

THE ICON OF SAINT JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA

In *Evangelium Vitae* n. 95 Saint John Paul II wrote:

The purpose of the Gospel, in fact, is to transform humanity from within and to make it new. Like the yeast which leavens the whole measure of dough, the Gospel is meant to permeate all cultures and give them life from within, so that they may express the full truth about the human person and about human life.

That expression is so remarkably close to the writing of Saint Josemaria Escriva that one immediately recognizes a close spiritual fraternity between them. In his homily at the canonization of the Saint, John Paul the Great recalled the words of the newly elevated:

“The ordinary life of a Christian who has faith”, Josemaría Escriva used to say, "when he works or rests, when he prays or sleeps, at all times, is a life in which God is always present" (*Meditations*, 3 March 1954).

The Pope continued, in words that could easily have been those of Saint Josemaria:

This supernatural vision of life unfolds an extraordinarily rich horizon of salvific perspectives, because, even in the only apparently monotonous flow of normal earthly events, God comes close to us and we can cooperate with his plan of salvation.

To elevate the world to God and transform it from within: this is the ideal the holy founder points out to you, dear brothers and sisters, who rejoice today to see him raised to the glory of the altars. He continues to remind you of the need not to let yourselves be frightened by a materialist culture that threatens to dissolve the genuine identity of Christ's disciples. He liked to repeat forcefully that the Christian faith is opposed to conformism and interior inertia.

Following in his footsteps, spread in society the consciousness that we are all called to holiness whatever our race, class, society or age. In the first place, struggle to be saints yourselves.

The *Icon of Saint Josemaria* tells a rich story of the Saint and is accompanied by symbols drawn from his life and message. Saint Josemaria was born in Barbastro, Spain on January 9, 1902. He was ordained deacon on December 20, 1924, and priest on March

28, 1925. He died on June 26, 1975. He was beatified on May 17, 1992 and canonized on October 6, 2002. On October 2, 1928 he founded Opus Dei, a way of sanctification in and through the ordinary pursuits of life: work, family, friendship, and all the innumerable activities embraced by human freedom. He spread this message of holiness to every corner of the globe through tireless apostolic action grounded in a life of prayer and the sacraments.

Do you really want to be a saint? Carry out the little duty of each moment: do what you ought and put yourself into what you are doing.

Josemaria Escriva in [*The Way*](#), n. 815

This image of the saint recalls an unforgettable moment in his life of abandonment to the heart of the Theotokos. On 22 November 1937, amidst the material privations and interior turmoil that accompanied his daring escape for the religious persecutions of the Spanish Civil War, he was assailed by doubts whether he should continue his flight or return to his spiritual children who remained behind. Throughout a sleepless night he prayed through tears, begging our Lord and the Virgin to give him some sign of the will of God. With morning light he ventured from the primitive refuge he shared with some members of Opus Dei to the charred ruins of a small mountain church. There he renewed his plea for a sign, interiorly thinking of a flower or other ornament of the church's destroyed retables. Immediately, at a spot he had looked before, he discovered a gilded rose – The Rose of Rialp – a sure sign to continue his flight across the Pyrenees to Andorra, which he and his companions safely entered on 2 December 1937. The icon shows him cradling the rose with an expression both confident and attentive. The inscription surrounding the image captures Saint Josemaria's exhortation to

holiness through the little duties of each moment: “Sanctify yourself. Sanctify your work. Sanctify others through your work.” The saint’s clothing recalls the white linen garments of the Levitical priesthood, the cranberry cassock proper to the dignity of a Prelate of Honor, and the chasuble and stole of the Latin Church with the distinctive high bared cross within a circle – the seal of Opus Dei: a cross embracing the world. Holding true to the traditional craft of the iconographer, the image is drawn in egg tempera consisting of finely ground dry pigments, egg yolk, and water. Gold leaf representing the realm of the divine and the holiness of the saint is added as background and the halo. Finally, holding firm to the belief in the resurrection of the body, the saint is wearing eyeglasses, a witness to the imperfection that subsists in the mortal remains of the saints until the second and glorious coming again in the Parousia.