

Saint Josemaría's Faith

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A homily delivered at a Mass in honor of Saint Josemaría Escrivá

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1. My dear brother priests, dear brothers and sisters: we are gathered together to celebrate the glory of God shining in one of his finest sons, San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of the *Opus Dei*. Following a tradition that comes from her beginnings, the Church commemorates the anniversary of the death of her saints, but giving to it a completely name: *Dies natalis*, the birthday. On 26th June 1975 Josemaría Escrivá died to this earthly life; on that very day was he was born into heaven. That is the glory we celebrate today, joining the Church that rejoices for one of her sons. The glory of heaven.

2. Through the mystery of the *communion of saints*, we are given, now on this earth, a glimpse of that future glory. The *communion of saints*, that profound union between the saints in heaven and us here on earth, is a communion of intercession and of example: of intercession, because they intercede in our favor before Christ; of example, because we can learn from their lives to conduct a life worthy of the calling we have received from God.

In today's liturgical texts we find, summarized in a marvelous way, some of the central points of San Josemaría's teachings and example. There is the universal call to holiness in the opening prayer; the need to sanctify human work in the first reading; the divine filiation in the second reading; and finally the call to the apostolate in the Gospel.

But today, here in this homily, I do not wish to talk about one of these points in particular. I would rather like to stop in another point that, in a way, encompasses all of them. And that point is *faith*, the life of faith. We are celebrating together the whole Church the *year of the faith*. And we all want, as San Josemaría says, *to serve the Church of God "fidelísimamente", most faithfully (The Way, 519)*. Therefore, I think San Josemaría would like us, precisely on his feast's day, to meditate about the faith. Or rather: to meditate about faith through his life of faith, so that we can imitate him and grow in our faith through his example and his intercession.

3. In the life of San Josemaría there is an event that I really like to remember. It happened one winter, probably on the first days of the year 1918, when Josemaría was about to turn 16; he was just a teenager. Heavy snow fell during those days and Logroño, the city where he was then living in, was covered with a white mantle of snow. And one chilly morning, Josemaría looked down from a window of his house and saw footprints left by bare feet in the snow. He soon realized that they had been made by one of the Carmelite friars who had recently arrived in the city. And then he wondered: *If others can make such sacrifices for God, can't I offer him something?*

This episode marks the beginning of something new for him. He felt for the first time what he called the "*barruntos*", the *intimations* from God wanting him for something different. God's will was still hidden from him at that time, but he was already able to see something else in those barefoot prints. This is what has always stricken me. The wonder is not on those prints on the snow, but on the eyes of whom, looking at them, immediately perceived a sign from God. On those eyes that can see further, beyond the ordinary, to have a glimpse of God's plans.

That is precisely what faith is. *Omnia quasi oculo Dei intuemur*, is a beautiful definition of faith by Saint Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian. "To see everything as if with God's eyes". To see everything the way God sees everything; to see everything finding God in everything, even in some barefoot prints on the snow.

If you go to San Josemaría's homily called *Living by Faith*, you will find that in the very beginning he talks about two blind men: the blind-born man at the pool of Siloam, and Bartimeus by the roadside near Jericho. Both were blind, and both recovered their sight, as a lesson of what faith is. San Josemaría, speaking about them, says: *We must learn to acquire the divine measure of things, never losing our supernatural outlook (Friends of God, n. 194).*

This *divine measure of things*, this *supernatural outlook*, this capacity to see everything with the eyes of faith: this is what we have to learn from San Josemaría, asking him to intercede for us so that we also may be able to *acquire that divine measure of things*. For Him, faith was always a new *sight* given to us instead of our blindness; a new *light* given to us instead of our darkness. *Shine forth with the torch of your faith*, he says in the very first point of *The Way*. The faith as a *torch* to see what is hidden, to see further, with that

supernatural sight to discover the hand of God in every single moment of our lives.

4. Looking at this *supernatural outlook* in the life of Saint Josemaría we may learn two great lessons. The first of them, the most important one, is that faith is a gift from God. No one can pretend to create it, because that would not be real faith, supernatural faith, but only a human belief. No one can pretend even to hold it as if he or she were entitled to it, as if faith were something God were obliged to bestow on us. It is not so: faith is a gift. We do not deserve it, and therefore, the only way to keep it, and to grow in it, is to beg for it, to pray unceasingly. The young Josemaría used to repeat the same prayer of that blind man of Jericho, of Bartimeus: *Domine, ut videam!*. "Lord, that I may see!" He didn't see clearly, but he knew that for *seeing further* he need first and foremost to *pray harder*. He knew that faith is a gift.

In the letter *Porta Fidei* for the indiction of the Year of the Faith, Pope Benedict wrote that *faith cannot be taken for granted* (cfr. *Porta Fidei*, n. 2). And how many Catholics we meet in our daily lives that unfortunately have done so! They took their faith for granted and they were careless. They did not take care of their catholic formation; they were remiss on their prayer life; with a blind presumption that they were already Catholics, that they already had faith. And little by little, they assumed the world's criteria, the world's way of seeing things, instead of following the teachings of the Church. More and more aspects of their lives – their jobs, their friends, their family – fell little by little in the dark, because they lost the capacity to look at them with God's eyes, with that *supernatural outlook*.

San Josemaría's prayer, *Domine, ut videam!*, shows us how much we need, each and every one of us, of perseverance in praying. How much we do need to receive more of that light, so that our faith becomes unshakable. So that our faith gets brighter and brighter, capable to illumine first every corner of our souls, and then every corner of our familiar lives, social lives, professional lives. Saint Josemaría says that *the apostolate, of whatever kind it be, must be an overflow of the interior life* (*Friends of God*, 239). Only keeping alive and burning the torch of our faith we will be able to shine before others.

5. The second lesson is that faith needs trials. It needs the trials of darkness, when we do not see clearly, when we do not understand. It needs even the

trials of sorrows and sufferings, to be purified. There is an amazing metaphor that San Josemaría used repeatedly to explain how the Lord purified him along his life. A metaphor taken from the farming, from the shoeing of a horse. *One blow on the nail and a hundred on the horse-shoe*, he used to repeat, explaining how God, wanting to purify him, blew his hammer one time on him and 99 times on those who were close to him. He experienced the death of two very young sisters and of his own father, when he was still very young; he suffered poverty coming to his household; he endured many difficulties and incomprehension in his work, coming sometimes not from outside but even from inside the Church. But here is that *divine measure of things* he lived in: not only he never complained, but he saw those trials like *one blow on the nail and a hundred on the horse-shoe*. He was able to see those trials with that *supernatural outlook*, with the sight of the faith; even more, he was able to see that those trials were necessary for his own purification and for the purification of his nascent work, for the *Opus Dei*, so that from the very beginning his work would not be his, but God's.

During this Eucharist, let us entrust to the powerful intercession of San Josemaría these our intentions. May the Good Lord may bestow on us that unshakable faith, capable to see with God's eyes come what may. May we never take our faith for granted, but rather both ask for it unceasingly and commit ourselves to keep it alive by our fidelity in following our Mother Church's teachings. Grateful for the gift to the whole Church which is the life and work of San Josemaría, let us also pray for the members of *Opus Dei* throughout the world and very especially in this country. Amen!