

# **"The driving force of his life was the desire to see God's will done"**

Saint Josemaria was beatified on 17 May 1992. Here is the homily given by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger at the Mass of Thanksgiving for the Beatification of Josemaría Escrivá on 19 May 1992, in the Basilica of the Holy Apostles in Rome.

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The mysterious Book of Revelation by Saint John terrifyingly speaks to us about the past and the future of our history, yet continuously tears the veil that separates heaven and earth, showing us that God has not abandoned the world. However great evil may be in certain moments, in the end God's victory is certain.

Amid earth's tribulations, we can still hear a louder song of praise. Around God's throne there is a growing choir of the elect, whose lives—spent in self-forgetfulness—have now been transformed into joy and glorification. This choir does not sing only in the next world; it is prepared in the middle of history, while remaining hidden from it. This is made quite clear by the voice that comes from the throne, that is, from God's seat: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great" (*Rev 19:5*). This is an exhortation to do our own part in

this world, thus beginning to belong to the liturgy of eternity

The beatification of Josemaría Escrivá tells us that this priest of our [twentieth] century is in the choir of those who praise God, and that the words of today's Reading pertain to him: "Those whom he justified he also glorified" (*Rom* 8:30).

Glorification is not only something in the future; it has already happened: and beatifications remind us of this.

"Praise our God, all you his servants, . . . small and great" (*Rev* 19:5). In this voice, which in the Book of Revelation issues from the throne, Josemaría Escrivá saw his vocation, but he did not refer and apply it only to himself and to his life. He considered it his mission to transmit these words that come from the throne, to make them audible in our century. He invited the great and the small to give praise to God, and

precisely in this way he himself gave praise to God.

Josemaría Escrivá became aware very early of the fact that God had a plan for him, that he was supposed to dedicate his life to a task. But he did not know what this task was. How, then, could he find an answer?

Where could he look for it? He set out to search, above all, in listening to the Word of God, Sacred Scripture. He read the Bible, not as a book from the past, not even as a book of problems to debate, but as a present word that speaks to us today, as a word in which *we* appear, each of us, and in which we must seek our place in order to find our path.

In this search, he was moved particularly by the story of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar sitting along the road to Jericho who heard Jesus passing and started to cry out in a loud voice for his mercy (*Mk*

10:46-52). While the apostles tried to silence the blind beggar, Jesus turned to him with the question, “What do you want me to do for you?” And Bartimaeus’ answer was: “Master, let me receive my sight.”

Josemaría recognized himself in Bartimaeus. “Master, that I may see!” was his constant prayer: “Let me know your will for me.” Man truly sees only when he learns to see God; and one begins to see God only when one sees the will of God and is willing to consent to it. The true driving force of Escrivá’s life was and remained the desire to see God’s will and to put his own will in God’s. “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (*Mt* 6:10). Through this desire, through this incessant prayer, he was prepared, when the moment of illumination arrived, to respond as Peter did: “Master, . . at your word I will let down the nets” (*Lk* 5:5).

And his Yes was no less daring and adventuresome than the Yes pronounced then by Peter on the Sea of Galilee, after an unsuccessful night of fishing. Spain was steeped in hatred against the Church, against Christ, against God. Some wanted to eradicate the Church from Spain, when the task of casting the nets for God was given to him. But as God's fisherman, he let down the nets tirelessly throughout his life, into the waters of our history, in order to draw the great and the small to the light, so that they might see.

The will of God. Paul says to the Thessalonians: "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (*I Thess* 4:3). The will of God is ultimately quite simple and, in its main point, is the same for everyone: sanctity. And, as today's Reading tells us, sanctity means being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). Josemaría Escrivá considered sanctification not

only as a personal vocation but, above all, as a task for others: to instill the courage for sanctity, to gather for Christ a community of brothers and sisters.

The word “saint” had undergone a dangerous reduction over the course of time, which is in effect even today. We think of the saints depicted over the altars, we think of miracles and heroic virtues, and we think that this is something reserved to a few elect persons, among whom we cannot be numbered. In this way, we leave sanctity to those few unknown souls, and we are content to be as we are. Josemaría Escrivá shook people out of this spiritual apathy: “No, sanctity is not the exception, but the usual thing, the normal thing for every baptized person. It does not consist of inimitable heroic deeds, but has a thousand forms; it can be achieved everywhere and in every profession. It is normalcy. It consists of this:

living your usual life with your sights set on God and shaping it in the spirit of faith.”

For this mission, the Blessed traveled tirelessly on several continents and spoke to the people in order to instill in them the courage for sanctity, that is, for the adventure of being Christians, wherever life has placed us. Thus he became a great man of action, who lived by the will of God and called others to the will of God, but without becoming a moralist. He knew that we cannot justify ourselves; thus, just as love presupposes the passivity of being loved, so too sanctity is always associated with a passive element: agreeing to be loved by God. His foundation is called *Opus Dei*, the Work of God, not *Opus nostrum*, “our work.” Josemaría Escrivá’s work is not an attempt to create some work *of his own*: he did not intend to build a monument to himself. “My work is



not mine,” he could and intended to say, conforming himself to Christ (cf. *Jn* 7:16): he did not want to do his own work, but, rather, he wanted to give God room to accomplish His work. Certainly he was also well aware of the words that Jesus addresses to us in the Gospel of Saint John: “This is the work of God—faith” (cf. *Jn* 6:29)—that is, to hand oneself over to God, so that he can act through us.

In this way, a further identification with another Gospel phrase comes about: with the words of Peter in today’s Gospel that become his words: *Homo peccator sum*, (I am a sinful man) (*Lk* 5:8). When our Blessed became aware that his life was an abundant catch of fish, he was terrified—like Peter—by his littleness compared to what God wanted to do with him and through him. He described himself as a “founder without a foundation” and

an “inadequate instrument”; he knew and saw very well that he was not the one who did all this, that he was not able to do it; instead, it was God who acted through an instrument that seemed completely inadequate. And ultimately this is what is meant by “heroic virtue”: what happens is something that only God himself can do. Josemaría Escrivá recognized his own misery, but he abandoned himself to God without considering himself. Without asking questions about himself and about what was his own, he placed himself at God’s disposal in order to carry out his will. He himself always spoke about his “foolish actions”: about beginnings without any material means whatsoever, about beginnings in the realm of impossibility. They seemed to be foolish actions, which he had to dare and did dare to undertake. The words of his great Spanish compatriot Miguel de Unamuno

come to mind: “Only fools act seriously, the clever accomplish only nonsense.”

He dared to be something like a Don Quixote of God. Does it not seem rather quixotic to teach, in today’s world, humility, obedience, chastity, detachment from possessions, altruism? God’s will was for him true reasonableness, and so gradually the reasonableness of what was apparently irrational was able to come to light.

God’s will. The will of God has a concrete place and form in this world: it has a body. In his Church, Christ remained a body. And hence obedience to God’s will is inseparable from obedience to the Church. Only if I bring my own mission into the obedience of the Church can I be sure that I am not mistaking my own ideas for God’s will but am truly following *his* call. Therefore,

obedience to the hierarchical Church and unity with her was for Josemaría Escrivá always the fundamental criterion of his mission. In this there is no authoritative positivism: the Church is not a system of power; she is not an association for religious, social, or moral purposes that she devises by herself and that eventually she can exchange for others more in step with the times. The Church is a sacrament.

This means that she does not belong to herself. She does not carry out her own work but must be at the service of God's work. She is bound to God's will. The sacraments are the authentic scaffolding of her life. The center of the sacraments, however, is the Eucharist, in which this corporeal character of Jesus touches us most directly. Thus, for our Blessed, ecclesiality meant, above all, life centered on the Eucharist. He loved and proclaimed the Eucharist in all

its dimensions: as adoration of the Lord, corporeally present among us; as a gift in which he continues to offer himself to us; as a sacrifice, in keeping with the words: "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me" (*Heb* 10:5; cf. *Ps* 40:6-8). Christ can be distributed only because he sacrificed himself, because he accomplished the exodus of love and offered and still offers himself. We become conformed to the image of the Son (*Rom* 8:29) only if we enter into this exodus of love, only if we become an offering: there is no love without the "passive" of the Passion, which transforms us and makes us open

When Josemaría Escrivá was two years old and in danger of death—the doctors had already given up on him—his mother decided to consecrate him to Mary. Amid great hardships, by difficult pathways, she

finally brought the child to the Marian Shrine in Torreciudad to entrust him to the Mother of the Lord, so that *she* might become his mother. Thus, for his whole life, Josemaría Escrivá was conscious of being under the mantle of the Mother of God, who was a mother to him. In his office, facing the door, stood the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe; every time he went into that room, his first glance fell on that image. It was the last thing he saw, too. At the hour of his death, he was able to enter his room and look up at our Lady's image just before death overtook him.

While he was dying, the bells were tolling for the Angelus, the announcement of Mary's *fiat* and of the grace of the Incarnation of her Son, our Savior. Under this sign, which stood at the beginning of his life and always guided it decisively, he also returned Home. Let us thank

the Lord for this contemporary witness to the faith, for this tireless herald of his will, and let us pray: “Master, that I may see. Grant that I, too, may know and do your will.”

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