

INTRODUCTION



A man who'd suffered the loss of several family members killed by the militia during the Spanish Civil War was deeply troubled. Gripped by turbulent emotions, he decided to have a large roadside cross placed at the spot where they had died to recall the crime committed there. To him it seemed an act of justice to keep that atrocity from ever being forgotten.

When he spoke of his plan to a priest, he received disconcerting advice: "You shouldn't do it, because your motive is hatred. It would not be Christ's Cross, but the devil's."¹ The cross was never placed there, and the man learned how to forgive.

To forgive another person is one of the most difficult human acts. Injustice provokes a passionate reaction, and often it can seem that forgiving the other person would be a mistake—condoning an act of aggression or accepting an injury in a cowardly fashion. Forgiving someone also is hard because, far from indifference or coldness in the face of evil, it means suffering a real "wound" and then pardoning the other from one's heart. That may be why people sometimes say forgiving can be beyond human strength.

Yet to live without forgiving would be inhuman; a person who refuses to forgive hurts only himself in the end. But how

1. Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei, Vol. II: God and Daring* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2003), 278.

A MAN WHO KNEW HOW TO FORGIVE

can we always forgive? How can we accept the past and bear with hurtful experiences? There are no easy answers. The path to forgiveness is never easy. Each of us must find his own way.

This book offers some stories of forgiveness from the life of the priest just mentioned, Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei. Canonized in 2002 by Pope John Paul II, he is a modern-day saint who made a lifelong effort to learn ever more perfectly the secret of forgiveness from the One who, nailed to a cross, prayed, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”²

The events related here are grouped in three periods of time: before, during, and after the Spanish Civil War. This conflict, the most important event of the twentieth century in the civil and political life of Spain, is considered by many historians to have been the opening phase in what would soon become the Second World War.

2. Lk 23:34.