

work of the Church for the good of souls is not sufficiently well known and understood. What needs to be done here?

Besides praying—excuse my insistence, but praying with faith is the essential thing—it would be opportune to have well-prepared professionals competent in the communications media at the level of the Bishops' Conferences, and also in each diocese. "Good will" is not enough to inform adequately about the Church. One needs to know the methods of institutional communication, crisis management, etc., which are especially needed in the context of the globalization that marks today's society. In this regard, I am happy to note that the courses in the School of Institutional Communication at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross are very popular. These courses are meant specifically for people who occupy communication posts in the press offices of dioceses, bishops' conferences and other institutions of the Church.

17. *Once the Year for Priests is over, what should we retain from this celebration?*

In priests, a deep personal renewal, with specific and daily interior conversions, aimed at living their ministry with a more refined fidelity, and a greater daily love for the celebration of the Eucharist and the administration of the sacrament of Penance. And in the other faithful, a greater awareness—not only with words, but with deeds—that we all make up the Church. The future depends on them as well: on how they fulfill their Christian du-

ties; on how they pray for the Pope, for the bishops, and for priests; on how they raise their children; on how they exercise their priestly soul also in their work, in times of rest; on how diligently they ask our Lord to send many holy laborers into his vineyard.

Interview granted to the weekly *Paraula*, Valencia, Spain (June 20-26, 2010)

(by Francisco Pastor)

Benedict XVI convoked the Year for Priests that we are now celebrating. What are the great challenges faced by the priesthood in our time? How does the Prelature of Opus Dei view this event?

I think the most important challenge, and the key to all the others, is the need for priests to struggle to be holy: to let God act in us and through our ministry. Benedict XVI, in proclaiming the Year for Priests, exhorted us to a deep interior renewal that will help spread the *magnum Dei*, the divine marvels, to all humanity, by our words and deeds.

The message of St. Josemaría invites priests to sanctify themselves in the exercise of their ministry, which is at the service of the common priesthood of all the faithful. Among the many challenges this involves is that of learning each day to celebrate Holy Mass well. We priests need to

learn this again, discovering that it is the center of our life, that on the altar we are Christ. Hence the need to be humble, so that only Christ will shine forth.

St. Josemaría is known throughout the world as the founder of Opus Dei, but earlier he had worked as a priest in the diocese of Saragossa and later in Madrid. Could you point out some event or experience from that time, which perhaps is less widely known?

St. Josemaría, shortly after being ordained in 1925, took charge of the parish of Perdiguera, a village near Saragossa. The pastor was absent due to a serious illness. This was the setting for his first pastoral experiences, without the help of a more experienced priest. He put all his human and supernatural enthusiasm into that task. He always remembered that period with a lot of affection and felt a great admiration for the hidden work of so many parish priests in small towns and villages.

From the first day, he saw clearly that he should dedicate time to the confessional and show refined care for the liturgy, as well as for popular piety, through the prayer of the rosary in the evening, and the holy hour on Thursdays. He dedicated special attention to catechism classes for children and preparing them for their first communion. And he showed special concern for the sick. He visited them frequently and, even when their sickness was not serious, if they asked for the sacraments he would always provide them. He also insisted that the parish church be kept clean. God's house should al-

ways be exceptional for its beauty as well. He also worked as the parish priest in another small village, and was grateful to God for these opportunities to serve souls. Also in Saragossa he cared for many people from all walks of life, impressing people by his love for the Church.

When he arrived in Madrid, in 1927, he became closely acquainted with the urban poverty there, in the shacks in the outlying districts. He dedicated many hours to attending to these people, as chaplain to the Foundation for the Sick, often in a heroic way.

Not everyone has the opportunity of having been in close contact with a saint. Could you describe for us some details of your personal relationship with St. Josemaría?

I consider it a blessing from God to have been his personal secretary from 1953 until his death in 1975. I also accompanied him on his frequent trips and saw his great love for everyone. He was a true father, for me and for the other persons he encountered, in first place for those who were closer to him. I could tell you, for example, about his care for me when I was sick, or his concern if he saw I was worried about something. Although he was a man with a great heart, his paternity did not have a merely human explanation: it stemmed from a supernatural participation in God's own paternity, which led him to feel the sorrows or joys of his children as his own. I was also surprised by his capacity to love those who had attacked him publicly.

*You once said that the fact that the Bible continues to be one of the most widely published books in the world shows that people still have an interest in religion in this century as well. The book *The Way* has also had millions of copies published throughout the world, and is an authentic bestseller. Why do you think *The Way* has helped and continues to help so many people? What is your favorite quotation from this work?*

I assume you know this, but the first edition of *The Way* was printed right here in Valencia, in 1939.

I think that the interest of so many people and, one might say, its “usefulness” in their lives comes from the short and incisive points, and the fact that the author was very close to God and tried to transmit his own Christian experience. *The Way* helps one to pray because it is both a very human and a very supernatural work. If one looks carefully, although many of the points don’t say so explicitly, all the points are Christocentric: *The Way* is an encounter with Jesus, God and man, the true “Way.”

I don’t have a favorite point.

For many readers of *The Way*, it has been a surprise to later find two other books with a similar structure, *The Forge* and *Furrow*. A short time ago, a friend told me how much *The Forge* had helped him to get closer to God in prayer.

Within the great diversity of movements and associations in the Church, at times one gets the impression that

some put special emphasis on God’s grace, on abandoning oneself in his hands, on divine forgiveness and mercy, while others put more emphasis on the will, on the desire for personal perfection, and on continually overcoming oneself through personal effort in daily demands. Could some people be running the risk of overemphasizing their own personal growth or not trusting enough in the grace of the Spirit? How should one combine the human will and God’s grace?

There are many paths in the Church. All of them have as their goal life in Christ. And they always combine the grace of God and human correspondence, our free response to divine love. There comes to mind some words of St. Josemaría: whenever a light is lit in the service of God, we always have to be filled with joy.

On the other hand, in this small part of the Church which is the Prelature of Opus Dei, erected by John Paul II, formed by the Prelate, his priests and many men and women, laity from all walks of life, the foundation of their spiritual life is rooted in the sense of divine filiation, in knowing ourselves to be God’s children. And at the same time we have to live the personal responsibility of struggling to be saints in the middle of the world, especially in professional work and in the other aspects of ordinary life.

What is your Episcopal motto? Why did you choose it?

Deo omnis gloria (all the glory be for God). This is a phrase that St.

Josemaría frequently used and that expresses very well what we all should be striving for.

Your book Getsemani has as its subtitle "Praying with Jesus." You try to draw out meaning from each of the Gospels' words about this transcendent moment in Christ's life. The moment of Gethsemane comes between the Eucharist and the Cross. You find many lessons for us today there, but one seems to stand out: the importance of daily and continual prayer, as Jesus himself told us. Many Catholics who attend Sunday Mass say they don't have time for daily prayer. What do you have to say to them?

Simply that speaking personally with our Lord every day is a marvelous reality. Moments of prayer are moments of peace and joy, and a requirement for the soul, although at times it demands effort. We need to be alone with Him! All the saints agree on this point. To follow Jesus, we have to get to know him and converse with him. Certainly at times we find our soul dry in prayer, as though mute, or perhaps we are distracted, but our desire to draw close to God is always pleasing to him, also when it is more difficult to do so.

Therefore I advise them to remember that God is always present and wants to speak to us. With this disposition, they should open the Gospel and put themselves into the scene as one more person there, and address Jesus personally.

If you will permit me a small joke, I would say that your book Getsemani

leaves no doubt that you are a person in Opus Dei. For there you often allude clearly to the "sleeping apostles" who despite their good intentions fall into paralysis or inactivity. One of the contributions of Opus Dei, which it shares with other ecclesial groups, is the active attitude of its members. Why are so many Catholics asleep in their life of prayer or in their actions? What advice do you have for pastors who find it hard to move their parishioners to action?

Opus Dei tries to spread the Gospel, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and to help people to live as the early Christians did. Apostolic responsibility is not the same as activism. It stems from contact with God and disinterested friendship, true charity towards others. In the supernatural life, it is difficult to make comparisons. To bring God's light to souls, the work of the laity in their professional, family and social milieu is essential, striving to be "contemplatives in the middle of the world," as St. Josemaría said. But also consider, for example, how greatly the hidden prayer and sacrifice of consecrated souls in cloistered convents and monasteries contributes to the sanctification of the world.

We are all in danger of falling asleep, if we are careless in our sacramental life and daily prayer, if we don't bring our faith into our professional work, our family life and social relationships, if we don't endeavor to study and live the content of our faith. The advice that I would give to those pastors—and I give the same to myself—is that they follow the guidelines of their bishop, that they

continue to celebrate the Eucharist with piety, that they pray a lot, that they care for the poor and those who are suffering, that they don't get discouraged, that they have no hesitation in inviting young people to consider a possible call to the priesthood. And always doing so with faith, with hope, with supernatural and human optimism.

Canon Law has established the age of 25 as the minimum age for ordination to the priesthood. However, it seems to be the case that the priests of the Prelature are ordained at a later age. Can you tell us anything about this?

The call to Opus Dei does not take anyone out of his place. A person who receives it, just like any other person, is someone who has to work to earn their living. In addition, they have to strive to convert their work into a path to holiness. This doesn't prevent some faithful of the Work, after various years, from accepting freely and joyfully the call to the priesthood, to serve ministerially the faithful of the Prelature and all souls; in a word, to serve the Church. The priests of Opus Dei are usually ordained after working professionally for some years. They have been doctors, teachers, office workers, etc., and afterwards, or perhaps in an intermediate phase, they have interrupted for some time their working life, and have dedicated several years also to the formation required for the priesthood.

In recent decades, it seems that many minor seminaries have closed their doors. Nevertheless many older priests who studied in those centers ex-

press deep gratitude for the formation they received there. What is your experience in this regard?

Opus Dei has never had minor seminaries, nor will it ever have them, also because of what I've just said: the priests incardinated in the Prelature come from its own lay faithful, after some time spent exercising their secular profession. But those kind of seminaries can be very good for the dioceses. That is how St. Josemaría saw it, and he encouraged the bishops in this regard. I recall his advice that the studies provided there should be useful and valid for later work at the university, and that a closed-in atmosphere should be avoided.

I perfectly understand the grateful feelings of many priests, who speak of the minor seminary as the place where they grew in human formation and in intimacy with God.

Valencia has a parish dedicated to St. Josemaría and also various educational centers linked to Opus Dei. What relevance does Valencia have for the Work?

Divine Providence so disposed that Valencia was the first city to which St. Josemaría brought the message of Opus Dei, after its foundation in Madrid. He had great friends here, such as Fr. Antonio Rodilla and the Servant of God Fr. Eladio España. Shortly before his death, in his last visit to Valencia, he stated that he loved this city with a special predilection. He explained that, in 1936, when he was planning for members of Opus Dei

to go to Paris and Valencia, the civil war broke out, and unfortunately he had to postpone those plans. But as soon as the war was over, he established the first center of Opus Dei in Valencia, on Samaniego Street, very close to the editorial offices of your own journal.

Publication of the book *Vivir la Santa Misa*

In the context of the Year for Priests, Bishop Javier Echevarría has published a new book entitled *Vivir la Santa Misa* (Living the Mass). The book collects and expands on some considerations that the Prelate presented to the faithful of Opus Dei in the pastoral letters he wrote during the Year of the Eucharist, convoked by the Venerable Pope John Paul II in 2004. These were written with the intention of “encouraging a spirit of care in dealing with Jesus, not only in the Mass, but throughout the whole day, and transmitting this to other people.”

In Spain the book is already in its second printing. Counting the editions published in Argentina and

Colombia, the number of copies now in print exceeds 20,000.

In his presentation, the Prelate explains the reasons for making the book available. “I published these pages,” he says, “with the intention of seconding the recommendations of the Roman Pontiff, while beseeching the Blessed Trinity, through the intercession of our Lady, that it may be of assistance to its readers ... I was moved, in short, by the desire to help make a reality—in myself and in many others—St. Josemaría Escrivá’s marvelous aspiration: “Before all else, we have to love the Mass, which should be the center of our day. If we live the Mass well, how can we fail to keep our thoughts fixed on our Lord for the rest of the day, with a longing to remain in his presence, to work as he worked and to love as he loved?”

This new publication joins the other books written by Bishop Echevarría: *Por Cristo, con Él y en Él* (Palabra, 2007), *Eucaristía y vida cristiana* (Rialp, 2005), *Getsemaní*, (Planeta, 2005), *Itinerarios de vida cristiana* (Planeta, 2001) [English translation, *Paths to God: Building a Christian Life in the 21st Century* (Scepter, 2010)], *Para servir a la Iglesia* (Rialp, 2001), and *Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá* (Rialp, 2000).