

**Homily for the Memorial of Saint Josemaría Escrivá
St. John's Hospital Chapel
Springfield, IL**

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**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here to celebrate the feast day of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei. Today marks the 40th anniversary of his passing from this life to that blessed life in Heaven. We give thanks to God for the great contributions to the Church that he has made through his work on earth, but even more for the great work that he continues to do by interceding for us from his place among the Communion of Saints in glory.

In his address to the pilgrims who had gathered for the canonization of St. Josemaría in Rome on October 7, 2002, Pope St. John Paul II offered a nice summary of the philosophy that guided this great saint in his tireless work for the Church. The Holy Father said the following:

St Josemaría was profoundly convinced that the Christian life entails a mission and an apostolate: we are in the world to save it with Christ. He loved the world passionately, with a "redemptive love" (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 604). Precisely for this reason his

teachings have helped so many ordinary members of the faithful to discover the redemptive power of faith, its capacity to transform the earth.¹

This capacity to transform the earth is not to be found so much in performing extraordinary actions. Rather, it is by doing our ordinary, everyday actions with great love and attention as a way of glorifying God and so inviting Him to multiply the effects of our offerings in the world around us.

St. Josemaría wrote in one of his homilies that “[t]he sanctification of ordinary work is, as it were, the hinge of true spirituality for people who, like us, have decided to come close to God while being at the same time fully involved in temporal affairs.”² The Lord does not invite us to abandon the world in order to sanctify it, but, in harmony with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, he wants us to “work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.”³

We see this in the Gospel passage that we just heard. In this account of the calling of the first disciples, we see Christ calling them in the context of their ordinary occupation as fishermen. Before the Lord came to them, the disciples had experienced disappointing results and were ready to give

up for the night. But Jesus encouraged them to not give up, telling Simon Peter: “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch” (Luke 5:4). Skeptical, yet obedient to the Lord’s command, they did so and experienced an abundant catch.

And even though the Lord would call these disciples from their ordinary lives of catching fish to “catching men” (Luke 5:10), He does not in any way downplay the significance of ordinary work, especially when it is done with an eye toward giving glory to God through that work, thus letting Him multiply what we offer in order to bring about that transformation in the world so that all things, from the ordinary to the extraordinary, are ordered toward Christ and His Kingdom.

Sanctifying our ordinary work is not limited to our professional work and activities. Every aspect of our lives is an opportunity for us to practice that sanctification. With the upcoming Synod of Bishops on the Family in Rome and the World Meeting of Families to be held here in the United States in city of Philadelphia, the Church is inviting us to look at the sanctification of the family as an important aspect of living out our Christian vocation to holiness.

In a recent Wednesday audience, our Holy Father Pope Francis spoke about the importance of the family in Christian life, for Christ Himself chose to come into the world through a family. He invites us to look to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph as a model to imitate. He said the following: "The family of Nazareth urges us to rediscover the vocation and mission of the family, of every family. And, what happened in those 30 years in Nazareth, can thus happen to us too: in seeking to make love and not hate normal, making mutual help commonplace, not indifference or enmity."⁴

He concluded by summarizing that one of the primary missions of the family is to "to make room for Jesus who is coming, to welcome Jesus in the family, in each member: children, husband, wife, grandparents.... Jesus is there. Welcome him there, in order that He grow spiritually in the family."⁵

St. Josemaría, mindful that a majority of Christians live their vocation in the context of marriage and family life, spoke and wrote often about the importance of seeing the family as an aspect of sanctification that should not go overlooked. He wrote the following:

Husband and wife are called to sanctify their married life and to sanctify themselves in it. It would be a serious mistake if they were to exclude family life from their spiritual development. The marriage union, the care and education of children, the effort to provide for the needs of the family as well as for its security and development, the relationships with other persons who make up the community, all these are among the ordinary human situations that Christian couples are called upon to sanctify.⁶

By making reference to other persons of the community, we can understand that the attention given to sanctifying the family has an evangelical character to it as well. Families that are living their vocation rooted in authentic Christian love provide a shining witness for others to see and imitate, just as with of the Holy Family at Nazareth.

In an insightful talk given by the Jesuit priest and theologian, Servant of God Father John Hardon, he spoke about the challenges being faced by Catholic families in the modern world. In that talk, Father Hardon references Pope St. John Paul II who spoke about “the Apostolate of families to families.” This apostolate highlights how the sanctification of the family is not just about individual families, but is about strengthening

and encouraging other families to seek that same sanctity. Father Hardon explained it in this way:

In other words, the sanctification of family life implies two responsibilities, not just one: the personal duty for each Catholic family to grow in holiness, as a family; and the social duty of working, as a family, to help other families to remain alive and to grow, as families, not in spite of but almost because of the demonic opposition from the unbelieving world all around them.⁷

As we celebrate the life and legacy of St. Josemaría today, we ask for his intercession in a particular way for the Church as she works during this year to address and propose solutions to the challenges faced by families in our world today, especially in light of today's tragic Supreme Court decision.⁸ We pray that families will embrace the universal call to holiness together so as to better reflect the perfect communion that exists in the Blessed Trinity, a communion that is not self-contained, but one that reaches out to invite others into that communion of love.

During this Marian Year for the Family in Opus Dei, we also ask Our Blessed Mother, Queen of Families, to intercede for us "that the irreplaceable value of this fundamental cell of society be rediscovered

everywhere.”⁹ May all of our prayers of Marian devotion, which make up an important part of the spiritual norms of Opus Dei, be offered this year so that, “through our Lady, our Lord will pour forth abundant graces for the Church and for society.”¹⁰

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope St. John Paul II, *Address in Praise of St. Josemaría Escrivá – Founder of Opus Dei*, 7 October 2002.

² St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 61.

³ *Lumen Gentium*, §31.

⁴ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 17 December 2014.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 23.

⁷ Father John A. Hardon, SJ, “Catholic Families: Heroic?” Father John A. Hardon, S.J. Archives, The Real Presence Association, www.therealpresence.org

⁸ *Obergefell v. Hodges*, http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf.

⁹ Bishop Javier Echevarría, *Letter from the Prelate*, January 2005, www.opusdei.org.

¹⁰ Bishop Javier Echevarría, *Words for the Convoking of the Marian Year for the Family*, 23 December 2014, www.opusdei.org.