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Homily of Bishop Francisco de Leon on the liturgical feast day of St. Josemaria Escriva

"Concomitant with holiness is apostolate... Someone called to be holy is called to be of service to others."

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My brother priests. My brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The favorite sport of most Filipinos is basketball; whether local (PBA) or American (NBA). For each team, though composed of about ten members, only five are playing in the court. And each player has a role or function: the point guard, the shooting guard, the small forward, the power forward, and the center. The team will likely win if they play their roles well. But if any player doesn't do his role or function, the team will likely lose.

I use this analogy of a basketball team for the Church. The Church has members with different roles or functions. We have the Pope, the bishops, the priests, the deacons, the lay ministers, and the laity in general. Each has a different role or function. But if the clergy acts like the laity, or the laity like the clergy; there will be confusion and division. The Church as a whole will have difficulty to fulfill her mission given

to her by the founder, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even if each member of the Church has a different role, ALL are called to holiness. The genius of Josemaría Escrivá – whose 40th death anniversary we are celebrating today – is to make this crystal clear, emphasize it, and form a body of men and women help to help other persons see this, and become holy.

There have been members of the laity who were holy and were canonized as saints, like St. Zita (the patron of housemaids), St. Apollonia (the patron of dentists), St. Cecilia (the patron of musicians), and St. Thomas More (the patron of lawyers). The parents of St. Therese of Lisieux are being considered for canonization; and if they are, they will be the first couple (husband and wife) to be canonized.

St. Josemaría emphasized well that holiness can be attained by ordinary men and women in their profession. By doing their work – at home or in the office, in school or in politics – honestly, lovingly, professionally, with perseverance and long-suffering, ordinary men and women can attain the heights of holiness.

They do not have to become members of the clergy or the religious to become holy. In truth, some members of the clergy are not holy, because they do not do what they are expected to. Some of them – as we say in Tagalog – “namamangka sa dalawang ilog”. They serve two masters.

Concomitant with holiness is apostolate. A holy person cannot remain holy if he or she does not reach out to others. Someone called to be holy is called to be of service to

others. The laity is holy when she reaches out to others in all the aspects of the human person: bodily, for example teaching the person livelihood, so that he may have some means to live; mentally, for example teaching or educating the slow ones; and spiritually, for example bringing them to the sacraments and giving them good example.

Holiness and the apostolate are like two hands. They need each other. It is easier to work or wash if you have two hands. Holiness and apostolate is just one aspect of the genius of Josemaría Escrivá. We know that there are still many gold nuggets in his teachings and writings. If we focus on holiness and apostolate, it is more than enough for the time being.

Let me conclude with a true story that happened to me several years ago. A woman came to me complaining about her husband. She

said that her husband “ay nagbababad sa simbahan” day and night. He is often in the church, from morning to evening. He told her that he was doing many things in the church, serving as lector and commentator every Mass, even as Eucharistic lay minister, and sometimes as catechist. And the reason that he told his wife was: “tumululong lang ako kay Father.” The problem, the wife said, was that he was neglecting his work in the office and in the house. The children missed him. She also missed him. But she said, “ayokong mab-maramotsa Diyos, pero sobra na!”

The case of the man, my brothers and sisters, shows us how not to be holy. It was taking him away from what he should do as husband and father of the family, where he can find real holiness. He stops earning a living just to be full time in his apostolate. It is good to serve the

Church, but it should be balanced with one's other duties in the family and in the office. And I hope that man can read the teachings and the books written by St. Josemaría Escriva. And that man can learn a lot from our patron.

Mabuhay si San Josemaría!

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