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Saint Josemaría challenges us to transform the world

Archbishop Donald Wuerl celebrated the Mass for the feast day of Saint Josemaria in Washington, D.C. In his homily he declared that Saint Josemaría reminds us to rejoice in the challenge of transforming the world.

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Here is the text of Archbishop Wuerl's homily:

In beginning these reflections on the life, ministry and legacy of Saint Escrivá I want to turn to the homily of Pope John Paul II at the canonization of Saint Josemaría on October 6, 2002. I had the joy and privilege of being present at that extraordinary outpouring of faith as Saint Peter's Square and the Via della Conciliazione all the way down to the Tiber was engulfed in tens and tens of thousands of the faithful, reflecting the Work of God.

This historic moment of grace followed some twenty seven years on the death of the saint who was so affectionately and respectfully referred to as "El Padre." I remember accompanying Cardinal John Wright, then-prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy, to the headquarters of Opus Dei in Rome so that he might pay his respects. It was a long line. Even then it was clear that Saint Josemaría's personal

sanctity was well recognized and acclaimed.

Twenty seven years later, in his homily at the canonization, Pope John Paul II reminded us that “God comes close to us and we can cooperate with his plan and salvation.” He then went on to recount Saint Josemaría Escrivá’s conviction that “it is possible to elevate the world to God and to transform it from within.” Pope John Paul II affirmed “that this is the ideal the holy founder points out to you.”

In the readings chosen for this liturgy we are reminded in the Book of Genesis that God brought all things into being. In the first creation, God formed out of the clay of the earth man whom he settled in the garden of Eden to cultivate and care for it.

Already in the first creation, God entrusts to us, in fact turns over his

own handiwork to man so that it can be made to blossom, to flower, to come to true fruition.

Only later in the unfolding of events do we come to understand that this first creation was to be surpassed by an even greater and more magnificent one – a new creation in grace. As in the case of the first creation, God would turn over to us, to human beings, the capability, the possibility of realizing the fullness of the new creation.

In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul goes right to the heart of the mystery – the plan of salvation. We are to receive an outpouring of the Spirit that makes it possible for us to become children of God, adopted children of God, but nonetheless, children of God.

Pope Saint Leo the Great reminds us of our extraordinary dignity:
“Christian, recognize your dignity

and, now that you share in God's own nature, . . . remember who is your head and of whose body you are a member."

It is in this mystery of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that we come to understand what it means to say that Christ comes to give new life. "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." (Jn 10:10). He offers us a richer life than any we could ever otherwise have, a life so radically new that we must be born again to receive it (cf. Jn 3:3-8).

Perhaps the most dramatic statement of the intensity of our new life in Christ is found in Saint Paul's letter to the Galatians. Here echoing the words of his letter to the Romans, he tells us that when the fullness of time came, God send his Son: "So that we might receive adoption." (Gal 4:5). By the utter graciousness of God's goodness, God chose to take us fallen,

frail creatures and raise us to a level of unique relationship with himself that reflects his unity with and love for his own son. All this was done through the power of the Holy Spirit.

What we are called to announce and to live is a whole new way of life that makes it possible for us to live in a communion with God that transforms us.

Saint Josemaría spoke of drawing close to Christ in order to experience the cross and its transforming power. He saw in each person's call from God a vocation to draw closer to Christ, and him crucified, in order to obtain the spiritual strength to be an agent of transforming spiritual power in this world. For this reason, he highlighted so often the importance of recognizing that one is truly called by God.

God calls each of us. In one way or another the call comes. It is God who

invites us to respond generously and so to find true joy in opening our hearts to God's grace. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

In a way, Saint Josemaría anticipated the Second Vatican Council's emphasis on our personal call to communion with God. The Council speaks of the universal call to holiness, that each of us has as our vocation in life. Ultimately we are called to union with God.

In this great Basilica on the bas-relief at the far end of the nave is a depiction of the universal call to holiness. The artist presents the Holy Spirit being poured out on us in our walk in the light of Christ and his Gospel. It is in the transforming power of the Spirit that we are capable of changing this world,

elevating this creation, transforming it from within.

As we understand the call to holiness, we recognize that none of us make our way through life alone. God is with us, beckoning us, prompting us, urging us in the Holy Spirit to respond to Jesus' gracious invitation to become his adopted brother or sister so that with our yes of faith he can so change our lives that we are worthy to be presented to the Father as part of his family.

Our vocation to follow Christ differentiates us from the world. To some extent we will always find ourselves in opposition to the "world." Today this is particularly true when every believer is challenged to confront our culture and our times. In an ever increasingly secular and materialistic age, those who live by the Spirit are challenged to set an

example that will bear testimony to the goodness of Christ and his way of life in an age that seems so uncomfortable with the things of the Spirit.

One of the insights of Saint Josemaría that I have found particularly encouraging is the recognition that all that we do, day in and day out, has its own transforming spiritual energy. Our activity to cultivate and care for this world where we are created in the image and likeness of God can have an enduring spiritual value. We do not live somehow spiritually abstracted from the first creation that is a sign of God's love. Rather in this world, with all of its temporality, we find the means by which the Kingdom of God, the realm of grace, the dominion of the Spirit comes to be.

Each of us can take consolation in that vision that so much of what we

do takes on enduring validity. The day in and day out labors that constitute the substance of our activities become not just the work of our hands, the earning of our daily bread, the manifestation of the human condition, all of which they are, but even more. Our work, our daily effort becomes the Work of God to the extent that we and what we do are united to Christ and his cross.

The Gospel chosen for today is a reminder of how our work which can seem at times to be lacking fruit can in fact be transformed into a bountiful catch. What it takes is openness to the Word. Jesus told them “Put out into the deep water, and let your nets down for a catch .”

At his command they did this and “caught a great number of fish.”

Jesus then says to Peter: “Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men.”

The words of Christ and his Gospel present for us a challenge that allows us to believe that what we are doing in our daily lives, the activity of our livelihood, the work that is the part of the human condition, can actually be a transforming, life giving, world altering action.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, enlightened by the word of Jesus, strengthened by his cross, we now see a far richer reality. Our lives and what we do become in the power of the Holy Spirit transforming instruments of the new creation.

As God brought into being all that is, in the first creation, so he now empowers us in a universal call to holiness, in a challenge to an all embracing response to the Spirit, to become the means of the new creation.

Today, as Pope John Paul II in his homily at the canonization of Saint

Josemaría reminded us, the challenge, “Duc in Altum,” put out into the deep is extended to all of us.

With the example of Saint Josemaría before us, we can through his intercession renew the vision of a new order of grace. We can reconnect to the new creation, coming to be in and through all that Christ calls us to be.

The manifesting of the Kingdom begins with our openness to the word, our commitment in faith and our courage each day to do the work of God. In this way all that we do allows the grace of the Spirit in and through us to bring about a true manifestation of the Kingdom. In this we become the agents of the new creation.

While this is an exalted vocation, it is nonetheless that to which we are called. Today we celebrate the legacy of Saint Josemaría who not only

recognized the call and lived it, but provided an inspiration for all engaged in the Work of God to rejoice in who we are and the challenge of transforming this world.

Most Reverend Donald W. Wuerl,
S.T.D.

Archbishop of Washington

Basilica of the National Shrine of the
Immaculate Conception

Washington, D.C.

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