

Interview with the Prelate: "God expects lay people to engage in a constant dialogue of love"

An interview with Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz by the "Ecclesia" News Agency during the Prelate's recent trip to Portugal.

11/13/2023

You've said that you feel "at home" in Portugal, that you are not just

visiting. What is your view of the situation of Opus Dei in our country and its contribution to the Church and Portuguese society?

I feel “at home” because I have been to Portugal many times, including praying at Fatima, and because there are many Portuguese men and women in Opus Dei. Opus Dei has been in Portugal for over 75 years, and its members strive to be leaven in the Church and society. In what sense? Not by seeing themselves as something special, but by living the same life as everyone else, in a heartfelt union with Christ shown in deeds, as children of God through Baptism.

This is their ecclesial vocation. While it is essential to have lay people dedicated to activities and services in the Church’s pastoral work, for the vast majority of them, this is neither possible nor desirable. God expects

lay people to engage in a constant dialogue of love in their home, in their married life, in caring for their children, in their economic concerns and workplace, in their commitment to civil and cultural causes, in sports, personal interests, the world of art, etc. Their relationship with God is not purely internal, without external consequences; it leads to identification with Christ and, like Him, to self-giving to family members, friends, neighbors and colleagues.

Two months ago, we hosted the international World Youth Day (WYD). Do you think it was an opportunity to make known charisms such as that of Opus Dei and to renew evangelizing efforts among the new generations?

I congratulate the Portuguese for organizing WYD so well. The Pope's satisfaction and the response from

many people who shared their experiences during WYD show how well it was done.

We should certainly appreciate the new impetus that WYD brings to various paths in the Church, including Opus Dei. Beyond that, however, WYD was a time during which Christ has made Himself present in a special way, and revealed his face – both gentle and demanding.

It was moving to see Jesus in the Eucharist adored in silence by so many young people in Tajo Park. It was also impressive to see the patient lines of about ten thousand young people who wanted to receive the sacrament of penance in Reconciliation Park.

Is working with young people, especially university students, still a priority?

Before saying yes, allow me to recall that the priority is to reach everyone, without excluding anyone. Each person is precious and unique in God's eyes. We need to be in a hurry, a serene hurry, not to leave anyone without the opportunity to get to know Christ, with the help of our prayer, our interaction, our sincere friendship.

Young people, besides being the Church's present, are also, in a special way, its future. Throughout history, Jesus continues to pass by the shores of the world's seas, seeking young fishers of men, to walk with Him and to send them out into the world.

Most young people will feel the attraction of God in the vocation of marriage. But some will experience that God draws them into an exclusive relationship in celibacy, open to the service of all men and

women. We often associate celibacy with priestly and religious life, not without reason. But it is worth remembering that, from the time of the apostles, God also calls people to celibacy in lay life, on the foundation of their baptismal consecration.

University students, in particular, have a special call to find ways to harmonize faith with culture and science, so that faith can effectively inform social life.

The Prelature is going through a moment of change; we know that work has begun with the Dicastery for the Clergy to prepare the proposal to modify the Statutes for the Holy Father. How are you living this period?

We seek to follow the Holy Father's provisions with sincere filial obedience and with the desire – as Pope Francis himself reminded us – that they serve to strengthen the

essential aspects of Opus Dei contained in its charism. This is what I expressly requested in several messages addressed to the members of Opus Dei: that we all be closely united, in sincere obedience, following the example of St. Josemaría and his two immediate successors. It is the Holy Spirit who guides the Church. Therefore these are also moments to live with peace and serenity.

Some members of the Prelature expressed their questions and concerns about this matter in the media and on social networks, not always – let's put it this way – peacefully. Do you understand their concerns, especially those that talk about an attack? Are you afraid that some people might instrumentalize Opus Dei to fuel opposition to the pontificate?

It is understandable that questions, doubts, and concerns arise, also due to certain interpretations that have been published with a worldly tenor, as if this were a matter of “gaining or losing power,” something that makes no sense in the Church.

In my first letter as Prelate, I wrote: “Part of our mission in the great family of God’s sons and daughters is to increase mutual appreciation among the faithful in the Church and all the quite varied groups that can exist there.” And I quoted a phrase from the Founder: “The principal apostolate we Christians must carry out in the world, and the best witness we can give of our faith, is to help bring about a climate of genuine charity within the Church.”

In this regard, I have sometimes recalled the example I saw in then-Cardinal Ratzinger, whose love for the Church and the Pope, strong and

founded on faith, went beyond mere emotion. In a delicate moment for the unity of the Church, which some were endangering at that time, I heard him say from the depths of his heart: “How do they not realize that without the Pope, they are nothing!”

Can the relationship of the laity with the Work change? Does this “specific vocational call” have to find its own theological and canonical status in the Church?

In the Church, life comes first, then the norm; that is, to use Pope Francis’s words, reality is superior to the idea.

God planted the seed of a message in St. Josemaría’s heart. What was that message? That of rediscovering the vocational value of the ordinary life of the faithful. God entrusts men and women with the divine task of building up the world (the family, neighborhood, work, progress, art,

entertainment...) as children of God in Christ Jesus.

Within the founding inspiration, this message had to be announced and lived with a specific spirit, with the help of an institution, Opus Dei. And from the beginning, with increasing development over time, this institution was a family within the People of God, made up of women and men, lay people and priests, with a unity of vocation, formation and spirit, with complementary and non-competitive interaction with dioceses and parishes, while its lay members remain fully faithful to their dioceses and parishes. Therefore this reality is prior to the canonical framework and is the reason for Opus Dei's existence.

Can this moment help to recover the original charism passed on by St. Josemaría Escrivá?

It is not a matter of recovering it, because it has not been lost or distorted; it is a matter of deepening and continuing our effort to live it faithfully. In this sense, we hope to respond to the Holy Father's call: to care for the charism of Opus Dei so that we can carry it into the future with the same freshness with which St. Josemaría transmitted it to us. That is, to commit ourselves more to "the task of spreading the call to holiness in the world, through the sanctification of work and family and social commitments" (Motu proprio *Ad charisma tuendum*).

My last question is about the Synod of Bishops. How do you expect the members of the Work to contribute to this process?

The first contribution is prayer for the Synod, and by prayer, I also mean the fulfillment of one's daily duties, carried out as perfectly as possible

within our personal limitations. In addition, many members of Opus Dei have participated in various stages of the synodal process, especially at the diocesan and national levels.

Moreover, we are trying to be in tune with the Pope's deep desire for the Synod, that is, to show that the effort to bring forward the Church is not the exclusive responsibility of bishops, priests or religious, but that is the responsibility of each and every baptized person, "walking together." The mission of evangelization and the search for personal holiness is everyone's responsibility, each with their own possibilities and limitations.
