

St. Josemaria Escriva, Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption

I. Introduction

A. I am delighted to welcome all of you to this venerable Cathedral as we celebrate (in anticipation of) the Feast Day of St. Josemaria Escriva, the founder and patron of Opus Dei. So many of you have come from near and far to celebrate this feast and to attest by your presence and your devotion the enduring influence of this great saint upon your daily lives. I join you in giving glory to God for the gift of this holy priest and in begging for the grace to reflect his teaching in my own life and ministry.

B. As together we celebrate this joyous feast, let us turn to the Scripture readings just proclaimed to discover yet again why St. Josemaria continues to exert such an important and blessed influence upon our lives and upon the lives of many people throughout the world.

II. Romans 8:14-17

A. Let us begin, not with the first reading, but the second, taken from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans where the Apostle proclaims to you and me: "...those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." This brings us to the heart of St. Josemaria's teaching and spirituality. For throughout his life, in his writing and preaching, in his private conversations, indeed in every aspect of his life and ministry, St. Josemaria constantly bore witness to the mystery of divine filiation – the profound and beautiful truth that every human person is called in Christ to become a son or daughter of the Heavenly Father. From his place in heaven, he constantly urges us to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit so that the graces of our Baptism will come fully alive so that we will live our ordinary, daily lives as true children of God by following his teaching and imitating his virtues.

B. Saint Josemaria himself had always believed that he was a child of God yet it was only later that he experienced the truth and beauty of this teaching. On October 16, 1931, after celebrating Holy Mass he remained in chapel and tried to pray – but had difficulty in doing so. Later that day, he boarded a street car in Madrid, and in the midst of the noise and confusion of secular life, felt keenly, in the depth of his heart, an ardent awareness of God’s fatherly love. In the depths of his soul the spirit of adoption was renewed and deepened, so that, like Jesus, he called out as never before, “Abba, Father!” And from that moment onward, the Holy Spirit bore witness through his spirit “that we are children of God,” true sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father, called in Christ to share in unfading joy of heaven.

C. When this same truth dawns on us and impresses itself upon our soul, how differently we begin to look at our lives. Yes, there is failure. Yes, we are weak and sinful. Yes, we rebel, stumble, and fall. Yet, as St. Josemaria reminds us, the Lord in his mercy loves us like a father and invites us to trust him and love him amid every obstacle and challenge. When this spirit of trust and love takes deep root in our souls, we do not hesitate to confess our sins in the Sacrament of Penance and in the orbit of God’s mercy we find true hope. And it is hope that enables us to live differently, as Pope Benedict taught us. Blessed are all who put their trust in God!

III. Genesis 2:4b-9, 15

A. And this brings us to our first reading, from the Book of Genesis, where we read how God created the world in all its beauty and placed the man in the midst of garden of Eden, commanding him to cultivate the garden and to take care of it. As we know, things did not turn out as planned. Sin entered the world and with it, the horizon of hope faded. Adam became a symbol of those who cultivate the land without hope – those who, in the words of St. Josemaria, “confuse hope with comfort.” In shunning God’s friendship, Adam and Eve symbolize the all-too-human tendency to lead lukewarm, mediocre lives, devoid of real achievement, seeking only to avoid suffering and to indulge the senses. How prone we are to seek the inheritance of Christ but how unwilling we are to suffer with him.

B. St. Josemaria taught us another “way” to lead our lives. Long before the II Vatican Council retrieved and reemphasized the Church’s teaching on the universal call to

holiness, This holy priest taught lay people and busy parish priests to go about their daily work as true sons and daughters of God, confident that the grace of the Holy Spirit will help them transform their ordinary daily work into the means of sanctification. Indeed he has taught us how to discover God's presence in our daily work and for that reason to do our very best, whatever our calling or profession. This is how we build up the world and cooperate with God in creating what St. John Paul II called "a civilization of truth and love". This is how we become "salt and light" and "leaven" in the world.

IV. Luke 5:1-11

A. Yet, there is more. If we live as true sons and daughters of the heavenly Father, as true brothers and sisters of the Incarnate Son of God, born of Mary, then we will most certainly encounter the mystery of the Cross. There will be in our lives, as there was in the life St. Josemaria, misunderstandings and sufferings, there will be difficulties. Indeed, I am sure there are times when you experience the Cross in what Pope Francis calls "polite persecution" for holding fast to your faith. Yet it is in the Cross that "we find light, peace, and joy!" It is when we suffer with Christ and for Christ in the midst of our daily labors, when we follow the way of the Cross and in his grace reproduce his passion & death, that we understand what it truly means to be the children of God. And it is only when we embrace the Cross that we become not only true disciples but indeed apostles, sent into the world to lead others to Christ and to the Church.

B. In the Gospel, we meet the disciples who had fished all night to no avail. When Jesus invites them to cast their nets into the deep, the haul of fish is tremendous, their nets were filled to the breaking point and their boats were even in danger of sinking. This invitation, indeed, this command, "lower your nets for a catch" is addressed not only to the Apostles and not only to priests and those in consecrated life: it is addressed to every follower of Christ, to every member of the Church. Indeed, it was St. John Paul II who taught that it is the laity who are the principal agents of the New Evangelization – for you daily bring the Gospel into your homes and your places of work and among your friends and acquaintances. How important that you partner with bishops and priests in doing the work of the Gospel – a work that is carried out not by techniques and styles of ministry but rather by minds and

hearts of God's children that are deeply rooted in his truth, love, and mercy through prayer, penance, and participation in the Church's sacramental life. This is what produces in you and me that "overflow of charity" by which many are won over to Christ and to the Church.

V. Conclusion

A. As we celebrate the feast of St. Josemaria Escriva, grant us Lord, "that by his intercession and example we may, through our daily work, be formed in the likeness of [Christ] and serve the work of redemption with burning love!"

B. St. Josemaria, pray for us!