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The Prelate in Cebu (Philippines) 2023

Msgr. Fernando Ocariz was in Cebu on August 3-5, at the latter part of his 12-day apostolic trip to the Philippines. From there he flew to Indonesia, and will proceed to Australia and New Zealand.

08/08/2023

AUGUST 3, Thursday

Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, the Prelate of Opus Dei, landed at the Mactan Cebu International Airport shortly before

noon. “Bienvenido!” and “Welcome to Cebu, Padre” read the tarpaulin signs carried by the well-wishers. Some Cebu families with their children formally met him as he entered the private reception area. A boy dressed as Datu Humabon and a little girl dressed as Queen Juana gave him gifts. Humabon and Juana were the first converts to Christianity in 1521.

A good number from the various cities in the Visayas and Mindanao came to the airport to welcome the Prelate. The last time the Prelate came to Cebu was in 1998. They practically filled the reception area and all wanted to personally greet him. At the background, young women from Iloilo sang Spanish songs familiar to the Father, providing a jovial family atmosphere.

The Father was visibly pleased with the reception. He engaged one well-wisher after another with a constant smile. He listened to their little messages, thanked them for their gifts, and obliged every request for a photo, signature, and blessing. Those warm and familiar 20 minutes set the tone for the Father's stay in Cebu.

Lahug

At his residence in Lahug, the Father met with more families. They shared their family stories and some gave him personally crafted gifts. Some children had their small messages for him and gave him drawings and sketches. He blessed the children's foreheads. He gladly acceded to their requests to sign their mementos and take photos with him.

The Father received guests in his residence after lunch and dinner. They came from Iloilo, Bacolod, Cagayan de Oro, and Davao, sharing

with him stories about the apostolic activities in their place.

PAREF Springdale

In the mid-afternoon, Msgr. Ocariz visited PAREF Springdale school. He was welcomed by members of the Board of Trustees for PAREF schools in Cebu, PAREF Springdale management staff, teachers, and their families. Springdale is a private grade school and high school for boys.

He was shown to the school quadrangle, which is presided by bronze relief sculpture of the Holy Family designed by renowned Cebu artist, Celso Pepito. The Director of the school pointed out that the child Jesus in the relief is dressed as the Santo Niño of Cebu. Two boys entertained him with a violin number and a song.

Diocesan Priests

The Father proceeded to the meeting hall in Springdale where about 25 priests were eagerly awaiting him. Among them was Bishop Isabelo Abarquez of Calbayog (Samar), who brought 5 of his priests. Present were clergy from Cebu, Butuan, and Leyte.

The Prelate spoke to them about the dignity of the priestly ministry, telling them that priests are Christs on earth. He touched on the importance of diocesan priests living a deep fraternity among themselves, and providing support to priests who at times may feel lonely in their ministry.

Responding to a member of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross who asked “how to be good sons of St. Josemaria,” his advise was to be very natural and not to be afraid to ask our Founder for things. And then to strive to be faithful to the spirit he has left us.

At the end of the get together, he asked for their blessing.

Santo Niño of Cebu

The *Santo Niño* (Holy Child) holds a special place in the hearts of Filipinos, particularly those from Cebu.

The Prelate of Opus Dei visited the *Basilica Minore* of the *Santo Niño* of Cebu in the late afternoon. He was welcomed by the *Hermano and Hermana Mayor*. Also there to welcome the Father were families in their *Sinulog* attire and well-wishers from Davao, Cagayan de Oro, and West Visayas. The Father went out of his way to meet them before entering the Basilica.

While traversing the wide esplanade, some ladies asked him to bless an image of Sto. Niño to be placed in their Center in Davao. A group of ladies from Bacolod asked the Father

to bless a seedling to be planted in their new Center. A young couple asked him to bless the mitten and booties of their first child to be born in December.

The Augustinians are the custodians of the basilica. Father Ion escorted the Prelate to the second floor of the Augustinian Convent to pray before the original statue of the *Santo Niño*, the one gifted to Juana by Ferdinand Magellan in 1521. He laid flowers at the base of the image.

AUGUST 4, Friday

Banilad Center and BCPD

First thing in the morning, the Prelate celebrated Mass in the oratory of the Banilad Study Center. There he met patrons of the Dayao center for women in Davao City who showed him the design of the definitive center in Davao, which the Father blessed. When he asked 'Can I

go there? Will you invite me there?" there was a millisecond of shocked silence, followed by a thunderous "Yes, Father!"

He walked to the adjacent Banilad Center for Professional Development (BCPD), a technical-vocational school that has played a pivotal role in promoting women empowerment and providing livelihood skills to vulnerable sectors of society like the Indigenous Peoples, the out-of-school youths, and persons with disabilities.

The BCPD students welcomed the Prelate with a popular Cebuano song "I Love Cebu" the lyrics of which were changed into "We love Padre". He was beaming with joy as he listened and watched them dance. After the performance, the students approached him for the traditional "Mano Po" greeting (forehead on the hand of one's parent).

Members of the Management Staff alternately explained to him the various social programs of the school, a number of which are supported by international agencies. The Prelate met and blessed some Badjao women who finished Bread and Pastry Production in BCPD. He asked them to pray for him to which they all agreed to do.

They showed him the printed architect's perspective of the BCPD dream school in Minglanilla, Cebu. He wrote on it: "With my blessings" and signed his name.

The school gifted him with a toque with a logo of BCPD and declared him as the "Master Chef of BCPD." They also gifted him with a small backpack, an invitation for him to come to Cebu for another visit.

The Prelate encouraged them to continue their work in the school so that more women, families, and

communities benefit from their various social programs. Before he left, the Prelate posed for the final photo with the BCPD Patrons, Board members, faculty members, staff, and mentors.

(More to come)

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