

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

## 80<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE PRIESTLY SOCIETY OF THE HOLY CROSS

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Opus Dei was founded by St. Josemaria after over ten years of incessant clamor to Our Lord and to his mother, Mary. Bolstered by a heroic spirit of penance, he received a very special illumination that promptly brought him to his knees on October 2, 1928, while being immersed in prayer, going through his notes that comprise reflections on inspirations he received from the Lord, insights through Jesus' words and actions. Finally, it was revealed to him what God wanted. Ever since he was a teenager, over ten years previous to October 2, 1928, St. Josemaria perceived, with special poignancy, that God wanted something special of him. He, then and there when he received that light, occasioned by seeing penitential footprints in the snow, after a snowstorm, in that small city in northern Spain called Logroño, right then and there, he knew that the Lord wanted something of him.

And so, he decided to become a priest. His parents supported him, but it brought a bit of natural sorrow to his father, since his father had designs of him supporting the family once he left this Earth, and probably like any normal father, he desired grandchildren. And this sort of came out of nowhere. But nevertheless, being a very holy man, his father supported him and facilitated that he get the proper guidance in pursuing this priestly vocation. I mean, it wasn't priesthood, per se; he saw, he realized God wanted something special of him, so to afford God the availability the Lord needed, he became a priest. And he had already been ordained by the time he received that divine illumination. And this is germane to the topic of this reflection, which is to reflect on the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, Opus Dei extending to priests, that was founded 80 years ago on February 14th, 1943. But to understand the importance of this foundation, we need to dwell a bit on the initial illumination whereby Opus Dei was founded. And I would say, it was a light and a conditional prophecy.

What kind of light was it? Well, he saw Our Lord Jesus Christ being brought to the world in a new way, in a renewed way, in a more intense way. And part of that light, that illumination, was that the layperson would be at the forefront of this special work of evangelization that decades later, a number of decades later, John Paul would coin as a "New Evangelization." But the contents of that New Evangelization was seen on that very special day, October 2, 1928. And I'd say it was a little bit of a conditional prophecy, that if the layperson pursues sanctity, to the same degree of commitment and dedication as a St. Teresa of Avila or St. Edith Stein, St. Teresa Benedict of the Holy Cross, or a Padre Pio, or a Blessed Carlo Acutis, we go on and on and on with our blessed and saints. But we get the idea that if they are committed to the Lord, in fact, part of this light was Baptism is a Sacramental time by which an individual receives a calling to nothing less than holiness itself. By living out that Baptismal vocation, one will bring the light of Christ into the world, which indeed is happening. And that, in a certain sense, especially in these times, and also during the first few centuries of the Church's history. The go-to people

for this New Evangelization is the laypeople, for many reasons, but one reason is that there's a need to bring the Church to the people. People just don't come to Church by osmosis. I wish it were different. But the layperson has to enlighten the world through the world of work, through family life, through social relations.

Now there is a bit of a supernatural or spiritual elephant in the room. Even if the layperson is that light of the world, is that salt of the Earth, but the layperson must rely on priests who would understand that unless the layperson pursues sanctity, that kingdom of God will not spread effectively. It's God's show, but from a certain perspective, if there's so many nominal Catholics or Christians in name who don't even realize Jesus is God, without being judgmental, we realize that unless there's, you know, a collective preternatural vision, which I doubt will happen, people who are followers of Jesus need to bring Jesus to them. And if they're holy enough, they will be attracted to Christ. Holiness, that heart of Jesus, that joy of Jesus, the wisdom of Jesus, expressed in his followers are very attractive, no matter how distanced someone is from the faith. I say supernatural elephant in the room because these laypeople need to be formed. Most of all, they need to be nourished by the Sacraments. They need to be purified by the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They need to see role models and icons of Christ. The priest is called to act in the stead of Christ or *in persona Christi*, using the traditional Latin phrase. He acts in Jesus' name in all the Sacraments, especially in Mass. It's Jesus Christ, through the agency of his priests, who brings his redemptive sacrifice to the present moment, leaving his True Presence underneath the appearance of bread and wine.

The Eucharist is key for the layperson, to become holy, to be transformed in Christ. And therefore, the priest is very much needed, is indispensable. One may say, "Well, can he just show up to some Mass and be nourished that way?" Yes. But St. Josemaria realized, if he's going to play to win, he needs priests who have that heightened awareness that Christ wants to be in the workplace. He wants to be in the family, he wants to be in social relations. He wants to be on the football field and the baseball diamond, on the tennis court, on and on and on. That layperson can't just receive the Sacraments in a perfunctory way. Those Sacraments need to be administered by holy priests who completely understand that the layperson is called to a first-class sanctity. And not only that, to use a profound idea of St. John Paul, when he approved Opus Dei as a Personal Prelature, he says that the priest and the layperson are an "organic unity."

The layperson is not the priest's gofer. He's not simply doing the priest's bidding. Both of them have their own role that is indispensable for the New Evangelization, to bring Christ to the middle of the world, and they complement each other and they're profoundly united to each other. I would say, if we're gonna say who works for whom, definitely the priest is there to serve the layperson. And if there ever is a gofer, and I say this with a bit of tongue in cheek with a little tiny strain of seriousness, that the priests would be the layperson's gofer. I remember, I'm so lucky that this, that I was in the presence of a future blessed. And in my own instruction on performing pastoral work as a priest, Blessed Alvaro, at that time, he wasn't Blessed Alvaro, he was the head of Opus Dei and he said, you know, everybody, connected with Opus Dei or in Opus Dei have an equal obligation to pursue sanctity; priest and layperson the same. There's no first-class or second-class

sanctity, everyone has an equal calling, according to his place in the world, according to his state in life. But he said, if you're gonna make the case, is there a difference between priests and laity, but besides the ontological difference of priestly ministry, and the common priesthood of the layperson, Blessed Alvaro said the priest is called to serve more. He's supposed to put his heart on the floor, so others can tread gently. And so, to inspire the layperson, the sanctity of the priest is important. And part of that sanctity of the priest is that he understand that he needs to inspire, he needs to be a role model, he needs to be a Sacramental of the presence of Christ, so that that layperson indeed does become the light of the world.

We, priests, are here to serve the laity preaching the gospel. We need to prepare our homily, we need to base it on the words of Christ, as Pope Francis has emphasized so often. But what makes our preaching so effective is not precisely brilliant theological insights or cute stories. Those serve its purpose, as long as the preacher is seriously looking for holiness. And that is when St. Josemaria, after probably over, well, I guess fifteen years after 1928, looking for a way to have priests in Opus Dei, who would really understand secularity in the sense that the follower of Christ should be in every sector of the world, in every kind of legitimate professional undertaking. Anytime you have a gathering of people, the workplace, the family, the sports field, the party, that sanctity is of the essence because sanctity means presence of Christ. But a priest who understand that spirit of being in the middle of the world as a follower of Christ, and forming that layperson into a real apostle, but at the same time, very much in the middle of the world. Very much, because he is part, or she is part of the world who understands that spirit that was miraculously seen on October 2, 1928.

And in the history of, or the early history of Opus Dei, St. Josemaria used his priest friends who were very good, very holy men. But that was providential. He realized as good as they were and as generous as they were, they did not understand completely the spirit of Opus Dei, that need of sanctity in the middle of the world, that equality of calling to holiness, the singular role of the layperson by virtue of his Baptism, and not because he's sent off on a project by a priest, that could happen, that's fine. But his Baptism, the Baptismal grace, has given him that calling or her that calling to spread the Gospel. And what that layperson needs from the priest is a formation tailored to being a Christ-like figure in the middle of the world. And so, after many years, fifteen to be exact, St. Josemaria saw at Mass a way, a canonical solution to have priests in Opus Dei. And after Mass, he had that inspiration in Mass, a canonical solution that he had been looking for but couldn't find it. And finally, an inspiration gave it to him. And he took out a piece of paper and drew a cross inside a circle, signifying Christ's Cross embracing the world, which would be a logo which would be for the priests of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei as well.

Again, why is this foundation so important? Because there's a burning need for holiness among the priests. And precisely because there's a burning need for holiness among the layperson. Some priests say, jokingly, that they have it easy, that they preach to good people, they give spiritual direction, and hear confessions of good people who want to follow Christ. And they're a little bit in a fantasy island, you know, serious Christians come to Mass, they have goodwill, they receive the sacraments, they go to confession, they get direction from priests. But that's just kind of a

cute, wise remark. In fact, the obligation for the priest to really rise up to the occasion and be a serious follower of Christ, to be centered on the Eucharist, to be a man of generous prayer, of penance, of selfless priestly service, the sick, the confessional box, spiritual counseling, giving classes, the list of duties, joyful duties, goes on and on and on. And therefore, he also needs that formation in the spirit of Opus Dei to present that light of Christ to the laypeople so that they are inspired and enthused and energized to follow Jesus Christ.

It's not uncommon, thank God, that you know I usually hear comments with laypeople. I usually don't hear about great preaching. Sometimes a person's good preacher. I usually ask, "Oh, I really like this parish. I really like my pastor." I go "I guess you like the preaching, I guess." And usually, the person says, "Yeah, yeah, it's pretty good. But what I really like is the sincere piety he has in celebrating Mass and spending time in prayer." And that is so important. And that's a legacy of the spirit of Opus Dei, the spirit of the spirituality of St. Josemaria that the Eucharist and the Mass must be the summit of our spiritual life, to reiterate the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, because only in that way as Our Lord says, that the Eucharist, he says it twice in that long discourse, the Eucharistic discourse, that the Holy Eucharist gives life to the world. And all of us need to see that life in the life of a priest, especially in the way he says Mass, especially in the way he gravitates towards the tabernacle, in the way he makes a thanksgiving after Mass, in the way he is really serious about serving the needs of others, the way he is very upbeat with people and joyful and cheerful, and how his interest in others, his union with his bishop, his union with the Holy Father, his union with his brother priests, all that speaks volumes to the laity.

And this is not theory, it really, it does work, it does help the laity. And whoever listens to these simple remarks, I ask you to please pray for us priests, so that we not let the lay people down. So that we ourselves take to heart our calling to holiness, by virtue of our own Baptism, confirmation, and holy orders. And, that we allow Our Lord who lives in us to be more apparent to our people so that they indeed desire to be salt of the Earth, the light of the world, and leaven in the mass. We go to the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose Motherhood is intimately linked with the High Priesthood of Jesus and the ministerial priesthood that we Sacramentally acquire. We ask her to pray for us and to pray that we be signs of her son to the people entrusted to us. Thank you very much.



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