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Sowing Peace and Joy

An article by Bishop Javier Echevarría published on the occasion of Opus Dei's 80th anniversary.

10/08/2008

Eighty years have gone by since October 2, 1928, feast of the Holy Guardian Angels. On that day St. Josemaría—by divine inspiration, as Pope John Paul II declared in the papal document *Ut Sit*—founded Opus Dei. I raise my heart in thanksgiving to the Blessed Trinity,

who wanted to open up a path of sanctification in professional work and in the ordinary circumstances of life, which men and women of all times can follow.

Pope Benedict XVI, when still Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in a homily given at a Mass of thanksgiving for the beatification of Opus Dei's founder, stated that "Josemaría Escrivá saw this call as addressed not to himself alone, but above all as *a message to pass on to others: to encourage them to strive for sanctity, and to gather a community of brothers and sisters for Christ.* Well-aware of this responsibility, "he journeyed untiringly through several continents, speaking to everyone to encourage them to be holy, to live the adventure of being Christians wherever their lives took them. Thus he became a great man of action, who lived by God's will and called others to it."

Speaking of the Christians of the first centuries, St. Josemaria said that the homes of those first brothers and sisters of ours in the faith "were centers for the spreading of the Gospel and its message. Families no different from other families of those times, but living with a new spirit, which spread to all those who were in contact with them. This is what the first Christians were, and this is what we have to be: sowers of peace and joy, the peace and joy that Jesus has brought to us" (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 30). That is how, right from the beginning, he described the role of the Prelature's faithful, in the heart of the Church: to sow peace and joy in all human activities in the middle of the world.

The Holy See, in granting Opus Dei its first canonical approvals, echoed these words, as we read in the Decree on June 16, 1950: "always and everywhere, members of Opus Dei

bring the peace and joy of Christ, and offer these to all men and women of good will. Moreover, they strive to pass this peace and joy on to everyone, and gently encourage each one to accept and savor these rich gifts of divine goodness."

Benedict XVI has said that, for a believer, the word "peace" is one of the most beautiful names for God. He is a Father who wants understanding to be present among all his children. To say "peace be with you" is the same as wishing that God be with you, and with every man and woman. And since Christ is our peace (Cf. *Eph* 2:16), this desire is shown in the effort to bring Christ to others, helping them to understand that being close to Jesus, friendship with him, brings to the soul an ineffable joy and peace: the peace of God, which the world cannot give (cf. *Jn* 14:27).

I was a witness to how St. Josemaría not only preached and spread the *gospel of peace* (Eph 6:15), but also bore it constantly in his heart.

Although his life was sometimes in danger, and his soul harbored a deep spiritual concern for the fate of the Church and civil society, I never saw him lose his serenity, nor stop striving to communicate that peace to others.

Convinced that spreading the Gospel necessarily means a generous sowing of peace and joy, he spurred others to an encounter with Christ, always with great respect for personal freedom. He knew that this was the greatest service he could render mankind, since knowledge of Christ's teachings and the commitment to live them perfect human freedom and channel it towards the service of others.

Through its evangelizing mission, the Church contributes to an abundant sowing of peace. As St. Josemaría writes, "the Lord wants his children in all the honest pathways of this earth, sowing the seeds of understanding and forgiveness, of harmony, charity and peace" (*The Forge*, no. 373).

By making Christ known, we also carry out an abundant sowing of joy. The joy of God's children doesn't stem from favorable circumstances, nor is it merely a physiological joy. Like anyone else, a man or woman of faith experiences weariness and sickness, hardship and anxiety, doubts and setbacks. But they always know they are very much loved by God. They rely on him, as his son or daughter, and, with his help, recover their joy if they have lost it.

Neither will the experience of our own spiritual weakness rob us of our

joy, if we bring our misfortune to a healing encounter with divine mercy. The parable of the son who deserts his father's house and is reduced to the wretched slavery of his passions, ends in the feast of rediscovered love (*Lk 15:11-32*). If ever we feel weak, we should remember that God's help will never be lacking. As St. Josemaría writes: "Jesus Christ, who is God and Man, understands me and looks after me" (*The Forge*, no. 182).

The human and the divine are interwoven in the work of Christian evangelization: concern for others, charity, respect for others' freedom. St. Josemaría, during a large get-together in Argentina in 1974 (a year marked by tragic conflicts in that beloved South American nation), insisted: "you have to sow peace and joy on all sides. Don't say a single word against anyone. Walk arm in arm with those who think differently than you do. Never mistreat anyone.

Practice fraternal charity with all men and women, being sowers of peace and joy."

Every anniversary is an opportunity to look towards the future. On the eightieth anniversary of Opus Dei's founding, I ask God that this small portion of the Church that is the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, will always carry out at the heart of civil society the mission he entrusted to it in 1928: to bring about in souls a generous sowing of the Gospel's peace and joy, which will also permeate the structures of society and make them more human.

The Universe, (U.K.), 5 October 2008.

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(04/27/2025)