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Opus Dei has 34 new priests

Bishop Javier Echevarria, Prelate of Opus Dei, ordained 34 priests in the Basilica of St. Eugene in Rome on May 27; they include one australian, Amin Abboud, and men from twelve other countries.

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In his homily the Prelate told the new priests to "count on our prayers for every one of you; it's a prayer that goes beyond you to all seminarians and everyone the Lord will ever call

to the ministerial priesthood." Prayer for priests, present and future, he added, "is an intention that no Christian can ever omit."

As the ceremony began, Bishop Echevarria transmitted to the 34 men and their families a special blessing from Pope Benedict XVI. Later, during the homily, he reflected on three aspects of priestly ministry: the Eucharist, preaching, and the exercise of divine mercy.

"One of your fundamental tasks, my sons, is to adore in such a way that the people are also moved to adore the most Blessed Sacrament, mystery of faith and love."

And then, "you have to transmit faithfully, also through your example, the teachings of Jesus, which fill souls with joy and peace. You can rely on the Holy Spirit when you announce to all the call to love God and neighbor at work and in the

ordinary things of daily life."

Preaching, he emphasized "is born of the Eucharist, of prayer--of the intimate, personal contact you have with Jesus."

Bishop Echevarria recalled that "God's loving fatherhood never leaves us alone," and that the priest's principal task is "to reflect that divine paternity in giving spiritual direction and administering the sacrament of Penance, which St. Josemaria called 'the sacrament of joy.'" In this way, "priests give hope to souls and listen to each one patiently, conscious that each is unique in the sight of God; each soul is his son or daughter." By being available to hear confessions and give spiritual direction, "you will help many persons to make small improvements in their interior life day after day."

The Prelate told the families of the new priests, and especially their

parents: "They owe their vocation to you!" And he added: "Along with you, I feel deep emotion when each new priest celebrates the paschal mystery at the altar, placing you on the paten along with Jesus who offers himself to the Father."

Priests become experts in the spiritual life.

One of the new priests is **Amin Abboud**, an Australian physician, 41 years of age, who practiced his specialty (treating persons with Alzheimer's disease) in a Sydney hospital and in a prison.

"The Christian philosophy of man has been fundamental to my work," he explained. "In school, they taught us how to prepare people for pain and death without any religious explanations. That seemed empty to me. Faith permits one to open himself to the next life and to give

meaning to the present one. It's a 'medicine' of incalculable value."

Father Amin has great hopes for the future of his country: "Australia is a tranquil place; there is love for freedom, and prejudices are rare. This makes it open country for God's truth. I'm praying that the next World Youth Day will be a time of spiritual renewal for many young people."

Luca Fantini, an Italian from Genoa, is another of the new priests. As a young man, he dreamed of scientific progress and devoted himself with great enthusiasm to astronomy and physics, placing it ahead of religion; eventually he stopped practicing the faith.

In the journey toward ordination, what proved decisive, in his view, was meeting two members of Opus Dei: "They were good professional men who found no incompatibility

between their work and their faith. And what is more, I saw that they had a more complete, sincere, and compelling understanding of reality. In time, I began to practice the faith again. But my 'reversion,'" he emphasized, "was not a purely intellectual process; it was the beginning of a new friendship with God."

Another member of the ordination class is **Alfonso Sanchez** de Lamadrid, a 45-year-old native of Seville, Spain. A biologist by profession, he spent fifteen years studying the Bay of Cadiz and the Andalucian coastline. "That work was full of surprises, marvellous and unknown." After a pause, he continued: "It's the same way with faith. We may think we know God, but if we go a little deeper, get closer and begin to ask questions, we discover a new world without limits."

Adilson Martini, a Brazilian engineer, left his position in a construction company to study in Rome and prepare for the priesthood. He had been in charge of verifying the quality of different kinds of structure, such as a soccer stadium, an oil refinery, and a tunnel. "Now I am a priest in the service of the Church. I'll be in charge of administering sacraments, of giving spiritual direction, of catechesis.... I'll be helping people to meet God, so I like to imagine that I'll still be concerned with 'the quality of structures,' building happy lives."

The 34 new priests are setting aside their professional work so as to be, in the words of St. Josemaria, "a hundred percent priest." Pope Benedict made the same point last Thursday when he addressed the priests of Poland: "It is not the business of a priest to be an expert in economics, in construction, or in

politics. What is asked of him is that he be an expert in the spiritual life."

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