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Mass in London to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the visit of St Josemaría Escrivá

A Mass for the Assumption of Our Lady is being celebrated at Our Lady of Willesden church where St Josemaría Escrivá consecrated Opus Dei to Our Lady on 15 August 1958.

10/08/2018

The Mass will take place at **7.30pm**
on Wednesday 15 August 2018 at

Our Lady of Willesden Church

1 Nicoll Road

London NW10 9AX

Confessions will be heard from
7.00pm.

**St Josemaría Escrivá in Willesden:
15 August 1958**

On Tuesday, 5th August 1958 St Josemaría celebrated Holy Mass in Great Britain for the first time. The previous day he had disembarked at the port of Dover, and from there travelled to London by car. As was his custom when he went to a country, as soon as he arrived he said three Hail Marys and the aspiration *Sancta Maria, Regina Angliae, ora pro nobis!*

Recourse to our Lady was to be a constant feature of those weeks which he spent in the British Isles, as well as on subsequent visits up to 1962. St Josemaría prayed in many towns and cities – London, Winchester, Oxford, Canterbury, Cambridge ... – and he discovered in them quite a number of statues and paintings of our Lady. In London he visited, often with Rosary beads in hand, Catholic churches, such as Westminster Cathedral, St James's Spanish Place, St Etheldreda's, as well as the Anglican churches of the Annunciation in Bryanston Street, Westminster Abbey, and St George's Hanover Square. At the Anglican churches of All Hallows and St Bartholomew, he stopped to pray with great faith before statues of our Lady.

Years later St Josemaría would remind a member of Opus Dei who spoke to him of an Anglican relative

who was very close to the Catholic faith:

Tell her to go to the ancient buildings of England, and she will discover so many statues and pictures of our Lady. Beautiful images of the Blessed Virgin! I've seen so many of them, in those churches which are now in Protestant hands, or in no one's hands, because nobody goes there. In the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge there are also many wonderful statues of our Lady.

In the heart of every man there is a great love for his mother; so how could it be that God our Lord – who is Man, perfect Man – didn't love his Mother? If that were so, it would be an imperfection.[1]

One of the sites dearest to English Catholic tradition is this shrine in London. The feast of Our Lady of Willesden has been traditionally

celebrated on 15th August, the solemnity of the Assumption of our Lady. It was on Friday, 15th August 1958 that St Josemaría came to Willesden to pray to our Lady. He was accompanied by Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, the late Bishop Javier Echevarría, the Regional Counsellor Fr John Galarraga, Fr James Planell and a couple of lay members of Opus Dei. There he renewed the consecration of the Work to the most Sweet Heart of Mary. And he invoked our Lady with the aspiration: *Sancta Maria, Regina Angliae, ora pro nobis!*

St Josemaría, wishing to give a push to the apostolate of his daughters and sons, placed the future development of Opus Dei in Britain in our Lady's hands. Around the time of his visit to Willesden in that summer of 1958, God gave him a caress in the City of London, which he recalled as follows:

A little more than a month ago I found myself in a country I greatly love... where there reigns a great indifference to the things of God. As I considered this panorama I got disconcerted and felt powerless: "Josemaría, here you can't do anything." I was absolutely right: on my own I would not achieve anything; without God, I couldn't even lift a piece of straw off the ground. My poor powerlessness was so patent that I nearly became sad; and that's a bad thing. Getting sad? A son of God? He can get tired, because he's pulling the cart like a faithful donkey; but sad? No. A bad thing is sadness!

Then suddenly, in the middle of a street, with people from all over of the world coming and going, inside me, deep in my heart, I felt the effectiveness of God's arm: "You can do nothing, but I can do

everything; you are ineptitude, but I am Omnipotence. I will be with you, and there will be effectiveness. We will bring souls to happiness, to unity, to the Lord's path, to salvation! Here too we will sow peace and joy in abundance."[2]

Blessed Alvaro del Portillo in Willesden: 15 August 1980

After St Josemaría Escrivá died on 26th June 1975, his closest aide for some 40 years was elected to succeed him. Blessed Alvaro del Portillo spent the summer of 1980 in Britain. He arrived in Dover on 6 July, the anniversary of the martyrdom of St Thomas More (1535) and went immediately to the Church of St Dunstan in Canterbury, where the head of More is buried.

Blessed Alvaro wished to walk in the footsteps of the Founder of Opus Dei, and on 15th August 1980, also a

Friday, he did a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Willesden. He arrived at 10:30am with the late Bishop Javier Echevarría, the Regional Counsellor Fr Philip Sherrington, Fr Dan Cummings and other members of Opus Dei. After making a Visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the main nave of the church, the group moved to the Lady Chapel to say the rosary. At Blessed Alvaro's suggestion, the rosary was led by Fr Philip in English, and they were joined by a handful of parishioners who were also present.

After the rosary, Blessed Alvaro renewed the Consecration to Our Mother.

He then addressed Her slowly, in a low voice:

“We have come to renew the Consecration of Opus Dei to your Most Sweet Heart, as our Father did

here, on a day like today, twenty-two years ago.

“We ask you for the Church, which is so much in need of prayers and for the Work, which forms part of the Holy Church. We ask you for all the Regions, for the two sections, and especially for the regions which are just beginning. We ask you in a special way for this British Region and for all of us. We ask for the fifty-eight sons of mine who are today receiving the Sacrament of Orders and who are your children. My Mother: We offer you all my daughters and all my sons, so that you keep guard over them.”

He turned to Divine mercy in petition for all of the Church's needs. He asked for the faithfulness of all his children “so that they may spread – with their apostolic work throughout the world – peace and joy, through

the most powerful help of St Joseph and our most beloved Father”.

As he left the church, Blessed Alvaro said that he had expressly wanted Fr Dan Cummings to be at his side, representing the whole of Opus Dei and the Region of Ireland, with Fr Philip representing the British region.

To commemorate the occasion, Blessed Alvaro was presented with two little bells of the 16th century. The late Peter Hoare, an antique dealer, had reserved these for an occasion like this. The bells are almost identical, and carry the aspiration “*O Mater Dei memento mei*” (O Mother of God, remember me); and below is a relief of the Virgin Mary with the Child in her arms. After reading the aspiration aloud, Blessed Alvaro gave the bells to this region as a memento of this occasion.

[1] St Josemaría, Notes from a get-together, 7 June 1975

[2] St Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, 2 November 1958

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