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An extraordinary catechesis by ordinary citizens

Most Rev. Gerardo Alminaza presided over the Mass in honor of St. Josemaría Escrivá in Jaro Cathedral, Iloilo City.

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When people hear the word “catechesis,” they may think of “religious instruction” (which is similar to what Wiktionary says). But what will they make of a catechesis

“on simply living an ordinary life in the middle of the world”?

This was the challenge that my two internet outsourcing officemates and I got when we attended a Mass on June 26, 2009 in Jaro Cathedral, Iloilo City. It was held in honor of St. Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei (Latin for “Work of God”), a personal prelature of the Catholic Church. I found it all rather ironic since St. Escrivá relentlessly espoused a message of “being ordinary Christians in the middle of the world,” and yet this Mass of about 700 faithful was a rather special way to end another ordinary weekday!

The Auxiliary Bishop, Most Rev. Gerardo Alminaza, presided over the Mass which started at 6:30 PM. Seventeen priests from the Archdiocese of Jaro concelebrated with him. Prior to the Mass, my two

friends and I observed the people around us, coming from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances, and people who in one way or another were attracted to the spirit of St. Escrivá. Indeed, these people were a fitting description of the Spanish saint's idea of Christianity: not just members of a family, but living members of an active catechism meant to be learned, re-learned and lived for a whole lifetime.

This timeless message heard after a long week of work served to balance the cathedral's stark and somber surroundings. The construction work being done inside the church was no small help to the respectful silence of the faithful, who were well aware of last year's powerful typhoon which also devastated more than 50 provinces all over the country.

The bishop started his homily by citing some signs of doctrinal

ignorance here in Iloilo alone, which makes the duty of catechism an even more urgent task. This meshed well with the next idea of the homilist, that “all the apostolates of Opus Dei can be reduced to just one: give doctrine.” He also mentioned highlights about the life of Saint Escrivá, who was canonized in 2002. He mentioned that an important part of this “Work of God” is made up of activities with young people all over the world. In Iloilo, these activities revolve around Tawili University Center for women, and Tuburan Study Center and Orbe House in Miag-ao for men. He also pointed out the catechism and tutorial activities that are being organized by young students themselves in the case of the Yuhum Club and the Civics 101. Bishop Alminaza summed this all up by punning: “People do not care how much you know, until they know how much you care!”

Soon, each of those who went to the Mass will be back in their respective circumstances: government and private offices and homes, malls and stores, schools and warehouses, streets and farms. And it will be in those settings that they will live the catechism the Bishop was so insistent on. As for you reader, I hope you will take time to know more and live this challenge yourself!

Opus Dei centers organize formative activities for students and young workers, such as Christian doctrine classes, spiritual guidance, cultural events and service projects. These formational activities emphasize that study and work are indispensable to any serious service to Church and society, to spreading peace and joy, to building a more human, just and Christian world.

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