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## **“This statue has made St Josemaría a father to me.”**

This statue of St Josemaría in St Peter's Basilica took Italian sculptor Romano Cosci more than 2 years to create. We recall his emotions on the day Pope Benedict XVI unveiled and blessed it on Sept 14, 2005.

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The statues of more than 150 saints from the beginning of the Church stand in and around St Peter's

Basilica and the Square. The latest addition in 2005 was that of the Founder of Opus Dei, St Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer who was canonized on 6 Oct 2002 by Pope John Paul II. The statue stands in a vaulted niche situated on the façade of the left transept of the Basilica, also known as the arm of St. Joseph, very close to the entrance to the sacristy. The niches in this section of the Basilica were destined by John Paul II for sculptures of saints and founders of our era.

This is the largest statue of St Josemaría known to date. In accord with traditional specifications for a statue destined for St. Peter's Basilica, it is carved from a single piece of white Carrara marble in perfect condition without internal fissures and breaks. The statue stands at 5.3m and has 2 angels at his feet holding an open page of the Gospel with the inscription from

John 12:32 : “*Et ego, si exaltatus a fuero a terra, omnes traham ad meipsum*” – And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, shall draw all men to myself.

This statue is the work of master sculptor Romano Cosci, who worked in his studio in Pietrasanta, in the province of Lucca, in Tuscany. Pietrasanta has been made famous by none other than Michaelangelo. Cosci spent more than 2 years from early 2003 to July 2005 in transforming the image from sketches and clay models into marble. It was brought from his workshop in Pietrasanta to Rome in early Sept 2005 and lifted into its niche by a crane.

On September 14, the Holy Father Benedict XVI blessed the statue in the presence of a festive audience of about a thousand people, which included the Prelate of Opus Dei,

Bishop Javier Echevarría. The statue was unveiled when the Pope arrived. The Holy Father blessed it and said a brief prayer: “O God, who has chosen, in the Church, St. Josemaría, priest, to proclaim the universal call to sanctity and the apostolate, pour your blessing upon this statue and let all of those who see it be inspired to faithfully fulfill their daily work in the spirit of Christ and to serve with ardent love the work of the redemption. Through Christ our Lord.”

Benedict XVI then paused to pray for a few moments beneath the image, greeted the notables present and all of the faithful, and congratulated the sculptor.

The emotion of the artist, Romano Cosci, on seeing the statue in its final place was palpable on that day. We catch a glimpse of his sentiment in the brief address he gave on that day:

“I am happy to be here today, and in particular I find it moving to be so close to the Holy Father, Benedict XVI. I worked for two years on this sculpture, so for me it is a very special moment. When the statue was finally finished, I felt something similar to what a father feels on the day when, after spending years raising a son, he sees him finally set off on his own.

In this statue I wanted to leave something of my own, something very personal to me, something that went beyond just a style or a part of my soul, of my soul as an artist, which as those who are acquainted with me know, seeks the meaning of faith as a path and as a dialogue. Therefore I would like those who in the future look at this statue to feel themselves involved in this dialogue, in this conversation with God and with men – a conversation in which

St Josemaría also takes part, by interceding for us.

St Josemaría's lively look and his hands that are so expressive were to be, in my plan, the means of this dialogue. But in reality, the whole ensemble is involved. It also includes the two angels I placed at the feet of the saint, one at the right and the other at the left, which reflects the equilibrium, serenity and peace that marks the saints.

I asked St Josemaría for help during the execution of the statue, and he certainly helped me. I am also grateful for the encouragement of the Prelate and the advice of the architect Javier Cotelo and the engineer Fernando Valenciano. I recall, for example, that one day I fell off the scaffolding and hit my head. I ended up in the hospital, but thanks to God (and in my own opinion, to St

Josemaría), I didn't suffer any major injury.

Otherwise, as I always do, I tried to get to know St Josemaría well, his life and his teachings, to interiorize his image before beginning to sculpt it. For me this has been a great experience. I hope the statue that I've sculpted will transmit at least a part of what he has given to me and what is reality he has given to all of us.

Therefore, I am very grateful to St Josemaría. This statue is, of course, my work. It is the fruit of my responsibility as an artist. But I think I can also say that this statue has made St Josemaría a father to me.”