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Faith and Life in St Josemaria Escriva

“The faith of a son, which is faith in the Son, was manifested in the faith of a father, the faith that characterized St Josemaria’s life. He felt very much a son of God, and also very much a father.” For the Year of Faith we publish an article by Giulio Maspero which will shortly appear in the journal ‘Romana’

03/22/2013

For the Year of Faith we publish an article by Giulio Maspero, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, forthcoming in no. 55 of *Romana*, Bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei.

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1. Introduction: Why have a Year of Faith?

At the beginning of the *motu proprio* Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* we read: “The ‘door of faith’ (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church.” (1) Faith and life are brought into close proximity at the very beginning of the Holy Father’s document announcing the Year of Faith. The life that it speaks of is the life of communion with God. The basic concern of the document, like everything that Benedict XVI taught

throughout his pontificate, is to ensure that Christianity can never be mistaken for a mere philosophical or moral teaching. It is essentially a living encounter with the Risen Christ, present in his Church; Christ the Lord of history. This is the encounter “which gives life a new horizon”. (2)

This new horizon, the life of communion with God, that is opened up by faith, is the source of the preaching and apostolate of Paul and Barnabas, who, on returning to Antioch, whence they had first set out on their missionary journey, “gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (*Acts 14:27*). Therefore it is God himself who opens the door of faith, acting in the lives of his apostles and saints.

The image of the door or gate is frequently used in the Gospel. The door is often closed, as in the case of the foolish virgins (cf. *Mt* 25:10), or the neighbour and his children who had already gone to bed (cf. *Lk* 11:7). In any case, the door is narrow, and the householder may close it (cf. *Lk* 13:24-25 and *Mt* 7:13-14). But God opens that door, as is shown by St Paul's life and experience. He writes to the Corinthians: "a wide door for effective work has opened to me" (*1 Cor* 16:9), and he asks the Colossians to pray "that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ" (*Col* 4:3).

St John's gospel adds an essential element to this: the door is not only opened by God but by the Good Shepherd, who is recognized because he comes through the door, and is himself the door (cf. *Jn* 10:2-10). From this viewpoint, Christ is the Door because he leads us to the full,

eternal life that is given by God the Father.

The Scriptural reference to the “door of faith” turns us, then, towards a supremely theological perspective: faith commits and involves life precisely because it gives life, a life that will never end. This is why “To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime.” (3)

The Holy Father intends the aim of the Year of Faith to be a recovery of the strong connection between faith and life. Faith is not alive today because people no longer realize that it is essential to life; they do not recognize it as a meaningful factor in their own lives.

This truth – the connection between faith and life – is central to the magisterium of Pope Benedict XVI. “Ever since the start of my ministry as Successor of Peter, I have spoken of the need to rediscover the journey

of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ.” (4)

Today religion, and especially Catholicism, is often looked on by the prevailing culture as an enemy to happiness. It seems to forbid everything we find attractive for the very reason that we are attracted to it. Faith is presented as though it is necessarily opposed to man's desires, and a fulfilled life. The teaching of Nietzsche referenced in the first footnote in *Deus Caritas Est* says this explicitly. (5)

But why is faith seen today as an enemy of life? Benedict XVI says the reason is that not enough room is given to God in the proclamation of the faith. What needs to be done is to highlight the primary importance of the gift, and show why it is essential for Christians to make every effort to

be receptive to it. In *Porta Fidei* the Pope states powerfully: “Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy.” (6)

Even more than the requirement to live in accordance with our beliefs, what makes faith into the natural guide for our lives is an awareness of the beauty of the gift, and joy at our encounter with God: “‘Faith working through love’ (*Gal 5:6*) becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man’s life (cf. *Rom 12:2; Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:20-29; 2 Cor 5:17*).” (7)

The theological virtues, faith, hope and charity, are the life of God that bursts, through grace, into our lives when we open ourselves to them. St Thomas Aquinas, for instance, says that “faith is a habit of the mind whereby eternal life is begun in us,

making the intellect assent to what is non-apparent.” (8)

The movement, then, goes from the life of God, who gives himself, to the life of man, who becomes *opus Dei*, a work of God. Benedict XVI expresses these dynamics with daylight clarity. We can look at St Josemaria Escriva’s teaching and experience in the light of *Porta Fidei* – “The teaching of Jesus still resounds in our day with the same power: ‘Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life’ (*Jn* 6:27). The question posed by his listeners is the same question we ask today: ‘What must we do, to be doing the works of God?’ (*Jn* 6:28). We know Jesus’ reply: ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent’ (*Jn* 6:29). Belief in Jesus Christ, then, is the way to arrive definitively at salvation.” (9)

2. Life of faith in St Josemaria's teachings

Like St Paul, St Josemaria too experienced that God had opened the door of faith to him, when he discovered that God wanted the “divine paths of the world” to be opened up, (10) bringing to light “something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations”, (11) with a “lively awareness of eternity” (12) at every moment. That was why he called Madrid his “Damascus”, (13) the place where he received a clear light on his vocation and his mission to found Opus Dei. The holiness to which God was calling him was contained in daily life and in love for the world. The work that God was bringing about in him was fulfilled in ordinary everyday events, which it transformed into meeting-places with God. Doing God's work was

specifically based, in St Josemaria's experience, on *being* God's work.

God himself is given absolute pride of place in all this, since belief, as taught in *Jn* 6:29, quoted above, is the work of God: the necessary condition for doing God's work is to enable one's own life to be more and more the work of God, through faith. (14) This really is a gift from God, who gives his life and holiness to every Christian in baptism.

It should not surprise us, then, to see that in St Josemaria's published writings, the word "faith" very often goes hand-in-hand with words like "life", "living", etc. (15) He asks his readers to "live by faith" and speaks of the need for a "living faith". We see this at the end of the homily "Passionately Loving the World", given at the University of Navarre on October 8, 1967. That too was a Year of Faith, convoked by Pope Paul VI, to

whom St Josemaria makes explicit reference:

"Now I ask you with the Psalmist to unite yourselves to my prayer and my praise: *Magnificate Dominum mecum, et extollamus nomen eius simul*: 'Praise the Lord with me, let us extol His name together' (Ps 33:4). In other words, dearly beloved, *let us live by Faith*. [...]

Faith is a virtue which we Christians need greatly, and in a special way in this 'Year of Faith' which our beloved Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, has decreed. For without faith, we lack the very foundation for the *sanctification of everyday life*.

A living Faith in these moments, because we are drawing near to the *mysterium fidei* (1 Tim 3:9), to the Holy Eucharist; because we are about to participate in our Lord's Pasch, which sums up and brings about the mercies of God among men. [...]

Faith, finally, my beloved daughters and sons, to show the world that all this is not just ceremonies and words, but a divine reality, by presenting to mankind the *testimony of an ordinary life which is made holy*, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and of holy Mary." (16)

Sanctifying daily life is possible precisely because of faith, and it means the same as living by faith and having a living faith, (17) with explicit reference to St Paul's teaching in *Gal 3:11* – "the just man lives by faith". All of this is based on the theological virtues, as St Josemaria points out in a phrase that is full of meaning: "Acts of Faith, Hope and Love are valves which provide an outlet for the fire of those souls that live the life of God." (18)

"Living by Faith" is the title of a homily included in *Friends of God*,

about the theological virtue of faith. In it the apparent absence of miracles today, compared with the times of the early Christians, is attributed precisely to the fact that Christians are not now living a life of faith. (19) By contrast, faith is living when it “becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man’s life,” in the words from *Porta Fidei* quoted above. Faith is alive when it is at work, when it shows, and leads to specific choices, decisions that give direction to Christians’ actual lives. (20) Otherwise, faith is dead, because it remains on a merely sociological plane, like an abstract lesson or a series of moral traditions that have no absolute value in themselves. Joseph Ratzinger explains this very well when he says that the contents of the faith are not like the periodic table of the elements, knowledge of which does not directly affect men’s lives. Faith, by contrast, contains

truths that we must necessarily react to. This means that there is no such thing as a true agnostic; agnostics are, in practice, atheists, because to live their lives they have to take some specific decisions, and they choose that those decisions shall not be in conformity with the teachings of faith. (21)

In other words, to live, one must have some kind of faith, because one inevitably chooses to give a meaning to one's life. Thus St Josemaria's teaching could not be further from Pelagianism and moralism.

Christianity cannot be limited to deeds; nor can man achieve salvation by human virtue or his own effort. It is clearly stated that the act of belief is not limited to the intellect, to the simple acceptance of a number of truths that have little to do with life; on the contrary, the act of belief is shown in the believer's very life, because faith bestows supernatural

life and enables us to think according to “the logic of God” (22) – God’s way of reasoning. We then connect everything to Christ and establish a personal relationship with him. “You don’t have *living* faith if you aren’t giving yourself to Jesus here and now.” (23)

That is the radical Christocentrism that enables St Josemaria to speak so boldly about sanctifying and loving the world. (24) The following paragraphs are very revealing:

"When faith weakens, men tend to imagine that God is far away and hardly cares for his children. They come to regard religion as a kind of appendage, something to have recourse to when there’s no other remedy; they expect, with what justification one cannot say, spectacular manifestations, unusual happenings. But when faith is really alive in the soul, one discovers

instead that to follow Christ one does not have to step aside from the ordinary pattern of everyday life, and also that the great holiness which God expects of us is to be found here and now in the little things of each day." (25)

The solemn proclamation of the universal call to holiness is seen, then, as a deepening in the faith as "a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man's life," since it is born of our encounter with Christ in everyday life. The reduction of the faith to a mere sociological tradition, separating it from real life, goes hand in hand with a reduction of its remit to the sphere of extraordinary, abnormal things. By contrast, accepting the universal call to holiness means giving new life to our own faith in order to open ourselves up to God who is close at hand:

"We should make no mistake... God is no shadowy or distant being who created us and then abandoned us; nor is he a master who goes away and does not return. Though we do not perceive him with our senses, his existence is far more true than any of the realities which we touch and see. God is here with us, really present, living. He sees and hears us, he guides us, and knows our smallest deeds, our most hidden intentions.

We believe this — but we live as if God did not exist. For we do not have a thought or a word for him; for we do not obey him, nor try to control our passions; for we do not show that we love him, and we do not atone...

Are we going to continue living with a *dead faith*?" (26)

Faith needs to be something alive, because Christ is not a figure from the past, a memory, or a tradition. He is alive today and now. (27) And

living by faith means, essentially, being on intimate terms with him, talking to him as a friend, developing a personal relationship with him. This teaching links our faith directly to man's deepest desires. It does not deny or suppress but satisfies the inmost secrets of the heart. "Our faith does not ignore anything on this earth that is beautiful, noble, and authentically human." (28) For this reason, St Josemaria was accused of preaching "retreats about life" and not, as was customary at that time, "retreats about death". (29)

Thus, in his homily "Living by Faith", the texts of Scripture that he takes as his starting-point are the miracles where Jesus comes to meet people in their needs, as in the case of Bartimaeus, the blind man of Jericho, in Mark chapter 10, and the woman with the issue of blood in Matthew chapter 9, and finally the father of the lunatic boy in Mark chapter 9. As

Joseph Ratzinger wrote, “the thirst for the infinite belongs quite simply to essential human nature, and is indeed precisely that essential nature,” (30) so that all genuine loves and desires find their meaning in God’s love alone.

"Practise your faith cheerfully, keeping very close to Jesus Christ. Really love him – but really, really love him! – and you will take part in a great Adventure of Love, because you will be more in love each day."
(31)

The human heart asks for a real “forever”. Even Nietzsche wrote that “all joy wants eternity” (32). But it is doomed to disillusion unless, in the loves of this earth, in the desires of his heart, man can recognize a path leading, like a river to its source, to God’s Love, to Christ, the Love of loves.

"Men lie when they say 'for ever' about things on earth. The only true, totally true 'for ever' is that which we say with reference to God. This is how you ought to live your life, with a faith that will help you to taste the honey, the sweetness of heaven whenever you think about eternal life which is indeed 'for ever'." (33)

In short, St Josemaria's view of faith was of something that speaks to life, to people's loves. By contrast with a faith conceived as a mere social phenomenon or tradition, St Josemaria's preaching addresses people's hearts, because it is born of faith "lived as an experience of love received." (34) He presents Jesus to us as one introduces a friend; as the Love of loves, the source and meaning of all loves that are genuine and pure.

The universal call to holiness is based on the conviction of God's

nearness to our individual lives, where our hopes and desires are. Passionately loving the world is possible by means of faith, by deepening in our faith.

By giving priority to the theological virtues, and by means of Christocentrism, the faith can be presented in a way that responds to man's deepest desires. But what are the theological bases of this approach?

3. A son's faith, a father's faith

This deepening in the theological dimension of faith, which enables an opening-up to the sanctification of ordinary life, and therefore shows how the faith itself responds to the deepest and noblest desires of the human heart, has profound theological roots. These roots touch the doctrinal elements that occupied the attention of theologians progressively more in the course of the twentieth century, as part of their

reflection on the universal call to holiness.

These elements are clearly present in St Josemaria's teaching; in the first place, because of the light granted to his soul by his foundational charism, and secondly, because of the deep understanding of the tradition of the Church with which that light endowed him. In particular, his teachings contain dogmatic elements that are characteristic of the thinking of the Fathers of the Church, which always presents faith and life together.

What stands out above all is his strong conviction of the divine sonship that Christ granted us, and that is even expressed in terms such as "divinization" (35). This sonship, or "filiation", points to a clear perception of the connection between the divine missions and the intra-Trinitarian processions, as well

as the link between the act of creation, and the eternal generation of the Son by the Father. Referring to Galatians 3:26, St Josemaria said: “All of you are God’s children through faith. What power we have! The power of knowing what we are, that we are God’s children.” (36) And he draws out the consequences of that mystery, which, in patristic terms, is identified with the distinction without separation, and the union without confusion, of God’s action and his being – the divine economy and the divine immanence. The history of salvation affords constant glimpses of the Blessed Trinity, and this enables us to recognize the meaning of creation in the incarnate Word. In the words of the great French theologian Jean Daniélou, “From the deepest origins of all things appears this close link of all creation with the Word. It may be said that creation is not without an irradiation of the eternal generation

[of the Son by the Father].” (37)
Which is why St Josemaria says,

“There is no human situation, no matter how trivial and ordinary it may seem, which cannot be a meeting place with Christ and a step forward on our journey toward the kingdom of Heaven.” (38)

Being contemplative in the middle of the world means recognizing, thanks to the gift of faith and constant vigilance over that gift, that everything speaks of Christ, that it is he who gives meaning to history and the world. Nothing of what is genuine can be alien to Christ, so that it is not necessary to abandon ordinary life in order to achieve holiness. In the words of Jean Daniélou again, Christ “coincides in a certain manner with the very reality of the created being in his or her totality. And to separate oneself from Christ is at the same time to separate

oneself from what is real. It does not mean going beyond Christ, but just the reverse: it means closing oneself to life.” (39)

The doctrine of the faith is not only a collection of teachings to be learnt, but a light that lights up reality, a light that shines out of Christ’s eyes.

St Josemaria’s union of faith and life, therefore, reflects his Christocentrism and his deep experience of divine filiation, the true centre of the whole of the Christian message and the point at which time and eternity join together. In the Incarnate Word, in his Sacred Heart, are both movements: God coming in search of man and man who, with his desires, is consciously or unconsciously seeking God, the Love of loves. For this reason St Josemaria never presents faith merely as a teaching,

but reconnects it in a living way to Christ:

“Faith is a supernatural virtue which disposes our intelligence to give assent to the truths of revelation, to say Yes to Christ, who has brought us full knowledge of the Blessed Trinity’s plan for our salvation.” (40)

The mind’s assent is inseparable from that given by the heart in the meeting with Christ, living and resurrected, in the Christian’s “today”. (41) The act of faith is thought and knowledge that are born of the relationship with Jesus Christ in person, of conversation with him and openness to him. Among the Fathers of the Church, St Augustine explained this aspect by distinguishing three aspects of the act of belief as follows: one has to believe that God exists, *credere Deum*, but one also has to believe in God who reveals himself, *credere*

Deo, and the whole thing culminates in *credere in Deum*, i.e. in personal adherence to God, in a faithfulness that leads one to tend continually towards him with one's whole life. (42) Thus St Josemaria's concept of faith is both profoundly modern and genuinely faithful to Patristic tradition, (43) which he appreciated for its apophatic theology – the realization that a knowledge of God as he is in himself is beyond human capacity. One may think here of the very beautiful reply he gave in a large gathering in Venezuela in 1975:

"And when they tell you they can't understand the Trinity and Unity [of God], tell them that I don't understand it either, but I love and venerate it. If I could understand the greatness of God, if God fitted into this poor brain of mine, my God would be very small..., and, nevertheless, he does fit – because he wants to – into my heart, he is

contained within the immense depth of my soul, which is immortal." (44)

The intellectual dimension does not exhaust the knowledge of God, who cannot be reduced to a concept or an idea. The Christian mystery is fully grasped in a personal knowledge of God who dwells in the soul in grace. Thus the doublet *faith and heart* recurs in St Josemaria's writings: it is a matter of "seeing the truth and loving it", (45) of loving and believing. (46) The doctrinal dimension is not sacrificed to an outpouring of sentiment, nor, on the other hand, is faith reduced to mere intellectual formulas divorced from life. The phrase he coined, "the piety of children and the doctrine of theologians", (47) to point out the safe path for his spiritual children to follow, shows this same deep harmony. It is this approach, based on the sense of divine filiation, that has nourished the fidelity of the

Church from the time of the early Christians. Belief is first and foremost a gift; it is the indwelling of God, his advent, in the human heart.

Thus we begin to see why an essential element in a deepened understanding of faith's theological dimension is the radical realism of the statement that the Blessed Trinity dwells in the human soul. Man is called to be one with Christ, who is man's true identity. The only way in which we can live by faith is by living the life of God's children, so as to be another Christ. (48) St Josemaria expresses this in the telling words *alter Christus, ipse Christus* (49): "Feel, instead, Christ urging you on to become another Christ, *ipse Christus* (Christ himself)." (50)

This, then, is the faith that "becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of

man's life"; that is full faith in the Incarnation, in its reality, its cosmic meaning. The meaning of the world is the Incarnate Son of God, and man is called to lead everything back to Christ, who returns all to the Father. This means recognizing the print of the Trinity on created being, going up from the Incarnate Son who gives the world its meaning, to the Father, source of all things. As Jean Mouroux wrote, "our faith is Christological, and because it is Christological, it is Trinitarian." (51) To be contemplative in the world, therefore, means looking at the world with Trinitarian eyes – which is made possible by our personal union with Christ. In this way we can find the meaning of creation and history in the freedom of the children of God.

"This hymn to freedom is echoed in all the mysteries of our Catholic faith. The Blessed Trinity draws the

world and man out of nothing, in a free outpouring of love." (52)

The Incarnation confirms God's love, revealing that the true law that governs the world is not blind necessity, nor absolute, disincarnate reason, but the freedom and confidence of God the Father, who creates each thing in the Son and for the Son. (53) And so St Josemaria declared in an interview in Spain in 1969,

"God, on creating us, ran the risk and adventure of our freedom. He wanted the history of the world to be a real history, made of real decisions, and not a fiction or a game. Each man has to experience his own autonomy, with all its concomitant hazards, trial-and-error, and uncertainty." (54)

Hence his "realization that history is undetermined and open to a variety

of human options – all of which God respects.” (55)

This deep understanding of faith was given life in St Josemaria's response to God, whose son he felt himself to be, to the point of becoming the father of more children, and forming them in their turn until they too became parents of others. But forming others in freedom and nurturing their growth demand faith in the one Father, who is always at work, giving life, and protecting. A magnificent passage written in 1937 (in the coded language that he employed throughout the Spanish Civil War to get past the censors) shows the strength and depth of this living faith:

"I'm not going to tell you anything. It's my custom to keep quiet and almost always just say, 'Good,' or 'Very good.' No one can truthfully say at the end of the day that he did this

or that thing by order, or even by an implied order, of the grandfather. When I think I have to say something, I limit myself to setting out clearly the facts of the problem at hand. In no way, even if I very clearly see one, do I or will I give a specific solution to it. I have a different way, a gentler and more effective way, of influencing the wills of my children and grandchildren: I give myself a hard time and pester my old Friend Don Manuel. May I never stray from this path, of always letting my children act with complete freedom... until the time comes to tighten the rope! That time will come. But, of course – I think you know this about me – despite my human frailty, I could never use anyone's life, not even a minute of it, for my own comfort or consolation. So much is this true that I will keep my mouth shut (though later I will speak with Don Manuel about it) even when what my children have in

mind looks to me like a real disaster."
(56)

St Josemaria shows his way of acting and governing with faith, having recourse to God – “Don Manuel”, meaning the original *Emmanuel*, God with us – to respect his children’s freedom, since, in order to grow and acquire the capacity to be parents, they need to experience their own limitations and make their own mistakes. For someone who loves them this process is painful, as painful as giving birth, but there is no other way of truly engendering another person and making them capable of becoming parents in their turn. Beyond helping their children to perceive their own and other people’s limitations, it is the parents’ job to bring them to discover the beauty of reality. Thus “the original optimistic view of creation, that *love for the world* which is at the heart of the Christian message”, (57) is based

on St Josemaria's faith, which made him a father in such an outstanding way.

The faith of a son, which is faith in the Son, was manifested in the faith of a father, the faith that characterized St Josemaria's life, totally dedicated as it was to the Work of God. He felt very much a son of God, and also very much a father. The same apostolic fruitfulness can be interpreted in his theological perspective on faith, which led him to inspire many people to become saints in the world, and to open up a path to holiness in actual history, as he set up the institution.

4. Conclusion: Trinitarian life

The Holy Father Benedict XVI proclaimed a Year of Faith to overcome the current crisis of faith and life – for it seems as if Christianity, and the truths professed in the Creed, no longer have any

value for people's real lives. In contrast with that, St Josemaria's teachings manifest, even at the level of terminology, a close connection between faith and life, presenting Christian life as a call to *live by faith*, to base one's life on a personal relationship with Christ.

The invitation to turn one's faith into deeds is born of a deep understanding of the primacy of the theological dimension, which enables the Christian message to address people's deepest loves and aspirations. The possibility of "passionately loving the world" and sanctifying all the genuinely human actions and dimensions of one's life, is based on a deepened understanding of the close connection between faith and life. The unity of life that was a constant theme of St Josemaria's preaching does not only consist of living according to the faith one professes,

but is born of a deep, operative faith that opens man's life to God's Life. Indeed, "There is only one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is that life which has to become, in both body and soul, holy and filled with God: we discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things."
(58)

All of this, from the theological point of view, is based on a Christological understanding of the faith as a call to identify oneself with Christ. Divine sonship is thus of primary importance, enabling one to read the world on the basis of the revelation of God as Trinity. If the Creator is God One and Three, the ultimate meaning of creation cannot be understood fully without reference to the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. The history and the freedom of mankind thus take on extraordinary value.

The theological depth of the union of faith and life in St Josemaria's thought is particularly evident in one of his deepest and most original teachings, which is evoked here because it synthesizes much of the rest: his invitation to learn how to live out the faith by contemplating the Holy Family, (59) rising up to the Blessed Trinity in Heaven from the daily life and mutual relations of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, whom he called the "earthly trinity". This pathway, based on an intuition that is a true and proper dogmatic synthesis, highlights both Christocentrism and a deepening in the theological dimension of faith:

"I strive to reach the Trinity in Heaven through that other "trinity" on earth: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They are, as it were, more accessible. Jesus, who is *perfectus Deus* and *perfectus Homo*. Mary, who is a woman, the purest of creatures, the

greatest: greater than her, only God. And Joseph, who is there right beside Mary: clean, manly, prudent, trustworthy. O my God! What models for us! Just to look at them makes me want to die of shame, for, my Lord, I have behaved so badly... I haven't risen to the occasion or become divinized. You have given me the means, and you are giving them, and will go on giving them to me... for, to live humanly on this earth, we must strive to live in a divine way." (60)

Every man and every woman is called to live the very life of God, the life of the Blessed Trinity, as did the Holy Family, each of whom lived totally for the others in a communion of perfect love, based on the presence of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, on earth. From the divine "missions", St Josemaria rises up to the immanent intra-Trinitarian "processions", showing how the Christian vocation is not a

merely human effort to imitate the inimitable, but consists of the fact that God himself always offers ordinary Christians the means to become “divinized” in their daily lives, working with and loving the people God has placed at their sides.

From the dogmatic perspective, St Josemaria’s teaching is deeply rooted in the Fathers of the Church, (61) in the thinking that was born of the lives of the early Christians.

Moreover, the primary place given to the theological dimension, and the connection between faith and life, are built up on the full perception of the transcendence of the mystery of God One and Three, which, in the language of the Fathers, is expressed in apophatic theology. This deep understanding of the mystery unites faith and life, and explains the connection between God’s action in history and the immanent life of the Blessed Trinity. Thus St Josemaria

said, concerning the incomprehensibility of the mystery of the Triune God:

"It is right that in the immense marvel of God's beauty and wisdom, there should be things that we can't understand, here on earth. If we could understand them, God would be a finite being, not infinite – he would fit into our heads, and how poor that god would be! So turn to Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, knowing that Jesus is God, and that God is three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and you are adoring the Trinity and the Unity, you are loving the Holy Spirit, when you love Jesus Christ." (62)

The actual lives of Jesus, Mary and Joseph are the only way for us to get to the Blessed Trinity, because only in the mystery of the divine Humanity of Christ do we have access to the inner life of God. Only in Christ can

we share in God's own life, singling out each of the Divine Persons and talking to them on terms of intimate friendship, as we can to the "earthly trinity".

This faith, therefore, that includes our loves, our deepest aspirations, our work, and our families, finds its most perfect model and fulfilment in the Holy Family. In this way, all Christians can sanctify themselves as contemplatives in the middle of the world, learning, through contemplation, to have the sort of faith that becomes understanding and a criterion for action in life, based on addressing our thoughts specifically to Christ. This characterized our father St Joseph and, especially, our Blessed Lady, Mary, to whom we need to apply if we are to learn to say the "Yes!" that unites faith and life. (63)

NOTES

(1) Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, for the Indiction of the Year of Faith (henceforth *Porta Fidei*), no. 1.

(2) Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 December 2005 (henceforth *Deus Caritas Est*), no. 1.

(3) *Porta Fidei*, no. 1.

(4) *Porta Fidei*, no. 2.

(5) *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 3, note 1, quoting F. Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, IV, 168.

(6) *Porta Fidei*, no. 7.

(7) *Porta Fidei*, no. 6.

(8) St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa-IIae, q.4, a.1, Reply.

(9) *Porta Fidei*, no. 3.

(10) St Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 21.

(11) St Josemaria, “Passionately Loving the World”, in *Conversations with Msgr. Escriva de Balaguer*, no. 114.

(12) St Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 239.

(13) Cf. J. Echevarria, “A New Damascus”, *Romana* 53 (2011), pp. 264-266 (originally published in *Alfa y Omega*, 28 July 2011).

(14) See Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Letting God Work”, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, 6 October 2002.

(15) For a full survey of the life of faith in St Josemaria, see E. Burkhart and J. Lopez, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de San Josemaría*, vol. II, Rialp, Madrid 2011, pp. 346-364.

(16) St Josemaria, “Passionately Loving the World”, in *Conversations*, no. 123 (my italics).

(17) Cf. St Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 578, and *Furrow*, no. 459.

(18) *The Way*, no. 667.

(19) Cf. *Friends of God*, no. 190.

(20) Cf. *The Way*, nos. 317, 380 and 489; *Furrow*, nos. 46 and 945; *The Forge*, nos. 256 and 602.

(21) Cf. J. Ratzinger, *To Look on Christ: Exercises in Faith, Hope and Love*, 1991, pp. 17-18.

(22) *Christ is Passing By*, no. 172.

(23) *The Forge*, no. 544.

(24) Cf. A. Aranda, *El bullir de la sangre de Cristo: estudio sobre el cristocentrismo del beato Josemaria Escriva*, Madrid: Rialp, 2000.

(25) *Friends of God*, no. 312.

(26) *Furrow*, no. 658.

(27) Cf. *The Way*, no. 584; *Christ is Passing By*, nos. 102ff.

(28) *Christ is Passing By*, no. 24.

(29) Cf. A. Vazquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 2, p. 473.

(30) J. Ratzinger, *To Look on Christ*, p. 16.

(31) *The Forge*, no. 448.

(32) F. Nietzsche, “Zarathustra’s Roundelay” in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

(33) *Friends of God*, no. 200.

(34) *Porta Fidei*, no. 7.

(35) Ramos Lisson, “Aspectos de la divinización en el Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer”, in J.L. ILLANES (ed.), *El cristiano en el mundo: En el Centenario del nacimiento del Beato Josemaría Escrivá (1902-2002)*, Pamplona: 2003, pp. 483-499.

(36) St Josemaria Escriva, Letter dated 24 October 1942, no. 68 (AGP, series A.3, leg. 91, carp. 5, exp. 4).

(37) J. Daniélou, *La Trinidad y el misterio de la existencia*, Ediciones Paulinas, Madrid 1969, p. 92.

(Original : *La Trinité et le mystère de l'existence*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1968; translated into English by Jeremy Leggat as *God's Life in Us*, Denville, N. J.: Dimension Books, 1969)

(38) *Christ is Passing By*, no. 22.

(39) Daniélou, *La Trinidad y el misterio de la existencia*, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

(40) *Friends of God*, no. 191.

(41) Arturo Blanco notes that St Josemaria related faith to the whole person, not just to the mind. See A. Blanco, "Alcuni contributi del beato Josemaria alla comprensione dei

rapporti tra fede e ragione”, in P. O’Callaghan (ed.), *La grandezza della vita quotidiana*, vol. V/1, Rome: Edusc, 2004, p. 259.

(42) Cf. St Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 130, 1; and *Tractatus in Ioannem*, 29, 6.

(43) The concept of faith held by St Josemaria is described by the Venerable Alvaro del Portillo, his first successor, as “alive and dynamic”. See A. del Portillo, “By way of conclusion” in M. Belda, J. Escudero., J. L. Illanes, and P. O’Callaghan (eds), *Holiness and the World: Studies in the Teachings of Blessed Josemaria Escriva*, Princeton, Dublin and Chicago: 1997, pp. 279-296; this quotation, p. 294.

(44) St Josemaria Escriva, reply to a question in Venezuela, 9 February 1975, *Catechesis en America* vol. III, p. 75 (AGP, Bibliotheca, P04).

(45) *Furrow*, 818.

(46) Cf. *The Forge*, no. 215.

(47) Cf. *Christ is Passing By*, no. 10.

(48) Cf. *Christ is Passing By*, no. 21.

(49) Cf. Aranda, *El Bullir de la sangre de Cristo*, op. cit., pp. 227-254.

(50) *Friends of God*, no. 6.

(51) J. Mouroux, *Je crois en toi*, Paris: Le Cerf, 1961, p. 37.

(52) *Friends of God*, no. 25.

(53) Cf. *Col* 1:15-20.

(54) St Josemaria Escriva, interview in *ABC* magazine, 2 November 1969.

(55) *Christ is Passing By*, no. 99.

(56) Cf. A. Vazquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 2, pp. 114-115.

(57) *The Forge*, no. 703.

(58) St Josemaria, “Passionately Loving the World”, in *Conversations*, no. 114. For a comment on this passage, see: *Conversaciones con Mons. Escriva de Balaguer. Edicion critico-historica*, edited by J. L. Illanes and A. Mendiz, Madrid: 2012, pp. 477–478 and 486–489.

(59) Cf. *Christ is Passing By*, no. 22.

(60) St Josemaria, meditation “Gathered together in unity”, 27 March 1975, quoted in S. Bernal, *Msgr. Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer: A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, London and New York: Scepter Publishers, 1977, pp. 341–342.

(61) A more developed study of this topic could be made on the basis of the excellent analysis by Cornelio Fabro, “El temple de un Padre de la Iglesia”, in C. Fabro, S. Garofalo and M. A. Raschini, *Santos en el mundo*:

*estudios sobre los escritos del beato
Josemaria Escriva*, Madrid: Rialp,
1993, pp. 23-130.

(63) Cf. *Friends of God*, nos. 284-286.

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escriva-2/](https://opusdei.org/en/article/faith-and-life-in-st-josemaria-escriva-2/) (03/27/2025)