

thus reminding us that personal friendship with Jesus, which is the font of joy, passes through the sacraments: Christ who pardons us in Confession and Christ who gives himself to us in the Eucharist.

The Sacrifice of the Altar is the center and theme of this World Youth Day, and of this entire year. The catechesis preceding the arrival of the Holy Father, the Saturday Vigil and the Mass on Sunday, all revolve around the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The Pope has set as the theme for this encounter: "We have come to adore you," as the Magi on their way to Bethlehem. I pray that all who take part in this gathering in Cologne may undergo a conversion, and first of all myself. We have to be convinced that it is always possible to convert anew, to transform our hearts. We have to feel the urgency of following Jesus closely, "in accordance with the vocation that God has indicated to each one" (Decree on Indulgences granted on the occasion of the 20th WYD, August 8, 2005).

God's call resounds in one's soul as an intimate and personal reality. And our response also has repercussions on those around us, on the society to which we belong. Saying yes to God means making our life one of service, putting ourselves at the disposition of others. Perhaps we will have to overcome a certain natural fear, which all of us experience in the face of great and binding decisions. "Be not afraid!" In these words of Christ, repeated by our beloved John Paul II, we find the daring that we need. Benedict XVI

echoed them right from the first day: "If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. Christ gives everything and takes away nothing. It is worthwhile to confront this beautiful divine and human adventure."

Cologne August 16, 2005

Interview granted to the German Press Agency: DPA.

How are you and the members and friends of Opus Dei planning to participate in World Youth Day?

Personally, I am going to Cologne filled with faith and hope, with the eagerness to experience once more that the Church is young, as the Holy Father has been saying since the first day of his pontificate. World Youth Day provides an opportunity to see the importance of the faith for young people and the great importance of young people for the Church. Those taking part will listen to the reflections of the Pope, and the Pope will listen to the hopes of the young people. I am sure that all of us will return from Cologne with a renewed desire to follow and love Jesus more fully. The faithful of Opus Dei (who will take part in the gathering without forming a special group, in quite varied ways, from different dioceses and organizations) will go with the same

readiness to be open to a moment of grace.

How do you see the relationship between young people today and the Church? What does today's Church have to offer them?

If I may express it in this way, I would say that it is a matter of mutual dependence. Young people have a vital need for the Church, and the Church needs young people because they are an important part of the People of God. It is through the Church that young people get to know Jesus Christ: God who becomes man, the answer to our deepest yearnings, the source of true happiness. Young people give the Church new life, when they discover with enthusiasm the person and message of Christ and transmit their enthusiasm to new generations. In this sense, they themselves are the Church; they constitute, together with the poor and the sick, a special treasure. Certainly, the relationship of the Church with young people also presents obstacles and difficulties. On the one hand, during youth one experiences hope and generosity, but also more than a few anxieties. On the other hand, young people don't always see the true nature of the Church in an adequate way, perhaps because of what we might call problems of communication proper to these times of ours, characterized by an excess of information and a lack of orientation. Thus Catholics are invited to act with the responsibility of someone who is aware of being a child of God, and to strive to transmit the faith with consistency. To the youth who are seeking the meaning of life, we have to offer the sincere testimony of our joy and our

commitment, each in our own circumstances.

How would you describe Pope Benedict XVI?

I see him, and I want to always see him, as a good Father of the Church. I will not go any further in my description, because that word—Father—sums up everything. Certainly, Divine Providence has been preparing him for his mission as Roman Pontiff. With all his years of ministry he has acquired a privileged knowledge of the Church's reality in the world; an acute perception of the challenges posed by contemporary culture; a clear vision of the whole which permits him to intuit the paths that God wants the Church to undertake in our time. If I had to sum up his profile in one expression, I would say: humble wisdom and contagious peace. Everyone can see in the Pope his great capacity to listen, to understand, and to seek answers that will satisfy the thirst for God of the women and men of today.

How has your relationship with him been up to now? Does he know and appreciate Opus Dei as much as his predecessor?

Before anything else, I would like to say that, in my opinion, any comparison would be out of place. In any case, I can tell you that at present Benedict XVI knows Opus Dei better than John Paul II did when he began his pontificate in 1978. But, I insist, the relationship of the Holy Father with the Catholic faithful and the institutions in the Church involves not only knowledge, but also com-

munion and affection. And here there are no differences.

How is the expansion of Opus Dei going in Germany? Did St. Josemaría have a special relationship with this country?

Opus Dei grows in a natural way; its message is spread from person to person, one to one. The measure of the apostolate is a human measure, but the driving force of the apostolate is always God's grace, which has its own rhythm and logic. In Germany, the apostolic work of Opus Dei (as I think is happening throughout the whole Church) is spreading in a special way among young families. They are people who want to share the experience of the faith, to take advantage of means of Christian formation compatible with their ordinary duties. I have heard that many people are taking part in our apostolic activities in various cities. In the Mass celebrated by Cardinal Meisner in January 2002, on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of St. Josemaría, the Cologne Cathedral was packed with people. St. Josemaría visited Germany on a number of occasions. I had the good fortune of accompanying him, for the first time in 1958, and I saw his admiration for this country and for the people and their virtues. He had a great trust in the contribution that German Catholics could continue making to the Church's evangelizing work. Here too, as everywhere, he came to learn, to love, to serve.

Opus Dei suffered strong attacks in the seventies and eighties from the media in

Germany. With the passage of time, how does Opus Dei see those years?

With serenity. On the one hand, it is obvious that the media are not infallible, and to suffer their attacks, when these have no basis, is not something worth worrying about. I don't want to give a negative picture of the media, which provides so many services to society. I refer to the fact that, like anything human, the people involved can commit errors. The same as in other fields, those who have been mistaken need to make amends in a noble way. On the other hand, attacks are nothing new, neither in the life of the Church in general, nor in Opus Dei in particular. If I may use the expression, they "come with the turf." My experience is that, in the end, they are a means for helping many people to get to know about Opus Dei.

Could you briefly describe the Founder? What is the most important thing that you learned from him?

Perhaps we could borrow the description that John Paul II gives in his book *Rise: Let Us Be on Our Way*. He was a holy priest, for today's world, because he recalled the importance of sanctity in ordinary life, especially now when we observe the split between faith and daily life that the Second Vatican Council and the recent Popes have pointed to as one of the greatest problems of our times. St. Josemaría's message can help us to remedy this personal and social division. It is always hard for me to sum up all that I learned from this holy priest. But certainly I can never forget his capacity to love: he

lived for God and for others, and he gave himself completely.

Rome August 24, 2005

*Interview granted to
the Zenit news agency.*

As Prelate of Opus Dei you know people from all over the world, since your "diocese" is not limited territorially. Do they all share the same "hunger for God" that the archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Joachim Meisner, spoke about, or are people from the south naturally closer to God than the Germans and the northerners in general?

In the first place, I'd like to point out that Opus Dei is a personal prelatue and, as such, forms part of the hierarchical structure of the Church; but it is not a diocese.

Yes, Opus Dei is indeed spread all over the world. The faithful of the prelatue are from many different countries, but we all have one thing in common: the conviction that we are children of God with a "hunger to be in touch with God," which we try to foster daily.

It's fairly clear, I think, that people are different everywhere: people from the north and the south, from the east or the west. But we all strive joyfully to live our lives close to God.

This applies everywhere, without exception, it seems to me. In Germany, for example, there's a great wealth of people who want to live close to God. Many people here, with all their German characteristics, try to bring God

into their daily lives, into their family life, their work, their traveling back and forth, their social life and so on; and they try to help others discover and live this great human ideal: to live one's life close to God.

What was special about these days in Cologne, for the world and especially for Germany?

What was special for me is that the Successor of Peter was here, and that the whole Church gathered round him and, through the communion of saints, was united to the intentions of our common father, the Pope.

So, what happened in Cologne these days is very important for Germany and for the world, because it shows that the Church is alive, that the Church is young, with a youthfulness that is also true of older people, of the sick, of those less well-off. Being young at heart is what is important, and all these people are young at heart, and they bring God to others. That is what is really needed.

Do you think the visit of the Holy Father will bring about a new spiritual springtime for the Church in Germany?

Certainly. In the Church we are always in a growing situation. Although at times we may think that things seem to have come to a full stop, the truth is there are never any real full stops. Here in Germany, for example, in this wonderful country, we know that there are many, many ordinary men and women who are people of prayer.