

Bishop Javier Echevarría introduces the new edition of The Way by Doubleday

We offer some excerpts from the Introduction written by the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, to the new edition of THE WAY by Doubleday, released to bookstores on May 9.

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We can see clearly both how St. Josemaría viewed the Christian's life — as a journey in search of union with Jesus Christ — and why he not only gave away spiritual books but also wrote *The Way*: he wrote it to inspire others to seek Christ and to help them find Him.

In the author's foreword to *The Way*, he wrote, «I won't be telling you anything new.» And yet there is something revolutionary about St. Josemaría's message; as he himself liked to remark, what he had to say was «as old as the Gospel... and as new.» Its originality, however, must be sought not so much in the text itself as in the striking combination of text and audience (...)

The originality of St. Josemaría and the spirit of Opus Dei, which he founded in 1928, lie precisely in this combination of an ancient message — the call to heroic Christian

holiness — and a new lay audience embracing it in the hustle and bustle of the workaday world. Between the lines of the book, we can discern a new culture of sanctity taking shape, a new breed of Christians striving to be apostles and saints in the middle of the modern world.

That is the essence of St. Josemaría's teaching: this seeking, finding and loving Christ...needs to take place in the context of everyday life. We are to look for Christ and find Him and love Him in ordinary daily life and work.

In his 1967 homily "Passionately Loving the World," St. Josemaría would sum up his message in this way: «Everyday life is the true setting for your lives as Christians. Your daily encounter with Christ takes place where your fellow men, your yearnings, your work and your affections are.... God is calling you to

serve him *in and from* the ordinary, secular and civil activities of human life. He waits for us everyday, 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. 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. ... There is no other way, my daughters and sons: either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or we shall never find him.»

St. Josemaría was aware that what he was saying could have a profound impact on many souls. Eight years before the publication of *The Way*, St. Josemaría had written, «I would like to write books of fire, which would run like wild-fire throughout the world.» The reader, however, who

opens *The Way* expecting a «book of fire» may well be surprised, for it is not a dramatic manifesto or a rhetorical tour-de-force designed to bring the masses to their feet. On the contrary, the author's own foreword sets a very subdued tone: «Meditate on these considerations slowly. They are things that I whisper in your ear, confiding in you as a friend, a brother, a father.» Clearly, if *The Way* is, in some sense, a call to arms, it is above all a call to the quiet hidden battles of contemplative prayer and daily work.

At the same time, there is no mistaking the infectious passion behind this unassuming book, a passion for God and an apostolic passion for souls. Its powerful language is an important source of its appeal. St. Josemaría's style is both familiar — it is full of echoes of both the New Testament and of classical spiritual authors — and

fresh, at times even colorful and colloquial. The tone is personal, pithy and intimate. The author cuts straight to the chase:

«Don't let your life be sterile. Be useful. Blaze a trail. Shine forth with the light of your faith and of your love.

With your apostolic life wipe out the slimy and filthy mark left by the impure sowers of hatred. And light up all the ways of the earth with the fire of Christ that you carry in your heart.» (n. 1)

(...) Without question, this book is meant to be a challenge, a reminder of the practical consequences of every Christian's high calling, received at baptism, to be both a saint and an apostle. It is written, says the author in his foreword, «so that some thought may come to you that will strike you: and that way you will improve your life.»

Above all, however, *The Way* is meant to inspire the reader to speak directly to God; it is a springboard for personal prayer — that dialogue in which Christ is sought, found and loved. This is why St. Josemaría reminds us that reader and author are not alone: «our confidential conversation is being listened to by God.» In the loving, fatherly presence of God, the experience of reading gives way, quite naturally, to prayer.

One of the marks of a spiritual classic is its ability to transcend the time and place in which it was written, and now, sixty-seven years after their original publication, we can see that St. Josemaría's quiet words of fire have truly circled the globe. From 1930s Spain to third-millennium Manhattan is a long distance, but the book has made the journey without apparent difficulty.

Along the way, it has changed countless lives. For many, reading *The Way* has marked, as its author intended, the beginning of a lifelong conversation with God. For others...it has been the first step toward their divine vocation in the middle of the world. For others it has become a lifelong companion, to be read and reread — a bedtable favorite.

Its powerful impact has not been restricted to particular countries, languages, cultures or classes: the professor in Berlin, the housewife in the Philippines, the businessman in Lagos, the ballerina in Boston, a priest in the mountains of Peru, the farmer in Dubuque... all find something in the words of a young Spanish priest from the foothills of the Pyrenees that speaks to them across the growing gulf of years and cultures. Surprisingly, by speaking sincerely to himself and the particular people around him in the

1930s, St. Josemaría Escrivá continues speaking to us all.

Perhaps, in *The Way*, we are hearing the voice of a friend we all can recognize: the voice, as the author puts it, of «a friend, a brother, a father» — the voice, we might now add, of a saint. For our friend and father from the 1930s is now a saint in heaven; these confidences whispered in our ear are being whispered by a man whom Pope John Paul II, at the ceremony of his canonization in 2002, hailed as "the saint of the ordinary."

St. Josemaría loved to speak in terms of roads and paths and journeys, perhaps because, as he once wrote, echoing Jesus's words in St. John's Gospel, «For us to reach God, Christ is the way» (*The Way of the Cross*, X). Indeed, in the end, there is only one way: Jesus Christ — the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Yet this one Way

can take an infinite number of shapes, as vast as the number of men and women in history (...)

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