

# Faith and Life in St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

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## 1. Introduction: Why have a Year of Faith?

At the beginning of Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* we read: “The *door of faith* (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church.”<sup>1</sup> Faith and life are brought into close proximity at the very beginning of the Holy Father’s document announcing the Year of Faith. The life it speaks of is the life of communion with God. The main concern of the document, like everything Benedict XVI has taught throughout his pontificate, is to ensure that Christianity can never be mistaken for a mere philosophical or moral teaching. Rather it is essentially a living encounter with the Risen Christ, present in his Church and the Lord of history, an encounter “which gives life a new horizon.”<sup>2</sup>

This new horizon of life in communion with God opened up by faith, is the source of the preaching and apostolate of Paul and Barnabas. On returning to Antioch, from where they had first set out on their missionary journey, *they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles* (Acts 14:27). Therefore it is God himself who opens the door of faith, by acting in the lives of his apostles and saints.

The image of the door or gate is used frequently in the Gospel. The door is often closed, as in the case of the foolish virgins (cf. *Mt* 25:10), or the neighbor and his children who had already gone to bed (cf. *Lk* 11:7). In any case, the door is narrow, and the householder may close it (cf. *Lk* 13:24-25 and *Mt* 7:13-14). But God opens that door, as is shown by St. Paul’s life and experience. He writes to the Corinthians: *a wide door for effective work has opened to me* (1 *Cor* 16:9), and he asks the Colossians to pray *that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ* (Col 4:3).

St. John’s gospel adds an essential element: the door is opened not only by God but by the Good Shepherd, who is recognized because he comes through the door, and is himself the door (cf. *Jn* 10:2-10). Therefore Christ is the Door, because he leads us to the fullness of eternal life given by God the Father.

The Scriptural reference to the “door of faith” points, then, to a deeply theological perspective: faith commits and involves a person’s life precisely because it gives life, a life that will never end. Hence “to enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter in the form of a *motu proprio*, *Porta Fidei*, for the announcement of the Year of Faith (henceforth *Porta Fidei*), no. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005 (henceforth *Deus Caritas Est*), no. 1.

<sup>3</sup>*Porta Fidei*, no. 1

The Holy Father wants the Year of Faith to help us recover the strong tie between faith and life. Many people do not live their faith today because they no longer realize that it is essential to life and gives meaning to existence.

This truth—the connection between faith and life—is central to the *magisterium* of Pope Benedict XVI. “Ever since the start of my ministry as Successor of Peter, I have spoken of the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

Today religion, and especially Catholicism, is often looked on by the surrounding culture as an enemy to happiness. It seems to forbid everything we find attractive precisely because it is attractive. Faith is presented as though it were necessarily opposed to human desires and a fulfilled life. The teaching of Nietzsche referenced in the first footnote in *Deus Caritas Est* says this explicitly.<sup>5</sup>

But why is faith seen today as an enemy of life? Benedict XVI says that the reason is found in not giving enough stress to God’s gift when proclaiming the faith. What needs to be done is to highlight the primary importance of the gift, and show why the essential disposition of Christians is the readiness to be receptive to it. In *Porta Fidei* the Pope states forcefully: “Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy.”<sup>6</sup>

Even more than the requirement to live in accordance with our beliefs, what makes faith into the natural guide for our lives is an awareness of the beauty of the gift, and joy at our encounter with God: “*Faith working through love (Gal 5:6) becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man’s life (cf. Rom 12:2; Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:20-29; 2 Cor 5:17).*”<sup>7</sup>

The theological virtues, faith, hope and charity, are the Life of God that pours forth, through grace, into our lives when we open ourselves to it. St. Thomas Aquinas says that “faith is a habit of the mind whereby eternal life is begun in us, making the intellect assent to what is non-apparent.”<sup>8</sup>

The movement, then, goes from the Life of God, who gives himself, to the life of man, who becomes *opus Dei*, a work of God. Benedict XVI expresses this dynamic with great clarity: “The teaching of Jesus still resounds in our day with the same power: *Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life (Jn 6:27)*. The question posed by his listeners is the same that we ask today: *What must we do, to be doing the works of God? (Jn 6:28)*. We know Jesus’ reply: *This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent (Jn 6:29)*. Belief in Jesus Christ, then, is the way to arrive definitively at salvation.”<sup>9</sup> We will now offer some reflections on St. Josemaría Escrivá’s teaching and experience in the light of *Porta Fidei*.

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<sup>4</sup> *Porta Fidei*, no. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 3, note 1, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, IV, 168.

<sup>6</sup> *Porta Fidei*, no. 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Porta Fidei*, no. 6.

<sup>8</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa-IIae, Q.4, A.1, Reply

<sup>9</sup> *Porta Fidei*, no. 3.

## 2. Life of faith in St. Josemaría

Like St. Paul, St. Josemaría too experienced that God had opened the door of faith to him, when he discovered that God wanted the “divine paths of the world” to be opened up,<sup>10</sup> by finding “something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations,”<sup>11</sup> with a “lively awareness of eternity.”<sup>12</sup> That was why he called Madrid his “Damascus,”<sup>13</sup> the place where he received the clear light on his vocation and his mission to found Opus Dei. The holiness to which God was calling him was to be sought in daily life and in loving the world. The work that God was bringing about in him was to be found in ordinary life, which is transformed into a meeting-place with God. *Doing* God’s work was grounded, in St. Josemaría’s experience, on *being* God’s work.

God himself is given absolute pride of place, since belief itself, as taught in *Jn* 6:29, quoted above, is the work of God: the necessary condition for doing God’s work is to enable one’s own life to be more and more the work of God, through faith.<sup>14</sup> This truly is a gift from God, who gives his life and holiness to every Christian in baptism.

It should not surprise us, then, to see that in St. Josemaría’s published writings the word “faith” is closely tied to words connected with life.<sup>15</sup> He asks us to “live by faith” and speaks of the need for a “living faith.” A clear example of this is found at the end of the homily “Passionately Loving the World,” given at the University of Navarra on October 8, 1967. That too was a Year of Faith, convoked by Pope Paul VI, to whom St. Josemaría makes explicit reference:

“Now I ask you with the Psalmist to unite yourselves to my prayer and my praise: *Magnificate Dominum mecum, et extollamus nomen eius simul*: ‘Praise the Lord with me, let us extol his name together’ (*Ps* 33:4). In other words, dearly beloved, let us live by faith. . . .

“Faith is a virtue which we Christians need greatly, and in a special way in this ‘Year of Faith’ which our beloved Holy Father, Pope Paul VI has decreed. For without faith, we lack the very foundation for the sanctification of everyday life.

“A living faith in these moments, because we are drawing near to the *mysterium fidei* (*1 Tim* 3:9), to the Holy Eucharist; because we are about to participate in our Lord’s Pasch, which sums up and brings about the mercies of God among men. . . .

“Faith, finally, my beloved daughters and sons, to show the world that all this is not just ceremonies and words, but a divine reality, by presenting to mankind the testimony of an ordinary life which is made holy, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and of holy Mary.”<sup>16</sup>

Sanctifying daily life is possible precisely because of faith, and it means living by faith

<sup>10</sup> St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 21.

<sup>11</sup> St. Josemaría, “Passionately Loving the World,” in *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, no. 114.

<sup>12</sup> St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 239.

<sup>13</sup> See Javier Echevarría, “A New Damascus,” *Romana* 53 (2011), pp. 264-266 (originally published in *Alfa y Omega*, July 28, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> See Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “*Dejar obrar a Dios*,” in *L’Osservatore Romano*, October 6, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> For a full survey of the life of faith in St. Josemaría, see Ernst Burkhardt and Javier Lopez, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de San Josemaría*, vol. II, Rialp, Madrid 2011, pp. 346-364.

<sup>16</sup> St. Josemaría, “Passionately Loving the World,” in *Conversations*, no. 123. My italics.

and having a living faith,<sup>17</sup> with explicit reference to St. Paul's teaching in *Gal 3:11*—*the just man lives by faith*. All of this effort is based on the theological virtues, as St. Josemaría points to in a striking phrase: "Acts of Faith, Hope and Love are valves which provide an outlet for the fire of souls that live the life of God."<sup>18</sup>

"Living by Faith" is the title of a homily included in *Friends of God*, about the theological virtue of faith. In it the apparent absence of miracles today, compared with the times of the early Christians, is attributed precisely to the fact that many Christians today fail to live a life of faith.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, faith is living when it "becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man's life," in the words from *Porta Fidei* quoted above. Faith is alive when it has practical effects, when it leads to specific choices, decisions that give direction to Christians' actual lives.<sup>20</sup> Otherwise, faith is dead, because it remains on a merely sociological plane, like an abstract lesson or a series of moral traditions that have no absolute value in themselves. Joseph Ratzinger explains this very well when he says that the contents of the faith are not like the periodic table of the elements, knowledge of which does not directly affect men's lives. Faith, by contrast, contains truths that we must necessarily react to. This means that there is no such thing as a true agnostic; agnostics are, in practice, atheists, because to live their lives they have to take specific decisions, which they choose will not be in conformity with the teachings of faith.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, to live we must have some kind of faith, because we inevitably choose to give a meaning to our life. Thus St. Josemaría's teaching could not be further from Pelagianism and moralism. Christianity cannot be limited to deeds; nor can man achieve salvation by human virtue or his own effort. The act of belief is not limited to the intellect, to the simple acceptance of a number of truths that have little to do with life; on the contrary, the act of belief is shown in the believer's very life, because faith bestows supernatural life and enables us to think according to "the logic of God,"<sup>22</sup> God's way of reasoning. We need to ground everything in our life on Christ and establish a personal relationship with him. "You don't have living faith if you aren't giving yourself to Jesus here and now."<sup>23</sup>

This is the radical Christocentrism that enables St. Josemaría to speak so boldly about sanctifying and loving the world.<sup>24</sup> "When faith weakens men tend to imagine that God is far away and hardly cares for his children. They come to regard religion as a kind of appendage, something to have recourse to when there's no other remedy; they expect, with what justification one cannot say, spectacular manifestations, unusual happenings. But when faith is really alive in the soul, one discovers instead that to follow Christ one does not have to step aside from the ordinary pattern of everyday life, and also that the great holiness which God expects of us is to be found here and now in the little things of each day."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 578, and *Furrow*, no. 459.

<sup>18</sup> *The Way*, no. 667.

<sup>19</sup> See *Friends of God*, no. 190.

<sup>20</sup> See *The Way*, nos. 317, 380 and 489; *Furrow*, nos. 46 and 945; *The Forge*, nos. 256 and 602.

<sup>21</sup> See Ratzinger, *To Look on Christ: Exercises in Faith, Hope and Love*, 1991, pp. 17-18.

<sup>22</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 172.

<sup>23</sup> *The Forge*, no. 544.

<sup>24</sup> See Antonio Aranda, *El bullir de la sangre de Cristo: estudio sobre el cristocentrismo del beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Madrid: Rialp, 2000.

<sup>25</sup> *Friends of God*, no. 312.

The solemn proclamation of the universal call to holiness is seen, then, as a deepening in the faith that is born of our encounter with Christ in everyday life. As Benedict XVI stresses above, it is “a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man’s life.” The reduction of the faith to a mere sociological tradition, separating it from real life, goes hand in hand with reducing it to the sphere of extraordinary, abnormal things. By contrast, accepting the universal call to holiness means giving new life to our own faith in order to open ourselves up to God who is close at hand:

“We should make no mistake. God is no shadowy or distant being who created us and then abandoned us; nor is he a master who goes away and does not return. Though we do not perceive him with our senses, his existence is far more true than any of the realities which we touch and see. God is here with us, really present, living. He sees and hears us, He guides us, and knows our smallest deeds, our most hidden intentions.

“We believe this—but we live as if God did not exist. For we do not have a thought or a word for him; we do not obey him, nor try to control our passions; we do not show that we love him, and we do not atone.

“Are we going to continue living with a dead faith?”<sup>26</sup>

We need a faith that is alive, since Christ is not a figure from the past, a memory or a tradition. He is alive today and now.<sup>27</sup> And living by faith means being on intimate terms with him, talking to him as a friend, developing a personal relationship with him. This teaching links faith directly to the deepest desires of the human heart. “Our faith does not ignore anything on this earth that is beautiful, noble, and authentically human.”<sup>28</sup> Thus St. Josemaría was once accused of preaching “retreats about life” and not, as was then customary, “retreats about death.”<sup>29</sup>

In the homily “Living by Faith,” the texts from Scripture taken as his starting-point are the miracles where Jesus comes to meet people in their needs, as in the case of *Bartimaeus*, the blind man from Jericho, in *Mark* chapter 10, and the woman with the issue of blood in *Matthew* chapter 9, and finally the father of the lunatic boy in *Mark* chapter 9. As Joseph Ratzinger wrote, “the thirst for the infinite belongs quite simply to essential human nature, and is indeed precisely that essential nature,”<sup>30</sup> so that all genuine loves and desires find their meaning only in God’s Love. “Practice your faith cheerfully, keeping very close to Jesus Christ. Really love him—but really, really love him!—and you will take part in a great Adventure of Love, because you will be more in love each day.”<sup>31</sup>

The human heart asks for a real “forever.” Even Nietzsche wrote that “all joy wants eternity.”<sup>32</sup> But this longing is doomed to disillusion unless, in the loves of this earth, in the desires of our heart, we can recognize a path leading, like a river to its source, to God’s Love, to Christ, the Love of loves. “Men lie when they say ‘for ever’ about things on earth. The only true, totally true, ‘for ever’ is that which we say with reference to God. This is how you ought to live your life, with a faith that will help you to taste the honey, the sweetness of

<sup>26</sup> *Furrow*, no. 658.

<sup>27</sup> See *The Way*, no. 584; *Christ is Passing By*, nos. 102ff.

<sup>28</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 24.

<sup>29</sup> See Andrés Vazquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 2, p. 473.

<sup>30</sup> Ratzinger, *To Look on Christ*, p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> *The Forge*, no. 448.

<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Zarathustra’s Roundelay” in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

heaven whenever you think about eternal life which is indeed ‘for ever.’”<sup>33</sup>

In short, St. Josemaría’s saw faith as force that speaks to life, to people’s loves. In contrast to a faith seen as a mere social occurrence or tradition, St. Josemaría’s preaching addresses people’s hearts, because it is born of faith “lived as an experience of love received.”<sup>34</sup> He presents Jesus to us as one introduces a friend, as the Love of loves, the source and meaning of all loves that are genuine and pure.

The universal call to holiness is based on the conviction of God’s nearness to our own life, to our hopes and desires. By giving priority to the theological virtues, and by a strong Christocentrism, faith is presented in a way that responds to the deepest desires of the human heart.

### **3. A son’s faith, a father’s faith**

St. Josemaría’s teaching on faith has deep theological roots, in first place, because of the light granted to his soul by his foundational charism, and secondly because of the deep understanding of the tradition of the Church with which that light endowed him. In particular, his teachings contain dogmatic elements that are characteristic of the outlook of the Fathers of the Church, who always tie faith and life closely together.

What stands out above all is his strong conviction of the divine sonship that Christ grants us, and that he sometimes expresses with terms characteristic of the Greek Fathers such as “divinization.”<sup>35</sup> This sonship or “filiation” points to a clear perception of the connection between the divine missions and the intra-Trinitarian processions, as well as the link between the act of creation, and the eternal generation of the Son by the Father. Referring to *Galatians* 3:26, St. Josemaría said: “All of you are God’s children through faith. What power we have! The power of knowing that we are God’s children.”<sup>36</sup> And he draws out the consequences of that mystery which, in patristic terms, is identified with the distinction without separation, and the union without confusion, of God’s action and his being—the divine economy and the divine immanence. In the words of the great French theologian Jean Daniélou, “From the deepest origins of all things appears this close link of all creation with the Word. It may be said that creation is not without an irradiation of the eternal generation [of the Son by the Father].”<sup>37</sup> Thus St. Josemaría says: “There is no human situation, no matter how trivial and ordinary it may seem, which cannot be a meeting place with Christ and a step forward on our journey toward the kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>38</sup>

Being a contemplative in the middle of the world means recognizing, thanks to the gift of faith and our diligent response, that everything speaks to us of Christ, that it is he who gives meaning to history and the world. Nothing of what is genuinely human can be alien to Christ,

<sup>33</sup> *Friends of God*, no. 200.

<sup>34</sup> *Porta Fidei*, no. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Ramos Lisson, “Aspectos de la divinización en el Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer,” in José Luis Illanes (ed.), *El cristiano en el mundo: En el Centenario del nacimiento del Beato Josemaría Escrivá* (1902-2002), Pamplona, 2003, pp. 483-499.

<sup>36</sup> St. Josemaría Escrivá, Letter dated October 24, 1942, no. 68 (AGP, series A.3, leg. 91, exp. 4).

<sup>37</sup> Jean Daniélou, *La Trinidad y el misterio de la existencia*, Ediciones Paulinas, Madrid 1969, p. 92.

(Original : *La Trinité et le mystère de l’existence*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1968; translated into English by Jeremy Leggat as *God’s Life in Us*, Denville, N. J.: Dimension Books, 1969).

<sup>38</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 22.

so that it is not necessary to abandon ordinary life in order to achieve holiness. In the words of Daniélou again, “To separate oneself from Christ is at the same time to separate oneself from what is real. It does not mean going beyond Christ, but just the reverse: it means closing oneself to life.”<sup>39</sup>

Faith is not simply a collection of teachings to be learnt, but a light that illumines reality, a light that shines out of Christ’s eyes.

St. Josemaría’s union of faith and life, therefore, reflects his Christocentrism and his deep experience of divine filiation, the true center of the entire Christian message and the link between time and eternity. The Incarnate Word, in his Sacred Heart, unites God and man: God comes in search of us, and we, consciously or unconsciously, seek God, the Love of loves. Therefore St. Josemaría never presents faith only as a body of teachings, but as vitally connected to Christ: “Faith is a supernatural virtue which disposes our intelligence to give assent to the truths of revelation, to say Yes to Christ, who has brought us full knowledge of the Blessed Trinity’s plan for our salvation.”<sup>40</sup>

The mind’s assent is inseparable from that given by the heart in the meeting with Christ, living and resurrected, in the Christian’s “today.”<sup>41</sup> The act of faith is thought and knowledge that are born of the relationship with Jesus Christ in person, of conversation with him and openness to him. Among the Fathers of the Church, St. Augustine explained this reality by distinguishing three aspects of the act of belief: one has to believe that God exists, *credere Deum*, but one also has to believe in God who reveals himself, *credere Deo*, which culminates in *credere in Deum*, i.e. in personal adherence to God, in a faithfulness that leads one to tend continually towards him with one’s whole life.<sup>42</sup>

Thus St. Josemaría’s concept of faith is both profoundly modern and genuinely faithful to Patristic tradition,<sup>43</sup> which he appreciated for its apophatic (negative) theology—the realization that a full knowledge of God as he is in himself is beyond the capacity of our human intellect. We can cite here the beautiful reply he gave to a question raised in a large gathering in Venezuela in 1975:

“And when people tell you they can’t understand the Trinity and Unity [of God], tell them that I don’t understand it either, but I love and venerate it. If I could understand God’s greatness, if God fitted into this poor head of mine, my God would be very small. And yet he does fit—because he wants to—into my heart; he is contained within the immense depth of my soul, which is immortal.”<sup>44</sup>

The intellectual dimension does not exhaust the knowledge of God, who cannot be reduced to a concept or idea. The Christian mystery is fully grasped in a personal knowledge

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<sup>39</sup> Daniélou, *La Trinidad y el misterio de la existencia*, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

<sup>40</sup> *Friends of God*, no. 191.

<sup>41</sup> Arturo Blanco notes that St. Josemaría related faith to the whole person, not just to the mind. See Blanco, “*Alcuni contributi del beato Josemaria alla comprensione dei rapporti tra fede e ragione*,” in Paul O’Callaghan (ed.), *La grandezza della vita quotidiana*, vol. V/1, Rome: Edusc, 2004, p. 259.

<sup>42</sup> See St. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 130, 1; and *Tractatus in Ioannem*, 29, 6.

<sup>43</sup> The concept of faith held by St. Josemaría is described by the Venerable Álvaro del Portillo, his first successor, as “living and dynamic.” See del Portillo, in Manuel Belda, Jose Escudero., Jose Luis Illanes, and Paul O’Callaghan, *Sanctity in the World...*

<sup>44</sup> St. Josemaría Escrivá, reply to a question in a get-together in Venezuela, February 9, 1975, *Catechesis en America*, vol. III, p. 75 (AGP, Biblioteca, P04).

of God who dwells in the soul in grace. Thus we find a close tie between the terms *faith* and *heart* in St. Josemaría's writings: faith entails "seeing the truth and loving it,"<sup>45</sup> loving and believing.<sup>46</sup> The doctrinal dimension is not sacrificed to an outpouring of sentiment, nor is faith reduced to mere intellectual formulas divorced from life. The phrase he coined to point out the safe path for his spiritual children to follow, "the piety of children and the doctrine of theologians,"<sup>47</sup> shows this same deep harmony that from the time of the early Christians has nourished the Church's fidelity to Revelation, grounded on the sense of divine filiation.

Belief is first and foremost a gift; it is the indwelling of God, his advent, in the human heart. Thus we begin to see why an essential element in a deepened understanding of faith's theological dimension is grasping the reality that the Blessed Trinity dwells in the human soul. Each of us is called to be one with Christ, who is our true identity. The only way we can live by faith is by living the life of God's children, so as to be another Christ.<sup>48</sup> St. Josemaría expresses this in the telling words *alter Christus, ipse Christus*<sup>49</sup>: "Feel, instead, Christ urging you on to become another Christ, *ipse Christus*, Christ himself."<sup>50</sup>

This, then, is the faith that "becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man's life," a vibrant faith in the Incarnation, in its reality, its cosmic meaning. The meaning of the world is the Incarnate Son of God, and we are called to lead everything back to Christ, who returns all to the Father. This means recognizing the imprint of the Trinity on created being, going from the Incarnate Son who gives the world its meaning, to the Father, source of all creation. As Jean Mouroux wrote, "our faith is Christological, and because it is Christological, it is Trinitarian."<sup>51</sup>

To be a contemplative in the world, therefore, means looking at the world with Trinitarian eyes—made possible by our personal union with Christ. Thus we find the meaning of creation and history in the freedom of the children of God. "This hymn to freedom is echoed in all the mysteries of our Catholic faith. The Blessed Trinity draws the world and man out of nothing, in a free outpouring of love."<sup>52</sup>

The Incarnation confirms God's Love, revealing that the true law governing the world is not blind necessity, nor absolute, disincarnate reason, but the freedom and trust of God the Father, who creates each being in the Son and for the Son.<sup>53</sup> As St. Josemaría said in an interview in Spain in 1969, "God, on creating us, ran the risk and adventure of our freedom. He wanted the history of the world to be a real history, made of real decisions, and not a fiction or a game. Each man has to experience his own autonomy, with all its concomitant hazards, trial-and-error, and uncertainty."<sup>54</sup> Hence his "realization that history is undetermined and open to a variety of human options—all of which God respects."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Furrow*, 818.

<sup>46</sup> See *The Forge*, no. 215.

<sup>47</sup> See *Christ is Passing By*, no. 10.

<sup>48</sup> See *Christ is Passing By*, no. 21.

<sup>49</sup> See Aranda, *El Bullir de la sangre de Cristo*, op. cit., pp. 227-254.

<sup>50</sup> *Friends of God*, no. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Jean Mouroux, *Je crois en toi*, Paris: Le Cerf, 1961, p. 37.

<sup>52</sup> *Friends of God*, no. 25.

<sup>53</sup> See *Col* 1:15-20.

<sup>54</sup> St. Josemaría Escrivá, interview in *ABC*, November 2, 1969.

<sup>55</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 99.

This deep understanding of faith was given life in St. Josemaría's response to God, whose son he felt himself to be, to the point of becoming the spiritual father of more children, and forming them in their turn until they too became parents of others. But forming others in freedom and nurturing their growth demand faith in the one Father, who is always at work, giving life, and protecting. A powerful passage written in 1937 (in the coded language that he employed throughout the Spanish Civil War to get past the censors) shows the strength and depth of this living faith:

"I'm not going to tell you anything. It's my custom to keep quiet and almost always just say, 'Good,' or 'Very good.' No one can truthfully say at the end of the day that he did this or that thing by order, or even by an implied order, of the grandfather. When I think I have to say something, I limit myself to setting out clearly the facts of the problem at hand. In no way, even if I very clearly see one, do I or will I give a specific solution to it. I have a different way, a gentler and more effective way, of influencing the wills of my children and grandchildren: I give myself a hard time and pester my old Friend Don Manuel. May I never stray from this path, of always letting my children act with complete freedom . . . I think you know this about me—despite my human frailty, I could never use anyone's life, not even a minute of it, for my own comfort or consolation. So much is this true that I will keep my mouth shut (though later I will speak with Don Manuel about it) even when what my children have in mind looks to me like a real disaster."<sup>56</sup>

St. Josemaría shows here his way of acting and governing with faith, having recourse to God ("Don Manuel," meaning *Emmanuel*, God with us) to respect his children's freedom, since, in order to grow and acquire the capacity to be parents, they need to experience their own limitations and make their own mistakes. For someone who really loves others this process is painful, as painful as giving birth, but there is no other way of truly engendering another person and making them capable of becoming parents in their turn.

It is also the parents' responsibility to help their children discover the beauty of world around them. Thus we see reflected in St. Josemaría's faith "*the original optimistic view of creation, that love for the world* which is at the heart of the Christian message,"<sup>57</sup> which made him a father in such a marvelous way.

The faith of a son, which is faith in the Son, was manifested in a natural way in the faith of a father that characterized St. Josemaría's life, totally dedicated as it was to the Work of God. He felt very much a son of God, and also very much a father. His great apostolic fruitfulness can be viewed in this theological perspective of faith, which led him to inspire many people to become saints in the world, and to open up a specific path to holiness.

#### **4. Conclusion: Trinitarian life**

The Holy Father Benedict XVI proclaimed a Year of Faith to overcome the current crisis of separating faith and life—for it seems as if Christianity, and the truths professed in the Creed, no longer hold any real value for many people's lives. In contrast, St. Josemaría's teachings manifest, even at the level of terminology, a close connection between faith and life, presenting Christian life as a call to live by faith, to ground one's life on a personal

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<sup>56</sup> See Vazquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 2, pp. 114-115.

<sup>57</sup> *The Forge*, no. 703.

relationship with Christ.

The possibility of “passionately loving the world” and sanctifying all the genuinely human actions and dimensions of life, is based on a deepened understanding of the close connection between faith and life. The unity of life that was a constant theme of St. Josemaría’s preaching is born of a deep, operative faith that opens our human life to God’s Life. “There is only one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is that life which has to become, in both body and soul, holy and filled with God: we discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things.”<sup>58</sup>

The theological depth of the union of faith and life in St. Josemaría’s outlook is particularly evident in one of his most original teachings: his invitation to learn how to live our faith by contemplating the Holy Family.<sup>59</sup> He invites us to rise up to the Blessed Trinity in Heaven from the daily life and mutual relations of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, whom he called the “trinity on earth.” This pathway highlights both his Christocentrism and a deepening in the theological dimension of faith:

“I strive to reach the Trinity in Heaven through that other ‘trinity’ on earth: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They are, as it were, more accessible. Jesus, who is *perfectus Deus* and *perfectus Homo*. Mary, who is a woman, the purest of creatures, the greatest: greater than her, only God. And Joseph, who is there right beside Mary: clean, manly, prudent, trustworthy. My God! What models for us! Just to look at them makes me want to die of shame, for, my Lord, I have behaved so badly. I haven’t risen to the occasion, or let myself become divinized. You have given me the means, and you are giving them, and will go on giving them to me. For, to live humanly on this earth, we must strive to live in a divine way.”<sup>60</sup>

Every man and woman is called to live the very life of God, the life of the Blessed Trinity, as did the Holy Family, each of whom lived totally for the others in a communion of perfect love, based on the presence of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, on earth. From the divine “missions,” St. Josemaría rises up to the immanent intra-Trinitarian “processions,” showing how the Christian vocation is not a merely human effort to imitate the inimitable; rather God himself offers ordinary Christians the means to become “divinized” in their daily lives, working alongside and loving the people around them.

From the dogmatic perspective, St. Josemaría’s teaching is deeply rooted in the Fathers of the Church,<sup>61</sup> in the thinking that was born of the lives of the early Christians. And like the Fathers, St. Josemaría stresses the incomprehensibility of the mystery of the Triune God to our limited human intellect:

“It is only right that in the immense marvel of God’s beauty and wisdom, there should be

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<sup>58</sup> St. Josemaría, “Passionately Loving the World,” in *Conversations*, no. 114. For a comment on this passage, see: *Conversaciones con Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer. Edición crítico-histórica*, edited by J. L. Illanes and Alfredo Mendiz, Madrid: 2012, pp. 477–478 and 486–489.

<sup>59</sup> See *Christ is Passing By*, no. 22.

<sup>60</sup> St. Josemaría, meditation “Gathered together in unity,” 27 March 1975, quoted in Salvador Bernal, *Mmgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, London and New York: Scepter Publishers, 1977, pp. 341–342.

<sup>61</sup> A more developed study of this topic could be made on the basis of the excellent analysis by Cornelio Fabro, “El temple de un Padre de la Iglesia,” in Cornelio Fabro, Salvatore Garofalo and Maria Adelaide Raschini, *Santos en el mundo: estudios sobre los escritos del beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Madrid: Rialp, 1993, pp. 23-130.

things that we can't understand here on earth. If we could understand them, God would be a finite being, not infinite—he would fit into our heads, and how poor that god would be! So turn to Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, knowing that Jesus is God, and that God is three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and you are adoring the Trinity and the Unity, you are loving the Holy Spirit, when you love Jesus Christ.”<sup>62</sup>

The actual lives of Jesus, Mary and Joseph are the only way for us to reach the Blessed Trinity, because only in the mystery of the divine Humanity of Christ do we have access to the inner life of God. Only in Christ can we share in God's own life, singling out each of the Divine Persons and talking to them on terms of intimate friendship, as we can to the “earthly trinity.” And to attain this strong faith, we need to go in a special way to our Blessed Lady, Mary, in order to learn to say the “Yes!” that unites faith and life.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> St. Josemaría Escrivá, reply to a question in a get-together in Argentina, June 14, 1974: *Catechesis en América*, I, p. 449 (AGP, Biblioteca, P04).

<sup>63</sup> See *Friends of God*, nos. 284-286.