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## **Pastoral trip to France: “Joyful in hope”**

From August 1-5, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, made a brief pastoral visit to France, where he had the opportunity to be with many faithful and friends of the Prelature.

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### **August 5**

On his fifth day in Paris, the Prelate received several families. These

meetings with Monsignor Ocariz were marked by a family atmosphere. “Among other things, we spoke to him about Vietnam, where we live, and about the apostolate we try to carry out in our work,” says Claire, who met the Prelate with her parents and brothers and sisters.

Paul came with his wife Benedicte and three children: Josephine (16), Charles (12) and Philippe (10). The Prelate listened to what they told him with close attention. “We said that nine years ago we decided to return to France so that our children could go to high schools that offered a sound Christian education. The Prelate told me that Saint Josemaria wanted the parents to be at the heart of these educational projects.”

Laetitia came with her parents and brothers and sisters. She told Monsignor Ocariz that she was

beginning her studies in nursing. The Prelate encouraged her to consider how many people her work would affect in the future. “The work of nurses is key to the good atmosphere in any hospital,” her mother said afterwards. “The Prelate opened up to her a marvelous horizon and she left filled with pride for her professional vocation. “

### **“Close to the Prelate, you feel loved”**

Many people have had the opportunity during these days to entrust to him some personal intentions. “We told him about a particular intention and he promised to pray for it in his next Mass,” says Paul.

“Meeting the Prelate re-enkindles the desire to always be faithful to Christ, says Achille, who came with his wife, Victoire, and their children. “He has helped us to see how beautiful the

spirit of Opus Dei is, so young and timely.”

Marie, on her part, says that “during those brief minutes, nothing special happened; nevertheless, we left filled with hope. I think what the Prelate transmits is peace and joy. After speaking with him you want to be better, to love Christ more. Close to the Prelate, you feel loved.”

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## **August 4**

On the 4<sup>th</sup>, in the afternoon, the Prelate of Opus Dei visited the chapel of the miraculous medal. There he greeted the Sisters of Charity who welcome the faithful and went up to the second floor of the chapel to pray the rosary.

## **Before our Lady of the Miraculous Medal**

On the previous day, the Prelate had shared with several people the intentions he wanted to entrust to our Lady: the Church and the Pope, the faithful of Opus Dei and their apostolic initiatives all over the world.

He also stressed the importance of praying for the Holy Father, who has been entrusted with an important mission: "The First Vatican Council made clear that the Pope's mission is to strengthen the unity of Catholics. His mission therefore is quite difficult. To achieve it, he needs our prayer and fidelity."

On leaving the chapel, some faithful of the Prelature who had gone there to pray and other people who were present had the opportunity to greet him. Monsignor Ocariz spent some time with each of them.

**In the parish where he was baptized**

Monsignor Fernando Ocariz also went to the Spanish parish in Paris, where he was baptized on November 18, 1944. The pastor welcomed him warmly. They spent some moments in prayer together and then went to the registry of baptisms, where his receiving the sacrament is recorded.

Before leaving, Monsignor Ocariz wrote these words in the visitors' book: "With the joy of visiting this church where I received holy Baptism, with my prayer for the community that continues to carry out pastoral work among the Spanish people in Paris."

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### **August 3**

On Thursday, Monsignor Fernando Ocariz visited Couvrelles Retreat Center outside of Paris, arriving just before noon. There he greeted the

faithful of Opus Dei who are spending some days resting and taking classes of Christian formation. Besides those from France, there is also a group of students from Philippines, the Middle East, Italy and Spain. Some of them took the opportunity to tell the Prelate about various initiatives underway in their respective countries: a social project in Latvia, university summer courses in France, humanitarian aid in Jordan, spiritual retreats on Reunion, an island in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar, etc.

### **Staying young by imitating Christ**

The Prelate of Opus Dei met with the young people there and told them: "With Christ as your model, you will always be young even as the years go by. But we need to abandon everything in our Lord's hands, starting with our efforts each day."

Monsignor Ocariz reminded them of the importance and effectiveness of the Communion of Saints, thanks to which we can always help one another. “We are never alone: each of our actions, each prayer has an impact on the life of the rest.”

### **Accent on freedom**

As in previous get-togethers with faithful of Opus Dei, the Prelate stressed the importance of Christian joy. He also spoke at length about freedom, and pointed to love as the key to being free: “When we love, we do things freely. The proper act of freedom is love.” Thus “we can love God freely when we fulfil our duties.”

### **A Ginkgo tree, symbol of continuity**

After the get-together, the Prelate planted a Ginkgo tree in the garden. His two predecessors also planted

trees of the same species when they visited Couvrelles: Blessed Alvaro del Portillo in 1988 and Bishop Javier Echevarria in 2011. The Ginkgo is a symbol of continuity that endures.

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## **August 2**

“When I learned that the Father was coming to France, I changed my vacation plans so that I could meet him in Paris,” says Sophia, who is 31 years old. Like her, many other people will be able to be with the Prelate of Opus Dei during his four-day stay in France. Many view him as “a bit French,” since he was born in the capital city of the country.

The first get-together with faithful of Opus Dei took place a few hours after his arrival, on August 1. The main reason for his trip, the Prelate said, is

“to encourage everyone to be faithful to Christ and to always be cheerful.”

## **Suffering is compatible with joy**

On Wednesday morning, he went to Fontneuve, a center of Opus Dei located in Neuilly, which offers spiritual and cultural activities for young women.

Monsignor Ocariz began by summing up the main message he wants to transmit during these days:

“Christians are called to be joyful, to have good humor, and to spread peace around them. Why? Because they are beloved children of God.”

Making reference to the difficulties each person faces in their life, the Prelate remarked: “At times we may encounter suffering, and we may cry.... But become sad? No!” Citing words of Saint Josemaria, he reminded people that we can be

cheerful also in difficult moments, with the help of prayer.

## **Why ask for anything when God knows everything?**

Marie, who is a high school teacher, asked what sense it makes to request something from “a God who knows everything I need, and much better than I do.” In first place, the Prelate replied, “because Jesus told us that we need to ask.” And also “because in prayer we open our soul to God and show we are ready to accept his will.” The get-together lasted 45 minutes and ended with the praying of the Angelus.

## **The power of friendship**

In a get-together held in Garnelles, a center close to the Seine River, Agustin, who is studying philosophy, said that sometimes he finds it hard to dialogue with people trapped in a “closed” rationalist environment,

where there is no room for faith. The Prelate pointed out the incoherence of trusting only in the judgment of reason, while “relativizing” all belief, and said that this could be a starting point for opening up a dialogue.

In any case, he added, “the best path for accompanying someone towards the truth is and always will be that of friendship.”

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