

other people need us, not because we are any better than them, but because we are all brothers and sisters. As St. Josemaría said—during his catechesis in Buenos Aires, actually—“When you work and help your friend, your colleague, your neighbour, in such a way that they don’t even realize it, you are healing them; you are Christ who heals, you are Christ who unhesitatingly shares the lives of those who have fallen sick, as can happen to any of us at any time.”

All of that also means carrying and loving the cross, which Pope Francis also spoke about in his first homily. And, as Cardinal Bergoglio said in his homily in the Chrism Mass last year, we need to have “patience with people” when we teach and explain and listen, and always pray to the Holy Spirit for grace.

How much will it help Pope Francis to know that Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI is close at hand?

I think that the Pope will feel, above all, the spiritual strength and companionship of his predecessor. And he’ll often find support in the rich, ever-relevant teachings of Benedict XVI. The love that all of us in the Church feel for him grows still greater, because we know he is praying for us in his Mass and his prayer, and supporting our unconditional union with Pope Francis. In that regard, I think it is important to respect Benedict XVI’s wish to disappear

from the eyes of the world, so that it is completely clear that there is only one Pope, so as not to confuse people who may have less Christian formation or little theology. The Roman Pontiff is now Pope Francis, to whom the previous Pontiff has promised joyful and total veneration and obedience.

Interview granted to *El Mercurio*, Chile (April 7, 2013)

1. *What does the election of a Latin-American Pope mean for the Church?*

In Latin-America there is an especially refined popular piety, and love for the Blessed Virgin Mary particularly stands out. One sees a living Church, close to the people, to its intimate problems, which now has given us a Pope to continue the new evangelization. This surely means a relaunching of the faith throughout the world, and especially in the Americas. All of this is a gift for the Church. Every pontiff has his own personality. Pope Francis brings us the pastoral imprint of a person close to those on the “periphery” of society and to the heart of the Spouse of Christ.

It is also clear that a Pope who comes from the continent of South America can bring to the whole

Church a stronger sense of fraternity and of detachment from material goods. He will help the whole world to grasp better the importance of a “culture of being” rather than “of having,” which at times is suffocating the more economically developed societies.

2. Opus Dei always stresses that it wants to “serve the Church as it wishes to be served.” What does that mean in practice, with respect to availability to carry out what the Pope is asking or might ask?

That is an expression used by St. Josemaría, when referring to the aim of Opus Dei. This affirmation is framed within the mission entrusted by the Church to this Prelature: to help remind all men and women that we are called to holiness in ordinary life, especially through professional work. Sometimes specific needs arise. For example, Pope John Paul II asked that some people of Opus Dei begin its apostolic activity in Kazakhstan, and we did so. Those who went there began by looking for professional work, as do other citizens. On other occasions, the Roman Curia may ask for the assistance of a priest; and when I see that the Pope supports that petition, I agree right away to it. The same happens in many dioceses. On another level, when faithful of Opus Dei—with the help of many others—begin a social work, for example, they do so in function of the local needs and with the

blessing of the local bishop. Thus an institute for technical training was begun on the outskirts of Nairobi, another in Lebanon, a hospital for the care of the terminally ill in Madrid, a social work in New York in the Bronx, etc.

3. Do you plan to go and see the Pope? Is this a question of protocol, or do you have to wait to be invited?

Besides the regular visits that are incumbent on every bishop, to inform on the state of his dioceses (in my case, the development of the Prelature of Opus Dei), I would like to see the Pope, when the moment comes, to express my full adhesion to him and to his ministry, something that I have already made known to him in writing. I think that for now the Holy Father has to confront the many urgent tasks that the beginning of a pontificate brings with it.

4. What is the commitment of the members of Opus Dei with regard to the Holy Father?

The same as that of all other Catholics; to be good and loyal children, who support the Magisterium of our common father Pope Francis, and accompany him with our persevering prayer and human affection.

As you know, Opus Dei has a minority of diocesan priests, but the great majority of the faithful of

the Prelature are men and women who spend a good part of each day in a factory, in a hospital, in a school, in a business, or in ordinary family life. Therefore, I have suggested to the members of the Work that they generously offer daily prayers for Pope Francis and unite themselves to his intentions at Mass, and also through their hours of work and their apostolate as ordinary Christians in the middle of the world; and through the sacrifices that are demanded today to support a family. I am completely convinced that many are also offering up for the Pope their illnesses, their financial and professional difficulties, their concern for a needy relative or friend, and also their joys.

In a brief prayer that the faithful of Opus Dei recite daily, taken from the liturgical tradition of the Church, there is a supplication for the Holy Father asking that God may conserve him for many years and make him happy here on earth. We try to pray these words with the conviction that prayer—including this brief daily petition—is very fruitful.

5. What was the relationship of the faithful of Opus Dei in Argentina with the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Bergoglio? Have people there told you any anecdotes about the present Pope?

In my visits to Argentina, I saw in the faithful of Opus Dei a great affection and respect for Cardinal

Bergoglio; it was a relationship of cordiality, of simplicity, of friendship, of concern to help bring forward the desires of that beloved archdiocese. The Cardinal often celebrated Mass on June 26th, the feast of St. Josemaría, in the Cathedral. I knew that the faithful of the Work had a close relationship with the then Cardinal, who responded with paternal warmth. For example, he went to a center of the Work to visit a sick priest, and he accompanied another priest at the wake of his mother. These details say a lot about how attentive he is to people, the affection he has for each one. He was well acquainted with a school started by people of Opus Dei in Barracas, one of the poorest districts in Buenos Aires, and he visited this school more than once.

6. What was your reaction as Prelate of Opus Dei on learning that the new Pontiff belonged to the Society of Jesus?

I entrusted the Holy Father to St. Ignatius of Loyola, whose spiritual heritage has brought so much fruit to the Church. I am convinced that St. Ignatius will intercede for the present Pope. And I thought of the joy that his election must bring to the Society of Jesus.

I also recalled the devotion that St. Josemaría had to St. Ignatius, whom he cites numerous times in *The Way*, and to whom he refers familiarly as Iñigo or Ignacio. He

considered him an eminent example of holiness, of the unconditional self-giving that he too proposed—along other paths—to those who drew close to his apostolate. And he celebrated Holy Mass in the room of the saint from Loyola.

To present the Church as made up of divided groups would go against communion, and show an outlook lacking in faith. We are all in the barque of Peter to serve, in a unity of hearts and wills, each according to their mission and charism.

7. Pope Francis has written a great deal about the importance of work for the dignity of the human person. One immediately recalls here the theology of work developed by St. Josemaría. Do you think the new Pope knows the writings of the founder of Opus Dei?

I don't have any information about his knowledge of St. Josemaría's writings, but I do know that the Pope has recourse to St. Josemaría's intercession. Some years ago he came to the Prelatic church of Our Lady of Peace, and remained for about 45 minutes praying before his tomb.

In any case, I am happy to see their agreement in the evaluation of human work as a path of sanctity and of social justice. Recently, recalling his youth, Cardinal Bergoglio said that working in a laboratory had been one of the

most important experiences in his life. "In the laboratory I learned that every human task has possibilities both for good and for bad," he explained. And it's true that, in our daily occupations, we can cultivate the best of ourselves or become egotists. Work is the arena for growing in virtues, or (in words of St. Josemaría) the hinge of our sanctification. The present Roman Pontiff said in 2007: work "guarantees human dignity and freedom, and therefore is the key to every social question." I am sure that the Holy Father will teach us by his example to transform our work—whether intellectual, manual, or domestic—into service, doing it for God and for our fellow men and women.

With our prayer and affection, close to Pope Francis,
Article in *Palabra*,
April 2013

We have welcomed with great joy the election of Pope Francis as Peter's successor in the See of Rome and as Supreme Pontiff of the universal Church. The festive pealing of the bells, sent ringing throughout the whole world, brought us the news we had been praying for so intently: *habemus*