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## **Masses of St. Josemaría in Ghana**

Last June 26 has perpetually remained engraved in my memory because I participated in several Masses in honour of St. Josemaría in Ghana, and it was the first time I would celebrate his feast outside Nigeria. The idea was made possible thanks to a conference on family medicine I attended a month earlier, in May, at Elmina, in Ghana's Central Region.

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I had been invited to deliver a medico-scientific paper to a group of fellow family doctors like me at a conference. Besides enjoying the beautiful scenery of the Atlantic Ocean from the beach resort where the conference took place, I made use of the opportunity to tell more people about St. Josemaría and his forthcoming feast day which was only a few weeks away. I was able to speak, among others, with doctors, taxi drivers and some students from the nearby University of Cape Coast. I did not hesitate to give them prayer cards of St. Josemaría, so that his cheerful image would at least brighten their day.

I returned to Accra immediately after the conference to spend a few days with some of my friends, students at

the University of Ghana, Legon, whom I know last year. Since then, we meet online every month, in what we call the Nyansapo Professional Development Forum, to discuss on virtues and values for young men: we have covered some like study, prudence, happiness and interior life. But this time the meeting was presential with fourteen out of the thirty who have participated in the forum.

With Godsway and Nicholas, who came recently to Lagos with Elvis, we prepared a list of parishes in Accra where Masses in honour of St. Josemaría could be celebrated. In preparation for the Masses, Nicholas volunteered to design flyers and was assisted by Stanley from Lagos, while Godsway took charge of publicity. We then began visiting the parishes to finalise the arrangements with the priests and some parishioners. While all these plans were underway, Fr.

James, a priest from another diocese heard about our plans at *St. Thomas Aquinas*, the university parish at Legon, and he immediately announced that he wanted to concelebrate. I eventually convinced him to celebrate in his parish, *St. Mary's*, in Asamankese, about two hours' drive from Accra. Fr. James had his initial encounter with Opus Dei in 2019, during a vacation in London, where he met a married couple that told him about it. On his return to Ghana, he was connected with Fr. Boni in Lagos, and the two have remained in touch ever since. He was introduced to a WhatsApp group where he could learn more things, and he has since been an active participant.

I had returned to Ghana two days before the feast. On the D-day, four Masses were celebrated in honour of this saint: three of them in Accra. Two were held in the morning at *St.*

*Thomas Aquinas*, in Legon, and at *Mary Mother of Good Counsel*, in Airport West. One in the *Holy Spirit Cathedral* at noon. And the fourth Mass was held at *St. Mary's* in Asamankese, Eastern Region, in the evening. I attended three of them.

In the course of organizing the Masses, my friends Godsway, Kwame and John helped sell copies of *The Way* which I had brought from Enugu in the parish of *St. Thomas Aquinas*. Fr. William, the chaplain, invited me to introduce St.

Josemaría, his vocation and how Opus Dei came to Africa. I did that in about five minutes just before the Mass, using slides in the screens behind the sanctuary. Fr. William encouraged the undergraduates to follow in the footsteps of the saint.

Marie-Therese, a final-year student of *Political Science and Spanish* at the University of Ghana, recounted

afterward: “I had seen prayer cards of St. Josemaría in the adoration chapel. I read it once but didn’t really pay attention. A friend invited me for the feast day Mass on the eve of the feast, and I was also moved to buy a copy of *The Way* which I love because it gives me practical points for achieving sanctity. At the Mass, I was inspired to pray for all the faithful of Opus Dei, and that this message grows and reaches everyone on this earth.” For my friend Nicholas, Opus Dei “has taught me that my struggle for holiness consists in sanctifying my studies. The feast day Mass was a blessing for me.”

During the Mass at the Cathedral of Accra, the Administrator, Fr. Clement, reminded the professionals in attendance to find God in their workplace by trying to be exemplary in the way they live the virtues. Reiterating the words of St.

Josemaría, he mentioned “that not all of us can be rich, wise, famous... yet, all of us are called to be saints.” The sales of *The Way* continued, buying also for friends, and Nana a banker and generous gentleman, bought the last copy paying for twelve times the price, as he said “to help for the effort.” Fr. Clement thought that our Father was patron of those who are sick with diabetes, as he was cured miraculously of this illness, and we discussed about it for some time. He invited me to speak at the end of the Mass about St. Josemaría to the congregation for three minutes. While taking a picture with the participants, some were asking when Opus Dei would be coming to Ghana.

The Mass at the parish of *Mary Mother of Good Counsel* was said by Fr. Stephen. A good number of the participants are in contact with Axel, a supernumerary from Ivory Coast, since many years ago.

I travelled by public transport to Asamankese. The solemn Mass at *St. Mary's* was well attended also by the students of *St. Mary's Technical Institute*, a vocational training centre attached to the parish, where they facilitate studies on catering, fashion design, cosmetology, information technology, and electrical courses. Their youthful and vibrant choir enlivened the Mass with their voices. Fr. James, who concelebrated with two other priests, encouraged them to cultivate devotion to St. Josemaría and ask the saint to help them to become better students. Before the final blessing we said aloud a prayercard to St. Josemaría asking for his intercession. Then we took a picture by the sanctuary.

The following day, after enjoying the hospitality of Fr. James in Asamankese, I went back to Accra to meet Fr. Samuel. He had recently completed his doctorate in Rome,

arrived Accra and was eager to celebrate the Mass of St. Josemaría in his home country. A mutual friend in Rome introduced him to me, and so we started making some arrangements to do it on June 28. Our initial plan fell through, however, the meeting with Fr. Samuel at Mary Mother of Good Counsel Parish on the evening of June 27 turned out to be providential, as we eventually had it that evening. That was the *fifth*. His friend James and I who served his Mass were the only ones in attendance. During the consecration, as Fr. Samuel raised the sacred host, I looked up towards the heavens, and I could 'see' St. Josemaría smiling at us. It was a very moving experience.

I must confess that I enjoyed my stay. Apart from enjoying the beautiful Ghanaian landscapes and making many Ghanaian friends, the Ghanaian cuisine is a delight for the

taste buds. I especially relished the Waakye (pronounced WAH-chay, made of rice and beans) and the *Ghana* jollof rice. I bonded with young and not-so-young people who are fascinated by the message of finding God in everyday life. Everyone went home with a prayercard of the saint, some collected prayercards to share with their friends and loved ones, and we eventually sold all the copies of *The Way* that I came along with from Nigeria!

Michael Dike

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