

thing good and desirable in itself, but as merely one of many competing options. While such people acknowledge that transmitting life is a great good, the prospect of having more children and educating them is seen as something complicated and risky. Then parental satisfactions are weighed against the required sacrifices, and often the balance reached is that more children just aren't worth while. Circumstances are blamed, but what people have forgotten is the value of life, the meaning of love, and the beauty of motherhood and fatherhood.

Your book concludes with a chapter on "the essence of joy." But some might ask how one can be joyful in a world filled, as is ours, with suffering and injustice.

In its liturgy, the Church sings joyfully of the mystery of Christ's cross. Suffering doesn't eliminate joy if one is united to Christ's self-giving for our salvation. Joy withers when one gives in to the selfishness of sin, when one overlooks love for God and love for neighbor, when one fails to repent. Those swayed by an environment where the main concern is one's good image, success and power, easily get depressed over a failure or a financial setback, even by wrinkles on their face. For a Christian, joy doesn't depend on a presumed sinlessness, which doesn't exist. Rather it comes from asking for pardon, from repenting. It's the joy of the prodigal son. I'm more and more convinced that Blessed Josemaria Escriva was right when he called the sacrament of Penance "the sacrament of joy."

Madrid April 9, 2001

Radio interview on the network COPE on the occasion of the publication of the book Itinerarios de Vida Cristiana.

There is no better mirror of our faith that the life of men and women who have been changed by encountering Jesus Christ, living and present in his Church. That's why on our program we try to present the paths of these person's lives, paths that provide guidance for us and help each of us to follow our own path in life. Itinerarios de Vida Cristiana is the title of a recent book by Bishop Javier Echevarría, Opus Dei's Prelate (part of the collection "Planeta Testimonio"). Bishop Echevarría, who just ordained 24 members of Opus Dei to the priesthood here in Madrid, has graciously accepted our invitation to appear on this show and to share with us some of the pathways sketched out in his book. Good afternoon, Bishop Echevarría, and many thanks for being with us.

Good afternoon to you. I'm the one who is grateful. I ask you and your audience to pray for me, as I do with all my heart for them.

I imagine you are happy to be back in your native Madrid, especially on such a joyous occasion as the ordination of 24 members of the Opus Dei Prelature. Here's my first question: What is the significance of the fact that the Work continues being so fruitful in finding men who say Yes to God's call as priests?

I think the answer is found in the very reality of the Church's life. Although throughout its history the Church encounters many trials, it remains a living body, thanks to the presence of the Holy Spirit. I think it's clear to everyone that the Church couldn't exist without priests. Our Lord, who promised to assist his Church till the end of time, continues sending priests in every corner of the world. I pray for a worldwide increase in priests and seminarians who are eager to be holy priests. In particular it gives me a special joy (and this is my sixth ordination) to confer ordination as deacons on these men who have dedicated their lives, with a total generosity, to serving the Church through their service to this part of the Church that is the prelature of Opus Dei.

Now let's turn to some basic themes of your book. You say there that every spiritual, Christian pathway takes place within the Church. Today we find, however, the anomaly of people hungry for spirituality, hungry for a spirit free of materialism, who seek it on paths outside of the Church. What would you say to those who are looking for spirituality, but who do so on the often strange paths of sects or new age religions?

I think that people today have a hunger for God, a hunger that will always be present in this world of ours. Perhaps part of the confusion and disorientation evident in today's society is due to a gap between dealing with God and people's daily lives. In consistent Christians there should be no gaps, since they know that their faith, hope and love have to be exercised in all of life's circumstances. Despite the

claims made by some persons, it's undeniable that man's soul has engraved upon it a deep longing for transcendence. And when he least expects it, and even at times explicitly rejects it, there comes a moment when he feels a deep need for the truth, the truth of a God who creates, whose providence guides the world, and who never abandons mankind. We are all called to enjoy eternal happiness with God, to a transcendent destiny. At times this truth can be lost from sight, replaced by a seemingly worldwide search for material security. When faith is weakened or obscured, the need is felt for something to take its place. How this contrasts with the sincerity and holy steadfastness God has given the Church with this Pope of ours, who continues to proclaim the Truth vigorously, despite his declining physical strength. His witness to the faith is universally acknowledged, independently of his outstanding personal qualities. His life has given testimony to the fact that only in the living Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever, is found the truth that saves humanity.

You have just mentioned the Pope and the witness of his life. I know that recently a large group of the Prelature's faithful met with the Holy Father. I was impressed by how strongly and urgently the Pope in his address called for lay people to commit themselves to be missionaries in the environment where they find themselves, in order to help those who are disconcerted and confused to find again the path to Christ.

This meeting was meant to be an opportunity for reflection. It wasn't a presentation of formal papers or studies.

Rather we meditated on the main ideas found in the Pope's letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. At the end, we asked the Pope for his confirmation of the ideas that had been discussed. How the Holy Father spends himself every day in serving the Church! The only thing he insisted on, as he did in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, is that, to make the redemption take root in souls, we must all, priests and lay people, strive for holiness. All of us without distinctions are the Church, right where we find ourselves. It was very comforting to see how the Pope is relying on the help of everyone in the Church. He knows that we are all called to help carry Christ's cross, since we all called to live in true freedom and happiness.

Your book speaks of pathways. It seems to me that this word is very well chosen, since Christian life is truly a pathway that one has to set out on. You also speak of the grace of finding on one's journey a guide, a teacher, to point out the path. I'd like to ask you, in light of your personal experience, to tell us briefly how Blessed Josemaria Escrivá de Balaguer has affected your own path in life.

If I had to sum things up...

A difficult task, right?

Difficult, yes, since everything I try to do (with God's grace, of course) I've learned from the heroic correspondence of that holy priest, with whom I was very blessed to live. At his side one experienced with supernatural naturalness, or natural supernaturalness, that God's gift of freedom to humanity allows for a wide range of paths leading to Him. Su-

pernatural life must also be fully human. The universal call to holiness that Christ addressed to everyone is relevant wherever we find ourselves, amid all the upright occupations that men and women carry out. There we can find Christ, placing Him at the summit of our work, in order to praise God, to give him glory, knowing ourselves accompanied and protected by his marvelous providence.

Monsignor Escrivá was the great apostle of heroic sanctity in daily life (and all sanctity requires heroism; a half-hearted sanctity is a contradiction in terms). He taught us to finish well whatever task we have at hand, whether important or not, regardless of how the world might view things.

Bishop Echevarría, today is Monday of Holy Week, an appropriate time to speak of conversion, as you do in your book. There you put great stress on the fact that Christian life means a conversion. Isn't this a titanic task. Is it a realistic goal, especially since we are often disheartened on seeing how weak we are? How are we to pose the challenge of conversion to men and women of the 21st century?

You're absolutely right about it being a titanic struggle. Not because it is beyond our strength, since with the help of grace we can attain it.. Rather, because with Christ one can carry out great epics, marvelous adventures. Holy Week shows us how close God is, how he loved us to the very end. As Blessed Josemaria insisted, Christ gladly gave his last drop of blood, his last breath, for each of us. Always, especially in Holy Week, we should have a vivid

sense of God's nearness to us, of his concern for us. In Christian life conversion means beginning once and again. But that doesn't mean only correcting our shortcomings, which we all have an obligation to do. Conversion should also be seen in a very positive light, as a constantly renewed effort to draw closer to God and to help those at our side.

Certainly, this requires effort! It requires a new effort each day, and many struggles throughout the course of each day. But what joy and peace this struggle wins for us, and also for those around us. One's heart then expands, and one feels the need to serve all men and women, helping them through our work, carried out with more love and care. And one also feels the need, as Blessed Josemaria so often said, to learn from the others. A Christian, someone who is truly Christ's disciple, knows that he can learn a lot from every soul he meets.

There are three main dimensions to life, within faith's journey, as you point out in your book, that I'd like to ask about. One is the role of the family. Why are today's men and women so reluctant to take up parenthood? Where does this fear come from, and how can it be overcome?

I think a lot of people in today's culture are caught up in a selfish search for comfort. Many people have lost sight of the truth that those who are called to take up the path of marriage, the path of the family, are called to a path that requires a generous self-giving. Bringing into the world other souls is proof of God's confidence in the husband and wife, since children come not when they

want but when God wants, with their collaboration of course. If men and women united by the holy sacrament of marriage try to appreciate more deeply the marvelous mystery of their participation in God's creative power, there would be less fear to transmit life. They would also come to realize that it's by spending themselves and caring for their children that they become fuller men and women, better parents, sharing in God's own paternity and maternity.

Another dimension of the contemporary scene is the world of work—something you follow very closely, for it lies at the heart of Opus Dei's spiritual path. How does one go about seeing work in all its depth, given our obsession with productivity and a technology that tries to absorb everything else?

That is another challenge. It seems to me that when one loses sight of work as service, one also overlooks its true role in society, and its true value for the human person. Work can be prayer, friendship with God. It's not we men who invented work, but God. When God created us, he told us that he wanted us to draw close to him and become holy by means of work, also before the fall. God placed our first parents in a marvelous garden, so that they might enjoy it and subdue it. But also, as Genesis 2:15 says, "*ut operaretur*," "in order to work," to draw close to God by working. If one views work not as a punishment, but as a means to co-redeem the world, then we become aware of its extraordinary value. We can raise to God a pure offering by our work, uniting it to the Host offered in the Mass.

Finally, besides family and work, a third dimension consists of a Christian's presence in society. On this point the Pope spoke very clearly, I'd even say with a sense of urgency, to the Prelature's members in your recent audience. How are Christians to be present in a world fast losing traces of the human dignity inherited from Christian tradition?

Yes, the Pope placed great stress on the need to sanctify work. I remember how at first I was deeply struck by Blessed Josemaría's strong affirmation of the essence of the spirit of Opus Dei: we have to sanctify ourselves in our work and through the circumstances presented by our work. A consistent faith requires living it in every setting. Back in the thirties, he used to say that we can't be part-time Christians. How can one sincerely claim to be a Christian if, while praying from time to time, one leaves aside his faith on entering a legislature, a university, a corporation? We

have to manifest our faith precisely by working very well, giving a testimony of solidarity, service, dedication and responsibility. And all this can be converted into a dialogue with God, whether our work requires great intellectual efforts or great physical prowess. Any job, whether manual or intellectual, if oriented to God, becomes prayer, as both the Old and the New Testaments teach us. Work can and ought to be another way of keeping up our conversation with God.

Well, Bishop Echevarría, time is running out. Thank you for spending these minutes with us on Holy Monday, discussing the pathways you sketch in your book. I hope in future we can continue our conversation.

I do too. It's always a great joy for me to speak to a radio audience, and to learn from them. Others' needs and viewpoints are a great stimulus to me, and I learn a lot from them.