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The Prelate's Homily at the Mass of Thanksgiving

A homily by Bishop Javier Echevarria, Prelate of Opus Dei, delivered in St. Peter's Square, Rome, during the Mass of thanksgiving for the canonization of Josemaría Escrivá on October 7, 2002.

10/18/2002

1. *Laudate Dominum omnes gentes* (Ps 116/117:1). Praise the Lord, all you nations. The invitation of the

Responsorial Psalm, which resounded a few moments ago, constitutes an excellent summary of the sentiments that overflow from our hearts today: *Deo omnis gloria!* To God be all the glory! We want to adore the Thrice-Holy God and give Him thanks for the gift with which He has enriched the Church and the world: the canonization of Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, priest, and Founder of Opus Dei, carried out yesterday by our beloved Pope John Paul II.

Our gratitude is addressed also to the Holy Father himself, who has fulfilled the plans of the Blessed Trinity: while preparing ourselves to raise our prayers to heaven, we pray to the Lord for his person and intentions. We know that this prayer pleases Saint Josemaria, who loved the Vicar of Christ on earth with all his soul, to the point of never separating this love for the pope

from the love he professed for Jesus Christ and his Blessed Mother. From the very moment that our Lord burst into his soul with the first intimations of Opus Dei, of which, at the time, he had no notion, he began to pray and to work in order to make a reality the prayer that sprang forth from his heart: *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!* All with Peter to Jesus through Mary.

All the participants in this Holy Mass, and the countless souls united with us in spirit throughout the world, recognize joyfully our debt to this new saint whom God has granted the Church. Many of us have obtained graces and favors of all sorts through his intercession. Not a few of us strive to follow in his footsteps of fidelity to the Lord, trying to reproduce in our souls the spirit that he incarnated. Saint Josemaria has shown all of us — by his example and his teachings — a clear way of

traveling the road of the Christian vocation, which has sanctity as its destination. For this reason, the canonization of the Founder of Opus Dei has the character of a feast — a feast of this great family of God, which is the Church. For all of this, we wish to give thanks to the Lord in this Eucharistic celebration.

2. Nearly forty years have passed since the Second Vatican Council proclaimed the universal call to holiness and apostolate (cf, *Lumen Gentium*, Ch. V), but there is still a long road to travel before this truth can be said to illuminate and guide the steps of the men and women of this world. The Roman Pontiff has recalled this explicitly in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in which he proposed this doctrine as «the foundation of the pastoral program that concerns us at the beginning of the new millennium» (NMI 31).

Everyone in the Church, every shepherd and all of the faithful, are called to commit themselves personally to the daily struggle for personal holiness and to participate, personally as well, in the fulfillment of the mission which Christ has given us. If the 20th century has been the witness of the «rediscovery» of this universal call to holiness — it was contained in the Gospel from the beginning, and Saint Josemaria was constituted its herald by the personal, divine vocation he received (cf. Mass of Saint Josemaria Escriva, *Collect*) — the century in which we are now living should be characterized by a more effective and extensive practice of this teaching. This is one of the great challenges that the Holy Spirit has placed before the men and women of our time.

Saint Josemaria endeavored to awaken this zeal for holiness in all

souls. The fact that his canonization has taken place at the dawn of a new century is charged with meaning. His message resounds with special force in today's world: «We have come to say, with the humility of those who know themselves to be sinners and of little worth — *homo peccator sum* (Luke 5:8), we say with Peter — but with the faith of those who allow themselves to be guided by the hand of God, that sanctity is not something for a privileged few. The Lord calls all of us. He expects Love from all of us — from everyone, wherever they are; from everyone, whatever their state in life, their profession or job. For the daily life we live, apparently so ordinary, can be a path to sanctity: it is not necessary to abandon one's place in the world in order to search for God, if the Lord hasn't given a soul a vocation to the religious life, because all the paths of the earth can be the occasion for an encounter with Christ» (*Letter 24-III-1930*, n. 2).

3. In every moment — as the new Saint was already saying in the 1930s (cfr. *The Way*, n. 382) — one must *look for Christ, find Him and love Him*. Only if we strive daily to take these three steps will we arrive at full identification with Christ, becoming *alter Christus, ipse Christus*. «Perhaps you will say» — I address these words of Saint Josemaria to you now — «that you are still at the first step. Look for him, then, with hunger. If you make this effort, I can guarantee that you have already found him, and that you have begun to deal with him and love him, to hold your conversation in heaven» (cf. *Phil. 3:20*) (*Friends of God*, n. 300).

We meet Jesus in prayer, in the Eucharist and in the other sacraments of the Church; but also in the faithful fulfillment of our family, professional and social duties. This is an arduous goal, which we only fully

achieve when our earthly pilgrimage has finished. «But don't lose sight of the fact that saints aren't born: they are forged from the interplay of divine grace and human correspondence,» wrote Saint Josemaria in one of his homilies, adding, «That's why I tell you that if you want to be a coherent Christian You have to take great care of the little details, because the sanctity that our Lord demands of you is reached by carrying out your work with love for God, fulfilling your everyday obligations, which are almost always made up of little things» (*Ibid.* , n. 7).

Sanctify your work. Sanctify yourself in your work. Sanctify others through your work. With these pithy phrases, the Founder of Opus Dei summed up the nucleus of the message that God had entrusted to him, in order to remind Christians of it. The effort to reach sanctity is inseparably united to the sanctification of one's own

work — carried out with human perfection and rectitude of intention, with a spirit of service — and to the sanctification of others. If one wants to follow the Lord, it is not possible to neglect one's brothers and sisters, with their spiritual and material needs. «Our vocation as children of God, in the middle of the world, demands that we not seek our own personal sanctity alone, but rather that we travel along the pathways of the world, converting them into roads which, while passing through obstacles, lead other souls to the Lord; that we take part as ordinary citizens in all temporal activities, in order to be leaven (cf. *Matt* 13:33) which must cause the whole mass to rise (cf. *1 Cor* 5:6)» (*Christ is Passing By*, n. 120).

4. Divine providence arranged that the earthly life of Saint Josemaria should take place in the 20th century, a time that has seen enormous

developments in science and technology, which have not always, unfortunately, been used for mankind's benefit. It is necessary to recognize that, alongside admirable achievements of the human spirit, there abound in our times torrents of bitter water, which attempt in vain to quench the thirst for happiness in human hearts. Nevertheless, it is certain — as Bishop Alvaro del Portillo wrote — that, with the message of the new Saint, «all the professions, all the classes, all honest social settings have been moved by the Angels of God, like those waters in the Probatric pool that the Gospel speaks of (cf. *John* 5:2 ff), and have acquired healing strength» (*Pastoral letter*, 30-IX-1975, n. 20).

Recalling Don Alvaro, the first successor of our Father, we feel his spiritual presence very keenly in these moments. With him, we can affirm, full of gratitude to God, that

thanks to the teaching and spirit of the Founder of Opus Dei, «even from the driest and most unlikely stones have gushed torrents of medicinal water. Human work well done has become a cleansing liquid for the eyes, allowing one to discover God in all the circumstances of life, in all things. And this has occurred precisely in our times, when materialism strives to transform work into a mud that blinds men, and prevents them from looking at God» (*Ibid.*).

I would like to greet all those who have come to Rome from English-speaking countries to attend the Canonization of Saint Josemaria Escriva. When you return home, bring back with you the teachings of the new Saint and try to put them into practice. Ask Saint Josemaria to teach you to *convert the prose of each day* — your most ordinary occupations — *into poetry, into heroic*

verse: into desires and deeds of holiness and apostolate.

I would remind those of You who come from French-speaking countries of the importance of collaborating in the apostolic mission of the Church, which is a duty of every Christian, endeavoring to impregnate arts and letters, science and technology, with the spirit of the Gospels. Seek the intercession of Saint Josemaria, putting into practice that ideal which God Himself engraved in his soul: *placing Christ* — through our work, whatever it may be — *at the summit of all human activities*.

Today the Church venerates the Blessed Virgin with the title of Our Lady of the Rosary. It gives me great joy to think that the canonization of our Father should have taken place on the eve of a feast of Holy Mary; this coincidence is one more sign of

her affectionate motherly care. Let us have recourse to her maternal mediation, full of confidence, as we renew our thanksgiving to the Lord for this canonization. *Deo omnis gloria!* I say once again, as we ask that this desire for personal holiness and apostolate spread with ever great force among all Christians.

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