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The Christian Vocation, Nucleus of the Message of Msgr. Escrivá

Homily given by Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo at the Mass of Thanksgiving for the Beatification of Josemaría Escrivá (May 18, 1992)

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Yesterday, with immense joy, we attended the beatification of the Founder of Opus Dei, Josemaría Escrivá, and that of Mother Josephine

Bakhita, a Canossian nun of the Daughters of Charity. Today, thanks to the kindness of the Holy Father, John Paul II, I am happy to be able to preside at this solemn concelebration, in thanksgiving to the Most Blessed Trinity and in honor of Blessed Josemaría.

The words of the Sacred Scripture, which we have just heard in the first reading, speak to us of a great multitude of saints in heaven who exclaim: *Alleluia! Victory and glory and power to our God!*[1] This is the cry of praise which also springs from our hearts in communion with the Church in heaven, a union which is truly intimate, because supernatural life, definitively reached by the blessed, is also our life. God has called us to become *true images of his Son*,[2] and has sent the Holy Spirit in our hearts to transform us into *another Christ, Christ himself!*, as the

Blessed Josemaría loved to exclaim.

[3]

We are already the children of God, St. John writes, but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed;

all we know is, that when it is revealed, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is.[4]

The meaning of our divine filiation in Christ, which filled the entire life and preachings of Blessed Josemaría

Escrivá, roused in his soul an ardent desire to contemplate God. How

many times did I hear him exclaim, above all in the last years of his life:

Vultum tuum, Domine, requiram![5]

I long to contemplate your face, Lord!

This yearning would push him to

nourish constant dealings with God

in all circumstances: at work and at

rest; in the solitude of prayer and in

his priestly conversation with souls;

in happiness and in sorrow, which he would always change into joy,

because he knew how to see the

Cross of Christ in suffering. The love for the Cross allowed him to understand the very depths of the words taught by St. Paul: *by turning everything to their good God cooperates with all who love him.*[6] Amidst whatever trials, his reaction was always: *omnia in bonum! everything works for the good!*

A few weeks before Our Lord called him to permanently enjoy his presence, he told us: *We have to be... in Heaven and on earth, always. Not 'between' Heaven and earth, because we are of the world. In the world and in Paradise at the same time!... immersed in God, but knowing that we are of this world.*[7] Through this path of contemplation, lived in the realm of earthly occupations, the Holy Spirit led Blessed Josemaría towards the heights of the mystical life, towards union with the Blessed Trinity. Filial dialogue with God then became so intimate that, he himself

explained, *Words are not needed, because the tongue cannot express itself. The intellect grows calm. One does not reason: one looks! And the soul breaks out once more into a new song, because it feels and knows it is under the loving gaze of God, all day long.* Then he would add:*I am not talking about extraordinary situations. These are, they may very well be, ordinary happenings within our souls: a loving madness which, without any fuss or extravagance, teaches us how to suffer and how to live, because God grants us his wisdom.*[8]

I am greatly overjoyed as I declare here today, with profound gratitude to Our Lord, that for forty years, day after day, I was a witness to the holy life of Blessed Josemaría, his love for God and for all souls, his heroic correspondence to Christ's grace, which God grants copiously to him who is humble.[9] I was a witness to

how he carried out the formula of the Baptist with heroic selflessness: *He must increase, I must decrease*,^[10] until he reached the summit which allowed his soul to cry out with St. Paul: *Life to me, of course, is Christ; [11] I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me.*^[12]

When we look at the lives of those who have faithfully followed Christ, Vatican Council II teaches, we are inspired with a new reason for seeking the City that is to come (cf. Heb 13: 14 and 11: 10) and at the same time we are shown a most safe path by which among the vicissitudes of this world, in keeping with the state in life and condition proper to each of us, we will be able to arrive at perfect union with Christ.^[13] The sanctity attained by Blessed Josemaría does not present for us an impossible ideal; it is an example not only for a few select souls, but also for

countless Christians called by God to sanctify themselves in the world, in their place of work, in family and social life. He left an enlightening example of how daily tasks should not be an obstacle in the progress of one's spiritual life, but can and should be an aid to transform them into prayer. With a tinge of surprise, he himself had left written in his personal notes, that he was vibrating with Love for God *right in the middle of the streets, amid the noise of automobiles, of people, even while reading the newspaper!*^[14] It is an example that is particularly intimate because Blessed Josemaría lived among us; there are many of you here who knew him personally. He reached sanctity by participating intensely in the anxieties of our era, and specifically in the activities of everyday life, through the faithful fulfillment of the daily duties done with the Spirit of Christ.^[15]

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In the Gospel of the Mass, we have just listened to the words with which the narration of the miraculous catch ends: the Apostles, *left everything and followed Jesus*.^[16] The teaching is clear: in order to follow Christ, we need to leave all things. Blessed Josemaría answered readily to this demand, and taught others that it is possible to fully live this demand in the middle of the world. Yes, it is possible *to be* of this world without being worldly; it is possible to remain in the place of each one, and at the same time to follow Christ and to stay with him. It is possible to live *in heaven and on earth, to be contemplatives in the middle of the world*, transforming the circumstances of ordinary life into occasions of encountering God. In the middle of the world we can bring other souls to Our Lord, by offering to God the Father all our works in

union with the Sacrifice of the Cross, renewed sacramentally in the Eucharist.[17]

This message of sanctification *in, from, and through* human realities is providentially relevant in our time, [18] which urgently needs to channel scientific and technical development not towards the simple and *infrahuman culture of material well-being*, but towards what we can call a *culture of integral well-being*. It is a culture of the entire man and of all men, in order to build the kingdom of Christ on earth: *a kingdom of justice, of love and of peace*. [19] This kingdom, which the Church is a messenger of, begins in the heart of man, and is spread from there to his family, professional and social life. Quoting the words of the Holy Father, John Paul II, in his first encyclical, this world of ours, a world *of conquests of science and technology... is at the same time a*

world that is 'groaning and suffering' (Rom 8:22) *and 'waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God'* (Rom 8:19)[20] Do not doubt: *These world crises are crises of saints. God wants a handful of men 'of his own' in every human activity. Then... 'pax Christi in regno Christi' - the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ.*[21]

Ever since he was young, Blessed Josemaría understood, through divine lights, that the Creation, the Redemption and the Sanctification of the world constitute the framework of a single, eternal project of the Most Blessed Trinity, who in having ordained all things to the glory of the Father leads them towards this end through the Son with the strength of the Holy Spirit. As early as in the 1930's, he had already summarized in brief sketches the program of his life and the *raison d'etre* of Opus Dei: *We have to give all the glory to God.*

He wants it: 'gloriam meam alteri non dabo,' I shall not give my glory to another (Is 42:8). That is why we want Christ to reign, for 'per ipsum, et cum ipso, et in ipso, est tibi Deo Patri Omnipotenti in unitate Spiritus Sancti omnis honor et gloria'; 'through Him, with Him, and in Him, to you God the Almighty Father, in unity with the Holy Spirit all honor and glory.' And a vital need of his glory and his kingdom is that all, with Peter, go to Jesus through Mary.[22]

The Blessed Josemaría always wanted to live for the glory of God and to direct all earthly realities to that end. Therefore, with all his soul, he sought union with Christ through Mary; and he reached this union because he loved the Church and the Pope with all his heart and served them with all his life. I cannot help but recall the first time he came to Rome. I remember how moved he was as he glimpsed the dome of St.

Peter's Basilica and prayed the Creed. He spent that night in a vigil of prayer, with his eyes set on the windows of the rooms of the Holy Father, seen from a short distance, from the terrace of the house in the nearby street of Citta Leonina where we were staying. That spirit of persevering prayer and atonement, that love for the Church and for the Roman Pontiff, is the same which he himself instilled in countless souls and which we, today, would like to be exceptional witnesses of.

With joy and gratitude, we invoke Blessed Josemaría's intercession, so that we may also reach sanctity through a sure path: Our Mother the Virgin. Pope Paul VI proclaimed Holy Mary as Mater Ecclesiae, Mother of the Church,^[23] and the Holy Father John Paul II has wanted to illumine this marvelous St. Peter's Square with her image, her arms always open to mankind. Through her

maternal mediation, we receive the grace from the Holy Spirit who makes us members of Christ in the Church.

Christ, Mary, the Pope: three names that are intimately united in the heart of Blessed Josemaría. He wanted to summarize thus his apostolic zeal in that aspiration which he repeated many times and which we also say now, the prayer being ours once more: *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!*: everyone, with Peter - with the Pope and the Church - to Jesus through Mary! Amen.

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[1] Rev 19: 1 (*First Reading*).

[2] Rom 8:29 (*Second Reading*).

[3] Cf. Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 104.

[4] I Jn 3:2.

[5] Cf. Ps 27 [26], 8.

[6] Rom 8:28 (*Second Reading*).

[7] J. Escrivá, *Meditation Consumados en la unidad (Perfected in Unity)*, March 27, 1975.

[8] J. Escrivá, *Friends of God*, no. 307.

[9] Cf. I Pt 5:5; James 4:6.

[10] Jn 3:30.

[11] Phil 1:21.

[12] Gal 2:20.

[13] Vatican Council II, Dogm. Const. *Lumen gentium*, no. 50.

[14] J. Escrivá, March 26, 1932, *Intimate notes*, no. 673.

[15] Cf. *Prayer for the Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá* (Congr.

De Cultu Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum, Prot. CD 537/92).

[16] Lk 5: II (*Gospel of the Mass*).

[17] Cf. *Prayer over the Gifts for the Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá* (Congr. *De Cultu Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum*, Prot. CD 537/92).

[18] Congregation for the Causes of Saints, *Decree on the Heroic Virtues of the Servant of God Josemaría Escrivá*, April 9, 1990.

[19] Roman Missal. *Solemnity of Jesus Christ the Eternal and High Priest. Preface.*

[20] John Paul II. Enc. *Redemptor hominis*, March 4, 1979, no. 8.

[21] J. Escrivá, *The Way*, no. 301.

[22] J. Escrivá, *Instruction*, March 19, 1934, n. 36-37.

[23] Paul VI, *Closing speech of the 3rd Session of the II Vatican Council*, November 21, 1964: AAS 56 (1964) 1015.

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