

of God's love and comes to recognize it as the goal to which all men on earth are called."³⁸

Abruzzo, Italy (June 6, 2009)

*Message regarding
the earthquake*

As soon as I received news this morning of the powerful earthquake that shook the Abruzzo region, I raised my heart to God, through the intercession of St. Josemaría, in petition for the souls of the dead and for the speedy recovery of the injured.

I am convinced that St. Josemaría, who passed through that beloved region so many times and who prayed so much for the men and women of Abruzzo, will intercede for them in a special way during these moments and gain from God the grace that the material and moral damage be as small as possible.

With all my heart I unite myself to the people affected by the tragedy and, together with my prayer, I send them my blessing, asking our Lord to grant them the strength and consolation that they need in these moments.

✠ Bishop Javier Echevarría
Prelate of Opus Dei

Poznan, Poland (June 7, 2009)

*An interview granted to Przewodnik
Katolicki. By Aurelia Pawlak*

Last year Opus Dei was 80 years old. Founded by a diocesan priest, the Work today is spread throughout the world and is opening up many new centers. Does this mean that in this world of ours so filled with turmoil, people still feel the need to draw close to God?

Certainly, people need to be close to God, and when this contact is missing they live with a "nostalgia" for God, who is above all our Father. We shouldn't forget that God is the one who has sought this relationship, this closeness. When he created mankind, he is the one who takes the initiative, who seeks out his creatures, each man and woman.

It seems clear to me that it is this divine concern for us that has also led to the reality of Opus Dei in the Church, a reality of Christian life that is an expression of God's mercy towards the world and that is seen in the expansion of the Prelature throughout the world.

I am happy to tell you that during these days some faithful of the Prelature have begun the apostolic work in Indonesia. Those who have begun there know very well that the seed they are planting in that country will grow, as in other

38. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 99.

countries, above all under the impulse of grace.

Every anniversary is an opportunity to take stock. What ideas come to mind when you look back at the years that have gone by?

The experience of these 80 years stirs up in the Prelature's faithful first of all a reaction of humility, since each one well knows that God is the one who is doing everything. He makes use of us, his children, and grants success to apostolic endeavors that by ourselves we would never be able to carry out.

At the same time, there naturally arises deep gratitude to God for the marvels he has accomplished by means of Opus Dei: the spread of the call to holiness in all sectors—in work, in the family, in social relationships—fostering love for Jesus Christ and his Church.

I also personally give thanks to God for the social and evangelizing projects promoted by members of Opus Dei, along with many other people, in response to the new needs of our times, such as the Monkole hospital, which treats some 40,000 people a year in the outlying areas of Kinshasa. I could also include here the Campus Biomedico University in Rome, whose definitive site was opened just a year ago. This is a health-care center that gives special attention to the dignity of the human person and the elderly.

The world is being ravaged by a wave of secularization, many people are

choosing a model of life which has little to do with the teachings of Christ. For example, one sees this clearly in regard to pre-marital chastity, which is viewed as something out of date. Poland is a country that is somewhat special in Europe, where Christian traditions seem more strongly rooted. What do we Poles have to do so as to resist a consumerist life style and defend moral values?

To have an effective influence on society, we Catholics, both the Polish people and everyone else, have to strive to be trustworthy witnesses who show forth in our conduct the model of Christ, perfect God and perfect man. That is to say, we have to live the Christian and human virtues as well as possible.

I have had the good fortune of traveling several times to Poland, and have noted with joy how deeply rooted piety is in most of its people: they genuflect with piety, a sign of faith in the Eucharist; they celebrate the Liturgy with dignity, and take advantage of the sacrament of confession. These ways of acting reflect the faith more than many words. The Holy Father Benedict XVI never ceases to stress the importance of these apparently small gestures.

Of course, spiritual direction, doctrinal formation and reading Scripture are also very important for maintaining and defending one's own convictions, because without doctrine the faith falls apart. For example, one of the first things that those who go to Centers of Opus Dei are advised to do is to read the New Testament each day. Even if a matter of only a few minutes, that

daily contact with Sacred Scripture keeps a Christian alive because it places one in dialogue with Christ. The last Synod of Bishops, on the Word of God, strongly stressed the need for Christians to rediscover each day the treasures contained in the Scriptures.

And as I just said, the human virtues are also important. I know that the men and women of Poznan, for example, are very hard workers. I am sorry to admit that I've never been there, although I hope to have an opportunity to visit it some day. In any case, the habit of hard work found in those living there is one of the human qualities that forges interior consistency in people, especially if it is done with supernatural outlook and an eagerness to serve society.

Through their interior life and virtues, Christians can bring constructive values to bear on public life: each one autonomously from his or her own position. This is what St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, called a lay spirit, which is marked by love for freedom and personal responsibility to undertake initiatives related to key topics of human dignity: the family, the defense of life, education, the eradication of poverty, etc., always in accord with faith and morality, with the Church's magisterium.

Many people think that sanctity is an ideal accessible only to a few chosen persons. Being aware of our weaknesses and limitation, how can we attain holiness in our ordinary life?

St. Josemaría Escrivá said that "sanctity is more attainable than learning, but it is easier to be a scholar than a saint." He wanted to express the idea that the struggle for sanctity is difficult, but it is within everyone's reach. It is never an ideal just for a few chosen souls.

We struggle to attain sanctity when we make an effort to pray and to frequent the sacraments. Because we love God, as we do other people, if we strive to stay close to him, every day, whether we feel like it or not.

We also struggle for sanctity when we try to ensure that charity towards our neighbor is present in our life, not only as a generic sentiment but as a specific reality in the midst of the thousand small details that come up in our work, in the home, in social relationships, when we smile, when we serve others without asking for anything in exchange, when we show understanding towards the defects of those around us, when we forgive, when we practice fraternal correction.

Opus Dei demands a lot of its members. Not long ago I heard that there is no place in Opus Dei for sinners. What do you think about this?

Thank God, that isn't so, because in that case Opus Dei would be empty, since we are all sinners and we know that, as he himself said, Christ came to save sinners.

As I mentioned earlier, in Opus Dei we are very aware of our own personal deficiencies. And we also realize that we have to commit

ourselves seriously to be better each day, also learning from the virtues of so many good people in the world.

It is no secret when I say that John Paul II had a great esteem for Opus Dei. In canonizing St. Josemaría Escrivá he called him the saint of the ordinary. Did the Polish Pope have direct acquaintance with the Opus Dei Prelature?

Before he became Pope, he knew about Opus Dei through Cardinal Deskur, on his trips to Rome. Cardinal Deskur admired St. Josemaría and was a great friend of the one who was to be his successor as head of Opus Dei, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo. He spoke to the Cardinal of Krakow about Opus Dei and its founder when he came to Rome.

I can never forget that it was John Paul II who established Opus Dei as a personal prelature, although the work that was to culminate in that decision, by which Opus Dei obtained the juridical personality desired by its founder, went back much further.

John Paul II showed great confidence in Don Alvaro. For example, the fact that faithful of Opus Dei are working in Kazakhstan today is due to that Roman Pontiff who, on one occasion, told a bishop from there that he should ask Don Alvaro, at his request, that he do whatever was necessary to have some priests and lay people of Opus Dei go to that country. This occurred in March of 1994. A few days later, on March 23, Don Alvaro died. That evening, the

Pope went to pray at his wake in the Prelatic Church of Opus Dei.

What are your intentions for the Year of St. Paul?

St. Paul is, among other things, an example of a deeply Christocentric life and also an important figure for ecumenism. As far as the Prelature of Opus Dei is concerned, I hope that stable apostolic work will begin soon—this year if possible—in several countries where the majority of people are non-Catholic, including Romania and Bulgaria.

I think that in the area of ecumenism, the Polish Church can do a lot: not only the priests, but also the laity who reside in other nations, by trying to adapt to the mentality of their new country, while spreading a Christian way of life, striving to carry out apostolate. The Pauline Year is a good opportunity for all Christians, in the exercise of their professional work as doctors, journalists, tradesmen, etc., to become aware of their apostolic mission in the world to make known to others Christ's love, and thus help them to live with joy and optimism.

This past August, the Holy Father Benedict XVI resided in a retreat center of Opus Dei in Australia. How do you interpret this gesture of the Holy Father?

Naturally I was very happy about the fact that, while in Australia, the Pope rested for a few days in a center of Opus Dei. But at the same time, it would have seemed equally natural to me if, instead of going to that re-

treat house, he had gone to some place offered by other Catholics.

Because of its location and facilities, the organizing committee for World Youth Day chose that place.

I was very happy that some of the faithful of the Prelature in Australia were able to express in a material way the affection that all Catholics have for the successor of Peter.

London (June 18, 2009)

*Interview granted to
"BBC World." By
Christopher Landau*

What is the place of Opus Dei in the Church? What is a personal Prelature?

Opus Dei is a part of the Catholic Church. Its purpose is to remind all Christians that they are called to holiness whatever their state in life.

It helps Catholics to live their faith in their ordinary life: work, family life, social and cultural activities, etc.

A Personal Prelature is a type of organization in the Catholic Church which is ideally suited to Opus Dei. With the Prelate and his priests, it can have members who are men or women, married or single, intellectuals or manual workers.

What is the influence of Opus Dei in the Church and in the world today?

Opus Dei serves the Church and reminds all Christians that they should strive to be holy in everything they do.

It inspires individuals to change the world for the better, serving people with their lives, and striving to make Christ present in all environments.

When St Josemaría was a young priest, he once wrote in a notebook after Mass, that it would be the men and women of God who would place Christ at the summit of all human activities. It would be individuals with their lives of integrity who would make the difference, rather than organizations.

I ask your prayers so that Opus Dei, as a part of the Church, can continue to inspire people to be leaven in society.

What is the program of Opus Dei for the future?

The program of Opus Dei is the program of the Catholic Church.

For instance, one of the main priorities in the Church is to encourage young people to follow Jesus Christ with confidence in his Church and with love for his Sacraments. I remember clearly my trip to Sydney for the World Youth Day last July. When the Pope proposes to young people authentic models of Christian life they always respond, even if it is difficult. And this happens in Australia, in the United Kingdom, in Africa, in the Middle East...

Another priority of the Church is