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A saint for our times

From many points of view the most important – or at least the most decisive – day of our lives is, paradoxically, the day we die. It is the end of our life in this world and the beginning of our eternal life.

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We may have many short-term goals in life but the long-term goal has to be seen in the context of where we hope to go when we die. People who do not believe in life after death are short-changing themselves!

Their only hope is to try to live as long as possible to make this life and its fleeting happiness last but they will end up like the motorist who loves driving and doesn't want the journey to end although he is going nowhere in particular and when the car finally stops – that is it! A person who thinks like that is like a golf ball. He gets a lot of perks out of life but ends up in one small hole in the ground and that is the end of the game! Or is it?

The love of material pleasure – here and now – has given rise to our consumer society since pleasure stops when what we are enjoying finishes or begins to cloy. Some adults behave like small children who begin to cry as soon as their enjoyment or entertainment ends. The difference is that very small children do not have an educated Mind or Will and therefore are as little to blame as the animals who

live a perfectly orderly life, albeit completely egoistic if judged from the human point of view.

They don't have any long-term goal because they don't reason. As soon as our reason develops we begin to realize that, in order to perfect ourselves as mature human beings, we need to know the purpose of our life and strengthen our will in order to BE what we want to BE rather than just HAVE what we want to Have. The old adage of "You can't take it with you when you go!" is truer than we think but do we give ourselves time to think? The only thing we take with us when we go is what we are, with our virtues and our defects.

According to a very ancient Christian custom, the day on which a holy person dies is called their "dies natalis" (their "day of birth"). Saint Josemaria Escriva was born on

January 9, 1902 but his “dies natalis” was June 26, 1975. His Canonization ceremony took place in St. Peter’s Square in Rome on October 6, 2002 and was witnessed by hundreds of thousands of persons from all over the world whose lives have been touched by the message he spread from the moment he founded Opus Dei on October 2, 1928. As he said in a homily he gave on October 8, 1967: “…you must understand now more clearly that God is calling you to serve Him in and from the ordinary material and secular activities of human life. He waits for us everyday in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all the immense panorama of work. Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it”. He spread this

message with the urgency that was needed in a world, which was becoming each time more materialistic because men and women had begun to live a kind of double life. “On one side an interior life, a life of relation with God; and on the other, a separate and distinct professional, social and family life, full of small earthly realities”.

Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life”, he said, “or else we shall never find Him. That is why I can tell you that our age needs to give back to matter and to the most trivial occurrences and situations their noble and original meaning. It needs to restore them to the service of the Kingdom of God, to spiritualize them, turning them into a means and an occasion for a continuous meeting with Jesus Christ.”

In one of his books “The Way” – which is a major spiritual classic – he wrote a point in the 1930s which has become even more relevant in today’s society: Rush, rush, rush! Hustle and bustle! Feverish activity! The mad urge to dash about. Amazing material structures…On the spiritual level… shams, illusions, flimsy backdrops, cheesecloth scenery, painted cardboard … Hustle and bustle! And a lot of people running hither and thither. It is because they work thinking only of “today”; their vision is limited to “the present”. But you must see things with the eyes of eternity, “keeping in the present” what has passed and what has yet to come. Calmness. Peace. Intense life within you. Without that wild hurry. Without that mad urge for change. From your own place in life, like a powerful generator of spiritual energy, you will give life and vigor to ever so

many without losing your own vitality and your own light".

My parents first met Msgr. Josemaria Escriva in London in 1962 and it was the beginning of a long friendship. In spite of his tremendous workload and his responsibilities towards his thousands of spiritual sons and daughters in the five continents, he never failed to answer their letters and to send them a Christmas card, sharing their joys and sorrows with his prayers, his sympathy and his warm, friendly smile. They always remembered the time they drove to Italy on holiday and encountered him by chance taking a country walk near a small town outside Rome.

My father stopped the car to greet him and he immediately invited them over to his home in Rome. That is how Saint Josemaria was! He practiced what he preached and to be with him was to be filled with a

burning desire to spread peace and joy throughout the world and to win souls for God. “I assure you, my sons and daughters”, he said on October 8, 1967, “that when a Christian carries out with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with the transcendence of God. That is why I have told you repeatedly, and hammered away once and again on the idea that the Christian vocation consists of making heroic verse out of the prose of each day. Heaven and earth seem to merge on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives.”

In 1935 he had jotted down some personal notes: “Live a life of faith. Love self-giving: struggle, waverings! We can all go through this. At the end one rests in Thee! Life, a test, a step, a dream, a comedy, a way, a struggle, a flower, a twinkling of a star, a flash

of lightening; a hundred years? Only a second! Then Love Himself, who is Life, End, Reality, Rest after the victory, Light of the eternal sun … and this: Eternity." As Pope John Paul II said during the Canonization ceremony: "May the example and teaching of St. Josemaria be an incentive to us so that at the end of the earthly pilgrimage, we too may be able to share in the blessed inheritance of heaven!"

Here we have a man who achieved this long-term goal and who, during our lifetime, encouraged men and women, of all ages, races, creeds and social backgrounds, to sanctify their lives in the middle of the modern world. He is truly a Saint of our times!

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