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The Pope blesses statue of St. Josemaría

Benedict XVI blessed a statue of St. Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, which was recently placed in a niche on the outside of St. Peter's Basilica.

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Prior to the arrival of the Holy Father, Bishop Javier Echevarría, prelate of Opus Dei; Cardinal Francesco Marchisano, archpriest of the Vatican basilica; and Cosci, the

sculptor, each made speeches which were interspersed with hymns sung by the Cappella Giulia Choir.

During the ceremony, the Pope recited this prayer: "O God, who have chosen St. Josemaría priest to proclaim the universal vocation to holiness and the apostolate in the Church, bless this image and let all those who contemplate it be encouraged to fulfill faithfully their daily work in the spirit of Christ and to serve with ardent love the work of redemption. Through Christ our Lord."

The marble statue, some 5 meters high, is located in a niche on the external wall of the left transept of the basilica, also known as the arm of St. Joseph, near the entrance to the sacristy.

The statue of St. Josemaría Escrivá, the work of the Italian sculptor Romano Cosci, was placed alongside

other statues of similar dimensions, among them those of St. Gregory the Illuminator, apostle of Armenia, and St. Marcellin Champagnat, founder of the Marist Brothers.

On the eve of the ceremony, Cosci explained how the intercession of St. Josemaría Escrivá helped him in an accident: "I was working on the statue and I fell from the scaffold," Cosci recalled. "I hit my head and they had to take me to the hospital. But I was able to finish the statue and now I am here. This is the conclusion of two years of work. This bold venture has just finished. Finally I have seen it in its place."