



# Remembering the Opus Dei Priest Who Made St. Josemaría Escrivá Laugh

COMMENTARY: Father Dick Rieman died last year, but his holy advice continues to be cherished.



Father Dick Rieman portrait for his 90th birthday (photo: Provided by Opus Dei U.S. Press Office)

**Paul Coppola** December 1, 2020

*“First, you love this God of ours. Then ... the others, the others, the others.” — Father Dick Rieman, Nov. 8, 1925-Dec. 2, 2019*

“Hey, Duke!”

That’s how he used to greet me when he saw me.

He was full of expressions like that from years gone by. He was a very simple soul who could speak very directly.

Father Dick Rieman passed away on Dec. 2, 2019, after 94 years on this earth. But he left everyone who knew him with a fund of simple sayings that we can never forget.

I will never forget what he said about marriage: “It requires a lot of hanging in there” — simple but true.

He was chaplain at Montrose School in Medfield, Massachusetts, for 40 years, and I’m sure the women who came through there as young ladies never forgot what he told them. He would tell them in a homily at Holy Mass that “God made you to love you. He made you to love you.” Or he would tell the girls to “crawl into Our Lady’s lap.”

That was Father Dick. He was a very simple soul but at the same time very profound.

## **Bringing Opus Dei to America**

If you met him in later life, you might not know that Father Dick’s life had been full of adventure. He was born in Chicago and as an 18-year-old became a Navy flyer in World War II. He said he was scared to death, but he did his duty.

Father Dick was the first member of Opus Dei in the United States — and that in itself was an adventure. He joined Opus Dei in 1950 in Chicago. He had been a baseball player in college and worked in onstage productions in Chicago. But before you knew it, he was off to Rome studying for a doctorate in canon law at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, known as the Angelicum.

All the classes were given in Latin. But at the Villa Tevere, the central house of Opus Dei in Rome, they spoke Spanish and had classes and talks in Spanish. So he had two new languages to learn right off the bat.

The living quarters there were rough at the beginning. It required a lot of sacrifice. But Father Dick was happy to do it. He had huge faith, and God was counting on him. And because of his faithfulness, sacrifice and prayers, thousands of members of Opus Dei came after him in the United States.

He was a favorite of St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, with whom he lived at Villa Tevere. Father Dick was quite funny — and even

more so with his broken Spanish. St. Josemaría would roar with laughter at his jokes.

Father Dick could say things that nobody else would say to St. Josemaría. After a pilgrimage to the famous Shrine in Pompeii to Our Lady of the Rosary, Father Dick, Josemaría and others went to see the ancient ruins of Pompeii. St. Josemaría asked Father Dick what he thought of the ruins. Father Dick responded that it was just a bunch of dirt — which likely brought laughter to St. Josemaría.

He returned from Rome with a doctorate in canon law and began his priestly work, first in Washington, D.C., and then in Boston, where he remained for the rest of his life.

## **Making Friends**

Father Dick truly loved people. He suffered when they suffered. That was the simple thing that made him such a great friend.

He also had a wonderful gift for making each person feel like the most important person in the world. He loved to tell jokes — and he laughed at his own jokes heartily. He was gentle in listening to your problems but always injected humor to help you out.

One day as I was complaining about a difficult boss, he started to tell me she was just having a bad day. She accidentally bumped her head on the car, her cat bit her, her house caught on fire, etc. Now I was laughing. All of a sudden I didn't feel so bad. I couldn't take myself so seriously. And I felt more understanding toward my boss.

If you criticized a public figure or a sports star, with humor he would say, "He always spoke highly of you!"

And he knew some sports stars. Father Dick became friends with the great Bobby Orr, a legendary hockey player for the Boston Bruins. Bobby came to visit Father Dick right before he died.

Likewise, Father Dick became close friends with Jeff Supon, a pitcher for the Boston Red Sox. Jeff later went on to win the World Series with the St. Louis Cardinals. Father Dick was delighted — Jeff had reached the top of his profession. When Jeff was in Boston, Father Dick would say, “Okay, Jeff, duck into the box” — by which he meant go into the confessional.

Father Dick made friends with Harvard hockey coach Bill Cleary as well as many Harvard players over the years. A tradition developed in which the Harvard hockey practice would not end until Father Dick shot a puck into the goal. *Sports Illustrated* wrote about this and mentioned Father Dick by name.

## **In the Presence of Our Lord**

Father Dick was a member of Opus Dei for 69 years and was a priest for 61 years. During his priestly life, he preached countless retreats and days and evenings of recollection — and heard thousands of confessions. He taught many classes of philosophy and theology, especially in the early days of his priesthood, at centers and conference centers of Opus Dei in the U.S. He was also a spiritual director for parish priests and was ever ready to help out in hearing confessions in area parishes.

Father Dick is buried at St. Joseph Cemetery in West Roxbury, Massachusetts. The funeral director of Father Dick’s funeral commented that it was the biggest funeral that he had ever seen. Needless to say, Father Dick was much beloved.

His final resting place is with, among others, Father Joseph Múzquiz and Father Sal Ferigle, who were sent by St. Josemaría to start Opus Dei in America in 1949. Father Sal was a layman at the time.

That trio comprised the pioneers of Opus Dei in the United States. With the death of Father Dick, you could say the foundational stage of Opus Dei in the U.S. was closed.

When Father Dick entered a chapel, right away his demeanor changed. He became very respectful of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. It was clear he was in the presence of Our Lord. When Father Dick prayed before an image of Our Lady, you could see that he was just a child speaking lovingly to his Mother — something he learned from St. Josemaría. He also had a great devotion to the angels. He would often encourage people to go to the angels.

That advice will prove to be time-honored, indeed. May he rest in peace.

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