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Video: "When we work with God's grace, miracles happen"

Homily of the Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Charles John Brown at the Manila Cathedral on 27 June 2022 to celebrate the feast day of St. Josemaria Escriva.

06/29/2022

FULL TEXT OF THE HOMILY

Your Eminence Jose Cardinal Advincula, archbishop of Manila,

My dear brother bishops and priests,
Reverend Monsignor Carlos VG
Estrada, regional vicar of the
Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus
Dei,

Priests, lay people, members of Opus
Dei:

For me, as your papal nuncio, as the
representative of Pope Francis here
in the Philippines, it gives me so
much joy to be with you this evening
in this beautiful cathedral so
wonderfully decorated, to celebrate
this votive Mass on the feast day of
St. Josemaria Escriva, the founder of
Opus Dei.

We come with hearts filled with
gratitude and joy this evening to
celebrate the memory and the
teaching of this great saint who has
shown us a way of sanctification in
the modern world.

In the Opening Prayer for the liturgy this evening we prayed together: “O God who raised up your priest, St. Josemaria, in the Church to proclaim the universal call to holiness and the apostolate, grant that by his intercession and example we” - and these are the important words for us - “we, through our daily work, be formed in the likeness of Christ, your Son, and serve the work of redemption with burning love.”

Saint Josemaria is known, of course, for his teaching - his prophetic teaching - on the universal call to holiness: the fact that all of the baptized -- baptized into Christ -- we are called to sanctity. We are called to the perfection of God's grace in our lives. We are called to bring the good work that has begun in us by Baptism to fruition.

St. Josemaria Escriva is also known for valuing so importantly the

vocation of the laity; for understanding that the church is not simply a clerical association of priests and bishops but that the vast -- almost the entire vast majority of Catholics, make their way to heaven as laypeople. And he recognized that beautiful truth and developed it in his teaching.

But thirdly, and this is what I'd like to concentrate on a bit with you this evening in my reflections: St. Josemaria Escriva also very profoundly taught us about the importance of work; of sanctifying our work and seeing our work as a means of our own sanctification.

As I look out at this large crowd in the Cathedral this evening, I think that probably some of you were there with me in Saint Peter's Square on October 6, 2002 for the canonization of St. Josemaria Escriva by St. John Paul II. On that day -- I

don't expect you to remember every detail -- but that day, the First Reading for the liturgy of canonization was what we heard this afternoon, this evening; the same First Reading from Genesis, from the second chapter of Genesis.

And Pope St. John Paul II said this that day in October of 2002: "The book of Genesis, as we heard in the First Reading," the pope said, "reminds us that the Creator has entrusted the earth to man 'to till it, to keep it.' Believers, faithful people acting in the various realities of this world contribute to realize the divine universal plan. Work and any other activity carried out with the help of grace is converted into a means of daily sanctification." Those are the words of John Paul II that day, reflecting on this First Reading that we heard this evening; indeed, the First book of the Bible, the book of Genesis.

And it's interesting in the book of Genesis, in a part of Genesis Chapter 2, which is not part of tonight's reading but comes immediately before the passage that we read - the book of Genesis talks about how God finished the work he had been doing and rested on the last day. On the seventh day, God had finished his work and all he had been doing and he rested from his work. God finished his work, rested from his work. And then we have the passage that we read this evening.

In the Latin Bible, of course: the translation of St. Jerome, the Vulgate, that line that God finished his work on the seventh day goes like this: "*Complevitque Deus die septimo opus suum, quod fecerat.*" (God completed the work on the seventh day) the *opus* that he had done and he rested from all his work.

So creation, brothers and sisters, God's work of creating the universe, is described literally in the book of Genesis as the "*opus dei*," the "work of God," *Deus* who did this *opus* of creating the entire cosmos in which you and I find ourselves as part of his Creation.

None of us created ourselves. All of us are created by God. All of us are part of that "*opus Dei*," which is his Creation from which he rested on the seventh day. Creation is described as the work the "*opus Dei*."

If we go back in history a little bit before the canonization of St. Josemaria Escriva, back to 1981, we would find that very famous encyclical letter written by the same Saint who canonized Josemaria Escriva, St. John Paul II. That encyclical letter called *Laborem exercens* (Through Work) written back in 1981.

Again our dear Pope and Saint John Paul II reflected on this book of Genesis. And he reflected on this fact that God has made Creation as his work. He says this: “The description of Creation which we find in the very first chapter of the book of Genesis is also, in a sense, the first gospel of work, for it shows what the dignity of work consists of. It teaches that man ought to imitate God his Creator in working because man alone has the unique characteristic of likeness to God.”

Pope John Paul II writes: “Awareness that man's work is a participation in God's activity, that awareness ought to permeate even the most ordinary everyday activities.” And isn't that a beautiful summation of the spirituality of St. Josemaria Escriva, written in 1981 by John Paul II: the awareness that human work is a participation in God's activity. That awareness ought to permeate the

most everyday and ordinary activities.

God's *opus Dei* is Creation and we return - in a certain sense - to God, through our work. Man's work - human beings' work - is analogous to God's work in Creation. In working, we imitate God and we see in that the nobility of work. And we find in that a spirituality of work, a sanctification of work, because by working we are imitating God's creative power in our own much more humble ways.

People who criticize the Catholic Church say: "Oh you Catholics! You think by doing your works you're going to work your way to heaven. You have no room for grace." That, of course, is a complete misunderstanding. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even think about tonight's Gospel of the apostles in the boat fishing all night, catching nothing - zero, because they were

fishing without Jesus in the boat. And then later Jesus comes into the boat and says: “Cast out your nets again.” And they say: “We did this all night and nothing happened,” but in obedience they do it and their nets are bursting at the seams.

What does it show us? It shows that, of course, our own work in itself without God’s grace is completely insufficient, completely inadequate. But when we are living a spirituality of work and allowing God’s grace to penetrate our work, then our nets become full to the point of bursting. Then, God’s work is actually activated in our work. That is a sanctification of work.

It’s interesting also in the Gospel that we read tonight: how Jesus, in a certain sense, allows the apostles to work and find that great catch of fish. It wasn’t as if Jesus said in the gospel this evening: “Oh you haven’t

caught any fish,” and then Jesus prayed and fish miraculously jumped into the boat. That's not what happened. Jesus says: “Put your nets out again. Work and you will find something.” This idea that our effort is important.

Is our effort completely enough? No, but our effort is important. Our efforts are absolutely necessary. Our efforts are not sufficient, they're not adequate; but they're necessary. And when we work with God's grace, then miracles happen. God's grace permeates our work and our work becomes a sacrifice.

In the Preface to the Saints in the Roman Missal, when we pray a Mass of the Saints, we have this amazing line in the first of the Prefaces of the Saints talking about the merits of the saints, that is, their glory, their merits. That they have merited something. They have - in a certain

sense - deserved something from God. But the Preface says this, speaking of God: “You are praised in the company of your Saints, and in crowning their merits, you crown your own gifts.”

It's interesting when God rewards us for the good work we've done. It's not as if we did this without God. It's his grace that makes it possible for us to participate in his work. So, his grace permeates our work and our work becomes abundant and our work becomes indeed meritorious for us. God crowns our merits because he is really crowning his own gifts.

Even in the Eucharist, which we are celebrating this evening -- think about it for a moment -- Jesus will give us in a few moments his true body and blood, his soul and divinity for our sanctification.

But what is necessary for the Mass? Obviously a priest is necessary, but

bread and wine are also necessary. And bread and wine, as we will hear in a few minutes, both of them are the “work of human hands.”

So for Jesus to become present among us in the Eucharist to feed us, to sanctify us, he needs our work. He needs someone who has made that wine; someone who has made that bread. That work is necessary for him to come into our lives. Is the bread and wine by itself, without his grace, enough for our sanctification? No, it's simply bread and wine. But when God's grace permeates the bread and wine and transforms it, it becomes the body and blood of Jesus.

Jesus didn't choose natural elements to make the Eucharist. He didn't take a piece of fruit - as he could have - and said: “This is my body”; and water and said: “This is my blood.” He took something, as we will hear,

that is “fruit of the earth and work of human hands.”

This idea of the sanctification of work, so that everything that you do as members of Opus Dei, every task that you are assigned to do, every apostolate that you're engaged in, whatever it is, it has this Eucharistic quality because God's grace is penetrating and imbuing your work with power - the power that comes from grace.

So, we need to value our work. We need to do our work well. As I said now several times: Are our efforts on their own enough? No, but our efforts on their own are necessary. That paradox: something that is insufficient and necessary at the same time. And that is the miracle of our faith.

When we reflect on all of these things, we reflect of course under the eyes and the gaze of the Blessed

Virgin Mary, our mother. In heaven, she who intercedes for us, she who lived a humble life and work - we can say - of a mother and a wife in a small town - not the capital - but a small town in what is now Israel. She who lived those domestic virtues in an extraordinary way, she who sanctified herself even more through her work - of course she was born without original sin - but she cooperated in the most marvelous way with God's grace in her life so that her efforts, everything she did was permeated by God's grace.

So, dear brothers and sisters, on this feast day in which we celebrate not only the memory but the teaching, the doctrine we can say, of St. Josemaria Escriva, we thank God for the gift of Opus Dei here in the Philippines and throughout the world. I have been Nuncio in various places in the world and I've seen in every place the great work done by

members of Opus Dei in various sectors of society, seen and unseen work, which is marvelous. And for that reason, as Pope Francis's representative here in the Philippines, it gives me so much joy to be with you this evening and to wish you a blessed feast day.

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(03/21/2026)