

# **Celebrating Saint Josemaria in Dubai**

On Saint Josemaria's feast day, Masses are celebrated all over the world... the desert included. In a country that is officially Muslim, populated by over a hundred nationalities, the saint of ordinary life inspires many to keep the fire of their faith alive.

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For years, members and cooperators of Opus Dei from all over the world have been living in the Emirates. As

the number began to increase, starting in 2009, several priests began to stop in Dubai on their way to India or Kenya, to offer spiritual attention to people living there.

The first Mass of St. Josemaría ever celebrated in the Emirates was in June 2009, at St. Francis of Assisi parish in Jebel Ali. Fr. Albert Pampillón, who has since passed away, celebrated the mass, stopping by on his way to Nairobi. Although it is a Muslim country and there are no Opus Dei centers here, seventy people attended.

Until then, the few supernumeraries and cooperators residing in the country would organize themselves to be able to receive some means of Christian formation. In 2012, priests began to visit on a monthly basis, and thanks to this, they could also have recollections for men and for women: a monthly break for a few

hours to pray, guided by a priest and open to anyone who would like to join.

Since June 2015, these recollections also take place in Qatar, where every three months there is a recollection at the church of Our Lady of the Rosary in Doha, the capital. “Before starting, we spoke with two representatives of the Church there (from North and South Arabia), who gave their permission. And we try to keep them informed about what we do,” explains Fr. Ferrán Canet, who travels from Lebanon to preach these recollections.

This is how he describes his experience. “When I talk about these trips, someone always asks me if I go dressed as a priest, and whether it is dangerous, or if I’ve had any problems because of being a priest... Whenever I have traveled to an Arab country (Egypt, Kuwait, Dubai, Qatar)

I have always gone dressed as a priest. And I've never had any problems. In fact, the only problem I have ever faced was when my old passport broke in two in the hands of the police, who were putting an entry visa to Dubai on it, and it was resolved when another policeman inspected it and saw that I was born in Barcelona: he returned it to me saying "Visca Barça" in perfect Catalan, and the problem was solved."

"In both Dubai and Qatar, the recollections began thanks to the presence of some faithful of the Prelature who were living in those countries for professional reasons. Many people come and go through these countries, often staying for three or four years. With globalization and the economic crisis, this area of the world has provided a place for many people to make it through the storm, while

others are simply trying to take advantage of some thriving markets. All this has brought many people from around the world to these countries, including, of course, many Catholics,” he adds.

Those who get in touch with the Work in Dubai usually do so through friends back in their home countries. Others have come in contact through new friends, colleagues, or even chance encounters. Since there is no center here and people often have very different schedules, organizing things so that everyone can attend can be difficult. However, “everyone who comes enriches us with their friendship and their interest by coming in spite of the difficulties,” says Jackie Alcantara, a supernumerary who lives there and coordinates the activities for women in the area.

**A dream come true**

In 1933, Saint Josemaria celebrated benediction with the Blessed Sacrament after the first class of Christian formation that he ever gave, to just three students. Years later he recalled: “It seemed to me that our Lord was blessing three hundred, three hundred thousand, thirty million, three billion...white, black, yellow, of all colors, all the combinations that human love can produce.”

At the parish of St. Francis of Assisi in Jebel Ali (Dubai), after one of the masses for Saint Josemaria that was held, the sacristan asked where everybody came from: he was surprised because he was used to seeing each nationality in different parish groups, with its own language. “Here,” he said, employing Saint Josemaría's own words, unbeknownst to himself “everyone is together: how many colors!”

Additionally, the government of United Arab Emirates[1] has officially invited Pope Francis to visit the country. Catholics in Dubai are very excited about the possible visit of the Pope, who is very sensitive to the peripheries of the world.

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[1] <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/pope-francis-invited-to-visit-the-uae>

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