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A Resumé of the Pastoral Visit of the Prelate of Opus Dei to Canada

We offer a brief description of the events around the visit of Bishop Echevarría to Canadian cities including Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

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Prelate arrives in Montreal

Bishop Javier Echevarría arrived at Trudeau International Airport in

Montreal on Thursday September 14th. Soon after arriving he met with several families from the Montreal area. The following day, September 15th, he visited the Manoir de Beaujeu, a recently expanded conference centre used for retreats and workshops. There he consecrated the chapel and had get-togethers with more families, encouraging them to be very faithful to each other and make the home a place of affection and peace. In the evening he also met with a large number of priests coming from different dioceses, including Ottawa, Quebec City, Longueuil, Montreal, as well as some nearby US dioceses in Vermont and Massachusetts. He thanked them for the generosity in their ministry and encouraged them to love the Holy Mass and be very available to the faithful, especially in the sacrament of reconciliation. He told them how well he remembered St. Josemaria's habit of always

recollecting himself in prayer before celebrating any Mass.

Montreal University Students

On Saturday the 16th, the Prelate met with university students from Montreal, Quebec City, Ottawa, and Kingston. A first year accounting student asked how he could bring Christ into his studies. Bishop Echevarría underlined the importance of living in a consistently Christian way in studies, and compared the spiritual life to the daily work of bookkeeping, where every day we can tally the pluses and minuses in our struggle to be more a man of God; at the end of the day, a good act of contrition where we ask forgiveness for all those minuses balances us with God, who always forgives. He also encouraged a recently baptized student from China to know his faith deeply in order to

bring the light of Christ to his country.

General Get-together in Montreal

About 1300 people were present later that day for the main gathering that took place in the Theatre Maisonneuve at Place des Arts in downtown Montreal. The Prelate began by saying that he was very happy to be in Canada which he described as a vast country with enormous resources and great potential. Saint Josemaria had sent the first members to this country in 1957. The Founder of Opus Dei had immense hope in the goodness of the people here, and prayed for Canada often.

“St. Josemaria was a great friend of this country. He prayed a lot for you. I cannot describe the intensity of his prayers, because he began praying even before I was born,” he said. Responding to a question about how

to juggle the numerous responsibilities of life, including work, family, home with the corresponding temptation of not having time for God, the Prelate spoke about the importance of finding God in the little things of each day. “Sometimes we may be tempted to think that God wants us to undertake big extraordinary things that require heroism. That may happen, but the vast majority of our life is made up of very ordinary events at home, at work, with the family and with friends. God is not disinterested in these apparently mundane trivialities of every day. If we do them with love of God and an upright desire to serve others, we will have sanctified them.”

He compared God’s love to that of parents who are touched by gifts from their children even if it is something like half-eaten candy. God

is pleased with our conversation with him, the bishop said.

Julie Gaudreau, a young professional woman told the Prelate that in Quebec, many people think one has to go into foreign lands in order to help others, yet there is plenty to do here. She told him about a tutoring program she had begun in a school with many immigrants and that it was in thinking of others that one ends up being truly happy. The Prelate encouraged her in her work and said that sadness is indeed the dregs of selfishness. He said we should write this in large letters. He warned the audience against a common attitude in many people at the end of a long and tiresome day: they come home and plunge into the newspaper, silent and without even a smile or a kind word for their spouse. This is not just a homey unimportant detail, he said, it is very important for the couple. He urged

husbands and wives to “love each other crazily.” He advised busy parents to keep a photo of their family on their desks. “Look at the picture and fall in love more and more every day.” With this example, the Prelate honed in on the essential point: the need to stay on the same wavelength as those around us, particularly those of our family with whom we are naturally more intimate. This positive attitude will make families full of that cheerful warmth that should characterize Christian homes.

At the end of the gathering he invited the people there to pray for the Pope daily and to read the Catechism of the Catholic Church and its accompanying Compendium recently published by Pope Benedict XVI.

Prelate Moves on to Toronto

On September 17th, Bishop Echevarría flew from Montreal to

Toronto where he stayed in Ernescliff College, located on the University of Toronto campus. His first meeting was a gathering in Ernescliff with university students. He underlined the need to study very well, pointing out that it is an important obligation. He said that St. Josemaria demanded a great deal of himself but also of others, including the present Father. St. Josemaria studied a lot not only because he had a strong sense of duty and responsibility toward God but also in order to help others. When he was in the seminary –despite the fact that he had other earlier plans for a civil career –he obtained high marks; he pushed himself a great deal and he helped fellow seminarians. Later the Father spent time receiving numerous families from the area.

Gathering with the Prelate at Roy Thomson Hall, Toronto

The principal theme was the importance of leading a consistently Christian life in all the different circumstances of our day, to be authentic Christians in the middle of the world.

The Prelate began by asking us for suffrages for souls who have died. He said that he received some joyful and at the same time sad news very recently: the death of Ms. Mary Mahoney, an American numerary of Opus Dei who had worked for nearly 50 years in Kenya and who had passed away in the U.S after undergoing several difficult surgical operations. She cheerfully accepted her sufferings which she offered for the Prelate and his intentions. He explained that it was also good news because he was sure that she was now in heaven. “We have to live like this woman in the middle of the world: in a consistently Christian way, putting God in all the ordinary

things of everyday life. This had been the constant teaching of St. Josemaria in whose name he is re-visiting Canada and Toronto. St. Josemaria prayed very much for this country and the souls here. Bishop Alvaro came to Canada and Toronto some years back and no doubt both St. Josemaria and Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, his first successor, are praying for all of us. We, too, will join them in a spirit of prayer.”

Fielding many questions on prayer, family life, the media and friendship he ended by challenging the audience to pay particular attention to fashion, helping those around us to understand the true dignity of each person.

For example, one woman said she had been a fallen away Catholic until 2002: “I changed and become practicing Catholic due to contact with Opus Dei. What I know of the

Work from within is different from what is sometimes portrayed in the media. What is the real Work like?” To this the Father said that the Work has a simple message: to put Christ at the summit of all things. At times there will be misunderstandings—as Christ Himself experienced—when we try to work for His glory. He told her that the spirit of Opus Dei she has witnessed closely is the one she should follow without wavering.

A Visit to a School

On September 18th, the Prelate paid a visit to Hawthorn Girls School in North York. He was received by a contingent of about 250 schoolgirls with their parents and the staff. Their choir sang some songs for the Prelate and he planted a Maple tree in the front yard of the school. The following day the Prelate met with other families at Ernescliff College, as well as with a group of priests and

seminarians, many of whom are studying at St. Augustine's seminary.

Speaking with priests in Toronto

Speaking to the priests, he explained that St. Josemaria was a soul enamoured of the Eucharist. He was greatly in love with Jesus. For this reason he was also enamoured of diocesan priests whom he always regarded as his brothers. He was ready to leave Opus Dei to found a separate association or institution for the diocesan priests. The Holy See granted him leave to do so if he wanted to. God intervened and directed him to remain in Opus Dei and from there to carry out his dreams. Opus Dei priests are secular priests and that is why they have a kinship with diocesan priests.

Bishop Echevarría mentioned the recent death of Fr. Frank Turk, who was one of the first in Toronto to join the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross.

What a good example he left for us, he said. We have to be 100% priests! Everything we do should be done with priestly zeal. We are souls for others and not for ourselves. We have to give our whole life for the others. This will give us immense joy since that is holiness and holiness is always joyful. We cannot afford to be sad. The Prelate also mentioned that the priesthood is a public office. For this reason it is important to dress in clerical garb so that people will recognize us as Christ. St. Josemaria compared the clergyman to a uniform worn by the cab driver who is there to serve with his visibility. Likewise we serve souls through our visibility, to attract souls for Christ.

From Toronto Further West to Vancouver

The Prelate arrived in Vancouver on September 22nd. He stayed in Glenwood. There he met with

numerous families and also visited Crestwell. Some of the students there presented him with a miniature lighthouse that they had made. The Father thanked them and said that each of them must be a lighthouse, orienting others by giving them an example of women who know how to pray, to study well, and who don't give in to outside pressures to offend God.

The general get-together with the Prelate took place on Saturday September 23 in the Grand Ballroom of the Westin Bayshore Hotel downtown. About 900 people attended, some having traveled from Alberta and Washington State. He told the crowd: "In a short time I will be leaving Canada, and already I want to come back. I have learned many things from this land, and I give thanks to St. Josemaria for this visit."

The Prelate made two requests. The first was that we pray more for the Holy Father, recalling that when he was elected, Benedict XVI repeated three times, "Pray for me."

"Catholics must love the Pope as a father. I can tell you with complete certainty that while he celebrates Mass, works and prays, he is thinking of the good of souls".

The Father's second request was for more prayer for Opus Dei. "It is an institution of the Church that exists to remind all people that we can and must be saints in our ordinary lives." He mentioned several countries where the Work is preparing to go: Russia, Vietnam, Romania, Bulgaria. "We need the help of your prayers so that when Christ passes by, people will not be afraid to say yes."

At one point during the get-together Mrs. Maria Doll, who came in with her husband from Calgary, offered

him a large cowboy hat with a certificate making him an honorary Calgarian.

While answering a question about fashion and the dignity of women, he related an anecdote about a member of Opus Dei who had gone shopping for shoes and found herself being served by a store employee who was dressed in an outfit that was a bit too revealing. "She told this girl that she had a beautiful face, but with clothes like that, on the street people would not be looking at her face. And the face is the mirror of the soul."

"This girl's reaction was first, to cover herself, and second, to thank her, saying 'No one has ever told me this before.' She later attended a conference on fashion organized by some members of the Work in order to acquire a greater refinement in this area."

"Be courageous, be decisive," the Father urged in closing. "Love your brothers and sisters. If you see them behaving in a way that does not befit children of God, tell them."

During his stay the Prelate was taken on a helicopter trip to see the grounds of a future conference centre that is planned north of the city in Britannia Beach. He blessed the site and prayed for the future apostolate there. Upon seeing the view of the city, he mentioned that Vancouver is one of the most beautiful cities he had ever seen.

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