

Episode: "An Enduring Influence" | The 20th Anniversary of the St. Josemaria Institute

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence; I beg your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

We want to use the occasion of the 20th anniversary of a big blessing for the Church throughout the English-speaking world, and that is the St. Josemaria Institute, that disseminates the life and writings of a saint who has a special message from divine inspiration. Inspiration in a private sense, but may for the benefit of the whole church in the whole world, nothing more and nothing less than the gospel message that is translated into everyday life. It's as new and as old as the gospel, to quote St. Josemaria. And it is the teachings of Jesus, the example of Jesus, that Jesus lived in the first 30 years of the most spectacular 33 years in the history of the universe when the Son of Man makes our world a relic. He lived among us, human in every sense of the word, except sin, without detracting from his divine nature. In imitation of St. Josemaria, I don't want to take for granted this great blessing. God, through the intercession of the Blessed Mother, has bestowed on the Church and the world, and that is the sanctity and the docility of St. Josemaria. I personally wouldn't be so serious about my Christian life, let alone being a priest, without him, I could speak for thousands and thousands of others.

My first exposure to the witness of St. Josemaria was during his lifetime. I was a teenager and invited to the center of Opus Dei in New Jersey, part of the New York metropolitan area. And I kept hearing the name of a priest referred to as the Father and I was so curious. What is so special about the Father, and why is his name bandied about? And to be precise, it's not his name, he's the- he's the Father. They referred to this priest as the Father. And I would notice phlegmatic adults, serious adults, fun adults—anybody over 21 was an adult for me at that time—and I noticed they'd get very excited. I recall this very academic person who's known as your classical book worm, he would talk about the Father and get very excited. Little anecdotes were told about the Father, especially from men who lived in Rome who knew him. I knew a good number of people who knew him, especially the priests, but not only priests, lay people as well. And finally, I just burst into the chaplain's room, the chaplain of the center in New Jersey and so- and I

said, what gives with the Father? Who is the Father? And I noticed that everyone gets excited about the Father, and when they talk about him, they light up like a Christmas tree, I am so curious. What's going on here? He said, I'll keep it simple. We think he's a saint, but he's alive, we still think he's a saint. Ask anybody. The priest said, you think he's a saint? And I said, well, given my ethnic background, I said, like St. Francis of Assisi. And he said, yeah, that caliber. The priest said, but to be more precise, I would kind of compare him with St. Paul, you know, the enthusiasm, the zeal, the work of evangelization. I don't really like St. Paul, not that I knew all that much about St. Paul, but I know he wrote- wrote most of the New Testament. Says, yeah, like St. Paul, you know, I mean what I said. And so that sparked my curiosity more. And I was getting bits and pieces of his deep prayer life, of his- of his joy, of his paternal warmth with people, how special he made you feel.

During those years, another impression that was made on me—but then I was disabused of that—disabused of that impression—was that when people would talk about the Father, the first ones who would talk about the Father, they gave me the impression that they had a special connection with him, that they were close to the- to him, and that the Father had special affection, favored him, was a special friend of his, that he was singled out as very special to the Father. They would even describe the look of the father, who now is called, since he's founder, he's called *our Father*, not- not to be confused with the Lord's Prayer, because the Father is the present Prelate. It's more of a familial- it's more fraternal, more paternal. So he's called the Father, but you know, canonically, he's called the Prelate. So you will- we hear reference to our Father to distinguish the founder of Opus Dei from the present Prelate, who's called now the Father. And we address ourselves to Our Lord because the St. Josemaria compared himself to an envelope with very interesting contents, or special contents. He says that you open up the envelope- he's the envelope, and you take to heart the contents, and you discard the envelope, teaching and proclaiming that he's an instrument, an unworthy, weak, defective—we didn't agree with them, but anyway—defective instrument in receiving a very powerful grace called a charism, because a charism is a grace that affects others. And that very powerful charism can actually change the world, put a serious dent into evangelizing the world. He's a special saint because he's- every saint is special. Every saint is proclaimed or professed as a role model for the Church until the end of time. It's an infallible proclamation of the Magisterium of the Church. Beatification is not infallible; canonization, apparently, is. And that we're invited by Our Lord himself to learn from that saints- to imitate that saint.

But without compromising the level of his holiness, what we want to focus on, in addition to St. Josemaria's example, is what was communicated to him through a very spectacular, miraculous illumination coming from the Holy Spirit himself on how to bring Jesus everywhere. He'll say, again, it's as new as the gospel and as old as the gospel. Old because it's the charism of Opus Dei, is basically a packaging and digestion of the Divine Commission, which is to make disciples of all nations, through three ports of entry or mediums. One is family, two is work site, three is social gatherings. These are the three forums or arenas where the lay person is very much at home, and part of this vision is that the lay person is the new hope of the Church. The lay person is always the hope of the Church. Every follower of Christ the hope of the Church, but a new hope for very practical reasons.

Especially in the West, we are in a post Christian culture. At the same time, people are coming back to God or coming to God for the first time, and for the most part, they're brought by other lay people, whether it's within a family circle, a lot of times it's colleagues at work or in a university or high school, or just any kind of gathering of people, the lay person has contact with people that a member of the clergy will not even remotely have contact with. Just to give us more motive for Thanksgiving, we thank Our Lord for this.

I find myself extremely fortunate. I didn't realize at the time, because they were not canonized or beatified, had exposure to- well, first, the mortal remains of saint- the future St. Josemaria, where I would spend time in meditation, that was called the crypt. Now he's in an altar in the Prelatic Church that, if you will, the principal Church of Opus Dei in Rome, and he's in that altar, I guess the technical word is an urn. And I knew the future Blessed Alvaro, his immediate successor. I was able to exchange words with St. John Paul. And when I arrived in Rome, the future St. Paul VI was Pope, and the future St. Paul VI made a number of statements that drew my attention, it was shared by the future Blessed Alvaro at the time, this is the 70s- late 70s, and Paul VI mentioned to Blessed Alvaro and a number of guidelines or counsels advised him that think about St. Josemaria, how he would act or choose in every given situation, every set of circumstances. How would he react? How would he act? How would he live his typical day? I'd hear little anecdotes of St. Josemaria when those people, this is the 70s now, knew him. He would tap on their shoulders and say, my son, how many times you tell Jesus you loved him? and he wouldn't give him a chance to answer, encourage him to tell the Lord many times he loved him. And Paul is, going back to Paul VI, he said he's one of the persons in the history of the Church who have received the most charisms, the most graces, and at the same time, he has been exemplary in corresponding to those graces. The- that's not dogma, this is a response of a pope who eventually will be canonized himself recently.

And what especially drew my attention, I heard this anecdote as well being there, that St. Josemaria had his last audience with Paul VI, who he knew in the 40s. They were friends, he knew him when he was a Monsignor, and Paul VI said to his face that he was a saint, and that upset St. Josemaria, and he told the Holy Father. He said, Holy Father, the only saints here is yourself. Two saints arguing who's a saint. And the reason why we- this was disclosed is because when he was being driven home- St. Josemaria was driven home, he was with Blessed Alvaro, and he was kind of down. Here, he sees the Holy Father, he had incredible devotion to the Holy Father. He would not- he couldn't help shaking because of his, you know, love for the Holy Father his first day in Rome- or his first night in Rome, he spent it on a balcony contemplating St. Peter's Church and, more precisely, the papal apartments, and he prayed for the Holy Father the whole night. But anyway, going back to the ride home, Blessed Alvaro said, What's the matter? Something's definitely bothering you. He said, well, indeed, there is. And he didn't want to talk about it, and he was urged by Bl. Alvaro, you know, what's going on here? You know I'm your right-hand man. What's going on? I don't know. I mean, my conversation with the Pope didn't go too well, right? Well, what happened? I don't know. I'm talking to him, and he's- out of the blue he says, I'm a saint. I'm disturbed by that. You uh- and then I told the Holy Father, the only person here is yourself, who's a saint. And that kind of got to him, because I don't know, I'm just reading into it. The Holy Father doesn't know me, or, you know, I think he may have said something to the effect that he thinks he kind of deceived the Holy Father, for the Holy Father to say that. But the Holy Father meant it. And I guess he wouldn't be a saint if he said, yeah, I agree with the Holy Father, obviously. So that's- we- it's- you know, this is not just a way of glorifying our saints here, you know. St. Josemaria Institute- I mean, he's the heart of the Institute, obviously. But to give thanks to Our Lord and to have confidence that we have received a gift. This is not hero worship, this is not comparison that you know my man is, you know, the man. It's that we have a gift and my objective of telling these anecdotes, besides keeping people awake, is to reinforce our own confidence in Our Lord through this very special instrument who is St. Josemaria himself.

Time has flown by and over the many years of my priesthood, I've seen incredible miracles of conversion, of repentance, of healing, of new found joy, the creation of beautiful families, when many individuals come from tragic dysfunction and they themselves are holy people. I've witnessed and I've heard scores and scores of confessions. And I had another motive of credibility, in my naivety, and I don't want to give a false impression that I'm comparing. I'm just saying, if I'm going to say anything, I got to be appreciative and fascinated by God's grace through this saint. I recall in my early priesthood, my exposure was first in

Spain, working in a church that was entrusted to priests of Opus Dei, where, while St. Josemaria was alive in Madrid, he would pray in that church, say mass in that church, the Basilica of St. Miguel- San Miguel and their endless lines of penitents, number of priests there. And naively, I thought, well, this is a little bit of a Spanish thing, Spain's a Catholic country and all that. Then I come to this country, and I'm noticing a similar phenomenon on retreats or people coming to a spiritual activity like meditation or evening of recollection, seminar, people lining up for confession, and we have a church entrusted to priests of Opus Dei and lines every day, especially on weekends. And I spoke to a priest friend of mine, I said, well, we hear a lot of confessions. We want to know how, you know, how much confessions have you been hearing? I said, well, lots, you know, with long lines so you put out your shingle, they come. And my buddy said, oh, I have a holy jealousy, holy envy that we have, if- if that a handful at my parish and St. John Paul II, humorously, but seriously- but seriously at the same time, you know, audience for university students in Holy Week. I was there. I was an usher, because I was living in Rome, and he said that, because of St. Josemaria, that those connected with Opus Dei, have the charism of bringing people back to confession, and he got a standing ovation, I remember that. And this is not to compare, but it's a motive of gratitude, and gratitude that what caused him to be accused of being insane and crazy and a dreamer like saint-patriarch Joseph with the Egyptians and his brothers, sons of Jacob, the dreamer, who was the adopted father of Our Lord, husband of Mary, St. Joseph. And his- one of his many mottos was, "dream and your dreams will fall short." He saw in this interior illumination that occurred on October 2, 1928, Jesus Christ in the heart of the world in a new way, in a renewed way. And in that light, he received a conditional prophecy. And- or maybe bordering on a mandate, that Christ will be brought into the heart of the world. If the auto mechanic, the cab driver, the hairdresser, the nurse, the doctor, the teacher, the research scientist, the garbage collector, the caregiver, embrace holiness the way Mother Teresa would, but in their place in- amid their daily activities, their work, whether it's manual, intellectual or a combination thereof, and they will get to people, and they will attract people. That cannot happen unless it's through personal apostolate of friendship and confidence, another idea of St. Josemaria.

We ask Our Lord rhetorically, in light of the gift of St. Josemaria, and most of all the gift he received, that is the charism of Opus Dei, that is as new and as old as the gospel. And what enlightens us a little bit, he was asked in those early days, and who are your role models? Who are you imitating? He says, we are called to do- duplicate what our first brothers and sisters of the faith did in the first, second, third, fourth centuries. In it the showcase of the Church were the lay people, nourished and formed and educated by the bishops and priests who passed unnoticed because they were not called to be in the marketplaces, in professional work, outside of ecclesiastical work, and more concretely, many of them were killed. And for centuries, through family relationships, through friendship, through good example, little by little, that pagan world, that hedonistic world, that violent world, that skeptical world, became significantly more Christian. And eventually the main characteristic of that world was a Christian world, not saying saintly, but Christian. We ask Our Lord to help us have the faith and the magnanimity of St. Josemaria that we see throughout *The Way*- that excited people.

And when that copy of *The Way* was composed, it was a very dark period. You would never know that. It was a big- it was a low point, the lowest point in the history of the Church in Spain. Lowest point from a certain perspective. When we're doing God's will, we're always at a high point, but in a certain- from a certain perspective, in one perspective, the execution of so many thousands of priests and religious, the snuffing out of the faith by a communist regime, the destitution and the poverty and the lack of means, lack of understanding that surrounded St. Josemaria in those early days, and he showed us how Our Lord overcomes those obstacles with an abundance of union with Christ, through the Eucharist, through the word of God- contemplating the Word of God, through his devotion to Mary, through very demanding penances that he was very strong about urging his followers not to do what he did or what he was doing,

because he had the grace of being a founder. And so, he had special graces, inspirations to do very demanding penances. And hence, that's the faith he had so interesting to read that singular set of aphorisms that's called *The Way*. It's so optimistic, it's so ambitious, at this nadir of- especially if we're going to judge by an annual report, which we shouldn't in the history of the Church in Spain.

Anyway, Blessed Mother plays a big part in the spirituality of St. Josemaria. We turn to Mary, we again thank her for intercession for the St. Josemaria Institute, which is a testimony of the influence St. Josemaria has and how people gravitate to his writings, to his ideas, to his example, to encounter Christ in a more profound way. We thank her. We pray for her material intercession so that we take full advantage of this gift God has bestowed on the Church, on the world, and on each and every one of us personally.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations that you have communicated to me in this time of prayer. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.