

Votive Mass of St. Josemaria Escrivá – June 16, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 7:00pm Mass – 1,100 words

As Pastor and Rector of the Cathedral of Saint Paul, it is my pleasure to welcome you all for this annual celebration in honor of a great saint of modern times, St. Josemaria Escrivá. He has touched the lives of you all and drawn you, by his intercession, toward the spirituality that he was inspired by God to promote: a life of apostleship, striving to inspire the world with Christ's message as faithful people engaged in an active apostolate, carried out in your families, your workplaces, and the world-at-large. He has touched my life as well, for I was fortunate to study canon law at the Pontifical College of the Holy Cross in Rome, founded by Opus Dei and staffed by its priests. And so I consider myself blessed to be able to celebrate this Mass today here with all of you.

The three readings for this liturgical memorial present three main themes for our prayerful reflection: the first reading recalls the beginning of creation and how man was made by God “to cultivate and take care of” the earth; the psalm speaks of the primacy of God over every earthly power; and the gospel tells of the mandate given to the apostles to be “fishers of men” – a mandate which extends to all the baptized, to all the Christian faithful. We can summarize these three themes quite simply: God is over all, and he has given men a mission to care for his creation and for each other, leading the world, ourselves, and each other back to God. And all of this is summed up very well in the concept of “apostolate” that permeates St. Josemaria's writings: each one of us has a mission to undertake in this world; this mission is not only for priests and religious but for lay people as well – it is for all of the Christian faithful.

And so this annual Mass can be, in a way, an examination of conscience for all of us with regard to the apostolate. How am I doing in carrying out the mission that belongs to me to fulfill? It begins, first of all, in our relationship with the Lord: our daily prayer, our worship at Holy Mass at least on Sundays and Holy Days, and our regular reception of the Sacrament of Confession and the other sacraments as needed. From there, it unfolds in the context of our particular states in life, whether as married people, single, or consecrated. We can ask: is my home really a “domestic church”, a place of prayer and worship? Do I seek to be a good steward of the resources that God has given me? Do I teach others to do the same? Then, finally, we look beyond the confines of our particular state in life and our homes, out to the wider world: do I bring the love of Christ and the inspiration of his gospel to the world around me?

June is the month of the Sacred Heart – the human heart of God, the incarnation of his infinite love – and it occurred to me to look for some wisdom from St. Josemaria on this topic. In one of his sermons, he beautifully draws a connection between the love of Christ as revealed in his Sacred Heart and our mission in the world. I quote:

If we begin to understand God's love, we will feel impelled to become increasingly more compassionate, more generous, more dedicated. We must give what we receive, we must teach what we learn. Very simply, without any kind of conceit, we must help others to share in the knowledge of God's love. As you go about your work, doing your job in society, each of you can and should turn your occupation into a real service. Your work should be done well, mindful of others' needs, taking advantage of all advances in technology and culture. [...] Through your work, through the whole network of human relations, you ought to show the charity of Christ and its concrete expression in friendship, understanding, human affection, and peace. Just as Christ “went about doing

good”...,<sup>1</sup> so must you also spread peace in your family circle, in civil society, on the job, and in your cultural and leisure activities. This will be the best proof that the kingdom of God has reached your heart. [...] But no one can live out this love unless he is taught in the school of the heart of Jesus. Only if we watch and contemplate the heart of Jesus will we ensure that our heart is freed from hatred and indifference.<sup>2</sup>

Has the kingdom of God reached our hearts? It will only do so – and do so more fully each day – as we are taught in the school of the heart of Jesus. Let us contemplate and experience the love of his Sacred Heart so that we may be more effective apostles of him in our families and in our world.

We encounter the Sacred Heart in a most profound way in the Holy Eucharist, which I will celebrate for you shortly. Today I do so in the way that St. Josemaria himself preferred, and as is done in so many Opus Dei centers around the world: facing the crucifix, or what we know as “liturgical east”. For the crucifix calls to our sight what we know by faith takes place sacramentally on our altars, and the priest stands at the head of the assembly to bring this holy sacrifice about anew and mediate between God and his assembly. Thus, when I address God I will be turned toward the cross, and when I address you I will turn accordingly. This posture for celebration, known as “ad orientem” (facing east), is still foreseen in the rubrics of the Roman Missal; its abolition in the latter part of the last century came about for ideological reasons, not through any legislation of the Church. Today it is enjoying popular resurgence as we recover some of the elements of our Catholic life and identity that had been rashly and hastily discarded. Pope Francis has celebrated Mass this way in the Sistine Chapel each year of his papacy, and Cardinal Sarah, the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, has recently called for a greater use of this venerable posture. I hope that you will find it meaningful and enriching.

May the love of the Sacred Heart, then, which we encounter especially in the Holy Eucharist, ever fill our hearts; and may we be ever more capable of sharing that love with others. St. Josemaria, pray for us.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 10:38.

<sup>2</sup> A homily given by St Josemaria on 17 June 1966, the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; accessed on June 16, 2017 at <http://www.josemariaescriva.info/article/sacred-heart-of-jesus>.