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Saint Josemaria, a priest forever

To commemorate the centenary of St. Josemaría's ordination, a video on his priestly vocation was shown in Zaragoza and Rome. It includes fragments of get togethers in which he shared advice with priests, inspiring them to live a holy and fruitful ministry.

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“Inklings of love”

Do you remember when, in the Acts of the Apostles, it says that Jesus would gather his disciples and speak with them, spend time with them *in multis argumentis*, in a get together, like we are now. You will speak, and I'll ask you questions, and you'll ask me questions, because I don't want to keep talking. It has to be a real get together. *In multis argumentis*. We'll talk about whatever you want, as long as we put love into it.

I was a teenager. I was not thinking of becoming a priest. In fact, the thought of it bothered me. The Lord acted as He does — I won't describe it — and I had inklings of love. I sensed God's call: He wanted something.

My father said to me: "My son, do you realize that you will not have human affection on earth, a human love? I will not stand in your way." Two tears welled up in his eyes. It

was the only time I ever saw my father cry. “I will not stand in your way, and in fact, I am going to introduce you to someone who can guide you.” And he introduced me to a friend of his, who was the abbot of the collegiate church [in Logroño].

I began studying at home with a private tutor, with the ordinary’s permission. I took my philosophy exams year by year. Later, when it was time to study theology, I entered the seminary and, afterward, a pontifical university in Zaragoza.

Advice for the formation of future priests

You know that we are working in the seminary, and thanks be to God, there are more vocations. We have 69 students from across the Republic. We believe it is very important to insist on personal prayer and spiritual direction. Father, do you

think we should insist on anything else?

St. Josemaría: First of all, you are laying a tremendous foundation; that of direct and immediate contact with God, our Lord. Sincerity with the spiritual director, seeing Christ Jesus in him. Just as one must be completely honest with a doctor when it comes to matters of the body, that same sincerity must be had with the spiritual director when it comes to matters of the soul.

You are laying a very solid foundation: love for the Eucharist, love for the Master, as you call Him here. How beautiful! “The Master,” isn’t that what you say? And devotion to Holy Mary. Love them. They hunger for noble, pure, and holy human affection. I was also a director in a seminary, and I remember so many virtues of those young men, many of whom later

became martyrs. They did me a great deal of good.

I remember so many wonderful things. I remember — the notes will be around somewhere, if they were not burned during the war — noting, with joy: “They’re improving, you can see them growing,” “God is here, in this soul...” Draw close to them with affection when they are sick, when they are troubled, when they feel overlooked, when they are suffering due to family difficulties.

And then, Saint Joseph: love him very much, too; cherish him. I call him my father and my lord, and I refer to him, both in speech and in writing, as “the one I love so much.”

Memories of his early years in Madrid

In those early days, I carried out my work in Madrid, specifically in the hospitals and the outlying

neighborhoods of the city. My poor soul was being formed in the spirit of spiritual childhood through my interactions with children, poor, helpless, ignorant little ones, children who no one cared for.

I spent many hours each week hearing the confessions of children from public schools in the most remote neighborhoods of Madrid. I learned much from having them as my teachers, and from time to time, I also had a few stones thrown at me — which, in its own way, was also a means of learning.

Love for the Mass and the Eucharist

You've always told us that the Mass is the center and root of the interior life. I would like you to talk to us about the Mass...

St. Josemaría: *In persona Christi*, I renew the divine sacrifice of Calvary.

See how you make me talk! And I am deeply moved. My heart may be cold, but my faith is firm, and by the Lord's mercy, when, through the words of the consecration, the Body and Blood of the Lord come into my hands...

I long to purify my heart, my hands, my entire life. Lord, I believe that it is You, that You are truly here, with your Body, your Blood, your Soul, and your Divinity.

I place all my hope in You. I love You, I love You madly. Make me your good servant. Then you tell Him everything. You will see how well it goes, how much strength it gives you. But more than that, you hold Him in your hands. We hold Christ Jesus in our hands, we leave Him hidden and alive in the Tabernacle. Here He remains with his Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, really, truly, and substantially, out of love.

I would like the faithful to be able to see you make a genuflection and say, “There is a priest who loves Jesus Christ.”

Do not be in a hurry when genuflecting, do not be in a hurry when preparing for Mass, do not be in a hurry when celebrating Mass, do not be in a hurry when giving thanks after Mass. I know you cannot always stay for long, but at least ten minutes after finishing.

In parishes

What can we priests do when we are in densely populated parishes, working alone, where the people sometimes lack education and do not understand us when we speak or preach? Father, what is the most important element in renewing a parish? What matters most?

St. Josemaría: Your prayer, your consecrated hands, your light (which

is not your own, but the light of Christ), the salt of your life. But be convinced of this: you have everything in your hands, everything.

Priestly fraternity with the hearts of Christ and Mary

Let us thank God for our entire priesthood. Let us lovingly accept both the small sacrifices and the great joys that we have so often experienced deep in our hearts. And even when we do not feel anything in particular, we know we still possess them.

I would like you to be courageous precisely because we love. Do you remember those words of Saint John? *Qui autem timet non est perfectus in caritate!*: he who fears does not know how to love. You must know how to love all souls, and especially the souls of our brother priests. We care deeply about them.

Lord, hear us, because You are here in our midst!

My brothers, let us pray for one another, let us love one another. Above all, let us love one another. Love each other. Do not be afraid to bring your heart into your interactions. Let that affection pass through the most sweet heart of Mary, through the merciful heart of Jesus.

If we do this, we will be both profoundly human and deeply divine. Accompany the one who is sick, the one who is sad, the one who is slandered, the one who may feel alone in some remote corner of a diocese. Let him see that you love him.

The vocation of a priest in Opus Dei

For a diocesan priest who loves his secular vocation and, through the

Sacrament of Holy Orders, is fully dedicated to the things of God, what does a vocation to Opus Dei add to his already complete dedication to God and to souls?

St. Josemaría: The priest's professional work, his priestly ministry, is his secular vocation, with all it involves. He is set ablaze with love for his vocation, which does not change, and he will sanctify his professional work.

What does Opus Dei ask of him? It asks for deeper interior life. There are a number of spiritual obligations, demanding ones. There is a greater detachment from earthly things, and an even greater love for everything that the priest holds in his hands as part of his diocese.

This priest will find himself more deeply united to his diocese, with greater love for his seminary, with greater love for his vocation, with

more devotion, more respect, and more affection for his bishop.

Love your bishops, and above all, love the universal Church and the portion of Christ's flock that the Lord has entrusted to you. And let us love the Pope.

I love all religious with deep affection. I have a special weakness in my heart for all religious sisters, especially those in cloistered communities. It would bring me great joy if you could help them. Let them understand that you are contemplatives, that you understand their life, and that their life is essential to the Church, just as air is to the lungs.

Devotion to the Virgin Mary

Father, speak to us about our Mother, the Virgin Mary.

St. Josemaría: You want me to speak to you about the Virgin Mary? We are with her all day long. From morning till night, we are attentive to our love for our Lady, for her protection, her affection, her devotion. Instilling this love and devotion, and speaking about her privileges with every soul we can.

Love her: that is the priest's duty. But love her with a tender love.

The importance of the priest's family

At that time, I was giving many spiritual retreats for priests all over Spain because the Lord wanted it, and the bishops were calling me. My mother was seriously ill, gravely ill, and I went to Lérida.

I used to give five talks. Before lunch, in that talk, I talked about the role of a priest's mother. And I also spoke about the good sisters of priests, who

sometimes sacrifice themselves and choose not to start a family so as not to leave their brother alone.

It occurred to me to say: “The mothers of priests” (I was thinking of my own mother’s suffering, because she was sick) “should only die the day after their son does.”

At that very moment, they called for the bishop. He left, and I finished my talk. Then he came back looking pale. Álvaro! “They are calling you from Madrid.”

I went to the phone, and he told me, “Your mother just passed away,” and I froze. I went to the Tabernacle without shedding a tear, but finally, I broke down in tears. I did not complain. I simply said: “When I spoke those words, it was because You, Lord, placed those thoughts in my mouth, in my heart, and in my mind, and they are good and holy

thoughts. If You have taken her, it is because she was ready for Heaven.”

I love your mothers and your sisters very much, very much.

Confession

Don't you think that we priests are meant to lead people to peace, to an encounter with the Father, rather than burdening them with difficult penances, like three Masses and ten ways of the Cross...?

St. Josemaría: I'm going to tell you something. You're right. Penance is something we should take upon ourselves. Make it a habit. Often, when you see that someone is struggling because they've led a bad life, tell them: “We're going to do the penance together. *Ave Maria Purissima* (Hail Mary Most Pure), *conceived without original sin*... Go in peace, don't worry.”

You know how much I love for you to spend hours in the confessional. Even if, at first, you spend that time praying the breviary, reading spiritual books, or meditating because no one is coming. The people will come to you, and you will carry out a wonderful work of pastoral theology.

A message from St. Josemaría to everyone

1975, St. Paul: We know that this year marks your 50th anniversary as a priest. Could you briefly speak about your life as a priest?

St. Josemaría: You haven't called me old, but you did say that I'm in my 50th year as a priest... Very tactful of you! And it's true.

First of all, I must give thanks to God, our Lord, for these 50 years of work. I have worked... Do you want me to say it as I usually do? Because you'll

understand me very well: *Ut iumentum factus sum apud te*: I have been like a little donkey before God, pulling the cart.

That has been my task. My task is to serve the Lord, and by serving the Lord, to serve all souls without distinction.

I only want to remember that I am Christ, and Christ speaks of peace and of battle. Christ speaks of giving and of self-giving. And Christ always speaks of love. And I believe this is the priest's mission: to speak of God, to repeat again and again the words of Christ, our Lord, the saving doctrine of the Redeemer, and to administer the holy sacraments to all, without distinction, with equal love for everyone.

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