

and ministry, with the certainty that I am expressing the sentiments of the faithful, both priests and laity, of the Prelature of Opus Dei. We all entrust ourselves to the prayers of His Holiness, in order to contribute effectively, with joyful availability, to the work of evangelization that the Pope has mentioned in his first greeting to the Church.

During these weeks of serene waiting, much has been said about the burden that weighs on the shoulders of the Holy Father. But let us not forget that the Pope relies on God's help, on the assistance of the Holy Spirit and the affection and prayers of all Catholics, and of millions of other men and women of good will.

As Saint Josemaría Escrivá always advised, I ask our Lord today very especially that all of us Catholics may share "one will, one heart, one spirit, so that *omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam*—so that we may all go to Jesus, closely united to the Pope, through Mary" (*The Forge*, 647).

✠ Javier Echevarría
Prelate of Opus Dei

Interview granted to *La Razon*, Spain (March 24, 2013)

How did you receive the news that we had a new Pope? What sensations went through your heart at that moment?

Great joy. As Catholics, we need to have a common father on earth, the vicar of Christ in the universal Church. When we saw the white smoke I knelt down and prayed for him, without yet even knowing who he was. I renewed my inner desire to be a good son to the Roman Pontiff.

When the newly-elected Pope Francis spoke from the Balcony of Blessings, he mentioned all people of good will. And I thought about how, as well as Catholics, the Pope carries the burden of the joys and sorrows of all mankind. So, as well as joy, I also felt an intense desire for all of us to pray for the successor of St. Peter, and I experienced a filial ambition to invite people to love the Roman Pontiff.

Of the things he has been saying during these first days of his pontificate, what do you recall? What struck you, what attracted your attention?

"Christ is the center," he told the journalists in the audience of March 16. It reminded me of what St. Josemaría often used to say: "It is Christ we have to talk about, not ourselves." That points us straight

to what is essential. Pope Francis also talked to us about the action of the Holy Spirit. The recent conclave, and the whole history of the Church, need to be read from that viewpoint, from the viewpoint of faith.

This is the first Latin-American Pope in history. From your experience as prelate of Opus Dei, what do the Christians of Latin America contribute to Europe?

What you find in Latin America is the attitude that charity is shown by warmth and affection. That human warmth often helps to prevent prejudice against other people, to avoid the sort of intellectual complexes that harm interpersonal relationships, and helps to form real human contact instead. One manifestation of that capacity to love can be seen in the popular piety that is still so alive in many Latin American countries, with a devotion to the Mother of God that is both tender and strong, and that has at its heart a very enriching attitude for all mankind. All of this is a great gift for the Church.

Little by little we are learning details about the Holy Father: he travels by bus, lives in a small Buenos Aires flat... Do you think that these small daily details will help change the minds of those who have a stereotyped idea of priests, Cardinals, the Church in general?

That austerity has been a feature of all the recent popes, with

different external manifestations, and also a great majority of priests, who have only just enough to live on, and many of them not even that. As you say, people have stereotyped ideas. I'll tell you about a Cardinal who came to the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross one time; between one event and another, at 5 o'clock there was a coffee break. He had something then, and said, "You know, this evening I won't have any dinner, I don't have anyone to help me prepare a meal." Not all of them live in exactly the same way, but there are plenty of examples like that.

The absence of material possessions, as St. Bernard says, is not a virtue in itself, but the virtue consists of loving poverty, which is also seen in those acts of self-denial. That disposition is still more creatively fruitful when a person is able to go without superfluous possessions and is detached from the things they have. Truly, as St. Josemaría said, poverty brings man a treasure on earth, and in that respect he held up as an example those parents of large families who, in their loving efforts to support their families, joyfully renounce so many things for themselves. We see, therefore, that poverty is a virtue to be loved—as Jesus taught us—and it is included in charity. At the same time, we should do everything possible to relieve the suffering caused by personal and social injustices, and I find it very natural that we should sometimes be overcome with impatience on

seeing so much injustice, which we want to remedy.

The reform of the Curia, the new evangelization... There are many matters that have been discussed by the Cardinals in their "general congregations" meetings. Of all the affairs that have been tabled, which one do you consider the most urgent for the Church?

The Curia, for human and supernatural reasons, is adapted by each Pope and the needs of the Church, according to the times. But it isn't my job to set priorities: that is in the hands of the Holy Father, whose only desire is to serve everyone. While we speak of a reform that may be necessary, we know that many people work in Rome self-sacrificingly, with a great spirit of service, sometimes far from their homeland and family, and for low rates of pay.

Obviously, I wasn't in the general congregations, where the Cardinals have their discussions together, but there is no doubt that the new evangelization is still a priority for the Church. I think that this Pope's simple, direct style is a great help here.

In the statement you made a few days ago you underlined Pope Francis' call to evangelize. How does the Holy Father's invitation match with the specific charism of Opus Dei? What are the challenges involved?

Cardinal Bergoglio's motto has been "*miserando et eligendo.*" It comes from the Venerable Bede, from a passage we read every year in the Liturgy of the Hours. It is a commentary on the calling of St. Matthew. Jesus had pity, had mercy, and at the same time called his disciples to follow him. A vocation brings a proof of love: it is born from God's merciful Heart. St. Bede comments that Jesus saw "more with the inner eyes of his heart than with his bodily eyes."

St. Josemaría, with the message he received from God, came to remind people that we are all called to holiness, and he used to pray: "May I see with your eyes, O Christ, my beloved Jesus." I think that the urgency to evangelize, which is ever-present in the Church, is an invitation to look at people, at everyone, with the eyes of an apostle, with mercy and affection, with a desire to help them receive the great gift of knowing Christ and his love.

"As St. Josemaría said during his catechesis in Buenos Aires, "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"

The spirit of Opus Dei impels the faithful of the Prelature, both priests and lay-people, to realize that in ordinary life, in the world of work, in the family, in social relations, we have to discover that

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