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Letter from the Prelate (October 2012)

The Prelate asks us to give special thanks to God on a new anniversary of the founding of Opus Dei and the 10th anniversary of October 6, 2002, the day John Paul II canonized Saint Josemaria

10/02/2012

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

Throughout this month, we will once again call to mind so many anniversaries, so many milestones in the history of Opus Dei. Truly, as St. Josemaría often wrote, it is the “history of God’s mercies,” which it is now our turn to live out.

From October 2, 1928, the Work took each of its steps guided by the all-wise hand of our Father God, under the impetus of the Holy Spirit, sheltered beneath our Lady’s mantle. Now each and every one of his sons and daughters, with the daily effort to turn our whole life into a song of praise to the Blessed Trinity, feels impelled to cry out, in union with St. Josemaría: *Gratias tibi, Deus, gratias tibi!* We want to express this with our mind, our heart, our lips and our deeds, throughout the course of our life here on earth. Certainly, some dates (like the one we will celebrate tomorrow) render this need even more imperative. But as our Founder

said on the eve of the golden anniversary of his ordination, addressing our Lord: “This is not an obligation of this moment alone, of tomorrow’s anniversary. No. It is a constant duty, a manifestation of supernatural life, a way both human and divine of corresponding to your Love, which is divine and human.”

[1]

Eighty-four years have gone by since that *mirábilis dies* , that marvelous day. And what our Father “saw” in the quiet of the room where he was recollected in prayer, after celebrating Holy Mass, is now a universal reality, a light guiding countless people all over the world, teaching them to turn all humanly noble tasks—those of each day—into paths that lead directly to holiness, paths that God himself offers to men and women.

Gratias tibi, Deus, gratias tibi! Let us give thanks to God with our whole heart for his immense goodness, and also for our Father's heroic fidelity. "His life and message," proclaimed Blessed John Paul II ten years ago, "have taught countless Christian faithful, particularly laypeople, in the most varied professions, to transform their ordinary work into prayer, service of others, and a path towards holiness." Therefore, as that great Pontiff added, "he may rightly be called 'the saint of ordinary life.'" [2]

This solemn declaration by Christ's Vicar was the Church's definitive confirmation of the reputation for holiness that surrounded our beloved Father already during his lifetime. Pope Pius XII, when speaking to some Australian bishops about our Father, said: "He is a true saint, a man sent by God for our day and age." [3] Paul VI also considered

him a holy priest, as Don Alvaro told us (with the Pope's authorization) after an audience with the Roman Pontiff in 1976. On that occasion, Paul VI said that our Founder had been "one of the people in the Church's history who had received the most charisms and had corresponded to God's gifts with the greatest generosity." [4]

A month before being raised to the chair of Peter with the name of John Paul I, the Cardinal of Venice, speaking about a phrase used by St. Josemaría in *Conversations*, wrote: "The 'everyday realities' constitute the work which one does every day; and the 'flashes of divine splendor' are those things which lead to a holy life. Msgr. Escrivá, with Gospel in hand, constantly taught: God does not want us simply to be good, he wants us to be saints, through and through. However, he wants us to attain that sanctity, not by doing

extraordinary things, but rather through ordinary common activities. It is the way they are done which must be uncommon.” [5]

I am passing on here just a few brushstrokes that mark out the figure of St. Josemaría, a saint who, as Paul VI also said, *now no longer belongs exclusively to the Work*, but is the property of the universal Church. What joy it gives us to see devotion to our Father spreading throughout the world, among people of all races and walks of life! Indeed, “in many countries it has become part of popular piety.” [6] But we cannot forget that, with our daily conduct, it is our responsibility to show people what Opus Dei is, and how it has to try to serve the Church and souls ever more effectively.

All of our gratitude to God—expressed in feelings and deeds—becomes more intense on

commemorating the tenth anniversary of the canonization. I have often urged you to keep very much alive in your memory and heart the events of October 6, 2002, rediscovering its constant timeliness. This date (which has left such a deep furrow in millions of people, and I am not exaggerating) is especially apt for meditating in depth on the vocation to sanctity in the ordinary circumstances of daily life, a vocation all of us have received, asking God for light through the intercession of St. Josemaría to respond faithfully to that call.

In our Father's conversations with his *Custodes*, he frequently mentioned his confidence in his daughters and sons, those of that time and of all future times. And he added that he never ceased beseeching our Lord that a "bedrock idea" would take root deep in the soul of each woman and each man of

Opus Dei: that we are not merely carrying out a good task, of more or less importance, but that God has called us to a divine plan of wholehearted service to the Church, to souls, to all humanity. He insisted that each day we have to strive to be more refined in contemplating Christ, because the more intensely we do so, the closer we will draw to our peers, awakening in all environments the great and incomparable joy of living by faith. Our Founder opened to us his heart filled with the apostolic desires that consumed him in the first years, and always. For on seeing in so many places people separating themselves from the faith, he begged Heaven that we would know how to bring to the most varied settings God's friendship with humanity, person by person.

To give solidity to this "bedrock idea," we can make use of some

words of Cardinal Ratzinger on the day of the canonization, when he stressed St. Josemaría's docility to the divine will. The then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith made some incisive remarks about our Father, applying to him a phrase from Sacred Scripture about Moses speaking with God *face to face, as a friend speaks with a friend* . [7] "I think that, even if the veil of discretion hides many details from us . . . we can very well apply to Josemaría Escrivá this 'speaking as a friend speaks with a friend,' which opens the doors of the world so that God can become present, to act and transform everything." [8]

October 6 is also another anniversary in the history of Opus Dei, since in 1932, during a retreat, our Father began to invoke as patrons of the Work the archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, and the apostles Peter, Paul and John,

viewing them since then as patrons of the various channels of Opus Dei's apostolate. The coinciding of that anniversary with the date of our Father's canonization was and is a source of great joy for me. It is as though our Lord wanted to point out to us once again that we have to always advance along the paths that our Founder opened up with full fidelity to the divine will, without separating ourselves in any way from the path he marked out for us with his teachings and holy life. Today we can ask ourselves how we are following Christ in this "little portion of the Church" that is Opus Dei. Do we strive each day to follow in St. Josemaría's footsteps? Do we have frequent recourse to our holy patrons and the Guardian Angels? Do we go with faith to their intercession when trying to bring forward the various apostolic initiatives?

On the day after this date, October 7, a new ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will begin, on the topic of the new evangelization. Support its efforts with your prayer and sacrifice, with the offering of your work, with a special closeness to the Holy Father and the Pastors in communion with him.

A few days before this, on the 4th, the Pope is planning to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of Loreto. Let us accompany him, going to our Lady's intercession for the fruit of that Assembly and of the Year of Faith which will begin on October 11. I sent you, a few days ago, a long letter suggesting specific ways to participate in this Year. Therefore I won't spend more time on this point. I only want to insist that, during these months, we should stay very close to our Mother, sheltered beneath her mantle. Let us not forget that it was precisely on October 11,

1943, then the feast of the divine Motherhood of Mary, that the Work received the *nihil obstat* , its first approval by the Holy See

At the end of September, I went to Zürich, and from there to Einsiedeln, the Marian shrine to which our Father and our beloved Don Alvaro so often went. It was there that, in 1956, a General Congress took place in which it was decided to move the Council to Rome. We invoked our Lady, asking her to guide the steps of the whole Work.

With a new year in the history of Opus Dei beginning, I entreat you to renew your apostolic zeal each day. Let us launch out with optimism to sow Christ's doctrine around us, among those we have direct contact with, and in the whole world, with the desire to spread the Catholic faith and the spirit of the Work everywhere, through our prayer and

our sanctifying and sanctified work. How many people are waiting for us, in the places where we are already working in a stable way and in many others!

The Pope's call in his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* has to give rise to a special effort in the life of all the children of God, for the strengthening of our desires for sanctity and for the apostolic expansion that our Lord wants us to carry out. I suggest that you entrust these intentions to the intercession of Blessed John Paul II, whose liturgical memorial we will celebrate on the upcoming 22nd.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, October 1, 2012

Footnotes:

[1] St. Josemaría, Notes from his personal prayer, March 27, 1975.

[2] Blessed John Paul II, Decree for the Canonization of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, October 6, 2002.

[3] Testimony of Bishop Thomas Muldoon, Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney, October 21, 1975 (see Flavio Capucci, *Josemaría Escrivá, santo*, ed. Rialp, Madrid 2009, p. 52).

[4] Testimony of the Venerable Servant of God Alvaro del Portillo, March 5, 1976 / June 19, 1978 (see *op. cit.* , p. 53).

[5] Cardinal Albino Luciani, article in *Il Gazzettino*, Venice, July 25, 1978.

[6] Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Decree on Heroic Virtues, April 9, 1990.

[7] *Ex* 33:11,

[8] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger,
“Letting God Work,” an article
published in *L’Osservatore Romano*,
October 6, 2002.

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(08/09/2025)