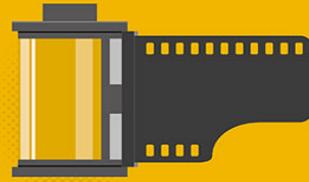


Javier Cremades Sanz-Pastor



# THE CREMADES

# PLANS

A Family's Friendship with Saint Josemaria



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My father, Juan Antonio Cremades, first met Saint Josemaria Escrivá when they were fellow-students in the Department of Law at the University of Zaragoza, Spain, from 1925 to 1927. It was there that they made friends.

Years later, at a very painful time for the founder of the Opus Dei, when his mother had just died, my father was able to do him a service for which Saint Josemaria was very grateful ever after. And for that reason, the large Cremades family – my parents and all of us ten siblings – enjoyed a very close, direct friendship with him until he went to Heaven.

In this book I have collected some of the adventures – really big adventures! – that we had with our father and friend, Saint Josemaria. I have tried to highlight his kindness, the affection and friendly warmth that he scattered (especially on my lucky family), his sanctity, his joy and sense of humor. Also, his closeness to God, and the way he was able to bring all those who crossed his path closer to God.

Javier Cremades Sanz-Pastor

# **The Cremades Plans**

**A Family's Friendship with Saint Josemaria**

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To my brothers and sisters, for them to keep preparing the plans that the Cremades family are going to organize in Heaven. Up there, every single one of us has to join in.

# 1. Introduction

My name is Javier and I was born in Zaragoza, Spain, at the end of the first half of the twentieth century, in 1946. I am now enjoying my senior years. I have always considered myself honored to have been baptized, a week after I was born, in the basilica of Our Lady of Pilar. I am the fourth of ten siblings, five boys and five girls, the children of a wonderful couple: Pilar and Juan Antonio Cremades.

Both of my parents came from deeply Christian families and tried to be strong in their faith and their love for Jesus Christ and the Church for the whole of their lives. They were, and are – because now, from Heaven, they still keep helping us – the makers and the strength of this happy, funny family.

My parents made a great couple [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). We siblings remember with amazement and delight the speech given by my father at their golden wedding anniversary celebration: he told us that that in their fifty years of married life they had never had any serious quarrel or upset. We had never seen them arguing in front of us, but we then realized they had never quarreled in private either.

It could seem from these pages that my mother was the one in charge. But I can confirm – and all my siblings agree – that each of them was the speaker for the other. They each had their own character and way of doing things: my mother was more impulsive, my father was calmer. Together they formed an attractive, harmonious symphony. Yet they lived through both easy and tough times: times of wealth, and times of penury. To have ten children and give them a good start in life, with a decent education including learning languages, was an expensive undertaking, especially in the hard times of 1940s and 1950s Spain. Their work and self-denial had no fixed timetable, nor free weekends. When they joined Opus Dei, they already had ten children.

Besides being a stupendous family, the fact that there were five boys from Aragon gave a special atmosphere to our home. This is why every time we asked my mother if we could buy a pet, she would say that she already had five animals at home, meaning us five boys. I don't include the girls in the more feral group with the boys, as the girls are all lovely, beautiful and feminine. I offer compliments to my sisters not only because they deserve them – which they do – but also because if I don't, they will settle accounts with me later.

When all of us got together, we had a great time. It wasn't easy, as by the time the youngest was born, the eldest had already moved to France. God so arranged things that, for many years, our family get-togethers were often held around Saint Josemaria [1]. Informally, we called ourselves the “Cremades Clan”, in its dictionary meaning of “a group of people forming a strong family bond”. Sometimes the word “clan” has more exclusivist connotations, but that wasn't the case for us, as our home always had its doors open to everyone.

To avoid any false interpretations, I chose to title this book about family get-togethers with Saint Josemaria **THE CREMADES PLANS**. Those get-togethers were certainly hugely enjoyable occasions, really big adventures that shaped our lives and mapped our futures, marking each of us indelibly.

I feel I am lengthening this Introduction unduly. I don't want to tire you out before we start, so without further ado, let's get to the day when Saint Josemaria started to be endlessly grateful to my father: the day his mother died.

## 2. Death of Doña Dolores

The biographies of Saint Josemaria recount in greater or lesser detail the circumstances that surrounded his mother's death, on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1941, at the age of 64. A few days earlier, while she was in bed with pneumonia in Madrid, Saint Josemaria had traveled to Lerida (a.k.a. Lleida) to preach a retreat to diocesan priests. Here's what happened:

**Halfway through the retreat, at noon, I gave them a talk. I spoke about the supernatural work, the incomparable role, that falls to the mother at the side of her priest-son. When I finished, I wanted to stay recollected for a little while in the chapel. But almost immediately the Apostolic Administrator Bishop, who was also doing the retreat, came in looking very pale, and said to me, "Alvaro [2] is on the phone for you." And what I heard from Alvaro was, "Father, Grandmother has died."**

**I went back to the chapel, with not one tear. I saw right away that the Lord my God had done best thing. And then I cried like a baby, praying out loud (I was alone with Him) that long aspiration I so often recommend to you, "May the most just and most lovable Will of God be done, be fulfilled, be praised and eternally exalted above all things. Amen. Amen." From then on, I have always thought that the Lord asked me for that sacrifice as an outward sign of my love for diocesan priests, and that my mother continues to intercede for this apostolate in a special way. [3]**

In Spain people are customarily buried the very next day after they die. It was going to be difficult, if not impossible, for Josemaria to get back to Madrid in time to say his farewells to his mother before the funeral, so he went to the Town Hall to see my father, explain the situation and ask him for any help he could give. My father was very

much struck by his visit, and he never forgot the talk they had together. The Father was very dejected, and said, in the words of Jesus praying in Gethsemane, **Juan Antonio, the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak** (cf. Matthew 26:41). He explained his wish to get back to Madrid quickly, and how difficult it was. My father also remembered how Saint Josemaria told him, with enormous pain, that he thought the mothers of priests should always die after their children, because priests need their mothers so much.

My father was able to provide him with a car and driver who would take him to Madrid, plus the necessary safe-conduct documents to travel on restricted roads, and enough petrol vouchers, since fuel was rationed. He left Lerida at noon and arrived in Madrid at four the next morning. It took about fourteen hours' driving, because of breakdowns, for an exhausting journey that today takes just two hours by train. [\[VIEW MAP\]](#)

When, years later, my father asked to join the Work, he recalled this episode in Lerida, and thought that Josemaria must have written him a letter, thanking him for organizing it. As he was a very orderly person – I hold it against him that he failed to bequeath this virtue to me – he did indeed find in his files this letter, dated a few days later, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1941, headed:

**José María Escrivá de Balaguer y Albás**  
**Rector of the Royal Foundation of Saint Elizabeth**  
**Madrid**

The letter said [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#):

**Dear Juan Antonio,**

**I will never be able to forget the kindness you showed me on the occasion of the death of my mother, may she rest in peace. God reward you!**

**I want you to be aware that, although I am of little value, I shall always be at your disposal, eager to reciprocate your kindness in some way.**

**Give my best regards to your wife, whom I very much want to meet. Give a kiss to your little son from me, and don't forget to pray for my mother's soul.**

**With my best wishes and blessing for you all,**

**Josemaria**

The friendship between the two of them was of long standing, as I will now relate, but I have always thought that this letter presages the enormous kindness and affection that the Father had for my family. **I will never be able to forget ... I shall always be at your disposal ... eager to reciprocate ...** He amply fulfilled this promise throughout his life.

### 3. The reason for this book

In everyday life, the Father was very, very grateful. Those who lived with him confirm this. He said graphically that **if Saint Teresa of Avila – as she said of herself – could be won over with a sardine, I can be won over with a sardine-bone!** In our frequent meetings with him, he regularly recalled what had happened in Lerida, and his gratitude to my father extended to my mother and each of their ten children too.

I have a personal memory that confirms this. Many years later, in the early 1970s, I was living in Rome. I had the good fortune one day to be asked to go on a car trip with the Father. He was going to make several visits and transactions, and I was going with him in case any difficulty arose. At one point, he gripped my arm and said, **My son, how grateful I am to you!** I asked, “Why, Father?” And he answered, **Yes, son, I’m very grateful to you: I owe you a debt for the fact that I was able to kiss my mother before she was buried.** I should make it clear that when Doña Dolores died it was five years before I was born; indeed, I was only in the mind of God. So much for the enormous debt the Father owed me. But, as you can see, his gratitude carried on from father to children, to the whole family.

It is precisely that gratitude that is the common thread of these memories. Perhaps there may be times when reading them can give the impression that I am writing out of pride, to boast of my large family and of our friendship with Saint Josemaria. It’s true that, as with cholesterol, there is good pride and bad pride; and in these pages I want to tell about the many reasons why I have an abundance of the good kind of pride, because my parents and my brothers and sisters are simply wonderful, and the kindnesses that the Father showed us at different times are certainly something to be

proud of. But that's not my reason for writing. I want to chronicle how the Father treated his friends.

Furthermore, I aim to show how the Father helped us to live the fourth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother." He used to call it **the sweetest of the Ten Commandments**. And he engraved it deeply on our lives. I also want to give some idea of what the Father was like day-to-day, in family life, in daily work, in our worries, cares and adventures.

It scares me a little to think that when we have devotion to a saint, we may see him or her as a very godly person, but somehow standing on a pedestal, somewhat cold and distant, set there to be venerated. It is true that, in the Father's case, the films that were made of him in gatherings during the last years of his life give us a slightly better idea of what he was like; but even so, I think that much is lost, and that sometimes we present the saints as examples not to be imitated, but only to be admired.

Some of us were fortunate enough to be in direct, affectionate, everyday contact with him before his death. I was one of those fortunate few. On many occasions I received his understanding, his words of encouragement in the face of difficulties, his kisses of fatherly affection, hugs, gifts, innumerable expressions of sincere warmth and closeness. I also saw him suffering and overwhelmed with worries. It made me happy to see his constant joy, cheerfulness and sense of humor and, above all, his love for Jesus Christ and the Mother of God, which came out of him at every pore and spread to everyone around him ...

I would like to be able to portray in writing something of his characteristic way of being, which now, in Heaven, has been transfigured by the vision of God and his closeness to Him. In other words, my aim is to testify how we as a family enjoyed our closeness to the Father up until his death in 1975. And I can confirm that since then, we have continued to experience his help from Heaven.

Briefly, I started to write because I think that what we enjoyed so much may perhaps help other people: faithful of the Work, Co-operators, people who come to the Work for guidance and development on the spiritual and the human planes, and many other people who pray through his intercession all over the world. On many occasions and in different meetings, when people find out that I knew the Father, they ask me about him with great interest and want me to tell them my memories. They think I'm privileged. And it's true.

I know that the task I've set myself is not an easy one. At the same time, I am lucky in that many people are already experiencing what I want to talk about, because they are living their lives in accordance with it. I will be satisfied if, when reading these lines, someone discovers, or rediscovers in greater depth, that "the patron saint of ordinary life", as Saint John Paul II called him in Saint Peter's Square on the day of his canonization, is a very affectionate, close, friendly and fun model to follow. And that because he is with God, he helps us effectively to fall in love with Jesus Christ, and to go through life joyfully, sanctifying our daily tasks, and being both very human and very supernatural.

I remember personally hearing him say these or similar words, on different occasions, **When the Lord calls me and takes me to Heaven, from there I'll be able to help you much more, and more effectively.** I can confirm the truth of this, and I want to put it on record that he does it wonderfully. I encourage anyone who has not yet experienced it to try it out [\[VIEW PRAYER CARD\]](#). If you don't know how to approach him, tell him I sent you, because he loves me a lot and always listens to me.

I hope that this attempt will come to fruition. I'm praying for the help of the Father, now a saint of the Church, who has always been one of the family in my home. And I also pray for the help of my parents, the founders of this family; they will lend me a hand too. I am convinced that, from Heaven, they will indeed help in this work

I'm beginning. It's a very pleasant task, though a tough one because I don't have a gift for writing. In order not to get dates and anecdotes wrong, I'll be making frequent use of what my parents and some of my siblings wrote recalling the various occasions I describe.

I am printing the Father's actual words in bold type, as if they were a literal transcript. They are not 100 per cent verbatim, but very close, since we usually sat down together straight after we had met and spent time with him, to reconstruct what had happened and get his words down in writing.

I have promises to keep, and so before starting on the *Cremades plans* that form the title of these reminiscences, I will begin at the beginning: how my father and the Father met.



## 4. Students at the university

This is how my father tells it: *My earliest memories of our Father go back to what we can call the prehistory of the Work. I met him in those times when, feeling called by God to do something, he went to the Basilica of Our Lady of Pilar in Zaragoza every day to ask the Blessed Virgin, **Domina, ut videam!** “Lady, may I see!” We met in the Law Department at the University of Zaragoza, in the academic years 1925-26 and 1926-27. In those days there were relatively few students, with just forty or fifty in each year, which made it easy to meet students in the other years.*

*Our Father was already a priest and I was a just a young lad. He was finishing his law degree and I was just beginning it; on the other hand, both he and I, as well as attending classes, also studied on our own, aiming to advance more rapidly through the degree course than if we spent a whole year on each stage. This was easy to understand in his case, since he had already completed his training for the priesthood.*

*So that was where we met and got to know each other. Soon our daily contact became frequent, cordial and friendly, because on Sunday afternoons we used to go and teach catechism together in a school building (no longer standing) located on the outskirts of the city. We would meet in the Plaza de Aragon and go to the catechism classes, returning afterwards deep in conversation about things, of which, unfortunately, I remember very little. Of course, we used to talk about university topics, especially about the lecturers who, despite being of exceptionally high quality both professionally and humanly, were subjected by the students to criticism that was not always unfounded.*

*I remember how our Father exercised Christian charity, avoiding any kind of disparagement. It made me change the opinions that I*

*had formed of more than one lecturer, and taught me in a practical way to be objective in my judgements, removing all negative notes from them. I can firmly state that these lessons have served me well throughout my life, and I have recalled them on many occasions.*

This was what my father told us. Sometimes he would tell us some particulars of those years. He spoke to us about teaching the catechism to poor children in the Casablanca neighborhood of Zaragoza. I have always thought that the Father began to do apostolate with my father in this priestly way more intensely then, because the long walks on their round trips gave him many opportunities for it. They were very profitable walks.

My father also told us some of what he kindly calls *criticism that was not always unfounded*. Among the university lecturers in the faculty, there were some who stood out for being a little peculiar. One of them, for example, was obsessed that he was going to die soon. It was well known that he had written letters addressed to his family and friends informing them of his death. He wrote their names and addresses on the envelopes, stuck a postage-stamp on each, and inside put a card stating that he had died and that they were invited to his funeral. This was to be in the parish church of Santa Engracia, on *date* – here he left a blank –, at *time* – another blank. The only thing left to do, therefore, was to fill in these two pieces of information after his death and post the letters.

Another, a professor, had a different foible. He measured the interest that students took in his subject by the degree of trouble and disruption they caused in class. In other words, it was nothing to do with their academic work. So if, for example, you threw chinks, or balls of paper, or any object from your desk, he would get angry and shout at you, but at the same time he would reckon, according to his original way of seeing things, that this student was interested in the subject and deserved a good grade.

My father said that one day this professor was gesturing with his arms and pointing with his index finger. A student went up to him,

grabbed his finger and would not let go. The professor shouted furiously, “Let go! Let go!” The student held on. Therefore, he was also considered an outstanding student, a fact that was reflected in his good grades.



My father enrolled in that module. My grandfather was a military commander in the area at the time. Zaragoza was a much smaller city then, and everything was discussed and gossiped about. The goings-on in this professor’s classroom were well known. My grandfather was worried, and at the beginning of the course he asked my father to do him the favor of behaving well in this class, since the two families were friends. My father said that he obeyed my grandfather and took no part in the upsets.

After the course started, the professor met my grandfather on the street and told him that he was concerned about my father, because it seemed to him that he was not paying attention to the module, that he was apathetic and distant, and that he was not on the right track. When he got home, my grandfather told my father off and my father assured him not to worry, that from that moment on, he was going to express more interest and things were going to change. And he started behaving like a hooligan in class. Consequently, he also got good grades as well.

The unique classroom behavior that this professor required in order to award good grades explains an episode that might not

otherwise be properly understood. One of the students was in the army, and used to wear his uniform to class. In the winter he used to wear the classic military cape, which was khaki on the outside and had a deep red lining. One day, when they were in the middle of class, there was a loud knock on the door. The teacher was annoyed, and the noise persisted. Finally, the door opened and, surprise, surprise! A procession of several students entered who, playing it up, acted out the arrival of a Roman emperor in Zaragoza, coming to greet and pay homage to the professor. He, beside himself, screamed and shouted at them to leave. “Caesar”, hamming it up more and more, also shouted, “Ave, I salute you!” The teacher answered, “Go away! Go away!!” After struggling for a while, the emperor said a polite farewell and, with his entourage, left the classroom.

It should be explained that the person who played Caesar was the student Josemaria, wearing his priest’s cassock with the military cape inside out on his shoulders, so that its bright red color was very evident, and even more when he waved his arms. The military cap, with the visor at the back, crowned his head. It goes without saying that Josemaria also passed the module with good grades, because he had proven himself to be an outstanding student ...



## 5. The Father enters our family

When Opus Dei's apostolate with married people began in Zaragoza – at first, the only apostolic activities had been for students – Saint Josemaria sent a message to the people of the Work there, asking them to contact my father. They did so, and my father soon expressed his desire to join the Work. Seeing that my mother was not very happy about this decision, because she did not fully understand its scope, he decided to wait for *the boss's* approval. My older brother, Juan Antonio, had also begun to go to formational activities at the Colegio Mayor Miraflores (run by people of Opus Dei) and asked for admission to the Work.

At the beginning of the 1950s, six siblings had already been born (in order of arrival: Juan Antonio, María Pilar, Bernardo, myself, Mari Carmen and Carlos). Sabela and Pablo soon followed. And, after the birth of the latter, doctors advised my parents to be careful about having more children, because they could be risk pregnancies. Their generosity was evident and so, after very complicated pregnancies, my two little sisters arrived: Conchita and Ana Mary. With each of them, my mother was stuck in bed for practically the whole nine months until they were born. [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)

But my mother *made a mistake*, a serious mistake: she asked Don Jose Orlandis, a priest of the Work, for spiritual direction. And that was her downfall. The change was noticed almost immediately because, shortly after the birth of my youngest little sister, my mother's misgivings dissipated and both my parents decided to join the Work: my father in 1955 and my mother the following year.

Shortly after asking to join, my father wrote some letters to the founder, the first he had written as a son of his in the Work. In the correspondence that we keep, there is a reply with this heading printed on it: **Mons. José María Escrivá de Balaguer**. Underneath,

in his unmistakable handwriting, the Father writes, ... **hugs you, blesses you, thanks you for your affectionate letter, and asks the Lord to confirm you on your way, and to make you yourself, and all of you, very happy.**

**Rome. Feb. 1956. [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)**

Since then, little by little, we were formed in the spirit of the Work, and our confidence in the founder grew progressively. We began writing to send him our best wishes on important dates, and we spoke more and more fondly of *the Father in Rome*.

I remember the times when we sat down to write to him, each of us in a different corner, because it was a very personal thing, where you told him anything you wanted. Each in our own handwriting that clearly reflected our respective ages, and with spelling to match, we would tell him about our little things, our joys or, if we happened to be annoyed about something, some of our aggravations. One asked him to get our parents to let him wear long trousers ... another said whatever came into his head ... My mother collected the letters and, although she never acknowledged it, I am convinced that she used to do a bit of screening, a prior censorship, so that not everything arrived in Rome sounding rough and Aragonese-style.

We always got an answer: a letter, frequently accompanied by some gift – holy pictures of Our Lady with something written on the back; a copy of *The Way* with a hand-written message from the author in the front; and not infrequently, a box of sweets or chocolates ... We all looked forward to the Father's answers. We still have a treasure-trove of about 90 letters, including cards, Christmas cards and other longer ones, in which he responded to our little confidences.

We also felt solidarity with him, because we had been told that the Father was going through a lot of financial difficulties in Rome. The headquarters of the Work were being built without any money. In our letters, we sometimes included our savings: perhaps a few pesetas or even smaller coins. If it was close to a birthday, there

could be something else, because of the gifts received. More than one of us once sent him, in case it could help him with building Villa Tevere, our lovingly-amassed collections of stickers. And the chronicles tell that there was someone who, finding it specially hard to part with them, sent him his stickers – but only the ones he had duplicates of.

He was very touched by our generosity and replied to us, also sending chocolates and sweets. But there came a point where he asked us not to send him our little savings anymore. This is what he said in a handwritten response to our Christmas greeting, **For all those dearest little children in the Cremades family, with the Father's affection, a loving blessing.**

**Josemaria**

I was very grateful for your sacrifice, but from now on, Baby Jesus will also be very happy if, instead of sending me the money, you buy yourselves some sweets. Is that ok? [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)



**We meet for the first time**

We were eager to meet him personally, but in the 1950s and 1960s he hardly ever came to Spain and so we could not. The first opportunity arose when he came to Zaragoza in 1958 because his younger brother Santiago was going to get engaged, and a formal request for his future wife's hand was going to be made to her family. It was up to him to do it, as he was the only close relative. And, as it was a tradition, he fulfilled this obligation.

On that occasion, he stayed in a house belonging to the Caja de Ahorros in Cogullada, a neighborhood in Zaragoza. There, finally, we met him. He gave a big hug to my father, whom he had not seen since the death of Doña Dolores; greeted my mother; and kissed and hugged all the little ones. At that time, my brother Bernardo had expressed his desire to join the Work, and soon also asked for admission to it.

Since I was only twelve years old, I don't remember many things, but I do remember a little detail. When we met, after the Holy Mass that he celebrated in the house chapel, he made the sign of the cross on each of our little faces, while repeating aloud: **good material, good material**. It is evident that he was already praying for us and asking God for our future vocations. In fact, all of us who were there joined the Work years later, when the hour of God's grace arrived for each of us.

## **A chase straight from a film**

One of the oldest memories I have of our relationship with the Father may have happened on this same trip. One day we were in the car, with my mother at the wheel, and a lot of us children inside. Suddenly, she began to chase another vehicle, among whose occupants she had recognized the Father. She was trying to catch up with him, stop his car, and so be able to spend a bit of time with him.

The driver of the other car noticed us and tried to pull away. The chase became exciting. My mother said to us little ones, “Children, the Father’s in that car! Just pray that we can stop them and greet him.” And we started to pray.

I do not have statistical data on how many women in Spain had a driving license in the 1950s, but my mother was one of them. And much more. My mother was a pioneer of university women in Spain in the 1930s. She had an Arts degree, a rare thing for women at the time, and was ahead of her time as an intellectual fighter for equal rights for women. And she was always self-sacrificing, forgetful of her own needs, and generously devoted to her husband and children. She was committed to all possible solidarity good causes – Caritas, cancer research, Red Cross, and many more. She was behind the setting up of several educational Centers and social mobility hubs. When she was over eighty, she became an expert user of computer programs and surfed the internet with ease, in addition to helping grandchildren with their IT homework. My father was a lawyer, working very hard and away from home much of the time, but still managed to be a terrific father, devoted to his wife and children, and dedicating the best of his life to us. They made a wonderful couple, cheerfully swapping the leading role back and forth between them. That also applied to our family’s friendship with Saint Josemaria, which had been initiated by his gratitude to my father and continued, apparently, by my mother’s boundless enthusiasm. I say *apparently* because, although my mother seemed to be the main driver, she always had my father’s full support, and he sometimes, unnoticed, took the lead here too.

But let’s get back to the car chase. Shortly after we began praying for the remarkable intention of catching up with the car the Father was in, the head of Don Florencio appeared in the rear window. He was the Counsellor of the Work in Spain [4], who usually accompanied the Father during his trips to our country. We could all

see him energetically shaking his index finger at us, meaning that our driver was not to continue pursuing them.

The inhabitants of Zaragoza have a reputation for being somewhat stubborn, so the only thing my mother needed to encourage her to continue the attack was this rebuttal by Don Florencio. Hence, in response to it, she lowered the visor of her helmet, metaphorically, and kept her hand firmly on the steering wheel and her foot on the accelerator, as if it was nothing to do with her. And we kept praying ...

When the fugitives realized that it was neither easy nor prudent to escape, they surrendered. At the first opportunity they stopped and we pulled in right behind them. We ran out of the car to greet Father and give him a hug. He was grinning. He said, **Pilar, what a joy to see you!** And she, with the proverbial bluntness of my land, replied, “Joy, Father? It doesn’t look like it!” **Pilar, how can you say that?** protested the Father. She went on, “Father, Don Florencio said no,” indignantly copying the negative gesture he had made, which the Father knew about perfectly well, because he had seen the entire maneuver. He thought for a moment, and then asked my mother, whom he knew very well, **But Pilar, have you ever listened to Don Florencio in your life?** And she replied, “Never, Father! And I don’t intend to!” Everyone burst out laughing, and we carried on chatting together, having a great time. Finally, the Father gave us a blessing before saying goodbye. It was a wonderful occasion, and ... mission accomplished! They say that fortune favors the bold, and also that children’s prayers are always heard.



## **6. The First Communion of my youngest siblings**

In 1960, we learned that the Father was planning to come to Spain in October and that he was going to visit Zaragoza, where he would receive an honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Arts at the university.

Then it occurred to us that Pablo, our eighth sibling, might be able to receive his First Holy Communion from the Father. Pablo was going to make his First Communion in May, but by stretching the date a bit he could wait a few months. We wrote to the Father and asked him.

The request was supported by the following argument. Some of my siblings remembered hearing my father say that when he was young, the Father had expressed his desire to officiate at his wedding when the time came. This could not be done, among other things because it was a high-profile ceremony, with the presence of government ministers and officiated by the Archbishop of Burgos. Our request to the Father now was that, since he had not been able to be at the wedding, he could make up for it on this occasion. He sent a friendly answer, saying that if the date coincided with his stay in Zaragoza, he would be delighted to officiate at the First Communion. And that was it! We were lucky: by some chance or other, the date did coincide with his trip.

When the negotiations were already underway, it occurred to us that, just as we were delaying Pablo's First Communion for a few months, perhaps we could also bring forward that of Conchita, the ninth child in the family, who was then six years old, coming up to seven. This addition to the First Communion ceremony was accepted, and we were all happily looking forward to the event. But one day, my mother surprised us by saying in conspiratorial tones,

“I’ve had an idea!” My father, fearful of her ability to complicate things, said, “Careful, Pilar! Sometimes you’re a peril!” She told us her idea: why shouldn’t we take advantage of the opportunity to let our youngest sister, number 10 in the family, also make her First Communion?! Ana Mary was four at the time and would be five at the beginning of October. It sounded crazy to every sensible person, but my mother persisted in her project.

We went to Don Vicente, a priest from the Colegio Mayor Miraflores and a close friend of the family, to ask him what he thought. His approach was as follows: to make their First Communion, a person has to have the use of reason, to have sufficient knowledge of the Faith to know Whom they are receiving, to be able to distinguish between ordinary bread and the Eucharistic bread, and to be in the grace of God. “This is what we can do,” he said. “After the summer, I’ll give all three siblings an oral exam. If they each show that they are well prepared, and meet all the above conditions, they can make their First Holy Communion, regardless of their age. And anyone who doesn’t, I am sorry to say, won’t be able to make it.”

That summer there was a lot of work with intense catechism sessions, especially for our littlest sister. Microwaves had not yet been invented, but I joke with great conviction that my mother was the forerunner of the “brain microwave”. And thanks to her intensive teaching that summer, my sister fully assimilated the careful preparation that she received, even though it was so early for her age.

The planned examinations took place in early October. At the end, Don Vicente concluded that all three of them were very well prepared, but that if he had to say which one was the best, he thought it was undoubtedly the youngest. And so we set out to enjoy the great event.

The ceremony took place in the oratory of the Colegio Mayor Miraflores [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). The Father celebrated Mass; the three little

ones were placed on prominent kneelers near the altar [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#); and my parents were on the left. The rest of the family and friends filled up the oratory. It was a lovely ceremony. Just before the moment of Communion, the Father said a few words to the children to help them pray [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#).

**Today the all-day party is for you, my dearest little children. You are the important people here. We see you as coming first, because in a few moments I am going to deposit Jesus Christ our Lord, Baby Jesus, in your hearts.**

**I know that you are very well prepared; I know that you are eager to receive Christ; but I need to give you a few suggestions. Look, my children, first of all I'll give you a very interesting one: I am sure that on a day like this, Jesus won't deny anything to children. You need to make the most of this, you need to pray to Him first of all for yourselves. Ask Him that you may always wear that beautiful white costume, in your heart, in your soul. Ask Him that you may be very good, that you may belong very much to God. Love Jesus very much, because He will always look at you from Heaven.**

**Next, if you want to make the most of today and Our Lord's kindness, you can pray a lot for your parents, who love you so much. It was your parents who, by God's will, brought you into the world. You should love your parents very much, and today is the day to show it, by asking Jesus when I give Him to you, "My Jesus, may Dad and Mum be very happy afterwards in heaven, and also here and now on earth." Say it boldly. And pray for your grandparents, and for your siblings, and for your relatives, and for your friends, and for your country. Ask Him for everything. Take advantage of the kindness of Jesus, who loves children very much always, but especially today.**

**But it won't be all asking for things; you can also make resolutions that come from the bottom of your little hearts. You can tell Him that you always want to be very good friends with**

Him, very faithful, that you always want to please Him. Will you tell Him that you want to always please Him?

My daughters, my son: I also need you to pray for me. Pray for Opus Dei, for us to be very holy, and especially for this poor priest. Say to Jesus very trustingly, “May the Father be good and faithful.” Will you tell Him that?

“Yes!” they said all together.

Well, I won’t keep you waiting any longer. I don’t want to give you a long talk, which I think would be out of place. I can still remember the one I was given – much too long.

My children: faith! Jesus is coming to you now. Receive Him affectionately, very affectionately. Hug Him to your heart, and always be faithful. [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)

Afterwards, he invited us to breakfast and we spent some time chatting together [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). The three little ones talked and played, and gave out their own First Holy Communion memorial cards [\[VIEW PHOTOS\]](#) The Father gave each of them a little medal of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, with their name and the date engraved on the back.



When we got home, after the ceremony [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#), all still wallowing in joy, someone said to my mother, “You did it! Our

youngest sister made her First Holy Communion too ...!” And my mother, very solemnly, uttered a lapidary phrase, which has remained in our family history and is frequently remembered, “If your little sister had not received her First Holy Communion from the hands of a saint, when it was possible for her to do so, she would never have forgiven me!” This prompted a round of applause from the whole family.

That same morning the Father received his honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Arts, at a ceremony some of us were able to attend. The following day the Father celebrated Mass in Saint Charles’ Church for people of the Work, their families, co-operators and friends. The church was full to overflowing. He was deeply moved, since that church brought back so many memories of his seminary years, his priestly ordination and his hard years in Zaragoza. His homily was vibrant and he spoke with great passion. I can still remember it, because I was impressed by the way he shouted – actually shouted – when saying forcefully that the faithful of the Work were free in all their activities, works and tasks; that in Opus Dei, each person thinks and acts as they choose in everything. And he stressed, **They are absolutely free, absolutely free!** And his voice boomed throughout the church. At that time, given the situation of the Spanish government, people frequently made the mistake of thinking that in the Work there was total uniformity in social and political ideas.

Later, in the reception, we all lined up to greet him personally [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). I got a kiss on both cheeks from him several different times, because I repeatedly sneaked back and managed to go up again. I must have been a bit of a nuisance, because of my persistence.

## **My parents’ legacy**

A few days later, my mother approached the Father at the door of the Colegio Mayor Aralar in Pamplona, when he was leaving the house. She wanted to ask him a favor and explained it as follows. “Father, ten children is a lot, and we can’t leave them much in the way of property when we pass away. We don’t have much money, and even if we did, divided by ten, it comes to very little each. Therefore, I would like to be able to leave them, when we are gone from this world, a memory that will help them throughout their lives. If you agree, Father, you can write a few words in a copy of *The Way* for them, so that they can always keep it as an irreplaceable gift.”

Surprised, the Father agreed, and then my mother took a copy of the book and a pen from her bag. He went into the visitors’ sitting room of Aralar with her and there he wrote, on the first page, the following Latin aspiration: ***Omnia in bonum!*** and the date, **26/X/1960**. These are some words from Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (8:28): *All things work together for good for those who love God*. Those words, everything is for the good, were a quotation the Father used a lot. [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)

My mother thanked him for his kindness, put *The Way* in her bag and, without more ado, took out another copy. The Father looked at her in amazement and she said, “Father, it’s one copy of *The Way* for each of the children.” Recovering from his surprise, he wrote in the second copy, and then the third, and so on, up to 12 copies. Infinite love and patience were displayed in the face of this exhausting attack.



Over the years, she gave each of us our own copy, when she considered that we were mature enough to value this heirloom and

not to lose it. I have still got mine, of course. It really is the best legacy. I keep it like gold, wrapped up in a cloth, and I meditate on those words assiduously, since life takes many turns.

## **7. Silver Wedding Anniversary in Rome**

5 March 1964 marked my parents' 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. With the speed and confidence that we had already shown on the occasion of the little ones' First Holy Communion, it occurred to us that the best plan we could organize for this occasion was to go to Rome and celebrate it there. So we wrote to the Father setting out our wishes: for us to spend time with him, for none of the children to be missing – the two eldest no longer lived at home – and for the Pope, who was then Paul VI, to receive us. Since in practice two of the three conditions depended on him, two positive replies were sufficient for the trip to be organized.

He answered immediately saying that he would welcome us and that we could all come together. So the machinery was set in motion and the trip was an intimate family get-together, although I paid dearly for it, as will be seen later on.

### **My eldest sister and I**

Now is the time to tell about the problems experienced at that time by the two oldest children still at home. To reassure those who read these lines, I'll state in advance that both stories ended well.

My older sister was more than halfway through her university studies in the Arts faculty. She had been formally engaged for a while, although her fiancé did not enjoy a good press on the part of his presumed future in-laws. He was a very good person, but – I don't know the whys and wherefores of this – the fact is that they didn't like him. The engagement seemed to be very serious, and there were a few difficult moments at home when dealing with the situation.

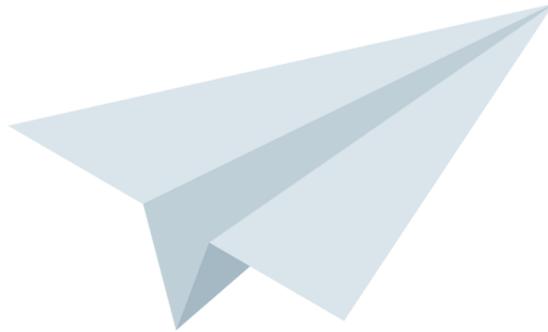
The other problematic person was myself. I was studying my first year of Medicine at the newly-founded University of Navarra. I had always been in contact with the Work's formational activities and had thought about my possible vocation to the Work, but my answer had been no, both because I was afraid of it, and because of a more profound conviction that marriage was for me and, if anything, I would become a supernumerary later on, like my parents. I also protested frequently because I thought, exaggerating things they said, that my friends in the Work coerced me and were overbearing. In addition, I suffered from an element of stage fright, because thinking that I could dedicate my life, once and for all, at 18 years old, gave me the heeby-jeebies, to put it mildly.

This situation made me go to Rome with some reservations, and determined to keep some distance from the Father and the things of the Work. Like that, above all, I could prevent my family from thinking that I was going to commit myself for life and become another of the people in Opus Dei. In termtime I was living in the Colegio Mayor Belagua in Pamplona, Spain, and the people of the Work that I mixed with there encouraged me to make the most of the trip. In response, I looked at them over my shoulder, making the point, to make them envious, that I was going to spend time with the founder, while they stayed in Pamplona ...

## **We made a start**

And with these two premises, I can already tell you about the trip. The older two went to Rome by themselves, and the other ten of us traveled together. Now the system is more modern, but I remember that, then, on the outbound flight, a stewardess would tick off the passenger list with a sheet of paper in hand at the foot of the plane's steps, just as they were boarding. The face of the stewardess,

repeating the same last name with different first names so many times in a row, was like an operetta.



On the return flight, there was another little scene. As in Italy they were more modernized than us, they already had computers in Fiumicino, although they were very rudimentary. When the airline employee entered the surname Cremades on the passenger list at the airport check-in counter, the screen filled up with 10 passengers. Thinking it was some sort of a technical fault, he started banging the machine on the side to try and fix it. These things happen in Latin countries. We have original ways of solving technical faults ...

An old Aragonese friend of my family and of the Father, who lived in Rome, Don Pedro Altabella, a priest who was a canon at Saint Peter's, worked on arranging an audience with the Pope for us and succeeded in the end. In other words, the Silver Wedding Anniversary was a fully satisfactory trip, with all objectives duly accomplished. We stayed in a hostel run by nuns, who were very kind to us.

## **Mass and breakfast at Villa Tevere**

The first morning in Rome we went to the Father's house early. We immediately greeted him enthusiastically. He celebrated Mass,

served by Don Javier Echevarría, in the Holy Family oratory. The homily was very moving. He said how happy it made him to be with us, he recalled the times when he and my father used to go and give catechism classes in the poor neighborhoods of Zaragoza, and he said that our family was specially favored by God, because the Lord had already chosen one son from it to dedicate himself to His service.

As I was tensely expecting him to target me, his words were, instead, a song to freedom. He explained that not all of us had to follow the same vocation, that each walker should follow their own path. Freedom forever! He added that no-one can coerce or impose conditions on other people. I really was pleasantly surprised, because I was convinced that everyone in the Work was after me, and I was permanently on the defensive, perhaps exaggerating and sometimes dramatizing my situation.

The Mass was very prayerful, and we saw at first-hand how devoutly he treated Our Lord in the Eucharist [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). He gave us Holy Communion [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). At the end of Mass, he made his thanksgiving aloud. Then he told us why that oratory had been built, and talked about the love all the members of the Work have for their parents and siblings. He stressed that people's vocations would not be possible without the upbringing they had received at home as children. He also read aloud to us the words engraved on a stone plaque in that oratory. It is a prayer that consecrates the families of the faithful of the Work to the Holy Family of Nazareth. Extracts from it appear on the Opus Dei website, opusdei.org.

*O Jesus, our most lovable Redeemer, Who in coming to enlighten the world with Your example and doctrine, chose to spend the greater part of Your life subject to Mary and Joseph in the humble house in Nazareth, sanctifying the family that all Christian homes were to imitate; graciously accept the consecration of the families of Your children in Opus Dei, which we now make to You.*

*Take them under Your protection and care, and fashion them after the divine model of Your Holy Family. (...)*

*Grant them, Lord, a continual growth in their knowledge of the spirit of our Opus Dei, to which You have called us for Your service and our sanctification. Instill in their hearts a great love for our Work, and an ever-growing appreciation of the beauty of our vocation, so that they may feel a holy pride that You have deigned to choose us, and learn to thank You for the honor that You have accorded them. Bless especially their co-operation in our apostolic work, and make them always share in the joy and peace that You grant us as a reward for our dedication.*

Then we went to a sitting-room, where a large, wonderful breakfast was set out. We must have been very hungry. The Father went out of his way to look after each of us: he poured out our coffee and orange juice, brought the dishes to us ... He insisted that we should eat plenty and not be shy. He guessed our tastes correctly, because for second helpings he brought me a dish, saying, **You do like this, don't you?** And he was right. He told me repeatedly that, to be a good medical student at Navarra, I needed to be strong and well fed. And, also, that I should always feel completely free in everything. Obviously he knew how to hit the nail where it was needed.



He also realized that Mari Carmen, who at the age of 16 was in full adolescent mode, was sitting at a corner of the table and not eating anything. She had adopted this habit at that stage as a way of showing her rebelliousness. He sat next to her for a while and, between one thing and another, between jokes and non-jokes, talking to her about various topics, he managed to make her eat breakfast normally. The gratitude in my parents' eyes was eloquent, as they were fighting to neutralize the power of the moods she was subject to.

Although the Father spoke a lot about freedom, there was a moment when he also approached the area that I considered dangerous for me. He said that, for the Work to spread and be able to take Jesus Christ to the furthest corner of the world, there needed to be many numerary vocations. Then he added that many supernumeraries were also needed. I put up my defenses instantly, to get away from the conflict zone inside me: the possibility of giving myself body and soul to the Lord, in apostolic celibacy.

There was another difficult moment: after breakfast, he turned to my sister, the one who was dating the boy we liked *so much*, and asked her directly if she had a boyfriend. There was a sharp rise in tension, and all of us gradually moved away from this conversation, as if anticipating a monsoon or patch of turbulence. It was like a group of planes flying in formation, which begin to drop down one after the other, swerving down from both sides. I also moved away from the risk zone, but, perhaps because I am very nosy, I stayed far enough away not to get splashed, and close enough to be able to hear the conversation.

Immediately, he realized the situation. **What's up**, he said, **don't your parents like him**. She told him the whole story. The Father reassured her and said, more or less, **Look, don't worry. You and I are going to make a pact: we are going to pray to God. I am going to pray every day for this intention. And you too. Be at peace, because the Lord will hear our prayer, and in the end,**

**you will see how this will be sorted out, to your parents' liking and to your own.** I thought to myself, "Some hopes!" because I saw no way out. It was an impossible situation, which would take an unimaginably large miracle. To the liking of both parties? It occurred to me that it would be a marvel almost as great as the famous miracle granted by Our Lady of Pilar to the one-legged man of Calanda.

But at the same time, those words stuck with me because I knew the Father was very close to God. So I set myself to wait, thinking, "If the Father says that it is going to be fixed, because they will both pray, and he states with such conviction that Our Lord is going to answer their prayers, surely this story will end well." It was like being ready to witness a pre-announced miracle: at the same time as feeling sure of a happy ending, though I didn't know what or how, I maintained a considerable dose of skepticism.

We got a call saying that we had to leave for the Vatican soon, because the scheduled time for our audience with the Pope was earlier than expected. Some of us had to dress up: my father with his civil and pontifical decorations, and my mother and older sister with the mantilla and comb, a privilege bestowed on Spanish women in the Vatican. As there was no time to lose, they got ready there in Villa Tevere, and the Father enjoyed seeing and talking to all of us [\[VIEW PHOTOS\]](#). He called a few Americans who lived in the house at the time so they could see women wearing the Spanish mantilla, which they had never seen before [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#).

He also told us that, when we were with the Pope, we could tell him that my parents and my brothers belonged to the Work, because Paul VI would very much like to know about it.

## **Toccatà and fugue**

And now I have to tell about my own star performance. When it was time for us all to say goodbye to the Father at the front door, I was embarrassed at the thought of the Father kissing me in front of everyone, as if I were in the Work. So I stood near the door, thinking that if I managed to slip out of the house alone, without anyone noticing, I would escape that embarrassment. I did so, feeling sure that as the Father had to say goodbye to so many of us, he would not notice that one was missing. Taking advantage of the fact that someone went out, without anyone noticing I left the house to wait for the others outside.

But my joy was short-lived; I was discovered immediately. The door opened again and the Father came out into the street looking for me, saying, **Javier, where's Javier?** And he caught me there, doing a runner. He took my arm and, bringing me inside again, said, much amused, in front of the whole group, **Look, Javier is too embarrassed to let the Father give him a kiss in front of everyone. Well, come here! Instead of giving you one kiss, today I'm going to give you two.** And, to the applause and mockery of my brothers, the Father said goodbye to me with special affection.

## **Saint Paul VI meets our family**

We set off for Saint Peter's. As my father had a pontifical decoration, he was considered a VIP in the Vatican, and the Swiss Guard did the honors as he went by. At the gates and throughout the long corridors of the loggia, when my father was still a few meters away the Swiss Guards clicked their heels and stood to attention, lance at the ready. And they remained like that until after he had passed on a few meters. As we were excited, wanted to have fun, and had a facility for playing up a bit, we soon realized how to make the most of the way the Pope's soldiers were behaving.

Then the family group divided into three: in the middle were my parents with the older two, who received the honors as they went along; a few meters in front, at the calculated distance, one group of siblings went along instructing the Swiss Guards, with voices and gestures, to stand to attention; and another group of siblings, a few meters behind my father, closed the procession, signaling to them that they could now stand at ease. The guards were following their protocol, but it looked exactly as if they were obeying our orders. Muttered threats could be heard: “Stop that right now ..., just you wait and see what happens when we get home ..., then we’ll settle accounts with you ..., stop messing about, we’re in a very serious place ...” The fact was that we had a blast, and the papal guards were very surprised.

We waited a little while for the Pope, and when he arrived, he spoke in Italian, both amazed and happy to see us. “*Che bella famiglia, che bella famiglia ...!*” We greeted him one by one, genuflecting to kiss his hand, as protocol required [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). The Pope was very loving and funny, and congratulated us on our parents’ Silver Wedding. We explained which of us were in the Work, and Paul VI said, “Opus Dei is a blessing from Heaven.” My father told him that he was president of Catholic Action in Zaragoza, and other things. We had our photo taken with him, he gave each of us a rosary and a medallion, and then he gave us all a blessing [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#).

On the way out, the same operation was repeated with the Swiss Guard, and, I don’t know why, was accompanied by renewed and unjust calls to order and parental threats.

## **The wheels of justice turn slowly, but surely**

We returned very happily to the residence where we were staying, remembering the abundant grace from God we had received

that morning, and how much we had enjoyed that memorable day. But, together with the joy of having had the Mass and the time spent with the Father, and the audience with the Pope, it was time to settle accounts. According to the authorities, we had committed two serious crimes. The first telling-off was because of our hooligan behavior with the Swiss guards and our playing up in the Vatican. It was quite unbelievable. What scandalous behavior. We had behaved terribly ... We endured the downpour to as best as we could, apologizing and pretending to show a regret we did not feel.

The other trouble-spot was the breakfast after Mass. We were accused of having eaten too much, of showing no self-restraint; we had looked as if we were starving and very rude ... We were surprised by this reprimand, because, while it was true we had been hungry, it was the Father himself who had encouraged us to have second helpings ... But anyway, it seemed over the top, and I still – I dare say it jokingly, 55 years later – don't understand the reasons for it, although it's also true that we filled our bellies.

The problem was that the next day, the Father invited us back, this time for an afternoon snack. Remembering our scandalous breakfast, my mother recapped the telling-off from the previous day before lunch and ordered us to behave during the afternoon. She said, "I understand that you are hungry ... Now we are going to have lunch. Anyone who wants to have second helpings of the first course, can have as much as you need ... If you want more of the second course, just ask for it, there's plenty ... There is also as much pudding as you want ... So this afternoon, you are not going to be hungry ..."

And she rounded off her speech with some sharp threats, "Now, if the regrettable, shameful episode of breakfast is repeated today at the afternoon snack ... !" and the ultimatum: we would have no more pocket money until the end of time; the whole apocalypse would descend upon us; and many other tremendously unattractive possibilities ... A real Pandora's box, complete with thunderbolts.

## Afternoon snack at Villa Sacchetti

When we arrived at Villa Sacchetti we were greeted by some very friendly girls from various countries. And a strange thing happened. Sometimes, when you are threatened about something, your inclination in that direction decreases. In this case, logically, our hunger should have decreased. But, curiously, that day it was not like that. Just the opposite, in fact: the severe warnings seemed to have sharpened our appetite, contrary to all expectations.

After the initial greetings, we went to the sitting-room. They invited us to start on the snacks because the Father had said that he would arrive a little later, asking us to begin by ourselves.

At first we were a fairly restrained, but, as the snacks were very nice, our good intentions began to falter, as hunger distressed our young stomachs. Little by little we forgot about the threats received, and in a short while all the snacks had disappeared from the trays. To give an idea of what happened in this act of vandalism, here is one example: sitting next to me was my brother Carlos, who said to me at one point, "Pass me that plate." I replied, "But there's nothing but crumbs left!" And he said, "Pass it to me so I can eat the crumbs." Obviously, no-one could meet my mother's eyes. She said to the girls in anguished tones, "Just look at the way they've attacked it!" And they couldn't think of anything to say ...

When the Father arrived, he said aloud even before coming in, **I'm going to see what these boys have eaten, because as they're very shy, I'm sure they won't have dared to have a decent snack.** My mother blurted out again, "Father, you've no idea how they attacked it!" As he approached the table and saw the existential emptiness that reigned among the dishes – it looked rather like the Gobi Desert – he was silent for a moment and reacted quickly. He said to the girls looking after us, **My daughters, do me a favor! These boys are really, really hungry! Do you understand?**

**So bring them a proper, substantial snack.** We really wanted to applaud him, but obviously we couldn't do it. The ladies went out promptly with the empty trays ...

We continued chatting for a while and the new batch of food arrived, even more splendid than before. Then the same scene as at breakfast was repeated, and the Father began to serve us. He took a plate and offered it to the littlest one, saying, **My daughter, what would you like?** Ana Mary hesitated, looking anxiously at my mother ... The Father immediately realized that we had been ordered to fast, and exclaimed, **My children, don't look at your mother; eat whatever you want, feel completely at home. What's more, you must be very hungry because you've been walking through the streets of Rome all day ...** And he added enthusiastically, **Come on, children, eat, and let's make sure that nothing is left ...!** That was the starting-gun, and the cavalry attacked again, giving a good account of the snacks, grateful for the Father's broad-mindedness and affection for our youthful, *exhausted, famished* bodies ...

We chatted for a little longer, and he said he also wanted to show us Villa Tevere and Villa Sacchetti. We went around the house with him, and he told us the story of every detail. He was walking with two of the little ones, holding their hands, but there was some shoving among them, because the others were all fighting to walk beside him. At one point, he saw that the youngest one was crying silently, and asked her what was wrong. She explained that her brother Pablo was pinching her to make her move away so he could put himself in her place, but that she didn't want to. He laughed and from then on that little sister was his special favorite [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#).

When we arrived in the oratory of Our Lady of Peace, as we went up to the sanctuary, he jokingly took Ana Mary and sat her in the presidential seat. She was surprised and delighted, but looked at my parents with a face that said, "I wonder if I'm going to get told off for this later ..."

Afterwards, the older ones went down to the crypt and the Father showed us a beautiful statue of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a devotion that is cultivated with special reverence in upper Aragon. At his sister Carmen's tomb, he put on a purple stole, lit a small candle and said a responsory. Then, with his customary delicacy, he lit another candle and said another responsory for the deceased in our family.

When we came to the place where he was to be buried, he told us that when the house was built, the architects had been reluctant to tell him that they planned to construct tombs there for him and some other people, and that when he found out, he told them that a child of God is not afraid of life nor of death. He added that he didn't care where he died or where he was buried. Later, jokingly, he said that he realized that this crypt was the coldest place in the house, and so when they buried him, he was going to end up with some serious attacks of lumbago.

I still remember the moment when he climbed onto the marble slab and, stamping on it, repeated, **The Father is not afraid of life, nor afraid of death. He is always in the hands of God who is a fantastic father.** He also invited us to join him, laughing, **You come up here too, because when I'm dead, they certainly won't let you.**

## **Enjoying Rome, and farewell**

Happy to have spent time with the Pope and the Father, we filled the rest of our stay visiting Rome in a rented minibus. We went to Mass in Saint Peter's, and then said the Creed there and admired the *Pietà* ... We saw the Vatican Museums, walked through the Forum and went into the Colosseum ... Legend has it that those who throw a coin into the Fontana di Trevi are sure to return to the

Eternal City [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). We did so, and it worked, as we all came back together on two more occasions ...

At the end of the trip, we went to Villa Tevere to say goodbye to the Father, and had another family gathering with him. He asked about the visits we had made, how we had enjoyed them, and if we were tired ... He gave us each a rosary and some holy pictures with handwritten prayers on the back. He gave my mother a photo of the preparatory model for the statue of Our Lady, Mother of Fair Love, that a sculptor was working on for the Navarra University Campus in Pamplona.

The Father had received us several times, celebrated Mass for us, invited us to breakfast and an afternoon snack, taken us to see the house in detail, and had done all he possibly could for us. To try to reciprocate, we told him that when he was next in Zaragoza he had to come to lunch with us one day. He happily accepted and we made a firm agreement for his visit. We made our farewells and he gave us a blessing for the trip.

Soon we were leaving Fiumicino on different flights bound for Paris, Seville, Zaragoza and Pamplona ... The family, after the fantastic adventure of those days, crossed the sky in different directions, happy and grateful to God for the wonderful Silver Wedding Anniversary that, through the Father's kindness, the whole family had enjoyed together.

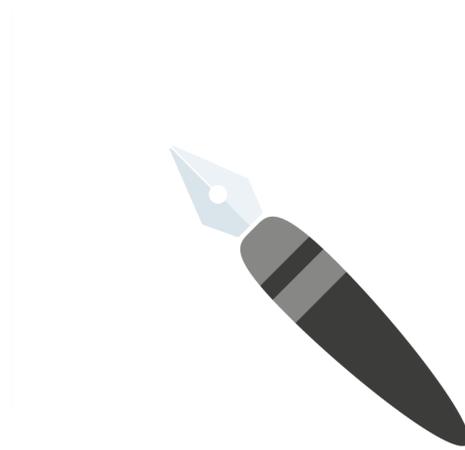
## **8. On our return, the great decision**

I came back from the Rome trip with several darts stuck dangerously in my soul. I had seen how much the Father loved the Lord and how happy he was. I had felt, beyond all doubt, the real affection he had for me personally. His song to freedom had also made a breach in my walls, because my strongest line of defense had been that others wanted to coerce me, and it had now become clear that I was as free as a bird, and that it was up to me alone to sort things out between Our Lord and myself. Other excuses no longer held water. In addition, it made a lot of sense that many numeraries were needed, because the Lord needed them ... And a few more things of the same kind ...

The people of the Work in Belagua asked me about the trip and I told them about how wonderful it had been, showing off, and arousing envy. I admit that I used a little trick as camouflage. Reversing the Father's words, I told them that he'd said that we had to pray because many supernumeraries were needed, and that many numeraries were also necessary. Surprised, they asked me whether I had got it muddled, and I defended myself by assuring them that that was what I had heard in Rome. Some were still unconvinced. "Hey, are you sure it wasn't the other way around?" And I insisted, "Sorry, but I'm the one who was there, right? You're not going to tell me what the Father said!"

I suffered this inner turbulence for a short time, just over a month and a half. I began May, Our Lady's month, in that same state. On Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May, I went with a good friend to make a pilgrimage to a little shrine of Our Lady in a church in Pamplona. There before her, it was harder to resist God's will. And I entered a vocational crisis. A few days later, on Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1964, I decided to ask to join the

Work, and I wrote a letter to the Father saying that I wanted to be a numerary. And that's what I am today.



The moment of that decision has its funny side: it was in the Colegio Mayor Belagua, in the afternoon, sitting astride a window-sill on the fourth floor at the front, messing around about 15 meters above the ground, with one leg dangling over the void and the other inside the room. The danger of falling to my death was obvious. Playing up and swinging my legs, I don't know why, this thought came to me, "If I decided right now to join Opus Dei, I'd remember the absurdity of this situation all my life." I thrust it away, but the thought came back. Right there and then I had a *coup de grâce* and said yes to Jesus. Then I looked at the clock. It was 4:53 p.m.

And I have not forgotten it: every year, for more than half a century, I have celebrated that anniversary on 15<sup>th</sup> May at 4:53 pm, in the month of Mary, thanking God for helping me make the best decision of my life.

## **The day after**

I called my parents, saying that I wanted to speak to them, and they immediately came to Pamplona. We went out to lunch at Las Pocholas restaurant and, when my father had just been served the

consommé he had ordered, I told them the news. I then underwent rigorous questioning: if I had thought it through, if I felt completely free in doing it, if I was aware of the commitment I made, etc. I tried to explain myself, telling my father, who was horrified, that I hadn't thought too much about it, since it had been a grace from God. But, in case they worried, I did not tell them that the decision had been taken while playing the fool, hanging out of a window 15 meters above the ground.

They told me that they had always prayed a lot for me. They were very happy, and both gave me a big hug, assuring me that whatever I did in my life, whatever my paths and decisions were, I could always count on them. At the end of lunch, my father joked about the consommé at the beginning: he was so carried away by emotion that although it was hot, he had gulped it down in one go, before he realized. It caused him a slightly sore throat for several days.

As God is very good, I began to experience a joy that I had never experienced before. Seen from the God's side – the real one – things have an unknown light. How has it been possible that a lazy so-and-so like me could say yes to the Lord in 1964, and maintain that decision firmly until now, 2020? The secret was that my parents prayed for me tirelessly; they made many other people pray; people of the Work, so many of them that I have met over time, also prayed to God for me, offered up hours of study, made so many sacrifices ... All asking God to help me do His Will, to discover which vocation was mine ...

I will add two small but relevant postscripts to my decision on 15<sup>th</sup> May.

## **Six months later**

In November that same year, the Father came to Pamplona to preside at an academic ceremony as Grand Chancellor of the

University. Since I lived in Belagua, I was roped in to help keep order as a volunteer.

My job was to be one of those lining the route of the long procession of professors and notables, attired in their robes and gowns as rigorous academic etiquette required, on the way to the newly-built Great Hall of the Central Building. In Pamplona, recalling the San Fermin bull-running, this university occasion is wryly known as the *docto encierro* – the learned bull-run. Hundreds of people stood on both sides of the route, and those of us wearing the official armband had to keep order, amid all the excited applause and desires to see the Father and get closer to him.

What happened was that, in the hubbub of so many people – as I say, many people were crowding the space – when the procession reached the place where I was stationed, the Father saw me and, skipping the protocol, came over to greet me personally, taking everyone by surprise. He said he welcomed me to the Work, and gave me another kiss and another hug. He also told me that he had prayed a lot for me, had kept an eye on me, and had celebrated when God gave me the grace of my vocation. And that was it ...

## **Seven years after my failed escape attempt**

The second incident happened during my stay in Rome, while I was living at the central house of the Work from 1969 to 1973. I do not remember the specific date, but do remember what happened. One day we were told that the Father was in the sitting room. We left whatever we were doing and went there. This time he seemed very tired, dull, dejected, and not very talkative. Later we found out that he had not been able to sleep the previous night, and Don Alvaro had encouraged him to come and spend time with us to relax a bit. It was an unusual situation for a get-together: the Father sat there in silence, and all of us, also silent, gathered around him.

Then he began to speak in a very quiet voice, and told us, **My children, when I die, don't think I was a special person. I am just a sinner. A sinner who loves Jesus Christ madly. Please, when you hear of my death, I ask you to pray a lot for me and offer many prayers for my soul. I am a sinner and God is going to ask me to render a strict account. Furthermore,** he continued, **I resisted the will of God, which was to found Opus Dei.**

Then he was quiet for a while, and we were still puzzled, not knowing what to say. He said the same thing again, but when he realized the atmosphere was growing tense, he tried to lighten it. To break the ice, he made a considerable effort and changed the subject, saying, **Well, my children, what is your news ...?**

There were more than a hundred people at this gathering: a few sitting in chairs, but most of us sitting on the floor or standing in a circle around him. I was behind a column, poking my head out and the Father was looking around the room, looking at us one by one with enormous affection. When he caught sight of my head leaning out, he said, **In any case, Javier, I am very consoled by the thought that you did not want to be in the Work either and today, here you are.** And the conversation continued ... Obviously, I was struck. It was like an endearing settling of accounts, seven or eight years after what had happened at my parents' Silver Wedding Anniversary, and that failed attempt of mine to escape through the front door in Bruno Buozzi Street in Rome.

## **And my sister, the one with the boyfriend...?**

Well, the one with the boyfriend, the one who had also got the Father to pray for her, continued for over a year apparently in the same situation, without any change either in the perspectives nor the diagnosis. The forecast of a possible wedding was getting closer. But

appearances are often deceptive, and the process of what is happening on the inside goes unseen ...

In June 1965, at the end of the academic year, I was in Belagua when I received an unexpected call from my mother. She said, "Pray a lot for your sister! Pray a lot for your sister ...!" Alarmed, I asked her why, and she said there was nothing wrong; that she didn't know anything, but she sensed something (mothers have special gifts, and are a little like fortune tellers). She said she assumed I was praying, but that I had to do so much more intensely, because it was important. She did not want to go into details. After a while, she again stressed that I had to pray harder for this intention.

And, wonder of wonders, a few days later my mother called me again and said that the day before, my sister had decided to be a numerary of the Work as well. She explained to my parents that she had been thinking about it for a long time, and that she had seen that this was God's will. Because of that she had to break off with her boyfriend, so she did, with great regret, that morning. Early in the afternoon, she went to the Center of the Work where they knew her, to ask the director for admission. Since there was no problem, right there and then she wrote a letter to the Father asking to join the Work. And, since her boyfriend lived very close to her home, and what the eyes don't see doesn't grieve the heart, she felt it wise to put some distance between them. A few days later, she packed her suitcase and moved to Barcelona. And she is still there now, doing stupendously.

History relates, to the credit of the abandoned boyfriend, that when she explained to him the reason for her change of course, and that she was responding to God's call, he replied that if another man had come between them, he would have fought with all his strength to keep her; but if the competitor was God, he could not do it and he surrendered.

The Father had said that the solution would be to my parents' liking and to my sister's. That, which had been unthinkable and had

seemed impossible, was exactly what happened. It is yet another proof, an absolutely clear one, of the power of prayer, the grace of God, and parental affection. And, also, of the strength of the Father's prayer and his loving care for all of us.

When my parents told my younger siblings of my sister's decision, they were at that time on vacation in France, staying with different families and learning French. They immediately wrote letters or postcards to María Pilar, commenting on the news [\[VIEW PHOTOS\]](#). Almost everyone congratulated her enthusiastically and movingly on her decision. But one of the little ones was angry and disappointed and, as a true Aragonese girl, she did not hide it, but let off steam, firmly and stubbornly stating her disapproval, while at the same time showing that she had already made up her mind to accept the situation. She wrote her sister a reiterative declamation, with spelling that was still a work in progress: [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)

*Dear sister, dear Maria Pilar,  
How are you, I am very well.*

*This Morning I heard that you have become a numerary of Opus Dei and I dont want that No, No, and No, and No, No, No, No, No, No, No, No, No, because I dont want that and also I dont waaaaaaaannnnnnnnnttt that*

*Send me your adress so I can write to you.*

*I am having a really good time and rigt now I have a sore tooth that is very wobly and is hurting me Horribly (...)*

*Howisit going with the hair extention do you wear it much but send a photo of you wearing it.*

*Write to me lots and every day or if not twice a week so I don't get bored, because some days I get as bored as an oyster.*

*Write to me soon and put poscards of Barcelona inside the letter (...)*

*Well, its dinner time.*

*Big hug from your sister that loves you and doesnt forget you.*

*Conchita Cremades*



## **And the rest of the gang...?**

I think the example of the two elder siblings, this piece of news, plus mine from the previous year, were like a trigger for the siblings who came behind. Henceforth, as they got older, they also decided to become numeraries, one after another. After María Pilar, they “fell” in this order: Carlos, Mari Carmen, Sabela, Conchita, Pablo, and, finally, Ana Mary.

You may think, reading of this panorama, that we were all acting like remote-controlled robots, with no choice; but nothing could be further from the truth. In my parents’ house there was a great atmosphere of freedom, and each of us did whatever we wanted. There was total respect for the decisions we made. We all went through good and bad times; we did not escape teenage angst and rebelliousness, in all their possible manifestations; sometimes some of us got top grades in our school exams, but there were also fails. Our numerous gang all went through the difficulties typical of each stage of growth, exuberant and insulting by turns ... There was a bit of everything, a real potpourri.

But the grace of God was making its way in and solving all the twists and turns. At the end of a few years, and for a time, all of us ten siblings were numeraries. Later on, the two older boys left the Work to follow other paths, and Pablo became a supernumerary. All three of them got married and had wonderful families. Now we delight in their children and grandchildren. Pablo gave us the greatest sorrow, because a cancer took him to Heaven early, before he was 50. And what an upset was that for all of us! The five girls are numeraries and Carlos and I are priests.

## 9. Absolutely free

Although my family is not involved in the following story, I can't resist writing about it. It clearly shows one of the Father's characteristics which I have repeatedly referred to. The first years of the University of Navarra were marked by considerable excitement in the sphere of politics. The University was just beginning its journey, and in Spain at that time there was not much room for freedom, including in teaching. The University board of governors had well-founded fears that if there were student movements and riots, they could affect the civil authorities' view of the University, and therefore its future.

In the academic year 1965-1966 I was in my third year of medicine, and was staying at the Colegio Mayor Aralar in Pamplona. It was a year of student unrest throughout Spain and Europe, as a sort of appetizer for the forthcoming youth explosion known as "May 68." There were almost a hundred students and some young graduates in Aralar, all members of the Work, and, obviously, each of us had our own ideas. The huge variances between us were evident: there were a few Francoists; many others opposed Franco's regime; there monarchists who supported Don Juan; monarchists who supported Don Carlos; Republicans; leaders of the Spanish University Syndicate or SEU; supporters of the Falange; some who were not bothered at all and had no known political affiliation ... And there was even one extreme liberal, almost bordering on anarchism.

In our family life in Aralar, we never discussed politics, so as to respect everyone's freedom; but in our activities, both academic and civic, each of us might or might not be involved with unions, various different associations, personal groupings, or all kinds of movements.

Our life together in Aralar was totally peaceful, affectionate and warm, since thinking the same or differently from the others was not only no obstacle, but actually enriching. It made no difference that many of us had clearly opposing, incompatible views on life and ways of understanding it: we were activists and participated in student assemblies, illegal street demonstrations that were often broken up by the *greys* – as the police were called because of the color of their uniforms – with batons or with tanks that launched powerful jets of dyed water. Afterwards those who were wet and had their clothes dyed the color of the water were easily identified and detained by the police.

One of the members of Work was a great revolutionary – diametrically opposed to the political regime in power – and he was very much on police files. He was often detained and ended up in the cells of the local police station or in court. Every so often, he spent almost more of his time in a cell than out of it. When we were allowed to, we would visit him and bring food and stuff he may like. The policemen were amazed, especially at the affection we had for each other. And also at his intense study routine whilst he was detained, because the exams were getting closer and, as he was a brilliant student, he was doing his best to get top grades ... One of the policeman said to us one day, “I wish my son studied half as much as this man does.”

We knew that Aralar was watched 24/7, because it was notorious for containing representatives of all possible political fauna, something like Noah’s ark and its animals. Hence, we tried to avoid compromising the management. So at night, when we went out to clandestine meetings, to put up posters, or to spray political graffiti, instead of going out by the door, we would jump over the fence in the back garden. And, because our political ideas differed so much it often happened that those who went out to put up posters at 3am, covered with their own posters the ones that other Aralar residents had put up earlier. And so on and on, one after the other.

I really want to emphasize that inside the house, we enjoyed a wonderful atmosphere of total freedom, and that we were all brothers, although ideologically we were often poles apart, on so many issues.

In this hotbed of ideas and activities, with all kinds of goings-on, we learnt that the Father was going to spend a few hours in Pamplona, stopping at Aralar. I was curious to know what he would say to us, because I was sure that he would hear of the seething cauldron we were immersed in.

He arrived when we were celebrating a birthday party. He came in unexpectedly and asked us to carry on with our program of songs, dances, magic tricks, jokes, etc. We had a great time, and tried to make sure he enjoyed the fun and could relax. At the end of the gathering he was smiling and happy. He said goodbye, thanked us and left without saying anything in particular.

I was sorry that we had missed a chance to hear his thoughts. But shortly after leaving the sitting room, he came back in and said, **My children, I want to tell you something. Think about everything as you please, always do what seems best to you. You are free. In Opus Dei, long live freedom! And if ever someone in the Work were to coerce you in any way, or tried to tell you how you have to think or act, just call me. Wherever I am, I will leave everything and I will come to personally defend your freedom. Is that clear, my children?** We said yes, absolutely delighted. And he said goodbye to us without adding anything further.

## 10. Jewels for a monstrance

After that little digression I now return to my subject, to recount the next venture we organized as a family. My mother had an aunt called Rosario, a good, very pious person, who had suffered a lot because one of her two sons was killed the Spanish Civil War, and shortly after, her other son and her husband also died tragically. So, as a young woman, she was left a widow, alone and with a large fortune, since her family were the foremost landowners of Navarre. Rosario grew fond of buying and amassing high-quality and very expensive jewelry. Some of them were unique pieces: huge pearls, sapphires, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, etc. Others were either loose gems or set in earrings, rings, bracelets, chokers, pendants ... She enjoyed wearing them at parties and meeting people from the high society of Pamplona.

At the end of her life she said in her will that she wished some sort of sacred vessel to be made with her jewels, to serve and honor the Blessed Sacrament. She named my mother's brother, my uncle Jose Maria, as her executor. Wishing to fulfil her last will in the best possible way, he spoke to my mother, and they agreed to make a good-quality monstrance, set with Rosario's jewels, to honor Our Lord when solemnly exposed in the Blessed Sacrament. When thinking about where to bestow it, they decided that it would seem disproportionately opulent in the village where she had had her property, so it could be donated to the University of Navarra, where they would certainly know how to value it and make good, frequent use of it.

The design and creation were commissioned from Talleres de Arte Granda in Madrid. They put all their considerable skill and a lot of love into it. The result was a perfectly beautiful, very valuable piece, a real work of art [\[VIEW PHOTOS\]](#).

Having resolved my uncle's doubts about where it should end up, my mother suggested that, being a precious object of special significance, it could be given personally to the Grand Chancellor of the University – the Father. She had to overcome the resistance of the Counsellor – our old friend Don Florencio! But when he was faced with the threat that either it was given to the Father in person, or he would not get the monstrance at all, he organized things in such a way that it could be presented on the Father's next visit to Pamplona. There was also another small difficulty that was quickly solved: clearly, all the Cremades children had to be there together for the presentation. And it was managed: we all arrived, and enjoyed another even bigger family event.

The presentation took place in Pamplona, on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1966, at the Colegio Mayor Aralar. The Father spoke about the monstrance with enormous appreciation and gratitude, expressing his deep affection for us, and we had a great time together, over some nibbles in the sitting-room. Then my cousin Conchi, Jose Maria's daughter, made the official presentation of the monstrance, and the Father blessed it. The whole family went with him to the oratory, and with the Father officiating, the first solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, exposed in our brand-new monstrance, was celebrated. He was very happy since, as he had always told us, for the worship of the Lord in the Eucharist everything seemed little to him. Speaking of the difference between the material monstrance, which in this case was extremely valuable, and the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacred Host, he said, **Don't you think that, although it is very rich, when it is for the Lord everything seems poor?**

I also remember how affectionately and confidingly he treated my uncle Jose Maria, who was somewhat reserved by nature. The Father won him over from the first moment with a big hug and some loving words. And he truly enjoyed it all.

My sister Sabela, in an aside, asked him to pray for her, because she was soon going to make him happy, since she wanted to join the Work. The Father replied that he was not going to pray for that, because it was her personal, free decision. He said he was going to pray for her to be able to fulfil God's Will. And he added that she should be very clear that the vocation to the Work involves deciding to join the Lord on Golgotha, on Calvary, and not on Mount Tabor. A few days later, Sabela wrote a letter asking to join the Work.

The Father asked my cousin Jose Maria if he had a girlfriend. Jose Maria replied that he had had one, but they had just broken up. The Father told him very kindly that he was going to pray for the Lord to give him a beautiful, smart, good wife. And that was what happened.

A sister of my grandmother, whom we called Aunt Petra, aged 90, was also there. She told the Father that she "prayed for her religious nephews and nieces in Opus Dei." And with great affection, he explained that in the Work we were ordinary Christians, from the street, who seek sanctity in their work, in their daily occupations; that we live in the middle of the world, with the joy of the children of God, and that our vocation is not that of religious orders and institutions, which we love very much. Expressing great affection for those who are consecrated to God, he explained our lay, secular charism. Aunt Petra was really happy to talk with the Father, and to hear all that he said.

It was decided that the monstrance should be kept in the Colegio Mayor Aralar, in a safe embedded in a wall in the management office, with maximum security and the most modern protection and alarm precautions. Years later, it was decided that if it was moved to the headquarters of the Work, in Rome, it would be used more often and, with my uncle's agreement, it was transferred to Villa Tevere, where it is usually used on the most solemn festivals, giving glory to God with the precious little stones from my family.

## **11. The mother of the sons of Zebedee, twentieth-century version**

The next episode took place just a few days after the presentation described above. In 1966, when I finished my third year of medicine, the people of the Work suggested that I could apply to transfer to the University of Salamanca for the remaining years of my degree. There were still not many people of the Work there, and reinforcements were needed. I said yes, delighted, and prepared to move.

Travel is easier now, but at the time, it seemed to me that Salamanca was very far away, as if I was going to move to the Wild West. So at the beginning of October, I went to Zaragoza to spend time with my family, planning to continue on to my new city from there. When I arrived, I was surprised to find only my mother at home. My father was away working, and all my siblings had also fled the nest for one reason or another – plans, workshops, trips, etc. When I gave her a hug, she confided joyfully to me, “The Father is in Miraflores. Go there, and I’ll be there soon.” I was delighted to hear it, and went there as instructed.

Sure enough, it was true. Once at the Colegio Mayor Miraflores, I did not have long to wait before my mother’s arrival. I heard her unmistakable voice as she came up the stairs of the house, accompanied by the director of Miraflores, to the area where the Father was. Discreetly, I positioned myself next to her and a few minutes later the three of us met him. The Father started asking after all of us, very lovingly. Our important news was Sabela’s decision to join the Work, and we thanked God for it together. I took the opportunity to tell him that I was going to continue my studies in Salamanca, and he assured me he would pray for me and for the apostolate that was starting.

At one point, my mother became serious, almost other-worldly, and said that she wanted to ask him, in my father's name and her own, something important. The Father prepared to listen to her patiently and so did I, without knowing what was about to fall on me.

She went back to prehistoric times. She told him in solemn tones that ever since she and my father had started dating, more than 27 years before, they had prayed to God every day for a son who would become a priest. And that they wanted to convey this desire to the Father, to ask for his prayers for this intention and for him to do everything possible so that one of their sons would be ordained to the priesthood.

I thought to myself, "God forbid! Which of my two older brothers is she going to put in a cassock?!" The Father was about to reply, but she kept talking, because she said she had not finished yet. She added, quite seriously and as if it were the most normal thing in the world, "Father, we both think that the most likely one to be a priest is Javier." And she pointed at me. I, defenseless in the face of the unexpected future that they were wishing on me, thought, "What nonsense! Go and get ordained yourself if that's what you want, and leave me in peace! I'm only a student, I've just finished my third year, I've never studied philosophy or theology ..." Such a possibility had never once crossed my mind.

The Father was highly amused by the firmly planned project and the look of astonishment on my face. He said that he was going to pray for what she asked; but for someone to become a priest, the first thing that is necessary is for God to want it; at that time I was needed in Salamanca; God would make his will known in due course. And, obviously, it was a decision in which the will of the person concerned was decisive.

When we left Miraflores, I protested vigorously to my mother, telling her to watch what she said, that she could have told me something earlier and asked my opinion, and that I was going to get into trouble. She was quite upset, saying that the last thing she

needed was to be obliged to ask me for permission to speak confidentially with the Father about whatever she wanted. I realized that that wall was unassailable.

Cicero called history “the teacher of life,” and Cervantes, going still further, called it “the mother of truth.” And indeed, looking back at events now after such a long time, it is clear that my mother’s request was not at all misguided and that God was going to grant it amply, through my parents’ persistent prayers, and the Father’s. After a few years, two brothers received ordination to the priesthood: I was ordained first, and Carlos two years later. So my parents had not just one son who is a priest, but two! Big time! Nothing less! The Lord’s words are perfectly clear: “Ask and it will be given to you ...”

\* \* \*

At around the same time, my mother also embarked on a new adventure of great significance. She was a pioneer in creating the Cantal Club, of which she was the founder and director, a Club for secondary and sixth form schoolgirls. The Club was to be a place where they could supplement and round off the formation they received in their homes and schools. The numerary women of the Work who lived in Zaragoza could not take on a club of this kind. They were running centers for women university students and training centers for vocational studies, but not for secondary schoolgirls and sixth-formers.

Not having a place for the formation of my two younger sisters was what decided my mother to create the Cantal Club, and she encouraged the mothers she knew, and her daughters’ friends’ mothers, to join in. She drew up its regulations and dealt with all the legal paperwork necessary to set up and run an apostolate of this kind.

She was very mindful of the Father's motto, **God and daring!** So, trusting in God's help, praying intensely, making many people pray and talking everyone around her into the idea, she rented a small apartment that she did up and furnished as best she could. The apartment was soon too small for the growing Cantal Club and she had to move it to a much larger place. She was also hoping that in due course it could become a Center of Opus Dei, where the people running the Club could live.

Formational activities, sports and mentoring began little by little. She fitted out the Cantal Club the best she could: it had a study room, an oratory, a kitchen, a large sitting room, sports equipment, etc.

She got the money to pay for it all from wherever she could: contributions from her friends; applying to my father's friends and those of the other mothers – she was a past master in the art of fund-raising for formational, social and charitable work –; the girls' club membership fees; offering after-school tutoring; applying for official grants; putting mothers to work at different craft activities to sell the things they made; etc.

I remember one major source of income: they specialized in producing handmade tapestries, embroidered with wool, silks and other very good-quality materials. The tapestries were large-sized and truly beautiful. They started selling customized tapestries, with the appropriate images and designs, to all the official institutions in the city. Colorful tapestries traditionally adorn the façades of their headquarters, hanging from their balconies and windows during the festivities of El Pilar, Christmas, Easter and other events of the liturgical year.



They got commissions from the Town Hall, the Regional Government, the Courts of Justice, the Army, the regional parliament, and from almost all the important organizations, to renew their tapestries, many of which were old and very shabby. Even nowadays in Zaragoza, almost 50 years later, they still look wonderful when they are used. They also received commissions from many other places. These were magnificent works of art, made with professionalism, skill and care, like the old artists used to do.

A group of good mothers worked there for hours and hours ... to help their daughters' club. Enjoying the cheerful atmosphere of those long hours spent working together, also helped them to draw closer to God and start going regularly to formational activities themselves. My mother made the most of all opportunities. When we wanted to tease my mother a little, we told her she was *enCantalada*, as in made by and for Cantal.

She bought the property herself and, when everything was on track and with hundreds of members, seeing that she was no longer able to cover all the areas of formation, given its size and the reputation it had acquired, she left it in the hands of women Opus Dei numeraries, who by this time were able to take over. My mother continued to help as much as she could and watched the progress of

Cantal Club with joy. Years later, my parents gave the property to the Work for the continuity of the club.

My father was not far behind and, at that time, he was also a member of the board of trustees supporting the first steps of the Jumara Club for secondary and sixth-form boys.

And now in Zaragoza these two clubs of the Work, Cantal and Jumara, continue to go full steam ahead. This proves once again that, if you take a leap of faith, God never leaves you in the lurch ... **God and daring!** the Father told us, and things will go ahead.

Well, I must also leave on record the fact that my two younger sisters Conchita and Ana Mary, who were beneficiaries and initiators of the club, and the original reason for its existence, were very well formed ... and were *enCantaladoras* ("enChanting").

## **12. Another even bigger plan**

It will be remembered that the Father had agreed to come to lunch at our house, so that we could try and show our gratitude for his many acts of kindness towards us. He was going to come to Spain again in October 1967, but this time he couldn't fit in a visit to Zaragoza. He wrote us a wonderful letter which I copy below. It was another new invitation.

**My dear Pilar and Juan Antonio,**

**May Jesus watch over that whole family for me!**

**Before arriving in Spain, I want to send you these lines, so that you can tell me if it is possible to arrange things as I suggest below.**

**Although I would very much like to, I will not be able to stop in Zaragoza this time; therefore, as I must necessarily spend a few days – very few – in Molinoviejo, it will give me great joy if all of you join me there for lunch one day.**

**In case this plan is feasible for you, the Directors have already been notified, so that none of your children would miss it. If you cannot organize this “mobilization” now, we will agree on Zaragoza itself, I hope in the near future. Believe me, I am really sorry not to be able to arrange things to our liking: yours and mine.**

**Since I am leaving Rome, could you send your reply to Madrid, to Don Florencio?**

**With love always, I pray for you and bless you *in Domino.***

**Josemaria**

**Rome, 16<sup>th</sup> September 1967**

Our joy was immense and we had a great new family celebration to look forward to, all together around the Father. In the end, it was settled that the lunch was to be in Madrid, at the Colegio Mayor

Alcor, on 4<sup>th</sup> October. As planned, no-one missed the engagement. I came over from Salamanca. We had some appetizers, lunch and a long after-lunch chat. The Father poured out his affection with appreciative words for each of us, treating us with the loving kindness he always showed.

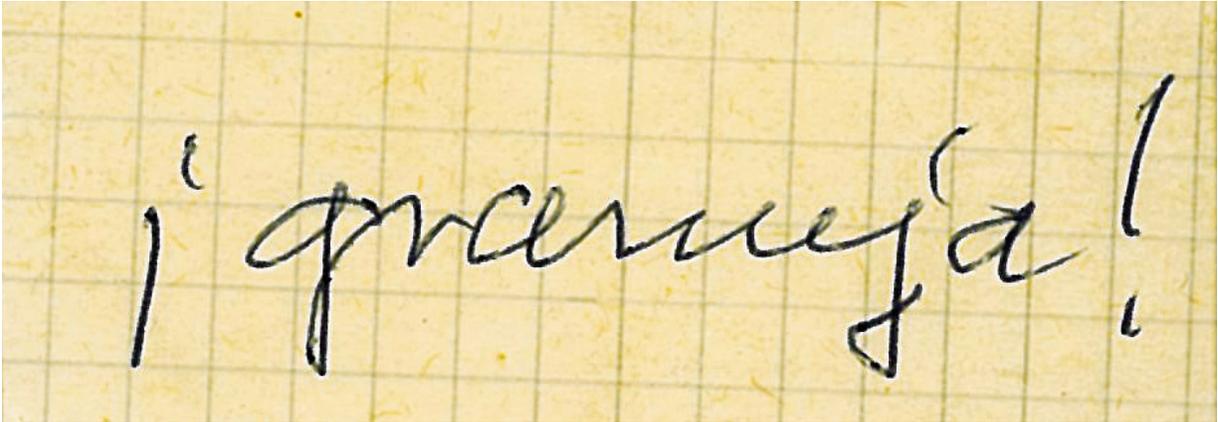
I went to this encounter with several pictures of Our Lady and photographs of the Father in my pockets, because I hoped that he would write some words or aspirations on the back of each of them, to keep as mementos. Some were mine, others had been given to me for that purpose by people in my Center or other friends. Several of my siblings had had the same idea and also brought photos and holy pictures with them.

We easily got the Father to start writing on the holy cards and photos we were putting before him [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). To make it easier, we put the pictures face-down. But he always started by looking at what was on the other side. If it was a picture of Our Lady, he would write a short prayer and you could tell that he was praying while he wrote them. If it was a photo of himself, he protested with a cheerful grumble. He did not like being the protagonist. He said things like, **Who is this ugly chap?** or, **Where on earth did this one come from?** or, **Couldn't you have brought a photo of me from when I was young – I was handsome then!?** He wrote the same on the back of all of them: *Ut iumentum!* These are two Latin words that mean “Like a donkey.” [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)

The Father often talked about little donkeys because he was very fond of them. This animal sometimes appears in Holy Scripture, and he imagined it carrying the Virgin Mary, and accompanied by Saint Joseph, to Bethlehem, with the Child about to be born; on the flight to Egypt; on entering Jerusalem... In the Old Testament a donkey also appears in some of the stories, and Psalm 72 says: *Ut iumentum factus sum apud te*, “I’m like a donkey at your side...” He really liked the idea of being like God’s little donkey, who demands nothing and accepts everything, docile and hardworking. And he

wanted to carry Jesus, like a faithful little donkey, everywhere he went. That is why he put *Ut iumentum!* as a summary of his attitude.

As he kept writing with great patience, and I had come to the end of the photos and holy pictures I had brought, I placed my notebook in front of him open at a blank page. The Father looked at me in amusement and wrote, **Rogue!**



In that get-together he spoke about the expansion of the Work, his visits to the Pope, Don Alvaro's work in the Vatican, the many bishops who talked about the spirit of the Work during the Council, etc.

He told us he had just heard that the chief of an African tribe had told one of the women in the Work, realizing her love for the poor and the enormous social work she was doing in his country, "Since you are doing great charitable work, when you get tired you could be my fifth wife ..."

Maria Pilar and Ana Mary gave him a large ceramic duck and he was very interested in it. **How I like this creature! Where did you get it from?** He shared out some sweets, and the atmosphere in the get-together was relaxed and family-like.

He asked which of us was the shareholder of Eléctricas Reunidas. It was Conchita. In one of her letters she had told him that with her small savings, she had bought shares in the company, as

my father was its Managing Director, and that, if he was in money difficulties, he was welcome to have them. Very kindly, he said to her, **Well, my daughter, I have not asked you for them, but if I need them I will ask, and you have given me the joy of knowing that you are willing to give me what you have.** Conchita was delighted, and told him about Cantal girls' club, which she attended regularly.

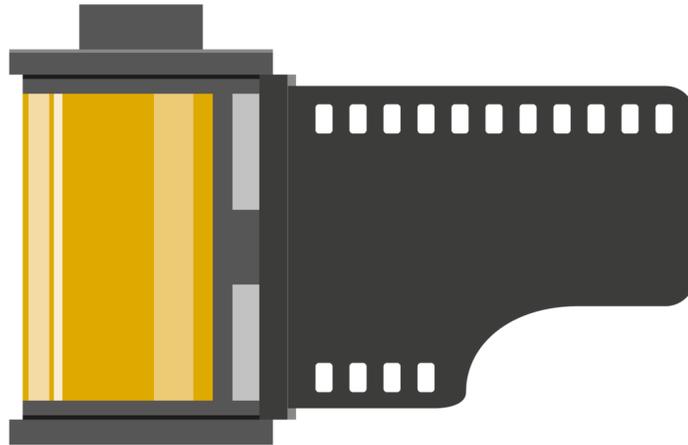
We told him various little stories from our recent past plus some from when we were small. He really enjoyed them all. We wanted to have some photos taken, and we asked the managers of Alcor if anyone could take them for us. Soon a young woman came, who we were told was an expert photographer, and took several group photos of us while chatting with the Father, and then of each of us alone with him. It was yet another wonderful opportunity to keep a memento forever. At the end, he gave us a blessing for the journey.

On that same afternoon, we left Madrid in a hurry in several cars and drove to Pamplona, where the Friends of the University of Navarra were holding a meeting. We saw him again some days later at the Holy Mass that he celebrated at the university campus for a huge congregation, where he delivered his unforgettable homily "Passionately Loving the World."

## **The issue of the photographer keeps rumbling on**

The story of the *expert photographer* did not have a happy ending. Time went by, and the photographs did not arrive. We asked for them repeatedly, to be met with vague replies. A few months later, one of my sisters investigated further, and told us the tragic truth: the photographer was not so much of an expert after all. She eventually explained that when she went to print the negatives, either she lost the reel of film, or the camera hadn't worked – I don't

now recall which. Therefore, there were no photos at all. Our hopes were well and truly dashed ... but there was nothing to be done.



It is easy to imagine the indelible memory that we still retain of the *expert photographer* of Alcor. The following will serve as proof of the deep sympathy we all felt for her. Sometimes between siblings there are squabbles or quarrels. Thank God, in our case they are always over minor issues. But if we do argue, the worst thing any of us can say in moments of anger is, “You remind me of the photographer of Alcor!” And whoever receives the compliment responds straight away, “No, please, call me anything you like, but not that!” There is nothing worse that can possibly be said.

## 13. Surgery

My parents went to Madrid in the first days of October 1968. My mother intuited – with her particular divination skills – that the Father was in Diego de Leon, the Work's headquarters in Spain, and she went there and started pacing around the building like a sentry. The Father, from a window, saw her by chance in the street, and sent for her. When she entered the house, he was already waiting for her at the door with Don Alvaro. The three of them spent a long time together in a sitting-room.

I have at hand the long testimonial that she wrote in her memories of our Father. Hence I can tell you about that meeting, as my mother related it, in full detail.

He greeted her with real joy and said that she should have come in directly, not waited in the street, because his doors were always open. She explained that there were some “gorillas” on duty – young men who were “defending” the door – who prevented her. The Father insisted again that, whenever she wanted to see him, she could enter as by right, because he loved us all very much and it always made him happy to see us. He repeated several times, **My daughter, I always want what you want; you can give the orders.**

He asked about my father and each of us, and when she told him that we were very well and very happy, he said that in Opus Dei we are always happy because we know we are children of God. He said Our Lord had given her and my father a crown of children, who were all lovely. He asked her not to tell us he had said so, but that the seven of us who were numeraries were indeed their crown of glory.

My mother told him that she was going to have an operation at Navarra University Hospital in Pamplona, and he became even more lovingly concerned. He asked her to make sure we notified him a few days before the operation so that he could offer the Holy Mass for

her. He told her not to worry, that God wanted everything to go well, because she still had a lot to do. He assured her that her children would be there on the day of the operation, as indeed we were.

Seeing how calm she was, he spoke about the serenity with which she was facing the operation. He said this was the right way to do it, because on such occasions we have to show how people in the Work react. Our outlook as children of God makes us accept everything the Lord wants to send us. He emphasized that what the Lord disposed would be the best: **A Father always wants the best for his children.**

My mother said later that after this conversation she was happier than ever Opus Dei had entered our house and, on the day of the operation, she went into the operating theatre with the conviction that everything would be fine; she felt happy and carefree. She was in the best hands, the hands of God.

The Father also told her how much he loved our family. He said he had known my father since they were both young, and he added: **You, Pilar, have had me in your pocket for many years. I hear from your seven children who are in the Work, and they are very happy, and splendid – but don't tell them I said so,** he repeated again.

He reminded her that he would come for lunch at our house one day, and insisted that whenever she wanted to see him, she did not need to join a queue, nor let herself be stopped by the *gorillas*. He asked her to give us all a hug from him and said that, whenever she wanted to get the whole family together, she should do it just as she chose.

On the day of the operation, after it was over, we sent a the Father a telegram saying it had gone well. The Father sent an immediate reply, saying **[VIEW PHOTO]:**

**RECEIVED TELEGRAM STOP EXTREMELY HAPPY GIVING THANKS TO THE LORD AND BLESSING YOU ALL JOSEMARIA**

Next, he wrote a longer letter whilst we were at the hospital, telling us of his great joy at how our mother was improving, and how pleased he was to see that we were a family with supernatural ties. And he asked us, **Help me to thank the Lord who has wanted His Work to be this way.**

“It is truly impressive to see,” my mother concluded, “that the Father, who had so many important matters to attend to from all over the world, set us an example of how to put our hearts into the small details, how to listen or write to anyone who had problems, to alleviate their burden and share their concerns.”

## **14. From Salamanca to the Eternal City**

When I finished my degree in June 1969, I thought about my professional future, and how to focus my life from that point on. On the one hand, I could spend a few years preparing for the state public exams for a doctor's post in the Social Security area, the Spanish equivalent of the National Health Service. I also quite liked the idea of specializing in internal medicine at a good university in the United States, spending several years over there and then returning to Spain.

I again told the directors in the Work that I was completely available for whatever was necessary, and I offered, specifically, to go and study philosophy and theology at the Roman College of the Holy Cross. At that time, it was located in the Work's headquarters, where the Father lived. It was there that the provisional seminary of the Work was based, while a permanent one was being built.

My offer of going to Rome was accepted. I didn't directly consider the possibility of the priesthood at that time, although I left the doors open to what the Lord could decide. The idea of living in Rome next to the Father, side by side with a saint, was something very special for me.

In October I moved to Rome, the See of Peter; at that time the Pope was Saint Paul VI. Being in Rome meant being right at the heart of the Church and of the Work, together with the founder of Opus Dei. I felt I was a privileged man among the privileged, and was certainly the happiest of the happy.



I lived there for four years. It was a time of profound formation and intense family life. I was steadily deepening my knowledge of Jesus Christ, the supernatural nature of the Church, Opus Dei and my own vocation, living alongside Saint Josemaria, its founder, and also Blessed Alvaro del Portillo and Don Javier Echevarria [5] who, after the death of the Father, would succeed him as Prelates of Opus Dei. Those were golden years in my personal life; pure multi-carat gold.

That gift from God is printed indelibly on my memory, but describing it is outside the scope of this book. So after recounting in a few brushstrokes what my arrival and stay in Rome meant to me, I will just write about the Father's affection for the Cremades family as shown during those years. Some other stories may also come to light, either because they are linked, or because they spring to mind spontaneously along the way.

I arrived at Villa Tevere, as the house is called, at the end of September. I soon had the chance to greet the Father, who welcomed me with special affection and kindness – although the truth is that all of us who lived close to him had that feeling of being *special* to him. I presented to him the letters I had been given. He asked after each member of the family. A few days later, on 11<sup>th</sup> October, he wrote to my parents.

**My dearest Pilar and Juan Antonio,**

**I have received the letters that you sent me with Javier. As always, I felt grateful to the Lord, on seeing once again the preferential love with which He continually blesses you.**

**Thank you very much for your prayers; I too remember you and pray for you every day with so much affection.**

**With the joy of having Javier so close, I bless you and your children affectionately**

***in Domino***

**Josemaria.**

## **Like sardines in a can**

It was no small effort to leave my medical studies, which I had really liked and had cost me so much effort. On the other hand, in Villa Tevere life was very different. Together with the Father, there were the members of the General Council of the Work and the people who helped them. The house felt cramped and uncomfortable because we students of the Roman College were also there, like squatters invading its space. There were more than a hundred of us young professionals – most of us under 30 – living in small rooms, which we jokingly called *five-person singles*. Each room had two or three bunks. There was a queue in the morning for the only shower, and there was only one bathroom on each floor, that is, for about 30 people. The wardrobes were tiny and our clothes didn't fit in the space available. We hung clothes on hangers at the heads of the bunk beds, or kept them in suitcases and bags, and got them out according to the season of the year ... There, any comfort was elusive.

We were young and could make light of the hardships, but we felt very sorry for the Father, boxed in and working all day, locked between four narrow walls.

Since there was no money, we could not go out for much entertainment, so life was usually reduced to our philosophy and theology classes, study, fulfilling the assignments that each of us had to do, and little else. The house had no garden, there were no sports fields or anything like that. We coped as best as we could. But living in Rome, near Saint Josemaria, made up for all the hard work and renunciation, the straits and difficulties.

## **It is very hard to be the Father. His love for the Pope**

It was very important for me to get to know the Father more deeply. At family gatherings and when I had been close to him, I had enjoyed myself, had learned to love God, and saw his happiness. Now, in Rome, it was the same and, in addition, you realized that the Father was carrying the weight of the whole of the Work on his shoulders: he spent many hours working in his office, dealing with queries from all over the world, which were generally difficulties, and not small ones at that. Usually, more problems come to the person at the top than good news.

He was also deeply affected by the situation being endured at the time by the Church, which experienced a deep crisis after the Second Vatican Council. He suffered a lot; he cried when news came of the harm caused by ecclesiastics who should have spread light but spread confusion instead. He urged us to pray insistently and ask the Lord for forgiveness to compensate for those betrayals. I noticed especially that more bad news and setbacks came his way on feast days. And we saw him suffer, pray and turn to God with increasing intensity. He asked his children to accompany him in this task with a lot of prayer. I realized that being the Father is very hard.

And the burden that the Pope carries is still greater: the weight of the universal Church and all humanity. For this reason, Saint

Josemaria prayed constantly for the Pope, for whom he felt deep, sincere, unbroken affection. He offered his life for him, and he left in us, branded on our hearts, a prayer that he had said ever since he was young, at the beginning of the Work, **All of us, with Peter, to Jesus through Mary!**

One day I was fortunate enough to be driving through Rome with him, and he opened his heart to me and give me a commission. He told me, with deep sorrow, some of the great concerns he had in his soul. Then he asked me to pray still more, and made a request that I have always tried to fulfil since then. He said, **My son, when I die, tell your brothers as much as you can how much the Father loved the Pope, whoever he is. He is now Paul VI. But this Pope, he stressed, the next, and all who come after him, we must love them all very much, unconditionally. Tell this to your brothers! I am happy to fulfil this request once again.**

## **Entertaining the Father**

This introduction to the environment and circumstances in Villa Tevere explains why we prayed a lot for the Father and we tried, when he came to our get-togethers or when meeting him around the house, to cheer him up and to distract him from his many worries.

Sometimes we planned the gatherings with songs, reminiscences, jokes and all kinds of entertainment. Each one did what they could. I specialized in two things. As a member of the Cremades family, which the Father loved so much, I always tried to have something ready to tell, from when we were little or more recent news I received by letter. I told them when relevant. They were amusing events and comical stories, and he found them hilarious.

I remember now one of the things I told him about my childhood. Every year, on Christmas Eve, after dinner at home, we used to go

to the Colegio Mayor Miraflores for Midnight Mass and for the get-together afterwards with the families of people of the Work. One year, being a very young chap, I was thrilled to see the food that they had set out for us, as a surprise, as a late supper after Mass. I liked the display so much that, without thinking twice, I filled my pockets with the sugared almonds, nougats, pine nuts, flaky soft sweets, etc. I planned to carry on celebrating alone in my room. When I got home, the others saw me and, after questioning, they made me put on the table the loot I had been hoarding. They told me off big time, calling me greedy, a thief, ungrateful, a disgrace to the family, etc.: never once did they congratulate me for bringing home some food.

And in order to engrave the need for honesty on my conscience, and so that the bad deed I had committed would not be repeated, authority decreed that next day, I had to go back to Miraflores and return my looted goods. And there I went, crestfallen, like a repentant thief. I went into the director's office, acknowledged my sin of the previous night, and emptied my pockets again, putting on his table my succulent nougats, now rather tired-looking after all the comings and goings, and asking for the appropriate pardon. The director, very kindly (though I think he had already been notified by my parents), accepted my apology, and to calm things down, told me that if I was still hungry, I could eat whatever I wanted ... The Father thought my punishment had been somewhat severe, and he listened with surprise. He laughed about it for days afterwards, and I was happy to see how much it amused him, although, at the same time – poor me! – it was still hard to finally put behind me those *traumas* that had haunted me since my childhood.

The other specialty, although when reading this now it might be hard for anyone to believe it, is that I was born with special powers, with faculties that common mortals lack. This is why I have always developed the practice of magical arts. I am a magician, Sedamerc II; Sedamerc the First was my older brother, because this feature runs in the family. The stage name Sedamerc is our surname written

backwards. It is not that I do sleight of hand, tricking people skillfully and subtly. No. I have powers, magical powers that are not within everyone's scope.

The Father was very entertained by my magic and enjoyed seeing the astonished faces of the audience, especially the Germans who, logically analyzing the magic that I practiced, found no rational answer to their questions. For this reason, I became a classic standby in the get-togethers – even though it took a lot of practice – and helped the Father to relax and kept the others entertained with my performances with hats, doves and live chicks, handkerchiefs, playing cards, swords, flying balls, prodigious memory feats, etc. But, having set the scene in Rome, let us return to the main story.



## **15. The Father comes to dinner**

Six months after I arrived in Rome, the Father traveled to Spain and was able to carry out the plan we had dreamed of: for him to come to dinner at our house. Since it was arranged between the morning and the evening of the same day, no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get there, because I was too far away. I was the only one in the family who failed to keep the appointment for this Cremades plan. Fifty years later, my face is still stamped with the daft expression that resulted from missing out on it. But the fact is, you cannot be in two different places at the same time.

### **A big announcement and general mobilization**

So I was not there on that night, but as I have the testimonial my mother wrote, I am going to let her narrate in first person all the preparations and the great party. Once again, her skills as a real strategist were verified. The text is a bit long and I have cut a few paragraphs. This is how she expressed her memories, and I copy them verbatim although I appear in them several times, referred to in glowing and affectionate terms, perhaps because I was absent.

*On 7<sup>th</sup> April 1970, the same day he made the pilgrimage to Torreciudad, the Father came for dinner at home in the company of Don Alvaro.*

*At half past seven in the morning, without knowing what was going to happen that day, the two Juan Antonios left Zaragoza: Juan Antonio Sr. drove to Madrid, and left Juan Antonio Jr. at the airport, because he was flying to Barcelona to continue from there on to Paris.*

*Shortly after that, I was taking the three little ones to school, and my guardian angel led me to drive down the street past Miraflores. The guardian angel accomplished his mission marvelously, because you could sense that something was happening: the Father was in Zaragoza and presumably he was just about to leave Miraflores. We waited on the street hoping to see him go past, even just for a moment.*

*Pablo went into Miraflores, and when the Father saw him, he made the sign of the cross on his forehead, hugged him, and kissed him with great affection. He said to him, **My son, I'm coming to dinner with you tonight. Ask your mother to prepare me a lettuce without any salt or oil, a French omelet, and an orange juice.** Pablo replied that he was very happy and that his mother was downstairs. Then the Father came quickly down the stairs calling, **Juan Antonio, Pilar ...!***

*In the street, next to the door of the residence, Conchita, Ana Mary and I were waiting. Then the Father's voice was heard calling, **Pilar!** He looked out, and came to greet me. The two girls and I kissed his hand and we were overjoyed when he said, **My daughter, when I get back from Torreciudad, I'll come to dinner at your house. Alvaro and I will come. Prepare a lettuce without any salt or oil for me, a single egg omelet, and an orange juice; and since your home is mine, I will eat nothing except what I ask you.** Conchita shouted, "How wonderful, Father!" We thanked him and said how happy we were that he was coming.*

*He asked for Juan Antonio. I replied that he was on his way to Madrid; that only the four of us were in Zaragoza at that moment, but that I would tell everyone so they could get back in time and, if he agreed, I would try to gather as many of the children as possible. The Father replied, **Do what you can, my daughter. It will make me so happy to be with you all; get together as many of the family as you can, and don't worry about preparing anything for me other than what I told you, because that diet does me good.***

*He added that it was a proof of trust in him to let him eat only that; that he would be really happy to come to **his home** after he returned from Torreciudad; and that it would make him very happy to see us all getting together for dinner. And saying, **God bless you, my children**, he went to the car.*

*I took the girls to their secondary school because they had an exam, and I returned home quickly to tell everyone and try to get most of the Cremades clan together.*

*I located Juan Antonio Jr. at Barcelona Airport via the loudspeakers, as he was about to go through customs to board the plane to Paris. He hired a self-drive car and picked up his siblings Maria Pilar, Mari Carmen and Carlos, who were living in Barcelona, and they all came together.*

*I called Javier in case he could catch a plane from Rome and the family would be complete, but he couldn't find any possible combination of flights, and was the only one of the family who didn't make it. How much we miss him!*

*Next, I spoke to Sabela, who was in Pamplona, and she quickly came by herself. She was the first to get to Zaragoza.*

*I found Juan Antonio Sr. at the Ministry of Industry, and Bernardo at the University of Madrid, where he was teaching. They traveled back together, but a storm caught them on the way and they arrived last.*

*As soon as the phone calls were made, we started preparing for the dinner at home and adding extension boards to the table for the great family reunion. The table was five meters long. A new tablecloth, made of linen, and some Rosenthal tableware came out, white with a wide gold stripe, that we had decided not to use until the Father came to our house [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#).*

*The table was decorated with red roses in German crystal bowls, and, among them, a duck in the center and three different-colored Murano glass donkeys.*

*On the cutlery cabinet, surrounded by twelve little porcelain donkeys, stood, as always, a photo of the Father on which he had written [VIEW PHOTO], To Pilar and Juan Antonio, with loving memory and the best blessing. Rome, 1968. Josemaria. [VIEW PHOTO]*

## **The Father's arrival at our house**

*I continue copying: Just before he was due to arrive, Juan Antonio Jr., Carlos and Pablo went down to the front door. As he got out of the car, he hugged them warmly, and came up the stairs holding Pablo's arm.*

*As he stepped into the entrance, he said in a strong but emotional voice, **Peace and joy in this house. God bless you, my children.** He kissed Ana Mary, the youngest, on both cheeks, and then Conchita and, as they were so excited, Sabela, Mari Carmen and Maria Pilar, saying to each of them, **My daughters, you're still little to me.** Then he greeted me and said he was very happy to be home, and that I was to order him where he had to go and what he had to do.*

*We went to the sitting room, and on seeing the photo of Javier he said, **This son of mine is great! How much I love him, and how sorry I am he isn't here!** Then he took the picture frame with the heads of all ten children, blessed it, and added, **How handsome you all are! God bless you!** [VIEW PHOTO] He sat down on the large sofa by the balcony, with all of us around him.*

*He was concerned that Juan Antonio Sr. and Bernardo were still on the road. He said he had played a bad trick on Juan Antonio, making him turn round and come back as soon as he arrived, and spend the whole day traveling. He promised to apologize to him. I told him not to worry, because never in their lives had either of them been happier to make a trip. In a few minutes they walked through*

*the door, and he gave them a very big hug. When the Father tried to apologize, they replied that they wished they could repeat the same trip often, if it meant finding him at home.*

*He had just got back from Torreciudad and explained to us in detail how the pilgrimage had been. What he kept quiet about, because it was personal and he wanted to make light of it, Don Alvaro told us, while the Father kept saying, **Don't pay any attention to him.** (...)*

*I asked him, "How about if the Cremades make our own pilgrimage to Our Lady of Torreciudad tomorrow, as a family?" The Father was pleased, and said, **That seems a very good idea to me, my daughter,** and he asked Don Alvaro to telephone the architect so he could show us everything, adding, **Call beforehand, because otherwise they won't be able to go in; and ask them to take good care of them.** Don Alvaro went to the phone, and when he returned he told us that they would be expecting us at the shrine at twelve the next day.*

## **In the dining room**

*I told the Father we could have dinner whenever he wanted and he replied humorously, **They say mother is the one who commands, so we have to obey. Let's have dinner.** We moved to the dining room. **Pilar, tell us where to sit: today you organize it.** I begged the Father to preside at table, with Maria Pilar on his right and Juan Antonio Sr. on his left. I sat opposite him, with Don Alvaro on my right and Juan Antonio Jr. on my left. The others sat alternately girl-boy-girl around the table. The Father said, **Alvaro can say grace, because he does it so very well.** Don Alvaro complied, and added, "Today I'm the chaplain."*

*The lettuce was served first, without any seasoning, just as the Father had requested. With the lettuce, in case he wanted to try*

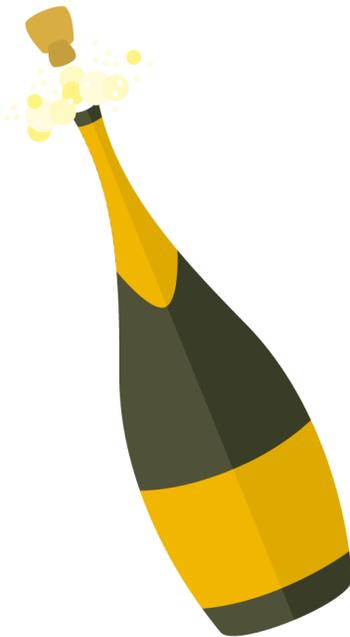
something else, there were tomatoes and radishes, but he only ate the lettuce. When the omelets came, since they were rather large, he said, **My daughter, this omelet is made from two eggs, but I'll eat it.** I replied that I honestly couldn't tell him how many eggs his omelet had. Laughing, he answered, **How could you possibly not know how many eggs there are in this omelet?** I replied, "Because I beat all the eggs together, Father, so I don't know how many went into the pan every time I made one omelet." He laughed, **You're very bad, but I'll eat it, it's delicious.** And he ate it all.

Later, I tried to get him to eat a little more, and said, "Father, there are some lamb cutlets, those little ones from Aragon that are so tender, wouldn't you like one?" The Father said, **Look, my daughter, I'll return whenever you meet the food conditions I ask of you. Today it isn't good for me to eat any more. Lunch is my main meal, not in the evening. It's a proof of confidence not to make me depart from the plan.**

Naturally, the meat did not find its way onto the table, and the Father was served with his glass of orange juice. When Tere, one of the two ladies who were serving at table, set the glass of juice before him, the Father looked at her affectionately and said, **Thank you, my daughter.** She was so delighted that her hand trembled when she brought him the sugar bowl. She had been attending the Home and Culture courses at Miraflores all winter, and was glad that it was she who was serving the Father's side of the table. The rest of us had strawberries and ice cream, except for Don Alvaro who served himself the strawberries and not the ice cream, because it included chocolate biscuit and the Father said to him, **Alvaro, my son, you can't eat chocolate. It will disagree with you.**

The time for the champagne came, Pablo uncapped the bottle with a loud pop and the Father told him he had done it very well. He raised his glass and said, **Let's drink a toast to the Mother of God and to the mother of this house. For this great family, God bless you all!** When I clinked my glass with his, I said, "For your intention,

*Father,” and he replied happily, **Don’t worry, my daughter, it’s practically accomplished, thank you.** Don Alvaro said, “Let’s drink a toast to the Father’s next visit here.” Pablo wanted to make a bigger toast than anyone, and went for it. “I want to make a big toast with the bottle!” and he clinked the bottle against the Father’s glass! The Father replied promptly, **Thank you, my son, but don’t drink it all ... Well, if you want to, do ... but you’ll have to go straight to bed ...***



*He remembered Javier was missing and said, **This son of mine has been too discreet. He knew I was going to come, because I told him without giving it any importance, but so that he could tell you and you would know beforehand. He’s great, with his magic tricks he’s one of the stars of the ICU [an international Easter gathering in Rome for students]. He amuses me a lot, but he also studies hard. As well as his games, he saved a suitcase from getting lost going through customs, and he gets discounts on his purchases at the shops in Rome. He’s happy and content, and works well. Everyone loves him very much: he’s very loveable.***

*Pablo, who is going to act as the third magician of the saga, offered himself, in case the Father should need his services one day as a magician, and showed him his magician's business card. The Father took it and read it, and we explained to him that the stage name "Sedamerc" is "Cremades" backwards. He put it away in his wallet, saying, I'll keep it in case I need you.*

*The Father praised the organizations of the "Cremades Clan" and again mentioned Javier, **We'll have to do something to make it up to this son.** I replied, "It's easy, Father, we can meet on another occasion when Javier can also be here." He thought it was a very good idea.*

*The Father picked up the glass duck that was on the table and said, **How beautiful, and so is that donkey, and that one ...** Conchita shouted from the other end of the table, "Here's another one!" (...). At the end, Don Alvaro said grace after meals, and we got up from the table.*

## **An after-dinner chat**

*Conchita approached the Father and said that she needed to speak to him alone for a moment. They both went into the next room; she was going to close the door, but he said no, because with a woman, even if it was a girl like her, the priest always leaves the door open. They were there for a few minutes and the Father could be heard saying in amused tones as he came out, **Nothing doing! You can't buy me,** and he came to our room saying, **This daughter of mine wanted to buy me, but she doesn't buy me with one dinner.** We all happily sat down around him.*

*He took a tray with sweets on it and started offering them to everyone, saying, **I can't taste them, but you can, and you have to eat.** Soon the Father and Juan Antonio started reminiscing about the early years when they used to go and teach catechism in the*

*poor areas. They also talked about their university years and had a great time remembering stories from teachers and students.*

*The Father told us, I've always loved your father very much, and also owe him a debt of gratitude. The only people I've ever asked for gifts or favors are God and your father. I don't like asking for favors unnecessarily, but I owe your father one that was very big in my life, which I will always thank him for. While I was in Lerida, giving a retreat to priests, I got a telephone call to say that my mother had died. Since the war had just ended there were no trains, no means of transport, and I thought I wouldn't be able to get back in time for her funeral. I went to your father, who was the Civil Governor. He was so kind that he lent me his own car, so I was able to get to Madrid to kiss my mother's body before she was buried. Looking at his notebook, he added, It was 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1941.*

*Juan Antonio Jr. exclaimed, "Just then, Father, I was an only child, I was one-and-a-half." The Father laughed, and then continued, Because God so willed it, I couldn't be there when my father died, nor when my mother did. I will always have to thank you for helping me in that situation. In the Work we always love the sweetness of the Fourth Commandment. I couldn't do it and it makes me happy for my children to make sure that they can be with their parents at such times.*

*I said that we had more reasons to be grateful to the Father, and he replied straight away, No, my daughter, these are things one never forgets one's whole life long.*

*He then spoke of parents being God's instruments for forming their children. He said, 90 percent of a vocation is due to the person's parents and, even physically, we imitate them more and more as time passes. Without intending to, we do what they did years before. I realize that I say and think things that my father did many years ago.*

Then Juan Antonio Sr. said jokingly, "Father, then tell these children of mine that they are as hideously ugly as their father was, and see how happy it makes them." The Father laughed heartily and retorted, **God bless you! I bless you with all my soul, because in homes like yours, people like your children are formed.** I told him that we had realized that the children loved us more when they left, than whilst they were at home ... When they are here, they allow themselves the luxury of bickering with each other ... The Father and Don Alvaro laughed.

He remembered Javier again, saying how we missed him, and that he was a son who was easy to love because he was always there for everyone. Then he turned to Pablo and said, **Javier knows a lot of magic tricks, but they told me that now you beat him at it. Is it true?** Pablo replied happily, "I can do one now if you want, Father." He brought him a deck of cards and asked him to choose one. The Father showed it to us without Pablo seeing it, and put it back in the deck, face down. Pablo shuffled the cards, put the deck in his jacket pocket, and with a wave of his hand said, "Father, your card has been stolen!" And he pretended to hunt for it all over the room, making some of us get up. In the end, as if an inspiration came to him, he said, "I know where it is! As the Father says, Javier is a great magician, so it must be Javier who stole it, from Rome." He went to the photograph of Javier that stood on the sideboard and, just behind, there was the card the Father had chosen from the deck. The Father applauded, saying, **It worked very well, my son! I'll tell Javier!**

He spoke of Javier's magic tricks in Rome, and how one day he had made a hen disappear (he did not know where he got it from, but it must have been cheap because it was extremely skinny) and that, after it had disappeared by magic in front of everyone, it then began clucking loudly from somewhere. So Javier turned the music up loud to drown out the sound of clucking from the audience. He laughed a lot while telling us about it.

*I suggested that if he liked, he could write a message to Javier on a sheet of paper and we could all sign. I thought it would be a good memento for him, since he had missed the treat. The Father liked the idea, and Pablo promptly lent him his pen. He wrote, **A loving hug and the Father's blessing**. Below, Don Alvaro added, "Dear Javier, how much we have missed you! A hug. Alvaro." Next, all of us parents and siblings signed it. [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)*

*I showed him the picture of Our Lady in the study and told him, "This is the painting you gave us last year. We put flowers in front of her throughout the year." The Father liked it, and said, **That makes me very happy, my daughter.***

*He continued, **I'm really happy, because this morning I was able to fulfil my duty as a good son towards my Mother in Heaven, and in the evening, towards a mother on earth, the mother of this family that I love so much. Then he added, I'm going to give you a blessing before leaving. We all got down on our knees, and he raised both hands and blessed us with the words, **May the Lord be in your hearts, in your works, and in your words, and always remain, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.** He said goodbye to each of us individually, thanking us and saying what a great time he had had. Don Alvaro did the same. We asked them to give Javier a big hug from us when they returned to Rome and they said they would do so as soon as they got there.***

*We all went down with them to the waiting car. A short time later, a beautiful bouquet of red roses was delivered to our house: it was a gift from the Father.*

## **With Our Lady, after the Father**

*My mother's story continues: **The next day the whole family went on a pilgrimage to Torreciudad, and took the red roses to Our Lady.***

Conchita carried the flowers in her hand all the way, so they would not get spoiled. [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)

We arrived at the shrine just at midday. We said the Angelus in front of a little silver statue of Our Lady inside a glass processional cover. It is the one that years ago, devotees carried in procession through nearby villages. The Father had prayed there the day before, and his presence still seemed to linger. Everything was clean and neat. The emotion of all those who had been part of his pilgrimage could still be felt.

We left the flowers on the altar at the feet of the statue of Our Lady, knowing that the Father would like to see them there. The architects who directed the building work at Torreciudad showed us everything: the alcove with the statue of Our Lady of Torreciudad, the votive offerings, the ancient shrine, the building works and the place from which the Father blessed what was going to be the new shrine.

Afterwards, they offered us some yummy snacks and we had a good get-together with them, as they told us again how the Father's pilgrimage had gone, and the emotional time they had had the previous day in Torreciudad. One of the men who worked on the building-site had said to the Father, "Father, will you let me give you a kiss as I would if my mother came?" He replied, **Not just one, my son – twelve!** and he kissed him on both cheeks six times, very quickly. They told us how he hugged all the workmen and spoke affectionately to the watchmen, the rigger, the builders ..., in short, everyone. One of the workmen sang a Spanish song, a jota, to the Father whose lyrics were very timely:

The love of my countrymen  
Is difficult to obtain,  
But though the years pass  
It remains true love.

We saw the visitors' book, in which the Father had written, **Mother of mine and Lady of Torreciudad, Queen of Angels,**

***monstra te esse Matrem*** – show that you are a Mother – and make us good children, faithful children. Torreciudad, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1970. Mariano. [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)

*In another visitors' book, Juan Antonio wrote, "The Cremades family comes to ask for the protection of Our Lady of Torreciudad and to bring her the flowers that the Father gave them." Then we all signed it.*

*It was with great joy that we returned to Zaragoza, and the next morning the "Cremades Clan" broke up, going off in different directions, to their respective houses. Despite having to say goodbye, we were all very happy after the wonderful hours we had spent with the Father.*

## **Some interesting comments**

So much for my mother's very detailed account of that historic dinner at home. She does not say what Conchita asked the Father when they were alone. She told him that she wanted to be a numerary and, in the Opus Dei Center she went to, they had been holding her request for a long time, I suppose so that she could let it mature, and be sure that it was not just a fancy or an impulsive decision. What Conchita was trying to do was *peddle a favor*: she wanted the Father to intervene and pressure the director to let her write the letter and join the Work. That's why he left the room joking out loud that she wanted to *buy* him, but he wouldn't let her do so ... She still had to wait a couple of months more, and finally she was able to fulfil her wish. When the Father got the news, he wrote from Rome, **I have just received your letter and I fully understand your joy, which I share with all my heart, at the wonderful news you give me. I am praying for that daughter with affection, so that she may be very faithful and very happy.**

I keep very carefully, as a relic, the letter sent to me, signed by everyone. Every time I read it, I imagine I am receiving again, from Heaven this time, **a loving hug and the Father's blessing**. I am also moved once again to read, "Dear Javier: how much we have missed you! A hug. Alvaro." And the signatures of all my family, at the bottom, are a very good incentive and reminder to pray for everyone. It was a great shame to miss the occasion, but, thank God, I have this fond memory to keep forever. Also, it had been decided that there would be another family reunion soon. We had taken up our positions in readiness for a re-run.

To appreciate the grandeur of the gesture and the great effort it cost the Father to come to dinner with us, one has to take into account what he had done that day. It was the day he made his pilgrimage to Torreciudad and it had been a very intense day. He left early, after celebrating Holy Mass. He made the round trip from Zaragoza by car, along bad roads. Going through Barbastro, 55 years after having had to leave, must have brought back many memories and emotions. One kilometer away from Torreciudad, he stopped the car. He took off his shoes because he wanted to do that final stretch on foot, and barefoot, as a penance, praying the three parts of the rosary. He walked along the new road, which was still under construction, not yet paved, on gravel and rough, sharp-edged pebbles. He ended up with his feet cut and bleeding, and gravel embedded in them. After he prayed in the old shrine, a doctor gave him first-aid, removing the bits of gravel with tweezers, and washed and disinfected his feet.

One can easily realize, then, that that evening he was extremely tired, as well as having sore, bruised feet. But that did not stop him from fulfilling his desire to come to our home and continuing, throughout dinner, to give his love to each of us, without ever mentioning the state he was in. Exhausted and footsore as he was, he was lovingly affectionate to everyone, offering chocolates left and right, as if nothing was the matter ...

On getting back to Villa Tevere in Rome, he wrote a thank-you letter to my parents, although we were the ones who were grateful.

[\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)

**Rome, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1970**

**My dearest Pilar and Juan Antonio,**

**On my return to Rome, I wanted to send you a letter to thank you for your hospitality, and let you know that I had a great time with all that dear family, whom I love so much.**

**I have given Javier a very big hug from you. I found him looking very well, better, if possible, than when I left him: as always, full of joy, in good spirits, and working hard.**

**I pray affectionately for all of you, and pray to Our Blessed Lady of Pilar that, through her intercession, there may be many vocations in Zaragoza.**

**Remembering and blessing you and your children,  
Josemaria**

**Pilar, you truly know how to do things with love and efficiency: what a mobilization, and how charming everything was!**

## **16. «Operazione Cremates»**

As expected, the calm was short-lived. My family had already spoken at dinner about repeating the meeting, but without anyone being left out. In their Christmas card that year, they suggested to him that the next “family plan” could be in Rome, right away, taking advantage of my living there. The Father replied, realizing that my mother was the writer of this bold suggestion, but that she was acting in full agreement with my father.

**Rome, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1971**

**Dear Pilar and Juan Antonio,**

**I was very grateful for your affectionate Christmas greetings and your prayers. I, in my turn, kept all that dear family in mind in my prayers before the Crib at Bethlehem.**

**I am very happy with what you tell me in your letters, and I want to tell you, Pilar, that everything you “command” seems fine to me, because I am sure that you always do it in agreement with Juan Antonio.**

**Happy New Year, and I bless you affectionately  
in Domino  
Josemaria**

Soon they informed me that they had the green light, and asked me, since I was on the spot, to find out which dates would be convenient. Finally, the trip was agreed for 4<sup>th</sup> March, and a new *Cremades Plan* was launched.

The Father often asked me about the logistics of it. There was the difficulty of space, because he wanted to invite us to lunch, and in Villa Tevere there was no large place where we could all fit comfortably without affecting the normal running of the house. He decided the best solution was to have lunch in the dining room of the Roman College. The hundred-odd students had lunch there every

day in several shifts. This decision was hard on the numerous students, since on the scheduled day they all had to organize themselves to go out to have lunch on their own account. Some went to the Rui del Eur residence, some went to the Elis Center in Tiburtino, some went out with friends, some went to a corner cafe, others arranged for sandwiches to be delivered ... But everyone had to disappear from the map, so that we could comfortably have lunch with the Father. I was embarrassed to be the cause of all this, so I kept quiet, saying as little as possible about the reason why they all had to get out.

## Hippies at the airport

One of my tasks in Rome was to help in a youth club, especially at weekends. To make the family's arrival more welcoming, it occurred to me to commission one of the lads, who was good at drawing, to paint me a large cloth banner, to be used to welcome my traveling family on their arrival at the airport. As the boy was Italian, the text that was written in large letters over the drawing was "*Operazione Cremates*".

In order not to be alone when holding the banner, I persuaded my brother Juan Antonio to arrive in Rome from Paris a short while before the others. Thus, each of us could hold up one pole, with the banner spread out so the warm welcome was clearly visible. And, to puzzle them completely, I had some striking long-haired wigs, one blonde and the other red, which reached to our waists, and made us look like perfect tousle-haired hippies. My brother, a very sensible man, looked stiff and uncomfortable, but I enjoyed myself enormously, flaunting the banner and flinging *my* hair about ostentatiously, playing the fool.

There is no need for me to describe the general amazement when, after passing passport control and customs, they met us in

that guise, behaving like hooligans. At first they didn't recognize us, thinking we were nothing to do with them. Then they refused to acknowledge us. Finally, in the face of the evidence, there was slowly-growing astonishment and the utmost confusion. Some of them were really embarrassed, others were killing themselves laughing... Some concluded that during my stay in Rome, supposedly to study Theology, I had been ruined. The laughter and the hugs were enormous, although some of them were repelled by my hairiness, despite my ultra-modern look. This nonsense marked a fun start to the family's new, bigger plan.

## Spending time with the Father

The next day, we arrived at Villa Tevere mid-morning [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). The Father celebrated the votive Mass of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Holy Family Oratory, and then we had lunch. He was as loving as ever. He offered the Mass for my mother's intentions, adding some more himself. He asked us to join in his prayers. He began the homily by saying, **When my heart is full of joy I don't like to talk much, so I am only going to say a few words.** And then he continued, **We have met so often, always united in the Heart of Our Lady of Pilar...! United in a supernatural love, which makes you feel proud that the Lord said to you "come with me"**. He recalled again the catechism classes for children in Zaragoza, his mother's death, and how good God had been to our family, which He had filled with graces and blessings.

We all received Communion from his hand and, when he finished, he made his thanksgiving out loud. He mentioned that he had got very tired while celebrating Mass because Our Lord had granted him the grace of experiencing that the Mass was God's work, it was *Opus Dei* too. He said that on that day he had been especially exhausted, and was increasingly eager and hungry to

approach the altar. He had been really happy to celebrate it with us, because that way he had been able to renew the Consecration of the Work to the Holy Family, which has borne so much fruit throughout the world.

We went into the sitting room and my mother wanted to serve him some snacks [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). She asked him what he wanted to drink and he asked her to give him the same drink she was going to have. She asked Don Alvaro for advice, and he suggested a Martini. She prepared it for him and she served herself the same. Then the Father blessed her Martini and, smiling, told her that he would give her the glass so she could take it home as a souvenir, which she did. Lunch was served by several Assistant Numeraries. Reading the notes from that day, I realize now that one of them was Dora, whose beatification process is under way. Another came from Kenya. I loved that when they came into the dining room, my mother and my sisters went to hug them. The Father looked very happy.

After lunch, we paid a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and went back to the sitting room, where we stayed until 5 in the afternoon. The main topic of conversation was his enormous concern for the situation of the Church, and he went into very specific details. He stressed that we were living through times when a lot of prayer and atonement to God were needed.

We gave him a gift. On the last occasion, he had told us that he had a collection of little donkeys of all kinds, but that the one he liked the most was one made of wire covered with straw, with which he could play, bending its head, bending its ears, putting its legs closer together or further apart, and doing whatever he wanted. And he had encouraged us to be the sort of people who let God's grace act on them at will, leading them to serve Him and being attentive to fulfill his Will. The family had now brought a little silver donkey as a gift. It was mechanical and could be put into many different positions: standing, kneeling, with its ears in different positions, turning its head or tail, bending its legs ... He was delighted with it, and kissed it. He

said he liked that a little donkey made of a noble material could be adaptable and docile [\[VIEW PHOTOS\]](#).

He wanted to give us something and said he would give each of the girls a duck [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#), and each of the boys a little donkey. He added: **Everyone except Javier, who already has many things, since he lives here.** I was upset at being left without my little donkey, but I offered it up. When Don Javier brought the ducks and the little donkeys, the Father distributed them, but one little donkey was missing, so Don Javier had to go back to look for it. He did so under protest, because he said he was sure he had counted them all correctly beforehand. The Father said, in jokingly accusing tones, **You say you counted well, but then, at the moment of truth, one was missing.**

The ducks perhaps require a brief explanation. Along with the image of the little donkeys, the Father liked that of ducks and ducklings. They are daring creatures that naturally jump straight into the water, and learn to swim by swimming. He adopted the expression **Ducks to the water!** by which he meant learning how to bring God everywhere, whether or not the current is favorable. Ducks jump into the water and play in it, they glide around with their ducklings behind, they overcome difficulties ... He liked to see little ducks in drawings, or made of different materials. And he would often draw them himself on paper or, as on this occasion with my mother and sisters, he would give ducks as gifts.

He told us about his trip to Mexico to make a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Guadalupe. We listened to a recording of the song *Chapala*, sung by the Rondalla Tapatia. At one point, the lyrics say: *Where souls can talk familiarly to God.* He loved this phrase, and hummed along with the song.

He wrote some words in a copy of *The Way*, one of the special edition of a thousand copies that was made for bibliophiles.

**To Pilar and Juan Antonio Cremades, and to all that wonderful crown of children the Lord has granted them, with**

**the best and most loving blessing from  
Josemaria**

**Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> March 1971. [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)**

They told him about the adventure of the big banner at the airport, with our long hair blowing in the wind. He laughed a lot to think that my brother Juan Antonio had come from Paris ahead of time, just to hold up a banner and wear a hippie wig.

As the theme of the famous *expert photographer* from Alcor was still rumbling on, we asked him if this time we could have some good photographs taken to keep as mementos. A real expert came, and took some wonderful photos, of which, by the Father's wish, we each have copies of all the ones in which we appeared [\[VIEW PHOTOS\]](#). We realized that the girls were in the front row, next to the Father, and the boys were always behind, half covered by them and in second place [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). This was our excuse to claim a photograph each, alone with the Father: we had a good time doing all of them [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). He also wanted us to take a picture of the whole family under the airport banner [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). Although they asked me to go to my room and get the wigs, I flatly refused, so as not to go down in history in that guise [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#).

Before finishing the trip, the whole family returned to Villa Tevere again, to say goodbye. He asked about our Roman adventures, and we described our visits to Saint Peter's, Villa delle Rose in Castel Gandolfo, the Catacombs of Saint Priscilla, etc ...

It was snowing in Rome those days, and my youngest sister told him that she was praying for the snow to continue so they would have to stay there longer. Also, she said cheekily that like that she would miss some days at school. He found it funny and gave her his support, asking my parents to give her a day off when she got home; in exchange, she had to promise to bake them a sweet pudding, so they would not miss all their other children who, when they got back

to Zaragoza, would already be scattered around the world. She duly did so, and it turned out really well [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#).

Finally, we told him that we had had a great time, and that we were very grateful for all the affectionate gestures and kindness he had lavished on us those days. He replied, **We will meet again soon; now we separate, but we'll always be united, since God never separates people.** Finally, he gave us a blessing for the trip and everyone was happy to go home, *each little owl to its own olive tree.*

Before continuing, I must tell the end of the story of the little donkey that I wasn't given, as the Father said that my great gift was to be lucky enough to be living in Rome. Just in case someone is sorry to think I was left without that gift, after all these years I can state the truth of the matter and the real ending.

When I came out of Villa Tevere after the gathering, and was standing in the street, my mother came up to me stealthily and said in a low whisper, "Son, I have a little donkey for you." I asked her whose it was and she answered, "Don't ask, it's for you." When I insisted that no way did I want to deprive anyone else of their gift, she explained, "You can understand that I couldn't let you be left without a little donkey." In other words, Don Javier had indeed counted correctly, and one was missing because she had filched it, without anyone noticing. So there was one for me after all; I was delighted. She was just about to give it to me, when she suddenly changed her mind. She put it back in her bag, and explained, "It's yours. But I'm afraid of you, because you're quite capable of returning it. I'm taking it to Spain, and I'll give it to you when you come back." And now I am still delighted with my little donkey ...

[\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)

## 17. More and more grateful to God

In the months following this last family reunion, a few important things happened, before the call for the next even bigger plan.

A short time later, the youngest of us, Ana Mary, joined Opus Dei. Before applying to join, she asked us for prayers because she wanted to discover what God was really asking of her. She maintained firmly that she was acting in complete freedom, despite having a lot of siblings in the Work already ... One of her principles was, *To take this decision I put myself before God and imagine that I'm an only child.*

Another event was that my brother Carlos finished his industrial engineering degree and followed in my footsteps, joining the Roman College in September 1971. Clearly, this meant a family reinforcement, with the two of us living in the same house. Also, as he has always been smarter, more studious and more formal than I am, he raised the level and prestige of the family, which had deteriorated because of me. One of my jokes was to tell him that I was an uncouth Aragonese and that he was a *little Pyrenean lamb*. But since he is thick-skinned, he was not much worried by my attacks and defended himself perfectly well.



It is also important to mention that I was maturing the question of my possible call to the priesthood, inside myself, little by little, in Our Lord's presence. On one occasion, after a gathering with the Father, I asked to speak to him for a moment. We spent some unforgettable minutes walking and chatting alone. I told him I was available to be ordained a priest, if he saw fit. It gave him great joy, and he said that God would decide, with the passage of time. He stressed that what I had just said did not commit my future; that is to say, if he later offered me the possibility of becoming a priest, I could say yes or no, in absolute freedom.

Another important moment was on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1972. The Father was visiting Aralar, in Pamplona, and my parents went to see him there, with the two youngest girls, who were still living at home. Ana Mary was very happy, because it was the first time she had seen the Father as a numerary. The Father said, **My daughter, to celebrate we are going to have some drinks and sweets.** And all of them were very happy to celebrate together. The Father encouraged her to persevere, saying, **Starting is for everyone, persevering is very difficult; but if you don't manage that, you've wasted all that time. Do you remember the man in the Gospel who started building a house and couldn't finish it? Everyone seemed to be laughing at him! So try, my daughter, not to let them laugh at you..**

He assured my parents not to worry about having so many numeraries among their children, and promised to make sure that we could take it in turns so that they would never be alone, and there would always be someone at home to quarrel with. They replied that we were not quarrelsome and that he should not worry about it, because they would never have time to get bored. He also gave them news about us in Rome: he was very happy having both brothers so close to him.

Then there was a new attack. "Father, and when will we have a son who is a priest?" He replied, **That depends on the decisions of**

**four different people: God, the person concerned and me; and ... in this case, you too, Pilar. But since you and I already agree, we are already part of the way there.** Don Alvaro added, “And for the person to request it.” The Father replied, **Someone has already asked me. Pilar, you always get your way.** They didn’t tell me anything about this conversation; I found out about it years later.

To the little ones, he said they had to be like their parents and my father replied, “They outshine us,” to which the Father added, **You two are the ones who gave them their life and their good upbringing.**

## 18. The two young pigeons

It was a very original gift from the Father to my parents. A painting of a magician, done in oil and very large, more than one meter high and eighty centimeters wide. The artist was Javier Cotelo, a numerary who worked in the architects' studio at Villa Tevere. An excellent artist, he was the one who usually drove the car in which the Father traveled. I contributed to this painting with my face, the magician's bow tie, a colored handkerchief, and my brand-new, wonderful top hat on my worktable. The rest – the best part – is supplied by my brother. As I have Carlos' very detailed account of this story to hand, I give him the floor at this point. And this is the story as related by *poor old Carlos*.

*At the beginning of 1972, my brother Javier told me that Javier Cotelo had had an idea for a painting. Javier would be dressed as a conjurer, and I would be coming out of the top hat. It was common for my brother to play magic tricks for our Father, at "shows" that we put on for some big event, or in front of visitors who came to see our founder. Out of mere common sense – at least it seems that way to me – I strongly vetoed any such project. I thought, you never know the turns life can take, and I was not prepared to be immortalized in a painting, let alone one in which I was acting as a rabbit.*

*A few days later, Javier told me that the painter, on one of their car trips, had told our Father about his idea, and that our founder liked it. I felt the battle was lost (as indeed it was).*

*The artist began to paint the picture. I resisted quite a bit and in fact they couldn't get me to pose. Shortly afterwards, our Father went to the artist's studio and liked the first sketch. I could no longer put up any resistance.*

*In a gathering at the Roman College, our Father, who had been following the progress of the painting, asked everyone if they had*

seen it, to my great surprise. As the those present said no, he asked me to bring it down.

Duly embarrassed, I went to get the painting, and brought it in with the back facing the people. **Turn it round, my son,** the Father told me. When they saw Javier dressed as a magician and me acting as a rabbit, there was a roar of laughter. Then I put the painting back in its place.

After a few days, my brother told me the Father had told Javier Cotelo that, if the painting turned out well, he was going to give it to my parents as a present. I remember feeling that I would never be able to get away from the story of that painting.

Javier Cotelo continued painting in his spare time, especially on Sunday mornings, which was the time we had to pose. More ideas came to him every day. He added a couple of young pigeons hovering above our heads to give it a touch of “conjuring realism.” In addition, it occurred to him to name the painting “The two pigeons.” This title was then written on the back of it. I didn’t find it funny. I imagined this was what I was going to be called from then on.



A short time later, our Father asked again in a get-together if they had seen how the painting was developing. Once again, **Carlos, bring down the picture, please.** This time I brought it face forward, so people wouldn’t see the title on the back. Seeing the picture, everyone laughed. I was stunned when our Father told me to turn it around. Everyone read the title and laughed again. The laughter

*stopped short when our Father said, more or less, **If I find out that you call them pigeons I'll come down and cut out your tongues. In this family, we have never called people names. At last I felt I could breathe freely. And in fact there was never a joke or hint about the painting from anyone. The Father himself found it very funny. He laughed jokingly, Do notice that Javier looks almost as happy as Carlos ... Instead of a rabbit, he's taking out his brother ...***

This is my patient, long-suffering brother's account of his compulsory experience of posing as a rabbit. The painting arrived in Zaragoza on 24<sup>th</sup> June, as a gift for my father on the feast of Saint John the Baptist, the day we celebrated his name-day [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). It is easy to imagine his astonished, amused face on opening the present. That same day, after dinner, I was told that the Father wanted to see me. Highly entertained, he showed me the telegram that had just come from Zaragoza. It said: *CARRIER PIGEONS ARRIVED LOFT MOVED AFFECTIONATE MESSAGE SENDING EQUAL AFFECTION PLEASE CONGRATULATE ARTIST AND EMBRACE OUR PIGEONS LOVINGLY WE BEG PRAYERS FOR SOME CHILDREN AND BLESS US ALL PILAR JUAN ANTONIO CREMADES.* [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#)

That painting always had a place of honor in my parents' sitting room, and still has it now in my oldest brother's house.

## 19. The Brafa film

There was another remarkable occasion in November 1972. The Father traveled throughout Spain and attended large gatherings in many cities. He usually started the conversation, and then people told him their stories and asked him questions; and he answered the questions raised as he went along. The tone of all of this was very supernatural, family-like, warm, and engaging. During a gathering at the Brafa Sports Center in Barcelona, my father, after recalling his old friendship with the Father and boasting of his children, complimented Don Alvaro and asked the Father how we too could be as faithful as that son of his in our vocation to the Work. There was a huge burst of applause and the Father loved it, although Don Alvaro blushed [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#).

It was one of the first gatherings that were filmed and so my father's intervention went viral, as people say now, because for the first time there was a film that could be seen immediately by thousands of people anywhere in the world where there were people of the Work. He said that this film made him famous, because until then, he had been simply the father of the Cremades, but now people greeted him because they recognized him.

His popularity also began to persecute his children. Now people often asked us, "Oh ... are you one of the sons of the man in the Brafa movie?" Sometimes, as a joke, we repeated the words with which he had begun his little speech, "Father, with an emotion that I neither can nor wish to hide ..." I remember one day, sometime after, over the telephone, my father asked me, "So how are you, son?" And I replied, "Father, with an emotion that I neither can nor wish to hide ..." He cut me short, saying with apparent annoyance, "Hey, son, no taking the mickey out of your father!"

## 20. A priest in the family

On 14<sup>th</sup> February 1973, we celebrated in Rome the foundational anniversaries of women and of priests in the Work, respectively. It was a great event, and we had a get-together with the Father at the Roman College. He announced that in the summer about 50 numeraries in the Work would be ordained priests. He asked us to pray for them, and to thank God for this gift. Normally, between 20 and 30 numeraries were ordained every year, but the fact that this time there were going to be 50 made the Roman College students a little nervous, to think that, as the quota was open, we had more possibilities of figuring on the list.

The last step before priestly ordination in the Work involves three phases. In the first, the person concerned is asked, on behalf of the Father, if he wants to be ordained with the next group. Then it is up to him to meditate on it before the Lord, and to decide for himself in total freedom. If he says yes, the final phase is that the Father confirms his acceptance. It is like, “Do you want to be ordained this summer? – Yes? – Well, okay, you can be!” But it isn’t done without pause for thought; instead, between each of the three phases as much time as necessary is allowed to go by.

Shortly after the above-mentioned get-together, the crucial question was indeed put to me. It gave me a massive fright, since one thing is to consider the possibility for yourself, and another – with all respect –, to see the horns of the bull approaching in a matter of months. So, more prayer, more intense affection for the Lord, more amazement at the gift that God was giving me. The contrast between my personal incapacity and the greatness of the priestly ministry was profound. I said yes, and waited for final confirmation from the Father, which looked more than probable. It

was clear that it was only a matter of time, and that in summer I held all the tickets to be among the 50.

## **Consommé with a cassock**

We were in the middle of all this when the drums began to sound in Zaragoza to organize a new Cremades plan. This was going to be another trip to Rome, in the spring. The family had already come to visit Rome, using the excuse that I had missed the family dinner with the Father. Now, with Carlos also there, there was an added reason. Obedient to instructions received, we both set to work and, in agreement with the Father, the date was finally fixed: it would be 14<sup>th</sup> April, the Saturday before Palm Sunday. The Father invited us once more to have lunch at Villa Tevere, and once more, all the students in the Roman College were turned out to fend for themselves.

It seemed a wonderful occasion to break the news of my forthcoming ordination to the priesthood, taking advantage of the family's stay in Rome. It would be warmer and more family-like to say it face to face, seeing everyone's faces and saying it aloud. Giving the news by phone or letter felt colder. But the date arrived, and I hadn't yet received definite confirmation. Therefore I felt as if I was in the air, about to land but unable to use the runway. I remember that on the morning scheduled for the family lunch, I went to see Don Javier beforehand and asked him how I should say it, because it seemed obvious that when they arrived at Villa Tevere, the news would come out, and it could sound a bit abrupt and inconsiderate. Don Javier, looking a little serious, told me that if it had not yet been ratified that I was to be ordained, I had nothing to say to anyone. Thus, I was left with that door closed and had to wait and see what happened.

I went to the place where they were staying to pick up the family. They were getting ready and looking very elegant. Since I foresaw

there could be emotion and tears, especially on the part of one of my sisters, I advised them, making a joke of it but with underlying seriousness, that they did not need to put too much makeup on. They looked at each other as if to say, "What is this boy going on about? He's gone a bit funny since living in Rome! Who asked for his opinion?" I told them, without further ado, "If you don't listen to me, you'll have to take the consequences, because when you're with the Father, there can be moments of emotions, tears and landslides. Afterwards, don't complain I didn't warn you."

This time the family's gift to the Father was a wooden figure of Baby Jesus in his crib-manger, half a meter in size. I seem to remember it was a copy of the one kept by the nuns at the convent of Santa Isabel in Madrid, which was related to the history of the Work. The Father loved the present, blessed the Baby Jesus figure, kissed him, and complimented him aloud. He declared it would be perfect for one of the oratories in Cavabianca, the final site of the Roman College, which was already under construction.



On this occasion he did not celebrate Mass for us and, after the initial greetings, we went directly to the sitting room [\[VIEW PHOTOS\]](#). The atmosphere was as loving as ever. He gave us boys the job of passing round the snacks, and asked about the family's trip, arrival, etc. in detail. When Don Javier said that we could go into the dining room, everyone went except Don Alvaro, my older sister and I, who stayed behind putting the leftovers on the clearing trolley. Whilst the three of us were at it, without any warning Don Alvaro suddenly asked her, "Maria Pilar, are you going to get used to having a priest for a brother? She was puzzled, and it was clear that, obviously, she had a better opinion of my brother Carlos than of me, because, without hesitation, she replied, "What? Is Carlos being ordained?" Don Alvaro said no, it was me.

At that moment, I thought fondly of Don Javier and of his refusal that morning to resolve this foreseeably tricky situation. Having put

everything on the clearing trolley, we went to the dining room. When I arrived at the door, Don Javier was waiting for me, and told me, "The Father says that if you don't say anything, he won't either." I must have looked at him with an unfriendly expression, and I went into the dining room thinking to myself, "Let's see how I can get out of this one." So I asked my guardian angel to inspire me with the best way to act, after this original and romantic way of receiving confirmation that I was going to be ordained.

The Father presided at table. He placed my parents next to him, saying, **Juan Antonio, you on my left; and you, Pilar, on my right. And I in the middle, because the Father does not separate you, but unites you.** Sitting opposite were Don Alvaro and Don Javier. We all sat down around the big table, each in our proper place because the foodservice department had lovingly prepared a small card with our names, in front of each place. I found myself sitting next to my mother.

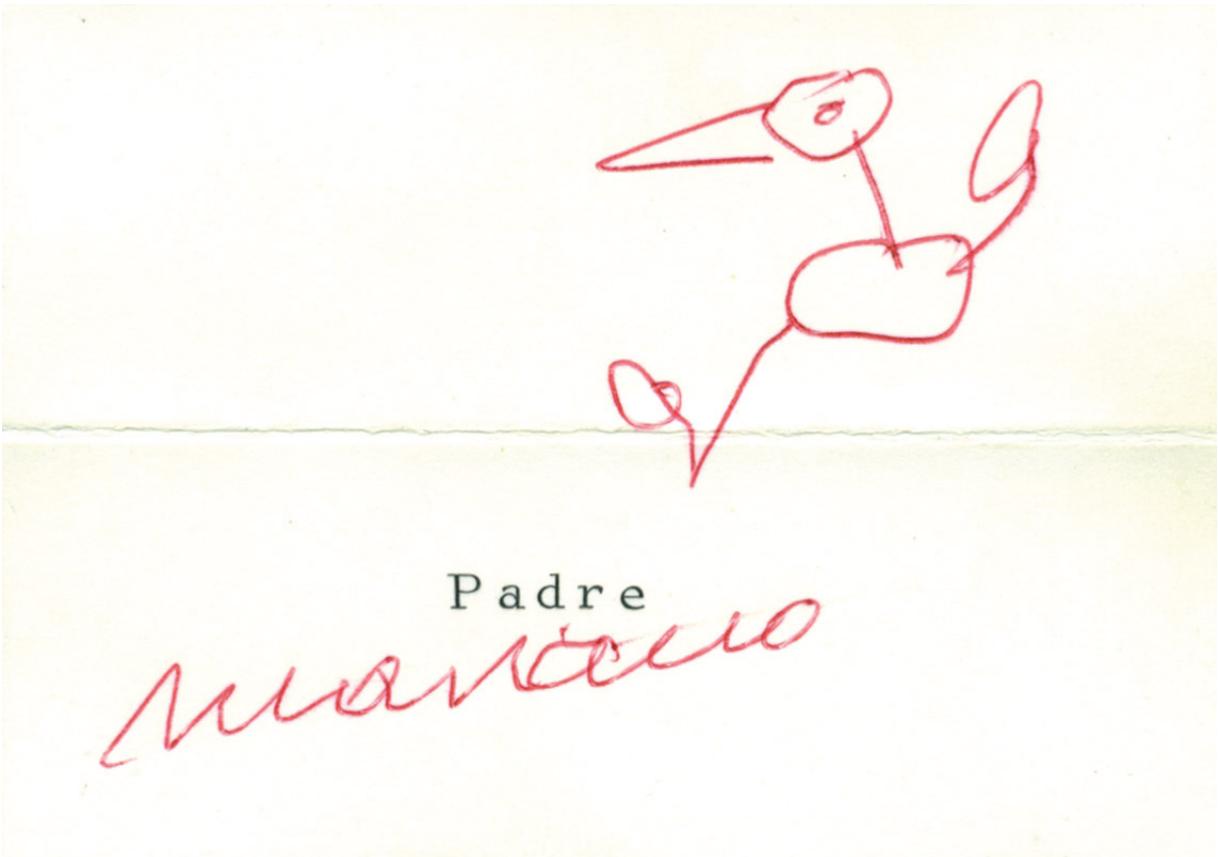
I kept an eye on my older sister, thinking that if she kept quiet about the news she had just received, I would still have room for maneuver. But if she began to pass the news on to those sitting next to her, I was lost. And that was what happened. She passed it right and left and they all began to look at me in wonder, waiting for confirmation. Then it seemed to me that, although the moment was a little unusual, I should speak up as soon as possible, to avoid my parents finding out about it via Chinese-whispers, or because someone hurled a question at me about the big news. Lunch had already started, and we had just been served a delicious, very hot consommé.

Soon, during a lull in the conversation, I asked for silence and everyone's attention. Looking at the person sitting at the head of the table, I said clearly, "Father, what my parents and my brothers and sisters don't know is that I am being ordained this summer." The shock and surprise were absolute. My mother took my hand and asked for clarification. "What did you say, my son? I didn't hear you

properly.” I repeated, “Yes, mother, I said that I will be ordained this summer.” She had to hear it a third time ... My father was also visibly moved and the Father gave him a hug. He forgot that the consommé was really hot, and swallowed it all in one gulp without realizing. My other siblings each did the best they could. Our family name for that occasion, back home, is the *consommé with a cassock*.

The Father wanted to emphasize that I was very free to be ordained or not, even up to the moment of going up to the altar. He said it was no kind of bad spirit to change my mind and refuse. He asked for prayers for me and for the others who were going to be ordained with me, and told me my duties right in front of everyone. **Javier, who is very smart, has to continue being as cheerful and smart as ever; or rather, happier, smarter and holier every day** ... A clear message forever more.

More than one of the girls had ignored my previous warning about the makeup. And sure enough, the tsunami came. Conchita was overcome with emotion, and tears started rolling down her cheeks. The pre-announced ocular landslide occurred. And she anxiously asked the person next to her, “Has my mascara run?” Without realizing, she asked the question out loud, and her voice rang across the table. When the Father saw Conchita like that, her voice breaking, tears in place, her eyes all smudged, and some of us laughing at her, he wanted to be kind to her. He told us to let her cry in peace, and offered her as a gift the small card that marked his place, which said “Father.” He said, **If you want, I’ll sign it or draw a duck for you**. Don Alvaro intervened, “Better still, both, Father.” And he did. The drawing of the duck was very funny and he signed it **Mariano**, one of the names he had been baptized with, because he often called himself that as a sign of his deep love for Our Blessed Lady. Of course, Conchita still has that memento.



When the meal was over, my father rushed over to me and gave me a huge hug. The Father, to lighten the atmosphere, asked me if I would light the candles in the oratory where we were going to make the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament, before having a get-together.

Sabela was the last person to finish the dessert, eating an apple. Realizing she was lagging behind, she got nervous and started laughing loudly, but quickly stopped laughing, putting her hand over her mouth. The Father asked her why she did that, and she explained that, since she always laughed very loudly, she had been advised at home not to do so in Rome. The Father said, **My daughter, always laugh as much as you like, it's lovely to hear you ...**

After the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament, we went to the sitting room where we spent a long time together. Pablo played some magic tricks, and one went wrong. The Father applauded even

harder, to show him that what mattered was not the result, but the good will he had put into doing it.

I have already mentioned the Father told us about the collection of little donkeys that he kept in a glass cabinet in his office. The topic came up again during the conversation, and, with a boldness beyond the usual limits, someone, I don't know who, said, "Father, we've never seen that collection of little donkeys." The Father turned to Don Javier and said, **Javi, get up there and turn on the lights, because we're going to my room.** I saw that Don Javier looked startled, but the Father repeated to him, **Hurry, Javi, go up and turn the lights on.** And we all went. We saw how small his room was, and how dark, because it had only indirect light; we saw his bed, small and very narrow; the desk, with the minimum and without even an armchair ... And we enjoyed examining the collection of little donkeys at our leisure. There were donkeys of all kinds and all materials: iron, glass, ceramic, porcelain ... There was also the straw and wire little donkey he liked so much. The Father's patience and affection were, once again, inexhaustible, making light of this invasion of his privacy, practically leading us to the wardrobe where he kept his clothes and his bathroom.

We met again in Villa Tevere before the end of the trip. He came to the sitting room with a present, saying, **Pilar, I've brought you a present; I'm sure you don't have one.** It was a medal commemorating Pope Paul VI's visit to the Elis Center in Rome's Tiburtino district. My mother thanked him very much, and took the opportunity to keep asking: she had learned that, every Easter Sunday, he sent a blessed olive branch, as a gesture of unity and Easter greetings, to the Counsellors of all the countries where there were people in the Work. And she thought that, being a very large family and with so many in the Work, perhaps we could ourselves be considered as one more single country. The Father thought it was a very good idea and was highly amused by her argument. He sent for one of the small olive-sprigs, sealed at the bottom with the seal of

the Work to guarantee its origin. It was set within a neatly-constructed little cardboard box. He handed it over, to her saying that it was the first time he had given it to a woman [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#).

The subject of my ordination came up again and he said that, since my parents would be praying for me, I had more than half of my perseverance in my vocation assured. And he continued, **Parents' duties towards their children last a lifetime. As long as you live and they live, help them to be holy. Remain a resting place for them. Bring them your virtues, because the Communion of Saints is very special between parents and children. If you are holy, your children will be very holy. If any of them makes you suffer, they will end up being loyal to God. Remember Monica and Augustine.** He also told them, again, that although their children had been called to the Work and we were scattered all over, they would never be left alone. By the way, my sister Mari Carmen was already living in Switzerland and she is still there today, working and taking the Work forward.

As a farewell, he gave us the blessing for the trip in Spanish, because, he told us, he did not like the name of Our Lady of Pilar in Latin, **Through the intercession of Our Lady of Pilar, may you travel safely, may the Lord be on your path, and may his angels accompany you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

## **Thirty years preparing a present**

I now come to a fixation of my father's. For some reason, he had acquired the entire collection of books published by the Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (BAC, "Library of Christian Authors", a publisher of classical authors of the Catholic Church). There were several hundred volumes – each year a number of new items were added – that occupied huge bookshelves on various walls all over the house.

They were not much used, and you could tell some had not even been opened. But he checked them regularly, ensuring no copy was missing, and replacing any that were. Those bookshelves were also cleaned so that the books were in perfect condition.

I had always been amazed at this quirk in a house where there were several beds in each bedroom. I didn't know what to make of all those books of Church history, the complete works of the Fathers and of the saints, all kinds of Catholic authors, the magisterium of the Pope, etc.

After the family's lunch with the Father, when I arrived at the place where they were staying, my father took me aside and, just as he had when I asked to be admitted to the Work, he again asked me, seriously, a whole set of questions: if I had thought it through, if I felt free, if I had considered the scope of the decision, if I realized that the Father had said I could back down at any moment, if ... I answered them all, reassuring him, and said I was also in very good hands.

That afternoon, when we were all together, he explained that the collection of BAC books at home had begun to be published shortly after my parents' wedding. And, even back then, they had decided to keep all the books that were published, with the idea of preparing a gift for when one of their sons was ordained a priest. We brothers looked at each other in amazement. I took the floor and, thanking him sincerely, declined that gift, claiming that we had all always seen the love and care which he had lavished on the collection. I said I couldn't take any of those books which meant so much to him. He reiterated that the sole reason for collecting that library was as a gift for a priest son of his. And there and then the issue was settled.

At last we understood the reason for this fixation of his. It was further proof of the generosity of Christian parents, and of the trust and effectiveness of their intense prayer for their children over decades. More than 30 years!

## Everything is ready... and the great day arrives

They all returned to their respective cities, delighted with the success of the *even bigger plan* we had enjoyed, and with the great news. I also received good wishes and expressions of surprise from grandparents, uncles, cousins, lifelong friends ... The family set to work to prepare everything necessary for my ordination. Making a quick trip to Madrid, they commissioned a wonderful enamel chalice at Talleres de Arte Granda, with the names of my parents and all my siblings engraved around the edges of the base. The prestigious Los Rosales workshop made and embroidered some beautiful linens and vestments, including the very best chasuble and alb they could make, for my first solemn Mass.

I stayed in Rome until almost the end of June, lucky enough to continue having the Father close at hand in the semi-final stage of our pre-ordination formation. He also preached to us one of the homilies which were later published, the one entitled "A Priest Forever." He paid special attention to each and all of us. On the day we traveled to Spain, he gave us the blessing for the trip. He was so moved that when he said goodbye to us after the blessing, he couldn't say another word.

In Madrid, the 51 of us, from more than 15 countries, met for the final stretch. We did a preparatory retreat. We received the rite of admission to holy orders. Bishop Jose Maria Garcia Lahiguera, a close friend of the Father, ordained us deacons. And on 5<sup>th</sup> August, the feast of Our Lady of the Snows, in Saint Michael's Basilica, Cardinal Tarancon, Archbishop of Madrid, ordained us to the priesthood [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). They were days of intense prayer, of deep preparation for the great gift we were receiving, and of asking the Lord for the grace to be very faithful to Him. We were very aware of

the Father and his intentions. The whole family came together as one, and thanked God incessantly.

Three days later, I celebrated my first solemn Mass at the main altar of the Basilica of Our Lady of Pilar in Zaragoza [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#), sponsored by my parents [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). Several thousand people filled the basilica to overflowing. From one of the basilica's towers, a white flag fluttered in the wind, as is the custom in Aragon at the first Mass of a new priest. After spending a long time having my newly-anointed hands kissed by the congregation, I was allowed, trembling, to climb up the stairs of the Holy Chapel to kiss the small, loveable statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Pilar. I touched the renowned Pillar with a flower which, once I came down, I gave to my mother [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). At that moment it came to my mind that the Father had also celebrated his first Mass there in 1925. At that Mass, however, only very few people were present.

After these joyous events, we wrote to the Father telling him how everything had gone. We also sent him photos of the ceremonies and a *Lignum Crucis*, a relic of the True Cross, with its authentication document, which my grandfather gave me as a present. He had kept it as a precious family heirloom, passed down from father to son, from a long time past. The Father wrote to us acknowledging receipt of the present [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#).

**Rome, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1973**

**Dearest Pilar and Juan Antonio:**

**It is only now, on my return to Rome, that I find the precious relic that you have sent me and all your affectionate letters, and I now drop you a few lines to thank you with all my heart.**

**I fully understand your joy, which I share, and I join in the thanksgiving that all your beloved family is making to the Lord for Javier's recent ordination. Pray for him and for all the new priests, so they may always serve the Church and souls with**

**loyalty and joy. I am sure that, with Our Lady's help, they will all be very faithful and give great glory to God.**

**Keep offering your whole day, very united to the intentions of my Mass.**

**I send a hug to Juan Antonio and bless you all affectionately  
in Domino  
Josemaria.**

## 21. A saint at my feet

In May 1974, the Father came to Pamplona again. After a gathering in the auditorium of Belagua, he received me and my parents in a sitting room. It was the first time he had seen me after my ordination. He kissed me on both cheeks and then knelt down in front of me and asked for my blessing, as he always did with new priests. As I was nervous, I hesitated a little over the words, and Don Alvaro, who was next to me, prompted me in a whisper. Then, still on his knees, he took my hands and kissed them. When he got up, I knelt down and he blessed me; and I was able to return the kiss to his hands. I will never forget that moment.

**[CHRISTMAS 1974]**

## 22. Another boiling consommé

My brother Carlos went through a process similar to mine. Two years later, the same story as with my ordination was repeated again. He had already returned from Rome to Pamplona and was finishing his theology studies. The Father asked him if he was willing to be ordained a priest that summer. He said yes, and went to Zaragoza on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1975 to tell the family. They began dinner that day with a very hot consommé, and suddenly Carlos informed them that he was going to be ordained a priest in Barcelona at the beginning of July. The chronicles narrate that my father once again swallowed the consommé without realizing how hot it was. Recovering from his emotion, he carried out the usual classic questioning. Then came the big hugs and congratulations. Once again, the prayers of so many years still proved effective.



I say jokingly that my parents prayed so very hard for God to give them the grace of having a priest for a son, that I was the result. And with the prayers that were left over, the result was Carlos. He doesn't mind my joking with this personal assessment of mine, or being

considered the *leftover*. What's more, there must have been plenty of leftover prayer, because he is an excellent priest and brother.

At this point I will explain a fun decision made by my father, to protect himself against dramatic news and any further sore throats. As you will remember, he had inadvertently ingested three very hot bowls of consommé on different occasions when he experienced strong emotions: when I told my parents I had decided to become a numerary; when I told them about my forthcoming ordination; and when Carlos did the same. He always remembered those occasions, pretending to be bothered by them. When we had family gatherings, he never asked for consommé, and if consommé was served, he asked for something else just in case. "I will never again have consommé with any of you," he would say, causing a general laugh.

## 23. Goodbye kisses, before going to Heaven

While we were preparing for Carlos's ordination, the City of Barbastro bestowed the Barbastro Gold Medal on the Father in a ceremony at the Town Hall, towards the end of May [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). My mother, Pablo, Conchita and I were able to attend that event. It was the last time we saw the Father before he died on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1975. As we arrived early, we were able to get good seats.

The Father was very sad because he had just been informed of the death in Rome of one of the oldest priests of the Work, Don Salvador Canals. He also looked very tired. He was not the Father with a strong, vibrant voice of other times; he was a heart-broken Father, who, because of his love for the Church and the whole world, was offering his life to God, by giving himself to others.

When the line of dignitaries entered the hall, the Father greeted my mother and my sister Conchita; he gave Pablo a hug; and when I approached him, he wouldn't let me kiss his hand. **Today, I will kiss your hands**, he said. He took my hands, and kissed each one of them. I tried to do the same to him, but he stopped me. That was my farewell to the Father here on earth. We never saw each other again. And that is my last memory of him [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#).

That day, his last words to the Cremades family were to my mother. He said to her, **My daughter, tell Juan Antonio and all your children that I love you very much; pray for me.**

I remember how we talked afterwards about the Father's strikingly poor state of health and the fear we felt that he might die soon. It was not expected, but his progressive physical deterioration was increasingly evident.

Then came that unforgettable 26<sup>th</sup> June, the day of his death. It is a date that we will remember forever, a day of great suffering and pain, much prayer and lamentation to the Lord before the

Tabernacle. Alongside the great sorrow I experienced, I was also certain the Father had already reached his destination, and had definitely triumphed in making his way to Heaven. At last, I thought, he had ceased to suffer the constant torment he had been enduring, with the situation of the Church and the world weighing down on his soul. I was certain that his great suffering had finally ended, thanks to God.

## 24. The engineer is ordained a priest

A few days after the Father's funeral, Carlos was ordained to the priesthood in the church of Montealegre in Barcelona, by Cardinal Casariego of Guatemala. It was another lovely ceremony, and a new *Cremades plan*; but, for the first time, we knew that the Father was completely happy, without any suffering, blessing all of us from Heaven. The ceremony was clouded by the sorrow of that sudden, unexpected loss.

Days later, we experienced the wonder of another First Solemn Mass in the Basilica of Our Lady of Pilar in Zaragoza [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). Again a white flag fluttered on the tower, and the basilica was filled with the faithful. We felt that Our Lady was happy and smiling to have the Father at her side, and another bunch of his priests beginning their ministry. This time I was in charge of the preaching, and I did my best. The Archbishop of Zaragoza, Don Pedro Cantero, an old friend of the Father, was with us in the sanctuary during Mass [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#). Carlos, so as not to be outdone by his older brother, after going up to kiss the statue of Our Lady, also touched the blessed Pillar with a flower and gave it to my mother: it just shows how important it is to set a good example to the little ones ...! It goes without saying that she dried and pressed the two flowers and kept them until she died [\[VIEW PHOTO\]](#).

But, once again, poor Carlos! He was left without the gift of the BAC books, since I had been taking the whole collection from home, little by little. After all, the boy is younger than me, and these things can happen to those born later ...

On the day of his first solemn Mass, 17<sup>th</sup> July, Carlos distributed a memorial card for the occasion with a beautiful picture of Our Lady of Pilar. On the back was the following, in small print:

*DOMINA, UT VIDEAM!*

**OUR LADY, LET ME SEE!**

*An aspiration that, before God showed him Opus Dei, was made to Our Lady of Pilar by Mons. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, for whose soul the new Priest asks for prayers.*



DOMINA, UT VIDEAM!  
¡SEÑORA, QUE VEA!  
Jaculatoria que, antes de que Dios  
le hiciera ver el Opus Dei, repetía a  
la Virgen del Pilar Mons. ESCRIVA  
DE BALAGUER, por cuya alma  
pide oraciones el nuevo Sacerdote.

**Carlos Cremades Sanz-Pastor**

celebró su

**PRIMERA MISA SOLEMNE**

el día 17 de Julio de 1975

en la Santa Basílica  
de Nuestra Señora del Pilar  
de Zaragoza.

One final detail. In the celebration after Mass we were already able to distribute the prayer card for private devotion to the Father to those present, asking God for graces through his intercession. It was not even three weeks since he had died, and the reputation for holiness of this Servant of God, and the highly effective power of his intercession from Heaven, was already ringing through the world. It was a universal clamor.

## 25. A Tale Without End

Before finishing these lines, I want to thank all my siblings for the great help they have given me whilst writing these pages: encouraging me, pointing out errors, putting reminiscences together, suggesting approaches and, on some occasions, giving their precious consent to let me go public with some of their personal details. Thank you from the bottom of my heart: you are great!

I have not written down each and every one of our beloved family reunions. I have written about only some of the *plans* and the *even bigger plans* the Cremades family made and carried out, either together or by ourselves, with our Father and friend, the holy founder of Opus Dei.

I have tried to show the meaning and substance of what he always used to say, **I am a sinner who loves Jesus Christ madly**. I have tried to highlight his tender, filial affection for the Mother of God, the Church and the Pope; the tender affection he bestowed on everyone, his sanctity, his joy and sense of humor. Also, his warmth and his ability to draw to God all those who crossed his path.

I wanted to show that, along with being deeply optimistic and always upbeat, he felt deep sorrow at all the offenses against God, and felt burdened by the weight of the Church, of the Work and of the world, as by a real cross.

In particular, I have especially highlighted his love and affection for my family: my parents and all of us siblings. By a very particular and very special grace from God, we enjoyed a unique relationship with him until he went to Heaven, one that left a lasting mark on our lives.

Now that he is so close to God, he continues to intercede for us, and I am convinced he also intercedes for all who come to him asking for his help and making personal petitions.

Some may have concluded, reading my stories, that my family received special treatment. I am happy to say yes, it is perfectly true. We were very privileged. And that is something that can never be taken away.

But my point is that now, from Heaven, he gives that *special treatment*, that privileged relationship, to all those who come to him asking for spiritual or material help, just as he did, and continues to do, to us. God allows him to do so. Many people around the world experience this every day. And they enthusiastically tell their family and friends. There is always an answer for those who say the prayer card asking God, “Grant that I also may learn to turn all the circumstances and events of my life into opportunities to love you and serve the Church, the Pope and all souls, with joy and simplicity, lighting up the paths of the earth with faith and love.”

This is why if anyone is still skeptical after reading this little book, I encourage you, if you like, to try it out for yourself. It's very easy, because Saint Josemaria is very approachable, and is close to our everyday affairs. He is the patron saint of ordinary life, of daily work and toil. And I repeat again the advice I gave at the beginning of this book: if you don't know what to say to him, tell him I sent you. Since he's very fond of me, I'm sure he will help you a lot and pay you a lot of attention. You can tell him, “Father, Javier told me to get in touch with you,” or anything else that occurs to you. As he is very sharp – as they say in my town – he catches on quickly!

So I invite you not to be shy. Be straightforward with him. He loves it. Aragonese people are like that. And Saint Josemaria never disappoints. Later, if you like, you can tell me how it went. For that purpose, I have created this email:

[planazoscremades@gmail.com](mailto:planazoscremades@gmail.com)

I guarantee you my unconditional prayer and support ... Beneath the mantle of Our Lady of Pilar, who is so beautiful, we place ourselves, as all my family has always been. We continue to be in there, and it has gone very well for all of us. And I assure you very

sincerely: this story has not yet ended. It does not end here, it ends in Heaven ... and that is where we are heading, some of us rather sooner than others ... There we are, with God, going to make fantastic plans, absolutely magnificent plans ... That's what we were born for.



**Javier Cremades Sanz-Pastor** (ZARAGOZA, 1946 – MADRID, 2021)

BSc. Medicine and Surgery (Salamanca, 1969)

Doctor in Theology (Navarra, 1978)

Ordained a priest in 1973, he carried out his pastoral work in Pamplona (1973-1974), Santiago de Compostela (1974-1982) and Madrid (1982-2021, with a brief parenthesis as rector in the Shrine of Torreciudad, between 2015 and 2016).

Among other positions, he was chaplain of the Department of Law and Information Sciences at the Universidad Complutense for 22 years; founder of Caritas Universitaria; 21 years a member of the Council of Priests; World Youth Day organizer in Madrid in 2011 (Pope Benedict XVI appointed him chaplain to his Holiness); rector of the church of the Holy Spirit (2006-2015); delegate of public acts for the Archbishop of Madrid (2012-2015) and chaplain of Aldeafuente School.

He died in Madrid, Spain, on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

## Notes

[1] In these pages I will always simply refer to Saint Josemaria Escrivá as “the Father”. This is what we have always called the founder of Opus Dei in my family.

[2] Don Alvaro del Portillo was one of the first three priests of the Work. He lived with the Father for almost 40 years, and was his strongest support and main helper. When the Father died, he was elected as his successor at the head of Opus Dei. He died a holy death in 1994. He was beatified in Madrid in 2014.

[3] Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, 3 vols., New York: Scepter, 2001-2005, vol. 2, p. 333.

[4] The Counsellor is a priest who governs each of the Opus Dei regions around the world as the Father’s representative.

[5] Don Javier Echevarria lived in Rome, with the Father and Blessed Alvaro from 1950 onwards, working exclusively and very

efficiently to take the Work forward in the footsteps of the Founder.  
He died in 2016, also with a reputation for sanctity.





1939 – My parents' wedding in Burgos, 5<sup>th</sup> March: the beginning of all the *Cremades Plans*. [\[BACK\]](#)



[BACK]

JOSÉ M.<sup>A</sup> ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER Y ALBÁS  
RECTOR DEL REAL PATRONATO DE SANTA ISABEL  
M A D R I D

30 de Abril de 1941.

Sr. D. Juan Antonio Cremades

L E R I D A

Muy querido Juan Antonio:

No es fácil que olvide nunca las atenciones que tuviste conmigo, con ocasión del fallecimiento de mi Madre, q. e. p. d. ¡Dios te lo pague!

Quiero hacerte presente cómo me tienes siempre a tu disposición, aunque yo para poco valgo, deseoso de corresponder de alguna manera a tu afecto.

Saluda a tu mujer, a quien tengo muchos deseos de conocer, besa a tu pequeño, y no os olvidéis de encomendar a mi madre.

Te abraza y os bendice

JOHANNIA

1941 – Letter from the Father thanking my father for his help when his mother Doña Dolores died. [BACK]



## Saint Josemaría Escrivá

Founder of Opus Dei

PRAYER

*O God, through the most Blessed Virgin Mary, you granted countless graces to your priest Saint Josemaría, choosing him as a most faithful*

*instrument to found Opus Dei, a way to holiness through daily work and the ordinary duties of a Christian. Grant that I also may learn to turn all the circumstances and events of my life into opportunities to love you and serve the Church, the Pope and all souls, with joy and simplicity, lighting up the paths of the earth with faith and love. Through the intercession of Saint Josemaría please grant the favour I request (here make your petition). Amen.*

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

Prayer card of Saint Josemaria, who intercedes before God for all who turn to him for material or spiritual help, just as he did, and continues to do, for our family.

[\[BACK\]](#)



1955 – First photograph of my whole family: 10 presents from God to exceptional parents. [\[BACK\]](#)

Mons. JOSÉ MARIA ESCRIVA DE BALAGUER te abra-  
za, te bendice, agradece tu caritativa cari-  
ta y pide al Señor que te confirme en  
tu camino, y que a ti y a los tuyos  
os haga muy felices.  
Roma. Feb. 1956

1956 – The Father's reply to my father who had written asking him for admission to the Work. [\[BACK\]](#)

Mons. José María Escrivá de Balaguer,  
Presidente Generale dell'Opus Dei, le  
augura un Santo Natale e un felice  
Anno Nuovo.

Para todos esos que  
d'rimos pequeños de  
la familia Brenada,  
con el cariño del Padre  
una afectuosa bendi-  
ción y oración

Agradeci mucho vues-  
tro sacrificio, pero desde  
ahora el Niño Jesús esta  
va también muy conten-  
to si en vez de enviarnos el  
dinero - o comprar dulces, etc.

1960 – Letter from the Father after we had sent him our small savings for Christmas to help him in his financial difficulties; he asks us not to make that sacrifice any more. [\[BACK\]](#)





1960 – The Father talking to my parents and my brother Juan Antonio. [\[BACK\]](#)



1960 – The Father during the homily, addressing the children, who were listening attentively. [\[BACK\]](#)





1960 – The Father during the homily, addressing the children, who were listening attentively. [\[BACK\]](#)





1960 – Pablo receiving his First Holy Communion. [\[BACK\]](#)



1960 – First Communion family photo with the Father, plus my grandparents and Montse Porcioles, who were living with us that year. [\[BACK\]](#)



1960 – Giving First Communion cards to the Father. The nose in the top left corner is mine. [\[NEXT\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)

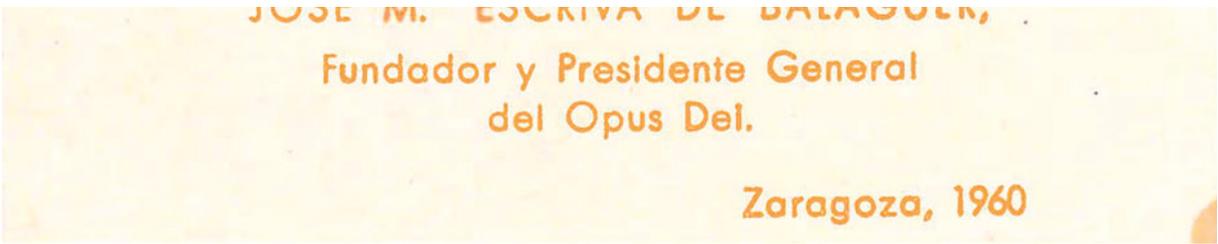


† DAR DE BEBER AL SEDIENTO †

PABLO, CONCHITA Y ANA MARI  
CREMADES SANZ-PASTOR

recibieron por primera vez la Sagrada  
Comunión, el día 21 de octubre, en el  
oratorio del Colegio Mayor Miraflores,  
de manos del

EXCMO. y REVDMO. MONSEÑOR DON  
JOSÉ M<sup>o</sup> ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER



1960 – One of the First Communion cards, which represented the seven Corporal Works of Mercy. This one is “Giving water to the thirsty.” [\[PREVIOUS\]](#)[\[BACK\]](#)





1960 – The three children who made their First Communion, in the Basilica of Our Lady of Pilar, where they went straight after the ceremony, to kiss the statue of the Virgin Mary. [\[BACK\]](#)



1960 – The Father at the end of a ceremony in Zaragoza. As the Father hardly came to Spain at all in the 1950s, many people in the Work, and friends, had never met him; his charisma, and their affection and enthusiasm in response, can clearly be seen in this photo. My head is on the right-hand edge, third from the bottom.

[\[BACK\]](#)



JOSÉ MARÍA ESCRIVÁ

TABLA DE EDICIONES

# CAMINO

16.ª EDICIÓN CASTELLANA

*Omnia in  
bonum!  
26/x/1960.*

MADRID

1 9 5 8

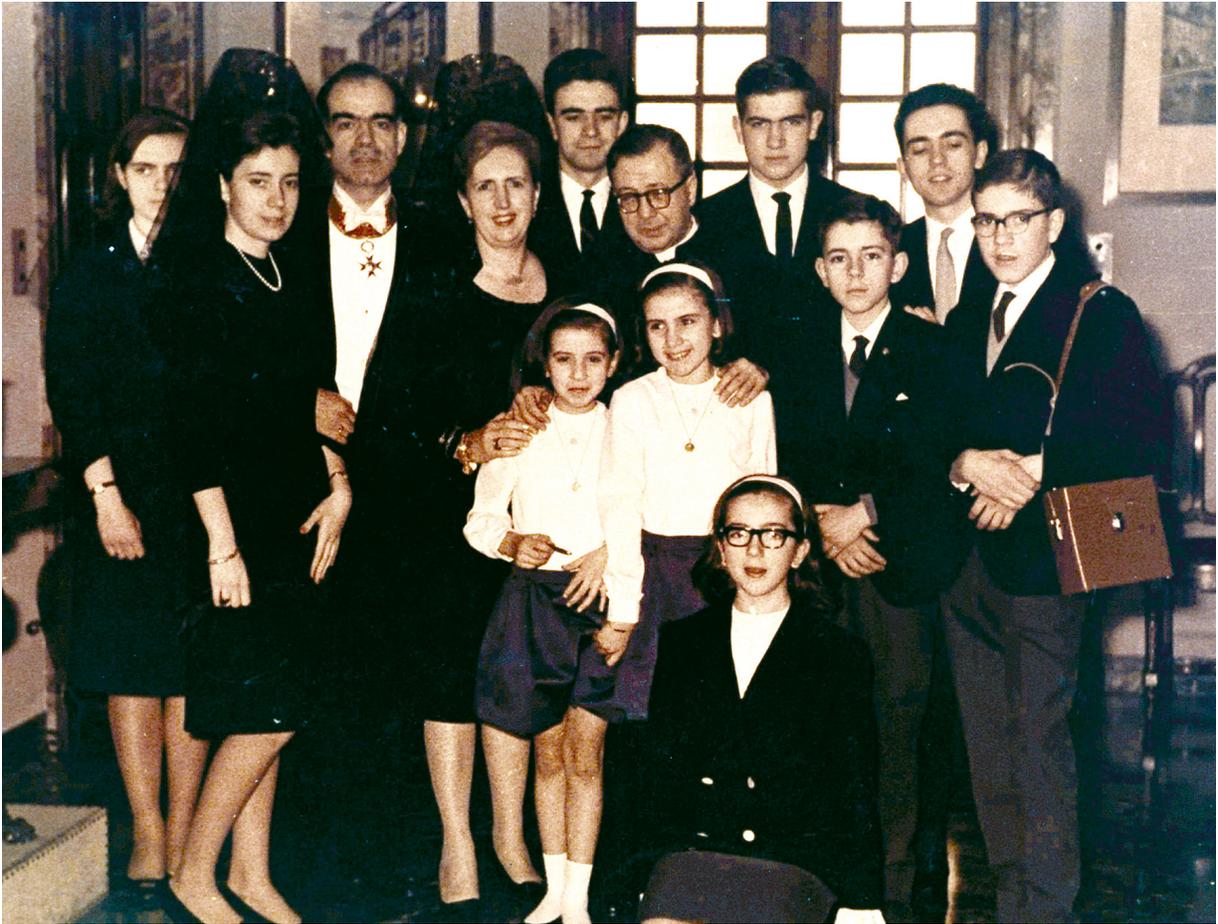
1960 – The Father’s handwritten message in a copy of *The Way*. On this occasion he wrote it in 12 copies, one for each member of the family. [\[BACK\]](#)



1964 – The Father celebrating Mass for us in his house when we all went to Rome for my parents' silver wedding anniversary. The loving way he treated Our Lord made a deep impression on me. [\[BACK\]](#)



1964 – Receiving Holy Communion. [\[BACK\]](#)



1964 – The whole family with the Father, taken before we set out for the Vatican. This is one of my favorite photographs. [\[NEXT\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)

A Pilar y a Juan Antonio  
Cremades, y a todos  
sus hijos, con todo cariño,  
una afectuosa bendición,  
Paris, 15 de sep. de 1966.  
Josemaria

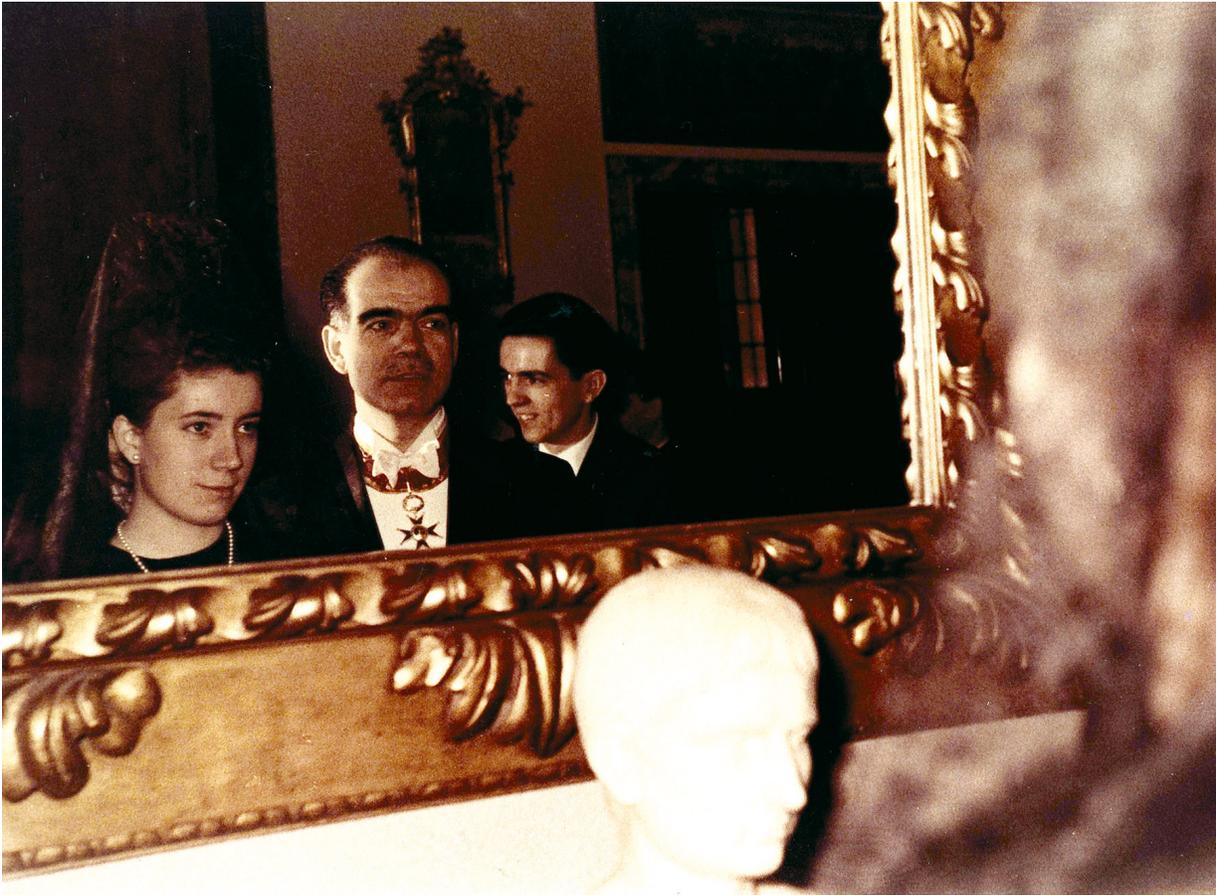
1966 – Inscription written by the Father two years later on the back of the same photo, in Paris:

**To Pilar and Juan Antonio Cremades, and to all their children, with all my affection, a heartfelt blessing,**

**Paris, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1966.**

**Josemaria.**

[\[PREVIOUS\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)



1964 – In Villa Tevere, preparing for our Papal Audience. We dressed as smartly as we could, the ladies with Spanish mantillas and combs, and my father with his civil and pontifical decorations. [\[BACK\]](#)



1964 – Greeting the Pope in a long line, from eldest to youngest. My father was vigilant to ensure that protocol was followed properly. [\[BACK\]](#)



1964 – All of us with St Peter's successor, who told us, "Opus Dei is a blessing from Heaven." [\[BACK\]](#)



1964 – The Father showing us round the headquarters of the Work. [\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – Legend has it that if you toss a coin into the Fontana di Trevi, you will return to Rome. We did it on all our trips and had a lot of fun. And it worked, because we all met the Father together in Rome on three occasions: 1964, 1971 and 1973. [\[BACK\]](#)

IGOM 82-6-65

Luzida Maria Pilar:

Esta mañana he recibido una carta de madre y me he enterado de que te habías hecho numeraria del Opus Dei.

¡ENHORABUENA!

Voy a pedirle a Dios que te haga muy santa y que te ayude a seguir por el buen camino y te pida luego por mí.

Además le vas a dar una alegría al Padre de Roma por ser cofundadora a la vez que él.

Me supongo que habrás hecho un

1965 – Letters from my younger sisters to my older sister, on hearing that she had asked to join Opus Dei, two of them congratulating her and the third expressing strong, if badly-spelt, disapproval. [\[NEXT\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)

7-VII-65

NOS BELLES PYRENEES  
1.36. ANE DES PYRENEES.

SET@LOR  
TADIA

Querida Ma<sup>a</sup> Pilar:

Te doy la enhorabuena por lo del Opus

Dei y alomejor me meto yo del Opus

Dei y asi estaremos los diez.

Estamos en Lourdes he rezado por ti y por el Padre de ROMA

Te quiere mucho ~~tu hermano~~

Editions P. CHAMBON, 6, rue Hôtel-de-Ville, LOURDES  
Collection "YAN", Tél. : 94.04.35  
Reproduction interdite

Srta Ma<sup>a</sup> Pilar Cremades  
"Escuela - Hogar Las"

Barcelona

(España)

¿te gusta este burro?

1965 – Letters from my younger sisters to my older sister, on hearing that she had asked to join Opus Dei, two of them congratulating her and the third expressing strong, if badly-spelt, disapproval. [\[PREVIOUS\]](#) [\[NEXT\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)

Querida hermana Maria Pilar

Que tal estas, yo muy bien.

Esta Mañana me he enterado de que te habias  
hecho numeraria del Opus Dei y yo no quiero No, No,  
y No,  
y No,  
ademas porque no quierooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo  
Mandame tus señas para escribirte.

Me lo paso muy bien y muy divertido ahora mismo  
me duele una muela que se me muere mucho y  
me esta doliendo ~~hacer~~ Horrores.

Cuando te va a Barcelona vera, a Mase y la familia  
y a todas mandame una foto tulla para acordarme  
de ti.

Que tal te va el pastijo te lo paner pero mandame  
la foto con el punto.

Escrubeme mucho y todas las dias o uno dos  
veces a la semana para no aburrir.  
me, porque hay dias que me aburo como  
una Hastra,

Escríbeme pronto y dentro de la carta  
pastales de Barcelona.

## 1965 - Letters from my younger sisters to my older sister, on hearing that she had asked to join Opus Dei, two of them congratulating her and the third expressing strong, if badly-spelt, disapproval. [\[PREVIOUS\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)

1965 – Letters from my younger sisters to my older sister, on hearing that she had asked to join Opus Dei, two of them congratulating her and the third expressing strong, if badly-spelt, disapproval. [\[PREVIOUS\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)





1966 – The monstrance made with jewels bequeathed for this purpose by a maternal aunt, and which my family presented to the Father in the Colegio Mayor Aralar, Pamplona. [\[NEXT\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)

Doña Rosario de Palacios y López-Montenegro Viuda de D. Angel Jiménez Mauleón, dejó sus joyas para honrar al Santísimo Sacramento.

Sus sobrinos D. José María Sanz-Pastor Fernández de Piérola y Doña Concepción Mellado y Pérez de Meca, mandaron construir una custodia de oro, para que en ella pusieran dichas joyas y cumplimentar de esta manera tan piadoso deseo.

Fue entregada, para la Universidad de Navarra, a su gran Canciller el Excmo. y Revmo. Monseñor D. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Albás, el día 26 de Septiembre de 1966.

1966 – The back of the card accompanying the monstrance, giving its history.

[\[PREVIOUS\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)

Yeyé  
4-11-67  
Pablo de los  
Cruces,

1967 – A very brief note from the Father to Pablo: **Yeyé – but the right sort, 4-11-67**. The 1960s Spanish colloquialism yeyé meant cool, modern, progressive, and was how 15-year-old Pablo saw himself at the time. [\[BACK\]](#)

*Semper ut  
in mentum!*





1967 – A photograph of St Josemaria, on the back of which he wrote for me the words ***Semper ut iumentum!***, meaning “always like a little donkey!” The Father saw himself as a little donkey of God, taking him wherever he went. **[BACK]**

Mod. Tg. 2. —Español Giménez, S. A.—Madrid.

Recibido de .....

*[Handwritten signature]*

PORTE GRATUITO

TELEGRAMA

JUAN ANTONIO CREMADES

CLINICA UNIVERSITARIA PAMPLONA



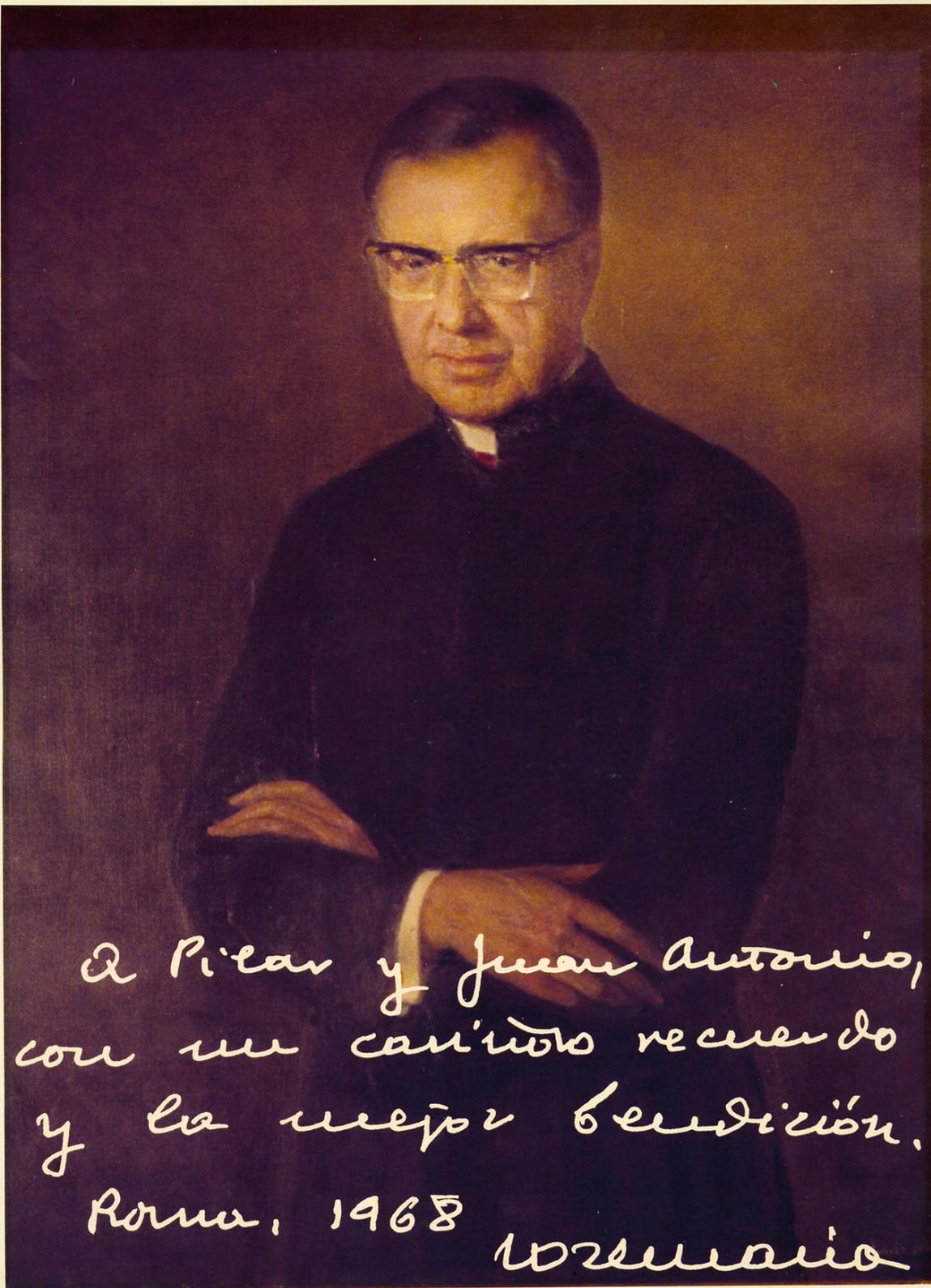
= MDTF 195 ROMA 124 20 6 125Q= VITALC =

= RECIBIDO TELEGRAMA STOP CONENTISIMO DA GRACIAS AL SENOR Y OS BENDICE A TODOS JOSEMARIA =====

[BACK]



1970 – A panoramic view of the dining room table, more than 5 meters long, on the evening the Father came to dinner with us. [\[BACK\]](#)



A Pilar y Juan Antonio,  
con un cariñoso recuerdo  
y la mejor bendición.

Roma, 1968

Orsuaia

1970 – Portrait of the Father, on which he had written **To Pilar and Juan Antonio, with a loving greeting and best blessing. Rome, 1968. Josemaria.** [\[BACK\]](#)



1968 – The same portrait of the Founder, with 12 little donkeys in front of it, which always stood on a sideboard, and which he saw when he came to dinner with us.

[\[BACK\]](#)



1970 – Miniature photos of all ten Cremades children, arranged in order of age, which the Father saw and blessed on the same occasion. [\[BACK\]](#)

Un cariñoso abrazo y  
sua bendición del  
Padre

Muy querida Javier: ¡cuanto te hemos  
echado de menos! Un abrazo Alvaro

Muy querido hijo Javier: te recomen-  
damos con gran cariño esta gran noche fami-  
liar y rogamos al Padre que se repita estando  
tú también entre nosotros.

Un fuerte abrazo

Marta

~~Pablo~~

Sabela

Pedro

~~Marta~~

Ane Olave

Conchita

~~Ally~~

Bernardo

~~Mary~~ Karmen

~~Juan Antonio~~

ZARAGOZA 7-IV-70

1970 – The message written to me by the Father and Don Alvaro, and signed by everyone, on the same occasion; it is a wonderful memento that I keep with very special affection. [\[BACK\]](#)



1970 – Conchita (holding the bunch of roses) and Ana Mary at the front door of our house, about to set off with the rest of the family for Torreciudad to leave the flowers at the feet of the statue there. [\[BACK\]](#)

Madre mía y Señora  
mía de Forreciudad, Reina  
de los ángeles, monstrá te  
ese Matre y haznos bue  
nos hijos: hijos fieles  
Forreciudad, 7 de abril, 1970.

Manixxo

---

[BACK]



Roma, 30 de abril 1970

Excmo. Sr. D. Juan Antonio Cremades Royo  
ZARAGOZA

Muy queridos Pilar y Juan Antonio:

A mi regreso a Roma, no quiero dejar de poner unas letras para daros las gracias por vuestra hospitalidad, y para que sepáis que pasé un rato estupendo junto a toda esa queridísima familia, a la que tanto quiero.

A Javier le he dado un abrazo muy fuerte de vuestra parte. Le he encontrado muy bien, mejor -si cabe- que cuando le dejé: como siempre, lleno de alegría y de buen humor, y trabajando mucho.

Os encomiendo cariñosamente, y rezo a la Santísima Virgen del Pilar para que, por su intercesión, se logren muchas vocaciones en Zaragoza.

Os recuerda y os bendice, a vosotros y a vuestros hijos

*Rosemaria*

*Verdaderamente Pilar  
sabe hacer las cosas  
con cariño y eficacia;  
¡qué mobilización y  
qué encantador Todo!*

[\[BACK\]](#)





1971 – The Father and my father: friends for 46 years. [\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – My parents with the Father, whom they revered as a saint. [\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – Three of the boys, explaining to the Father the movements of the articulated little silver donkey we gave him as a present. [\[NEXT\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – The five girls, doing the same. [\[PREVIOUS\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – One of the ducks the Father gave to the girls. [\[BACK\]](#)

Para Pilar y Juan Antonio  
Cremades, y para toda esa circun-  
sta corona de hijos que el Señor  
les ha concedido, con la mejor y  
más cariñosa bendición de  
Roma, 4 de marzo, 1971.  
Rosaura

Ejemplar número 100

impreso especialmente para la

Familia Cremades Sanz-Pastor

[BACK]



1971 – Some of us with the Father. The girls, as usual, in front, and the long-suffering boys behind. [\[NEXT\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – The Father, my mother, my younger sister, and myself probably making some silly remark. [\[PREVIOUS\]](#) [\[NEXT\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – The Father with my mother, Conchita, Ana Mary, and me. [\[PREVIOUS\]](#) [\[NEXT\]](#)  
[\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – The Father, having just chosen a card from the deck offered him by Pablo, “Sedamerc III the Magician”. [\[PREVIOUS\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – A beautiful photograph of the whole family with the Father, with the women in front again, and all the boys at the back. [\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – The Father with the boys alone, to make up for previous photographic injustices. [\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – All of us under the airport banner, as a permanent souvenir, with my father very much in charge. The Father, opposite us, was watching with great amusement. [\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – The two *hippies* with the welcome banner from Rome Airport. When we showed it to the Father he asked us to have this photo taken. I was urged to go and get the wigs for the photo too, but I refused to go down in history in that guise.

[\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – Ana Mary with the special pudding she made for my parents at the Father's request. She sent the photo to the Father, who promptly replied, amused and grateful, and asked her to pray for him when she went to the Basilica of Our Lady of Pilar and to tell Our Lady many things from him. [\[BACK\]](#)



1971 – My little donkey, obtained by underhand maternal manoeuvres with my silent complicity. [\[BACK\]](#)



1972 – “The two pigeons” painting. The Father decided to give it to my father as a present for his name-day, and he followed the progress of this amusing *work of art*

on a daily basis. [\[BACK\]](#)

TELEGRAMMA • Amm.ne P.T. • TELEGRAMMA

MONSEÑOR JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA DE BALAGUER  
BRUNO BUOZZI 75  
ROMA

PALOMAS MENSAJERAS LLEGARON PALOMAR EMOCIONADOS MENSAJE AFECTO  
CORRESPONDEMOS CARINOSAMENTE ROGANDE FELICITE ARTISTA Y  
ABRACE FUERTEMENTE NUESTROS PICHONES SUPPLICAMOS ENCOMIENDE  
ORACIONES ALGUNOS HIJOS Y NOS BENDIGA A TODOS  
PILAR JUAN ANTONIO CREMADES

COL 75

1530F

[BACK]





1972 – 26<sup>th</sup> November, the gathering in Brafa, attended by almost six thousand people. My father, standing on the left, holds a microphone, displaying his notable skill as an orator in highlighting Don Alvaro's fidelity to the Father. The Father, initiating a huge round of applause, turns towards Don Alvaro, who responds with a menacing gesture as though telling my father off. [\[BACK\]](#)



1973 – The family with the Father, as always, having a good time and enjoying a joke. [\[NEXT\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)



1973 - The whole family with the Father. As in all the *Cremades plans*, we couldn't fail to have a photograph taken. [\[PREVIOUS\]](#) [\[BACK\]](#)





1973 – A small olive branch which the Father gave my mother. It is the symbol of the peace brought by the Risen Christ. This *Cremades plan* was in Rome, during Holy Week. [\[BACK\]](#)



1973 – A moment of the ordination ceremony of the 51 new priests in the Basilica of San Miguel, Madrid. As there were so many of us, we were only able to invite parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents and close relatives to the ceremony. I am sitting fourth from the left. [\[BACK\]](#)



1973 – The Chalice used in my first solemn Mass, and in that of Carlos too. Around the base are engraved the names of all of us. It is now used in Villa Tevere, in Rome. [\[BACK\]](#)





1973 – At my first solemn Mass, celebrated in the Basilica of Our Lady of Pilar, with my parents offering me water for the washing of the hands after the Offertory; the intensity of the moment is visible, as is the beauty of the chasuble from the Los Rosales workshop. [\[BACK\]](#)





1973 – Myself, coming down after kissing the famous pillar of Our Lady of Pilar. I am holding a flower with which I had touched the pillar, and which I presented to my mother. [\[BACK\]](#)

Roma, 19 de octubre 1973

Excmo. Sr.  
D. Juan Antonio Cremades Royo  
ZARAGOZA

Queridísimos Pilar y Juan Antonio:

solamente ahora, a mi regreso a Roma, encuentro esa preciosa reliquia que me habéis enviado, y vuestras cariñosas cartas, y os pongo unas líneas para daros las gracias de todo corazón.

Comprendo perfectamente vuestra alegría -que comparto-, y me uno a la acción de gracias que toda esa queridísima familia dirige al Señor por la reciente ordenación de Javier. Rezad por él y por todos los nuevos sacerdotes, para que sirvan siempre, con lealtad y con alegría, a la Iglesia y a las almas; estoy seguro de que, con la ayuda de la Santísima Virgen, sabrán ser muy fieles y dar mucha gloria a Dios.

Seguid ofreciendo todo vuestro día, muy unidos a las intenciones de mi Misa.

Abraza a Juan Antonio y os bendice a todos afectuosamente

*in domino  
no venia*

[BACK]



1974 – A holy picture of the Virgin Mary as a baby. The Father enclosed 12 copies of it in the Christmas card he sent to my parents so that they could give one to each child as a present from him. On the back there is a printed text written by him, about saying the rosary. The original painting belonged to Saint Pius X when he was Patriarch of Venice. It was given to the Father by the Saint's great-nephews. The Father loved it and had great devotion to it. [\[BACK\]](#)



**C**l Alcalde de Barbastro, en nombre de la Excma. Corporación Municipal, tiene el honor de invitar a Vd. al acto de entrega de la Medalla de Oro de la Ciudad al Excelentísimo Sr. D. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Albás, fundador y Presidente General del Opus Dei, que tendrá lugar en el Salón de Sesiones del Palacio Municipal, el próximo día 25 de Mayo, a las 12 horas. ~ ~ ~

Mayo de 1.975.

1975 – Invitation to me from the Mayor of Barbastro to the ceremony of presenting the city's Gold Medal to the Father. [\[BACK\]](#)



1975 – The Father greeting my mother in Barbastro, giving her a message for all of us: “My daughter, tell Juan Antonio and all your children that I love you all very much. Pray for me.” This was the last time we saw the Father. Pablo and Conchita can be seen behind. [\[BACK\]](#)



1975 – Carlos arriving in procession at the main altar of Our Lady of Pilar to celebrate his first solemn Mass. [\[BACK\]](#)



1975 – Our parents, in a privileged place, also acted as his sponsors. [\[BACK\]](#)





1975 – Carlos coming down from kissing the statue of Our Lady of Pilar, and, as I had, also carrying a flower for his mother. [\[BACK\]](#)

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