

Archbishop Neary's Thanksgiving Mass Message

A homily given by Michael Neary, Archbishop of Tuam, Ireland, at a Mass of Thanksgiving for the Canonisation of Saint Josemaría Escrivá at the Cathedral of the Assumption, Tuam.

11/15/2002

When I was a child, like most children, I would have loved nothing better than to be told that for

Christmas, say, or for my birthday I could have anything I wanted. No limits. Only say the word. Anything at all. In the Scriptures Our Lord uses exactly the same language arising from exactly the same human needs when He tells us: "Ask and you shall receive." He is explaining God's limitless love for us as Creator and Father. One could preach on that subject forever and not exhaust its breadth and depth. What interests me today, though, is one of the subtler manifestations of that great love. It is central, crucial to our lives as sons and daughters of God. I would call it the gift of self-giving.

In this gift, and in this specific case, God takes a man, a fairly ordinary, normal man, and gives him the strength to imitate Him. He enables a man of flesh and blood, with all the faults and selfishness of flesh and blood, to give Him the only thing of real worth which that man possesses.

His life. His very being. When a sensible human being becomes daft enough to do this you know that God is not far away. Craziness is not greatly admired in this smooth, clever world. There is much talk about risk-taking but little appetite for taking the really big risks. It takes tremendous courage to turn to God and talk to Him like a child of God. To say to God, as God says to us: “Ask and you shall receive.” To wave a hand in the direction of your life, your little bit of security, and say: “Here, within this world that is me, whatever you want. Take it. Do it. Let it be.”

No, this is not an easy thing to do and without God, impossible. I am reminded here of the story once told by Saint Josemaría concerning the old knight of the roads he noticed in a Spanish hostel for the homeless where he was helping out. When it came time for the simple meal

provided by the hostel the other guests all took their bowls of food and whatever crude cutlery the hostel could provide. Not so with Josemaría's friend. Not for him the regulation issue. He, with a considerable flourish, produced what was clearly the pride of his life: his own personal spoon. It was not much of a spoon, as far as Josemaría could make out, but it was his spoon and that, clearly, was what mattered. He ate his food with relish, licked the spoon absolutely clean and, having given it a look of loving approval, put it carefully away. Life was not so bad. He did not have much, but he had something. He had a spoon.

And we all have our spoons, in whatever form. Self-preservation is a powerful instinct. Our temptation, perhaps our greatest temptation, as with the servant in the parable, too cunning by half, is to hide the one talent and take no chances. This life

and the assets we hold within it appear frighteningly weak and transitory to even the most cursory examination. The things we place so much hope in, that compliment from someone we admire, that salary raise, that favourable comment from the boss, good things all of them, have so little power to help us in the end. Yet, acting on the philosophy that “something is better than nothing” most of us cling to those pathetic bits of false security as if our lives depended on them. In fact it is quite the contrary. Our lives, if only we would recognise it, depend on giving them up.

Precisely because you seem to understand this so well, you in Opus Dei have an incalculable amount to offer to the Church, especially at this time. You seem to have a powerful sense of the enormity of one human being’s “yes” to God and a true grasp of the minute detail in which that

“yes” must be expressed and worked out. You seem to understand the risks involved and calmly take and live with them. Your Founder was fond of comparing a good Christian to a donkey, working away unnoticed and quietly getting things done. That massive calm, that serenity, that firmness of purpose, is what we need now more than ever before. I am saying this because, as you cannot but be aware, tremendous harm is happening to the Church and to the lives of many Church members. The sad betrayals of a minority of priests have wreaked a degree of havoc hitherto almost unimaginable in the lives of believers. Saint Josemaría used to observe, I believe, that if the Devil neglected the ruin of priests he was a fool, and the Devil was no fool! He was right, and the results are clearly to be seen. Pray for us, now, and keep up your tireless, often unnoticed work in the fields of God. In your dedicated lives you have

taken a great risk. Give example now so that others, losing courage and faith, may be inspired to do the same.

Fr. Josemaría is now a saint. Speaking infallibly before the whole Church, the Vicar of Christ on Earth has said this and has stated it to be true. If we were to attempt a very crude sketch of what this means we might do worse than to say he is officially recognised as a master-investor, a spiritual risk-taker *par excellence*. If we were to extend the metaphor we might say, in a way which would have appealed to his sense of humour, that he is now recognised as one of the better chancers to have made it into heaven. “God and daring” was his motto. God and daring have raised him to the altars. May we too, gathered here today, have the courage to imitate the mad, reckless generosity of God. May we find the

confidence to wave at our whole lives and tell God to ask for anything He wants. And somehow understanding, through His grace, exactly what it is He does want, may we have the faith to ask our Mother with Saint Josemaría, *Domina, ut sit!* Lady, that it may be!

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