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Interview with the Postulator for the Cause of Ernesto Cofiño

Interview with Fr. Santiago Callejo, postulator of the cause for Ernesto Cofiño, on the occasion of the authorization for the promulgation of the decree on his heroic virtues.

12/14/2023

1. You have studied the life of Ernesto Cofiño thoroughly. In a

few words, how would you describe him?

Many people remember him as an exemplary husband and father, and for his activity in serving children, adolescents, and the most disadvantaged people in Guatemala. As a doctor, his desire was to heal people. He also wanted them to see Jesus serving them through their treatment.

Examining his life, it can be said that he followed the call to holiness that the Lord extends to everyone to the very end. Ernesto is known for many positive human characteristics: good humor, perseverance, elegance in the way he related to others, affability. At the same time, he had his flaws, like everyone else. For example, he evolved from a rather energetic and demanding temperament in his youth to the kind and welcoming character that could be seen at the

end of his life. The way he let divine grace act and responded to God's love are striking when you look at his life.

2. What does it mean for the Church to declare him "venerable"?

In a nutshell, it means that the Church has thoroughly studied both his life and the impact he had on the people of God and has concluded that Ernesto was a Christian who can be proposed as an example for others. I think he will be a familiar inspiration for the Church in Guatemala.

The declaration of his "venerability" expresses the fact that Ernesto responded to God's gifts by heroically living the Christian virtues, especially the virtue of charity. This declaration is a significant step towards his possible beatification and canonization.

3. How can Ernesto's life inspire Christians today?

He is a very relevant figure today, not only because he lived until the end of the 20th century, and his death is relatively recent. Many people can see themselves in him: he was, among other things, a family man, grandfather, friend, student, doctor, and teacher. He faced challenging circumstances, such as the death of his wife at a relatively young age, when their youngest child was seven years old. He also had to navigate numerous complicated social and professional situations.

His figure can be inspiring because it illustrates something Pope Francis often says, that holy people “discover the meaning of life by coming to the aid of those who suffer, understanding their anguish and bringing relief. They sense that the other is flesh of our flesh, and are not

afraid to draw near, even to touch their wounds. They feel compassion for others in such a way that all distance vanishes. In this way they can embrace Saint Paul's exhortation: 'Weep with those who weep' (Rom 12:15). Knowing how to mourn with others: that is holiness" (*Gaudete et exsultate*, no. 76). Ernesto did good for many people in various ways. He cared for children as a medical doctor, including caring for the unborn, advocating insistently for human life. He cared for those who benefited from the social initiatives he promoted. He helped others find God through his example. He helped his friends. And, of course, most importantly, he cared for his wife, children, and relatives.

In our times, everyone faces a variety of activities every day. It is no small challenge to find time and ways of reconciling family and

professional life, concern for others, etc. Like us, Ernesto lived in constant activity but he knew how to be a loving husband and dedicated father. He aimed to be a good doctor, a great professional, knowing that work was his way of serving others and changing the piece of the world God had entrusted to him. In this, he is similar to most of us: work and family are where we need to act as Jesus would. Ernesto devoted himself to serving others with all his heart. He also cared about fostering his own life as a Christian, he encouraged those around him to grow in their spiritual lives, and he acquired a professional prestige that earned him many accolades.

4. A doctor, husband, father... How did he find time to cultivate a heroic Christian life?

Perhaps, if we asked him this question, he would say, "In fact, I

tried to cultivate Christian life by being a doctor, husband, and father.” He did not cultivate a “heroic” Christian life separate from those aspects of his life; they were integral to his identity. He lived his Christian life to the full through his various occupations.

Those who knew him well agree that he never had a free minute, yet he was always available to those who needed him. His remarkable organizational skills undoubtedly helped with this. However, the driving force behind this was his relationship with Jesus Christ. His priority each day was attending Holy Mass, praying the Rosary, and spending time in personal prayer. By putting God first, all the aspects of his life were infused with deep unity and coherence.

5. Do you hear stories from people who have sought his intercession? Can you share some examples?

The office of postulation receives stories from many different places, although people from his native land and – since he was a doctor – people seeking his intercession to recover their health predominate.

I recall a simple favor, the account of which reached the office of postulation recently. The mother of two young children, going through months of viruses and fevers, including some hospitalization, would often seek Dr. Cofiño's intercession. On one occasion, her four-year-old daughter had been feverish for several days with no improvement. The mother took a prayer card of Ernesto and told her daughter that "her friend in Heaven would help them." The daughter asked, "Mom, why is Jesus wearing

glasses in this picture?” referring to the image of Dr. Cofiño. The mother explained that it was not Jesus, but a friend of hers, and she reflected on the challenge Christians have of ensuring that our faces reflect Jesus’s. She saw that her daughter was chatting with the doctor and she went outside for a moment. When she returned, about ten minutes later, the doctor took her temperature and saw it dropping from 38.5 to 37.6, then 37.1, etc. The mother is more grateful than she can express, and she asks Dr. Cofiño to pray for mothers, young children, and pediatricians.

I remember another story: a man shared that his 95-year-old mother suffered from an intestinal obstruction this year, causing an abdominal infection. The prognosis was bleak, and the only treatment option was surgery, which the doctors proposed as an exception,

given her age. She refused, requesting only palliative care. Relatives started praying, and the person seeking the favor thought of Ernesto, because he was an older man and, on top of that, a doctor. He began a novena, praying nine prayer cards each day. His mother began to improve from the very first day. Her intestines spontaneously started functioning. A month later, she could return home and now leads a normal life, with the normal limitations of her age.

6. Is there any anecdote that, in your opinion, reflects Ernesto's identity especially well?

I remember a well-known story from the doctor's life. At the age of 88, he and a friend were asking for donations to support a residence for university students. They were assaulted by two thieves with uncovered faces who pointed a

revolver at them and took them in their own vehicle to rob them elsewhere. The doctor remained calm. His friend recounted that he only shed a tear when they took his wedding ring, which he had not removed since his wedding. The doctor prayed quietly as the assailants drove the car to a deserted place, and the situation became tense. They ordered him to be quiet, but he replied, "I always pray." After these words, they decided to leave them in an open field, and one of the assailants held out his hand. The doctor replied, "Friend, I won't shake your hand now because you're on the wrong path. I will pray for both of you so that you find God, and when you change your life, I will be very happy to shake hands with you and your friend."

For me, this story highlights many of Ernesto's qualities, from his courage and supernatural vision to his

interest in helping everyone, even those who could be considered his enemies.

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