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Solemn Mass in honour of St Josemaria

Homily of Mgr Nicholas
Morrish, Regional Vicar of Opus
Dei in Great Britain

30/09/2005

This year our annual solemn Mass in honour of St. Josemaría is special not only because it is the 30th anniversary of his death on 26th June 1975, but also because of the special events of the past few months. We have lived through a

time of mourning for Pope John Paul II, a time of prayer and waiting for a new Pope, and then the election of Pope Benedict XVI. Our new Holy Father described those days as “an extraordinary time of grace for the Church and for the entire world.” Referring to the funeral of the late Pope he said, “The funeral of John Paul II was a truly ecclesial experience in which was perceived in some way the power of God. Who, through his Church wishes to form a great family of all peoples, through the unifying force of Truth and Love.”

With a recently elected Pope there is, I think, much that we can learn from St. Josemaría. Although it is now 30 years since his death we are encouraged by his words and his example to pray for and support Pope Benedict as he begins his Pontificate.

In the 1970s St. Josemaría often offered his life for the Church, adding “and a thousand lives if I had them.” This would be his prayer each day at Mass. In those years when there was great turmoil within the Church in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, this man, whose heart was filled with a great love for the Church, suffered a great deal. He prayed a lot and encouraged others to pray.

St. Josemaría had encouraged people to pray for the next Pope, sometimes saying, “he will have to suffer a lot” or “he will have to be a martyr” – as in deed he was, in a sense, when shots were fired in St. Peter’s Square in 1981 – he shed his blood as a witness for Christ and the Truth; although God in his goodness kept him with us for many more years.

One thing St. Josemaría teaches us is that we should not only accept the

mystery of the Church with our minds saying: “I believe in one holy, Catholic, apostolic Church” or “I accept that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of Peter and the divinely appointed head of the flock”, but our hearts should be involved. St.

Josemaría was a man who loved the Church and the Pope. He wasn't just in the Church or accepted the Church, he loved the Church. He saw this as a gift and he would say, ‘Thank you Lord for this love you have placed in my heart’. Perhaps we can ask for that grace today.

It is not hard to remember events from his life which show his love. We can think of the young priest walking all over Madrid visiting the poor and sick, praying the rosary for the Holy Father in Rome. In fact he used to imagine he was praying the Rosary with the Pope.

In 1946 he travelled to Rome for the first time. He was 44 years old. After a very difficult sea crossing from Barcelona to Genoa and a long car journey to Rome, he was deeply moved when they first caught sight of the dome of St. Peter's and recited the Creed. That night, in spite of his tiredness and his bad state of health due to diabetes, he spent all night in prayer on the balcony of the flat they had rented near the Vatican, looking at St. Peter's and the Pope's apartments.

Later when he was able to meet Popes: Pius XII, then John XXIII and Paul VI, he always went out of his way to bring the Pope good news about the apostolate being carried out by his spiritual sons and daughters in Opus Dei, together with presents – simple ones as he didn't have much money – he gave Pius XII some oranges!

The best present though was the news he brought about the daily faithfulness of members of the Work and the co-operators in so many different sectors of society, doing different jobs, all of them trying to fill their family, their work environment with the spirit of Christ. He was able to lay before the Pope the exciting panorama of the work of the lay faithful in the Church.

As the Second Vatican Council taught in its Constitution *Lumen Gentium* about the lay faithful: “their life is lived in the world. It is lived in each and all of the world’s occupations and employments and in the ordinary situations of the life of the family and society. (...) This is where they have their call from God to make their contribution to the sanctification of the world from the inside, as leaven, by tackling their own job with the spirit of the gospel as their guide.”

That passage answers the question, how can I serve the Church? How can I support the Holy Father? The answer: live an intense Christian life, there were you are, pray, love and serve the people around you, do your work well for God and help others through your example and your words.

For those of us in Opus Dei the best help we can provide the Church is being faithful to our specific vocation – which can be expressed in many different ways: contemplatives in the middle of the world, salt, light, leaven, apostles.

When John Paul II was dying, a woman belonging to Opus Dei was among those who were able to see him. He was already burning with fever the Monday before he died, long before we knew how seriously ill he was. He laid his hand on her head and managed to say, “Be

faithful! Be an apostle!” I’m sure he would have said something similar to each person here and it can be interpreted as his last wish for us.

There is a lot to be done. We look around and discover that the Church is often ignored or sidelined. Think how frequently laws are passed which contradict her teachings, even in countries where a majority of the people are Catholic. Examples would be: laws about marriage, the defence of life from conception to natural death. In some places the Church is still persecuted. Then at times we notice problems within the Church: a lack of interest or rejection of the authentic teaching of the Church, a lack of unity with the head of the Church or the bishops in their dioceses. The love for the Church I mentioned before does not allow us to remain indifferent. The first thing we can do as always is to pray, the second is to take part in the mission

of the Church, not observing from the outside but being fully committed.

St. Josemaría used to say that Opus Dei exists to serve the Church. In fact on two occasions, when plunged into deep doubts, he offered the sacrifice of Abraham. Opus Dei was his whole life, but he said to Jesus in his prayer, “Lord, if the Work is not yours, destroy it. If it is yours, confirm me.” Immediately God confirmed that it was indeed His Work filling his soul with joy and certainty.

On the day St. Josemaría died he repeated once again to a group of people, “We have to love the Church and the Pope, whoever he may be, very much. Ask God that our service to His Church and the Holy Father may be an effective one.”

This is the spirit he passed on to us – that’s the inheritance he has given us – a great love for the Church and the

Holy Father, the two of which of course go together, *ubi Petrus, ibi ecclesia* (where Peter is, there is the Church).

A statue of St. Josemaría will soon be put up on the outside of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. It will not be visible from the square on front of the Basilica, but tucked around the side near the sacristy; nevertheless it will serve as a physical reminder of the aspiration so often on our Founder's lips: *Omnes cum Petro, ad Iesum, per Mariam!* (All with Peter to Jesus through Mary).

Those words sum up the mission of Opus Dei. Our apostolic work consists in leading all the people we meet along the road, in close unity with Peter, all the way to Jesus, through Mary. That *cum Petro* means first of all a lot of prayer for the Holy Father and his intentions, for all those who work with him in

governing the Church: the bishops, priests and for all the Christian faithful. Then it means daily faithfulness in the tasks and responsibilities each of us has within this marvellous family of the Church. And let's not forget Pope Benedict's encouraging words, "The Church is alive." She is very much alive and we have ahead of us the possibility of joining in a great adventure of Christian life and apostolate if we remain united with Christ and his vicar through Mary.

Let's ask St. Josemaría to pray for us so that, using the words of his prayer card, "we learn to turn all the circumstances and events of our lives into opportunities to love God and serve the Church, the Pope and all souls."

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