

opusdei.org

# **Saint John Mary Vianney, Holy Curé of Ars**

4 August is the feast of Saint John Mary Vianney, who Saint Josemaria named intercessor for Opus Dei's relationship with the diocesan bishops. This is a study on the relationship between the two saints.

08/03/2024

**Index**

Introduction

Appointment as intercessor

Why an intercessor for relations with the bishops?

Why in 1951-53?

Why the Curé of Ars?

An example of relations with his bishop

In the life of St Josemaría before 1951-1953

Presence in the life of St Josemaría

Intercessor, but not a model of the specific vocation of Opus Dei

St Josemaría and the Curé of Ars after 1951-1953

Visits to Ars

The pilgrimage project

The holy Curé of Ars in Villa Tevere

---

A professor of history, a regular reader of *Studia et Documenta*, on hearing that I was writing this article, asked me with a smile whether its title was going to be of the kind he thought was usual in the journal: “Prolegomena to a study on...”, or “Introduction to the history of...”, and so on. In a spirit of contradiction, I preferred to give it a short title,<sup>[1]</sup> but a longer and more prudent version would not have been out of place: on the subject of the relationship between St Josemaría and the Curé of Ars, there are still many points to be clarified and the archives are far from having said their last word.

This study is content to set out the results of the research, following a logical order in three points: firstly, the appointment by St Josemaría, around 1951-1953, of the Curé of Ars

as intercessor for Opus Dei's relations with the diocesan bishops; secondly, St Josemaría's relations with the holy Curé of Ars before 1951-1953, as a framework announcing the appointment; and lastly, the consequences of this appointment, the relations of the two saints after 1951-1953.<sup>[2]</sup>

---

## **The appointment of the Curé of Ars as intercessor for Opus Dei's relations with diocesan bishops**

Perhaps the most important element in the relationship between the founder of Opus Dei and the Curé of Ars (†1859) is St Josemaría's decision to appoint St John Mary Vianney as intercessor for the Work's relations with diocesan ordinaries. This decision seems to date back to the years 1951-1953.<sup>[3]</sup>

---

On 9 August 1951, he wrote in a note of government:

*Remind the priests of the need to treat the bishops with affection; and of the duty not to do any external work – outside our houses – without prior permission from the ordinary.*

*Perhaps I have not told you that I always make the holy Curé of Ars my intercessor in my relations with the bishops: make him your intercessor as well.*<sup>[4]</sup>

---

Thus, even before 1951, St Josemaría was already entrusting himself to the Curé of Ars in his relations with the bishops; what changes this note is that a personal devotion of the founder is institutionalised for the whole of Opus Dei (he says: “Perhaps I have not told you”, which suggests that previously he did not ask his spiritual sons to accompany him in this prayer); he asks everyone – above all the priests – to entrust themselves to the saint in their relations with the bishops.

According to St Josemaría's own recollections, it was at least from 1938 onwards that he began to have personal recourse to the intercession of the Curé of Ars for this intention. In 1950 he wrote: *At least since 1938 I have had him as my intercessor in these matters.*<sup>[5]</sup> What happened in 1938 in his relations with the bishops that could have marked St Josemaría's memory in this way? That year the founder of Opus Dei moved to Burgos, and we could say that circumstances forced him to multiply his contacts with different bishops. Until the Spanish Civil War, Opus Dei's apostolic work had been carried out mainly in Madrid, in the territory and with the blessing of its bishop, Monsignor Leopoldo Eijo y Garay. When St Josemaría arrived in Burgos, he wanted to reorganise the apostolate of the Work and to increase contact with his spiritual sons and daughters – still few in number and scattered throughout

Spain due to the vicissitudes of the war – and with those who had attended Opus Dei's formation courses before the war, whom he had not been able to see for a long time. All this obliged him to travel to many places, to carry out apostolic activities which St Josemaría always carried out with the approval of the local bishops.<sup>[6]</sup> He had already met some of them in Madrid before the war, such as Bishop Marcelino Olaechea and Bishop Javier Lauzurica; but in this new stage of his life he was received by the bishops of Ávila, Astorga, Burgos, León and Valladolid.<sup>[7]</sup> Moreover, from 1938 onwards, he preached retreats to the clergy of many Spanish dioceses at the request of the bishops (from September 1938 to October 1942, he conducted nineteen retreats for seminarians, deacons and priests, generally of six days<sup>[8]</sup>).

As the meetings and collaboration with the bishops multiplied, St Josemaría placed these in a perspective of faith and accompanied it with prayer. It was in this context that he began to invoke the holy parish priest.

## **Why an intercessor for relations with the bishops?**

The date of the institutional appointment would therefore be 1951-1953, but why does Opus Dei need a specific intercessor for its relations with the diocesan bishops? Because of its mission and its organisation, which intrinsically require collaboration with the local churches.<sup>[9]</sup> These dimensions were definitively regulated from the juridical point of view with the erection of Opus Dei as a personal prelature,<sup>[10]</sup> but they have always shaped its life and structure. In fact, the mission of the Work is to spread



the message that daily life, work and the ordinary circumstances are an occasion for sanctification. In order to spread this message, Opus Dei collaborates with the local churches, offering means of Christian formation to those who wish to receive them. From an organisational point of view, those who join Opus Dei remain faithful of the diocese to which they belong, and are subject to the diocesan bishop in the same way and in the same matters as the other baptised, their equals, and depend on the Prelature for the fulfilment of the particular commitments – ascetical, formational and apostolic – which they assume by forming part of Opus Dei. The Work exists, therefore, to serve the universal Church and the local churches. Its life and development also involves contact and collaboration with the diocesan bishops. This is what St Josemaría lived in a spirit of faith and prayer,

and this is what he passed on to his spiritual children. With regard to the diocesan bishops, especially those whose dioceses hosted Opus Dei activities, he always showed a clear spirit of loyalty and affection.<sup>[11]</sup>

---

## **Why in 1951-53?**

In the absence of any explanation from St Josemaría as to why he appointed the holy priest as intercessor in 1951-53, some hypotheses can be put forward.

The first would be analogous to the reason proposed to explain the beginning of this recourse of the founder of Opus Dei to the holy parish priest: as in 1938 the expansion of the Work in Spain multiplied the relations with the bishops and the need to support them with prayer, in 1951 the international expansion of the apostolates of the spiritual daughters

and sons of St Josemaría began. Under his impetus, the apostolic work of Opus Dei began in Italy (1943), Portugal (1945), Britain (1946), Ireland and France (1947), Mexico and the United States (1949), Chile and Argentina (1950), Colombia and Venezuela (1951). Then, after 1951: in Germany (1952); Guatemala and Peru (1953); Ecuador (1954); Uruguay and Switzerland (1956); Brazil, Austria and Canada (1957); Japan, Kenya and El Salvador (1958); Costa Rica (1959); the Netherlands (1960); Paraguay (1962); Australia and the Philippines (1963); Belgium and Nigeria (1965); Puerto Rico (1969).<sup>[12]</sup> The apostolic work, therefore, began in new countries, in new dioceses, with the agreement and collaboration of new bishops. In the context of this apostolic expansion and its primarily supernatural dimension, St Josemaría wished to count on the

intercession of the saintly parish priest.

This first hypothesis seems to me to be the most important, the most appropriate to explain the decision of the founder of Opus Dei.

We can add two more. The first has to do with the development of the *Priestly Society of the Holy Cross*, which in 1950, a year before 1951, opened its doors to diocesan priests.

<sup>[13]</sup> Moved by love for his brother secular priests, in 1948-1949, St Josemaría thought with sorrow that he would have to leave the Work to found a new institution for diocesan priests. The definitive approval of Opus Dei was under way – it would come about on 16 June 1950 – and St Josemaría saw it possible for the Work to go ahead without him, without endangering its continuity. In the end, he understood that secular priests fitted perfectly into

the structure and spirit of the Work: his message of sanctification of secular life and his call to contemplation in daily life also suited the ministry of secular clerics, and there was no need to make the sacrifice of leaving the Work to devote himself to something new specifically for priests. From 1950 onwards, then, the apostolate with priests took on a new institutional form in St Josemaría's life, and the figure of the secular priest John Mary Vianney perhaps also came to the fore (we will see later, with regard to the project of the pilgrimage to Ars, that St Josemaría establishes a certain link between the figure of the Curé of Ars and his desire to help diocesan priests).

A last reason, more accidental and no doubt less important, for situating in 1951-53 the decision to propose to his spiritual sons the intercession of the holy Curé of Ars, could be the

misunderstanding expressed in 1950 by the Archbishop of Valladolid, Antonio García, about the relations of the diocesan curia with the local centre of Opus Dei.<sup>[14]</sup> St Josemaría knew how to act – and to make his spiritual sons act – with his usual veneration for the bishops and with respect for the law (according to the concrete indications of the competent Vatican Congregation), so that the diocesan curia ended up not encountering any more difficulties.

Perhaps because in the past he had received numerous expressions of affection from Bishop García, the founder of Opus Dei – who knew from experience that the novelty of the Work could cause some misunderstandings – invoked the Curé of Ars<sup>[15]</sup> with particular intensity in order to resolve the matter of Valladolid, which was particularly acute for him. It is possible, therefore, that this brief

disagreement with the diocesan government reminded St Josemaría of the usefulness of giving his spiritual sons all the supernatural means to achieve a just and holy relationship with the local ordinary.

## **Why the Curé of Ars?**

Up to now it has been pointed out that, by its nature and mission, Opus Dei has links with the bishops, and that it needs to place them under the protection of heaven. It has also been pointed out that the early 1950s, marked for the Work by a strong international expansion, made recourse to supernatural means even more urgent. But at least another question remains: why go to the Curé of Ars, why not choose another saint?

I think St Josemaría indicated two criteria: the first, valid for all intercessors of Opus Dei, was that they should be non-Spanish, in order

to underline the universality of the Work, and not assimilate everything to the nationality of the founder and his first followers, and thus encourage his spiritual children in all countries to live an authentically Catholic spirit; the second criterion, more specific to the intercessor for relations with the bishops, was that he should be a diocesan priest.

On the first point, Monsignor Escrivá spoke on several occasions. For example, at a meeting with the students of the Roman College of the Holy Cross on 20 June 1956, before a trip to Ars.<sup>[16]</sup> He noted then that since Spain had many saints, he could have chosen only intercessors from his own country, but he preferred not to choose any, in order to avoid nationalism.<sup>[17]</sup>

He also says – and this confirms the second criterion – that as intercessor for relations with the local



ordinaries, he could have appointed, for example, the then Blessed John of Avila.<sup>[18]</sup> I think he chose the example of this 16th century saint as an alternative to the Curé of Ars, because both are secular priests belonging to a diocese, and therefore logical intercessors for relations with the local ordinaries.

John of Avila, who died in 1569 and was beatified in 1894 by Leo XIII, perhaps comes to St Josemaría's mind in 1956 because he had been proclaimed patron saint of the Spanish secular clergy ten years earlier by Pius XII in the brief *Dilectus filius* of 2 July 1946. He was canonised by St Paul VI during St Josemaría's lifetime, on 31 May 1970.<sup>[19]</sup> With John of Avila excluded because of his nationality, in 1951-53 there were few secular priests canonised. Apart from St John Mary Vianney, the first parish priest to be canonised (in 1925)<sup>[20]</sup>, few secular

priests are counted among the saints, apart from martyrs and founders of religious congregations who, in general, have been brought to the altars because they have shed their blood for Christ or because they have opened a new path of religious life and not so much because they were secular priests. The only exception I know of is St Yves de Tréguier, who died in 1303 and was canonised in 1347; but he does not appear in the Roman calendar, and it is possible that St Josemaría, despite his university training in law, had not heard of the man who in many countries holds the title of patron saint of jurists.

But it would be too simple, and no doubt inaccurate, to reduce the figure of the Curé of Ars in the eyes of St Josemaría to two negative criteria: on the one hand, not being Spanish; on the other, being one of the few secular priests canonised; in

other words, not being one of the few secular priests canonised; in other words, he would not have had many competitors when it came to finding an intercessor.<sup>[21]</sup> I will propose here other hypotheses to explain the choice of St John Mary Vianney.

## **The Curé of Ars, an example of relations with his bishop**

As we shall see below, St Josemaría knew the life of the saintly parish priest quite well. Vianney lived with great submission and loyalty towards his prelate: seeking his intercession in relations with the bishops is therefore natural, since Vianney lived his own in an exemplary way. Thus – to give one example among others of this obedience – he abandoned the rigourism of his first years of ministry thanks to his bishop, Bishop Alexandre Devie (†1852), who introduced him to the morals of St Alphonsus Liguori,

which were in full circulation in the 19th century.<sup>[22]</sup> In 1830, the Bishop of Belley wrote a pastoral letter praising the *Theologia moralis* of St Alphonsus,<sup>[23]</sup> and it can be considered that in 1839, the saintly parish priest abandoned the rigourism that had initially led him to use deferred absolution as the usual means of leading souls to conversion.<sup>[24]</sup> Moreover, he had a copy – which he reviewed every winter – of the *Moral Theology for the Use of Priests and Confessors* (1844) by Cardinal Charles Gousset, Archbishop of Rheims (†1866), a great disseminator of Alphonsian morals.<sup>[25]</sup> Liguori's influence on the Curé of Ars, received through his bishop, enabled him to absolve without delay truly contrite penitents, strengthened his love for the Eucharist and encouraged him to preach in a positive tone, almost always on divine love.<sup>[26]</sup> The influence of his bishop is therefore at

the heart of the manifestations of John Mary Vianney's holiness:

Such a link between the saintly parish priest and his ordinary perhaps explains why he was chosen as intercessor for relations with the bishops.

## **The Curé of Ars and the life of St Josemaría before 1951-1953**

Let us look at some circumstances in the life of the founder of Opus Dei that facilitated his sympathy for the Curé of Ars.

Pope Pius XI canonised St John Mary Vianney on 31 May 1925, a few weeks after St Josemaría's ordination to the priesthood on 28 March 1925. In those years, canonisations were less frequent than they are today: it is easy to suppose that St Josemaría was aware of this pontifical act. We know that in Madrid, from 1927

onwards, the founder of the Work distributed many magazines of religious information: no doubt he read them beforehand, and they would certainly have echoed the canonisation.<sup>[27]</sup>\_\_\_\_\_

It is also very likely that he was felt close to one of the few secular priests canonised so far, who died less than 70 years earlier. The canonisation in 1925 of Curé Vianney was exceptional, at least from two points of view: he was a secular priest, and he was also almost a contemporary. We have spoken above of the low number of secular priests canonised; the following table illustrates the paucity of canonisations up to Vatican II, and the fact that they exceptionally involved men and women recently deceased.<sup>[28]</sup>\_\_\_\_\_

The canonisation took place only thirteen days after St Josemaría's return from the Aragonese village of

Perdiguera, where he exercised his first weeks of ministry, and from which he departed on 18 May 1925. It is easy to find a parallel between the small rural parishes of Ars and Perdiguera. About these pastorally and humanly analogous situations, a good connoisseur of the spirituality of the late 19th and early 20th century wrote: “John Mary Vianney had become for the Catholic clergy a symbol, a hope and a banner. There were many very humble priests like the Curé of Ars in villages that seemed to be an arid and barren land, poor like him, with few financial means, but ready to pray and work sincerely in the hope of a revival of religious practice and fervour, thanks to God’s help, through the Eucharist and devotion to Mary Most Holy “. <sup>[29]</sup>\_\_\_\_\_

It should be noted in passing that the choice of a French saint is all the more remarkable if we remember

the climate of Francophobia that surrounded little Josemaría, especially at school, as a consequence of the misdeeds committed by the Napoleonic troops in Spain during the war of independence.<sup>[30]</sup> As he matured humanly and spiritually, Josemaría not only learned to reject these resentments in a truly Catholic spirit, but also felt indebted to France, as if he had to love it to erase the climate of antipathy he had suffered as a child.<sup>[31]</sup>

## **The presence of the Curé of Ars in the life of St Josemaría**

The first noteworthy fact was the presence of books by and about St John Mary Vianney in the working library that Monsignor Escrivá organised in Rome after 1950 for him and his successors.<sup>[32]</sup> There are two volumes of the sermons of the Curé of Ars translated into Spanish,<sup>[33]</sup> and



three classic books on the spirituality and life of the holy priest: those of Alfred Monnin, Hippolyte Convert and Francis Trochu.<sup>[34]</sup>\_\_\_\_\_

To prove that Josemaría read these books and/or others by and about John Mary Vianney, it is worth noting that he quotes him in his preaching. He gave him as an example of faith during a priestly retreat preached in Vitoria in August 1938.<sup>[35]</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ During another retreat, in Valencia in November 1940, he used two anecdotes from the life of the Curé of Ars: the first, which is taken up in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2715: “‘I look at him and he looks at me’, a peasant of Ars who was praying before the tabernacle told this holy priest (cf. F. TROCHU, *Le curé d’Ars St Jean Marie Vianney*, pp. 223-224)”. This is not from Trochu’s book in St Josemaría’s library, but the famous biography, a classic for secular priests which, for example,

influenced the priestly vocation of St John Paul II<sup>[36]</sup> and which we can think that St Josemaría read. The second anecdote told during that retreat in 1940 was also later taken up in an ecclesial document, this time the encyclical *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia* of St John XXIII. It is the response of the saintly parish priest to a fellow priest who complained about the lack of effectiveness of his ministry: “You have prayed, wept, groaned and sighed. But have you fasted, have you kept vigil, have you slept on the ground, have you disciplined yourselves? As long as you refuse to do so, do not think you have done everything.”<sup>[37]</sup> I have chosen to quote these magisterial documents and to refer to Saints John XXIII and John Paul II to illustrate that there are teachings from the life of John Mary Vianney that have marked several generations of priests. (Angelo Roncalli was born in 1881, Josemaría

Escrivá in 1902 and Karol Wojtyła in 1920.)

## **The Curé of Ars, intercessor, but not a model of the specific vocation of Opus Dei.**

St Josemaría reads and quotes St John Mary Vianney, his life and teachings inspire him, but he does not consider him a model to imitate for living the vocation to Opus Dei. It seems that, because of the Curé of Ars, Josemaría Escrivá changed the title to *intercessors* of the Work, of those who had originally been called “minor patrons”. The change of title was intended to emphasise that the faithful of Opus Dei have recourse to the intercession of these saints, but are not obliged to imitate them.

This change of terminology seems to be related to an episode in the summer of 1961, during a meeting with the founder of Opus Dei at the

Colegio Mayor La Estila (Santiago de Compostela),<sup>[38]</sup> when one of those present asked St Josemaría whether the priests of the Work should imitate the then so-called minor patrons, adding that he found it difficult to think that the priests of the Work should take the Curé of Ars as their model. The question does not specify the aspects to which the questioner refers, but one could think in particular of the specific way of living poverty, which John Mary Vianney lived heroically with an often dirty cassock and unpolished shoes,<sup>[39]</sup> while St Josemaría tried to wear a cassock that was always clean, which he used until it was worn out, and shoes – he had two pairs – which he himself cleaned for years.<sup>[40]</sup> His attitude reflects what he preached about secular ways of living poverty, which imply a certain elegance lived according to one's social circumstances. Another witness recalls that St Josemaría said

that the Curé of Ars was not a model for the faithful of Opus Dei in the way he mortified himself by eating too little or eating bad food.<sup>[41]</sup> The fact is that in 1961 the founder of Opus Dei answered the question by saying that the minor patrons were only intercessors, and that the members of the Work should live the spirit that corresponds to them and imitate only Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The founder did not judge negatively the life of the intercessors in general, and that of the holy priest in particular, but simply wanted to point out that Vianney was not a model for living according to the spirit of Opus Dei. A few months later, on 13 April 1962, he sent a note of governance stating that the intercessors were not a model for living the specific vocation of Opus Dei.<sup>[42]</sup>

## St Josemaría and the Curé of Ars after 1951-1953

Once he had appointed him intercessor for relations with the local ordinaries, St Josemaría prayed to the Curé of Ars because he was the first to live the spirit he passed on to his sons, and he continued to mention him in his teachings. On 15 December 1954, for example, speaking of the need to ask God for many learned and holy priests for Opus Dei, he added: *“For if they are not learned they cannot be saints. And you will say to me: – Father, what about the Curé of Ars? The Curé of Ars ended up being learned and a saint, because our Lord gave him his enlightenment and because he had made every human effort – the human means – to be learned.”*<sup>[43]</sup> Once again, St Josemaría shows his good knowledge of the life of the Curé of Ars, who, despite the difficulties of his ecclesiastical studies, was able to

acquire a good level of intellectual formation. As already mentioned, every winter he studied the *Théologie morale à l'usage des curés et des confesseurs* (1844) by Cardinal Charles Gousset, Archbishop of Rheims, according to the account given by his vicar Raymond.<sup>[44]</sup> He read a book on theology or spirituality every day in bed, even if he had been confessing for many hours. His library consisted of 426 volumes,<sup>[45]</sup> writings of the Fathers, and of spiritual authors such as Friar Louis of Granada. He often reread the fundamental book of his initial formation, the *Instruction sur le rituel, concernant la théorie et la pratique des sacrements et de la morale*, by the Bishop of Toulon, Louis Albert Joly de Choin (1778); but his favourite books were the two volumes of the *Vie des saints* by François Giry.<sup>[46]</sup>

On 8 November 1968, fourteen years after the first example we have chosen, in the context of the post-conciliar crisis, St Josemaría exhorted his listeners to study doctrine and commented: *In order to be ordained the holy Curé of Ars, his bishop only required him to know the Our Father and the Creed. Now, if some people are asked the Creed and the Our Father, they stumble.*<sup>[47]</sup> In this case, the biographical data does not seem to be accurate: Joseph Courbon, vicar general of Cardinal Fesch, Archbishop of Lyon in exile in Rome, would have asked about the Curé of Ars, whose examination results were not brilliant: “Is he pious? Does he have devotion to the Blessed Virgin?”, and when he was answered: “Yes, he is a model of piety”, he decided to ordain him.<sup>[48]</sup>

There are also other concrete details of devotion to St John Mary Vianney that did not become apparent in the



life of Josemaría Escrivá until after 1951-1953. The first of these manifestations would undoubtedly be the visits to Ars. St Josemaría went there to pray nine times, between 1953 and 1960: all these visits took place after the appointment as intercessor – and it can be deduced that St Josemaría prayed to him as such, to accompany the expansion of the apostolic work of his spiritual sons in new dioceses – and also after the founder of Opus Dei saw that the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross could be open to diocesan priests. So it can be assumed that John Mary Vianney was also prayed to as a holy secular priest, something that is illustrated by a second manifestation of piety: the unrealised project of a pilgrimage of the Priestly Society to Ars. According to Bishop Javier Echevarría, prelate of Opus Dei and eyewitness to several of these pilgrimages to Ars, it was these two prayer intentions that encouraged St

Josemaría during his visits to Ars: “I have witnessed the affection that our Father showed him, when on one occasion he went to venerate him in Ars, to commend to him the holiness of priests and the relations of Opus Dei with the diocesan bishops.”<sup>[49]</sup> —

## Visits to Ars

Little documentation has been found on these visits.<sup>[50]</sup> The first took place on 25 October 1953, when St Josemaría and his companions arrived from Paris and Fontainebleau and then left for Chambéry and Italy.<sup>[51]</sup> —

The second visit was on 20 November 1955. This time they came from Italy via Milan. 20 November was Sunday, and the church of Ars was full when they went in to pray.<sup>[52]</sup> — They then left the village to go to Mâcon and then to Fontainebleau.<sup>[53]</sup> —

The third visit took place on 27 June 1956. St Josemaría celebrated Holy Mass for the first time in Ars, left for Versailles and Paris, and then on to Belgium.<sup>[54]</sup>\_\_\_

In 1957 he made three visits to Ars:.  
<sup>[55]</sup>\_\_\_ the first took place on 21 May (they followed the Bologna–Bardonecchia–Modane–Ars route.<sup>[56]</sup>\_\_\_ They left for Avignon, then Lourdes, Paris and back to Italy.<sup>[57]</sup>\_\_\_ In Lourdes and Ars, St Josemaría prayed for his sister Carmen, diagnosed with cancer shortly before, on 4 March and who died on 20 June;<sup>[58]</sup>\_\_\_ the second, in 1957, on 13 and 14 September (they came from Lyon to spend what was probably St Josemaría’s first night in Ars and continued on to Italy: Modane–Bardonecchia–Montecatini<sup>[59]</sup>\_\_\_); the third in 1957, on 24 November (they came from Italy<sup>[60]</sup>\_\_\_ and had previously passed through Lourdes and Marseilles, and then continued their journey to

Versailles and Paris, to finally return to Rome<sup>[61]</sup>).

Their seventh visit took place on 1 and 2 February 1958, and after celebrating Mass<sup>[62]</sup> they returned directly to Rome.<sup>[63]</sup> The eighth pilgrimage was on 13 May 1959: they came from Italy, passed through Monaco and then left for the south of France and Spain.<sup>[64]</sup>

St Josemaría made his ninth and last pilgrimage from 31 October to 1 November 1960: he came from Paris and Lyon, and before that from Spain, and after Ars he passed through Lyon again before going to Rome via Milan.<sup>[65]</sup>

He still had fifteen years to live – as we know, St Josemaría died in 1975 – this ninth visit took place during his seventeenth passage through France, a country to which he would return eighteen times.<sup>[66]</sup> But it seems that he did not visit Ars. Why? In the

absence of documentary evidence, I would put forward three hypotheses. On the one hand, the apostolic work of the Work was carried out in France, especially in Paris, and the Founder's journeys were primarily to see his spiritual children, to encourage them and to pray with them and for them; on the other hand, the crisis in the Church, which caused St Josemaría so much suffering in the last years of his life, <sup>[67]</sup> led him to turn more intensely to Our Lady, and to multiply his visits to the shrines of Our Lady during his travels: Mary takes precedence over the other saints, hyperdulia over dulia; finally, although it is a more prosaic reason, some journeys are made not by car but by plane<sup>[68]</sup> and the passage through the small village of Ars becomes more difficult.

# The pilgrimage project

Another manifestation of St Josemaría's devotion to St John Mary Vianney is his unrealised plan to make a pilgrimage to Ars with the priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. He had planned it for 1956 and, in a note of governance announcing the project, he asked the directors of the Work and the priests of the Priestly Society for their opinions on the matter. When he wrote the note, he had not yet specified the programme of the pilgrimage: he only announced that a senior ecclesiastical figure would be sought to preside over the activity, and that it would include a day of recollection which he himself would preach. As he expected many spiritual fruits from this meeting, he asked his children to pray for them: *"1. I inform you that I intend to organise a pilgrimage to Ars in 1956. It is desirable that the greatest*

possible number of Oblate priests,<sup>[69]</sup> supernumeraries, cooperators and ecclesiastical assistants from the various regions attend, together with the numerary priests who will be designated. 2. Recommend the matter, so that in due course we may draw much spiritual fruit from this visit to the holy Curé of Ars, our patron saint. 3. In due course, well in advance, when the pilgrimage will take place will be indicated, the days to be spent, the events, including a day of recollection, the price, etc. 4. A high ecclesiastical personality will preside; and the Spiritual Director will be your Father. 5. The material things will also be studied with affection, so that the journey and the stay in the parish of St John Mary Vianney will be one more coursea, one of our own! 6. Tell me about these things, without making them official, so that these sons of the sss+ [Priestly Society of the Holy Cross] can give their opinion and, above all, indicate the most

*opportune time. Do not fail to tell me what you are thinking about this matter.*“<sup>[70]</sup>\_\_\_\_\_

In November 1955, while passing through Paris, he spoke to his children about the project, explaining that he would be counting on them for certain details of the organisation.<sup>[71]</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ A few months later, in March 1956, a new note announced the postponement of the pilgrimage to 1957, a delay due to the preparation of the Second General Congress of Opus Dei, to be held in Einsiedeln (Switzerland) from 22 to 25 August 1956.<sup>[72]</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ St Josemaría ended by writing: *Continue to entrust the matter for me, for it will not be long before this project will be carried out.*<sup>[73]</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ From then on, the archives are silent: there is no trace of the reactions to the initial project put forward in 1955, nor any other subsequent opinions to explain the abandonment of an idea that was



never carried out, not in 1957 nor later. We only know that he abandoned the idea because he considered that the organisation of collective activities of this kind did not belong to the spirit of Opus Dei.

[74] — One can no doubt think that this decision was influenced by what St Josemaría called collective humility, which he understood that his children should live with him, to avoid the fanaticism of a group, the false glory of numbers, crowds and statistics; he often encouraged his spiritual children to live only for the glory of God, to love silent and effective work without seeking applause, *to hide and disappear*. [75] — Perhaps St Josemaría thought that this pilgrimage might encourage a misplaced *esprit de corps*; perhaps he also feared that his humility would suffer from a collective act where he would undoubtedly be the focus of attention, being the founder of the Priestly Society.

# The holy Curé of Ars in Villa Tevere

Devotion to the saints has another common manifestation in the history of spirituality that can be found in St Josemaría's relationship with St John Mary: Christians build places of worship to honour God while at the same time remembering their saints and venerating their representations. This is what the founder of Opus Dei did at Villa Tevere, where he lived in Rome and from where he directed the Work throughout the world.

From an architectural point of view, this Christian tradition of expressing devotion through sacred art can be seen in the oratory dedicated to the Curé of Ars in Villa Tevere. Its construction was decided after March 1952, and therefore during the period 1951-1953, the period of the appointment as intercessor, as we have seen above.<sup>[76]</sup> The

realisation of the project would come five years later, when the architects were already working on the area of Villa Tevere where the oratory would be located. The first indications received from St Josemaría were quite general: that the style should be *relatively modern* and that the altarpiece, which would be presided over by an image of the saintly parish priest, would in some way commemorate the history of the Priestly Society.<sup>[77]</sup> The architects began work in March 1958<sup>[78]</sup> and soon became concerned about the limited space available to them as the work progressed. St Josemaría paternally encouraged them, approved their proposals and consoled them for the small size of the oratory, making them consider that they would later have to undertake more ambitious constructions: *the time will come to build cathedrals*, he told them.<sup>[79]</sup>

One detail shows once again St Josemaría's knowledge of the life and personality of St John Mary. When the oratory was only at a preliminary stage, the founder of Opus Dei alluded to the possibility of placing under the future altar of the holy parish priest the relics of the whole body of a martyr, and mentioned in this connection the devotion of the Curé of Ars to relics.<sup>[80]</sup> In the end the altar did not include the whole body of any saint, but it is interesting to note that St Josemaría knew that St John Mary liked to pray to the saints in front of their relics.<sup>[81]</sup>

The oratory does not include the altarpiece that was to illustrate the history of the Priestly Society, no doubt because it was smaller than the architects initially envisaged. The essential element of its decoration, which links it to the Curé of Ars, is a large statue of the saint placed on a pedestal behind the altar, and which

is the same height as St Josemaría.<sup>[82]</sup>  
In May 1957, the diary mentions that it will be life-size, and will be based on photographs brought by St Josemaría, who passed through Ars on 21 May during his fourth visit to the shrine. These photos, which I have not found in the Prelature's archives, were perhaps the statue of Émilien Cabuchet or the saint's reliquary. The diary also states that St Josemaría gave the architects a figure of the saintly parish priest.<sup>[83]</sup>  
It is probably a wooden image, made in France in 1953 for St Josemaría:<sup>[84]</sup>  
he received it in July of the same year, liked it very much and placed it for a while on his work table, as he told his children in France.<sup>[85]</sup>

On 12 June 1957, the photos were given to the sculptor Pasquale Sciancalepore, who promptly presented a sketch four days later.<sup>[86]</sup>  
The commission was formalised in July, and the artist, after choosing a

piece of marble in Querceta (Tuscany),<sup>[87]</sup> began his sculpture. St Josemaría visited his studio at least twice during the completion of the work, each time expressing his satisfaction with the result.<sup>[88]</sup> The sculpture was finished in May 1958,<sup>[89]</sup> the pedestal supporting it was mounted in the oratory in August,<sup>[90]</sup> and the whole thing must have been completed between August 1958 and May 1959, a period for which there are no notes in the diary.

In addition to this oratory dedicated to the Curé of Ars and the wooden image of the oratory-library mentioned above, St John Mary Vianney is also present at Villa Tevere with the other intercessors: there are relics of his on the altar of the Holy Trinity, where St Josemaría used to celebrate Holy Mass;<sup>[91]</sup> on the altarpiece of an oratory dedicated to the intercessors;<sup>[92]</sup> and a small silver image adorning the tabernacle of the

oratory of the General Council of the Prelature, which arrived at Villa Tevere in September 1956.<sup>[93]</sup> We should also mention, outside Villa Tevere, the statue of the saintly parish priest placed – together with those of the other intercessors – on the altarpiece of the shrine of Torreciudad, the making of which St Josemaría followed very closely.<sup>[94]</sup>

As St John Henry Newman wrote, “never does the Catholic Church lose what she once possessed. (...) Instead of passing from one phase of life to another, it carries with it youth and maturity into old age. (...) Dominic does not overshadow Benedict “,<sup>[95]</sup> and one might add that St Josemaría does not overshadow St John Mary Vianney. Thanks to the beautiful truth of the communion of saints,<sup>[96]</sup> friendships are forged between Christians through the centuries, and the devotion of the founder of Opus Dei to the Curé of Ars is a good

example of one of those bridges of affection and trust built beyond death: this is what this article has tried to illustrate. We see that “the saints shake hands and hold hands with us”<sup>[97]</sup> to encourage us also to go towards God.”

---

I wish to thank Francesc Castells of the General Archive of the Prelature of Opus Dei and Luis Cano of the Istituto Storico San Josemaría Escrivá for their help and advice.

---

<sup>[1]</sup> The original title under which the article was published is St Josémaría et le Curé d’Ars.

<sup>[2]</sup> The article therefore focuses on the relationship between the two saints with regard to the appointment of



the Curé of Ars as intercessor. No attempt is made here to systematically compare the spirituality of the two saints: it would be interesting to situate Josemaría in relation to John Mary, and to analyse the former in the history of priestly spirituality of his time, highlighting the more traditional aspects and possible originalities, especially the secularity of priestly spirituality; but this would be the subject of other research.

<sup>[3]</sup> Cf. the following note n. 54 and the paragraphs on the visits to Ars (the first took place on 25 October 1953) to explain the choice of 1953 as the *annus ad quem* of the appointment.

<sup>[4]</sup> Note on relations with bishops, Rome, 9 August 1951: AGP, A.3, 179-4-11. Nothing is recorded about this note in the diary of the Roman College around 9 August: AGP, M.2.2.,

427-8, nor in the four letters in the epistolary sent from Rome that day.

<sup>[5]</sup> AGP, A.3.4, 262-2, letter 500902-01.

This date given by St Josemaría is undoubtedly more reliable than the vague recollection of the editor of the diary of the Roman College, who wrote on Friday, 27 February 1953, after a meeting with the Founder, specifying that his memory failed him: "In the middle of a get-together Father comes to us. He tells us that in 1934 or 1935 – I don't remember exactly – he placed the Work's relations with the bishops under the patronage of the holy Curé of Ars. And a few days ago, he entrusted to St. Pius X the relations with the Holy See." See AGP, M.2.2., 427-16. It seems that it was precisely in 1953 that the idea of a group of saints to whom Opus Dei would entrust various institutional intentions took shape.

[6] "Don Josemaría began to draw up an itinerary to which he also incorporated other purposes, such as visiting all the bishops to make the Work known to them". Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. II, Madrid, Rialp, 1997-2003, p. 254.

[7] Cf. Vázquez De Prada, *El Fundador*, vol. II, pp. 253 ff.

[8] Cf. Constantine Anchel, *The preaching of St. Josemaría. Fuentes documentales para el período 1938-1946*, SetD 7 (2013), pp. 125-198, especially 135-139.

[9] For this brief explanation, I use here some expressions from the Prelature's French-language website [www.opusdei.fr](http://www.opusdei.fr), in its section *What is Opus Dei?* (accessed 9 January 2014).

[10] Cf. especially the *Codex Iuris Particularis Operis Dei*, Tit. IV, ch. V,

in Amadeo de Fuenmayor – José Luis Illanes – Valentín Gómez-Iglesias, *El itinerario jurídico del Opus Dei. Historia y defensa de un carisma*, Pamplona, Eunsa, 19904, pp. 654-656.

<sup>[11]</sup> For his friendships with the bishops of Spain, where Opus Dei was born and where it first expanded, mention should be made of Leopoldo Eijo y Garay, José López Ortiz, Santos Moro Briz, Pedro Cantero Cuadrado, Carmelo Ballester Nieto, José María Bueno Monreal, José María García Lahiguera and Juan Hervás Benet, among others. Cf. the indexes of names cited in the three volumes of Vázquez de Prada's, *The Founder of Opus Dei*; or the testimonies collected in Benito Badrinas (ed.), *Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: un hombre de Dios*. Testimonies on the founder of Opus Dei, Madrid, Palabra, 1994. For the later period and especially during the Second Vatican Council,

cf. for example Carlo Pioppi, *Alcuni incontri di san Josemaría Escrivá con personalità ecclesiastiche durante gli anni del Concilio Vaticano II*, SetD 5 (2011), pp. 165-228. The relationship of the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon, Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira, with Opus Dei serves to illustrate the respect and affection of St Josemaría at a time complicated by misunderstandings: cf. Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder*, vol. III, pp. 359-365. Cf. also Hugo de Azevedo, *Primeiras viagens de S. Josemaría a Portugal* (1945), SetD 1 (2007), pp. 15-39.

[<sup>12</sup>] Cf. Federico M. Requena – Javier Sesé (eds.), *Fuentes para la historia del Opus Dei*, Barcelona, Ariel, 2002, pp. 85-93; 109.

[<sup>13</sup>] Cf. Vázquez de Prada, *El Fundador*, vol. III, pp. 170-176; Fuenmayor – Illanes- Gómez-Iglesias, *El itinerario*, pp. 288-291.

[14] Cf. in particular the letters AGP, A. 3.4, 262-2, letters 500902-01, 500903-01 and 500914-03 from St. Josemaría.

[15] AGP, A.3.4, 262-2, letter 500902-01.

[16] AGP, M.2.2, D 428-6.

[17] Testimony of Mgr Agustin Romero, the present judicial vicar of the archdiocese of Paris, who recounts a visit of St. Josemaría to Paris on May 20, 1959, that is, as will be seen below, a week after visiting Ars: "As an example of the universality of the spirit he had given him, he spoke to us of the holy intercessors: St. Thomas More, a wonderful Englishman; the holy Curé of Ars, a Frenchman; St. Pius X, an Italian": AGP, A.2, 83-1-2, H, p. 4.

[18] "Look, in Spain we have lots of saints and I haven't looked for any Spaniards. He asks us not to be nationalists. [...] He told how he

could have chosen Blessed John of Avila as patron of our relations with the ordinaries and yet he chose the Curé of Ars": AGP, M.2.2, 428-6, 20 June 1956; AGP, A.5, 206-3-8: "He made us see how he had chosen intercessors from different nations, so that we would not be nationalists, when he could have chosen Spanish saints in abundance": Testimony of Hugo de Azevedo, Oporto, 6 September 1975.

<sup>[19]</sup> And proclaimed doctor of the Church by Benedict XVI on 7 October 2012.

<sup>[20]</sup> Cf. Marc Venard (ed.), *Histoire du christianisme*, t. Viii: Le temps des confessions, Paris, Desclée, 1992, p. 1026. St Peter Fourier (†1640), parish priest of Mattaincourt in Lorraine, had been canonised in 1897, but as founder of the canonesses regular of the Congregation of Notre-Dame.

<sup>[21]</sup> The dean of the rural parish of Bernanos remarks: "Is not the priest of Ars an exception? Is not the proportion insignificant, compared with this venerable multitude of zealous clerics, who consecrate their strength to the crushing burdens of the ministry? And who would dare to claim, however, that the practice of heroic virtues is the privilege of monks or, if I dare say so, even of simple laymen?": Georges Bernanos, *Journal d'un curé de campagne*, in Albert Béguin (ed.), *Œuvres romanesques*, Paris, (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 155) Gallimard, 1966, p. 1083.

<sup>[22]</sup> Cf. Gilbert Humbert, *Jalons chronologiques pour une histoire de la pénétration en pays francophones de la pensée et des œuvres d'Alphonse de Liguori*, in Jean Delumeau (ed.), *Alphonse de Liguori: pasteur et docteur*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1987, pp. 369-401; La



recezione del pensiero alfonsiano nella Chiesa: atti del congresso in occasione del terzo centenario della nascita di S. Alfonso De Liguori, Roma 5-7 marzo 1997, (Bibliotheca historica Congregationis SSmi. Redemptoris, 18) Collegium S. Alfonsi de Urbe, 1998.

[23] Cf. Gérard Cholvy – Yves-Marie Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine (1800-1880)*, I, Toulouse, Privat, 1985, p. 156.

[24] Cf. Gérard Cholvy, *Être chrétien en France au XIXe siècle (1790-1914)*, Paris, Seuil, 1997, p. 113.

[25] Cf. Henri Convert, *Le saint curé d'Ars et le sacrement de pénitence*, 1<sup>a</sup> partie, c. VII, Lyon, Emmanuel Vitte, 1923.

[26] Cf. Bernard Nodet, Jean-Marie Vianney, *Curé d'Ars. Sa pensée, son cœur*, Le Puy, Xavier Mappus, 19605, p. 20.

<sup>[27]</sup> In 1930 he wrote: "For a long time, in addition to taking religious magazines (The Messenger, the Iris of Peace, mission magazines and others of various congregations) to the sick, I have been distributing them, calmly and coolly, in the streets: in the slums, there was a time when I could not pass through some streets without being asked for magazines": Josemaría Escrivá, *Intimate Notes*, no. 86, 25 August 1930, in Vázquez de Prada, *El Fundador*, vol. I, p. 321. We can also think of a more scientific magazine such as *La Vida Sobrenatural*. Cf. Federico M. Requena, *El "Amor Misericordioso" in La Vida Sobrenatural*, "Vida Sobrenatural" 591 (1997), pp. 166-182; ID, *San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la devoción al Amor Misericordioso (1927-1935)*, SetD 3 (2009), pp. 139-174.

[28] Cf. Benoît Pellistrandi, From the "action of Catholics" to lay holiness. *El historiador frente a la santidad contemporánea*, in Josep-Ignasi Saranyana et alii (eds.), *El camino histórico de la santidad cristiana: de los inicios de la época contemporánea hasta el Concilio Vaticano II*, XXIV Simposio Internacional de Teología de la Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, Servicio Internacional de Teología de la Universidad de Navarra. Navarra, Pamplona, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 2004, pp. 19-42. Cf. also [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_ser...](http://www.vatican.va/news_ser...) accessed 14 Feb 2014.

[29] Pietro Stella s.d.b., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, II, Roma, LAS, 1981, p. 307. In this context, Pius XI named the Curé of Ars patron of parish priests throughout the world in the Apostolic Letter *Anno iubilari* (23

April 1929): AAS 21 (1929), pp. 312-313.

[30] Cf. Vázquez De Prada, *The Founder*, vol. III, p. 414.

[31] "He added that he loved France very much. For the spirit of justice, for reparation. I was taught to hate her so much as a child!": AGP, M.2.2, 428-6, 20 June 1956. A French member of Opus Dei, François Gondrand, recalls that in his first meeting with St Josemaría, in May 1960, he told him that "he had had to make an effort to love France, when he realised that the good religious who had been his primary school teachers had tried to instil in him hatred of the French, because in Aragon there was a very vivid memory of the Napoleonic campaigns. The Father charged us to tell the other Frenchmen who would come later that he loved France all the more, precisely because he had

had to make this effort in his youth to compensate for the hatred of the French that they had tried to instil in him in his early years. He added that it was a dreadful thing to introduce hatred into the hearts of children, and that, in spite of everything, in spite of what he had done in Spain, Napoleon was not the ogre he had been described as": AGP, A.2, 83-1-2, K, p. 2.

[32] Cf. Jesús Gil Sáenz, *La biblioteca de trabajo de san Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer en Roma*, Edusc, Rome, 2015. Some of the books arrived from Madrid after 1950, St Josemaría occupied the room leading to the shelves of this working library on 9 January 1953.

[33] St. John Baptist Mary Vianney, *Sermones de Juan Bta. M.<sup>a</sup> Vianney, cura de Ars*, Barcelona, Eugenio Subirana, 1927, vol. 1-2.

<sup>[34]</sup> Alfred Monnin, *Esprit du Curé d'Ars: St J.-B. M. Vianney dans ses catéchismes, ses homélies et sa conversation*, Paris, P. Téqui, 1935<sup>34</sup>. Uncut book; Id, *Spirito del Curato d'Ars*, Rome, Ares, 1956 (two copies); Francis Trochu, *L'âme du Curé d'Ars*, Lyon-Paris, Emmanuel Vitte, 1928. Uncut book; Hippolyte Convert, *Le St Curé d'Ars et la Famille*, Lyon-Paris, Emmanuel Vitte, 1922. Uncut book; Id. *Méditations sacerdotales: Le St Curé d'Ars modèle du prêtre retraitant*, Lyon-Paris, Emmanuel Vitte [1935]. As Gil Sáenz observes: "The closed volumes, that is to say, those that preserve the uncut sheets, do not allow us to affirm that the founder of Opus Dei ever read those titles, but that no one ever read those particular copies. As they were gifts, many of them had been read before they were sent to him". Gil Sáenz adds in a note: "Also affirmed by Bishop Echevarría in the same place [a questionnaire submitted by the

author of the brief on 20 May 2011], and furthermore he reiterates it in several questions of the questionnaire."

[35] Cf. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, critical-historical ed. prepared by Pedro Rodríguez, Rome-Madrid, Istituto Storico San Josemaría Escrivá – Rialp, 20043, p. 733.

[36] Cf. John Paul II, *Ma vocation: don et mystère*, Paris, Bayard-Cerf-Fleurus-Mame-Téqui, 1996, p. 70.

[37] At n. 277, according to the numbering of [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

[38] AGP, A.5, 221-2-2: "Another memory of the get-together we had with Father, in the summer of 1961, at La Estila, is the following: One of those present asked him – it was quite a long question – whether we should imitate what we then called minor patrons. "He went on at length about how he found it difficult to

think that the priests of the Work should imitate the virtues of the Curé of Ars, take him as a model. The Father hastened to clarify that the lesser patrons were simply intercessors, and that we went to them exclusively in this sense. Our spirit was a specific one – the one willed by God – which is the one we had to live. We should only imitate Jesus, the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, and ask the others for their intercession in those things we had placed under their protection. A few months later we received an indication from the Father, saying that from then on we would call the lesser patron saints intercessors".  
Testimony of Carlos Jordana Buttica, 20 July 1975.

[39] "Voluntarily, out of mortification and a spirit of humility, he wore a worn cassock, an old hat, patched shoes that did not know the luxury of glossy brushing": Francis Trochu, *Le*



*curé d'Ars, saint Jean-Marie-Baptiste Vianney, 1786-1859, d'après toutes les pièces du procès de canonisation et de nombreux documents inédits*, E. Vitte, Lyon-Paris 1954<sup>12</sup>, p. 315, which quotes on the same page one of the people who came to receive the saint's advice, the Baroness Alix-Henriette de Belvey: "If M. Vianney liked cleanliness, he would have liked to be clean, but he did not like it. Vianney was fond of cleanliness, his external indigence was a little detrimental to him"; "He only consented to pass his cassock to tidy up and wash when he needed it too much": Alfred Monnin, *Le Curé d'Ars, vie de M. Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney*, Lyon, C. Douniol, 1868, p. 167.

<sup>[40]</sup> Cf. Javier Echevarría, *Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Madrid, Rialp, 2000, pp. 159-161.

<sup>[41]</sup> AGP, A.5, 217-2-5. Cf. Trochu, *Le curé d'Ars St Jean Marie Vianney*, pp. 555-564: Trochu says also p. 556 that this mortification of the saint seems to him "more admirable than imitable."

<sup>[42]</sup> AGP, E.1.3, note 658: "The patrons of the Work are not properly models for us, for our specific vocation; but intercessors, protectors of our Work. Keep this in mind in your meditations and talks." St. Josemaría introduced the change of vocabulary, from minor patrons to intercessor, in the *Catechism of the Work*, which presents the particular law of Opus Dei in the form of questions and answers. Cf. the copy of the third edition of the AGP (29 March 1959), art. 5, nn. 20-27, 25 and 27, AGP, E E. 1.9, 205-3- 1, with handwritten corrections by St Josemaría for the fourth edition, from patrons to intercessors.

[43] Testimony of Iñaki Celaya, Rome, 22 September 1975: AGP, A.5, 204-3-4.

[44] Henri Convert, *Le saint curé d'Ars et le sacrement de pénitence, 1<sup>a</sup> partie*, c. VII, Lyon, Emmanuel Vitte, 1923.

[45] Bernard Nodet, *Jean-Marie Vianney, curé d'Ars. Sa pensée, son cœur*, Le Puy, Xavier Mappus, 19605, p. 18.

[46] Bernard Ardura O.Praem., "*Nella biblioteca del curato d'Ars. Conoscere san Giovanni Maria Vianney attraverso i suoi libri*", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 January 2010, p. 5.

[47] *Enrique Pèlach, Abancay: un obispo en los Andes Peruanos*, Madrid, Rialp, 2005, p. 86; AGP, A.5, 237-1-3.

[48] Cf. Tocanier, *Procès de l'ordinaire*, p. 115, in Henry Aurenche, *La passion du saint curé d'Ars*, Paris, NEL, 1949, p. 54.

[49] Javier Echevarría, Pastoral Letter (1 July 2009) at <http://www.opusdei.fr/art.php? p=34517> accessed 9 January 2014.

[50] AGP, A.2, 83-1, on the 35 stays of St Josemaría in France. However, the elements found will enable us to clarify certain points. Andrés Vázquez de Prada's biography gives the dates: 1953, 1956, 1958, 1959 and 1960. The 1955 visit and the three visits in 1957 have therefore disappeared. The author mentions as a source the Summarium of the process of canonisation, p. 837, which speaks of the pilgrimages to Ars, but does not give any dates. Cf. Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. III, p. 338.

[51] AGP, A.2, 83-1-1. We have found nothing about Ars and the holy priest around 25 October in the diaries of the Centre de la Rue de Bourgogne (Paris) AGP, M.2.2., 270-17; nor in

those of the Roman College of the Holy Cross: AGP, M.2.2., 427-18. The centre in Grenoble will not open until July 1962, after the last visit of St. Josemaría to Ars; the one in Lyon will not open until after the death of the founder of Opus Dei: therefore, there are no diaries for these two centres, which are closer to Ars than to Paris, for the period we are interested in.

[52] "They were present at a solemn service attended by the whole town, which suggests the profound mark left by this saint": AGP, A.2, 83-1-2, B, p. 1; Chronicle, XII-1955, p. 14, AGP, Library, P01.

[53] AGP, A.2, 83-1-1. Nothing was found about Ars and the holy priest on his return from St. Josemaría's trip in the diary of the Roman College of the Holy Cross: AGP, M.2.2, 248-3. Cf. also Ana Sastre, *Tiempo de caminar*, Madrid, Rialp, 19914, p. 440.

<sup>[54]</sup> AGP, A.2, 83-1-1. "No doubt they celebrated Mass": AGP, A.2, 83-1-2, C, p. 1. St. Josemaría was accompanied by Blessed Alvaro del Portillo and by Giorgio de Filippi (same source). Nothing was found about Ars and the holy priest around 27 June in the diaries of the Boulevard Saint-Germain (Paris) centre: AGP, M.2.2., 269-17, and of the Roman College of the Holy Cross: AGP, M.2.2., 428-6.

<sup>[55]</sup> 1957 was an important year because of the misunderstandings expressed by Cardinal Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira referred to above. This intention alone cannot explain the three pilgrimages to Ars, but it was present in the heart of St Josemaría and those who accompanied him, especially Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, who had gone ex professo to Lisbon in May 1956 to clarify the situation with the patriarch. Cf. Vázquez De Prada, *The Founder*, vol. III, p. 362.

[56] St. Josemaría was accompanied on this trip by Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Giorgio de Filippi, and by the later prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, then a young priest who was travelling to Paris for the first time: AGP, A.2, 83-1-2, D.

[57] AGP, A.2, 83-1-2. Nothing was found about Ars and the holy parish priest around 21 May in the diaries of the Boulevard Saint-Germain (Paris) centre: AGP, M.2.2., 269-19 and of the Roman College of the Holy Cross: AGP, M.2.2., 428-8.

[58] AGP, A.5, 237-1-4; Vázquez De Prada, *The Founder*, vol. III, pp. 263-272.

[59] AGP, A.2, 83-1-1. Nothing was found about Ars and the saintly priest around 13-14 September in the diaries of the Centre du Boulevard Saint-Germain (Paris): AGP, M.2.2., 269- 20 (St. Josemaría did not pass through Paris on this trip) and of the

Roman College of the Holy Cross:  
AGP, M.2.2., 428-8.

<sup>[60]</sup> St. Josemaría was accompanied on this journey by Blessed Alvaro del Portillo and by Giorgio de Filippi: AGP, A.2, 83-1-2, E.

<sup>[61]</sup> Nothing was found about Ars and the holy parish priest around 24 November in the diaries of the Boulevard Saint-Germain (Paris) centre: AGP, M.2.2, 269-21, and of the Roman College of the Holy Cross: AGP, M.2.2, 428-9.

<sup>[62]</sup> St Josemaría was accompanied by Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Don Javier Echevarría and Armando Serrano: AGP, A.2, 83-1-2, F.

<sup>[63]</sup> AGP, A.2, 83-1-1. Nothing was found about Ars and the saintly priest around 1 and 2 February in the diaries of the Boulevard Saint-Germain (Paris): AGP, M.2.2, 269-21



and of the Roman College of the Holy Cross: AGP, M.2.2, 428-9.

<sup>[64]</sup> AGP, A.2, 83-1-1. St Josemaría was accompanied by Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, D. Javier Echevarría and Armando Serrano. There is no diary of the Boulevard Saint-Germain centre for this period in the AGP. Nothing was found about Ars and the holy priest around 13 May in the diary of the Roman College of the Holy Cross: AGP, M.2.2, 428-12.

<sup>[65]</sup> AGP, A.2, 83-1-1. Nothing was found about Ars and the holy priest around 31 October and 1 November in the diaries of the centre of the Boulevard Saint-Germain (Paris): AGP, M.2.2., 269-27 and of the Roman College of the Holy Cross: AGP, M.2.2., 428-16. Cf. also Peter Berglar, Josemaría Escrivá. Leben und Werk des Gründers des Opus Dei, Köln, Adamas, 20054, p. 351.

<sup>[66]</sup> AGP, A.2, 83-1-1.

<sup>[67]</sup> Cf. for example Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder*, vol. III, pp. 582-588; pp. 591-596.

<sup>[68]</sup> At least those of 23 July 1961 and 3 October 1972, the last passage through France at Lourdes: AGP, A.2, 83-1-1.

<sup>[69]</sup> St. Josemaría later decided to call them aggregates.

<sup>[70]</sup> AGP, E.1.3, note 100.

<sup>[71]</sup> AGP, M.2.2, 269-15 (22 November 1955); AGP, A.2, 83-1-2, B.II. Nothing was found on the subject around the same dates in the diary of the Roman College of the Holy Cross, AGP, M.2.2, 428-3.

<sup>[72]</sup> Cf. Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder*, vol. III, pp. 257-260.

<sup>[73]</sup> AGP, E.1.3, note 4144 (15 March 1956).

[74] Cf. the recollections of Bishop Javier Echevarría in *Crónica*, 1994, p. 330, AGP, Biblioteca, P01.

[75] Cf. for example Ernst Burkhardt – Javier López, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría. Estudio de teología espiritual*, vol. II, Madrid, Rialp, 2011, pp. 400-405.

[76] Cf. AGP, A.3, 176-2-19, which is a list, handwritten by St. Josemaría, of 23 oratories planned for Villa Tevere, the 22nd being that of the Curé of Ars. On the back of the list there are indications about the works at Villa Tevere, dated March 1952.

[77] "Father wants it to be relatively modern in style and that in the altarpiece, where the statue will be presiding, the history of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross be commemorated in some way": *Diary of works*, 30 May 1957: AGP, M.2. For information from the works diary

kept by the architect Jesús Álvarez Gazapo, I am grateful to Alfredo Méndiz of the Istituto Storico San Josemaría Escrivá for his help.

[78] Diario de obras, 12 March 1958: AGP, M.2.2, D 1059, 9.

[79] "Father has been with us for a long time in the office in the morning. He has seen how the oratory of the Curé of Ars has been planted, which is very small. Father says that it will be a nice place where it will be possible to do a lot of work with the Oblate and supernumerary priests": Ibid., March 15, 1958: AGP, M.2.2, D 1059, 9: "Father spent a long time in the office in the morning. Commenting on the oratory of the Curé of Ars, he said not to worry, the time will come to build cathedrals": 17 March 1958: Ibid, "Father spent a long time in the office with us in the morning. We are still thinking about the Curé d'Ars; Father says to make

do with what we have prepared, but we don't really like it": 17 March 1958: Ibid. we don't like it": 18 March 1958: Ibid.

<sup>[80]</sup> The diary of the Roman College of the Holy Cross says exactly: "The whole body of St. Felix [will go] under the altar of the Curé of Ars, who was very devoted to the relics; above it will be a full-length statue of the holy priest that a good sculptor will make": AGP, M.2.2., 428-8 (6 June 1957). The relics of St. Felix are not in Villa Tevere: the editor of the newspaper must be confusing them with St. Severino, whose relics, given to St. Josemaría by Cardinal Marcello Mimmi, Archbishop of Naples, arrived in Villa Tevere in 1957 and were placed under the altar of the oratory of St. Joseph.

<sup>[81]</sup> Cf. for example Monnin, *Le Curé d'Ars*, p. 573.

[82] — AGP A.5, 329-2-1; AGP A.5, 323-2-9; AGP A.5, 338-1-4; AGP A.5, 218-2-3. I would like to thank Constantine Anchel for communicating these data to me.

[83] — "The Father gave Jesús [Álvarez Gazapo] last night several things he had brought back from the trip, for us. Photographs of useful things, a little book on Avignon and some photos and a sculpture of the priest of Ars. The latter will help us to have a sculptor – possibly Sciancalepore – make a life-size sculpture of the saint, which will preside over his oratory": *Diario de obras*, 30 May 1957: AGP, M.2.2, D 1059, 7.

[84] — "Today Fernando Maycas and Pepe went out and bought a statue of the priest of Ars (it had been ordered some time ago) for the Father. It is a wood carving, dignified but simple": Diary of the centre of *rue du Docteur*

*Blanche* (Paris), 12 April 1953: AGP, M.2.2., 272-40.

[85] As Fernando Maycas reports according to the writer of the diary: "The image of the Curé of Ars that we sent him was very much to his liking, he always has it on his desk": *Journal du Centre de la rue du Docteur Blanche* (Paris), 10 July 1953: AGP, M. 2.2., 272-40. Mgr Maycas, who was judicial vicar of the archdiocese of Paris – appointed by Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger – and with whom I corresponded on this matter before his death in 2014, aged 92, recognised the image given to him in 1953 in the photos of the oratory-library at Villa Tevere, a few steps from the room occupied by St Josemaría, which once again confirmed his devotion to the saintly parish priest. I would like to thank Don Fernando Maycas for his collaboration, and Don Ángel

Martínez, who kindly acted as intermediary for our e-mails.

[86] "The Father and Don Alvaro were in the office for a long time. Early in the morning, looking at the sketch of the priest of Ars, which Sciancalepore brought, and which has pleased the Father": Diary, 16 June 1957: AGP, M.2.2, D 1059, 7.

[87] Ibid. 8 July 1957: AGP, M.2.2, D 1059, 7.

[88] "The Father with Jesus went in the car, driven by Javier Abad, to see Sciancalepore. The Father has seen the priest of Ars, who is already very advanced and liked it very much: he wants us to make a mould of the small sketch in clay, so that we can cast figurines in light metal": Ibid. 31 March 1958: AGP, M.2.2, D 1059, 9; "Invention of the Holy Cross. Father went to Santa Croce in Gerusalemme first thing in the morning to pray with the relics, and on his way back



he passed by Sciancalepore's workshop, who must have been very surprised. The Father is very pleased with how the statue looks": Ibid. 3 May 1958: AGP, M.2.2, D 1059, 10.

[89] Ibid. 17 May 1958: AGP, M.2.2, D 1059, 10.

[90] Ibid. 13 August 1958: AGP, M.2.2, D 1059, 10.

[91] For example, Ibid. 2 June 1957: AGP, M.2.2, D 1059, 7.

[92] "The Father wants us to keep the models of the four intercessors so that we can make copies later": Ibid. 4 July 1959: AGP, M.2.2, D 1059, 11.

[93] Cf. Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder*, vol. III, pp. 306-309.

[94] Cf. Manuel González-Simancas Lacasa, *Un retablo de alabastro en pleno siglo XX*, in Manuel Gómez Leira–Manuel Garrido González

(eds.), Torreciudad, Madrid, Rialp, 1988, pp. 165-192, especially with regard to the statue of the priest of Ars: pp. 170-172; 174; 182-184; 187-188; 191.

[95] — St John Henry Newman, La mission de saint Benoît, in Yves-Marie J. Congar o.p., Sainte Église, Paris, (*Unam Sanctam*, 41) Cerf, 1964, p. 559.

[96] — "In the holy Church we Catholics find (...) the sense of fraternity, communion with all the brethren who have already disappeared and who are purified in purgatory – the purging Church – or with those who already enjoy – the triumphant Church – the beatific vision, eternally loving the thrice-holy God. It is the Church that remains here and, at the same time, transcends history": Josemaría Escrivá, *Amar a la Iglesia*, Madrid, Rialp, 20024, pp. 42-43.

<sup>[97]</sup> François-Marie Léthel OCD., *La lumière du Christ dans le cœur de l'Église. Jean-Paul II et la théologie des saints*, Paris, Parole et Silence, 2011, p. 16.

Laurent Touze

Studi et Documenta / cover  
image: Wikimedia Commons,  
used with a Creative Commons  
license

---

pdf | document generated  
automatically from [https://opusdei.org/  
en-ng/article/intercessors-opus-dei-  
john-mary-vianney/](https://opusdei.org/en-ng/article/intercessors-opus-dei-john-mary-vianney/) (07/26/2025)