

Interview Granted to *Eco Catolico*, Costa Rica (August 17, 2014)

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"I dream of a great number of God's children, sanctifying themselves in their life as ordinary citizens, sharing in the endeavors, hopes and efforts of those around them." If these words of St. Josemaría Escrivá are applied to Opus Dei today, is this now a reality or is it still a work in progress?

St. Josemaría always stressed, since 1928, that holiness is not a goal just for a few privileged persons, but for all the baptized. The apostolic work of the Prelature of Opus Dei is precisely to remind people of this universal call to holiness and the consequent value of everyday life as a path of sanctification. Thanks be to God, many people, through the apostolic efforts of the women, men, and priests of the Work, have decided to place Christ at the center of their lives. In this sense, one could say that St. Josemaría's dream has become a reality. Nevertheless, it is a reality always in process—as is the life of the Church—that comes about with God's grace and with each person's response. Christians cannot be conformists. Each day, with new joy, they need to show their love for God and for their fellow men and women.

You knew St. Josemaría. What would he say to those who today, in the twenty-first century, are yearning for true happiness? Would he point to Opus Dei as a path to attain it?

St. Josemaría used to say that "the happiness of heaven is for those who know how to be happy on earth." Authentic happiness arises as a consequence of living close to God; it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's presence in the soul. The men and women who realize, thanks to their faith, that they are God's beloved children, cannot help being filled with peace and joy, even in the midst of setbacks and suffering, with a happiness that is not simply a nice feeling. It is the fruit of faith and charity. Sin is the great obstacle to happiness.

Opus Dei is one among many possible Christian paths to which our Lord may call a person. Each of us has a very personal vocation that we need to discover in prayer, in a loving dialogue with God. Saying "yes" to the divine call, whatever it might be, and responding each day to its demands, is a sure guarantee of happiness.

In the perspective of the Church's history, the existence of Opus Dei is quite recent. How much does this fact affect people's understanding of the Work, its nature, methods and goals? What does Opus Dei do to provide answers in an evangelical

key to the doubts of some people or the open opposition of others?

When St. Josemaría saw that God was calling him to spread the universal vocation to holiness, this reality—deeply rooted in the Gospel—seemed something quite new to the majority of Christians. It was not that common back then to speak about a universal call to holiness and, as has happened many times in the history of the Church, he had to confront misunderstandings, especially in the 30s and 40s of the past century. Today (above all thanks to the Second Vatican Council) this teaching is quite common and familiar to everyone. Following the example of their founder, the faithful of Opus Dei have their arms wide open to everyone; and thanks be to God, for many years now it has been greatly loved and helped by millions of people, including non-Catholics and non-Christians. When misunderstandings arise, an attempt is made to clarify things with patience and serenity. Experience has shown that—even back then—attacks or misinformation are an opportunity for friendship and for bringing people closer to the Church.

Sanctification in everyday life clearly speaks to the laity. What place are they called to occupy in the Church? How does Opus Dei understand their role?

As Vatican II teaches, the laity are called to bring light and order

to temporal affairs, so that they be in accord with Christ's spirit and further the glory of God and the good of souls. Opus Dei helps its faithful and those who take part in its apostolates to find and draw close to God in their daily occupations: in their work, in their family, in social life, in moments of entertainment, in sickness or in poverty. When they strive to identify themselves with Christ in these spheres, the laity sanctify the world from within; they spread the Gospel message and contribute to the human progress of society. They thus take up their role as protagonists in the Church's mission from their workshop, their office, the operating room in a hospital, their school, and the other settings in which each one's day unfolds.

Today the emphasis is on the breakdown of the social fabric, but doesn't this focus take our gaze away from the family and the challenges it faces? Is the family in crisis?

The family is a great treasure, indispensable for society. Therefore we should strive to make known the true nature of the institution of the family, although at times this is not an easy task. For me, it is a reason for special thanksgiving to God to find myself these days in Costa Rica, with couples who are imparting family orientation to fathers and mothers of children and adolescents. I think that, by their generous dedication, they are provid-

ing the country and the world with a service of great value and importance, also in human terms. But we cannot be satisfied with defending with our words the values of the family. Our own example is absolutely essential! May we be concerned about the members of our family, may we pray for them, may we rejoice with them in their joys and accompany them in their sorrows. We have to create around us a true family atmosphere and strive to maintain it, sacrificing ourselves for our relatives and generously dedicating time and energy to the sick and the elderly. Let us frequently repeat those three phrases that Pope Francis stressed should always be found in a family: "please," "thank you," and "I'm sorry."

In Evangelii gaudium, Pope Francis says that he prefers a Church that is bruised and hurting because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church that is unhealthy from being confined. How can Opus Dei help to further the Holy Father's wish?

The apostolic dynamism of Pope Francis is a blessing for the whole Church. The evangelization to which he is spurring us is a mission that belongs to all the baptized. The Holy Father invites us to go out to meet others, to leave aside our own comfort and share our closeness to Christ with the people around us. How? First with our example and affec-

tion, and then with a face-to-face dialogue with our friends and acquaintances, preceded by prayer for the person we are speaking to and invoking the Holy Spirit. At times it may seem to us that our actions are not producing any fruit. But nothing could be further from the truth. Our Lord counts on everything we do for him, and no seed will remain sterile.

Pope Francis also encourages us to show mercy towards those who are suffering or who are alone. We are all in a position to help a sick person, a needy person, or the elderly. And we can also bring them the light of Christ. Let us not remain with our arms crossed! Personally I give thanks also on seeing so many faithful and friends of the Prelature who are carrying forward initiatives of social service all over the world: hospitals in needy parts of Africa, centers to care for the terminally ill in the peripheries of various European cities, assistance provided to immigrants in the United States and Brazil, and so many others. Every baptized person is and should realize that he or she is the Church. And therefore also through the civic activities of service such as those that I have mentioned or others, the Church makes herself present in the peripheries, in underprivileged areas, in those places where at times the affection that everyone is entitled to is lacking.

In this era of shallow thinking nowadays, we seem to lack any reference points. One confronts a great vacuum of truth, where doubt is making inroads, with an aggressively anti-Christian and especially anti-Catholic secularism. Do we still have reasons for hope in the midst of this reality? How can we present the faith today to a world so divided by contrasts?

A consistent Catholic can never give in to pessimism. Although today we may witness sad and even tragic events, if we are men and women of faith we will discover countless gifts from God in our lives, in the lives of those around us and also in the lives of nations. And above all, that faith is precisely the foundation of our hope, as we read in the Letter to the Hebrews. Amid the secularism and relativism that we see in large sectors of the western world, many people are thirsting for the truth about God. These people need witnesses who help those around them to come closer to Christ; colleagues or friends who are guided above all by love for God and others, and not only by their own interests, who bring light with their faith and who know how to explain it.

Therefore, as I already said, we need to anchor our own life on prayer, in conversation with God, and in the frequent reception of the sacraments, true channels of divine grace. Also we always need to make a greater ef-

fort to get to know our faith better, through reading, study, and catechism classes. I would also stress that the faith is passed on effectively when we are acting out of affection and concern for our neighbor. The soon to be blessed Alvaro del Portillo used to tell us: "Pour out affection on the others, my daughters and sons, even though it is not returned." This advice is very useful for anyone who wants to evangelize.

You will have the opportunity to meet with Archbishop José Rafael Quirós. In this regard, how can Opus Dei strengthen communion with the diocesan churches in our country and help further the common effort of evangelization?

Yes, I will have the pleasure of conversing with the archbishop of San José, Most Rev. José Rafael Quirós. As soon as we made plans for this trip, I asked that the archbishop and other ecclesiastical authorities be informed of my stay in Costa Rica, since Opus Dei, as a small part of the Church, only wishes, in words of its founder, "to serve the Church as the Church wants to be served."

Obviously, the apostolic work that the faithful of Opus Dei carry out bears fruit in the very diocese where they live and work. In the more than fifty years that have gone by since the beginning of Opus Dei's work in this coun-

try, there have been, with God's grace, many Christian marriages and vocations for the priesthood, for the religious life, and for lay celibacy.

I would like those who belong to the Work, and all Costa Ricans, to be a support for the diocesan bishops, to pray for each of them, and to ask God for abundant apostolic fruit in this land. I would ask them especially to pray for priestly vocations in the country's dioceses, for the catechists and educators, for the sanctity of Costa Rican families and for the other intentions of the bishops of the country. I would also encourage them to redouble each day their apostolic zeal, so that the Church in Costa Rica may harvest a lot of fruit from Opus Dei's work of evangelization.

Opus Dei is preparing for the beatification of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo. How will the raising to the altars of its "engineer," as some people call Don Alvaro, affect the Work?

Alvaro del Portillo was a man of peace, of service, of fidelity: first in his work as an engineer, later as a priest, and still later as a bishop. As the date for his beatification, September 27, approaches, I ask our beloved Don Alvaro to pass on to us his peace, his goodness, his joy, his loyalty to the Church, and his concern for the most needy.

People saw in him a man of God, and since his death the number of those who entrust their petitions to him has grown greatly. Up to the present, the office of postulation has received more than 13,000 signed accounts of favors attributed to his intercession. It is a surprising number, above all if you consider the fact that, among those who receive favors, only a few people decide to write them down and send them to Rome. Many of these reports come from countries that don't even have centers of the Prelature. The upcoming beatification of Alvaro del Portillo, besides being a cause for great joy, will be an opportunity to give glory to God and also will be a gift for the whole Church.

Since Opus Dei is in the forefront in this field, what is happening in the communications world regarding the faith and evangelization? Do we in the Church fully understand the value of social communication, or do we fail to appreciate its great possibilities?

St. Josemaría had a special affection for professional environments related to communication. He realized the importance of having many Catholics working professionally in the means of communication, to bring to the world the warmth and friendship of those who want to follow Christ. He himself gave classes of ethics for journalists; he encouraged the founding of schools of

journalism in several countries, and urged forward—with his human initiative and his prayer—the start of several media initiatives by people of Opus Dei and their friends. He dreamed of many Catholics choosing as their professional field the world of movies, literature, entertainment, radio and television. If your kind words of appreciation, for which I thank you, are a reflection of reality, it is undoubtedly due to the seed planted by the founder.

Thanks be to God, I think that today people generally view social communication positively—which does not exclude a critical reflection on the limits of a certain type of sensationalistic journalism. It gives me joy to see the large number of activities of evangelization that, through the means of communication, are arising all over, thanks to the efforts of Catholics: news agencies, web pages with Christian orientation, charitable and service initiatives on the internet, producers of movies and television programs with Christian values. Sometimes these are not widely known, but if you add up their audiences they surpass quite a few international media outlets.

Interest in social communication is clearly growing in most dioceses and Church institutions. Many, for example, are sending students to the school of Church Communications at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross,

in Rome. This program has as its aim training people to transmit effectively the Christian message and the marvelous reality of the Church, through the means of communication

Interview Granted to *Avvenire*, Italy (August 29, 2014)

Francesco Ognibene

What are the “existential peripheries” to which Opus Dei’s efforts are directed?

Pope Francis often speaks of offering a living testimony to the Gospel by assisting people in situations of poverty, both material and spiritual. The “existential peripheries” he speaks about are not far away; frequently they are found at our side and challenge us personally. The faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei live in very diverse situations, but they always find themselves facing the same challenge: to go out to help solve mankind’s needs. Whether they live in the so-called “rich countries” or in “developing” ones, the “peripheries” are always present there, and the faithful of the Prelature try to respond to the spiritual and material needs that continually accompany the human condition.