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Pope Paul VI's First Visit to Centro ELIS

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1965. (...) Next to the ELIS was built the parish church of San Giovanni Battista al Collatino – a parish entrusted to priests of Opus Dei. (...) The Pope stayed well beyond the time planned for the visit. He celebrated Mass, blessed a statue of our Lady for the University of Navarre, and attentively visited the various parts of the Centro (Cesare Cavalleri, Immersed in God: Blessed Josemaria Escriva, founder of Opus Dei, as seen by his successor Alvaro del Portillo, p. 8).

Pope Paul VI came to Tiburtino for the solemn inauguration of the ELIS Centre, now up and running, together with a big hall of residence, a catering school and a parish church nearby, also entrusted to priests of the Work.

Pope Paul enjoyed the visit, recalling how years before, just after the end of the Second World War, he had

been passing through Tiburtino when some youths entreated him in the street, “Give us work! Give us work!”

“What work can you do?” he had asked them.

“Anything ... well, nothing actually,” came the painful answer.

Now he saw that demand fulfilled, and when Monsignor Escriva asked him to bless everyone there in the new buildings, the Pope proposed, “Let’s give the blessing together.” Monsignor Escriva was so moved by the Pope’s deference that he dropped to his knees and bowed his head.

Soon afterwards, as Paul VI was leaving, Monsignor Escriva knelt down once again outside the door on the wet ground – it had been raining – to kiss his ring. But the Pope took hold of his elbows, lifted him up firmly and embraced him, saying,

“Everything here is Opus Dei!” (Pilar Urbano, *El Hombre de Villa Tevere*, p. 338).

“Paul VI, who yearns so much for peace , who loves so much, who is so concerned for the humblest, and so strongly desires equality in the world, and for an end to poverty, told me through Cardinal Del’Acqua that he wanted to inaugurate Centro ELIS, in Tiburtino, before the Second Vatican Council ended, so that Bishops from all over the world could see how much he loved Opus Dei and people who need a better standard of living, who have rights but have no way of exercising those rights” (Josemaria Escriva, speaking at a gathering in Tajamar, Madrid, on October 1, 1967. Quoted in *Antes, mas y mayor*, Lazaro Linares, p. 163).

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