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Homily for the Mass of St Josemaria

The following homily was given by Fr Andrew Soane in the Mass celebrated in honour of St Josemaria at St Thomas More, Swiss Cottage, on 28 June 2025

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In the Bible, in the Book of Genesis from which we have just been reading, it is written that *God took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it* (Gn 2, 15). To look after and work in and take responsibility for the

Garden, which stands for God's visible creation.

We recall that on the sixth day of creation *God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good* (Gn 1, 31). In spite of the subsequent fall, creation still is, good. It is certainly very beautiful.

Astronauts, seeing our planet earth from space for the first time, have described their awe on seeing for the first time *the sparkling blue and white sphere*, laced with white wisps of cloud (...) surrounded by a *thin halo of blue*, against the black space surrounding it.

John Glenn, the first American astronaut in space, who said, "*To look out at this kind of creation out here and not believe in God is to me impossible. It just strengthens my faith. I wish there were words to describe what it's like.*"

And in its great beauty, creation expresses the beauty and goodness of God. As Psalm 19 puts it: *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

And yet, as the cosmonaut James Irwin says, as he saw the spectacle for the first time *something was missing – I felt strangely unfulfilled. Here was a tremendous visual spectacle, but viewed in silence. There was no grand musical accompaniment; no triumphant, inspired sonata or symphony. Each one of us must write the music of this sphere for ourselves.*

We are called to give a finish to God's creative work, to perfect it. A more precise way of looking at this reality is to see ourselves as called participants in Creation, to develop and transform it.

This teaching is found in Pope St John Paul II's encyclical *Laborem*

exercens (September 1981): Man, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the Creator, and, in a sense, within the limits of his own human capabilities, continues to develop that activity, and perfects it (no.25).

The parallel of music making is very appropriate. Firstly because the art of music requires hard work and practice. Although perhaps the great composer Johann Sebastian Bach was over-optimistic about the rest of us when he said: “I was obliged to be industrious. Whoever is equally industrious will succeed equally well”. But it is true that, all things being equal, the harder we work, the better our contribution will be.

The parallel with music is appropriate secondly because St Josemaría himself loved music, and liked especially to sing; his artistic gift is evident to us in the cadence of

his speech, in the rhythms of his writings in Spanish. His biographer, Andrés Vázquez de Prada, who lived for many years in London, used to say that he was spurred to meet St Josemaría first of all because, on reading his best-known book called *The Way*, he thought he had to seek out the person who had written such a beautiful work of art.

And thirdly because music is both an art and a performance, and on making music, whether singing in several voices or playing an instrument, we are, in principle, playing to an audience.

The great guitarist Narciso Yepes, once said: *When I give a concert, (...) the most emotional and happy moment for me is that moment of silence which happens just before I begin to play. Then I know that the public and I are going to share music, with all its aesthetic emotions. But I*

not only do not seek applause, but I am always surprised when they applaud me: I forget that, at the end of the concert, there comes the ovation! And I will confess something more: nearly always, the person who I am really playing for is God. I say 'nearly always' because there are times when, through my fault, I get distracted in the middle of the concert. The public does not notice. But God and I, we do. And... [the interviewer asks] does God like music? Yepes answers, He is enchanted by it! More than my music, what He likes is that I dedicate my attention to Him, my sensitivity, my effort, my art... my work. And furthermore, to play an instrument as well as one can, and be conscious of the presence of God, is a marvellous way of praying. I am well experienced in this.

Well, what a great thing it would be if, when we were to ask the Lord if our work pleases him, we were to

hear the blessed reply, *it delights me!* God is delighted by my work, by my study! This is what we try to achieve. To make a little work of art of that which we have in front of us. Not to make a bad job of it, but a work of art which pleases God and therefore others.

We return to the scriptural image of creation as the Garden of God. We all have been entrusted with a portion of that garden, a plot; we can imagine it as a little square within its boundaries, which we have been entrusted to work on so that it may be fruitful.

And as we work, working as best we can, we offer the fruit of our work back to God, with our little contribution. And, collectively, we are offering the whole world back to Him, finished. And in doing so we are proclaiming His glory, and we are

sanctifying whatever action it is we are engaged on doing.

One final thought: Creation itself has much to teach us about God: the harmony of colours, of shapes, of light, of shadow, of balance in the seasons, of rhythms of plants that grow and flower; we can see something of the inner life of God when we contemplate the world around us – it is not surprising... all that beauty, all that motion, it is God at work. Our response, our own work, is like our rational worship of God, the rational counterpart of our *liturgical* worship here at Mass or more generally in our prayer-life.

Yes, when we work well and offer it to God, we are worshipping Him. When we find it difficult and turn to God and persevere, we are worshipping Him. When we find time to help our classmate or colleague who finds the pace

difficult, or our children, or our friend, or our co-worker, we are worshipping God. Worshipping God is going the extra mile to be kind to someone, stopping to give them the directions they need, or the time of day, or just our smile. Worshipping God is forgiving someone who has hurt us. By these everyday actions we are truly writing the music of the spheres.

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