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In Houston

A brief video summary of the Prelate of Opus Dei's pastoral visit to Houston, Texas.

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Monday, July 22

“Howdy, Father, you’re in Texas! Yee-haw!” This was the lively greeting the Prelate received from 200 young women waiting to see him on his second day in Houston. After welcoming him, they updated his “passport,” a gift he received in New York, by adding stamps from the

various cities in Texas they had come from to see him.

Rosie, a high school junior, lives six hours from Houston by car. She makes the trip every month to attend apostolic activities in the center and to help out. She told the Prelate that Americans tend to be “very result-oriented,” and asked how to keep her high ideals without “falling into perfectionism.”

Monsignor Ocariz said that the true goal of our work is love for God and others. This higher aim is what enables us to rightly value our profession, “dedicating the required effort and making good use of time, but not becoming slaves to it. Even though we need to work hard and many hours, our aim shouldn’t be only in the work itself but should reach far beyond it. And this also helps us to stop working when we should stop, in order to dedicate time

to our family and care for other people, which prevents an exaggerated professionalism.”

Several groups approached the Prelate to give him gifts they had prepared for him. Those from Dallas explained that, since he was a professor, they were giving him hours of study turned into hours of prayer. They and their friends have been offering their study for the Prelate and his visit to the United States. To represent all the hours offered for this intention, they painted an image of a bookshelf with their favorite books, each book signifying 20 hours of study.

Before leaving, the Prelate wanted to pass on two brief requests: first, that each of us should try to pray more for the Pope, and second, that they always try to be joyful, never giving in to discouragement.

The afternoon session for young men taking part in the Prelature's activities began with a question from two twin brothers, Peter and Raphael, age 13. The brothers claimed they were "the world's youngest cooperators" in Opus Dei. (Cooperators are men and women who, while not being members, help with their prayers and contributions.) Starting when they were around 9 or 10 years old, Peter and Raphael began making contributions of a few dollars each month. The two brothers asked the Prelate what more could they do to help out.

"What the Work needs from a cooperator—young or not so young—is prayer, that you pray a lot for the Work," the Prelate replied. "Pray that everyone in the Work and everyone close to the Work be faithful to their Christian vocation. Pray also that we all strive to bring to many people this

great wonder: the message of Christ —Christ himself.”

Next came a question from Joe, who is a student at the University of Dallas and a convert from Protestantism. He asked how the Prelate had come to discern his own vocation. Monsignor Ocariz said he first met the Work through his older brothers, while in high school. He attended activities for a while, but decided to stop, since he was already receiving a good religious formation in high school. After his last year of high school, he was invited by an older brother, an engineer living in another city, to stay with him and his family for the summer. His brother took him over to a center of Opus Dei that was close by.

“It seemed like a great atmosphere, and I had a great time with the people there. I attended some activities. And they invited me to

consider the possibility that I be part of the Work. My first reaction was to say no. Then I thought about it a bit, not a lot, and prayed more. And there came a moment—it's our Lord who acts—that I thought, this is possible, it is a wonderful thing. So I said, good, let's do it. This 'let's do it' is the freedom often needed to give shape to God's call. God always leaves us, at least in the majority of cases, without total clarity, so that it is we who take the final step, so that also here we are very free. So I said 'let's do it,' and this was 58 years ago now.”

As in the morning, the Prelate closed the session by asking for prayers for the Pope, because “the Pope relies upon the prayer of all Catholics.”

Sunday, July 21

After enjoying a brief rest in Wisconsin, Monsignor Ocariz continued his visit through North America, with his next stop being

Houston, Texas. During his first full day there, he had two gatherings with members of the Prelature and friends. People came from Dallas, San Antonio, Austin, Miami, Louisiana, and even from across the Mexican border to greet the Prelate and listen to his advice.

The first gathering was with a large group of women. The Prelate received a warm Texas welcome as they sang and clapped their hands to the beat of “Deep in the Heart of Texas.” Monsignor Ocariz began by making reference to the Gospel of that Sunday’s Mass, the story of Martha serving Jesus with her work while her sister Mary sat listening to Him. The Prelate said that our Lord calls Mary’s choice “the better part” (*Lk 10*), but that it is still only a part. “Both work and prayer are fundamental. As St. Josemaría taught us, we have to transform work into prayer, making everything we do a

dialogue with God. In order to do so, we need to contemplate our Lord, uniting our lives closely to Christ's. Just as Mary was there at the feet of the Lord while her sister was working—we have to do this also while working.”

The Prelate stressed several times that God's love for us “is the great truth that we need to have deep in our souls—that God loves us madly. Our relationship with Him has to be a response of love.” Liz, a researcher from Dallas, asked the Prelate how to keep alive the awareness of our divine filiation, not only intellectually but truly experiencing it in our feelings. He responded that “to experience that we are God's children, to ‘enjoy’ it, does not depend on our own efforts. Sometimes God grants us moments when our faith seems more alive, more deeply felt in some way. But other times our faith may contain

some darkness. Often we don't see God's love but we have to firmly believe in it, and consider it in our prayer." He also recommended "making acts of abandonment in God's hands, realizing how small we are before the Lord."

Odette, a nurse and mother of nine, voiced a concern shared by many parents; she asked the Prelate for advice on how to help her children use technology prudently. "In the first place, by giving good example," the Prelate said. "They should see that you too use modern technology with prudence, with temperance, not letting yourself be carried away by whims. And then by explaining to them the risk of addiction, that it can be like a drug. They need self-mastery, to preserve their freedom. And freedom can be conditioned, even severely limited, by an addiction. Finally, you can suggest practical ways to do this, without

imposing them by force but instead showing them by your own example.”

Gaby spoke about a favor she had received through the intercession of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Saint Josemaría’s successor as head of Opus Dei. A few years ago she received a dire diagnosis for her unborn child—the child would not be able to walk, talk, or breathe on her own. While Gaby was speaking, her now healthy new daughter, Daniela, approached the Prelate to give him a bouquet of flowers amidst a loud round of applause.

In the afternoon, Monsignor Ocariz had a get-together with some 300 men involved in the Prelature’s apostolic activities in Texas. He began by recalling an earlier trip to Texas, with the then Prelate Bishop Javier Echevarría. Seeing the growth of the apostolic activities not only in

Texas but all over the world, he said that this should remind us of “our Father’s faith at the beginning of the Work, when he received this mission, this task from our Lord. He looked at the whole world filled with hope, a hope based on faith. We too have to be people of great hope, a hope grounded on faith: faith in God’s love for us, faith in the Christian vocation we have received in the Work; and therefore, together with our vocation, we have the grace to carry out the mission entrusted to us by our Lord.”

Greg, a flight controller for NASA’s International Space Station, told the Prelate that this week is the 50th anniversary of the moon landing. Greg then posed a “trivia question” for him and all those present: What was the first word spoken on the moon? “HOUSTON!” the audience yelled in reply, with a shout that almost shook the room. Greg

explained that residents of Houston are “enormously proud” of the fact that the first words spoken on the moon were “Houston, the Eagle has landed.” He then presented Monsignor Ocariz with a plaque commemorating his visit to Texas that read, “Houston, the Father has landed.”

The next question was posed by Chris, the father of four boys under the age of eight, with a baby girl on the way. How can Christians, in trying to share their faith with others, overcome discouragement about obstacles in the environment and their own limitations? The Prelate answered that, when we feel weak, we need to find our strength in Christ, especially in the Eucharist. “What happens when we receive Jesus in the Eucharist is truly amazing,” the Prelate said. “We are transformed into Him. It is the opposite of what happens with food.

We become Him, we become more Christ himself. Feeling we are weak is only natural. But we should also feel strong, with the strength God gives us.”

One question for the Prelate came via FaceTime from Tom, the son of one of the first members of Opus Dei in Chicago, who had a serious automobile accident six weeks ago that left him with limited mobility. The accident occurred as Tom was returning from running an errand for his wife. Tom said he was offering his sufferings for the Prelate, and he recalled that Bishop Alvaro del Portillo had encouraged Americans to learn to have “more heart.” “How can we accomplish this?” Tom asked. “How can we have more heart?” the Prelate replied. “Only when God expands our hearts, when God enables us to love more; the strength we need to love comes from Christ’s charity, which we attain

by asking our Lord for it. So we don't face this struggle alone, since our Lord is with us, and therefore we need to always ask for His help.”

The Prelate ended by reminding those present of the need to always have hope and to pray a lot for the Church and the Pope.

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