

Homily at Mass in honour of St Josemaría Escrivá

Fr Justin Gillespie, Opus Dei's Regional Vicar for Ireland

Our Lady Queen of Peace, Merrion Rd,

30 June 2018

We have just heard Jesus tell us, with authority, to not be afraid.

Let's savour those words; let them sink into our souls. If we do, since all Scripture is alive and speaks in the present moment, we might also discover within those words, Jesus is telling us even more: *"Do not be discouraged, or confused. Resist the urge to blame or to accuse. Be filled with the certainty of hope. This is my world. I am here. Work with me."*

He would be telling us this, perhaps, because these past months have been intense. There have been days that were deeply painful and indeed even bewildering.

But as we hear Jesus' strong command to not fear, how might we think about the future God is calling us to? How can we think about it with faith and with hope?

Fifty years ago, a young German theologian was asked a similar question in a long radio interview. His name was Joseph Ratzinger, and he spoke of the future with a prophetic force and clarity that can help us pray today.

His answer was long and nuanced, but I would like only to read part of it; the part that I think can help us to rediscover how our moment needs St Josemaría's intercession, example, and teaching.

"The future of the Church can and will come from people whose roots are deep and who live from the pure fullness of their faith. It will not come from those who accommodate themselves merely to the passing moment or from those who merely criticise others and assume that they themselves are infallible measuring sticks; nor will it come from those who take the easier road, who sidestep the passion of faith, declaring false and obsolete, tyrannous and legalistic, all that makes demands upon men, that makes demands of them and compels them to sacrifice themselves. To put this more positively: The future of the Church, once again as always, will be reshaped by saints, by people, that is, whose minds probe deeper than the slogans of the day, who see more than others see, because their lives embrace a wider reality.

Let us go a step farther. From the crisis of today, the Church of tomorrow will emerge — a Church that has lost much. She will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning. She will no longer be able to inhabit many of the buildings she built in times of prosperity. As the number of her adherents diminishes, so it will lose many of her social privileges. In contrast to an earlier age, it will be seen much more as a voluntary society, entered only by free decision. As a small society, it will make much bigger demands on the initiative of her individual members...

It will be hard going for the Church...but when the trial of this sifting is past, a great power will flow from a more spiritualised and simplified Church.

Men in a totally planned world will find themselves unspeakably lonely.

If they have completely lost sight of God, they will feel the whole horror of their poverty.

Then they will discover the little flock of believers as something wholly new.

They will discover it as a hope that is meant for them, an answer for which they have always been searching in secret.

And so it seems certain to me that the Church is facing very hard times. The real crisis has scarcely begun. We will have to count on terrific upheavals.

But I am equally certain about what will remain at the end: not the Church of the political cult, which is dead already, but the Church of faith.

It may well no longer be the dominant social power to the extent that she was until recently; but it will enjoy a fresh blossoming and be seen as people's home, where they will find life and hope beyond death.”¹

Perhaps it was in view of a future such as this, that God raised up St Josemaría as a messenger and a witness. I'd like to suggest how his message and his witness speak particularly to our circumstances here, as this future envisioned fifty years ago, seems to be taking shape all around us.

I believe that if he were here, St Josemaría would speak to us lovingly and encouragingly. But precisely because he would be loving, and not trying to be “nice”, he would challenge us.

Energetically he would call out to us:

“The time for being passive is over!

You are loved by God more than your wildest imaginings! If you are certain of that love, you will tap into a hope that makes you free - a force more powerful than anything this world can offer.

Wake up to this; let Him love you and forgive you.

And stop waiting for others to bring about change, to reconcile the world to God, thereby making it a home for all of us.”

That's what I imagine him saying. This is what he actually said:

“A passive Christian has failed to understand what Christ wants from all of us. A Christian who goes his own way, unconcerned about the salvation of others, does not love with the heart of Jesus.

Apostolate is not a mission reserved for the hierarchy, priests and religious. The Lord calls all of us to be, with our example and word, instruments of the stream of grace which springs up to eternal life.”

But am I sure that I understand the opposite of passive?

For a Christian, the opposite of passive is being a Christian who is free. She is free because she knows herself loved. She has discovered that everything she does is actually an invitation to love Jesus back and to share that love with others. This means that she does not passively wait for Church structures to “do something”, or for her friends to be more religious like herself, making it easier and more comfortable to let herself be known.

She is free with the freedom of Christ and, one by one, she lets her friendship and her example disclose a new possibility to the people she encounters - the possibility that the Catholic faith is actually a source of transformation and of joy.

Perhaps for someone, this emphasis on love and on feeling oneself loved may sound soft, and even seem simplistic. Surely, he might think, dire circumstances call for more.

¹ This interview is reprinted in “Faith and the Future”, Joseph Ratzinger, Ignatius Press, 2009. Here I have edited out parts due to time constraints.

But the love we speak of is Jesus'. It is divine. It is stronger than death itself. It is the source of all being.

"I'm not speaking about imaginary ideals," St Josemaría once said. "I'm speaking about a very concrete reality, that is of primary importance; something capable of changing the most pagan environment, of opening the most hostile environment to the demands of God, just like what happened at the very beginning of our faith".

I'd like to recall part of Ratzinger's prophecy, because I think St Josemaría is eagerly praying for us so that we might actively address it.

"In a totally planned world," Ratzinger said, "men will find themselves unspeakably lonely. If they have completely lost sight of God, they will feel the whole horror of their poverty."

This horror is real; the loneliness too. We are not trying to be "right" or to win any sort of culture war. In fact, to engage in such a war, for a Christian, is to have already lost. We are trying - in spite of our own sinfulness and incompetence - to free others from that horror, from that loneliness. But we must strive to be free from it ourselves!

So today, let us react and reject any tendency to passivity, because with St Paul we say, ***"the love of Christ compels us!"*** It compels us not only to listen, to forgive, and to learn from those who think and believe very differently from us; it also compels us to love our sisters and our brothers in the faith even more. Solemnly and clearly, Jesus has told us: ***"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"***. This must be true first and foremost amongst ourselves as believers

St Josemaría echoes these words when he tells us: ***"The principal apostolate we Christians must carry out in the world, and the best witness we can give of our faith, is to help bring about a climate of genuine charity within the Church. For who indeed could feel attracted to the Gospel if those who say they preach the Good News do not really love one another, but spend their time attacking one another, spreading slander, and quarrelling?"***²

Today as we ask St Josemaría to pray for us, let us ask very specifically that we receive the grace we need to be awake, fully alive. Alive to the world around us and to the vocation that we have received to be light and leaven in the middle of it.

We know how all of this ends: it ends in the joy of God. May this certain knowledge of faith drive out fear and passivity. May it awaken in you and in me the creativity and initiative that will surely be the hallmark of the Church in Ireland for decades to come.

² St Josemaría Escrivá, Friends of God, no. 226