

## **"This painting draws me to Mass every day"**

In the Year of St. Joseph and of the Family, Oakcrest School in Virginia has dedicated an original painting of the Holy Family for the school's chapel.

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On September 18, 2021, Oakcrest School in Vienna, Virginia dedicated an original, commissioned painting of the Holy Family for the school's chapel. Particularly fitting in this

Year of St. Joseph and Year of the Family, the 8 ft x 9 ft oil on canvas Nativity painting reflects the teachings of St. Josemaria Escriva, the Founder of Opus Dei, and the mission of Oakcrest, an independent school for girls in grades 6-12 inspired by the teachings of the Catholic Church and the spirituality of Opus Dei.

Head of School, Dr. Mary T. Ortiz and AP Art History teacher Victoria Bigliano worked closely with the artist, Henry Wingate, to share with him the inspirations from St. Josemaria they hoped the painting would convey.

St. Josemaria had a special love for Nativity scenes. “Look at the Child in the manger. He is our Love. Look at him, realizing what a great mystery it is” (*Christ is Passing By*, 13). His ardent devotion to the Holy Family, coupled with the attraction that the

manger scene has for young hearts, played a large role in the selection of the theme of this centerpiece for the school's chapel.

In the Oakcrest painting St. Joseph appears as St. Josemaria envisioned him: a strong, handsome young man with the ability to protect and provide for the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus. “I don't agree with the traditional picture of St. Joseph as an old man. I see him as a strong young man, perhaps a few years older than our Lady, but in the prime of his life and work” (*Christ is Passing By*, 40).

The young donkey in the painting is a reference to St. Josemaria's love for this animal, who served faithfully in various moments in the life of the Holy Family. “Try to remember what a donkey is like. Not an old, stubborn, vicious one that would give you a kick when you least expected, but a young one with his

ears up like antennae” (*Christ is Passing By*, 181).

The painting also features several elements of Oakcrest School’s history and mission. Dogwood flowers and a female cardinal, the official flower and bird of Virginia, are a nod to the school’s location and its mission of serving young women and their families. The scene also contains a plaid cloth from the Oakcrest uniform in a basket. Faculty member Paula Rondon commented that this detail “reminds us that all of us at Oakcrest are there with the Holy Family in this transcendent moment.”

For Oakcrest students, this one-of-a-kind image of the Holy Family is a source of great joy. Dean of Students and alumna Meghan Hadley recalls that “as soon as classes were dismissed the day the painting was installed, I could hear a collective cry

of joy in the chapel as the girls saw the painting for the first time.” For Charlotte O’Beirne, a 10th grade student at Oakcrest, “this painting really brings a clarity and focus to the Oakcrest chapel and draws me to Mass every day.”

The painting of the Holy Family complements two other images in the Oakcrest School chapel: the statue of St. Josemaria, which was dedicated in September of 2020, and the statue of Our Lady of Oakcrest, which has adorned the school’s chapel throughout the its 45 year history and accompanied Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, then Prelate of Opus Dei, in his get-togethers at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC in 1988.

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