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Devotion to Saint Josemaría in San Felice d'Ocre, Italy

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but a physical presence of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, Founder of Opus Dei”, said Dr Nanda Palesse, Mayor of Ocre, L’Aquila, Italy, during a ceremony held on July 9 2003 for the solemn blessing of a picture of Saint Josemaría in the Church of San Giacomo Apostolo in San Felice d’Ocre.

“This event witnesses to the close link which has existed and I believe will continue to exist between Saint Josemaría and this town. The Founder of Opus Dei often visited this part of the country, and now the relic *ex ossibus* of the Saint, kindly donated by the Most Reverend Mgr Javier Echevarría, will be a lasting pledge of his presence among us,” she added.

The Mass was celebrated by the Most Reverend Archbishop Julian Herranz, President of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts. In the

course of it, he recalled that Saint Josemaría first visited San Felice in 1966, “and fell in love with this land”. He continued, “Today thousands of people throughout the world who have come to the Tor d’Aveia Center for periods of study, training and development, still bear in their hearts the memory of the beauty of this country and the hospitality of its inhabitants.” Later, the Mayor remarked, “We feel proud of this continuing memory.”

The picture of Saint Josemaría has been placed in the first side-chapel on the left of the church’s nave. It is an oil-painting showing Saint Josemaría in a liturgical cope, kneeling in prayer before Our Lady of the Rosary with the Child Jesus in her arms. Some angels surround the trio, two of them also holding copies of Saint Josemaría’s book Holy Rosary. The background is a characteristic Ocre landscape and

includes the unmistakable outline of its medieval castle. At the bottom of the picture is a Latin inscription with the words of a short prayer which Saint Josemaría had frequently said since he was a young priest: *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam* – “All with Peter to Jesus through Mary.” The painting is the work of the artist Salvador Perez, who knew Saint Josemaría personally and has painted many portraits of him.

“The project included the restoration of two of the church’s side-chapels, so that as well as embellishing a place of worship it has contributed to the conservation of part of the local artistic heritage,” explained Dr Boris Di Pasquale, president of the project’s organizing committee.

Also present at the ceremony were Dr Rosa Rosella, from the overseeing committee for the Environment,

Architecture, Art and History of L'Aquila, Dr Giacomo di Marco, President of the Amiterno Mountain Community, Father Domenico Marcocci, diocesan director of culture, Commander Gasbarro, head of the Carabinieri of L'Aquila, and the parish priest, Father Manuel Cepeda Pino. Many people from San Felice d'Ocre and nearby villages also took part in the ceremony, which was accompanied with singing by the Villa Sant'Angelo choir conducted by Rosella Pezzuti.

At the end of the ceremony the Mayor said, "Saint Josemaría's message is highly applicable today, because of the value it sets on the lives of lay-people. Saint Josemaría tells us: You don't have to be a priest or a religious to be a saint. You can reach holiness, the dignity of God's children, by trying to fulfil your own commitments as well as you can. He raised ordinary things up to the level

of the extraordinary! This is a very modern view of religion.”

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