

# **Saint Josemaría: at the service of a gift received in the Church**

An article by Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Prelate of Opus Dei, published today in the German weekly “Die Tagespost.”

06/26/2025

Fifty years have gone by since the death of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei. For those of us who had the good fortune to live in

Rome, in his very home, in 1975, this half-century seems very brief.

Witnessing him leave this world from one day to the next, while he was actively fulfilling his mission as a pastor and founder, intensified the impact of his death. Even then, we realized that the “Father,” as we affectionately called him, was a steadfast support in the lives and joy of many Catholics of his time.

With a passionate love for Christ and a profound understanding of what it means to be a child of God, over the course of his life, he rediscovered and preached several messages that are now widely embraced within the Church and society, beyond the institution he founded. These include the pursuit of holiness (encountering Christ) in the ordinary circumstances of work, family, and social relationships; personal friendship as a path to harmony and evangelization; the value of freedom

and pluralism; and the active role of the laity in the Church's mission and the revitalization of contemporary society, among others.

Reflecting on the time that has gone by, it is easy to see the many educational and social initiatives that have been realized around the world for people of all kinds, driven by these teachings. However, I would say that the most profound impact of Saint Josemaría's example and message is that it has inspired hundreds of thousands of people to draw closer to Christ through the ordinary, everyday activities of life. This resonates with what Pope Francis described as "saints next door," who exert a deep influence in their surroundings, often without drawing attention to themselves, with the naturalness of those who are close to God and radiate his love abundantly.

## Guided by the popes

In our time, the charism that Saint Josemaría received from God continues to flourish in stories of life, attitudes, gestures, and initiatives. To delve into the core of his message in service to the Church, I will draw on some reflections made by the recent popes as a guiding thread. First and foremost, the then-Patriarch of Venice, later Pope John Paul I, remarked: “Escrivá, with Gospel in hand, constantly taught: ‘Christ does not want us simply to be good, he wants us to be saints through and through. However, he wants us to attain that sanctity not by doing extraordinary things, but rather, through ordinary common activities.”<sup>[1]</sup>

From the time when Saint Josemaría began spreading his message in 1928, he asserted that to find Christ and evangelize the world, it was not

necessary to change one's location, profession, or environment, nor to perform extraordinary actions. Rather, it was about infusing God's love into everyday actions. This is primarily about an inner transformation in Christ, one that fully engages the heart and fills the entire soul (*Mt 22:37; Lk 10:27*). As he liked to say, “Heaven and earth seem to merge, my sons and daughters, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives.”<sup>[2]</sup> — Similarly, he encouraged us that what we need to walk this path “is not an easy life but a heart which is in love.”<sup>[3]</sup> —

The day of Josemaría Escrivá's canonization, Saint John Paul II described him as the “saint of ordinary life.” On another occasion, he said that Escrivá had reminded the contemporary world of “the Christian value that professional

work can attain in each person's ordinary circumstances.”<sup>[4]</sup>

## **An ideal of service, a heroism that is possible**

In a sophisticated world where digital interconnection and artificial intelligence anonymously dictate the rules in the professional sphere — as a recent document by the German Bishops' Conference highlighted — St. Josemaría's message reminds us that work is a means of union with God and service to others, a place where charity and justice converge. Far from the logic of success, the Christian ideal of work is expressed through service to others, which is the best measure of a Christian's professional practice.

During a thanksgiving Mass for the beatification, then-Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) stated that “Josemaría Escrivá shook people out of this spiritual apathy:

[Sanctity] does not consist of inimitable heroic deeds, but has a thousand forms; it can be achieved everywhere and in every profession.”<sup>[5]</sup> Sanctifying ordinary circumstances does not mean that our personal flaws will disappear or that everything in life will go smoothly; Saint Josemaría liked to say that he played the part of the prodigal son many times a day. This, too, is part of ordinary life: facing personal limitations and trusting in God's mercy, preventing sin from enclosing us within ourselves.

Service to others through one's own profession is exemplified by a character often overlooked in the parable of the Good Samaritan: the innkeeper. His role is overshadowed by the remarkable gesture of the charitable traveler. The innkeeper simply acts with professionalism. Yet his contribution is essential. He reminds us that performing any

professional task is a service to those in need and that every honest job, if we learn to recognize it, contains an element of charity.

## **A gift received, projected into the future**

In *Ad charisma tuendum*, Pope Francis reminded us that “the gift of the Spirit received by St. Josemaría” inspires us to undertake “the task of spreading the call to holiness in the world, through the sanctification of work and family and social commitments.” This message is forward-looking and universal: it is for everyone, in any place and time. We can all become friends of God, because “the Blessed Trinity has fallen in love with man.”<sup>[6]</sup> From this friendship, we will “contribute to peace, to the collaboration of people with each other, to justice, to avoiding war, to avoiding isolation, to avoiding both national and

personal selfishness. It will do so because everyone will realize that they are part of the whole great human family. (...) In this way, we will help to remove the all too common anxiety and fear of a future marked by fratricidal resentments. In addition, we will strengthen in souls and in society peace and harmony: tolerance, understanding, mutual relations, love.”<sup>[7]</sup>

Fifty years after his death, Saint Josemaría's message remains alive in our hearts, inviting us to serve God, the Church, and society. May we know how to cherish this message, embody it joyfully, and place it at the service of the needs of our contemporaries. With Pope Leo XIV, Christians aspire to build “a Church founded on God's love, a sign of unity, a missionary Church that opens its arms to the world, proclaims the word, allows itself to be made 'restless' by history, and

becomes a leaven of harmony for humanity.”<sup>[8]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Gazzettino di Venezia*, 25 July 1978.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Conversations*, no. 116.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Furrow*, no. 795.

<sup>[4]</sup> Address to the participants in a conference on the teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, 14 October 1993.

<sup>[5]</sup> Homily, Mass of thanksgiving for the beatification of Josemaría Escrivá, 19 May 1992.

<sup>[6]</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 84.

<sup>[7]</sup> Letter no. 3, no. 38a.

<sup>[8]</sup> Homily, Mass for the beginning of his pontificate, Letter no. 3, no. 38a.

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