

Articles and Interviews

Interview Granted to the Website of the Diocese of Malaga, Spain (July 3, 2017)

By Encarni Llamas Fortes

Last January, Pope Francis appointed Msgr. Fernando Ocariz Braña (Paris, 1944) as Prelate of Opus Dei. He thus becomes the third successor of St. Josemaría at the head of the Prelature, after the death of Bishop Javier Echevarría, on December 12th.

You have become the third successor of St. Josemaría. You also worked with Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. What does it mean for you to succeed these two holy men?

It means a great responsibility that, at the same time, is accompanied by a lot of serenity. Responsibility, because this new ecclesial service, in addition to the ordinary pastoral government, includes passing on the memory of holiness that we have received from them, and praying and working so that it takes root in each of our lives. Serenity, because I can rely on the intercession of St. Josemaría and his successors, and also on the prayers of so many

people. At the same time, it gives me joy to see the strong desire of the people of the Prelature to be faithful to God and to loyally serve the Church and souls, both in Malaga and other places with a Christian tradition, as well as in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, to mention two countries where there are few Christians and where the stable apostolic work of Opus Dei is more recent.

Now you are the Father of a very large family of laity and priests all over the world. How do you see that fatherhood?

All fatherhood comes from God, who is Father of love and mercy. To every father in the Church you could apply Saint Josemaría's words: striving to be a father "to the measure of the heart of Christ," which truly has no measure. But God counts on human weakness and I have no doubt that he will grant me the necessary graces. As I said before, I find support especially in the prayer of all the people who love the Church and pray for Opus Dei. I know that I'm closely accompanied.

"Each generation of Christians has to sanctify its own time." Is this still the priority of Opus Dei?

This has been true from the Church's beginnings. As St. Josemaría said in the words you just quoted, each generation of Chris-

tians needs to keep sanctifying, redeeming, its time, because they are not strangers to their own epoch, but rather a part of it. And they realize they are called to make Christ present there, by encouraging many people to meet him, showing the attractiveness of his face and the joy of encountering him.

It is true that redemption is finished, it is perfect; but it's also true that Jesus wants to rely on each and every Christian to bring it to others. This is the missionary mandate that Christ gave to his Church: "Go out to all the world," to all nations, to all professions and trades, to all families.... Go to all the peripheries of the earth, starting with the people who are closest!

Opus Dei is a small part of the Church, and also wishes to "go out" to every environment, as the Pope frequently says. The faithful of the Prelature, in carrying out their profession, or in the heart of their families, should foster continuously this attitude of openness and self-giving towards others, sharing in the worries and sufferings of their peers, learning from other men and women (relatives, friends, work colleagues...), and trying to help each one find his or her own path to God.

Sanctifying one's time means bringing one's daily activities to God: offering to society our humble and well-done work, a life of service to others, infecting them with hope and an eagerness to "hu-

manize" our world. Joy is a sincere bridge that unites people.

What do you see as the challenges we lay people face today?

Many moderns thinkers say that in our society interpersonal relationships have become "liquid," subject to the whims of what is immediate and superficial. Such relationships easily give rise to empty hearts. We Christians have to work for what is enduring, for beautiful and definitive ideals, and that's why I think the most important challenge for the Church—and for society as a whole—is to give hope to each person, especially to young people, to families, and to those who suffer greater material or spiritual needs.

To meet this challenge, despite our own defects and shortcomings, we need to bring to many people the light of Jesus' love: bringing Jesus to the environment in which we are immersed, while always respecting people's freedom. This is the missionary task of Christians of all times. Offering this treasure will be more authentic if we are able to show empathy towards others, if we can enlarge our heart so that the needs and sorrows, the fears and sufferings of the women and men of our time find a place here, starting with those closest to us and the weakest.

In these first months as Prelate of Opus Dei, you will have received many messages. Is there one that has especially touched your heart?

I truly appreciate the words of affection and closeness that have come to me from different parts of the great family of the Church, including from this beloved diocese of Malaga. Pope Francis wrote to me expressing his affection and prayer, and I often go back to his words. I have also received letters that have moved me from bishops, priests, communities of men and women religious. I remember now one from a young boy suffering from cancer, who sent me his support and prayer from the hospital. The countless messages that I received from the faithful of the Prelature have helped me a lot; they show a unity of prayer and intentions that moves me, and that without a doubt is a gift from God. I don't want to ever get used to these gestures of affection. True love makes any responsibility easier to bear. I ask God, and Our Lady of Victory, to help me carry out this service with the generosity Bishop Javier Echevarría showed.

Interview granted to *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Germany (September 3, 2017)

By *Constanze Reuscher*

You are the first person at the head of Opus Dei who has not had a personal relationship with the founder.

What does this mean for your work?

I met the founder when I was 19 years old. Later on I was able to see him more often, during the last eight years of his life, since (although I didn't work closely with him) from 1967 to 1975 I had the good fortune to live in the same house that he lived in. I listened to his preaching and saw the fatherly affection with which he treated all of us. His teachings and example impressed me and have remained forever engraved on my memory. Now I entrust myself daily to St. Josemaría and ask him to intercede for me in my task.

Being the successor of a saint is a great responsibility, which brings with it the desire to be faithful. I ask God to help me give continuity to the spirit we have received, with the creativity required of every Christian, just as my predecessors did. Their fidelity was never rigidity, since historical circumstances and new challenges often demand new solutions.

You were born in exile, in Paris, because your parents had been forced to flee from Franco's regime. Does this affect your work in the Prelature, since at times people claim that Opus Dei had ties to Franco and to South American dictatorships?

My father had to flee from Spain in 1939 because of the Civil War, since he was in the military