

“Aprite le finestre”: the soundtrack Saint Josemaría wanted for his farewell from this world

The song “Aprite le finestre” was the piece with which singer Franca Raimondi won the popular Sanremo Music Festival in 1956, Italy’s most important musical competition. St. Josemaría liked it and saw it as a simple and radiant expression of Christian hope in eternal life. He told those around him that he would like it to be sung at the moment of his death.

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In 1966, during a get-together at Villa Tevere, some of those living with St Josemaría sang *Aprite le finestre*, a song then popular in Italy.^[1] The founder told them he would like it to be sung in his final moments on earth, joyfully, after he received the last sacraments.

The song celebrates the joy of springtime, when flowers begin to bloom again, birds return from migration, and the sun streams through open windows, filling homes with light. Its lyrics invite listeners to open themselves to new dreams and to a life that begins afresh.

*La prima rosa
rossa è già
sbucciata*

The first red rose
has already
bloomed

E nascon timide
le viole mammole

And the shy
violets hide

Ormai, la prima
rondine è tornata

Now, the first
swallow has
returned

Nel cielo limpido
comincia a
volteggiar

In the clear sky, it
begins to flutter

Il tempo bello
viene ad
annunciar

The beautiful
weather comes to
announce

*Aprite le finestre
al nuovo sole*

Open the
windows to the
new sun

È primavera, è
primavera

It's spring, it's
spring

St Josemaría enjoyed singing, and often repeated a phrase from St Augustine: “He who sings, prays twice.” He also used to say that he liked “all the songs about pure holy

love, for in them I find, interwoven, both human and divine love.”^[2] It is not surprising, therefore, that he saw more than a mere description of the season in this song. Asking for it to be sung at the end of his life, made it clear he saw it as a metaphor for the passage to eternal life: death not as an end, but as a peaceful, radiant awakening. For him, ‘opening the windows’ meant opening the soul — as he had done throughout his life — to the Love of loves, to the definitive encounter with God, “for ever, for ever... for ever” (*The Way*, no. 182).

The sun, which Church tradition sees as a symbol of Jesus Christ, offers itself gently to each person, and enters in when we freely open the door or the windows of our lives.

At times, St. Josemaría would talk about that definitive encounter with God: “It moves me deeply to think of the moment — whenever God wills

— when I will be able to see Him, not as in a mirror, nor through obscure images... but face to face.”^[3] He never described that moment as something jarring, because “we are always seeking God, hoping for Him. If we were to die suddenly, it would be as if the Lord had surprised us from behind, and, turning round, we found ourselves in his arms...”^[4]

Afraid neither of life nor of death: that is how he tried to live each day, because, as he used to say, “we don’t know when the final battle will come, because we could die at any moment... But don’t be afraid: beyond death there is Life and Love.”^[5]

<i>Sul davanzale un piccolo usignolo</i>	On the windowsill, a little nightingale
Dall’ali tenere, le piume morbide	

	With tender wings, soft feathers
Ha già spiccato il timido suo volo	Has already taken its timid flight
E contro i vetri ha cominciato a picchiettar	And it has started to tap against the glass
Il suo più bel messaggio vuol portar:	It wants to bring its beautiful message:
<i>È primavera, è primavera</i>	It's spring, it's spring
Aprite le finestre ai nuovi sogni	Open the windows to new dreams

Might that symbol of people in love — the nightingale on the windowsill, tapping on the glass — not also be interpreted as grace, Love Himself,

coming to prepare the soul for its long-awaited encounter? Then, for the last time, the soul will open the window to the most beautiful of dreams: eternal life.

*Aprite le finestre
ai nuovi sogni*

Open the windows
to new dreams

*Alle speranze,
all'illusione*

To hopes, to
excitement

Lasciate entrare
l'ultima canzone

Let in the last song

Che dolcemente
scenderà nel
cuor

Which will
descend gently
into the heart

On 26 June 1975, Josemaría Escrivá died suddenly of a heart attack. Another of his wishes was fulfilled: he had asked God for the grace to die “without being a nuisance,” so as not

to be a “burden” to his sons and daughters in Opus Dei.

“That day will come for us. It will be our last day, but we're not afraid of it. Trusting firmly in God's grace, we are ready from this very moment to be generous and courageous, and take loving care of little things: we are ready to go and meet our Lord” (*Friends of God*, no. 242).

“In the sky, amid silver clouds, the moon has already set a date.” Our Lady, like the moon that reflects the light of the sun, reflects the image of God and guides Christians through moments of darkness. She accompanied St. Josemaría from his earliest years, and she was with him at the end of his life, too. In his last moments on earth, he fixed his gaze on an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, confident that she was accompanying him in that final step toward heaven. Five years earlier,

while looking at a picture in Jaltepec of Our Lady of Guadalupe giving a rose to Juan Diego, he had said aloud: “That is how I would like to die: looking at the Blessed Virgin and receiving a flower from her...”^[6]—

You might enjoy this playlist of songs Saint Josemaría liked:

One of the biographies of the founder recounts a family story from that day.^[7] Severino Monzó, who was spending a few days in a house near the shrine of Torreciudad, received the news of St Josemaría’s passing and remembered something the founder had said to him a decade earlier in Rome about that song: “You will sing it for me... without tears.”

He went over to the record player in the sitting room and put on “Aprite le finestre.” He began to sing it, hoping to fulfil the Father’s wish. He tried to hold back his emotions, but wasn’t quite able to fulfil that second part. At one point, his voice broke and he had to stop. He gathered himself and sang it through to the end. The lyrics of the full song are as follows:

Italian

English

*La prima rosa
rossa è già
sbocciata*

The first red rose
has already
bloomed

E nascon timide le viole mammole

And the shy violets hide

Ormai, la prima rondine è tornata

Now, the first swallow has returned

Nel cielo limpido
comincia a
volteggiar

In the clear sky,
it begins to
flutter

Il tempo bello
viene ad
annunciar

The beautiful
weather comes
to announce

*Aprite le finestre al
nuovo sole*

Open the
windows to the
new sun

È primavera, è
primavera

It's spring, it's
spring

*Lasciate entrare
un poco d'aria
pura*

Let in a bit of
fresh air

Con il profumo dei
giardini e i prati in
fior

With the scent of
gardens and
blooming
meadows

*Aprite le finestre
ai nuovi sogni*

Open the
windows to new
dreams

Bambine belle

Innamorate	Beautiful girls
<i>È forse il più bel sogno che sognate</i>	In love
Sarà domani la felicità	It may be the most beautiful dream you dream
[Ritornello]	
Nel cielo fra le nuvole d'argento	Happiness will come tomorrow
La luna ha già fissato appuntamento	[Chorus]
Aprite le finestre al nuovo sole	In the sky among the silver clouds
È primavera	The moon has already set a date
Festa dell'amor	Open the windows to the new sun
<i>La, la, la...</i>	
Aprite le finestre al nuovo sole	It's spring, the feast of love

<i>Sul davanzale un piccolo usignolo</i>	La, la, la...
Dall'ali tenere, le piume morbide	Open the windows to the new sun
Ha già spiccato il timido suo volo	On the windowsill, a little nightingale
E contro i vetri ha cominciato a picchiettar	With tender wings, soft feathers
Il suo più bel messaggio vuol portar:	Has already taken its timid flight
<i>È primavera, è primavera</i>	And it has started to tap against the glass
Aprite le finestre ai nuovi sogni	It wants to bring its beautiful message:
<i>Alle speranze, all'illusione</i>	

Lasciate entrare
l'ultima canzone
Che dolcemente
scenderà nel cuor
*Nel cielo fra le
nuvole d'argento*
La luna ha già
fissato
appuntamento
Aprite le finestre
al nuovo sole
È primavera, festa
dell'amor
La, la, la...
Aprite le finestra
al primo amor

It's spring, it's
spring
Open the
windows to new
dreams
To hopes, to
excitement
Let in the last
song
Which will
descend gently
into the heart
In the sky among
the silver clouds
The moon has
already set a
date
Open the
windows to the
new sun

It's spring, the
feast of love

La, la, la...

Open the
window to first
love

^[1] Celaya I., in *Recuerdos de san Josemaría.*

^[2] *Conversations*, no. 92.

^[3] Sastre A., *Tiempo de caminar*,
chapter XII.

^[4] Cfr. Testimony of Encarnación
Ortega Pardo, RHF 5074.

^[5] Ibid.

^[6] Cejas J.M., *Cara y Cruz: Josemaría Escrivá*, chapter XXVI.

^[7] Urbano P., *The Man of Villa Tevere*, chapter XIX.

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