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A Feast to Remember

A young architect with devotion to St. Josemaría asked his parish priest to celebrate a Mass in his honour around the 26th June. This was one of the close to 300 Masses that were celebrated in most parts of Nigeria. Brian, currently heads a youth-led environmental advocacy group teaching mainly young learners about preserving the environment with the use of crafts, and multimedia as learning tools!

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If I would describe any story as a success story, it would be that which comes with a lot of hurdles and makes the tale worth sharing. However, this success story took another way around to become one.

Every 26th of June is a highlight on my calendar because it is the day we celebrate the Feast of St. Josemaría Escrivá. It is a special day for me as **this Saint gets the credit for stirring a newly found friendship between God and me.** This has happened over the past year of attending formational activities in centres of Opus Dei.

In the second quarter of this year, while waiting to be called-up for the compulsory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme, I went to

spend some time with my uncle and his family in Sagamu, Ogun State. During that period, I made a few trips to Iroto Conference Centre in Ijebu-Ode, which is about sixty kilometres away, to receive spiritual formation from the Chaplain of the centre.

As June 26 approached, the priest encouraged those of us that come for activities in Iroto to try organize a Mass in honour of St. Josemaría in our respective Parishes. Despite the fact that I had little experience in organising events like this, I decided to take this up. The plan was to arrange for a date closest to June 26, since the actual date on this year's liturgical calendar coincided with the 13th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

Two weeks prior to the feast, I approached Msgr. Victor Ajayi who is the Parish Priest of Holy Family Catholic Church, GRA, Sagamu, after

a morning Mass and he gave me a warm audience! With slight nods and a still expression, he gently rolled out his reply. "**Pray about it**", he said, "**If it is what the Spirit of God wants, then it will be done without much struggle**". I took his advice and prayed about it. I was certain that God didn't want me to back down on sharing this new light to those I found here, I knew it was an apostolic endeavour I wanted to do! I later would learn to embrace this approach when seeking approval or getting offers for things.

I approached Msgr. Ajayi again after another morning Mass and this time, he agreed celebrate the Mass at 6.30 am on Saturday, June 25, 2022. He then requested that I prepare a short note about Opus Dei and its Founder for him, as this was going to be the first time the Mass of St. Josemaría would be celebrated in his Parish. With the help of another priest of the

Work, I got even more resources that would help with the Mass prayers and the homily as well. I also designed a poster and flyer for the event. “Brian, we need to keep Monsignor reminded about this often!” warned the Seminarian serving in the Parish. Luckily at this time, I had already become friends with this Seminarian who was a close collaborator of the Monsignor.

A few days to the D-day, I began to feel I wasn't doing enough for the day to be memorable. Each time I turned to the intercession of St. Josemaría for the success of the programme with the aid of his prayer card, I would try to paint a picture of what I wanted to see: a large turnout, perhaps a smiling congregation. But all this just caused some more emptiness in my stomach! I later would recline to Monsignor's advice: “Let the Spirit guide!” On the eve of the occasion, I

booked to see the Monsignor to remind him about the Feast and he reassured me that it will all go as planned, but then he made another request: "You have to come out and speak to the congregation yourself about Opus Dei and the Founder, so that they will hear from a young person like you!" I immediately became nervous. I had suddenly gotten into a rough road! It now felt like a lot depended on me.

The Mass day finally came. **I had my shirt dry-cleaned the day before, and thoroughly cleaned my sneakers.** "I have to be in my best for this", I told myself. Interestingly, I was not the only one in bright colours, four infants appeared in dazzling white to receive the Sacrament of Baptism! This was remarkable for me! Babies Mary, Rita Mary, Mary-Anne and Esther! The day also marked the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and so it

was a double celebration. For the turnout, it was far from disappointing. Towards the end of the Mass, I was called up to share the message of Opus Dei.

I began my address by paying due protocol to the Parish Priest, his Assistant, all parishioners and our newest members of the Church, resting in the arms of their loved ones. They were especially dear to me as I spoke about Opus Dei's message that **all baptized are called to holiness** of life in their ordinary duties and work. **Having four infants just baptized during the Mass made this crystal clear.**

Finally, the whole experience came with very good memories to recount, I realized that the 'ever-present help' we receive can make setbacks look non-existent. So I give all the glory to God for this first-time success that came with a lot of graces from the

Immaculate Heart of Mary and St
Josemaría too!

Brian Ugwu

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