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“Christ’s loving look and welcoming arms”

Some reflections on the meaning of the 2nd of October and the vocation to Opus Dei by Father Enzo Arborea, a priest of the Prelature in Italy.

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It was late in the evening when the parish priest of the Monreale Cathedral near Palermo, Italy, welcomed a small group of visitors into the church, completely

immersed in darkness and silence. Suddenly he turned on all the spotlights and we were dazzled by the extraordinary beauty of the mosaics that completely cover the Cathedral's interior. With great theological depth, he led us into the history of salvation through the biblical scenes of the Byzantine mosaics, set in a gold background. At one point he told us something that has remained in everyone's heart. He said that whenever he asks tourists and pilgrims what they have been most impressed by, the answer is always the same: the welcoming gesture and loving look of Christ Pantocrator.

Christ's gesture and look convey compassion, understanding, forgiveness, trust, hope. His arms that bless us, welcome us and offer us support remind us that none of us is "the result of chance nor of a bundle of convergences nor of forms

of determinism nor physio-chemical interaction.” Each of us “is a being who enjoys freedom, which, while taking our nature into account, transcends it and symbolizes this mystery of otherness that dwells within us ... This freedom reveals that human existence has meaning.”[1]

The experience of this personal encounter with Christ’s loving look and welcoming arms is present, in very different ways, in the life of every person who undertakes the path of a vocation in the Church. In this way we discover that the foundation of our freedom is the reality that we are children of God. We are truly free because we are God’s children, children deeply loved by God.[2] We are free because we can always lean on the Father’s mercy: *Son, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours (Lk 15:31)*. These words that Jesus puts in

the mouth of the merciful father, found in one of his most famous parables (cf. *Lk* 15:11-32), are always true for every human being. They are the foundation of our freedom and the source of our hope.

What is specific about a person in Opus Dei? He or she is a normal person who has discovered that Christ's loving look and welcoming arms are the deepest reality in this world of ours. They have discovered that Christ's loving look and gesture are a constant call to renew our life, because it is the embrace of the Father for his beloved child, even when we come face to face with our own limitations and miseries, our blindness to the needs of others and enclosure in ourself.

So then, what is the difference from other Christians? None... except for one significant difference that Saint Josemaría makes clear with the

image of a street lamp. A person who discovers, in the middle of the world, the freedom of being a child of God, deeply loved by the Father, is a lighted lamp. giving light and warmth, attracting others.

Christ's loving look and welcoming arms await us not only in the splendid mosaic of Christ Pantocrator in Monreale, but in the prose of every day which, when lived close to Jesus, becomes poetry.

“When you started your ordinary work again, something like a groan of complaint escaped you: ‘It’s always the same!’ And I told you: ‘Yes, it’s always the same. But that ordinary work – no different from what your fellow workers carry out – has to be made into a constant prayer by you. A prayer with the same loving words, but with a different tune each day.’ It is very much our mission to transform the prose of this life into poetry, into heroic verse.”[3]

It is in everyday life and especially in work that a person of Opus Dei discovers Christ's loving look and welcoming arms.[4] Even when we are "overwhelmed by life" and the hustle and bustle of daily events we try to always remember the loving look of Christ, who quickly restores peace to our heart: *Take heart, it is I; have no fear (Mt 14:27)*.

A person in Opus Dei is called – despite all their limitations and never thinking that they are better or different than others – to make Christ's loving look and welcoming arms present in the middle of the world, in the most ordinary situations of daily life and work.

We want all those we encounter at work, on the street, at school, and perhaps above all, in our home, to be able to recognize His loving look and welcoming arms.[5] Only thus can

we help bring this world of ours back to Christ.

Don Enzo Arborea

[1] Benedict XVI, Address to participants in the inter-academic Colloquium on “The changing identity of the individual” sponsored by the Académie des Sciences of Paris and by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (January 28, 2008).

[2] Here are some words of Saint Josemaria that point to the close tie between the truth of our divine filiation and the freedom it wins for us: “Christ himself gives us the answer: *veritas liberabit vos*, the truth will set you free. How great a truth is this, which opens the way to freedom and gives it meaning throughout our lives. I will sum it up for you, with the joy and certainty

which flow from knowing there is a close relationship between God and his creatures. It is the knowledge that we have come from the hands of God, that the Blessed Trinity looks upon us with predilection, that we are children of so wonderful a Father. I ask my Lord to help us decide to take this truth to heart, to dwell upon it day by day; only then will we be acting as free men. Do not forget: anyone who does not realise that he is a child of God is unaware of the deepest truth about himself. When he acts he lacks the dominion and self-mastery we find in those who love Our Lord above all else.” (*Friends of God*, no. 26)

[3] Saint Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 500.

[4] Cf. Saint Josemaría, *Passionately Loving the World*, Homily preached on October 18, 1967. “Everyday life is the true setting for your lives as Christians. There is no other way.

Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find Him. Your ordinary contact with God takes place where your fellow men, your yearnings, your work and your affections are. There you have your daily encounter with Christ. It is in the midst of the most material things of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves, serving God and all mankind ... Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.”

[5] Cf. Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing by*, no. 105: “Every Christian should make Christ present among men. They ought to act in such a way that those who know them sense ‘the good aroma of Christ’ (cf. *2 Cor* 2:2). They should be able to recognize the Master in his disciples.”

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