for me" (no. 707).

"Vigil of Saint Mark, 1933: Yesterday it was twenty-one years since my First Communion. My God!" (no. 989).

"April 30, 1936: In Valencia, on the feast of Saint George, the anniversary of my First Communion, I acted like a drone. Or, rather, like a perfect donkey, braying, and even.... I can honestly say that I don't know how to pray well even one Hail Mary.

Mother, Mama in heaven!" (no. 1332).

[2] (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, II, no.15, p. 582).

[3] See Alvaro del Portillo, Sum. 42. Also relevant is this excerpt from Javier Echevarria, Sum. 1778: "He always remembered with a special affection the old Piarist who taught him the prayer for making a spiritual communion. From back when he was a boy, from when he was preparing for First Communion, he constantly repeated that formula. I heard him preach many meditations in which he used that prayer, repeating it word for word. He said that it filled his soul with peace and serenity, even in moments of dryness or scruples, to see himself, so poor and so loaded down with miseries, faced with this marvel of a God who unreservedly gives himself to us."

See also Jesus Alvarez Gazapo, Sum. 4278.

For more about Father Manuel Laborda, see AGP, RHF, 0-04311-7. Born in Borja (Saragossa) in 1848, Father Laborda was sixty-four at the time of Josemaría's First Communion. He was a teacher of religion, history, Latin, and handwriting; he was the one who recorded data about his students in notebooks, some of which have been preserved. He died in Barbastro in 1929.

[4] See Alvaro del Portillo, Sum. 18; Javier Echevarria, Sum. 1781; and Encarnacion Ortega, AGP, RHF, T-05074, pp. 45 and 140.

[5] On March 28, 1950, his silver jubilee as a priest, he said to some of his daughters, "Today has been a totally happy day--something I hardly ever get for the big dates in my life. On such days our Lord has

almost always chosen to send me some kind of mishap. Even on the day of my First Communion, when they were getting me ready, fixing up my hair, trying to make it curly, they burned me with the curling iron. It wasn't anything serious, but for a child of that age it was something."

See Encarnacion Ortega, AGP, RHF, T-05074, pp. 45 and 140.

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