

ONE SECOND OF OCTOBER

(Extract from a meditation given by Saint Josemaria in Rome on 2 October 1962, on the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels and an anniversary of the foundation of Opus Dei in 1928.)

... Lord, many years have passed since you began to show yourself to my soul. I was fifteen or sixteen when I felt those first impulses of your Love.

After I resisted a lot through laziness and through cowardice – I have often said so and I have asked my children for forgiveness – the Work burst into the world on that 2nd of October 1928.

Help me to thank our Lord and to ask him never to let the trust and the love I feel for him – that easy conversation with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – grow cold, no matter how great my frailty and wretchedness. Let it be seen – without drawing attention, not only outside, but also inside – and never let me lose this clarity, this conviction of being a poor man: *pauper servus et humilis!*¹ This is what I have always been; from the first to the last moment of my life I will be in need of God's mercy.

... Only I know how we began: without any human resources. All I had was God's grace, my own twenty-six years, and a sense of humour. But once again the parable of the small seed has been fulfilled. We must be very grateful to our Lord. Since then time has passed and he has confirmed us in faith, granting us all we saw then and much more besides. Looking at this wonderful reality all over the world – a reality that is like an army in battle array for peace, for good, for joy, for the glory of God – looking at this divine work of men and women in such different situations, laymen and priests, in a marvellous expansion that must necessarily meet hardship now and then because we are always beginning, we must lovingly bow our heads, turn to God and thank him. And we must also turn to our Mother in heaven who right from the start has always been present in the history of the Work.

We must always smile. We must smile in the midst of the hardship of some circumstances, saying to our Lord: *gratias tibi, Deus, gratias tibi!*² Make use of these moments of prayer to take a glance around the world and see how things are going. We must practise charity, propel things forward, give people formation. As I was saying, take a quick look around all the Regions. Pause especially in that Region which ought to be more in your heart, pause with acts of thanksgiving, with your prayer, set the Guardian Angels in motion,

¹ *A poor and humble servant.*

² *Thanks be to you, O God, thanks be to you.*

Under the protection of the Angels

... For years I have felt the constant, immediate help of the Guardian Angel, even in the smallest material details. This relationship and this devotion to the holy Guardian Angels is second nature to us. It is a specific expression of the supernatural mission of the work of God. *Gratias tibi, Deus; gratias tibi, Sancta Maria Mater nostra!* And thank you, Guardian Angels: *Defendite nos in proelio, Sancti Angeli Custodes nostri.*³

Father, did the Work really begin on the 2nd of October 1928? Yes, my son, it began on the 2nd of October 1928. From that moment on I never had a moment's 'peace,' and I began to work, reluctantly, because I hesitated to throw myself into founding anything. But I began to work, to get moving, to start things rolling: to lay the foundations.

I began to work, and it wasn't easy. Souls escaped from me like eels in water. Besides, there was the most dreadful lack of understanding, because ideas which nowadays are readily accepted everywhere were not so at the time. And if anyone says otherwise he doesn't know what he's talking about.

And I repeat, I was twenty-six years old, I had God's grace and a sense of humour, nothing more. But just as we men write with a pen, our Lord writes with a table-leg, so it can be seen that it is he who writes. That is what is so incredible; that is what is so wonderful. The whole theological and ascetical doctrine had to be created, and all the juridical doctrine too. I found a gap of centuries, there was nothing. From a human point of view the whole Work was crazy. That is why some people said I was mad or was a heretic, and many other things besides.

Our Lord so arranged things that I hadn't even a penny to call my own, so that it could also be seen in this way that it was his doing. How I caused my own relations to suffer! It is only fitting that I should mention my parents. They bore so much humiliation so happily and lovingly! It was necessary to crush me, as wheat is ground to make flour before becoming bread. That is why our Lord hurt those who were dearest to me. Thank you, Lord! Because this oven full of wonderful bread is already spreading the *aroma of Christ*⁴ all over the world. Thank you, for the thousands of souls who glorify you all over the earth. Because they are all yours.

Desire for holiness

We come to the third point of our meditation; and here I am not going to be the one to propose specific considerations. It is up to you to look at yourselves, since our Lord has chosen us for the same purpose and this whole universal marvel has been born in you and me. This is the moment

³ *Defend us in battle, our Holy Guardian Angels.*

⁴ *2 Cor 2:15*

when each person must look at himself to see if he is or is not the instrument God wishes. This is something very personal and intimate which you have to undertake with God.

Be convinced, my sons, that the only way is the way of holiness; in the midst of our failings – I have many – we ask for forgiveness with all our soul. And in spite of these failings you are contemplative souls. That is how I understand it: I don't only look at your defects, for that's something we fight against constantly, seeking God our Lord and his Blessed Mother, trying to do the Norms [the practices of piety] I have laid down for you. We feel the need to have recourse to God and to our holy Mother Mary and have a constant conversation with them. Isn't this the way contemplative souls behave? When I woke up this morning I realized you would expect me to say a few words and I felt so ashamed I must have blushed. Then turning to God in my heart, seeing there is still so much to do, and thinking about you as well, I was convinced that I do not give everything I ought to the Work. He does, God does. That is why we have come this morning to renew our thanksgiving. I am sure that your first thought today too was one of thanksgiving.

Our Lord is certainly faithful. But what about us? You should answer personally, my son. How do you see yourself doing, each one of you? I don't ask if you see yourself as better or worse, because at times we believe something but are not objective about it. At times our Lord lets it seem as if we are going backwards. Then we grasp his hand more firmly and are filled with peace and joy. That is why, I repeat, I am not asking you if you are behaving better or worse, but if you are doing God's Will, if you are trying to struggle, to invoke God's help, to never undertake anything without at the same time using the supernatural means.

Ask yourself if you are trying to enlarge your heart, if you are capable of asking our Lord – because often we are not capable, or if we ask, we do so in such a way that he doesn't grant it to us – if you are capable of asking him to grant you the gift of putting yourself last and your brothers first, of being yourself the light that is consumed, the salt that is used up. This is what we must ask for, to give of ourselves so that others can be happy. That is the great secret of our life and the effectiveness of our apostolate.

Holiness that sanctifies others

Yesterday afternoon I was in the Map Room. Without realizing it. I looked above the door and my eye was caught by one of those 'reminders' that are spread throughout these buildings. *Elegit nos ante mundi constitutionem ut essemus sancti in conspectu eius.*⁵ It struck me deeply. The only solution is to struggle to be saints. This is our purpose, we have no other: holiness, holiness, holiness. The apostolic works, many though they be, are not ends, but means, just as the hoe is the instrument the gardener uses to dig from the earth the produce that feeds him. My sons, this is why we must struggle for holiness with all our strength: *Elegit nos... ut essemus sancti!* I

⁵ Cf. Eph 2:4: *He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before him.*

ask our Lord for forgiveness for my lack of response, and for the grace to respond to this choice. If necessary, I ask for more grace than that of ordinary providence; on this point, I don't mind going overboard.

My sons, I don't want to go on too long. Help me to express my gratitude and thankfulness to God the Father, to God the Son, to God the Holy Spirit. And to the Mother of God and our Mother, who has always had a motherly smile for us as often as we needed it. When I felt the premonition that our Lord wanted something and I didn't know what it was, I shouted, I sang – as best I could! – words you have certainly savoured in your heart, if you haven't pronounced them with your lips: *Ignem veni mittere in terram et quid volo nisi ut accendatur*,⁶ I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! And the answer: *Ecce ego quia vocasti me!*⁷ Here I am, because you have called me. Let's all say it to our God again, now!

Lord, we are only very poor quality, but we love you so much, and we want to love you much more, because we are your sons. We take full account of all your power and all our own wretchedness. Recognizing our wretchedness, we go like little children to the arms of our Mother, to the lap of the one who is Mother of God and our Mother, and to the Heart of Jesus Christ. We will receive all the strength, all the power, all the daring, all the generosity, all the love that God our Lord reserves for his faithful servants. And we will feel secure; we will be effective and joyful, and thanks to this divine fortitude we will fulfil God's Holy Will, with our Lady's help.

⁶ *Lk 12:49*

⁷ *1 Sam 3:9*