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Irish Archbishop: Escriva a Source of Inspiration for the Modern World

"Opus Dei marked a decisive intervention by God in the life and the work of many individuals and of the Church at large." An article in memory of Blessed Josemaria by the Archbishop of Tuam, recently published in the Irish Catholic.

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"Eaten bread," they say, "is soon forgotten." We are all too familiar with ingratitude. We recognise it and we despise it as quickly as we know and love its opposite. Gratitude, nothing too elaborate, no "licking up" but plain decent ordinary gratitude remains one of the finest things in human experience. And gratitude to God is humanity at its very finest, at its best behaved. These are the manners of heaven and the decencies of our Father's house: To say "thanks" and mean it.

This year we are celebrating the centenary of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei. In my estimation, the founding of Opus Dei marked a decisive intervention by God in the life and the work of many individuals and of the Church at large. Blessed Josemaría's vision of a work concerned with "turning the prose of every day into heroic verse" remains

as powerful now as it was seventy-three years ago. If anything, however, it is even more urgently needed.

The inspiration, the genius which distinguishes Opus Dei, and is surely of God, is precisely the ability to see in all details of life a plethora of "business opportunities" for anyone "ambitious for the things of God." Nothing is despised, everything can be turned around. The trick is to recognise every chance life gives for coming closer to God and to take these chances as they present themselves. The eye of faith needs training to make it sharp: "Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine hidden in the most ordinary of human situations and it is up to each one of you to discover it. Either we learn to find the Lord in the ordinary everyday life or else we shall never

find him" (Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, Conversations, 114).

When you remember that God calls everyone to holiness in the world, it hits you that everything, even the most ordinary things in everyday life, can be made holy. A bit of bread, after all, "the work of human hands," consecrated in the Eucharist, becomes the body of Christ. The ordinary becomes the vehicle of the supernatural, of the extraordinary. And when we are open to that sense of surprise by God, then we see life truly as gift and opportunity. We can approach it anew, with fresh and excited eyes. With eyes that miss nothing, not the slightest chance of getting closer to God. "Perfection," as Michelangelo famously observed, "consists in trifles but perfection is no trifle." Eventually even the "trifles" themselves are transformed and they become part of a new creation with an eternal purpose and

meaning. Everything is consecrated. Every single thing is returned to God.

Opus Dei has been with us in the archdiocese of Tuam for over thirty years now. The retreats and days of recollection at Ballyglunin Conference Centre have helped many people, priests and laity, to achieve that commitment of time and life to God which seems the central aim and preoccupation of Opus Dei. The Attitudes to Work seminars have made a sterling contribution to Christian ethical reflection on many aspects of business and professional life. Other courses have made a major contribution to the art and science of home-making and so have contributed to the life, both material and spiritual, of Church and society in this area. One of the great challenges of the Gospel today, as I see it, is to be able to show the presence of God in the technological society, to be able to illustrate how

God is as relevant to that society as he was to the society of ancient Israel. Opus Dei, as I observe it operating here in our archdiocese, is doing exactly that and doing it very well indeed.

In Blessed Josemaría's personal motto, *Deo omnis gloria*, "to God be all glory," you see, I think, a man who is at peace with the essential meaning of Christian service: a simple determination, overriding all personal needs and ambitions, that the thing may be. A man of intense practicality, he reminded everyone that all are constantly called to be salt, leaven and light. By their faith, their efforts, and ultimately their very selves as baptised and believing Christians, the ordinary faithful constitute a seasoning influence, a leavening agent in the lives of those whom they meet.

As we celebrate this centenary of the birth of its founder, I would ask the faithful of Opus Dei, and all those associated with it, not to hide the light that they have become in Christ for the world. The world needs it. Everyone should be encouraged to make use of all the means of communication presented by today's world to talk to the same world about the things of God and to sow seeds of hope in a culture that at times seems to be hopeless. And yet it is not hopeless, not hopeless because Christ has won. As the Pope has recently observed: "A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ. The Son of God, who became incarnate two thousand years ago out of love for humanity, is at work even today: we need discerning eyes to see this and, above all, a generous heart to become the instruments of his work. (Mt 28:19)"

(At the dawn of the new millennium, 6 January 2001, no. 58).

The world desperately needs to hear what the Gospel has to say, and therefore it desperately needs to hear what we, who are trying to live the Gospel, have to say. We have nothing to fear and an incalculable amount to offer. It is interesting to note that the most frequently repeated command in the whole Bible is not that you must do this, that or the other. The most frequent command is: "Do not be afraid." And no matter how the tide may be running in our world today, we have no need to fear because Christ is with us. He is on our side.

I would remind members of Opus Dei that Christians should not be afraid of misunderstanding or of malice. A constitutive part of communicating with the world is allowing the world to question us

and we need have no fear of the world's questions. On the contrary, it is important that we listen attentively to those questions and that we answer them on the basis of the Gospel.

And so now we give thanks. We give thanks for many years of questions and answers. We give thanks for time well used and for a world provoked again to think of God.

by Most Rev. Dr. Michael Neary,
Archbishop of Tuam

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