

Püha Josemaria Jeesus laps

As a young priest, Saint Josemaría was especially fond of a small statue of the Infant Jesus. He would hold the Child in his arms, sing and even dance with it. “I’m glad to see you as a small Child,” he would say, “because it makes me feel that you need me.”

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Among the treasures of the Royal Monastery of Saint Elizabeth in Madrid is this sixteenth-century

wooden figure of Baby Jesus. The Augustinian Recollect Sisters still have a vivid memory of Saint Josemaría, then a young priest, who was their chaplain from 1931 and rector of the Foundation from 1934. He wrote in his personal notes: "On my way out of the cloister they showed me, in the vestibule, a Christ Child which was a darling. I have never seen a better-looking Baby Jesus! Totally captivating. They uncovered it. He has his little arms crossed on his breast and his eyes half open. Beautiful. I ate him up with kisses and... would have loved to kidnap him."

He often used to ask them for the figure to take it home with him. It was closely linked to many happenings deep within his soul, favors and special graces. Today the sisters still call it "Father Josemaría's Baby Jesus."

In the book *Immersed in God - an interview with Álvaro del Portillo* (Cesare Cavalleri, Princeton, 1996), Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo says that Mother Carmen of Saint Joseph "remembers that when the Baby Jesus was in the sacristy of the church during the Christmas season, she would often see how Father Josemaría would talk to it, sing to it and rock it, as if it was a real baby."

"The Child Jesus," wrote Saint Josemaría. "How this devotion has taken hold of me since I first laid eyes on that consummate Thief that my nuns keep in the vestibule of their cloister! Child Jesus, adolescent Jesus -- I like to see you that way, Lord, because... it makes me more daring. I like to see you as a little boy, a helpless child, because it makes me feel like you need me."

Saint Josemaría had very fond memories connected with the

family's Christmas celebrations. Together with his sister Carmen, he would help his father put up the Nativity scene. And the whole family sang Christmas carols together.

He remembered in particular the one which begins *Madre, en la puerta hay un Niño* -- "Mother, there's a little boy at the door." This carol has a chorus in which the Child Jesus repeats, "I have come down to earth to suffer." The song stayed with him from the cradle to the grave. "When I was three years old," he would say, "my mother would take me in her arms and sing me that carol, and I would very happily go to sleep." In his last years he would be visibly moved, and would become totally absorbed in prayer, whenever he heard this carol at Christmastime.

Recording and words of the carol in Spanish

An English translation of "Madre en la Puerta":

1. "Mother, at the door there's a little Child,

Lovelier than the radiant sun

Saying that he's chilled with cold

For his clothes are thin and torn."

"Bring him to the fireside blaze, give him plate and cup;

Loving-kindness these days has nearly all dried up." (x 2)

2. So the Child came and sat down,

Where the fire was bright and warm

And the kindly housewife asked him

What country he came from.

"My Mother's from Heaven, and my Father too

Down to earth I've come, where -
suffering's my due." (x 2)

3. "Make up a bed for this noble Child

In my alcove, the best we can."

"Don't do that for me, my lady,

In a corner I'll lay me down.

On the cold hard floor I've slept, ever
since my birth

Such will be my bedding till I leave
this earth." (x 2)

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