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Ninth Day: Father Joe Cremades (1931-2017)

On the ninth day after the passing of Father Joe Cremades, we are posting the eulogy delivered by Dr. Bernardo Villegas on May 10, 2017.

05/15/2017

Rev. Fr Jose Monerris Cremades

Eulogy by Dr. Bernardo Villegas

The recent passing away of Rev. Father Jose Cremades left a void in

the hearts of so many individuals in the Philippines and surrounding Asian countries where for the past fifty two years he had been guiding numerous souls as an indefatigable confessor and spiritual director. I had the fortune of knowing him all those years since Fr. Joe, as he was known to his many friends, was part of the small group of members of Opus Dei whom the Founder, St. Josemaria Escriva, tasked with initiating the apostolic activities of this Personal Prelature in the Philippines and other parts of East Asia. From 1966 to 1992, he was at the helm of Opus Dei as Counselor or Regional Vicar, using his natural talents and supernatural virtues to put the foundational stones for the growth of the apostolates of Opus Dei, not only in the Philippines, but in such other territories as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao, Singapore, South Korea and Indonesia.

Both of us had been involved in the apostolic activities of Opus Dei in the United States. Although we never met there since he was in the Midwest and I was in the East, I had known of how he heroically faced the challenge of helping to initiate the apostolates of Opus Dei in St. Louis, Missouri and later in Chicago with the great handicap of a Spaniard who did not know how to speak English and feeling even more helpless because as he himself recounted “he neither knew how to cook nor how to drive a car” which made him useless in the context of the daily realities of life in the U.S. then. As I learned from the other members of Opus Dei who were with him in those circumstances, he was not one to be daunted and with even his imperfect English, he was soon deeply involved in hearing confessions and giving spiritual guidance to numerous individuals,

both men and women, a task that he continued till the very end of his life.

He came to the Philippines in 1965, a year after the apostolates of Opus Dei started in the Philippines. For the handful of members of Opus Dei then, he was a very welcome addition because of his very cheerful disposition and quick wit. I remember he had a stock of jokes he learned from his stay in the United States which he amply employed to enliven our get-togethers.

Cheerfulness was one of his most outstanding virtues despite the fact that he was quite sickly and suffered innumerable operations, including a bout with cancer, that gave him so much suffering. He was an example to all of us and the many people who soon started to be in contact with Opus Dei because he never lost the sense of peace and joy, despite severe physical pains that came with the illnesses.

Thanks to his having learned how to speak English quite well during his stint in the United States, he gladly accepted the burden of giving retreats, conducting days of recollection and receiving countless lay men and women, hearing their confessions and imparting spiritual direction to them. Since the two other foreign priests (there were no Filipino priests then in Opus Dei) were struggling with their English, the burden of giving pastoral attention to the faithful of the Prelature, Cooperators and friends fell squarely on his shoulders. Faithful to the wishes of the Founder of Opus Dei, he spent hours and hours daily in hearing confessions and imparting spiritual direction to lay people who were convinced by him to strive for sanctity in the midst of their ordinary duties of each day, the very charisma of Opus Dei. Even when he was appointed by St. Josemaria Escriva, then President

General of Opus Dei, to be the Regional Vicar of the Personal Prelature in 1966 until 1992, he always found time for what he considered the most important task of helping souls individually to seek sanctity in the middle of the world. When in 2003 he was relieved of his responsibilities in the governance of Opus Dei, he poured himself entirely to an abundant pastoral work in various centres of Opus Dei. A friend of mine commented that he was acting like a conscientious medical doctor towards his patients. He decided to schedule confession and spiritual direction in at least three venues strategically spread out in the Metro Manila area to make it more convenient to the people who were seeing him.

Egged on by St. Josemaria and later by his successor Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Fr. Joe, as the Regional Vicar of Opus Dei for the Philippines and

the rest of East Asia, mobilised the gradually increasing members of Opus Dei to put up some ambitious apostolic instruments for the good of souls, such as the Makiling Conference Center, the Center for Research and Communication (which later evolved into the University of Asia and the Pacific), the Tanglaw Residence for women, the Dualtech Training Center, the Punlaan Training Center, and a host of educational and cultural centers in various cities of the country and starting in 1981, in various territories of East Asia such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and Macao.

He knew how to inspire all of us to heed the advice of St. Josemaria when he said, “Dream and your dreams will fall short of short of reality.” When one less daring member of Opus Dei asked him how he was going to finance the building of the Makiling Conference Center

without money, he replied: "Money? I don't worry. I pray!" Indeed, he prayed as if everything depended on God. But he did not hesitate to work as if everything depended on him. Especially impressive were his efforts to literally beg for financial assistance from as many generous souls as possible so that he could recover from antique shops sacred vessels such as chalices, ciboriums, chasubles, images, and other liturgical articles that had been sold for profane use so that they could be restored to divine worship. He championed the cause of giving to the Lord the most precious and beautiful objects that money could buy in the construction of chapels and oratories in the various centres where the apostolate of the members of Opus Dei is being carried out. The Sancta Maria Stella Orientis Chapel of the University of Asia and the Pacific is a testimony to the great supernatural outlook he had in never

being stingy when it comes to divine worship.

Working closely with him in obtaining funds for the necessary instruments to carry out the corporate works of apostolate of Opus Dei, I never stopped marvelling at his financial savvy. Some of us attribute this trait to his coming from a region of Spain famous for very enterprising merchants and financiers. He was able to combine supernatural daring with a very pragmatic sense of getting the most out of scarce resources. I still can not get over the way he was able to convince the CEO of a conglomerate to lend us money to buy the property on which the Makiling Conference Center was built. When the gentleman asked him if we had the collateral to back up the loan, he innocently replied that with the money we were asking to borrow, we would buy the property and then use

the purchased property as collateral for the loan. It must have been his prayers that convinced this experienced business man to agree to this very unorthodox financial transaction. Fr. Joe had the uncanny talent of parlaying the contacts he made through his personal apostolate to be able to raise funds needed for the apostolic projects of Opus Dei. Up to the end of his life, he was helping a group of us who were raising funds to put up the University Residence Hall attached to the University of Asia and the Pacific and a much bigger project of relocating our undergraduate programs to a larger campus outside of Metro Manila.

When he replied “Money? I pray!” he could have added “I offer sacrifices.” I know of very few people who have suffered more pains from sicknesses than Fr. Joe. Over a period of some thirty years, he underwent many

operations in his spine, intestines (cancerous), and multiple heart operations. Throughout all these illnesses, he never lost his peace and joy, giving all of us an example of serenity in the midst of sufferings. These many bouts with physical pains did not stop him to continue with his pastoral work of helping many individuals in their struggle for personal sanctity. Up to the very end of his life, he was thinking of the future generations of people who would become members of Opus Dei to continue the work he helped start in the Philippines and all over Asia. He reminded some of us about the important apostolate of getting many young people to teach catechism to little children and to get them to make many visits to the poor. Imitating the example of St. Josemaria himself, he expressed the certainty that by involving these young people in these works of mercy, there will be abundant

vocations that will come to Opus Dei and to the whole Church. We could consider this as his last will and testament.

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