

Thanksgiving Mass Homily of Bishop Hopes

Bishop Alan Hopes was the main celebrant at a Mass in honour of St Josemaría Escrivá in London on 19 June 2006, in the church of St Thomas More, Swiss Cottage, London. This is the text of his homily.

22/08/2006

In the millennium year, the then Cardinal Ratzinger addressed the Jubilee celebration of Catechists as

they gathered in Rome. One phrase from his address speaks to the Church today and in particular to the members and friends of Opus Dei. He said this: *Evangelisation is to dare once again and with the humility of the small grain, to leave up to God the when and how it will grow.*

Tonight we celebrate those seeds of faith and vocation that were sown in St Josemaría Escrivá at the moment of his Baptism, his First Holy Communion, his Confirmation and his Ordination to the priesthood – seeds which gave him the firm foundation on which his sanctity was built. At the same time, we celebrate those seeds planted by St Josemaría Escrivá in so many places and in the many people who came to share in his vision since the foundation of Opus Dei in 1928. Sometimes we have the blessing of seeing the seed grow – often we do not. Your Founder certainly began to see the

fruits of his apostolic labours. Those fruits are given to encourage us in the work that God calls us to do from the moment of our Baptism. And the Work? The Church's work is to evangelise. As members of the Church, our work is to engage and to assist in the Church's work of evangelisation.

Evangelisation is not a word that sits easily with most Catholics. It is a word more readily applied to the work of charismatic protestants or even the religious sects such as the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses or the Hari Krishna groups. But evangelisation is supremely the vocation of the Church. Thank God for pope John Paul II who helped us to understand that this third millennium must be a time of evangelisation, an opportune moment for the Church to seek to proclaim the Gospel to all mankind and to do it with confidence and

conviction, Evangelisation cannot be an option for Catholics.

Your Founder knew this well. He knew it in those early days in Madrid, so soon after his ordination, when he received the inspiration to found Opus Del. That beginning was the sowing of seeds that have brought so many people from across the world to follow the way of Opus Del. It is a commitment to this inspiration of your founder or maybe an interest in the work of Opus Del that has brought you here to celebrate tonight.

Josemaría's aim in founding the Opus Dei, was to open up a new way of sanctification, of growing in holiness, in the midst of the world through our ordinary work. He was convinced that men and women are called to grow closer to God through the work they perform. The first reading for our Mass tonight, gives us a model of

what we can become when we work in co-operation with God: to work for God and with God, can lead the way to the perfect way — the sanctified way that Adam and Eve found in the garden of Eden before their fall from grace.

But why should we be encouraged to grow in holiness? Josemaría knew the truth, that we cannot share in the Church's work of evangelisation until our lives are sanctified. For each of us, there is a constant need to be converted, to turn our lives to God, to be forgiven, to be open to the activity of the Holy Spirit, to be sanctified. Evangelisation is never a mere programme. The desire to bring others to know and love Jesus Christ, can only take root in our lives, when we ourselves have been caught up in that love for Jesus Christ and his Church. S Paul teaches us this in the second reading of our Mass tonight. Your Founder knew the importance

of becoming a spiritual daughter or son of the Lord and his Church. And so tonight we thank God for his goodness that through Baptism we are his adopted children and that we are commissioned to go out and witness to others how much his love has changed our lives.

We are God's adopted Sons and daughters – what a privilege – and what a responsibility is given to us.

This year you celebrate the 60th anniversary of S Josemaría's momentous visit to Rome to offer the Holy Father and the Church, the loyalty and service of all who belong to Opus Dei. The journey was a real challenge to him, but nothing daunted, he arrived in Rome. We read how he refused to be moved by his own excitement at being so near to the Pope. He spent a whole night in prayer and then waited for a further period of time, so that he

could be sure that when he went to the Holy Father, he did so with the humility that is a gift from God himself. Throughout many years, Opus Del has been challenged by so many who could not see the true nature of the Work. And yet you have waited and watched with faithfulness to put the Work at the service of the Church. I believe that you can now see some of the fruits of those seeds that have been sown over these past decades. And none more so than at the present time when international interest has been generated by the *Da Vinci Code* novel and film. It has been good to see how you have met this challenge positively and with such cheerfulness, with trust in God and with the knowledge that each contact you make in our confused world is filled with potential for a life changing encounter with God.

In tonight's Gospel, Jesus tells us to *Launch out into the deep. At your word Lord*, is Peter's reply. It is the same challenge given to us by the late Holy Father at the turn of the millennium – and it has been the challenge to the Church since her beginnings. These words have been your inspiration and the inspiration of our Diocese over the past three years of renewal. No matter how difficult the path might be as Catholics we need to trust in the Lord and his Church and reveal to others that his faithfulness never changes, never ends.

Tonight we all have something to be thankful for – celebrating this Mass in honour of Josemaría, is our recognition that God catches up ordinary human beings to inspire us anew and remind us of the great truths of our holy religion.

Tonight we all have something to hope for. It is a challenging but a good time to be a Catholic, to be an evangelist. Celebrating this Mass in honour of the Founder, is our acknowledgement that we are not alone — we are surrounded and helped and strengthened by his prayers and those of all the saints of God to help us to evangelise and witness in our world more effectively and to do the work of God.

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