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# **Bishop George Stack, Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster**

Excerpts from his address at a  
seminar on St Josemaría  
Escrivá, saint of ordinary life  
Netherhall House, 14 June 2003

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The new evangelisation is based on familiar phrases: the deepening of personal prayer, the study of Scripture, and a rediscovery of tradition. Those seem to me to be the building blocks of everything that is

going on in the life of our Church at the moment. Different groups, different organisations, different movements, different people, are all coming back to the same thing: in order to get through to the world, which is opaque in its understanding of the things of God, we need in different ways, to rediscover a sense of prayer, deepen our relationship with God as individuals and as communities of faith, explore the Scriptures afresh, translating them into the language of everyday living, and then reaching out to people and inviting them to rediscover afresh the Tradition (with a capital “T”) in which we believe. All of that is a reflection of the Pope’s millennium encyclical *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, summed up in the shorthand phrase: the universal call to holiness.

It seems to me that this document echoes very much what seems to be the key principle in St Josemaría

Escrivá's great teaching and vision that holiness is to be discovered and lived in and through the ordinary circumstances of everyday living, in and through the vocation of all the baptised, as we translate the great principles, as it were, of our faith into the actions of everyday living.

St Josemaría wrote: "an essential characteristic of the spirit of Opus Dei is that it does not take anyone out of his place; rather it leads each person to fulfil the tasks and duties of his own state, in his mission in the Church, and in society, with the greatest possible perfection." That seemed to me to be a key text on which so much could be built around and the key to this rooted spiritual interior life is, of course, the life of prayer. And again, looking up *The Way*, number 961: "You must be a 'man of God', a man of interior life, a man of prayer and of sacrifice. Your

apostolate must be the overflow of your life ‘within’.”

If we dare project the things of God to people who perhaps are insensitive to the things of God, that projection has to be a reflection of the inner life of prayer and sacrifice in order that our communication of what we believe to be true and right and good may be authentic. We are not talking *about* God, we are not telling people something second or third hand. We are actually expressing a relationship, an understanding, a faith, which is part and parcel of our whole being.

I think the challenge facing, not just Opus Dei, but the Church at large is to help people, to help ourselves, to rediscover, to relearn, how to pray. Because prayer is the oxygen of our spiritual life. Over the last 30 years, I think, we've lost the skill of how to do many things. We've lost the skill

of how to operate education, how to operate health care, how to operate marriage and family life. Turmoil and confusion in the society in which we live has come from the fact that we've set aside one mode of operation and we haven't yet created a new structure in which people, ourselves, can operate how to do things in life. I think it's true of all of our institutions. I think even of our prisons, never mind our health, our education, marriage and family life. And I think it is also true of our spiritual life.

Because we have moved away from one tradition, as it were, or one mode of operation, but haven't yet discovered another mode of operation, we have been left with telling people, ourselves, "you really ought to pray, you really ought to deepen your spiritual life. Prayer is the oxygen of everything you do in your vocation as a baptised member

of the Catholic Church.” But we have not been good at telling people, showing people, leading people, discovering for ourselves, how that should be done. And I believe that when Pope John Paul spoke about schools of prayer, this is what he was talking about: the schools of prayerful listening, and the schools of seeing the world and our place in it through the eyes of God, seeing ourselves and our world as God sees us. I believe that is the key to unlock the mystery of how to pray. We all know why we should pray: because it is the stuff of our relationship with God. But the challenge for all of us who are attempting to deepen our spiritual lives and communicate the values in which we believe, consists in the skills of how to do these things.

One last word. Because the “how” question both of prayer and, as Josemaría says, of deepening the interior life, that “how” question is

not answered ultimately by our own efforts and our own skills. Of course, we have to put ourselves in the correct frame of mind. Of course, we have to open ourselves up to the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. Of course, we have to read the signs of the times, both within our lives and around us, and be prepared to respond to the challenges we see there. But the how to pray, how to deepen our spiritual life, how to invite others into that mystery of faith, will ultimately be answered by God alone. That's the wonder, the mystery, the awe of the human person, and the respect that God has for our response in faith.

God acts in and through us by our attentive listening to him, encouraging us in the silence of our hearts to deconstruct our view of the world, our view of people, our view of things, and invites us to articulate, perhaps even experience, the

devastation of a broken world, of a soulless world, of a world of situations, of institutions where familiar things are broken down, and I include the Church in that. Perhaps God is leading us out into the desert so that we are stripped of all the security and the comforts that had kept us going until now. And perhaps God is inviting us in a new way to trust in him, to be dependent on him, to realise that no matter what our gifts and our skills, no matter what our vocation, no matter what the challenges that face us are, in the end we are invited to a trust that God's purpose can be fulfilled in and through the most painful human circumstances, the most confusing situations, the most broken people.

Trust in the presence of God, in every circumstance of our lives, attentive listening to the word of God in the Scriptures translated into our own lives, based on the Tradition (with a



capital T) of our Church. These seem to me to be the structure in and through which all of us as individuals and as communities of faith are invited to respond to the things of God under the inspiration, among others, of St Josemaría Escrivá and, my own particular favourite, St Charles de Foucault.

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