

# The Father in Brisbane and Melbourne

From 16-19 August 2023, the Prelate of Opus Dei spent time in Melbourne and Brisbane.

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Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne all played host to the Prelate of Opus Dei, Msgr Fernando Ocariz, on 16 August 2023. Flying out of Sydney in the morning, he spent the day in Brisbane, before making it to Melbourne by night.

## Brisbane

Formation activities of Opus Dei commenced in Queensland in the 1980s, co-ordinated by lay women and men of Opus Dei who made regular trips from Sydney. Now there are two centres in Brisbane: Merindah Study Centre for women and Aldridge Study Centre for men.

In Brisbane, Msgr Fernando Ocariz attended a gathering at Tierney Auditorium on 16 August 2023. He arrived early and was greeted in the foyer by a number of families. The get-together had three musical performances, including an Australian-composed piece on the piano.

In his opening remarks, the Father spoke about loving with freedom. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, said Msgr Ocariz, was a moment when Christ showed one of the greatest acts of love in history, precisely

because it was one of the greatest acts of freedom. His free decision to stay on the cross and die in this way showed his love for, and desire to redeem, humanity.

The first person to speak to the Father was Joan, who was born in Brisbane and has spent 37 years helping to start Opus Dei in Nigeria. She spoke of the need for more vocations, and Msgr Ocariz responded by saying that if we want to be more, we have to be better – struggling to be holy, even with our defects.

When a father of young boys, David, asked how to make better use of time, the Father talked about the need for order and not giving into whims. He also mentioned the importance of rest, because well-rested people tend to make better decisions about their use of time.

A musician, mother of nine and a cooperator, Michelle asked about discernment on where to spend one's energies. The Father suggested asking our Lord in prayer, advice from people who can help us, and then deciding with freedom and love.

## **Melbourne**

On Saturday 19 August 2023, the Father gathered with around 500 people in Melbourne. He began by commenting on the Gospel of the day, which was about being like little children. He said that St Josemaria encourages us to be childlike – with an infancy not related to age, but the attitude of the soul in front of God. Like children, we can have trust and security in God, and truly believe in his love for us.

Renee, a mother of four, asked the Father how to help others to have flourishing marriages and families, especially in such a multicultural

nation where so many couples have come from different backgrounds. He spoke about transmitting the Christian gospel through genuine friendship, and about sharing with others their personal experience. He added that it is very important to continue to be loving friends, even when others don't agree with how we live.

James, married with 10 children, told Msgr Ocariz that he often gets asked how they manage their family life - and asked how to help others overcome a fear of having kids. The Father said that others will see that they are happy despite difficulties. And from a doctrinal point of view, transmitting life is a meaningful participation in the creative power of God.

Pia spoke about challenges of life: a husband who works long hours, the busyness of four kids, a home that is

far from friends and formation. She asked the Father about seeing the good in every situation; and he told her that optimism is not in conflict with reality. He said that God is with us always and we never lack his assistance. When we have our little crosses, we can look at the cross of Christ and be united to him.

Angelo told Msgr Ocariz that he had been going through lymphoma cancer recently, but that he had really felt the prayers of others in Opus Dei; and was so grateful for his spiritual formation which helped him realise that his suffering had meaning. He shared that after a scan the previous week, he is now cancer-free. The Father said that he was very happy that Angelo was cured – and also very happy to hear of the affection, unity and self-giving which he experienced. He quoted St Josemaria, saying that the day we live as strangers, we have killed Opus

Dei – and that what makes one happy is not a comfortable life, but a heart in love.

The conversations in this large family gathering were complemented by some musical performances, including Spanish folk songs on the guitar, 14-year old Nicholas singing the national anthem, and a recent convert singing “I still call Australia home”.

A few days earlier in Melbourne, Msgr Ocariz also had the chance to gather with over 30 people from Perth who had travelled specifically to meet him. He also gathered with young people from Melbourne who attend means of formation with Opus Dei - there were performances and stories about recent travels to World Youth Day in Portugal; as well as questions which addressed topics such as sharing faith with friends, discerning the calling of God in their

lives, and understanding God's merciful love. The Father even became a fan of Aussie Rules football when he was presented with the scarf of a local team!

Photos by PLA and Michael Wong

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