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Origami donkeys for the newly ordained priests

Some of the newly ordained priests - including Australia's Fr John-Paul - share some details of their ordination experience

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"There is a Japanese proverb about rice... Barley stalks grows straight but the rice stalks bend due to the weight of the rice. The more rice, the more it bends. So we have to be humble in order to be fruitful. The

more humble you are the more fruitful you will be."

This was the advice given by Bishop Paul Toshihiro Sakai, Auxiliary Bishop of Osaka-Takamatsu, to 29 men from all over the world. These faithful of Opus Dei were ordained together in Rome on 25 May 2024, at the Basilica of St Eugene.

Among them was Wai Leung (Billy) Ng, from Hong Kong. A student and later teacher of Tak Sun Secondary School, Billy said he was impressed by the words of Bishop Toshihiro.

"The bishop mentioned we have to be close followers of St Josemaría," he said.

"And he mentioned the Good Shepherd who we read about in the Gospel. We have to be good sheep of Our Father but also imitate the other animal he liked so much - the donkey."

"As priests, we have to be donkeys and do whatever Our Lord asks us to do."

Billy showcased the cufflinks on his new priestly shirt, which feature the image of the donkey taken from the Prelate's chair in his chapel in Villa Tevere in Rome.

"These were a gift from the bishop this morning," he said.

It wasn't the only gift the Bishop had for the ordinands.

John-Paul Hinojosa, a Mexican who has lived for many years in Australia, said Bishop Toshihiro also gifted each of them a small origami donkey that he made himself the night before.

Fr John-Paul said there was a moving story behind the donkeys.

"When Bishop Toshihiro himself was ordained a priest, he made 19 of these donkeys and gave them to the then-Prelate, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, to represent the 19 in that group of priests," he said.

"He also made two other large ones, one looking up at the other. He said these two symbolised Don Alvaro looking up at St Josemaría who was still teaching and guiding Opus Dei from Heaven."

"This moved Don Alvaro very much. So now we all have our own origami donkeys to remember that story and also stay close to those big saints who guide us from above."

Fr John-Paul's parents and siblings travelled from Mexico and the United States for the ordination. After defending his thesis he will go back to his home town of Monterrey in Mexico for some months before returning to Sydney.

Also visiting Sydney briefly will be Fr Billy, before making Hong Kong his home again.

"I was there in 2008 for World Youth Day," he said.

"I remember the joy of the youth and also the words of Pope Benedict XVI. After that I started reading Pope Benedict's works and it really helped me to build my interior life."

He said he was looking forward to meeting lots of Australians, including kangaroos and koalas, and watching rugby.

The day was particularly poignant for Alberto Shintani, who was ordained for Japan. Born in Sao Paulo, Fr Alberto moved to Japan when he was 18 and studied history.

"Yes, it was great to have Bishop Toshihiro here," he said.

"We actually lived together in the same place before he was made a bishop in 2018."

Being the last in the line of newly-ordained priests to embrace the bishop, it was an extra special hug.

"He told me congratulations and also to be prepared, because in Japan, we are just getting started."

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