

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE

MOVIE DISCUSSION GUIDES

“There Be Dragons” (PG-13)



This discussion guide was prepared to encourage small group discussion of some of the major themes of the movie “There Be Dragons” directed by Roland Joffe (*The Mission*) and inspired by events from the early life of Saint Josemaria Escriva.

The themes for this discussion guide include:

- Charity
- Presence of God
- Forgiveness
- Mission in Life/Vocation

This guide includes:

- Introduction to the Movie
- Movie Synopsis
- Discussion Guides by Theme
- “As the Credits Roll”
- Biography of St. Josemaria
- List of Resources on St. Josemaria

To get started:

- Read through the guide and biography
- Watch the film
- Choose a theme
- Revisit the scenes and review the questions

For additional tips on leading a film discussion group download our “Short Guide to Leading a Movie Discussion”.

Introduction to the Movie

Where do saints come from? How are their lives shaped? Are they somehow different than the rest of us? These are the questions that “There Be Dragons” explores, confirming the saying that “every Saint has a past.”

The word “Saints” may bring to mind beautiful statues of men and women who lived long ago, in times and places very unlike ours. We may see the saints as “super-human” - models to be admired from afar, but not real people who can be imitated. They are not like the rest of us, the thought goes, with daily problems and struggles to keep them down. Or, they are naturally endowed with an abundance of virtue from the moment of birth, without the weaknesses that the rest of us have. Here in the real world, we figure, Sainthood might be admirable, but for us it is not possible.

But no, the saints *are* just like us: real, flesh-and-blood men and women who have daily trials, temptations, fears and failures. They face rejection and betrayal. They struggle with their own weaknesses. The difference between a saint and a sinner is how the saint responds to these trials - how he or she confronts the dragons that are part of every person’s life. Saints are those who have faced their dragons and lived the teachings of Jesus Christ to such a high degree that their lives are worthy of emulation.

Sainthood is not easy. Although each and every person is called to sainthood, it only becomes a reality through hard work, patience and love. Through the daily effort of responding to God’s grace and working to overcome one’s weaknesses, each one of us can become the saint that God calls us to be.

“There Be Dragons” is the story of two men, the choices they make in their lives, and how those choices shape their destiny. Josemaria and Manolo face the dragons of death, anger, jealousy, and war, but they respond in very different ways. One responds with love; the other with hatred. But even when Manolo chooses the wrong path over and over, there is still hope - for God’s forgiveness is never far from the heart of man, and He is reaching out, even at the end of our lives, to reconcile us to Him and to those we have rejected and hurt in this life.

The story of Josemaria and Manolo is our story: the choices we make in responding to the dragons in our own lives will lead us down either the path of holiness or that of despair.

“There Be Dragons”

Movie Synopsis

"There Be Dragons" revolves around two men: Josemaria Escriva and his childhood friend Manolo. We are told their story from the perspective of Roberto, the estranged adult son of the dying Manolo. Roberto is writing a book about the recently deceased Josemaria, who in the early 1980's is being considered for sainthood in the Catholic Church.

Both Josemaria and Manolo have similar upbringings, but due to circumstances and the choices they make, their lives take divergent paths. Both face "dragons" – misfortune, suffering, doubts – but how they each respond to those trials shapes their lives forever.

Both Josemaria and Manolo begin life in comfort in early 20th century Spain and as children become close friends. However, Josemaria's family begins to face hardships - the deaths of three of his sisters and the bankruptcy of his father's business. Manolo's father, believing misfortune and poverty a contagious disease, forbids Manolo contact with Josemaria. But in response to these hardships, Josemaria witnesses the deep faith and love of his parents, who refuse to blame God for their misfortunes. Manolo, on the other hand, is taught that suffering and misfortune are punishments from God and something to be avoided at all costs.

From their similar beginnings, then, the two men's lives proceed in divergent directions. Josemaria becomes a priest and dedicates his life to helping others strive for holiness. Manolo becomes embittered and angry - angry at the death of his father and what he perceives as the cause of that death, the left-wing uprising in his country. Manolo eventually becomes a spy for the opposing right-wing forces, infiltrating an enemy military cell.

Both Josemaria and Manolo spend the years of the Spanish Civil War facing grave dangers on a daily basis. As a priest in Communist-controlled Spain, Josemaria is a target for capture and execution. As a spy fighting in the war, Manolo faces danger both from battle and the possibility of discovery.

As Manolo's son Roberto is uncovering the details of his father's life, he is repeatedly directed towards Ildiko, an attractive young woman in Manolo's military cell. When Manolo infiltrated the cell he was immediately drawn to Ildiko, but she has an interest in the cell's leader, Oriol. This leads to simmering jealousy on the part of Manolo, who perceives Ildiko as a possession to be taken, and cannot understand why she does not accede to his wishes.

The movie reaches its climax with the attempt of Josemaria to cross over the Pyrenees Mountains into friendly territory and Manolo's decision to frame Ildiko for his spying. As Josemaria struggles to determine God's will for him - should he stay with his loved ones in occupied territory or should he flee to safety? - Manolo ruthlessly frames Ildiko for espionage and then watches as Oriol kills himself rather than kill Ildiko for her supposed betrayal. A few moments later, Manolo discovers that Ildiko is pregnant with Oriol's child and resolves to help her bring the child to term. But Ildiko no longer desires to live, and rejects the child from birth.

When Ildiko abandons the child and lives recklessly in hopes of being killed, Manolo makes the fateful decision to "give her what she wants" and fatally shoots her. At this point in the retelling of the story, Roberto realizes that he is the child not of Manolo, but of Oriol and Ildiko, both of whose deaths can be laid at the door of his presumed father.

Roberto naturally struggles with this revelation, and at first refuses to forgive Manolo. Yet something keeps him at the hospital, leaving open the door to reconciliation. Likewise, Manolo desires to be reconciled to Josemaria, recognizing now at the end of his life that Josemaria's insistence on love as the response to suffering is the only way to peace. In the end, a vision of Josemaria brings reconciliation between Manolo and Josemaria as well as Manolo and Roberto, with Roberto realizing he who withholds forgiveness most harms himself.

“There Be Dragons”

Theme 1: **Charity**

“Put yourself always in your neighbor’s shoes. You will then see the various issues or problems calmly. You will not get annoyed. You will be understanding. You will make allowances and will correct people when and as required. And you will fill the world with charity.”

St Josemaria Escriva
(*The Forge*, 958)

St. Paul writes, "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:4-7). In older translations, the word "charity" is used instead of "love," which helps reveal the essence of love: it puts the good of the other over our own good. Love is the greatest of all virtues (cf. 1 Cor 13:13); without it we can do nothing.

Q: Love is always outward-facing: it seeks the good of the other. What concrete actions can we take today to put the good of others before our own good?

Q: Charity includes materially helping the poor and needy, but it is more than that. How can we be charitable in our thoughts and words to all those we meet in our daily lives?

Scene to Watch: **Unleash the Divine Flavors (15:00-15:40)**

Young Josemaria is in a chocolate factory with Honorio, the manager. Honorio picks up a chocolate bean and uses the bean as a teaching moment for his young friend. He tells Josemaria that, although it is a simple bean, "patience, skill, hard work and love" will unleash the divine flavors within. Love has the power to transform even the more ordinary things of life into something extraordinary.

Q: Most of us understand how patience, skill, and hard work allow us to accomplish great things. But why is love also an essential ingredient? How does love truly allow us to unleash things that these other virtues do not?

Q: A simple chocolate bean is quite ordinary, yet it can lead to such joy and pleasure in people’s lives. How can we make the ordinary activities of our lives into something that unleashes the divine flavors in others?

Scene to Watch: **Foundation for the Sick (24:18-26:50)**

In the early years of his priesthood, Josemaria spends many hours comforting the sick and dying at the Foundation for the Sick. He recognizes that what the dying need most is love - and that love must come through deeds. When Honorio is dying and fears being alone, Josemaria is there.

Q: Our modern culture glamorizes the petty and the insignificant. True Christian charity – caring for the poor, defenseless and rejected – is ignored by most. Do we recognize the divine Eyes that watch us when we help the helpless? Do we care only for their acceptance?

Q: How often do we give those around us our most valuable possession – our time? Are we too busy to simply sit with others and talk with them? Do we recognize the lonely around us?

Scene to Watch: **Faith Manifested in Love (59:45-61:45)**

After witnessing the murder of Fr. Lazaro, Josemaria’s friends want revenge on his killers. But Josemaria preaches love to them - love even for those who are wrong; even for those who are their enemies. This is "faith manifested in love."

Q: Following this scene, we witness Josemaria taking the discipline. What events precipitated this action? What did Josemaria wish to accomplish, and how is this related to the painting of Gethsemane we see on the wall outside his room?

Q: Many people today hate the Church and attack it. What is our reaction to this? Do we get angry? Do we refuse to see children of the same Father in those who hate us? Do we truly love our enemies?

“There Be Dragons”

Theme 2: Presence of God

“Your boat — your talents, your hopes, your achievements — is worth nothing whatsoever, unless you leave it in Christ's hands, allowing him the freedom to come aboard.

Make sure you don't turn it into an idol. In your boat by yourself, if you try to do without the Master, you are — supernaturally speaking — making straight for shipwreck. Only if you allow, and seek, his presence and captaincy, will you be safe from the storms and setbacks of life.

Place everything in God's hands. Let your thoughts, the brave adventures you have imagined, your lofty human ambitions, your noble loves, pass through the heart of Christ. Otherwise, sooner or later, they will all sink to the bottom together with your selfishness.”

St. Josemaria Escriva
(*Friends of God*, 21)

How easy it is to forget about God. Our work, our recreation, even our home lives can be lived without reference to Him. But such a lifestyle contradicts our very being as children of our Heavenly Father. One of the fundamental teachings of St. Josemaria was the presence of God: recognizing that God is with us at all times, in all activities.

Q: Do we recognize God in our lives at every moment of the day? Do all our actions reflect this recognition?

Q: Do we see God in the little things of life? St. Therese of Lisieux said she wanted to do little things with great love. Do we see the “little” things of our life as opportunities to love?

Scene to Watch:

I love Him very much (13:00-13:42)

In a time of great tragedy, Josemaria's mother affirms her love for God. She knows, even in times of trial and suffering, that God is present, joining us in such times and making them moments of grace.

Q: How do we handle the suffering in our lives? Do we allow Jesus to join in our suffering and offer it to him?

Q: How do we comfort those around us who suffer? Do we witness to them the love of God by our actions?

Scene to Watch:

Everyone and Everything for His Glory (29:30-30:10)

If God is present at all times in our lives, then everything we do can be done for Him. Every person - no matter his state in life or vocation - and everything - no matter the task - should be offered to God for His Glory.

Q: Josemaria has a vision in which he sees that "everyone and everything" should be offered for the glory of God. This led to the founding of Opus Dei, whose focus is striving for holiness in ordinary life - in family life, at work and in society. How can this concept of "everyone and everything" for the glory of God change the way someone lives? How is this different than some traditional ways of thinking about holiness?

Q: When we think of “everyone” and “everything” for God, do we in our minds exclude certain people and certain activities? Do we refuse to see the glory of God in the lives of those who are unlikable?

Scene to Watch:

I am still a man (67:25-69:10)

Josemaria is tempted as any man is tempted. But because he is aware of the presence of God in every moment, he knows to avoid situations that could lead him, or others, to sin.

Q: A striking contrast between Josemaria and Manolo is their attitude towards chastity: Josemaria avoids even the temptation to break his vow of celibacy, but Manolo looks upon Ildiko as something to possess. How do these differing attitudes affect the path their lives take?

Q: We live in a world that constantly bombards us with sexual imagery. What concrete steps do we take to avoid temptation, and like Josemaria, inconvenience ourselves in order to be true to God's calling?

“There Be Dragons”

Theme 3: Forgiveness

“If the forgiveness we need had to be won by our own merits, we would only be capable of a bitter sadness. But, because of God’s goodness, forgiveness comes from his mercy, and we praise him — Gloria!: ‘for you alone are the holy one, you alone are Lord, you alone, O Jesus Christ, are the most high, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father’.”

St. Josemaria Escriva
(*Christ is Passing By*, 81)

The most powerful force in this world is forgiveness; the ability to remove a wrong and to restore someone to favor. The heart of salvation history is forgiveness: that God has forgiven us, even though we have rejected Him. In *There Be Dragons*, we see lives transformed by the power of forgiveness.

Q: Do we hold onto some grudge against others in our own lives? Do we take perverse pleasure in hating another? Are we humble enough to see that we must forgive to be free?

Q: Jesus came to forgive us our sins – do we see Jesus as more than just a good model or a wise teacher? Do we see him as our necessary savior?

Scene to Watch:

Children of the same Father (20:35-22:20)

Josemaria and Manolo are both seminarians, but they come to the seminary by very different paths. This erupts into a fist fight between the two. The seminary rector teaches them a lesson on forgiveness...and the source of the ability to forgive.

Q: After Josemaria and Manolo get in a fight in seminary, the rector reminds Josemaria that Manolo shares with him the same Father. How does this change how Josemaria looks at Manolo, and at all men and women? What does it mean, in daily life, that we are all children of the same Father?

Q: Do we look down on others from a lower social class? Do we judge harshly those of a higher social class? Do we see every person as a child of the same Father?

Scene to Watch:

The path of revenge (42:45-45:00)

Withholding forgiveness leads to violence and death. When we seek revenge, we ultimately end up on a path like Manolo, whose refusal to forgive leads him to more and more destructive actions.

Q: Revenge is a powerful force that can take over our lives. When we are wronged, do we want to wrong others in return? Do we feel “weak” when we don’t return harm with harm?

Q: In this scene Manolo hesitates to pull the trigger, and in the end another man actually forces him to do it. Does this lessen Manolo’s culpability? Is he any less guilty of this terrible crime?

Scene to Watch:

The power of forgiveness (1:43:23-1:52:00)

Manolo lives for decades with a burden: the secret of his relationship to his son Roberto. He lives with the pain of remorse. Roberto, on the other hand, is faced with the difficult challenge of forgiving someone who has done him great wrong.

Q: At the end of the movie, Roberto notes that he who forgives frees someone - himself. How was Roberto freed by his forgiveness of his father? Why do we hold onto grievances and hurts if forgiveness brings freedom? What would Roberto's life be like if he did not forgive his father?

Q: Josemaria’s constant love for Manolo, regardless of circumstances, in the end saves Manolo. How was Josemaria able to endure the rejection from Manolo over all those years and continue to hope for reconciliation?

“There Be Dragons”

Theme 4: Mission in Life/Vocation

“Experience of sin, then, should not make us doubt our mission. True, our sins can make it difficult to recognize Christ. That is why we must face up to our personal miseries and seek to purify ourselves. But in doing this, we must realize that God has not promised us a complete victory over evil in this life. Instead he asks us to fight. 'My grace is sufficient for you,' our Lord replied to St. Paul, when he wanted to be freed of the 'thorn in his flesh' which humiliated him.”

St. Josemaria Escriva
(*Christ is Passing By*, 114)

God bestows upon each person a specific vocation. It might be as a priest, or a religious sister, or a husband, wife, father, or mother. No matter what our vocation, we are each called to holiness. Josemaria and Manolo both struggle, in their own ways and with different levels of success, to fulfill their own vocations in life.

Q: At one point in "There Be Dragons," two of Josemaria's companions argue as to the best way to respond to the growing unrest in their country. How does Josemaria respond? Does he take one side or the other? Based on Josemaria's response, how are freedom and personal responsibility related?

Q: Manolo at one point confesses to his son that his life has taken many "wrong turns." What were some of those wrong turns, and more importantly, what led him to make those turns? Was he unable to control his own life, or did giving reign to jealousy, hatred and envy lead him down that path?

Scene to Watch:
Footprints in the Snow (16:55-19:06)

At a young age, Josemaria sees footprints in the snow - footprints made by a shoeless priest. This missionary's acceptance of sacrifice for the sake of Christ would have a lifelong impact on the young man, eventually leading to his own decision to become a priest.

Q: Mortification is taking on physical hardship out of love for God or others. Do we ever take on mortifications for the sake of our own souls, or for the good of others?

Q: The vocation of priesthood is a high calling; do we treat priests with the utmost respect and charity?

Scene to Watch:
Following your vocation no matter the cost (46:59-49:00)

Josemaria lived through a time when being a priest was incredibly dangerous. As a priest, he was charged with safeguarding the Eucharist from desecration, even if it meant putting his own life in danger. Josemaria understood that following one's vocation is not always easy, but doing so always leads us closer to God.

Q: Twice in the movie we see Josemaria rescue the Blessed Sacrament from possible sacrilege at the risk of his own life. What does that say about the value and importance of the Eucharist? Do we, in our own lives, attach to the Blessed Sacrament as much sacredness as Josemaria did?

Q: Do we accept hardships and rejection for the sake of our vocations – as mothers, fathers, students? Will we endure anything in order to be faithful to God's call?

Scene to Watch:
Overcoming doubts (1:30:22-1:34:45)

No matter what our vocation, we will at times face doubts as to God's will for us. Even Josemaria doubted the path God had set out for him. He agonized about leaving his family and other loved ones back in the occupied zone. Yet he listened when God gave him a sign that he was doing God's will.

Q: No one lives without doubts. Do we let them fester until they dominate our thinking?

Q: When we have doubts about God, the Church or our vocation, do we bring them to a trusted spiritual advisor and work to overcome them?

“There Be Dragons”

As the Credits Roll

Each of us has a destiny to which we are called: life with God.

No matter our background or the challenges we face, we are called to a life of holiness – a life full of love, forgiveness and prayer. *There Be Dragons* tells the story of two men and the divergent paths their lives took – paths based on their own choices.

What choices will we make in our lives – today, tomorrow and every day? Will we choose to forgive or seek revenge? Will we choose to love or to use others? Will we choose to pray or to isolate ourselves from our loving Father? Will we overcome the dragons in our lives?

Q: Each person's family shapes who they are in life. What was the difference between Josemaria's family and Manolo's family? How did that impact the course of their lives?

Q: "There Be Dragons" revolves around the "dragons" which we face in life and how we respond to them. Both Josemaria and Manolo faced dragons but responded very differently. What dragons did they each face, and how did they respond to them? What dragons do we face, and how will we respond to ours?

“There Be Dragons”

Biography of St. Josemaria Escriva (1902-1975)



Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer was born on January 9, 1902 in Barbastro, Spain. He came into this world in comfortable surroundings: a loving Catholic family, an upper-middle-class lifestyle, and a stable society in which to grow. He seemed destined to live as his father did: a successful business owner and family man, respected in the community. But the world, and God, had something different in mind.

Tragedy entered the life of Josemaria at a young age: in short succession, his three younger sisters all died before Josemaria's tenth birthday. Soon after these tragedies, his father's business failed, leaving the family in dire financial straits. In many families, such events would lead to discord, hatred and depression. But Josemaria's parents responded in love: continual love for God and for Josemaria and his older sister. Not once did they question God's providence, nor did they blame Him for their troubles. This was to have a lasting effect on young Josemaria, as he learned early in life that the response to suffering must be love.

But it was when Josemaria was about fifteen years old that an event changed his life forever. In one of those moments that appear on the surface to be insignificant but has lasting consequences, Josemaria took a course which would affect millions of lives. Walking down the street on a cold, snowy morning, he saw footprints that had been made by someone who was barefoot. With the curiosity of a youth, he stopped and stared at the imprints in the snow obviously left by a shoeless Carmelite friar— his bare feet a part of his life of penance. His soul deeply moved, Josemaria asked himself, "If others can make such sacrifices for God and neighbor, can't I offer him something?" He felt in his heart that God had chosen him for something too. He began to pray that God would show him what it was because whatever that mission from God would be his answer was "yes".

To be best prepared for God's mission, Josemaria made the decision to become a priest. To many in Josemaria's time, however, priesthood was a career decision, not a vocation. Many young men at the time would look to the priesthood as an easy way to make a comfortable income, with the possibility of advancement up the clerical ranks to even more prestigious positions. Josemaria was repulsed by such ideas; he saw the priesthood as a vocation of service: a means by which one imperfect, sinful man could, by God's grace, lead others to holiness.

Josemaria was ordained a priest on March 28, 1925 for the Diocese of Saragossa in Spain. As a young priest, he continued to pray that God would show him the mission He was stirring in his heart; a constant prayer on his lips was, "*Domine, ut videam!*" (Lord, that I may see!). On October 2, 1928, the Lord gave him the eyes to see: Josemaria received a vision of an institution in which millions of men and women would sanctify themselves in the midst of ordinary life. Everyone and everything would be offered for the glory of God. No matter how small and insignificant the task, it could be done for God and His kingdom. Not only explicitly "religious" activities, but all activities were means by which one could draw closer to God – and means to draw others closer to Him. This vision led to the founding of what would soon be called Opus Dei, the "Work of God," a new institution in the Church which would consume Josemaria's life and become his vocation.

Opus Dei did not begin in comfortable circumstances. While Josemaria was working to spread the message of Opus Dei, Spain was experiencing immense upheaval. This discord would eventually lead to the Spanish Civil War – putting Josemaria behind enemy lines and bringing the work of Opus Dei to a virtual standstill. Josemaria's life was in danger. Thousands of priests and religious were being murdered,

some of his close friends among them. On the outside, Opus Dei appeared to be stillborn: dead before it had any real chance to develop. Yet Josemaria persevered, living the principles he had seen in his vision and patiently waiting until the time was again ripe to spread his message. Eventually he escaped from occupied territory by way of a treacherous hike through the Pyrenees Mountains. Though the escape was fraught with physical perils, for Josemaria the greatest hardship was knowing that he was leaving behind his mother, sister and brother in the occupied zone. Yet God gave him assurances that his path was the correct one, and after making it to safety, Josemaria immediately began again the work to which he was called (and, after the war, was reunited safely with his family).

Once stability returned to Spain, Opus Dei began to grow dramatically. Many people, from all walks of life, embraced

Josemaria's vision: that all human activities would be lifted up to the Cross, united with it, and be the means by which the salvation of souls would be accomplished. Through Christ's triumph on the Cross every person in every walk of life could triumph over sin and weakness.

Josemaria's vision of a *universal call to holiness* became enshrined in Church teaching at the Second Vatican Council of the Church in the 1960's, where it was made a primary emphasis of the document *Lumen Gentium*. Josemaria helped the Church to rediscover a truth that had lain dormant through many centuries: every man, woman and child is called to a life of holiness.

Josemaria Escriva died in Rome on June 26, 1975. Just 27 years later, the Catholic Church declared him to be a Saint, with Pope John Paul II calling him "a saint of ordinary life."

Additional Resources & Information

To learn more about St. Josemaria Escriva:

St. Josemaria Institute www.stjosemaria.org
St. Josemaria Information Center (Rome) www.josemariaescriva.info
Opus Dei www.opusdei.org

Books by St. Josemaria:

"Holy Rosary"
"The Way"
"Conversations with St. Josemaria Escriva"
"Christ is Passing By"
"Friends of God"
"Way of the Cross"
"In Love with the Church"
"Furrow"
"Forge"

Recommended Books about St. Josemaria:

"Uncommon Faith"; by John Coverdale
"The Man of Villa Tevere"; by Pilar Urbano
"Footprints in the Snow"; by Dennis M. Helming
"A Man Who Knew How to Forgive"; by Francesc Faus
"Dream and Your Dreams Will Fall Short"; by Pedro Casciaro
"Praying 15 Days with Saint Josemaria"; by Guillaume Derville
"Holiness for Everyone: The Practical Spirituality of St. Josemaria Escriva"; by Eric Sammons

Documentaries & Movies:

Passionately Loving the World
Meeting Saint Josemaria Escriva
There Be Dragons
Inspired to Love
The Catholic Priest Today

Where to find books and DVDs:

Studium Foundation (his complete published works online) www.escrivaworks.org
St. Josemaria Institute Shop www.stjosemaria.org
Scepter Publishers www.scepterpublihers.org
Midwest Theological Forum www.theologicalforum.org