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Meditations: October 2, Founding of Opus Dei

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on the feast of the founding of Opus Dei.

- Opus Dei: willed by God
- Contemplatives in the middle of the world
- Co-workers in a divine initiative

FROM SEPTEMBER 30 to October 6, 1928, the Paulist Fathers organized in Madrid a spiritual retreat for diocesan priests. Josemaría Escrivá, a twenty-six-year-old priest, decided to

sign up for it, since he would have a few days off on those days. Only God knew that during this activity, after celebrating Mass on the morning of Tuesday, October 2nd, that priest would receive the divine mission of bringing Opus Dei to the world. Saint Josemaría, while looking at some notes he had been taking for several years, understood for the first time that he was called to be the father of so many sons and daughters in the Work, all with the mission of bringing the Gospel message to where they lived and worked. “We are an intravenous injection in the bloodstream of society,”^[1] as he will explain graphically a short time later. Those who live the spirit of Opus Dei try to bring the life of God to the great body formed by the men and women around them.

“In my conversations with you,” Saint Josemaría wrote in 1934 to the few people who were then part of

Opus Dei, “I have repeatedly made clear that the undertaking we are carrying out is not a human one, but a great *supernatural undertaking*, which began by fulfilling to the letter what is needed to be called without boasting the *Work of God*.^[2] And further on, he summarized the same idea in a few words: “The Work of God has not been thought up by a man.”^[3] A brief look at the history of Opus Dei – and also that of each person in Opus Dei – shows clearly that this mobilization of Christians, this impulse for good and holiness that this family fosters in a great variety of places throughout the world, can only be possible if our Lord is accompanying it. God has always been present in a tangible way. The Church has officially recognized, on several occasions, that the Work exists “by divine inspiration,”^[4] and that “in accordance with the gift of the Spirit received by Saint Josemaría Escrivá

de Balaguer, the Prelature of Opus Dei, with the guidance of its Prelate, carries out the task of spreading the call to holiness in the world.”^[5] —

“FROM 1928 I clearly understood that God wants Christians to take the example of the whole life of our Lord,” Saint Josemaría said, almost forty years after that foundational date. “I especially understood his hidden life, his life of ordinary work in the midst of men. I dream – and the dream has become reality – of great numbers of God’s children, sanctifying themselves in their lives as ordinary citizens, sharing in the concerns, dreams and efforts of their fellow men and women.”^[6] — Opus Dei has been willed by God in order to offer a specific path of holiness in the midst of daily activities: at work and at rest, with family and friends, in

moments of joy and in moments of suffering. Saint Josemaría reminds us that we cannot be divided internally; that we cannot have on one side our spiritual life, with specific times reserved for it; and on the other, all our other daily activities, as if these had little to do with God. Proclaiming the universal call to holiness means announcing this unity of life, letting ourselves be loved by God in every moment of our day, barring none. Then we will be apostles capable of discovering a sense of mission in everything we do.

“Many times I have driven home with hammer blows to you, that the Christian vocation consists of making flowing verse of the prose of each day,” Saint Josemaría said on October 8, 1967, during his homily on the campus of the University of Navarra. “At the meeting of the horizon, my children, heaven and earth seem to come together. But no, where they

truly meet is in your hearts when you live your ordinary life in a holy way.”^[7] Certainly, allowing ourselves to be accompanied by God in everything we do, having the conviction that He dwells within us, is not something that happens overnight. Hence Saint Josemaría has handed down a path to us that draws on the rich tradition of the Catholic Church, and that takes the form of certain practices of piety adapted to the situation of each person, lived with the serenity and trust of God’s children. The aim is to let oneself be filled with God until one becomes, as the founder of Opus Dei liked to say to express the radical nature of this path, “canonizable saints” or “saints on the altar,” who lead a contemplative life in the midst of the world and who illumine their surroundings with the light of the Gospel.

SAINT JOSEMARÍA, when giving details that show why the light received on October 2, 1928 was a light from God, ends by expressing his heartfelt wish that the people called to Opus Dei will always keep in mind – “engraved with fire” on their heart – three things. First, that “the Work of God comes to fulfill the Will of God. Therefore, have the deep conviction that heaven is determined on its being carried out.”^[8] Second, that “when God our Lord plans some work for the benefit of men, he thinks first of the people he will use as instruments, and he gives them the required graces.”^[9] And third, that “this supernatural conviction of the divine origin of the undertaking will end up giving you such an intense enthusiasm and love for the Work, that you will feel greatly blessed to sacrifice yourselves to make it a reality.”^[10]

That is to say, it is God who does the Work. Therefore, if we want to live the spirit He gave to Saint Josemaría, we will not lack his help, nor will we lack in our hearts the “sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing.”^[11] —

Opus Dei, as its name suggests, is the work of God, not our work; and this reality will give us the serenity of knowing that, although God counts on our collaboration, it is He who is really guiding this family. He is the one who knows what is truly appropriate in each historical moment; it is He who lights the fire of the divine call in whomever He wants. When reflecting on how God invites us to share in his salvific mission, Saint Josemaría liked to imagine those strong fishermen who let young children take hold of their nets, even though they don’t have the strength to pull them in.^[12] —

The conviction that we are in God’s hands gives rise to the authentic *gaudium cum pace*, to joy and peace in our

heart. Saint Josemaría, recalling October 2, 1928, wrote that on that day “God founded his Work.”^[13]

The Prelate of Opus Dei has reminded us of our founder’s words: “If we want to be more, let us be better.”^[14] Saint Josemaría wanted that his children, ordinary Christians who work to make this world a better home, be distinguished only by the *bonus odor Christi*, by the good aroma of Christ. It is this divine attraction that is the beginning of all apostolate, and that will move people to seek authentic happiness. Holy Mary, *Regina Operis Dei*, who has always been so close to the Work, will intercede for us, together with Saint Josemaría and so many saints who have lived this spirit wanted by God for the world.

^[1] Saint Josemaría, *Instruction on the Supernatural Spirit of the Work of God*, no. 42.

[2] Ibid., no. 1.

[3] Ibid., no. 6.

[4] *Ut sit*, Introduction.

[5] *Ad charisma tuendum*,
Introduction.

[6] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 20.

[7] Saint Josemaría, *Conversations* ,
no. 116.

[8] Saint Josemaría, *Instruction on the Supernatural Spirit of the Work of God*, no. 47.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., no. 49.

[11] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 10.

[12] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*,
no. 14.

[¹³] Saint Josemaría, *Intimate Notes*, no. 306. Quoted in *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. I, p. 302.

[¹⁴] Fernando Ocáriz, *Pastoral Letter*, 4 February 2017, no. 9.

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