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Pope to canonize Blessed Josemaría Escrivá on Sunday

The Vatican Information Service has published the following biography of Josemaria Escriva, in preparation for his canonization on October 6 by John Paul II.

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VATICAN CITY, OCT 1, 2002 (VIS) - On Sunday October 6, the 27th Sunday in Ordinary time, John Paul II will

celebrate the Eucharist at 10 a.m. in St. Peter's Square and will canonize Blessed Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, founder of Opus Dei. On this occasion, we offer a biography of the new saint.

Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer was born in Barbastro in 1902, in northeastern Spain, near the Pyrenees. The second of six siblings, he grew up in a cheerful family, acquiring the Christian faith from his parents and from school. He soon came to know suffering through the death of his three younger sisters and the bankruptcy of his father. In 1915, his family moved to Logroño where his father had found a new job.

In 1918, Josemaria realized that God wanted something of him. He understood that he must give himself completely to God and become a priest to better fulfill the divine will.

He started his ecclesiastical studies in Logroño and entered the diocesan seminary of Saragossa in 1922. He also pursued studies in Civil Law with the permission of his superiors. In 1925, he received the Sacrament of Ordination and started his pastoral ministry, dedicating himself completely to it. Meanwhile, he waited patiently to know what God's divine will was for him.

In 1927 he moved to Madrid in order to obtain a Ph.D. in civil law. After his father's death in 1924, Josemaria became the head of the family, and as a result his mother and siblings moved with him. In the Spanish capital, he took on an intense pastoral work, serving especially the poor, the sick and children. At the same time, he supported himself and his family with other jobs, like teaching law courses. His priestly apostolate also extended to university students, artists, laborers

and intellectuals. When these young men came into contact with the poor and sick attended by Josemaria, they grew in charity and solidarity and became more conscious of their social responsibilities.

On October 2, 1928, during a spiritual retreat in Madrid, God showed Josemaria the light he had been waiting for and he founded Opus Dei or 'Work of God'. Its goal is to remind all those who are baptized that the Christian vocation is a call to holiness and apostolate, and to promote a personal commitment to follow Christ, to love the Church, and to search for holiness in ordinary life among men and women from all sectors of society. Since 1928 Josemaria Escriva worked tirelessly at the foundational mission he had received, without considering himself an innovator or a reformer. He was convinced that the Holy Spirit continuously renovates the

Church, which Opus Dei seeks to serve.

In 1930, with new foundational light, he saw that the mission confided to him by God must also include women.

In 1934, the first edition of *The Way* was published, originally titled. It is the most widely read book of Josemaria Escriva, with some 4 million copies sold. He is also well known in spiritual literature for other titles such as "The Holy Rosary", "Christ Is Passing by", "Friends of God", "The Way of the Cross", "Furrow", "The Forge" and "In Love with the Church."

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) was a considerable obstacle for the newborn foundation. Those were years of suffering for the Church and her faithful and the founder of Opus Dei also suffered personally.

However, they were also years of spiritual growth and hope.

In 1940, after the end of the civil war, he began to preach spiritual exercises to hundreds of priests in response to petitions from bishops throughout Spain. Meanwhile, under his leadership and encouragement, Opus Dei began to extend throughout the peninsula. With the Second World War (1939- 1945), preparations to begin apostolic work in other European countries slowed down momentarily.

In 1943, Josemaria saw the way for Opus Dei to have its own clergy, with priests incardinated in the Prelature. Thus the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross was founded. The priests, together with the lay faithful, belong fully to Opus Dei, forming an organic whole with mutual cooperation in the apostolate. This organic cooperation, has been confirmed and

established by the Church in the juridical configuration of the Prelature.

The Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, in collaboration with the bishops of the local Churches, also carries out activities of spiritual formation for diocesan priests and seminarians.

Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer moved to Rome in 1946. From 1945 to 1975, the apostolic work of Opus Dei started in some thirty countries, under his direct encouragement. Between 1946 and 1950, the Work received successive pontifical approvals needed to serve better the universal Church and the local Churches. The members of Opus Dei worked actively, faithful to its fundamental elements which include the goal of holiness in ordinary life, serving the Church and the Roman Pontiff, secularity, love of personal freedom and responsibility, and

respect for pluralism in political, social and cultural themes.

From 1948 married women and men could also belong fully to Opus Dei, seeking holiness in their own circumstances. In 1950, the Holy See approved the admission of people belonging to other religions as cooperators. Thus, Christians from other confessions as well as members of other religions started to collaborate formally with the apostolic undertakings of Opus Dei.

In the 1950's, Josemaria Escriva promoted many initiatives that would help meet different needs within society: professional training schools for men and women, technical schools for farmers, universities and schools, hospitals and clinics, etc.

During the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Founder of Opus Dei met numerous Council Fathers and

experts, who saw him as a forerunner of many of the master lines of the Second Vatican Council. Profoundly identified with the Council's teaching, he diligently fostered its implementation through the formative activities of Opus Dei all over the world. As a result of the deliberations of the Council, the Church's solemn Magisterium was to confirm fundamental aspects of the spirit of Opus Dei, such as the universal call to holiness, professional work as a means to holiness and apostolate, the value and lawful limits of Christian freedom in temporal affairs, and the Holy Mass as the center and root of the interior life.

Between 1970 and 1975, he undertook long catechetical trips throughout Europe and America. There he had many get-togethers that were formative. He talked about God,

the Sacraments, Christian devotions and the sanctification of work.

Josemaria Escriva passed away in Rome on June 26, 1975. Shortly after his death, many faithful requested the Holy Father to open the cause for his beatification and canonization.

On May 17, 1992, three hundred thousand people joyfully attended his beatification. The ceremony which was centered on the Eucharist was rich in symbolism with holiness as its theme. It was celebrated by Pope John Paul II and presided by an image of Our Lady, the Mater Ecclesiae. Christ, Our Lady and the Pope were Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer's three greatest loves and the purpose of his life and priestly ministry.

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