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St. Josemaría Escrivá's Recipe for Sanctity

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St. Josemaría Escrivá never forgot that he was just a simple, ordinary priest. Indeed, he often referred to himself as "a deaf and clumsy instrument" or as "God's donkey." But more importantly, he never forgot that he was a child of God, and upon

this foundation of divine filiation - the awareness that we are sons and daughters of God the Father - St. Josemaría built his lifelong spirit of thanksgiving.

Now, in 2002, the year of his canonization and the centennial of his birth, St. Josemaría's message of giving thanks to God shines more brightly than ever. His example and words impel Christians to adopt his childlike spirit of gratitude toward the Lord - in place of the ingratitude and indifference many of us often display toward Him.

The theme of thanksgiving is inextricably woven into St. Josemaría's life and books. In his collection of spiritual meditations *The Way*, he emphasizes the Christian's duty to constantly thank Our Father: "Make it a habit to raise your heart to God, in acts of thanksgiving, many times a day.

Because He gives you this and that...
Because someone has despised you...
Because you don't have what you
need, or because you do have it.

"And because He made His Mother,
who is also your Mother, so
beautiful. Because He created the
sun and the moon and this animal or
that plant. Because He made that
man eloquent and you He left slow of
speech... Thank Him for everything,
because everything is good."

Despite the tribulations St. Josemaría
encountered during his life, he
always maintained this spirit of
gratitude. And the tribulations were
plentiful. When he was a young boy,
three of his siblings died, and when
he was only 22, his father died. As a
priest, he was in continual danger
during the Spanish Civil War, and for
many years he suffered from
diabetes. As the founder of Opus Dei -
a personal prelature which promotes

and fosters lay sanctity - St. Josemaría faced fierce opposition from skeptics outside the Church and from the clerical-minded within it. Yet he persevered in thanksgiving through all obstacles. He realized they were opportunities to grow as a child of God and to grow in sanctity. As he points out in another book of meditations, *The Forge*, "When you receive a hard knock, a cross, you should not be downcast. Rather the reverse: with a happy face you should give thanks to God."

In the same book, he states, "God is very pleased with those who recognize His goodness by reciting the Te Deum in thanksgiving whenever something out of the ordinary happens, without caring whether it may have been good or bad, as the world reckons these things. For everything comes from the hands of our Father: so though the blow of the chisel may hurt our

flesh, it is a sign of love, as He smoothes off our rough edges and brings us closer to perfection."

St. Josemaría encouraged souls to be especially thankful for the Holy Eucharist. He spent 10 minutes of thanksgiving every day after Mass thanking God for the Communion he had received. In his collection of homilies *Christ Is Passing By*, he exhorts, "If we love Christ, who offers Himself for us, we will feel compelled to find a few minutes after Mass for an intimate personal thanksgiving, which will prolong in the silence of our hearts that other thanksgiving which is the Eucharist."

In his short story *In Love with the Church*, St. Josemaría says, "We give thanks to God our Lord for the wonderful way He has given Himself up for us. Imagine, the Word made flesh has come to us as our food! ...Inside us, inside our

littleness, lies the Creator of heaven and earth! ...If our thanksgiving were in proportion to the difference between the gift and our deserts, should we not turn the whole day into a continuous Eucharist, a continuous thanksgiving? Do not leave the church almost immediately after receiving the Sacrament. Surely you have nothing so important on that you cannot give Our Lord 10 minutes to say thanks. Love is repaid with love."

He also divided his day into two parts. During the first half of the day, he devoted himself to thanking God for the Eucharist he had received that morning. During the latter half, he would prepare himself spiritually for the next day's Mass, particularly with spiritual communions.

St. Josemaría also encouraged Christians to thank God for their divine filiation. In *The Forge*, he

repeatedly reminds his readers to give thanks to God for adopting them as His children: "Give thanks often to Jesus, for through Him, with Him, and in Him you are able to call yourself a son of God." He points out that "the best way of showing our gratitude to God is to be passionately in love with the fact that we are His children." And he adds that "we could sum up the thankfulness that we owe as children of God by saying to this Father of ours, now and always, *serviam!*: I will serve you."

Furthermore, St. Josemaría had a deep understanding of the important role parents play in their children's lives. "Be grateful to your parents for bringing you into this world, thus enabling you to become a child of God, he instructs. "And be all the more grateful if it was they who placed in your soul the first seeds of faith and piety, of your Christian way, or of your vocation."

John Coverdale, a member of Opus Dei, worked with St. Josemaría in the central office of Opus Dei in Rome between 1960 and 1968. "He [St. Josemaría] was genuinely very grateful," says Coverdale. "He made frequent acts of thanksgiving. He urged us [members of Opus Dei] to thank God for our vocation and for those things we like and don't like that God sends us for our good." Coverdale recounts how St. Teresa of Avila once expressed gratitude for being given a sardine. He says St. Josemaría's spirit was such that "just a piece of a sardine would make him happy."

St. Josemaría also thanked the Lord for many benefactors. For instance, he prayed everyday for over 50 years, by name, for Fr. Daniel Alfaro, the priest who loaned St. Josemaría money for the funeral of Escrivá's father. The saint also remembered with gratitude the priests who

administered to him the Sacraments of Baptism, first Confession and first Communion.

St. Josemaría's constant gratefulness toward God also fostered his profound love for giving glory to God. "He was a 'big picture' man," says Coverdale, "but very much concerned about the details, the insignificant. He encouraged doing the smallest things for the glory for God."

Guzman Carriquiry Lecour, Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, expressed his own thanks to God for St. Josemaría's example: "The announcement of the approaching canonization of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá has aroused in me a strong feeling of gratitude. He has been a father and a teacher to many along the path to holiness and apostolate - an untiring advocate of the apostolic responsibility of all of

the faithful, and especially of the lay faithful, in all the environments and activities in which they are involved."

Although St. Josemaría is remembered for heroically living many different virtues, his spirit of thanksgiving toward God is one that is especially memorable. It is befitting of a simple priest who continues to remind Christians - by his life and works - of their vocation to be children of God. Of the many aspirations St. Josemaría prayed throughout his days, there is one that epitomizes the attitude of gratitude he so intensely kept and encouraged others to keep: *Ut in gratiarum semper actione maneamus!* May we always remain in an act of thanksgiving!

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