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Interview with Susana Wilson, mother of Jose Ignacio Ureta Wilson

Susana's prayers to Bishop Alvaro for the recovery of her son have been cited by the Holy See in Bishop Alvaro's beatification process, since Jose Ignacio's recovery has been declared medically inexplicable.

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How old is Jose Ignacio today?

On 10 July [2013] he will be 10 years old. He was born on 10 July 2003.

He was born with problems, right?

Well, in fact the problems started well before the birth. Already in January 2003, when I was expecting Jose Ignacio, we were told his birth would not be easy as it was very probable that he would be born with an omphalocele (intestinal hernia). From that moment we entrusted ourselves to Bishop Alvaro, praying the prayer-card. When they did the ultrasound, in March, the diagnosis was confirmed.

At the beginning of June I had to go into hospital so that I could give birth to the baby. The waiting seemed to go on forever, they were difficult times, as our older son stayed at home and became nervous for his parents.

When finally Jose Ignacio was born, he weighed 1 kg 750 grams, but the

doctors thought this was a success as they expected him to be no more than 1.5Kg.

Had they not detected any problems with the heart?

Before he was born they had not. But afterwards the doctors, in order to operate on his omphalocele as soon as possible, carried out various tests, and very soon detected that Jose Ignacio had a cardiac malformation with grave consequences for his blood flow.

The problems with his heart started from his birth. On Saturday July 12 Jose Ignacio underwent surgery for the omphalocele, but there were complications, because his temperature dropped, his heart stopped and they had to finish the operation urgently. In the following few days there were fresh problems, and he suffered some damage to the brain. We have a diagnostic

sonography from July 28 which shows changes in brain mass, with lesions in both hemispheres due to lack of blood irrigation.

One day I started to pray in silence, and it seemed to me that the measurements of oxygen saturation shown on the screen for Jose Ignacio stabilised little by little. I remember telling my husband about it. At a given moment, the duty nurse came to see how he was, and when she saw the saturation levels had stabilised, she lowered the level of the respirator so that Jose Ignacio could start breathing little by little on his own. That was a key moment for us to be reassured in the conviction that Bishop Alvaro was helping us and so I asked a few more persons to please help us by continuing to pray to Bishop Alvaro for Jose Ignacio.

At first the idea was to stabilise Jose Ignacio so he could be discharged

from the hospital and bring him back for an operation a year later, but in view of the situation the doctors decided on a palliative operation, still planning the definitive operation later.

The heart operation on Jose Ignacio took place on July 30, twenty days after he had been born. In the first 48 hours after the operation everything seemed fine. The doctors seemed happy.

After that the situation changed completely.

What happened?

On August 2, around 2.30pm, we were asked to go immediately to the Intensive Care Unit for children in the University hospital because Jose Ignacio was very sick. We thought the situation was extremely grave. We prayed all the way there. When we got there I asked to see my son

and they told me that it was not possible as they were reviving him. I was so nervous I almost couldn't walk. I embraced my father in law who happened to be there at that moment, and started praying the prayer-card of Bishop Alvaro incessantly. I finished one and started another one straight away. We did nothing else.

We called several people and asked them to call everyone to ask them to pray to Bishop Alvaro del Portillo asking for Jose Ignacio.

A nurse told me later that that day she had seen Jose Ignacio and was surprised by how strange he looked, even though the measurements seemed normal. They decided to do an echocardiogram and it was then that they found out about the pericardial effusion, and immediately started to try to reduce

it. After that it's when his heart stopped.

Another cardiac arrest, like the ones before the operation?

No, this time the heart stopped for more than half an hour. The doctors thought he had died, because he did not react to the cardiac massage or to anything. But when they were starting to give up, the heart of Jose Ignacio started beating again.

Even then, the haemorrhage had been massive. I remember it was doctor Felipe Heusser, cardiologist from the Catholic University, who told us that Jose Ignacio had recovered his normal heart beat, but that there had been a blood spill in the pericardial area as well as in the area of the kidneys.

We went in to see Jose Ignacio and he was white as a ghost. We were distraught. His nails were purple – it

had been explained to us that this was for lack of oxygen.

During the whole of that day our prayer was very intense.

When did he start to recover?

The next day, at the start of the day, they told us that Jose Ignacio had had a good night. When we went in to see him we were surprised by his healthy colour, like the colour of a new born baby, and that his nails were no longer purple.

I remember that the duty doctor mentioned that doctor Heusser had come asking at what time of the night Jose Ignacio had died. It's a small thing that has always struck me, as it is the same thing that a doctor asked the father of saint Josemaría when he was gravely ill as a child.

Doctor Heusser has confirmed to me that he never thought that the child would live. He constantly reminds me how surprised he was that Jose Ignacio was saved. He once asked us to whom we had prayed. The other doctors were also surprised.

Does Jose Ignacio have a normal life now?

He lives the normal life of a child of his age, even though he has had to overcome difficulties which other children have not had to contend with. After all that happened to him, we thought that the only alternative was that he would die or, if he survived, that he would be lying in bed all the time. That's why for us everything that Jose Ignacio does can only be explained in the light of God and the intercession of Bishop Alvaro.

He is a great football player. Whenever he is able, he puts on the

shirt of Alexis Sanchez, or of Messi, or the one of his team, the Colo-Colo, and plays football with his friends. He also likes tennis, and one teacher with whom he has played in our house in the country says that he is very well coordinated and enthusiastic. He never tires of dancing: he loves music, and goes round the house signing songs he has made up himself and dancing to all kinds of rhythms. In the wedding of his aunty he danced non-stop till the party ended.

Have there not been any bad neurological effects?

Jose Ignacio gets help in order to concentrate better and, like some of his friends at school, has a special teacher to help him advance. In other words, you could say that the difficulties he has had are within normal parameters. At school, he has found reading and writing difficult,

but now he has learnt to manage better.

According to the special teacher, Jose Ignacio has a lot of potential and is very shrewd. Sometimes when he does some homework and it goes wrong he gets annoyed, but later thinks again and goes back to working at it. He is shrewd enough to understand things quickly, and is then able to use it as a joke to laugh about it, or as an argument to justify something. At mealtimes he makes us laugh a lot, as he is very witty and humorous.

How would you describe the character and personality of your son?

I am his mother and I recognise that sometimes I can lose my objectivity. But I will try to be as close as I can to reality, trying not to be led by my feelings, or the pride of having a son like him.

Jose Ignacio is a cheerful and enthusiastic boy, very motivated. I would also highlight his perseverance, his low tolerance of frustration, a great self-esteem and sociability.

At school he has many friends with whom he gets together to do homework, or to play with the Wii or with the Playstation, or to play football. He is often invited to the houses of the others, and is a leader in his year. He is also a friend of many of the teachers, assistants, and older pupils. At one school event, he took part in a dancing competition, and had no problem getting the microphone from the older pupils to sing a song.

A story we remember from when he was 8 years old, is about the religious studies teacher who sees him arrive at the school with a good packed meal in his hand. With great

enthusiasm he tells Jose Ignacio that that lunch will go very well with a coffee, and Jose Ignacio answers: “better if it’s taken with some beer”. That quick wit is very usual in him.

Despite the fact that school has not been easy, he has known how to persevere and his self-esteem has never gone down as a result. If he finds something difficult he asks for help and it doesn't become a problem.

In the family he is also a cheerful child, who tries hard and enjoys life. The birth of his younger brother, just over a year ago, filled him with happiness: he sings to him, talks to him, takes him in his arms, is concerned if he cries, and checks who goes near him in order to protect him.

May I ask you what these events have meant for you and your husband?

They have meant a lot spiritually. And they have left a mark in other ways too, but above all it has been important in the spiritual plane. When we analyse our married life, we realise that for us the “adventure” of Jose Ignacio has been a process of deep conversion and getting closer to God.

It was then that we discovered our vocation to Opus Dei. For me it was when I was resting in the hospital, preparing for the birth of Jose Ignacio, and my for husband some time later. We hope that Bishop Alvaro will continue to intercede for us in the future, as he has done until now.

Do you think that the story of Jose Ignacio includes a message that can be of interest to everyone?

It's a call to hope for all those living through difficulties. Jose Ignacio is a living testimony of the gift that God

has made to us bringing us to this world, and his perseverance shows us what it means to struggle day by day to give the best of ourselves whatever our circumstances in life. In times when the circumstances make life difficult, being close to God is what gives you strength to go forward.

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