

“Find holiness in every work”

Excerpts from the homily of
Most Rev. Jose S. Palma,
archbishop of Cebu, for the
feast of St Josemaria Escriva at
the Cebu Metropolitan
Cathedral on 25 June 2025

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My dear friends, on behalf of the archdiocese of Cebu it is my privilege to greet “Happy fiesta to all of you! Happy fiesta!” (applause)

I will always remember two occasions of my birthday in Rome - both meaningful to me.

One of them happened when we had this audience with the Holy Father. As a practice, we bishops, after the audience would line up and draw close to him and kiss his hand... some few words of advice from the Pope or greetings from him... and that's it. On this one occasion, after we had finished our turn as bishops, Bishop Rañola - a retired bishop who stays in our house - approached me and asked me: "Bishop Palma, how come there were 20 of us bishops, it's only you whom the Holy Father embraced and hugged. All of us he just extended his hands." I said, "you know what, because I told the Holy Father: '*Santo Padre, hoy es mi cumpleaños* (today is my birthday)" and the Holy Father said: '*Es verdad?*' (Really?). 'Yes Holy Father. I was born March 19,' etc." So he embraced

me and hugged me. That's why Bishop Rañola was a little bit envious because only I was hugged. That's about one birthday.

The other birthday was more meaningful to me. On that day, together with some priests - graduates of Navarra [University of Navarre in Spain] - and of course many of them still studying in Rome decided to come with me. And we celebrated Mass at the tomb of Josemaria Escriva in Rome. I thought that was most meaningful. And I will always remember that event when we had the Solemn Mass, celebrating at the tomb of the Saint.

Why do I mention the birthdays? Because incidentally last March 19 was my 75th birthday and I wrote the Holy Father [Pope Francis]: "Holy Father, I'm 75 and as per Canon Law we should tender our resignation so that you can assign someone else and

I would retire. And I hope you grant immediately my request on my 75th birthday.” I just mentioned this because I am happy to celebrate this Mass with you. Last year I was not here because I was in Iloilo. But today I am happy because it could be my last official opportunity to celebrate [this] Mass.

When I went to Navarra [University of Navarre in Spain] to visit our seminarians and ordain a deacon, they asked me to wear the vestments worn by the saint, Josemaria Escriva. They said: “This was worn by Josemaria Escriva.” “Why do you put it on me?” “Just wear it Bishop.”

Now I know the reason, the Opus Dei wanted me to wear them: *unta matabnan sa ilang pagkabalaam* (hopefully that we may be touched by his holiness). That’s why I said, “Ok, I have no problem wearing that, especially because after this there

will be an official picture taking.” But that is the main reason. I know wearing the vestment of the Saint hopefully will make us truly - at least - hopeful to imitate his sanctity.

My dear friends what a beautiful day to thank the Lord for the gift of the Saint. We know as we had mentioned that he was born in Spain 1902 and he was ordained at the age of 23, 100 years ago on March 28.

But the important reminder for us is that he founded Opus Dei and we are aware how much it has contributed to the growth, to the sanctification of the Church. He was a forerunner of the teaching of the call to universal sanctification.

Those who review a bit of history would recall that there was a time that people thought only the clergy or the religious are exhorted to be holy. The lay people should be contented with - in Italian we say:

“Cosi, cosi.” (So-so). *Basta lang.* But no! According to the Saint, all of us because we are God’s children and our Father is holy. What a great privilege to be called God’s children! And therefore the call to be holy - all of us no matter what station, no matter what profession we have.

The second is a reminder of the sanctification of ordinary life. We don’t want and we don’t need to do great things in order to be a great saint. All we need to do is to do the ordinary with great love. It is in this perspective that as Archbishop, I take this occasion to thank Opus Dei because in the institutions you have founded, for instance in the CITE (Technical School) you have thousands of young men knowing that, through their education, what seems to be ordinary can become a way to sanctification, done well, it is!

And likewise even in BCPD [Banilad Center for Professional Development] what seems to be ordinary, as cooking or cleaning the house, is a way to sanctification. That's why I take this occasion to thank the organization because we have seen, we have witnessed how thousands have been transformed, living holy lives — integrating prayer, a sense of duty, doing things with love, all for the glory of God. I repeat as Bishop, I say thank you because of what I know about CITE and BCPD and the many other ways they serve the community in various schools, injecting that spirituality of dedication and love, and of course doing things inspired by the love of the Lord.

I have told this story, but I love repeating it because it dramatizes what it means to do things, to do what we are tasked to do with love. We are all aware of how great

Michelangelo is. Those who visit Rome know. The first thing they see is usually the Pieta, the David, etc. What I want to tell is the story of some of his contemporaries who were kind of envious that such a young boy at 24 - that boy who at such a young age made the Pieta. How can he be so great? So, in not a very Christian way we might say, they asked the Pope to task Michelangelo no longer to do sculpture but to do a painting. They thought that "he is a sculptor; if he paints it will no longer be beautiful." And so the Pope commissioned him to paint the ceiling of the Sistine chapel. We have seen that during the Consistory. And the genius said, "Holy Father, I'm a sculptor. I am not a painter." "But you are an artist. You can do it," the pope said. So out of obedience he did it. He hung himself there in the ceiling for days, for weeks... and someone said of him, "Master, why do you have to stay

there for so long? What you are painting could hardly even be seen from down there. It's a bit dark." His response: "Nevermind, you may not be able to see it clearly but I know God sees my painting, my work clearly." So he tries to make it as best as he could and now we all know - if he is known for his sculpture he is also known for his painting.

When we work for the glory of God anything certainly is a means to holiness, to contributing to making this world a beautiful, a better place to live in. That's the spirituality of Opus Dei.

And I know many of you... I have known many of you in the various projects. You want to make it beautiful. And I know many of you were saying, "not so much for profit... yes there should be, but no, that is secondary. It is because it is God's task for us to initiate this

project, to make this contribution, to do this work.”

My dear brothers and sisters indeed we should find God in the ordinary and we should find holiness in every work that we do, be it gardening, cooking, cleaning the house. This is Opus Dei spirituality.

Love for the Church is also at the heart of Opus Dei spirituality... And I would like to end by his reminder for all of us: love for the Church and for the Pope.

When I submitted my resignation, Pope Francis died, so the others [jokingly] say: “*Namatay si Pope Francis, kay nagresign ka no?*” (Pope Francis died, because you resigned, noh?) Anyway, my letter was shelved. I was waiting for the new Pope... and incidentally I know him personally, because when I submitted "Sugbuswak", the division

of the Archdiocese, it was through him. He has been here 2010.

One Pope has been called to God; this time another one has come. I learned that even in Peru, like Mother Teresa when she was alive was known as the living saint, Prevost was known as the saint in the north, because of his witnessing, his simplicity, his clarity in teaching, and of course his love for God.

My point is: it is our task as well to pray for his intention because as Saint Josemaria Escriva said, we are all members of the Church and it is our duty to pray for unity, to pray for peace as the Holy Father has exhorted us; to pray for this world that is hurt because of division and quarrels. We follow that injunction.

And so, as we continue this Mass, we continue to pray in this year of the great jubilee, in the year when we celebrated 100 years of an

anniversary of his ordination and 50 years of his anniversary of [departure for heaven] we pray that we, belonging to the family, may truly live up to his exhortation to strive to be holy even in the ordinary as we may say, knowing that this is the way for us.

To all of you, thank you for your presence and may all of us, through the intercession of Saint Josemaria Escriva, journey towards the Father in the spirit of hope, knowing that the hope that is based on Jesus will not fail.

To all of you, once more I say, Congratulations! Happy fiesta of St. Josemaria Escriva! Amen.

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