

## Homily for June 26<sup>th</sup> 2020

### The Universal Call to Holiness of St Josemaria Escriva

In the reading from 2 Kings we heard of the devastation visited on the city of Jerusalem around the year 587 BC. The Babylonian onslaught was one of such brutality and brought to mind another time when the faithful were subjected to unimaginable assaults. Spain in the 1930s was a country where by 1932 the Jesuits were banned, the nationalisation of virtually all church property happened in 1933, the prohibition of teaching religion in schools, the prohibition of teaching by clergy and the violent persecution beginning in 1934 in Asturias, with the murder of 37 priests, religious and seminarians and the burning of 58 churches. Then when the civil war began in earnest in 1936, the violence consisted of the killing of tens of thousands of people, including 6,832 priests, in the summer of 1936.<sup>1</sup>

It was in the years immediately preceding this terrible persecution that the Lord inspired St. Jose Maria Escriva. On October 2, 1928, while making a retreat in Madrid, God showed him his specific mission: he was to found Opus Dei, an institution within the Catholic Church dedicated to helping people in all walks of life to follow Christ, to seek holiness in their daily life and grow in love for God and their fellow men and women. From that moment on, he dedicated all his strength to fulfilling this mission, certain that God had raised up Opus Dei to serve the Church. In 1930, responding to a new illumination from God, he started Opus Dei's apostolic work with women, making clear that they had the same responsibility as men to serve society and the Church.

Today's Gospel where the Lord heals a leper is an apt text as we honour St Josemaria. For just as the leper was ostracized from his society so too the Catholic Church experienced the same in the Spain of the 1930s. And like the leper, who was to keep the work Jesus did in his life quiet, so too during the years of the Civil War today's saint was in hiding as he continued to develop the purpose and principles of Opus Dei.

Once World War II ended in 1945, what St Josemaria had done in secret to prepare for the public establishing of the Work, began to be realized: so that today, Opus Dei is a world-wide movement with universities, hospitals, schools and residences established in more than 30 countries. Here in Calgary there are two residence, Bowmont for men and Westwood, for women,

The heart of St Josemaria's teaching can be stated this way:

*"The holiness that Our Lord demands of you is to be achieved by carrying out with love of God your work and your daily duties, and these will almost always consist of small realities."*<sup>2</sup>

This sanctification of daily life became known as the universal call to holiness, a theme St John Paul II emphasized at the Mass of Canonization on October 6<sup>th</sup> 2002. In the presence of 300,000 people Holy Father said of St Josemaria in his homily:

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red\\_Terror\\_\(Spain\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Terror_(Spain))

*“St Josemaria was a master in the practice of prayer which he considered to be an extraordinary “weapon” to redeem the world. He always recommended “in the first place prayer: then expiation: in the third place, and very much in the third place, action.” It is not a paradox but a perennial truth: the fruitfulness of the apostolate lies above all in prayer and in an intense and constant sacramental life. This in essence is the secret of the holiness and the true success of the saints. To elevate the world to God and transform it from within this is the ideal the holy founder points out to you. Following in his footsteps spread in society,. whatever our race, class, culture or age the consciousness that we are all called to holiness.”*

The Leper’s cleansing is a biblical precedent for us to embrace the universal call to holiness. For as we cry out: Lord, “if you choose, you can make me clean.” Jesus stretches out his hand to us and says:

“I do choose. Be made clean!”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Mt 8:2–3). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.