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"Trusting in the Holy Spirit's guidance"

An interview with Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz about the upcoming Congress that will elect a new Prelate of Opus Dei.

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On December 22, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, auxiliary vicar of Opus Dei, publically convoked the Congress that will elect Bishop Javier Echevarría's successor as head of the Prelature. On January 21, a plenary session of the Council for women in the Prelature will be held in Rome,

which will present to the Congress a list of suggestions for candidates. The voting of the elective Congress will begin on January 23.

by Rodrigo Ayude

How are the people in the Prelature of Opus Dei living this period of preparation for the election of the new Prelate. As auxiliary vicar, what are your sentiments during these days?

I think that all of us, both men and women, in the Prelature are trying to foster during this period a spirit of prayer, going especially to the Holy Spirit. In fact, the elective Congress will begin with the votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, to ask for guidance in all our steps. Faith gives us the certainty that our Lord is leading his Church, and therefore also this portion of his people.

Moreover, this time of Christmas will help us prepare our heart for the elective Congress, by directing our eyes to what is essential: to Jesus, the Child-God, the face of the Father's Mercy. In contemplating the mystery at Bethlehem, we will also find our Lady, Mother of the Church, and we will have recourse to her intercession.

We are living these days closely united to the Holy Father Francis and the whole Church, of which Opus Dei is a small part. Naturally, we also have a great sense of gratitude for the pastoral guidance and good example Bishop Javier Echevarría left us.

Following Saint Josemaría's footsteps and the witness of his first two successors, we are pondering in our heart on the inheritance we have received, which we need to pass on as light and consolation for today's

world, just as Christ's disciples have tried to do over the centuries. I am certain that we will unite ourselves wholeheartedly to the Prelate who is elected, to help him guide the Prelature in current-day society.

In the two previous elections, the “number 2” in Opus Dei was chosen as Prelate. In 1975, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, who for many years had been the Founder’s main assistant. Then, with Bishop Del Portillo’s death, the vicar general, Bishop Javier Echevarría, was elected. Do you think this trend might repeat itself in future elections?

It's true that this was the case in the previous elections. I think this was due to the special situation of the first two successors, who were formed directly by Saint Josemaría. The electors voted in conscience for these persons. It wasn't an automatic

process. It seemed best to them to elect those who had worked most closely with the Founder.

Now circumstances have changed somewhat. The new Prelate won't be someone who worked so directly with the Founder as Blessed Alvaro del Portillo and Bishop Javier Echevarría did, although they may have known and interacted with him.

In my opinion, the elective Congress has before it many worthy candidates, who have the virtues and prudence needed to take on this responsibility. The electors have the responsibility to vote, in conscience, for the person they consider best suited. The name of the person chosen will be sent right away to Pope Francis, since the confirmation of the Roman Pontiff is required.

When an election takes place, public opinion tends to view things

in political terms, speaking often about “currents,” “trends” etc. What is your reaction when things are focused in this way?

These interpretations are far removed from how those who experience this election as a spiritual and ecclesial reality view it. Those who have the responsibility for an election like this place their trust in the “current” of the Holy Spirit, as Pope Francis encouraged us to do a few days ago, when speaking about the immediate future of Opus Dei.

It’s true, as you said, that sometimes partial interpretations are made, from an overly human or political point of view. In placing the accent on these features, variety comes to be viewed as a problem. In my opinion, pluralism and variety are a great treasure. The electors of Opus Dei, like the other faithful in the Prelature, come from countries all

over the world, and have quite different ways of being and cultural trends, with tastes and styles typical of their homeland and family. This diversity, so strongly fostered by Saint Josemaría, is compatible with what is essential: fidelity to the charism received by the Founder and recognized by the Church. Being faithful to this spiritual inheritance (with some clear features such as the sense of divine filiation, the search for sanctity in the ordinary circumstances of each day, a lay mentality and priestly soul, etc.) assures an underlying unity among everyone

The two previous Prelates worked directly with the Founder. Does the election of the third Prelate open up a new epoch in Opus Dei?

There come to mind some words that Bishop Echevarría often told us: “Opus Dei is in your hands, in the

hands of each person in the Work.” This is a reality that now takes on new force. The current circumstances are a call to responsibility, since each of us has to strive more diligently to incarnate the legacy of Saint Josemaría in the world as it is now, for people today.

Certainly, whoever is elected Prelate will be able to rely on the prayer of the faithful of Opus Dei and of so many other people. He will also have the support of the team he assembles, and work alongside others: collegiality is another key feature of Saint Josemaría’s legacy.

What do you see as the main challenges that the new Prelate of Opus Dei will face?

The principal challenge is helping each person in Opus Dei to learn to build up the Church in their own place of work and professional environment, in the world of culture

and the family. By their Christian witness, the Prelature's faithful can help people today to find Christ in "the middle of the street," in a society that each day is becoming more varied. Thus the need exists to carry out a catechesis that is up to date in the world of the professions, right where people today find themselves.

Another challenge is giving joy and hope to today's world. Not to an ideal world but to this complex world of ours, riven with wounds and so in need of charity. In other words, sanctifying ordinary life today, bringing Christ to all the existential peripheries, as Pope Francis reminds us.

With God's grace, it will be possible to teach people to strive to live with their heart placed in Christ and their feet on the ground, aware of their own limitations. The joy of living the Christian message, embodied in their

own life, will be spread among those alongside them: from mechanic to mechanic, from nurse to nurse, from businessman to businessman, from journalist to journalist...

There will also be the need to strengthen the personal initiative of thousands of people who, spurred by love for Christ and other men and women, will be able to begin initiatives that respond to the great challenges of our day and age: fostering professional honor and ethics, the struggle against poverty, help for refugees, the fight against unemployment, strengthening the family, etc. In summary, hopefully we can contribute to building up the Church as the “world reconciled with God,” as Saint Augustine said.

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