

Meditations: February 14, Founding of the Women's Section and the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross

Some reflections that can assist our prayer as we celebrate two foundational dates in Opus Dei.

- The divine paths on earth have been opened up
- The Work is a family
- Women and priests bringing light to the world

ON FRIDAY, 14 February 1930, in Madrid, early in the morning Saint Josemaría went to a small oratory to celebrate Mass. Shortly after receiving our Lord in communion, he sensed something new in his heart. During the Mass we too sometimes sense the desire to identify ourselves more closely with Jesus, a greater yearning for holiness, light to grasp a bit better the mystery of God. But this time it was something much greater than usual. He understood that, from now on, many women would be called by God to join in the mission of Opus Dei, which had been born just over a year before. On the fiftieth anniversary of that day, Don Alvaro del Portillo, Saint Josemaría's first successor at the head of the Work, reminded us that "it was from the Holy Mass, the ever-renewed presence of Christ's sacrifice, that this spark of divine Love that would enkindle love in so many hearts came into the world."^[1]

By God's will, something very similar happened in 1943. Saint Josemaría had come to celebrate Holy Mass in the home of one of his daughters, also in Madrid. "When I finished celebrating it," the founder said, "I drew the seal of the Work, the Cross of Christ embracing the world, set in its midst, and I was able to speak of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. Give thanks to God for all this great goodness of his."^[2]

The spirit of the Work is, above all, a gift from God, always new. As Saint Josemaría reminded us, it is not a plan drawn up by human minds to solve problems from the past or for a specific place.^[3] The Work is born, over and over again, with each person called to incarnate it in his or her life, in the "perennial today of the Risen One."^[4] Hence to embrace the future with the boldness God asks of us, we should keep alive the memory of October 2nd, 1928 and

other foundational dates. Thus we will be able to rediscover, at any age, the “sweeping avalanche”^[5] that the Holy Spirit has prepared for us and for those around us.

AN ESSENTIAL PART of the mission that God gave Saint Josemaría on those foundational dates (and that He has later given to so many people through the founder) consists in forming a family. Within this divine plan, the presence of women in the Work takes on special relevance. Their presence is “a necessary prerequisite for a true family spirit to exist in Opus Dei.”^[6] Indeed, the Work is, above all, a very large family with men and women of all ages, where each one contributes their own way of being, their own talents and interests. This results in each person, individually, being at the center of everyone’s attention and prayers, especially when, for some reason, he or she needs it in a

special way. The psalmist says: *Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! . . . For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life for evermore* (Ps 133:1-3). The role of a family is to generate the rich, fertile space, in which each of its members can find a place to put down roots, being fully welcomed and happy. At the same time, Saint Josemaría foresaw that the apostolic activities of Opus Dei (that is, the formation it provides and its government) would be carried out separately for men and women. This, naturally, is not at odds with the deep unity that beats in the hearts of everyone.

A family spread throughout the world can be truly united thanks to the Communion of Saints, which the founder of Opus Dei used to graphically describe as the ability to share the same arterial blood.

Blessed Guadalupe Ortiz de

Landázuri experienced this union in many ways. On Wednesday, June 4, 1958, Don Alvaro reserved Jesus for the first time in the tabernacle of the center of the Work in Madrid where she was living. Recounting some details of this event, Guadalupe wrote a letter to Saint Josemaría in Rome: “[Don Alvaro] spoke to us about Rome and it seemed to us that we were right there next to the Father, as in reality we always are. And we want to be ever closer, even though, as now, we are far away.”^[7] Those who have experienced authentic love, a reflection of divine love, know that the limits of physical space are no obstacle for realizing how close we are to others, especially on a special anniversary.

AT THE END of the Second Vatican Council, the Church addressed these

words to all women: “The hour has come when the vocation of women is being achieved in its fulness . . . That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid mankind.”^[8] This is an ongoing process, in which the women of Opus Dei are called to employ “all their spiritual and human richness in a dialogue with the people of our day and age.”^[9] This is the divine mission given to Saint Josemaría in 1928: to strive to ensure, from within, that changes in society reflect Christ’s face, playing an important role in history.

“My daughters,” the founder of Opus Dei said on February 14, 1956, “I would like that today you reflect on so many marvelous things that our Lord, the Church, and all humanity are hoping for from the women’s section of Opus Dei; and that,

realizing the greatness of your vocation, you may love it more each day.”^[10] The vocation of women in Opus Dei is an apostolic vocation, a light that our Lord has lit so that it can be placed “on a lampstand” (cf. *Lk 11:33*), so its clarity and warmth can reach everyone. “The sanctity of women always plays a key role in the sanctity of those around them.”^[11]

Each February 14th is a day to rejoice and raise up a grateful prayer to God. First, because, in continuity with October 2nd, on this day a path of true Christian joy was opened up for many women, and consequently for everyone; and also because God continues to bless his Church through the priests of the Work who, lending their voices and hands to Christ, strive to enrich all the paths of the earth with holiness. The diary of the center where many women of Opus Dei lived in Rome, close to Saint Josemaría, recorded on the

anniversary of that date: “Today is a great and happy day, filled with joy for us. It is a day to set all the bells in Rome ringing, spending the whole day giving thanks to God. And it is a day for celebration, as though it were the birthday and saint’s day of everyone here.”^[12] This joy extends to all the persons who draw near to the warmth of the Work, with whom we can give thanks, close to our Lady, for all the gifts that God has granted to his Church.

^[1] Blessed Alvaro del Portillo,
Pastoral Letter, 9 January 1980.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, 14 February 1958.

^[3] Cf. Saint Josemaría, *Instruction on the Supernatural Spirit of the Work of God*, no. 15.

^[4] Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, no. 173.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *Letters* 32, no. 41.

^[6] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, “The Vocation to Opus Dei as a Vocation in the Church,” in *Opus Dei in the Church*, p. 190.

^[7] Letter to Saint Josemaría, 4 June 4 1958, in *Letters to a Saint*.

^[8] Saint Paul VI, Message to Women, at the Closing of the Second Vatican Council, 8 December 1965.

^[9] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Message, 5 February 2020.

^[10] Saint Josemaría, Homily, 14 February 1956.

^[11] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Message, 5 February 2020.

^[12] Diary of Villa Sacchetti, 14 February 1950.

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