

Articles and Interviews

Interview Granted to *Paraula*, Spain (April 26, 2015)

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Bishop Javier, Opus Dei is celebrating a Marian year for the family. On convoking it, you asked the members of the Work to pray to our Lady for families, thus uniting themselves to the intentions of Pope Francis. What is the present situation of the family, what are its principal challenges? And in relation to the Pope, what do you hope for from the upcoming Synod on the Family?

The celebration of this Marian year seemed to me to be a way of seconding the Pope, who is insistently asking all Christians for prayers for the fruit of the Synod on the Family.

It is a cause of joy to see that many families feel loved by God and are a reflection of Trinitarian love. Through the efforts of fathers and mothers, often heroic, they become “bright and cheerful homes,” as Saint Josemaría used to say. They pour out their affection on the society around them. But there are also many other families that are going through grave difficulties, or in which coldness and selfishness hold sway. Uniting myself to the Pope's intentions, I

would like to see the Synod become an acknowledgement and expression of gratitude for the first, and a strong point of support for a positive transformation of the second group of families. I would also like it to be an opportunity for families to realize that they are the Church and that the entire Church accompanies them in their daily efforts.

If in this year of grace, between the two Synods, we can manage with God's help to focus people's attention on the families in greatest need and reduce, although only by a small proportion, the number of families with serious difficulties, we will have achieved something very important for the Church, for society as a whole and for the good of many people. Therefore I advise families to read the Pope's encouraging catechesis on fathers and mothers, on grandparents and relatives, on brothers and sisters and children.

How would you evaluate the results of the Marian year for the family up to now?

Drawing up a balance sheet in spiritual matters is always difficult. But our Lady will certainly present to our Lord the continuous and incalculable prayer, the generous and abundant offering of suffering on the part of so many sick people, so many hardships and shortages

offered up by people all over the world for the same intention, the thousands and thousands of visits to Marian shrines...., and also so many hours of catechesis and reflection on the family, from every aspect: anthropological, philosophical, theological, pastoral.

I ask the faithful and Cooperators of Opus Dei to draw up their own personal balance sheet: to examine how their deeper grasp of the Gospel reality of the family is leading them to love marital fidelity and to be generous; and also to assist so many married couples who are undergoing special difficulties, often heightened (we should never forget it) by the global financial crisis.

Your address in Valencia for the "Almudi Theological Dialogues" centered on the figure of your predecessor at the head of Opus Dei, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, in his role as secretary for the Council's Commission on the Clergy. What memories do you hold of him, what stands out in his way of being?

Two words with Don Alvaro were enough for one to be filled with peace. He was a man, a priest, a bishop of great humanity, with a smile and goodness that, from the first moment, broke down barriers. It was impossible not to feel loved, respected, understood. I think his natural way of being had a certain predisposition for this special empathy, but above all it was clear that his welcoming attitude reflected the style of the Gospel, which he

had learned from Jesus through the example of Saint Josemaría.

Many of the Council Fathers who got to know him or interacted with him during the sessions of Vatican II have given testimony to Blessed Alvaro's way of being and acting.

You also worked closely with the founder of Opus Dei. What can you tell us about him? What is his strongest message for our times?

The Holy See's decree on his heroic virtues described him as "a traveling contemplative," a man, a priest who invited everyone to seek God in our daily journey, in the ordinary circumstances of our daily life, which should not be an obstacle but an opportunity to find God, who loves each one of us with an infinite Love.

One thing was obvious to me: he himself lived the advice he gave others. I was a witness, for many years, of his personal struggle to draw ever closer to God, as a person in love who wants to respond with his whole heart to the one he loves: doing so each day, in important tasks and in those that did not seem so important, in what was difficult and in what was easy, serving others with a contagious joy.

He often said, in many different ways: "Holiness means seeking God's presence, continuous contact with him, through prayer and work, based on a persevering dialogue with him." His message was not primarily an invitation to ac-

tion, to get things done, but to love.

The “Almudi Theological Dialogues” center this year on the Second Vatican Council and the priesthood, for the 50th anniversary of the decree “Presbyterorum ordinis.” How do you view the current state of the priesthood, especially in Europe, where problems such as the decline in the number of priestly vocations are evident. How can we re-energize the calling to the priesthood?

Certainly problems exist, but I think the Council documents and the magisterium of the Popes and of many bishops are helping the new generations to take up the calling to be a priest with an eagerness for holiness and for service, although we would all like to see greater fruit. Thanks be to God and to people of good will, quite a few countries are seeing an increase in the number of priests and seminarians.

Saint Josemaría used to ask: “Do we want to be more?” And right away he responded: “Then let us be better!” If we bishops and priests strive more zealously for sanctity; if Catholics pray more for us and for vocations; if we have the nobility and courage to challenge many souls with following Christ; if families, schools and those engaged in pastoral work with young people carry out a deep work of Christian formation... then despite all the problems, despite the reigning atmosphere of relativism

and hedonism, the materialism that is afflicting the world, the Lord of the harvest will not fail to send workers for his fields. He himself has promised it, as long as we ask him sincerely and with our deeds.

Right here in Valencia, there have been so many and such abundant ordinations of priests, some of whom have also gone to serve in other dioceses. This too is a sign of hope for our times.

As far as the laity are concerned, in light of the universal call to holiness proclaimed in the Gospel and spread so widely by St. Josemaría, should we try to take a more active role in the life of the Church, as the Council also indicated? And in which aspects?

As you know, the last Council, and the Roman Pontiffs as well, both the previous ones and Pope Francis, have strongly insisted on the apostolic mission of the lay faithful, who are called to make a very important contribution to the new evangelization.

Naturally for some this will mean collaborating in church institutions, but the specific task of the laity is found where their aspirations are, in their daily work and with those they love, as St. Josemaría explained. That is the place for their daily encounter with God. Their proper mission, the Council reminded us, is to infuse a Christian spirit into temporal realities. The primary responsibility of the

lay faithful, therefore, perhaps more so than priests and religious, is to foster the development of a culture, of legislation, etc., consistent with the dignity of the human person.

Certainly, within this great panorama of enlivening temporal realities with a Christian spirit, we also find the challenge to confront poverty and injustice in the world. Without detracting from the great effort that so many priests and religious are making in this area, it is also a demand incumbent on lay men and women, spurred by their concern for human dignity and acting with the professional spirit that is proper to them.

This past half year has seen the important step in Opus Dei of naming an auxiliary vicar to help you in governing the Work. Four months after that decision, what is your assessment of how this is going?

The role of an auxiliary vicar was already foreseen by St. Josemaría, and this past December, after asking God for light, it seemed to me that the moment had come to put it into operation. As far as “how this is going,” I give thanks to God for being able to rely on the help that is now provided by having an auxiliary vicar. The Work is carrying out stable activity in 69 countries and continues to expand, and although I am feeling well for my age, the auxiliary vicar means a new impulse to follow closely all of this apostolic work.

But I am very much in need of prayers, as are all of us who have this kind of pastoral responsibility. I ask your readers to accompany with their filial prayer my brother and friend, their cardinal archbishop, and to also pray for me.

Statement for the Beatification of Archbishop Oscar Romero

On February 3, the Holy Father Francis authorized the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate a decree of martyrdom for the Servant of God Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdamez. Archbishop Romero (El Salvador: 1917-1980) was assassinated out of hatred for the faith on March 24, 1980, while celebrating Holy Mass.

On learning of the news, Bishop Javier Echevarría said: “The martyrs present a challenge to all men and women, both believers and non-believers, but they are a shining light especially for those who have placed their hope in God. I am sure that Archbishop Oscar Romero is going to be a deeply beloved saint.”

“I met Archbishop Romero in Rome,” the Prelate of Opus Dei said, “during one of his visits to Saint Josemaría, in 1974. He was a pious person, detached from his own interests and dedicated to his