

**VENERABLE SERVANT OF GOD  
ISIDORO ZORZANO LEDESMA**

**PRESS KIT**

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## **1. Brief biography of Isidoro Zorzano Ledesma (1902-1943)**

Isidoro Zorzano was born in Buenos Aires (Argentina) on September 13, 1902. He was the third of five children of Spanish immigrants. In 1905, with their economic situation in life now secure, his parents decided to return to Spain, although intending to eventually return to Argentina. The family moved to Logroño, where Isidoro did his elementary and high school studies. In 1912 his father died unexpectedly, and his mother decided to remain there.

In January 1916 he met Josemaría Escrivá, a new classmate of his who had just arrived from Barbastro. The two of them became friends. Isidoro graduated from high school in 1918 and began to prepare for the entrance exam for the Special School for Industrial Engineers in Madrid, a city to which he moved in October 1919. While still an adolescent, Isidoro intensified his religious practices and sought the help of a priest who could advise him in his Christian life. He carried out works of mercy and, as a friend of his recalled, “he was always ready to help anyone at any time.”

In 1924, with the collapse of the Spanish Bank of Rio de la Plata, the Zorzanos lost almost all their savings. Isidoro and his younger brother, Francisco, thought about giving up their studies in order to support the family with their work. Nevertheless, their mother and two sisters wanted both of them to continue their studies. Isidoro began to give private classes to bring in some income.

In June 1927, Isidoro earned the degree of industrial engineer. He started giving classes in an academy that prepared students for the entrance exam to the school of industrial engineering, and also worked briefly in the shipyards of Matagorda (Cádiz). But soon he decided to move to Malaga, to work in the Andalusian Railroads Company and to give classes in the Industrial School in that city.

At that time, Isidoro began to sense a deeper spiritual restlessness. On August 24, 1930, he had a long conversation with St. Josemaría Escrivá, his former high school classmate, who had now been a priest for five years. St. Josemaría explained to him the message of Opus Dei, founded in 1928. Its purpose was to foster the search for holiness and apostolate through professional work and the fulfillment of one’s ordinary duties. Isidoro saw at once that this ideal corresponded fully to his own aspirations and decided to join Opus Dei.

He returned to Malaga and went back to his regular routine, but now everything had taken on a new light. He deepened his life of prayer, and woke up early every day to attend Mass and receive Communion. He also was generous in assisting the poor; among other things, he dedicated many hours to giving classes to poor children in some schools run by the Adoration sisters and by the Jesuit Father José Manuel Aicardo. One of his students in the Industrial School, who also accompanied him on his excursions with the Hiking Club, recalls that he was very friendly and easy to get along with, and possessed a well-balanced temperament; he made use of every opportunity to serve others and bring them closer to God. One of his colleagues at the university, who also knew him in Malaga, recounts that although his salary enabled him to live quite comfortably, he in fact lived frugally, since he used his money to help his family and the needy.

Everyone recognized his sense of justice and his closeness to those working under his direction. He did not discriminate against anyone because of their political ideas; he was concerned about and served everyone, both in the office and at the school. His students recall that he sometimes gave special classes without charge so that everyone could learn the material and pass their exam. In 1936 a bitter anti-religious attitude began to spread and the environment in the city became very dangerous. In June, some of those under him told him that certain political groups had decided to kill him because he was a Catholic. Therefore he moved to Madrid.

A short time later the civil war broke out and, in the regions controlled by Communists and anarchists, a violent religious persecution was unleashed. St. Josemaría and the handful of young men belonging to Opus Dei had to go into hiding or were imprisoned because of their Catholic faith. Isidoro could have left Spain, but decided to remain in Madrid so as not to separate himself from the others. Relying on a precarious form of documentation — a Buenos Aires birth certificate — and knowing that his life was constantly in danger, he helped keep the members of Opus Dei united to St. Josemaría and to one another.

During those years he assisted many people not only spiritually, but also by obtaining for them provisions and food that he managed to obtain with great personal sacrifice, giving up much of what he needed for himself. He endured so many privations that once he even fainted on the street. During those months his love for the Eucharist was very evident. Despite all the restrictions, he brought St. Josemaría and some other priests the bread and wine they needed to celebrate Mass secretly. He also kept the sacred hosts in his room so that those in hiding could receive Communion, and informed those he knew of the possibility of attending the Eucharistic celebration in certain apartments.

After the war, Isidoro obtained a position in Madrid with the National Western Railroad Company. A colleague declared that “he had a great moral authority for those working under him, first because he was a person of great talent and extraordinary competence, and second because his dealings with them were so warm and fatherly that no one could resist him.” St. Josemaría appointed him administrator of the apostolic instruments of Opus Dei, a task he carried out generously and humbly, never losing his peace in confronting the constant financial difficulties in the apostolic initiatives, which always operated with a deficit.

He knew and loved Christ’s life in its every detail, and had recourse to our Lady with filial affection. His great love for God was shown in his service to others and his care for little things. A witness who knew him in Madrid wrote that he had seen “in his actions and words, and in the expressions of his soul, a marvelous way of living with simplicity and naturalness the heroism of an ordinary life immersed in God. When with Isidoro, I sensed God’s presence in a simple and unobtrusive way.”

At the beginning of 1943 he was diagnosed with malignant lymphoma. He accepted this painful sickness with courage and abandonment to God’s will. One of the nurses who took care of him recalled: “He never needed anything; for him everything was good and he never complained.” He died with a reputation for holiness on July 15 of that same year, at the age of 40, and was buried in the cemetery of La Almudena. One of his co-workers at the Western Railroad Company said: “When we talked about our bosses, it was common for someone to say: ‘Don Isidoro is a saint.’”

In 2009 his mortal remains were transferred to the church of St. Albert the Great in Madrid, where they now repose.

## 2. Chronology of the Cause of Canonization

The following is a chronology of the principal steps in the cause of canonization of Isidoro Zorzano.

**July 15, 1943:** Isidoro Zorzano dies in Madrid with a reputation for holiness.

**October 11, 1948:** the first session of the informative process on his life and virtues takes place in the diocese of Madrid-Alcalá, presided over by Bishop Leopoldo Eijo y Garay, in the chapel of the episcopal palace.

**April 19, 1961:** closing session of the process, presided over by Bishop Eijo y Garay, in the chapel of the episcopal palace of Madrid. Declarations from a total of 71 witnesses were taken, among them St. Josemaría Escrivá.

**October 21, 1965:** decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites on the writings of Isidoro.

**1968:** preparation of the “public copy” is completed, as foreseen by the legislation then in force, so that its examination would permit the beginning of an apostolic process on his life and virtues.

**1969:** Blessed Paul VI, with his *motu proprio Sanctitas clarior* (of March 19), changes the norms of the causes of canonization so that a second process is no longer necessary. On May 8 of the same year, the Sacred Congregation of Rites is divided into two congregations, one for Divine Worship and the other for the Causes of Saints.

**January 25, 1983:** St. John Paul II, with the apostolic constitution *Divines perfectionis Magister*, changes the norms for processes of beatification.

**February 7, 1983:** promulgation of the new norms on the processes of beatification, prepared by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

**May 22, 1992:** the Congregation for the Causes of Saints establishes that a supplementary investigation be carried out for all the causes whose informative process had taken place before the *motu proprio Sanctitas clarior* (of 1969).

**November 11, 1992:** Msgr. Flavio Capucci, at that time postulator of the cause, asks the Cardinal Archbishop of Madrid to open an additional diocesan process.

**December 4, 1993:** opening session of the additional process, presided over by Cardinal Ángel Suquía Goicoechea, Archbishop of Madrid.

**June 17, 1994:** closing session of the additional process, presided over by Bishop Francisco Javier Martínez Fernández, Auxiliary Bishop of Madrid.

**September 30, 1994:** the Congregation for the Causes of Saints issues a decree confirming the validity of the informative process and of the additional process.

**October 15, 1994:** the Congregation appoints Rev. Daniel Ols, O.P., as relator in charge of the preparation of the *Positio super vita et virtutibus* of Isidoro Zorzano.

**March 25, 2006:** the relator presents the *Positio super vita et virtutibus* of the Servant of God. The *Positio* consists of four sections: history of the cause and sources (28 pages), biography (149 pages), critical study on the presence of heroic virtues (332 pages), and a summary (613 pages).

**October 6, 2009:** at the indication of the Archbishop of Madrid, Cardinal Antonio María Rouco Varela, and with the authorization of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, the mortal remains of Isidoro are transferred to the Chapel of Christ in the parish of St. Albert the Great, located at 9 Benjamin Palencia Street in Madrid.

**October 25, 2013:** after the death of Msgr. Flavio Capucci, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, appoints Msgr. José Luis Gutiérrez Gómez as postulator of the cause of Isidoro Zorzano.

**November 17, 2015:** the special meeting of theological consultants of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints gives a positive reply to the question of the exercise of heroic virtues by Isidoro, and on his reputation for holiness and for favors.

**December 13, 2016:** the ordinary session of cardinals and bishop members of the Congregation pronounces in favor of the heroism of the virtues and the reputation for holiness of Isidoro.

**December 21, 2016:** Pope Francis authorizes the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the decree on the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Isidoro Zorzano.

### **3. Questions addressed to Msgr. Jose Luis Gutierrez Gomez, Postulator of the Cause**

#### **1. Who was Isidoro Zorzano?**

Isidoro Zorzano was an engineer who worked diligently in an exemplary way, with loyalty and a spirit of service towards his colleagues. He promoted initiatives to help the needy, and demonstrated great faith and charity in his life as a Christian. Those who knew him remember his serenity, equanimity, optimism, and his reflective and thoughtful manner. One witness testifies that during Isidoro's years at the university, his companions "would go to him as a 'peacemaker' to resolve the arguments they sometimes had."

He was born on Sept. 13, 1902, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, of Spanish parents. In 1905 the family moved to Spain, where Isidoro earned the title of industrial engineer. He worked in the Railway Company, first in Malaga and afterwards in Madrid. He also gave classes in the Industrial School in Malaga. In 1930 he met with St. Josemaría Escrivá, a former high school classmate, and after a long conversation with him, Isidoro asked to join Opus Dei, which had been founded in 1928. In this path of the Church, Isidoro discovered the possibility of fulfilling his desire to give himself to God in the midst of the world.

His unwavering fidelity was always a great support to the founder of Opus Dei, in both the difficult years of the Spanish Civil War (1936 - 1939) and also in the development of Opus Dei's apostolic works in the early 1940s. In January 1943 he was diagnosed as having malignant lymphoma. It was an extremely painful illness, which had begun months before and which he had bravely borne with abandonment to the will of God. He died with a reputation for sanctity on July 15 of the same year, at the age of 40. One of his colleagues in the railway offices in Madrid remembers: "When we talked about our bosses, it was common for someone to say: 'Don Isidoro is a saint.'" Another person who worked with him declared: "We felt his loss in an extraordinary way, because his passing was for us like losing a father."

#### **2. Pope Francis has approved the publication of a decree about the virtues Isidoro lived to a heroic degree. Can you speak to us about some of them?**

Isidoro's perseverance in ordinary things was outstanding, an expression of his loyalty. He always fulfilled the commitments he had taken on, right up to last moment of his life on earth. This might appear easy because of a mistaken idea of what "heroism" means. This word is not synonymous with extraordinary deeds or surprising accomplishments. Heroism means practicing the virtues constantly and during a sufficiently long period of time, right where one happens to be, in everyday realities, in the fulfilment of one's obligations as a worker, citizen, friend, member of a family, etc. This is what Isidoro did.

He loved his profession, and he knew that God called him to seek holiness in his work. His love for God, for example, spurred him to be the first to get to work in his office in the morning; he accepted with good humor and supernatural outlook the occasional annoyances and injustices of his bosses; he sought to do everything with professional competence and tried to be pleasant in his dealings with others. He was well-known for his sense of justice and closeness to the people who worked for him. They knew that "with Don Isidoro shabby work wouldn't do," because he always made sure personally that the job had been done conscientiously. Isidoro also gave classes in the Industrial School of Malaga. His pupils recall his great patience, and that they could approach him to ask questions, even going to his home. Among the students "it was frequently said that he was a saint."

He made his work compatible with an intense life of prayer. He had a great love for the Eucharist, and got up early every day to go to Mass and receive Holy Communion. He helped out in social works and tried to lead his friends and colleagues closer to God.

### **3. How can Isidoro help a worker in our day and age?**

From the examples I've just given, Isidoro can be held up as a model for the worker of our day, whether an engineer or a laborer, or a mother of a family who cheerfully "multitasks" every day. Blessed Alvaro del Portillo knew Isidoro quite well and left a written testimony that he had learned from him to "sanctify the work of each day, with order and perseverance; to carry out with perfection, with Love, the little things of each moment. Isidoro was always working. I don't think that anyone can say that they ever saw him wasting time. But even more, he combined this industrious spirit with an exceptional spirit of humility. Isidoro never got in anybody's way; he worked silently and humbly, trying not to draw attention to himself."

I think Isidoro also gives us an example of Christian integrity; he was not bothered by what other people thought or said, even though this might bring problems or difficulties. One of his sisters tells us that he had a boss who opposed Isidoro's promotion at work saying: "What kind of engineer is someone who goes to Mass every day!"

### **4. Do people today have a devotion to Isidoro? How did they get to know about him?**

Isidoro died 73 years ago. There is hardly anyone alive today who knew him personally. Nevertheless, even before his death, those who knew him spoke about Isidoro's reputation for sanctity. And this reputation has been growing, spreading rapidly among people in many countries of all ages and social conditions. For example, a friar who knew him quite well, Fray José López Ortiz, on being named bishop asked for a piece of the ring Isidoro wore so it could be melted as a relic into his own Episcopal ring.

Many people go to Isidoro's intercession to obtain graces and favors from God, and sometimes true miracles. In the office of the postulator we have received more than 5,000 accounts of favors attributed to his intercession. They vary a great deal, touching on the thousands of events that come up in the ordinary life of any person. There are, of course, lots of engineers and people of related professions who address Isidoro as a colleague, to ask him to help solve problems in their specialty. Many have recourse to him as "their engineer" whenever they encounter a technical difficulty, for example, getting a computer to work that refuses to start. But Isidoro's intercession isn't confined to the technical world; he is ready to help wherever necessary.

Besides, in the last ten years, some 390,000 prayer cards for private devotion to him have been printed – not only in languages of the western world, but also in Arabic, Cebuano, Chinese, Japanese and Tagalog, as well as 300,000 copies of his newsletter.

So there are lots of people who are confident that Isidoro is in heaven and who make him known to the people around them as a model and intercessor to obtain help from God.

### **5. For the Church to declare a person as blessed, it is necessary to establish that through his intercession a miracle has been obtained. Have there been any miraculous favors attributed to Isidoro?**

The office of the postulator has received accounts of several possible miracles attributed to the

intercession of Isidoro. One example is the cure of a young priest who after a series of coughing attacks, accompanied by expectorating blood, was taken to the hospital urgently, where they diagnosed a possible cancer. They suggested immediate surgery to determine the nature of the tumor, and if possible to proceed with its removal. The priest entrusted himself to Isidoro, asking for a cure. At the same time, several people began to pray for him, through Isidoro's intercession. During the operation, after exploring the right lung and examining the mediastinum (the space between the membranes of the heart and the lungs and other organs in the thorax), the surgeon found no lesion or alteration. There was no sign of the nodular mass. The priest was completely cured.

I invite people who have a devotion to Isidoro, and those who find out about him now thanks to the news of this new step towards his beatification, to ask for favors and miracles through his intercession.

## 4. Bibliography and electronic references

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— Jose Miguel Pero-Sanz, Isidoro Zorzano. *Ingeniero Industrial (Buenos Aires, 1902 -Madrid, 1943)*, (1996), 5<sup>th</sup> revised edition, Madrid, Palabra, 2009, 445 pages. Italian translation: *Isidoro Zorzano. Il carisma della normalità*, Milano, Ares, 1999, 365 pages.

### Leaflets

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— Jose Miguel Pero-Sanz, *Isidoro Zorzano. (1902 - 1943)*, 1993; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Madrid, Palabra, 1994, 70 pages (Folletos Mundo Cristiano, no. 570).

### Documentary on DVD

— *Isidoro Zorzano. El sentido de una vida*, 1999, 31 min.

Available from Beta Films Foundation: [www.betafilms.org](http://www.betafilms.org). Can be watched at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JsJgHn0mAc> (this video does not yet have English subtitles).

### Photographs

— <https://www.flickr.com/photos/opusdei/albums/72157651819252019>

### Websites

— [www.isidorozorzano.org](http://www.isidorozorzano.org)

— [www.parroquiasanalbertomagno.com](http://www.parroquiasanalbertomagno.com)