

ENCOUNTER: SUNDAY, AUGUST 24, 1930

IT WAS AN ORDINARY CONSTRUCTION site, quiet now with the scattered machines taking their Sunday rest. Perhaps the young engineer who had paused to gaze at the scene was imagining what these machines would be doing when their masters arrived the next day. Isidoro Zorzano's delay was providential. From around the corner, his good friend, Fr. Josemaría Escrivá, appeared and called him from his reverie.

They had arranged to meet at the *Patronato de Enfermos* (Foundation for the Sick), where the priest was chaplain. But when Isidoro learned that his friend had been called to the bed of a sick person, he found himself with some free hours and decided to explore this unfamiliar neighborhood of Madrid.

Fr. Josemaría was out visiting a friend who had been sick for some days when he abruptly had a premonition that he needed to be somewhere else. “I felt uneasy, without any apparent motive, and I took my leave early.” On his way home he took Nicasio Gallegos Street, departing from his normal route, and there was Isidoro. The mutual surprise turned to warm embraces.

They both had concerns they wanted to share with the other. After a visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel of the *Patronato*, Isidoro unloaded first. He was having difficulty deciphering God’s plan for him. He felt a radical call, but since the death of his father sixteen years before followed by the collapse of the family’s investment portfolio, his mother and sister relied on his modest but steady income. Besides, he loved being an engineer: solving practical problems, building the Spain of the future. How could God be calling him out of the world when he was knee-deep in it?

Fr. Josemaría had the answer. He explained that since October 2, 1928, there was a new way to dedicate oneself completely to God, without abandoning the world and one’s ordinary activity, converting these circumstances and tasks into matter for sanctity and serving God, the Church, and souls. The members of the Work would seek Christ’s reign in work relations, in the university, in the worlds of business, art, medicine, journalism, entertainment, and in family and social affairs. And all this from within, as the leaven that acts inside the loaf. The idea was not to evangelize the secular world by *penetrating* it but to do so by *permeating* it, because the members of the Work would never leave the world in the first place.

Few understood this message but, from the outset, Fr. Josemaría had thought that his friend Isidoro might.

Unfortunately, Isidoro was working in Málaga, an overnight train ride away, and despite their occasional correspondence they had never been able to arrange a meeting.

Now, the panorama that unfolded before his eyes was precisely the ideal Zorzano had been looking for without success, “and that I believed unfeasible for a combination of reasons.” He also regarded the events of that day as more than just a fortuitous coincidence: “The finger of God is here. You’ve got me. Now I know why I came to Madrid.”

Both considered this new vocation to Opus Dei a favor granted by God through the intercession of Most Holy Mary, the mediatrix of all graces. Isidoro wrote in his diary that he had never stopped seeking her aid and “my daily prayers moved her to intercede for me, emphasizing precisely what I wanted the most: excellence in my profession.”

It’s hardly likely that Isidoro completely comprehended all the richness of Opus Dei from that first conversation, but one thing was clear and he described it years later: “The Father saw the Work from the first moment as it is and is going to be! He saw it all from the first moment! I can attest to that.”

But Isidoro had a train to catch. That very evening, he left for his family’s summer home in Ortigosa de Cameros, near Logroño, radiant with the light that had just transfigured his existence. “I find myself now completely consoled,” he wrote. “My spirit is awash in wellbeing, in a peace that I have not experienced until now.” He was conscious of starting a new era in his life.