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Countdown to the canonization

With a week left till the canonization of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, a picture of the event is coming into focus. So far, 230,000 participants from 84 countries are confirmed, with more expected. And everyone's got a story.

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Forty per cent of those coming are young people. Most of them are planning on bringing a sleeping bag and staying at campsites, gyms,

parishes and other places in Rome and its vicinity.

A contingent of 500 from Japan will be the first to arrive, touching down at Fiumicino Airport on October 1. A group of families from Catania (Sicily) are planning to come to Rome in trailers. One group of particular interest is coming from Russia. The 30 participants include Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants, and will travel by car from St. Petersburg, Moscow and Rostov. They will lodge with Roman families as part of "Benvenuti a Casa Mia" (the "Welcome to My Home" program) set up for participants with limited economic means.

More than 10,000 people from different regions of the Mediterranean (Marseilles, Barcelona, Palermo, Valencia, Corsica and Malaga) will arrive at the Eternal City in boats, mooring at the port of

Civitavecchia, which will be occupied exclusively by passengers for the first time. They will live on the boats and travel to Saint Peter's by train. The port authorities and the city council have prepared a celebration for the evening of October 6 in which one of the port's piers will be named after the new saint.

Among the participants from Africa will be 180 from the Democratic Republic of Congo. In one of the Thanksgiving Masses after the canonization they will pray for peace in their country, together with participants from other countries. The Mass will be in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere at 10:00 a.m. on October 9.

According to the Organizing Committee, more than 5,000 participants will arrive from the United States. Among them will be the members of a rock band from

Michigan, "Kitchen Queen," which organized a fund-raising concert to help people coming to Rome from some countries in Central America.

Among the Swedes is the 31-member Choir of the Cathedral of Stockholm, which will sing with 35 other choirs in the canonization ceremony and at the Thanksgiving Masses. The choir will arrive in Rome two days early for an ecumenical celebration in St. Peter's on the occasion of the 7th centennial of the birth of St. Bridget on October 4.

Thousands will be coming from Madrid, the diocese in which Blessed Josemaría founded Opus Dei in 1928. Some of them are coming in the diocesan pilgrimage led by Cardinal **Antonio Maria Rouco**. Coming also from Madrid are hundreds of college students who have paid for their trip by selling folding chairs for the

liturgical ceremonies of October 6 and 7.

Hundreds of volunteers

Volunteers will play an important role in making the participants feel at home. There will be a total of 1,850 young men and women, including 500 local Romans. The Romans will be introducing the city to the other volunteers, who are coming from all over the world. "I am volunteering out of gratitude to Blessed Josemaría," says **Annalisa Panio**, a 29-year-old married volunteer. "Life is a lot more colorful that way. Dedicating some time to others enriches you spiritually even if all you can give is a fraction of what they may need."

The volunteers will arrive in Rome from September 29 onwards and will lodge in groups at the Department of Civil Protection in Castelnuovo di Porto, in the Residenza Universitaria

Internazionale (RUI) and in the pilgrim lodge at the Sanctuary of Divino Amore. They will be in the city until October 10. In addition to helping out, they will have times of prayer together and other events.

Rome's open house

At this point, 950 Roman families have joined "Benvenuti a Casa Mia (the "Welcome to My Home" program). Under the coordination of the Organizing Committee, these families will put up people or families who wouldn't be able to come otherwise.

"Roman families have a tradition of hospitality," says **Federica Paolini**, one of the hosts in the program. She adds, "Blessed Josemaría is truly a father for many of us. He has helped us see the Church as a family, and therefore hospitality is a spontaneous gesture. I am sure it will be a beautiful experience for all."

Larger groups will also be lodged by various groups that have offered their premises. For example, more than 12,000 participants will stay in schools and parishes in Rome and in the region of Lazio.

The Presentation of Project Harambee 2002

Also related to the canonization is the launching of Project Harambee 2002, a charity fund that will finance educational projects in Africa with donations from canonization participants. This program will be presented on October 4 at the Auditorium of the National Academy of Santa Cecilia (Via della Conciliazione 4, 9:00 p.m.) The President of the Project's Committee of Honor is Mrs. **Mama Ngina Kenyatta**, the widow of the first president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta.

Saving with Creativity

The messages sent to the Organizing Committee show that making it to Rome has involved great economic sacrifices for a good number of participants.

One example is provided by the 300 farmers coming from Cañete Valley, a region in Peru where there is extensive devotion to Blessed Josemaría. **Aldegunda Chumpitaz** tells us they have organized different activities to raise funds for the trip, like selling 7,000 picarones per person (picarones are traditional pastries made of sugar, yeast and flour).

Noel Macaraeg is a young Filipino who suffers from leukemia. He is the youngest of ten. His family has great devotion to the new saint. His brother Raul sent a petition to the “Make a Wish Foundation” in the United States, an institution dedicated to supporting the wishes of

young terminally ill patients. Noel's wish was to come to the canonization with his family. After praying to Blessed Josemaría, the wish has come true. The foundation will sponsor his trip and that of his mother and two of his sisters. "We are all very happy!" he says.

Miguel Chigüichón is a gardener in Guatemala. For seven months he has been washing cars every Saturday after work to pay for his trip to Rome.

Natividad and Javier Isorna from Santiago de Compostela (Spain) have many children. To pay for their trip to Rome they started a "family piggy bank" where they and their children deposit money earned through odd jobs. **Chus**, 16, tells us how it all started. "Dad started by making filloas (a traditional meal in Galicia) and Mom made biscuits and gave private lessons. I found a job

assisting an elderly woman, and on weekends, I would do little side jobs with my sister Paola. We also babysat at parties and receptions. Now, 3 of us have been able to pay for our trips and we'll continue to help the rest save up."

Lucille Gaudette from Quebec (Canada) had wanted to come for the canonization but she will no longer be able to because she is ill with cancer. Mrs. Gaudette has decided that she can still participate by donating her savings to the young participants coming from her city.

Why Come?

The website www.escrivacanonization.org has information and news on the canonization. In the "Why go" section, many participants have given their reasons for coming to Rome.

"I want to be there that day," writes **Aurora** from Venezuela, "to support the Pope in his effort to extend the message of Christ to all corners of the world." **Alexandra** sends this message from Poland: "I will be at the canonization to thank Blessed Josemaría for his fidelity. I will be there with my whole family because we all have many intentions to ask for and many things to be grateful for." **Celma**, from Brazil, will fly over the Atlantic Ocean "to be with the Pope and give thanks for the gift that Msgr. Escrivá has been for us all."

Many of the messages portray a desire to thank the new saint for specific favors, cures, etc. **Erica** from Argentina writes: "Through the intercession of Blessed Josemaría I was cured from anorexia and bulimia when I was 16. Since then I have been waiting for the moment to thank God for the second chance He has given me to search for Him

everyday, to love more everyday and to redeem with my life as a wife, as a mother, as a friend...." Another message says: "I dream of being present and giving witness with infinite gratitude for his intercession that has permitted me to survive a clinical death after an accident I had on December 11, 1998." (**Lucrecia**, Mexico).

"I am going to Rome for the canonization of Josemaría Escrivá to thank God for all the gifts I have received through his intercession," writes **Houessou** from Ivory Coast. Like him, many people express their desire to come to Rome to thank Josemaría Escrivá for spiritual favors. "I want to participate in the canonization," says **Philippe** from France, "to give thanks for all he has done for me in my life these past ten years. I never prayed before, and now I do. I didn't have any perspective on my life and now I am

very happy with the little good I manage to do."

Fr. Abelardo from Venezuela declares: "In 1990, I read one of his biographies. I was so impressed that it helped me take a decisive step in my priestly vocation. I have been a priest for four years now. How can I not go and thank him?" "I owe my love for Christ to the new saint," writes **Markus Schwarz** (Austria). "Being at the canonization is a sign of acknowledgment for me and my family."

Maria Rosa from Cuba will participate in the ceremony of the canonization "to be sure there is someone from my country in the square." **Begoña** writes from the United States explaining why she will not be at St. Peter's Square on October 6: "God wants me to give birth to my fifth child that day. My

heart will be with you all, joyful and praising God."

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