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Fr John ‘helped thousands of souls’

An article published by the Sydney Catholic Weekly about a requiem Mass celebrated for the first counsellor of Opus Dei in Australia and New Zealand, Monsignor John Masso.

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Thousands of people attended a requiem Mass at St Mary’s Cathedral to mark the death of the first head of Opus Dei in Australia, Mons John Masso. The Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell, drew the

attention of the congregation to a statement by the founder of Opus Dei, St Josemaría Escrivá, that “the Christian vocation consists in making heroic verse out of the prose of each day”. The cardinal said that Mons Masso – known universally and affectionately as “Fr John” – had been one of those people who managed to achieve this ideal.

“He had enormous faith and optimism,” said Cardinal Pell. “He was very good to me, a great friend and wise counsel in good times and in very bad times.” Mons Masso had allowed himself to be used by God. “I thank God for that,” said Cardinal Pell. “He was right about many things.”

The director of the Catholic Adult Education Centre, Fr John Flader, drew attention in the homily to Fr Masso’s “exuberant, out-going personality”. “Of all the people I have

ever met, he was the closest in personal warmth to St Josemaría, whom you could not help but love,” he said. “He endeared himself to everyone and left a great impression on all of them. And he was very sensitive, very understanding.”

Fr Flader said that when the monsignor was informed recently that the Prelate of Opus Dei had appointed someone to succeed him as regional vicar in Australia, he had replied: “I am very happy. It was time. Now if I recover I can be full time for the apostolate.”

Fr Flader added: “What he really lived for was to help souls come closer to God.” He spoke of the “enormous spiritual impact” that Mons Masso had on so many people, “including bishops and priests, in addition to lay faithful”, and of his “natural dynamism and seemingly boundless energy”.

“With his business background he had a great capacity to analyse a situation and see a solution, and then he was tireless in seeing it through to completion,” Fr Flader said. Like St Josemaría, he was very demanding, first on himself and then on others, and at the same time, he was very positive and encouraging. He knew how to bring the best out of people. But first and foremost, he was a man of God. Anyone who attended one of his meditations or retreats, or received spiritual advice from him, was immediately impressed by his deep piety, his obvious and genuine love for God, and for Our Lady. As always the Mass was the centre of his interior life. He made a great effort to sit in a wheelchair and concelebrate Mass up to only a week before his death.”

Fr Flader noted that for many years Mons Masso had heard confessions in St Mary’s Cathedral for hours each

week. “Thousands and thousands of souls passed through those confessionals and were helped by his wisdom, and his supernatural and practical advice,” he said.

Juan Antonio Masso was born in Barcelona on June 17, 1932, one of seven children. He learnt his English from a year in Ireland as a schoolboy before studying commerce at the University of Barcelona. It was during his time at the university that he became a member of Opus Dei.

On completion of his studies he worked for his father’s company and later set up another company, Comercial Quimica Masso, which ventured into several markets abroad over the following 10 years. His plans changed when Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, asked him if he would like to become a priest of Opus Dei.

He was ordained in 1965. A year later he came to Australia where he became the first chaplain to Warrane College, a residential college for men at the University of NSW. Opus Dei had only two centres and a handful of members in Australia when Fr John was appointed counsellor in 1969. By the time of his death last month, it had expanded dramatically, with centres all over Sydney as well as in Melbourne and Hobart and the New Zealand centres of Hamilton and Auckland. As well, the prelature now conducts regular formative activities in Brisbane, Newcastle, Wollongong, Canberra and Perth and in Wellington, New Zealand.

The many bishops and priests who concelebrated the Mass with Cardinal Pell included his predecessor as Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Edward Clancy, the Bishop of Lismore, Bishop Geoffrey Jarrett, the Bishop of Broken Bay, Bishop

David Walker, Bishop David Cremin
and Mons Masso's newly appointed
successor, Fr George Rossman

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