

"Show us you are a mother!"

December 12 is the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. An account of Saint Josemaria's pilgrimage to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, in May 1970, where he was accompanied by Msgr. Javier Echevarria and Blessed Alvaro del Portillo.

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On May 1, 1970, Saint Josemaria announced his desire to cross the Atlantic and prostrate himself at the feet of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Recalling the circumstances of that outburst of filial love for our Lady, Bishop Javier Echevarria, who went with him, wrote 25 years later, “I would go so far as to say – in fact I heard him say so himself several times – that it was our Lady who obliged him to undertake that penitential pilgrimage, because she wanted him to pray for her intercession for the good of the world, the Church, and that little portion of the Church which is Opus Dei, there at the feet of the *Virgen Morena*.”

Early in the morning on May 15, 1970, Saint Josemaria arrived in Mexico City. “I’ve come to see Our Lady of Guadalupe – and, by the way, to see you too,” he told his children in Opus Dei there as soon as they met. The next day, May 16, even before he had fully adapted to the change of altitude and time difference, he went to the Basilica

and began his novena. He continued it until May 24.

On the first day he stayed on his knees in the sanctuary for over an hour and a half. His eyes fixed on the picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe, he addressed a very intense prayer to our Heavenly Mother, telling her with total trust, *“Monstra te esse Matrem!* Show that you’re a Mother! If a little child asked his mother that, there isn’t a single mother who wouldn’t be moved. Hear us: I know you will!” On the following days he was able to go up to a little balcony, where he was very close to the picture itself and could pray without attracting attention....

The final day of the novena, May 24, 1970, was a Sunday. Saint Josemaria arrived at the Villa, the Basilica of Guadalupe, at 16:40 in the afternoon. Before going up to the balcony he went first, as was his custom, to

make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

In the balcony Saint Josemaria began speaking to our Lady aloud, taking up the thread of the “get-togethers,” as he called them, that he’d been having with Our Lady of Guadalupe over the past nine days.

“I don’t have words to express my great joy at being here with you, Mary. My children [addressing some of his sons who were accompanying him], I call you to witness before God that I want to tell the one who is our Mother, whose children we are proud to be, that I have come here because, more than ever during these months, I want to beg her not to abandon the Church, and not to abandon us. I know she won’t ever leave us, but I am begging her to cut short the time of trial, the storm that is afflicting the barque of Peter. And I am appealing very especially,

constantly, to her intercession, because I trust her with all the strength of my soul.

"Through our Lady's hands, through the one who is all-powerful in her supplication, I also need to say to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, that I place myself before the Blessed Trinity in total submission, in unreserved self-surrender; and I repeat, in a sincere prayer, the acceptance of God's Will that she showed with her '*Fiat – be it done!*' My Lady, I surrender myself, I surrender myself totally: I'm not asking for anything any more! I love your Son's Will! We abandon ourselves, we love and accept his plan, obeying God's Will in full.

"We know, Mother of ours, that you will give us the means to take forward this path of charity and love, and to spread it throughout the world.

"We have had these 'get-togethers' so close to your picture: nine days of intense, filial conversation with you! And today, once again, with ever-growing love and trust, we want to present to you the Church; and so we want to present to you these sons and daughters of yours in Opus Dei, who want nothing for themselves, who don't nourish any ambition for themselves. Look at each of us, Mary my Mother! Look at me – although I am well convinced that I don't deserve the slightest glance from you. But *ne respicias peccata mea, sed fidem eorum!* Don't look at my failings, which are so numerous, and for which I'm sorry and ashamed and beg for forgiveness. Look at my sons, look at my daughters; look how they love you with the perennial fire of their dedication, which holds no human motives.

"We are not pursuing any human goal in our self-giving! We have

surrendered ourselves because your Son was the one who asked us to. Most Holy Virgin, protect the Church, save the Church! And from now on I won't make any suggestions. Up till now I have been telling you things boldly, but always with my head bowed, because I am a dirty rag, although I think I have always tried to act out of love for the Wisdom and Will of the Blessed Trinity."

Saint Josemaria continued his prayer aloud for a long time, with acts of love for God and abandonment to God's Will, acts of thanksgiving and acts of atonement, and burning petitions. Then he began to pray the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary with the other people there, slowly, savouring the scenes and words.

Before beginning the glorious mysteries, he said: "We will offer the first mystery for the peace and tranquility of Europe, the continent

in which many countries are under Communism. I don't want there to be wars, and that is what I beg of you, Mother of ours, Queen of Heaven and earth. I don't want there to be wars, because war is the worst scourge God can permit. In Europe there is a need for peace: peace to be able to love God freely. Our Lady, I persist in begging you for the peace of Christ for all nations."

At the end of the first mystery, Saint Josemaria said aloud: "We will offer the second mystery to Our Lady of Guadalupe, praying with very great faith and very great hope that she will bring freedom and the peace of Christ to the peoples of Asia.

"There comes to my mind the great nation of China – great for so many reasons. I pray that the seed that so many men and women have sown, and the blood and sufferings of many people, may bear fruit again very

soon. We ought to love the Chinese people and all the peoples of Asia, and ask the Mother of God to bring them all into the light and peace of her Son."

The third mystery of the Rosary was offered for Africa. "My children: now Africa. Let's pray to Our Lady to grant peace and Christian freedom to Africa. Look at how that continent is a very powerful charge of vitality. We should feel very deeply the need for those brethren of ours to know Christ and love him."

At the end of the third mystery, Saint Josemaria said: "We will offer the next decade of the Holy Rosary that our Lady, our Mother of Guadalupe, may obtain peace for the peoples of the American continent, which many people are trying to turn instead into a nest of constant revolution.

"Here before your picture I want to leave a sort of testament to my

children in Mexico: with your intercession they are obliged to take your Son's divine seed, to work with love for God and for love of God, from the north, the very north of this continent to Tierra del Fuego."

Finally, he came to the fifth glorious mystery: "This last mystery, we will offer for the peoples of Oceania – Australasia – where there are so few Catholics, so very few clergy, and so many islands! We feel the need to come to their help, because we are interested in the souls of everyone in the world, and because there are not enough people to care for them. We aren't put off by this desolation. The apostolic and human work to be done is certainly huge, but we have God's imperative command and the intercession of Our Lady, Queen of Victories.

"We appeal to our Lady's protection, because we can feel secure in the

knowledge that each of us in our own state – priest, lay-person, single, married, widowed – if we faithfully fulfil our daily duties, will achieve victory on earth, the victory of staying loyal to our Lord; and we will get to Heaven afterwards and rejoice forever in the friendship and love of God, with our Lady, Holy Mary.”

The novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe was nearing its end. It was half-past six in the evening. The Founder of Opus Dei said: “My children, before we say the three Hail Marys invoking her as Daughter, Mother and Spouse of God, and before going on to the litany, I want to thank my Blessed Mother in Heaven from the bottom of my heart for the immense happiness of these hours of family conversation we have spent in her company, so close to her picture. And I want to tell her that I find it hard to tear myself away. These days have been so

human and so supernatural! What's more, we end today by saying '*Fiat!* Be it done!' with total abandonment, because you don't abandon your children.

"Repeat with me, each deep in your hearts, with joy and peace: 'May the most just and most loveable Will of God be done, be fulfilled, be praised and eternally exalted above all things for ever and ever. Amen. Amen.'

"Our Lady of Guadalupe, Seat of Wisdom, our Hope, pray for us!"

As he went down the steps, visibly content, he said, "I'm so happy! In the end we didn't pray for anything, we just said to her in all confidence, '*Fiat!* Let it be done!' She will sort everything out. I am sure that it is already sorted out, right now."

The day before Saint Josemaria went back to Rome, he had a get-together with a group of his sons in Opus Dei.

One of them started to play a guitar, announcing: “Father, this is an old pop song. Some people say it’s too sentimental, but I like it. It starts off rather slow:

‘I want to sing you my sweetest song, for you are my love, the Queen of my heart...’”

Saint Josemaria stood up suddenly, saying: “Let’s go to the *Villa* and sing that to our Lady, to serenade her!”

The consent was unanimous, and by 8.30 that evening they were all in the Basilica of Guadalupe.

Half an hour before, pilgrims had begun to end their visits. But instead of remaining in shadowy silence, the Basilica was now filled with an enthusiastic group of his daughters and sons and friends of theirs. The Mariachi singers arrived with their guitars, and took their places. The Basilica was packed.

Saint Josemaria came in and the church-wardens closed the doors. Once again, as on the day of his arrival, he knelt down before the picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe. He intoned a *Salve*, and the singing was taken up by his daughters and sons, all singing together in a spontaneous farewell. Then the guitars broke the silence, and the voices rose in song: “Yours is my heart, my sunshine, my love,” as they sang *La Morenita*. It was a deeply moving moment, giving expression to the very soul of Mexico.

During his stay in Mexico he had been shown a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe giving a flower to Juan Diego. On seeing it Saint Josemaria had expressed a petition: “That’s how I’d like to die: looking at the Blessed Virgin, and with her giving me a flower...” And after a little silence, he repeated: “Yes, I’d like to die in front

of this picture, with our Lady giving me a rose.”

Generally speaking, Mexican Indians are reserved and silent. They may be deeply interested in a conversation but still refrain from taking part.

When they were with Saint Josemaria, however, their behavior changed: the Mexican Indians from the Amilpas Valley talked and laughed with him, revealing the simplicity and affection of their hearts.

Saint Josemaria, because he understood the language of their hearts, made his own their human and social problems, arising from the extreme poverty of rural workers. He examined the housing projects that aimed to provide decent homes for them around Montefalco; he asked in detail about the education and training they were receiving in the

technical training school there, which was being provided at the cost of huge efforts by many people; he opened his arms and his heart to the families of the trainees at training centres run by people of Opus Dei around Mexico City.

He told some of them: “We are concerned to see you improve, and escape from this situation, so that you don’t have such great money problems. We are also going to make sure that your children can get a proper education. Between all of us, we can do it, and you’ll see how some of them, the ones who are talented and want to study, will go very far. And how will we do this? Like we’re doing you a favour? No! I told you before: we’re all equal.”

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