

MASS IN HONOUR OF SAINT JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ

Homily notes of
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The quotation from Saint Josemaría on the printed invitation to today's Mass speaks in simple language about trustingly spending time with the Lord and "talking things over" with him. For Saint Josemaría, holiness is not to be sought in the exotic or the unusual or the complicated, but to be developed within the everyday things which make up our daily life. Simple, trusting intimacy with Jesus is something which we can all achieve within our family and professional life, in good health or in sickness, just as much as within the ordained ministry to which some of us are called.

Pope Francis is strong on the fact that active discipleship of the Church is a responsibility of the entire Church and that we have to avoid an over simplistic compartmentalization of that mission. All of us — ordained and lay — are called to trusting intimacy with the Lord and to become missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

Witnessing to the joy of the Gospel will only be effective if we understand what the Pope also calls "the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing" (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 9). We experience the Joy of the Gospel when we spread the Gospel. You do not spread the Gospel simply through decrying the evils of the world or through spiritual narcissism. We will never understand the joy which springs from the Gospel by just looking into a mirror at ourselves.

Pope Francis stresses again that "those who enjoy life most are those who leave security of the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating that life to others" (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 10).

The chalice that we are using in the celebration of the Eucharist this morning is one which Saint Josemaría donated to the small Opus Dei community here in Ireland back in 1972. It has images of the twelve apostles around the cup and bears as the inscription the words we heard in today's Gospel reading: *Duc in altum*: "Put out into deep water".

Most of us faced with the idea of putting out into deep water become hesitant, afraid to leave the shore, especially if we are effectively being asked to put out into the unknown. Faced with such a situation, all of us become very creative: not creative in an enthusiastic sense, but creative in finding excuses not to do so! There is no way in which we will undertake the risk of putting out into the deep if we start with the attitude that we always know better or that the whole exercise is pointless before the start.

Yet this is what Jesus asks of us daily: to put out into the deep. We are called to bring his name and his message into a world which no longer knows him, maybe even no longer seeks him. And he asks us to do so in a particular way. He does not say to us, go out timidly showing that we are scared or perhaps still unconvinced about the effectiveness of bringing the Gospel to an unwelcoming world. He is telling us to go out into the deep, beaming, to go

out into the unknown showing that the message of Jesus fills us with joy. It fills us with joy because we bear within us “strength, light and consolation born of being friends of Jesus” (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 49).

In a recent Letter to the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, Pope Francis noted: “It does us good to remember that the Church is not an elite of priests, of consecrated men, of bishops, but that everyone forms the faithful Holy People of God.” And he adds critically: “Clericalism forgets that the visibility and sacramentality of the Church belong to all the People of God (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 9-14), not only to the few chosen and enlightened.

The visibility and sacramentality of the Church belong to all the People of God. Pope Francis is very critical of clericalism. But clericalism is not just about a particular style of living among priests. It is a false understanding of the sacramentality of the Church. The Pope then goes on to add that the same false understanding which gives rise to clericalism can also lead to a false understanding of the role of laymen and women: “Without realizing it, we have generated a lay elite, believing that committed lay people are only those who work in the matters ‘of priests’, and we have forgotten, overlooked, the believers who very often burn out their hope in the daily struggle to live the faith.’

Where does this reflection lead us as we try to redefine within the realities of today’s world the essential role of lay men and women in the Church? Our pastoral planning has to be careful that, in rightly stressing the urgent need for priestly vocations, we do not end up in seeking a neo-clerical Church. I sometimes get the impression that there are those who feel that, if we could only manage to increase the numbers of priests, then we could dispense ourselves from fostering deacons or active lay men and women. While recognizing and treasuring the unique calling and mission of priests, we have at the same time to learn more about the call which springs from our baptism and the universal call to holiness which is one of the fundamental — if perhaps oft forgotten — concepts of Vatican II.

The Church needs saints rather than pundits or social commentators. If the Church needs theologians, it needs theologians who are holy. You cannot fathom the mysteries of Jesus without living what those mysteries mean. The universal call to holiness is not a distraction from reflection on the mission of the priests: it is the opposite. Priests find their calling within a community of believers who respond to the call to be God’s Holy People. Difference in ministry is always something mutual and complementary, rather than being in competition or conflict.

What we need is a vibrant affirmation within the entire Church of the “Joy of the Gospel”. A Church which does not at all levels radiate the “Joy of the Gospel” is a Church doomed to stagnation, closed in within an unreal comfort zone, focussed inwards. Such a Church will never truly reach out and embrace the marginalised and bring them and our society towards experiencing the “Joy of the Gospel”. It may seem a paradox, but a without vibrant lay affirmation of the “Joy of the Gospel” we will never produce priestly vocations.

The Joy of the Gospel springs from the fundamental fact that our God is a God of love. “He who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him”. The fundamental unity of all

believers is not a sociological unity. Theological reflection on the Church is not just a sort of sociological analysis of the Church. The fundamental unity is a unity in holiness. The Church is not our creation. We are called into a Church which is holy. We defile the holiness of the Church when we fail in our own holiness. The call to holiness is a call to all to become part of the life of God's Holy People and to witness authentically to that holiness.

The love which should be the mark of the Church springs from a particular style of life. It is not a sort of *do-goodism*, but an ascetical life. The Council stresses: "If charity is to grow and fructify in the soul like a good seed, each of the faithful must willingly hear the Word of God and carry out his will with deeds with the help of his grace: he must frequently partake of the sacraments, chiefly the Eucharist, and take part in the liturgy; he must constantly apply himself to prayer and self-denial, active brotherly service and the practice of all the virtues."

The Council stresses, however, that in responding to this call to holiness, the Christian is not opting out of his or her responsibilities for promoting human progress: "It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love and, by this holiness, a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society."

Saint Josemaría had a special gift in leading men and women into a form of holiness which would become fruitful through a life lived within the realities of daily life. Faith does not detach us from the realities of life. A Christian spirituality of any missionary disciple of Jesus is one in which our ordinary daily commitment in the world is imbued.

I am very pleased to be with all of you who have found strength and support from the spiritual heritage of Saint Josemaría. We thank God that he has allowed us — ordained and lay — to experience trusting intimacy with the Lord, and we ask the Spirit to inspire us to become joyful missionary disciples of Jesus Christ in the world of our times.