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Blessed Josemaría Escrivá Centenary Lecture at U.I.

The centenary celebration of the birth of the founder of Opus Dei, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, started on January 8, 2002 at the conference centre of the University of Ibadan with a seminar entitled “Holiness in Ordinary Life” given by eminent scholars.

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The Chairman of the seminar, Professor Joseph Obemeata in his opening speech said that the lay faithful should be grateful to Josemaria because through his teachings he made the faithful aware that their belief that it is only priests or religious that can be saints is wrong as anyone can be a saint in his or her everyday work.

Presenting the first lecture on “Sanctification of Ordinary work,” Dr. Bela explained that ordinary life involves work, family life, social or political activities and that Josemaria taught that it is the place and means of sanctification and the materials a Christian needs to build holiness upon. Speaking further on Josemaria’s teachings on ordinary life sanctification, the medical doctor said, one does not need to be extraordinary or live a secluded life to be a saint but use ordinary means while still deeply rooted in this world to

aspire to achieve holiness. In other words, one should do his work well, sanctify it, sanctify oneself in it and sanctify others through it.

Holiness, he said could be achieved in ones work if it is done well as an offering to God, hence, work could be offered to God. To work with love and to achieve sanctity in one's work, Dr. Bela gave four virtues that must be practiced; fortitude that is persevering despite all odds in your work; Temperance. which helps overcome love for excessive comfort and selfishness; Justice that is not neglecting fulfillment of ones duties to God, family, colleagues and society for work and fourthly, the virtue of providence which helps one at each stage of decision making.

Dr. John Anetor presenting the next lecture entitled "Marriage as a vocation, defined vocation as a calling; giving oneself once for all. He

urged married couples to take marriage as a vocation by being faithful to the call, working for its success, praying for it. Dr. Anetor resounded Blessed Josemaria's teaching on family values that nothing in a Christian home is useless as all can be sanctified as he Josemaria repeated frequently appealed to couples to make "their homes bright and cheerful."

Regarding marriage as a vocation, he said has an immense benefit which is clearly the fundamental antidote to all societal problems imaginable for everyone within the body of Christ is called to holiness according to his or her own state. For the married, they should not think that anything they do in life is more important than to be good Christian father or mother. Going on the same line after Josemaria's teachings on work, Dr. Anetor had earlier said that "he was almost tempted to say that marriage is a professional work, which we

must do well, sanctify it, sanctify ourselves in it and sanctify others through it.”

Presenting the third lecture “Authority and Freedom in Education”, Dr. Steve Olaoluwa Afolami gave a brief history of Josemaria. He stated that Blessed Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer y Albas was born January 9, 1902 in Barbastro, Spain, founded Opus Dei which means work of God on October 2. 1928 at 26 years and had the privilege of a sound Christian upbringing in a thoroughly Christian home by two saintly parents. Dr. Afolami defined authority as an unwelcome limitation of one’s freedom by an external force beyond one’s control; and from the traditional African Patriarchal family, the husband is the undisputed head of the wife (wives) and family, on whom disobedience is corrected by some physical

punishment, scolding or withdrawal of some privileges. He lamented that some women are not helping issues by willingly submitting to be second or third wife to satisfy the lust of a man who feels that with his money he can buy a wife. Authority, he stated is a necessity for sanctity in human society. In Christian home it is based on the mutual understanding that exist between husband and wife patterned along the line of the relationship between Christ and the Church, parents should bring up their children through living exemplary lives and administering of judicious admonition.

Dr. Afolami said that imposition of things through authoritarian method, tend to produce negative effect especially if such are not practiced by parents. Explaining freedom from Josemaria's point of view, he said people should do what

they are doing because they want to and not be bound by any vow, hence membership into Opus Dei is not bound to the Prelature by any vow. God he said wants children not slaves, “he respects our freedom” hence he wants our decision of obedience to him to come from our hearts and to use this freedom properly in love of God, as out of God’s love, freedom would be misused. Dr. Afolami telling parents that being a father or a mother is not simply a matter of bringing children into the world, called on Christian parents to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the development of their children into responsible men and women who would be authentic Christian beings conscious of the extent of their responsibility.

He advised parents to be their children’s friends, believe in them, find time to be with their children, listen to them and most importantly

to allow their children see that they are trying to live in accordance with their faith. When the children rebelled, he cautioned that parents should not be afraid but to listen to them and pray for them. If you act in this Christian manner they will come to you in simplicity and this is what peace in the family and truly Christian life means. There was forum for questions and answers at the end of the third lecture, during which poor attendance at good lectures as this was discussed reaching on agreement that those present should see they invite some one next time.

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