

Logroño January 18, 2003

"A priest and solely a priest: St. Josemaría, a model of priestly life." An address at an academic ceremony held in honor of St. Josemaría at the Diocesan Seminary of Logroño

I am grateful to my dear brother in the episcopate, Bishop Ramon Búa, for his affectionate invitation to speak to the Rioja clergy. He suggested that I speak about the call to holiness in the priestly ministry, in light of the example and teachings of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, recently canonized by Pope John Paul II, and I do so with great joy.

Indeed to evoke the figure and teachings of this holy priest is a very great joy for me. If, in addition, those listening to me are priests, my joy is multiplied, because I know very well the deep love, even more, the veneration, that the founder of Opus Dei had for his brothers in the priesthood. How much he enjoyed having a chance to spend time with them. He learned from all of them and, to those who asked him, he was happy to open his heart and speak about the great loves in his life: Christ and Mary, the Church and the Pope, and all souls. He used to say that, on these occasions, he felt like someone who was coming to sell honey to the beekeeper. But his honey was of such quality that those who listened to him left with renewed desires to be faithful to their vocation, their soul overflowing with optimism, deter-

mined to spend themselves joyfully in their pastoral and apostolic tasks.

Identity of the priest

I will begin my talk with some words that St. Josemaría often addressed to newly ordained priests, but that can be useful—perhaps even more so—when we have spent many years as priests: “Be first of all, priests; second, priests; always and in everything, only priests.” This affirmation reflects his very high concept of the ministerial priesthood, by which some poor men (and that is what we all are before our Lord) are constituted ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God (*1 Cor 4:1*). So firm was his faith in the sacramental identification with Christ that is carried out in the sacrament of Holy Orders, that his only claim to merit, besides which all other honors on earth pale, was simply that of being a priest of Jesus Christ.

The saints, from earliest times, have emphasized the dignity of the priesthood. A number of Popes, among whom I expressly mention St. Pius X, St. Pius XI and the present Roman Pontiff, have written unforgettable documents that have nourished and continue to nourish our priestly life. St. Josemaría has also left us his teaching on the priest's dignity. In a homily from 1973, when confused voices were being raised about the identity of the priest and the value of the ministerial priesthood, he summed up his thoughts in the following words: “Here we have the priest's identity: he is a direct and

daily instrument of the saving grace which Christ has won for us. If you grasp this, if you meditate on it in the active silence of prayer, how could you ever think of the priesthood in terms of renunciation? It is a gain, an incalculable gain. Our mother Mary, the holiest of creatures—only God is holier—brought Jesus Christ into the world just once; priests bring him on earth, to our soul and body, every day: Christ comes to be our food, to give us life, to be, even now, a pledge of future life.”¹

When those of us at his side asked him about how his priestly vocation came about, he always pointed to God’s initiative, who sought him out when he was fifteen or sixteen years old. As you know very well, it was in Logroño, in December of 1917 or January of 1918, where he had his first presentiments—his first “inklings,” as he used to say—that God was calling him to something that he didn’t as yet know of. He had never thought of becoming a priest. But sensing God’s impetus, and seeking to prepare himself better to fulfill God’s will, he decided to enter the seminary. In all truth he could say, as the years went by, that the impulse for his priestly vocation had been “a call from God, an inkling of love, the falling in love by a boy of fifteen or sixteen years of age.”²

He received his first priestly formation in the seminary of Logroño, and later completed it in Saragossa. God wanted the seed that he was going

to cast upon the earth on October 2, 1928, to find a priestly heart deeply prepared to receive it and make it bear fruit. This is why, with gratitude to our Lord, St. Josemaría said that his vocation was, let me insist, that of being a priest, only a priest, always a priest. He loved madly this gift that, by configuring him with Christ, had prepared him to be an instrument in God’s hands for the founding of Opus Dei.

A gift and a task

It used to be that when listing the conditions necessary for candidates to the priesthood, it was prescribed that they had to be chosen from among men who led an “honest life.” This formulation, minimalist and now antiquated, seemed very poor to St. Josemaría. “We understand, with the entire tradition of the Church,” he wrote in 1945, “that the priesthood demands—because of the sacred functions that belong to it—something more than an honest life. It demands a holy life in those who exercise it, constituted, as they are, as mediators between God and men.”³

Josemaría Escrivá received a deeply Christian formation in his family and at school, which instilled knowledge of doctrine, the frequenting of the sacraments, and a concern for the spiritual and material needs of those around him, as witnesses of that period have stressed. When he received God’s call to the priesthood, his life made a radical change in the sense that the intensity and

1. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Homily “A priest forever,” April 13, 1973.

2. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Notes taken during a family get-together, March 28, 1966.

3. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter February 2, 1945*, no. 4.

frequency of his contacts with God and his apostolic concern for others increased. This led him to a maturity beyond his years. Those words from Sacred Scripture were fulfilled in his life: *super senes intellexi quia mandata tua servavi*.⁴ I have acquired greater prudence than the elders because I have faithfully fulfilled your commandments. Right from those first “inklings,” the adolescent Josemaría began to take holiness seriously, diligently striving to know and fulfill God’s will.

In chapter five of the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council points to the vocation of all the baptized to holiness: “The followers of Christ, called by God not in virtue of their works but by his design and grace, and justified in the Lord Jesus, have been made sons of God in the baptism of faith and partakers of the divine nature, and so are truly sanctified. They must therefore hold on to and perfect in their lives that sanctification which they have received from God.”⁵

As members of Christ’s Mystical Body, into which we have been incorporated by Baptism, we have all been truly sanctified. We bear in ourselves the seed and beginning of the new life that Christ gained for us through his death and resurrection. Baptismal consecration is the foundation of the call to sanctity in all walks of life. Thus, given the absolute gratuity of what we have received,

holiness is clearly seen as a gift. It is an unmerited gift that God our Father grants us in Christ through the Holy Spirit. At the same time, holiness is a personal call, a task that is entrusted to the responsibility of every Christian. As St. Josemaría said, it is the task of a lifetime.⁶

Sanctity then is a gift and a task. It is the gratuitous gift that we can never merit and, at the same time, a task that has to be carried out by personal effort with heroic correspondence in a truly committed Christian life.

Priestly holiness as a gift

Since all the baptized, priests and laity, share one and the same radical condition, all are called equally to the fullness of Christian life. “There is no such thing as second-class holiness. Either we put up a constant fight to stay in the grace of God and imitate Christ, our Model, or we desert in that divine battle. God invites everyone; each person can become holy in his own state in life.”⁷

Here we come to one of the fundamental intuitions that St. Josemaría Escrivá preached, by divine will, from 1928 on. On founding Opus Dei, our Lord showed him that everyone has to strive to become holy in his own state in life, in the life to which he has been called, in his own work and through his own work, according to that well known expression of St. Paul: *unusquisque, in*

4. Ps 118/119:100.

5. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 40.

6. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, no. 285.

7. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Homily “A priest forever,” April 13, 1973.

qua vocatione vocatus est, in ea permaneat (1 Cor 7:20).

Holiness in priests and in lay people is built, therefore, on the same foundation: the original consecration imparted by Baptism and perfected by Confirmation. Nevertheless, it is evident that the duty of seeking holiness is especially urgent in the case of the priest, who has "been chosen from among men and is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" (*Heb 5:1*).

"Constantly in contact with the holiness of God," John Paul II has written, "the priest must himself become holy. His very ministry commits him to a way of life inspired in the radicalism of the Gospel."⁸ And he adds in his book *Gift and Mystery*: "While the Second Vatican Council speaks of the universal call to holiness, in the case of the priest we must speak of a special call to holiness. Christ needs holy priests! Today's world demands holy priests! Only a holy priest can become, in an increasingly secularized world, a resounding witness to Christ and his gospel. And only thus can a priest become a guide for men and women and a teacher of holiness."⁹

The priest has been doubly consecrated by God: in Baptism, as all Christians, and in the sacrament of Holy Orders. Therefore, although we cannot speak of first or second class holiness, because all are called to be

perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (cf. *Mt 5:48*), there is no doubt that the duty of striving for perfection falls in a special way on priests. Let us reread some words of the founder of Opus Dei that are especially clear in this regard. "All of us Christians can and should be not just other Christs, alter Christus, but Christ himself: *ipse Christus!* But in the priest this happens in a direct way, by virtue of the sacrament."¹⁰

In the exercise of the ministry for which he has been ordained, the priest is nourished by his spiritual life, which enkindles God's love in him. Therefore it would be a grave mistake to allow other aspirations or tasks to blur in his soul what, for him, is a clear path for attaining holiness: the careful and loving celebration of the Mass; the preaching of the Word of God; the administration of the sacraments to the faithful, especially that of Penance; a life of constant prayer and cheerful penance; the care for souls entrusted to him, together with the thousand and one services that a vigilant charity is able to detect.

From the moment he perceived his call to the priesthood, and more explicitly from the moment he was ordained as a priest, St. Josemaría wanted to identify himself with Christ, to be Christ himself, in the exercise of his priestly ministry and in his whole life. Hence his life of prayer, his attentive celebration of Mass, his "need" to spend long periods before the tabernacle; and hence

8. Pope John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*.

9. *Ibid.*

10. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Homily "A priest forever," April 13, 1973.

also his sense of urgency to seek out souls to lead them, in Christ, along paths of sanctity. He understood that one can and ought to live in a holy way in all states of life, and specifically in that of marriage. Therefore, from his earliest years as a pastor, besides leading many people along the path of apostolic celibacy taken up with true joy, he encouraged many others to discover the dignity of a vocation to marriage.

Pope John Paul II wrote to priests: "In the words *mysterium fidei* we find ever more each day the meaning of our own priesthood. Here is the measure of the gift which is the priesthood, and here is also the measure of the response which this gift demands. The gift is constantly growing! And this is something wonderful. It is wonderful that a man can never say that he has fully responded to the gift. It remains both a gift and a task: always! To be conscious of this is essential if we are to live our own priesthood to the full."¹¹

St. Josemaría Escrivá celebrated Holy Mass each day with a lover's passion, with the vivid awareness that "the sacrament of Orders, in effect, equips the priest to lend our Lord his voice, his hands, his whole being."¹² Listen to his description, during a family get-together, of the mysterious eclipse that takes place during those moments of the human personality of the priest, who becomes a living instrument of God:

"When I come to the altar, my first thought is: Josemaría, you are not Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, you are Christ. All of us priests are Christ. I lend our Lord my voice, my hands, my body, my soul; I give him everything. It is He who says: this is my Body, this is my Blood, it is He who consecrates. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to do it. There the divine Sacrifice of Calvary is renewed in an unbloody manner. I am there in persona Christi, taking the place of Christ. The priest disappears as a specific person: Father Peter, Father Paul, Father Josemaría.... No sir! It is Christ."¹³

Priestly holiness as a task

The incomparable greatness of the priest is based on his sacramental identification with Christ, which leads him to be *ipse Christus* and to act in persona Christi capitis, above all in the Eucharistic celebration and in the ministry of reconciliation. "It is a greatness which is on loan," wrote St. Josemaría, "completely compatible with my own littleness. I pray to God our Lord to give all of us priests the grace to perform holy things in a holy way, to reflect in every aspect of our lives the wonders of the greatness of God."¹⁴

Every Catholic has to try to ensure that all his conduct reveals that he is a follower of Christ: in his family, his profession, his social or recreational activity. The priest's daily life too has to make clear that he belongs to Christ. By the indelible

11. Pope John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*.

12. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Homily "A priest forever," April 13, 1973.

13. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Notes taken during a family get-together, May 10, 1974.

14. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Homily "A priest forever," April 13, 1973.

character received at ordination, he is a priest twenty-four hours a day, not only in moments when he is expressly exercising his ministry. We must keep this very much in mind today, when our multi-cultural and multi-religious society is dispensing with so many signs that reminded people in the past of the primacy of God and of the supernatural life. I do not say this with pessimism, but with the intention that all of us should strive to ensure that the Christian roots of our people are not lost, that they are manifested in pious traditions, in culture, art and customs.

The priest has to reach the goal of sanctity on an inclined plane, as it were, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, who is the one who molds the features of Jesus Christ in his adoptive children. In this process, which lasts a lifetime, together with the supernatural action of grace, each person's docile response is decisive.

It is impossible to attain holiness without an effort to practice the virtues, without the daily struggle to grow in them. The virtuous habits on which the priest's holiness rests are no different than those of the other faithful, since we are all called to the same goal, union with God, and we all have the same means to attain this goal. The difference is based on the way of exercising these virtues. In the priest, everything should be done in a priestly way, that is, always keeping present the purpose of his specific vocation, the service of souls. We have to follow our Lord's example,

who said of himself: *Pro eis ego sanctifico meipsum, ut sint et ipsi sanctificati in veritate (Jn 17:19).*

Human virtues of the priest

Using the metaphor of construction—an image with Biblical roots—the first thing that one looks for is solid ground. Christ himself alluded to this need, at the conclusion of his Sermon on the Mount, when he praised the prudent man who built his house on rock, so that when the wind and rain came the building stood firm (cf. *Mt 7:24-25*).

In the Christian's spiritual life, the solid ground of the spiritual edifice is made up of the human virtues, for grace always builds on nature. We mustn't forget that the priest does not cease to be man when he receives ordination. On the contrary, precisely because he has been taken from among men and made a mediator between God and men (cf. *Heb 5:10*), he must be careful about his human preparation, which enables him to serve souls better.

"This formation," writes Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, "includes all the human virtues which are integrated directly or indirectly in the four cardinal virtues, and the non-ecclesiastical culture which is indispensable to enable the priest to exercise his apostolate effectively—helped, of course, by grace."¹⁵ My predecessor as head of the Prelature of Opus Dei emphasized the principal reasons why a priest needs to acquire and

15. Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, *Escritos sobre el sacerdocio*, 6th ed., Rialp 1991, p. 23.

develop these virtues: "First, as part of the ascetical struggle normally needed to attain perfection; second, as a means to exercise the apostolate with greater efficacy."¹⁶

In St. Josemaría's life, the witnesses to his pastoral work agree in describing him as a priest in love with Jesus Christ, dedicated to the service of souls, with a strong and harmonious personality, in which the human and the supernatural virtues fused tightly in a unity of life. His homily entitled "Human Virtues," included in the book "Friends of God", shows the theological foundation for the need to cultivate human virtues: the deep reality of the incarnation of the Word, perfect Man without ceasing to be perfect God. The homily analyzes the principal virtues that a Christian and a priest should cultivate: courage, serenity, patience, laboriousness, order, diligence, veracity, love for freedom, sobriety, temperance, daring, magnanimity, loyalty, optimism, cheerfulness.

Founded on humility.

"Humility is the foundation of our life, the means and precondition for being effective,"¹⁷ wrote St. Josemaría, in harmony with the spiritual tradition of Christianity. Clearly he is referring here to the moral foundation, since the theological foundation—as he preached with his life and his words—is centered on theological faith, which leads us to deeply

consider our divine filiation in Christ. This conviction makes clear the deepest truth about ourselves and, therefore, necessarily strengthens our humility, which is nothing other than "walking in truth," as St. Teresa said: walking in the faith.

By cultivating a strong faith, one avoids the error of presenting humility as a lack of decisiveness or initiative, the renunciation of rights that are duties. There is nothing further from the thought of the founder of Opus Dei. "Being humble," he preached on one occasion, "is not going about dirty, or neglectful; nor does it mean being indifferent to all that is going on around us, in a continual ceding of rights. Much less is it saying stupid things against oneself. There can't be any humility where there is a theatrical pose and hypocrisy, because humility is truth."¹⁸

So important is this virtue in a Christian's life that St. Josemaría assured us: "just as one puts salt on food so that it doesn't taste bland, so in our lives we always have to apply humility."¹⁹ And he used a classic comparison: "Don't be like those hens who, when they have managed to lay just a single egg, go around the whole house clucking. You have to carry out your intellectual or manual work, which is always apostolic, with big intentions and desires, which our Lord will transform into realities, seeking to serve God and pass unnoticed."²⁰

16. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

17. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Letter March 24, 1930, no. 20.

18. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Notes taken during a meditation, December 25, 1972.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

But let us return to the theological foundation, faith, and along with faith, hope: there is no holiness if one's faith is not growing to embrace all reality, if one does not foster, as the motive for one's earthly journey, the virtue of hope. From the first moment, the founder of Opus Dei fully realized that the mission God had entrusted to him far exceeded his own strength. This is why he always had insistent recourse to the only means for placing divine omnipotence within our grasp: prayer and sacrifice. Innumerable testimonies exist documenting how he went around begging, in the hospitals and poor districts of Madrid, as though it were a treasure, for the prayers and offering of their sufferings to God by many abandoned people, to whom he brought the consolation and encouragement of his priestly assistance.

What a great need we priests have for an ever stronger faith and hope! We are involved in work where the only thing absolutely necessary (cf. *Lk* 10:42) is employing the supernatural means. True miracles are needed to lead souls to God. Nevertheless, "you hear people saying sometimes that there are fewer miracles nowadays. Might it not rather be that there are fewer people living a life of faith."²¹ St. Josemaría's words should be a wake-up call to our sense of responsibility, because the priest has to be, before all else, a man of faith and hope. "Through faith," writes the Pope, "he attains the invisible goods that constitute the heritage of the

redemption of the world carried out by the Son of God."²²

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (*Heb* 11:1). And it is in "the persevering prayer of each day, whether done with ease or with dryness, where priests, like all Christians, receive from God...new light, firmness in faith, a sure hope in the supernatural efficacy of their pastoral work, renewed love. In a word, the stimulus to persevere in their work and the root of the effectiveness of the work itself."²³ In these words of Bishop del Portillo, the founder of Opus Dei's closest collaborator for many years, we can detect an allusion to the spiritual life of St. Josemaría, who received from God the grace to be a contemplative in the midst of the most absorbing tasks. Don Alvaro adds: "Without prayer, a prayer that strives to be continuous in the midst of all one's activities, there is no identification with Christ...a priest who doesn't pray, if he doesn't falsify the image that he gives of Christ, the model for all, presents it as something nebulous that neither attracts nor orients, that fails to serve as a compass to the people who see us or hear us."²⁴

Pastoral charity

We thus arrive at the central virtue of Christian life, charity. In the case of the priest, this virtue takes on the specific contours of pastoral charity, stemming from his awareness of being

21. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, no. 190.

22. Pope John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*.

23. Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, *Escritos sobre el sacerdocio*, 6th ed., Rialp 1991, pp. 188.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

a representative of Christ, the supreme pastor (cf. 1 *Pet* 5:4) of souls, who has given his life for his sheep (cf. *Jn* 10:11). This supernatural conviction has to impel the priest to spend himself in the exercise of his ministry, urged on by the charity of Christ (cf. 2 *Cor* 5:14). Pastoral charity, nourished deeply by the Eucharist and by prayer, will ensure that a priest's ministry bears fruit.

The figure of St. Josemaría provides us with a marvelous example in this respect. From the first moments of his vocation, he spared himself no effort in his service to souls. I have already alluded briefly to his visits to the poorest districts of Madrid back in the 1920's and 30's, in constant contact with poverty and sickness, caring for the dying, comforting the sick, teaching children and adults Christian doctrine. I can assure you, because I saw it with my own eyes, that he spent himself in that way for the rest of his life, always concerned about the others, both those near and far, known and unknown. He prayed and sacrificed himself gladly for all souls, without exception.

God's special assumption of the person of the priest, which takes place at ordination, integrally consecrates him to the service and total love of Christ. So rich and extensive is this gift that a priest can make his own, in a particularly profound sense, the words of St. Paul: *mibi vivere Christus est* (*Phil* 1:21), *vivo autem iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus* (*Gal* 2:20). Therefore, the mission he has re-

ceived is universal in scope. A priest is sent out to the whole world, as a living instrument of Christ "who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (*Tit* 2:14).

Sacramental identification with Christ, together with the mission received, are the source of the special demands of pastoral charity, and place the priest in a special situation in the mystery of Christ and the Church. Commenting on the doctrinal deepening of this point by the Second Vatican Council, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo wrote: "If one considers that the incarnate Love who came to mankind avoided any kind of human attachment, no matter how good and noble, that might restrict his full ministerial dedication, one can readily understand why the priest should do the same, freely renouncing, through celibacy, something which is good and holy, in order to unite himself more easily to Christ with his whole heart, and for Him and in Him, dedicate himself with greater freedom to the untiring service of God and men."²⁵

Priestly celibacy is a manifestation of the complete offering of one's life, which the priest freely makes to God and to the Church. Seen in this light, it is easy to understand St. Josemaría's words spoken in a family conversation back in 1969. "A priest, if he has a true priestly spirit, if he is a man with interior life, can never feel alone. No one's heart can be more in love than

25. Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, *Escritos sobre el sacerdocio*, 6th ed., Rialp 1991, pp. 84-85.

his. He is a man of Love, the representative among men of Love made man. He lives by Christ, for Christ, with Christ and in Christ. This is a divine reality that moves me deeply when, every day, holding the Chalice and the Sacred Host in my hand and raising them, I slowly repeat those words from the Canon, savoring them: *Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso et in Ipso...* My life is through Him, with Him, in Him, for Him and for souls. I live through his Love and for his Love, in spite of my personal miseries. And in spite of these miseries, perhaps because of them, my love is a love that is renewed each day."²⁶

Priestly fraternity

Loving all souls without exception, St. Josemaría had a special love for his brother priests. I have already alluded to his joy when he was able to have a get-together with them, seeking to learn from their dedication, so often heroic, and transmit to them at the same time some of his personal experience. But I can't fail to recall his special concern for priests, especially during the years that he lived in Spain. In the decade of the forties, for example, at the petition of diocesan bishops, he preached many retreats for the clergy, so in need of spiritual assistance after the terrible trial of the religious persecution of the previous years. St. Josemaría gave himself wholeheartedly to that task, sometimes assisting more than a thousand priests in a single year.

Right to the end of his life, he urgently begged God to send many

priestly vocations to the Church. He personally prepared and sent to the seminaries a large number of young men with a vocation to the priesthood. And he urged the laity to pray with insistence to the Lord of the harvest, asking that he send many workers into his field (cf. *Mt* 9:37-38). For St. Josemaría, the pulse of the supernatural vitality of a diocese was measured by the number of priestly vocations, for whom the primary responsibility fell on the priests themselves.

How sad he was when he met someone who showed no concern for this task. For he saw this lack of concern as a clear sign that the priest himself was not happy with his call. On one occasion, when asked about the reason for the scarcity of vocations for the seminaries, he answered: "Perhaps the first reason is that often we priests do not fully value the treasure that we hold in our hands, and therefore we fail to enkindle young people with the desire to possess this treasure themselves. Seminaries would be full, if we loved our priesthood more deeply."²⁷

He showed a great concern to do everything possible to foster the sanctity of the clergy. The first apostolate of priests, he would insist, has to be with their brother priests: not leaving them alone in their anxieties, sharing in their joys, encouraging them in their difficulties, strengthen them in moments of doubt. Engraved with fire on his heart were those words from Sacred Scripture: *frater, qui adiuvatur a fratre, quasi civitas firma* (Prov 18:19), a brother who is helped by his brothers is as strong as a walled city.

26. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Notes taken during a family get-together, April 10, 1969.

27. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Notes taken during a get-together with priests, November 3, 1972.

So intense was his zeal to help his brothers in the priesthood, that in 1950, when Opus Dei had already received the definitive approval of the Holy See, he considered dedicating himself fully to diocesan priests. When he had already offered our Lord the sacrifice of Abraham—for he had decided to leave the Work, if this were necessary—God showed him that this sacrifice wasn't necessary. There was a place for diocesan priests in the spirit of Opus Dei, which teaches Christians to sanctify themselves in the midst of the world, each in his own occupation or task. In full communion with their own ordinary and the presbytery of their diocese, they could seek sanctity in the exercise of their ministerial duties, having a special veneration for their diocesan bishop and closely united with their brothers in the

priesthood. The doors of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, to which the clergy incardinated in Opus Dei already belonged, were opened wider to give access to diocesan priests who received this specific divine calling.

Today, in this land of Rioja, where the work of Opus Dei has been fully integrated in the diocese for many years, I raise my heart in gratitude to the Blessed Trinity for the plentiful fruit that the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross has produced and continues to produce, in service to the universal Church and to the local churches. All of this is the result of the grace that God grants through his Blessed Mother, a grace to which St. Josemaría corresponded fully eighty-five years ago, when, right here in Logroño, he received the call to the priesthood.