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Oct. 10 homily of Bishop Echevarría at St. Eugene's

A homily given by Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, at St. Eugene's Basilica in Rome on October 10, 2002, at the final Mass of thanksgiving for the canonization of Josemaría Escrivá.

03/27/2003

1. These unforgettable days of the canonization of St. Josemaría Escrivá are about to come to an end. In a few

moments, his venerable remains will be placed once again in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, after having been present for the veneration of the faithful for eight days in this Basilica of Sant'Eugenio. Immediately after that, the "diaspora" will begin — for many, it began right after the canonization — and we will all return to our usual activities: ordinary life, the playing field, as it were, for our race toward holiness.

Let us ask ourselves: What resolution can I draw from these days spent in Rome, in which I have experienced the marvelous universality of the Church and of this "little part" of the Church, Opus Dei? What should my life be like, from now on? What words of St. Josemaría can I bring back to those who were not able to attend the canonization, even though they have certainly been present spiritually during these days?

If I myself were speaking with them, I would remind them of something that my beloved predecessor Don Alvaro said ten years ago in one of the last thanksgiving Masses for the beatification of our Father. He said — and I make his words my own — that there had begun "a new stage in the life of Opus Dei..., in the life of each of its members. A time of more profound love for God, of more constant apostolic effort, of more generous service to the Church and all mankind. An epoch, in short, of greater fidelity to the spirit of sanctification in the middle of the world which our Founder left us as his testament" (Homily for Thanksgiving Mass for the Beatification of Josemaría Escrivá, May 21, 1992). In other words: a time in which to seek daily personal conversion.

I would like to comment briefly on these three points. May the Lord

engrave them in our hearts and help us to put them into practice.

2. **"A more profound love for God."**

For several months now, as a way of preparing for the canonization, we have struggled to be converted on a daily basis. How many times we have prayed for God's grace through the intercession of St. Josemaría Escrivá! We know well that the path of holiness consists of many steps and stages. Conversion consists not merely in embracing the true faith, nor in rejecting sin in order to allow grace to work in our souls. Certainly, dwelling in habitual friendship with God is indispensable if we are to become intimate with Him. But this is not enough. We must grow — as our Father did — in this intimacy, progressively identifying ourselves with Christ, until the moment comes when each of us can exclaim with St. Paul: "vivo autem, iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus" (Gal. 2:20), I live

now not I, but Christ lives in me, because I try to follow faithfully, in every moment of the day, the footprints which the Lord left on this earth. "Never be content with what you are", St. Augustine reminds us, "if you want to become what you, as yet, are not. For wherever you feel satisfied, there you will stop. If you say, 'Enough', you have perished. Always grow, always go forward, always advance" (Sermon 169, 18).

In our pilgrimage toward heaven, struggle is necessary to go forward every day, collaborating with the Holy Spirit in the work of our sanctification. This is achieved by dint of one conversion after another, perhaps in very small points — conversions which are like the concrete and progressive steps of the soul in its journey toward God. It is fitting, then, that, as a consequence of these days, we should renew in the depths of our souls the desire to

practice the teachings of the one whom the Lord constituted — by making him *see* Opus Dei — a herald and teacher of the universal call to holiness and apostolate in the circumstances of ordinary life. Let us ask God the Father, through the intercession of this holy priest, as the Church invites us in the Collect of the Mass, to grant that, "carrying out our daily work in the Spirit of Christ, we may be formed in the likeness of your Son" (Mass of St. Josemaría Escrivá, Collect). We ask you, Lord, that all Christians may deepen their awareness of their divine filiation, with the same eagerness and efficacy with which St. Josemaría did, responding faithfully to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

Although each one of us amounts to very little, our hope is sure: God our Father is determined to lead us to the perfection of charity in Christ by means of the Holy Spirit. Indeed,

"those who are guided by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you have not received a spirit of bondage to be once more in fear, but rather you have received a Spirit of sons by adoption, by which we cry out: 'Abba! Father!' For the Spirit Himself bears witness along with our spirit that we are God's children. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, provided that we suffer with Him, in order that we be glorified with Him as well" (Romans 8:14-17).

3. The resolution to love God more, to identify ourselves more fully with Jesus Christ, to respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, must be translated into **"a more constant apostolic effort,"** as the liturgy urges us, inviting us to ask that, "in union with the Blessed Virgin Mary, we might serve the work of Redemption with an ardent

love" (Mass of St. Josemaría Escrivá, Collect).

You are about to return to your countries, your homes, your jobs. Do so determined to be the instruments that the Lord wants to use to spread his word and his grace throughout the world. Take a glance around you. Look at the professional, social and familial circles in which you move, and you will discover many people — sons and daughters of God — who do not fully appreciate the high dignity to which Baptism has raised them, or the great vocation by which the Lord calls them to share in his very Life. Perhaps nobody has spoken to them about God or communicated to them, in a convincing way, the news that they are destined to Happiness with a capital H, to the eternal happiness to which all human beings aspire and which the things of this world cannot provide.

We must awaken them from their slumber, opening their eyes with the eloquence of our lives and the enthusiasm of our words, and thus lead them toward Jesus. We can count on the powerful help of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, the Guardian Angels, St. Josemaría and all of God's saints. We are not better than the others, but the Lord, in his infinite Love, has sought us out and invites us go out to the highways and byways and crossroads of the world to meet our brothers and sisters, the men and women all around us.

We will witness once again the miracle which the Gospel recounts today, when the Apostles, faithful to the command of Christ, "caught a great draught of fishes, so many that the nets began to break" (Luke 5:6). As the Founder of Opus Dei said, we too, "recalling our wretchedness, remembering countless failures caused by our pride, before the

majesty of God, before Christ the Fisherman, must confess with Saint Peter: Lord, I am a poor sinner" (cf. Luke 5:8). And then, Christ will say to you and to me, as he did to Saint Peter: 'henceforth you will be a fisher of men' (Luke 5:10), by divine command, on a divine mission, with divine efficacy" (Notes taken in a meditation, November 3, 1955).

4. Our effort to be saints and apostles has only one end: the glory of God, the salvation of souls: **"a more generous service to the Church and all humanity,"** as Don Alvaro said ten years ago. But let us not forget that we will not know how to serve all those who await us, if we are not striving every day to take care of those we live with. During his earthly life, St. Josemaría Escrivá had no other goal than to serve God, the Church, the Roman Pontiff and all souls. He followed the example of the Master, who "came not to be served,

but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). This holy priest truly loved souls, showing a refined charity for the people around him.

Being a servant of all, our Father rejoiced especially in offering filial service to the Church and the Pope. "Always consider," he wrote, "that after God and our Mother the Blessed Virgin, in the hierarchy of love and authority, comes the Pope. That's why I often say: 'Thank you, my God, for the love for the Pope that you have placed in my heart'" (Letter, January 9, 1932, n. 20).

Let us try to imitate this love and veneration for the Pope. His dignity as Vicar of Christ, as "the sweet Christ on earth," is a more than sufficient reason for us to feel wholeheartedly united to the Roman Pontiff, as a consequence of a genuine filial obligation. But, in

addition, it is natural that we should want to show our gratitude to John Paul II, for having been God's instrument for the canonization of our Founder, and that we should offer for his person and intentions intense prayers, generous mortifications and our daily work carried out with human and supernatural perfection.

Keep the Pope in mind — I tell you now with words of our Father — especially "when the difficulties of your work remind you that you are serving, because to serve for Love is a delight, which fills the soul with peace, even in the face of troubles" (Letter, May 31, 1943, n. 11). If we follow these suggestions, we will travel with confidence and "joy the path of our vocation" (Mass of St. Josemaría Escrivá, Prayer after Communion).

Let us entrust these resolutions to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of the Church. She, along with her spouse, St. Joseph, whom we venerate with such affection, the Guardian Angels, all the saints, and, especially, St. Josemaría Escrivá, will present our hearts' desires before the Blessed Trinity, and God will receive them lovingly, confirm them and grant us the grace to faithfully fulfill them.

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