

FOREWORD

On August 7, 1931, the diocese of Madrid celebrated the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord, Monsignor Escrivá made a note of a mystical experience granted to him by God. While he was saying Holy Mass that day, God gave him to understand in a new way the words of the Gospel, *et ego, si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum* (if only I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself; Jn 12: 31).¹ “I understood that it would be men and women of God who would raise the Cross with the doctrines of Christ on the summit of all human activities . . . And I saw the Lord triumph, drawing all things to himself.” Then, as if in response to those lights, he continued: “In spite of feeling myself devoid of all virtue and knowledge (humility is the truth—this is no sham), I would like to write books of fire, which would run like wild-fire throughout the world, giving light and warmth to men, turning their poor hearts into burning coals, that can be offered to Jesus as rubies for his kingly crown.”²

Those desires of his found expression in such books as *The Way*, *Furrow*, and *The Forge*. Although *Furrow* and *The Forge* have been published posthumously, they were begun then, and I cannot imagine a more suitable description of them than the words of the author which I have just quoted. *The Forge* is a book of fire. Reading it and meditating on it can bring many souls to the forge of divine love and enkindle within them a zeal for holiness and apostolate. That was the

¹ “Yes, if only I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself” (John 12: 32). This is how the sacred text then stood in the official Vulgate version.

² J. Escrivá, 7 August 1931; manuscript notes kept in the Archive of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei.

desire of Monsignor Escrivá, as is clearly reflected in the Preface: “How can I fail to take up your soul—pure gold—and place it in *the forge*, and fashion it with fire and hammer, until that gold nugget is turned into a splendid jewel to be offered to my God, to your God?”

The Forge contains 1,055 points for meditation, arranged in thirteen chapters. Many of the points are clearly autobiographical. They come from notes written by the founder of Opus Dei in some spiritual copybooks, not exactly a diary, which he kept in the 1930s. In these personal jottings, he recorded incidents that showed the action of God in his soul, so that he could go over them and meditate on them in his personal prayer. He also recorded events and anecdotes from everyday life, from which he always tried to draw some supernatural lesson. Monsignor Escrivá never liked drawing attention to himself, and so references to circumstances and events of an autobiographical nature are normally related in the third person.

Those of us who had the good fortune to be living by his side often heard him refer to this book, which had been taking shape gradually over the years. Apart from putting the book into its finished order, he had intended to read over each point carefully, so as to put all his priestly love at the service of his readers. He was not interested in *embellishing* these points. What he wanted was to enter into the intimate world of each person and, while he waited for a suitable occasion to carry out this task, . . . God himself called him into His own intimacy. These words are now published exactly as their author left them.

The central theme of *The Forge* can be summarized in these words: “If we are faithful to him, Jesus’ own life will somehow be repeated in the life of each one of us, both in its internal development (the process of sanctification) and in our outward behavior” (418).

The progressive identification of the soul with Jesus Christ, which is the essence of the Christian life, is carried out in a hidden way through the sacraments.³ It also needs an effort from each one to correspond to grace: to know and love our Lord, and to have the same dispositions as he had (see Phil 2: 5). The aim is to reproduce his life in our daily conduct, until we can exclaim with the Apostle: *Vivo autem, iam non ego: vivit vero in me Christus* (It is not I who live, it is Christ who lives in me; Gal 2:20). God's program for us—holiness—is thus explained to us. It is something which God asks of each of us without exception. "Just think, there are so many men and women on earth, and the Master does not fail to call every single one. He calls them to a Christian life, to a life of holiness, to a chosen life, to life eternal" (13).

This interior journey leading gradually to our identification with Christ is, as it were, the backdrop of *The Forge*. The book does not offer a rigid mold for the interior life. Nothing could be farther from the intention of Monsignor Escrivá, who had the greatest respect for every person's interior freedom. For in the last analysis, each individual soul follows his own way under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These points for meditation are in the nature of friendly suggestions, fatherly advice for souls who decide to take their Christian vocation seriously.

The Forge, as we shall see, follows the soul in its journey toward holiness, from the moment it perceives the light of a Christian vocation to the point when this earthly life opens out to eternity. The first chapter is about this very matter of vocation. The author titled it "Dazzled," because we are dazzled each time God makes us realize that we are his children, that we have cost the Blood, every drop of it, of his only-begotten Son, and that—in spite of our nothingness and

³ See Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, no. 7.

of our personal wretchedness—he wants us to be co-redeemers with Christ. “We are children of God, bearers of the only flame that can light up the paths of the earth for souls, of the only brightness which can never be darkened, dimmed, or overshadowed” (§ 1).

Responding to our divine vocation demands a constant warfare. Our fight is not a noisy one, as it takes place on the battlefield of our ordinary life, for to be a saint . . . doesn’t mean doing strange things. It means a daily struggle in the interior life and in heroically fulfilling your duty right through to the end” (§ 60).

We must accept that there will be defeats in this interior fight, and we may be threatened with the danger of discouragement. That is why the founder of Opus Dei constantly instilled in souls that cry of *possumus!*—“We can!”—of the sons of Zebedee (Mk 10: 39). It is not a cry that arises from presumption but from a humble trust in God’s Omnipotence.

Monsignor Escrivá loved to use the example of the donkey. It is not a very handsome animal, but a humble and hard-working one, which earned the honor of bearing Jesus Christ in triumph through the streets of Jerusalem. The example of a persevering and obedient donkey, aware of its unworthiness, leads the author to encourage his readers to acquire and practice a series of virtues which, with his keen powers of observation, he discovered in the donkey that pulls the water-wheel. “Donkeys are humble, hard-working, persevering—stubborn—and faithful, with a sure step, tough and—if they have a good master—also grateful and obedient” (§ 380).

Obedience is closely linked, in fact, with the humble perseverance of the little donkey at the water-wheel. “Be convinced that if you do not learn to obey, you will never be effective” (§ 626). For to obey the person who directs our soul and channels our apostolate in God’s name, is to open

ourselves to divine grace, and to let the Holy Spirit act in us. This requires humility. It is God, then, whom we obey. And the Church too, for God's sake. There is no other way: "Convince yourself, my child, that lack of unity within the Church is death" (§ 631). This is another of those *basic ideas* in Monsignor Escrivá's preaching: not to separate Christ from his Church, nor to separate the Christian from Christ, to whom he is united by grace. Only thus will victory be assured.

Men and women who seek sanctity in the world carry out their apostolic tasks in, and by means of, the fulfillment of their ordinary duties. The first of these will be their job or profession. "From Saint Paul's teaching we know we have to renew the world in the spirit of Jesus Christ, that we have to place our Lord at the summit and at the heart of all things. Do you think you are carrying this out in your work, in your professional task?" (§ 678).

Together with work, all the other noble endeavors of men need to be converted into instruments of personal sanctity and apostolate. "You should be full of wonder at the goodness of our Father God. Are you not filled with joy to know that your home, your family, your country, which you love so much, are the raw material which you must sanctify?" (§ 689). And so, a number of points make reference to marriage and the family, and to our civic duties, for "the Lord wants his children, those of us who have received the gift of faith, to proclaim the original optimistic view of creation, the *love for the world* which is at the heart of the Christian message" (§ 703).

The author often reminds us that we need a deep interior life if we are to "divinize things human"; otherwise we would run the risk of "humanizing things divine." Nor should we forget—as I often heard Monsignor Escrivá say—that "every supernatural thing, when it refers to men, is also very human." That is why, the more complete one's identification

with Christ becomes, the more pressing does apostolic zeal become, for, “whenever sanctity is genuine it overflows from its vessel to fill other hearts, other souls, with its superabundance” (§ 856).

The Christian ends up acquiring a big heart, like Christ’s, in which there is room for everybody. “Jesus will enable you to have a great affection for everybody you meet, without taking away any of the affection you have for him. On the contrary, the more you love Jesus, the more room there will be for other people in your heart” (§ 876). And so we come to detest any type of narrow-mindedness, any form of provincialism or exclusivism. Two attitudes typical of a mature soul are thus intertwined: an insatiable thirst for souls—“not a single soul—not one—can be a matter of indifference to you” (§ 951)—and the equally insatiable desire to be united to God (cf. § 927).

Hunger for God can never be satisfied in this world, and so we seek complete union in *eternity*. This is the theme of the last chapter of *The Forge*. In the manner of Saint Paul, and in an especially intense way in the last years of his life, the Founder of Opus Dei felt both the desire of embracing his love in Heaven as soon as possible (how often he repeated those words of the psalm: *vultum tuum, Domine, requiram!*), and the desire to serve God effectively and for many years upon this earth. “To die is a good thing. How can anyone with faith be, at the same time, afraid to die? But as long as the Lord wants to keep you here on earth, it would be cowardice for you to want to die. You must live, live and suffer and work for love: that is your task” (§ 1037).

Thus there is a perfect continuity in the lives of the children of God: “Happiness in Heaven is for those who know how to be happy on earth” (§ 1005). Happiness is the reward

⁷ “Lord, I long to see thy face” (Ps 26: 8).

Jesus Christ promised his followers (see Mt 19: 29): to be happy here, with a relative happiness, and to rejoice fully hereafter in the eternal life.

I venture to assure you, my dear reader, that if you and I enter into this *forge* of the love of God, our souls will become better, being cleansed of some of the dross that clings to them. Monsignor Escrivá will guide us along the ways of the interior life, with the firm steps of one who knows every inch of the terrain, having walked over it so many times. If we really do embark on this road, beginning and beginning again as often as necessary (see § 384), we too shall reach the end of our journey full of peace and happiness, assured of a welcome in the arms of our heavenly Father.

And do not forget that we are under our Lady's protection. Let us turn to her as these pages end, with words from *The Forge*, so that by reading and meditating on this book we may obtain, by God's grace, the goal Monsignor Escrivá had in view for us when he wrote it. "Mother, do not leave me! Let me seek your Son, let me find your Son, let me love your Son—with my whole being" (§ 157).

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