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Aug 2: Meeting the Prelate of Opus Dei in Singapore

Lin Hao is a Taiwanese member of Opus Dei. He recounts his personal impressions of the events leading up to the meeting his family had with the Prelate of Opus Dei in Singapore on August 2 and the fatherly advice they received, all of which was made possible because of the love and support of his family.

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Lin met Bishop Echevarría when he visited to Taiwan in 1996. In June this year, when Lin wrote to Bishop Echevarría extending him birthday wishes, he took the opportunity to invite him to visit Taiwan again. Providentially, Bishop Echevarría was then preparing for his tour to Asia and Australia. Although Taiwan was not on his itinerary, this did not dampen Lin's fervor to meet him. His wish eventually came true: he traveled with his family to Singapore to meet the Bishop and to receive his blessings. In this personal account, he recalls with affection the words of Bishop Echevarría and the details of their meeting.

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The Prelate of Opus Dei visits Southeast Asia

Bishop Echevarría turned 76 this June. To wish him happy birthday, I wrote a letter to the Father (members

of Opus Dei affectionately address the Bishop simply as “the Father”), telling him about my apostolic endeavours. I also took the opportunity to remind him that his last visit to Taiwan was already 12 years ago. In between, I had seen him during the Canonization of St Josemaría in 2002 in Rome. Then we had visited the Opus Dei Centre at Villa Tevere but there was no chance to meet the Father in person. In my letter, I expressed my filial love for him and my sincere wish to have him again in Taiwan, also reassuring him of my constant prayers for his intentions.

Very soon afterwards, I heard that Bishop Echevarría would be traveling to Australia for the World Youth Day. On his way, he would visit India, Hong Kong, Macau, Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia. Unfortunately, the itinerary did not include Taiwan. All of us in Taiwan

were eager to find ways to meet the Father during his visit to Asia and to hear his words.

I was considering the possibility of traveling to Singapore to attend some get-togethers with the Father. Since there would be a good number of faithful of Opus Dei in Singapore, and those from nearby countries would also be going to Singapore to see him, I realized that there was not much of a chance for my family to be received by the Father privately. In addition, there were considerations of finance and work commitments. So at that stage, I was all resigned to accompany the Father on his visit to Asia with my prayers. However, I was encouraged by the priest whom I usually talk with to realize my strong desire to be with the Father, to receive his blessing and to show him our love and support. Eventually, everything was arranged: there would be a chance for my family to

see the Father in Singapore. The next task then was for me to convince my family to make the trip to Singapore.

Convincing my family

My wife and daughter were not expecting my proposal. Furthermore, my wife felt that we were already sufficiently blessed by God's grace. I pointed out that since the Father was already 76, we couldn't be sure when our next meeting could be; and if there was a chance to see him in Singapore, we should not let the opportunity go. I also offered to finance the trip from my savings. After due consideration, the conclusion was this: the only reason to give in to a family member's wish is simply out of love for one another. So they decided to second my proposal – we would go to Singapore after all!

Still there was no absolute certainty that we will have the chance to be

received privately by the Father. In mid July, I received a request to deliver a package to the Bishop on our trip to Singapore. Accepting this 'courier' duty brought much benefit since the chance of a close-up meeting with the Bishop was thereby considerably increased.

At the same time, I received Bishop Echevarría's reply to my letter. He wrote, "I am looking forward to visit Taiwan. Pray for me so that Our Lord grants me chance to visit to this beautiful land." Soon afterwards, I received confirmation that we would be received by the Father at 6:30 p.m. on August 2.

On August 1, we left home at 5 a.m. and landed at Changi Airport in Singapore at noon. By the time we finished checking in at the hotel and attending Holy Mass at the nearby Sacred Heart Church, it was already 9 hours since we last ate.

The General Get-together at Orchid Country Club

In the afternoon of August 2, we made our way to Orchid Country Club for the General get-together that would last from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. At the Club, I met members and priests of Opus Dei whom I have not seen for years. After some conversation, we took our seats. I also met a Supernumerary from Malaysia who was there with his family. At 3 o'clock sharp, Bishop Echevarría entered the hall accompanied by Don Fernando, Don Joaquin and Monsignor Ramon Lopez. He spoke in Spanish and the simultaneous translation was very fluent.

During the get-together, the Father mentioned that there were presently some 90,000 faithful of Opus Dei. He encouraged us to love the Pope a lot, and told us that the 82 year-old Holy Father had rested at the Kenthurst

Conference Centre in Australia before the World Youth Day began. The Pope was accompanied by 3 priests and 2 numeraries of Opus Dei and had rested well at Kenthurst. Bishop Echevarría was with the Holy Father during the World You Day. He recalled the Holy Father telling the youth, “Dear young people, you traveled with enthusiasm from all over the world for the World Youth Day. But for this 80 year-old Pope, it is tough traveling to be with you from half-way across the world.”

On the day he arrived in Singapore, Bishop Echevarría had been held back in a traffic jam. This prompted the Bishop to recount an anecdote from Ireland where a Supernumerary was also caught in the midst of heavy traffic. Without losing his peace, he waited patiently and rolling down the window, he began a conversation with the young woman in the next car, who not long

after became his wife. Subsequently, his wife also became a member of Opus Dei.

The Father also reminded us that the only 'weapon' Opus Dei has is prayer; there was no other secret. No matter what happens, we should remain cheerful and optimistic. We should be prayerful, responsible, faithful, mortified; making a sincere effort to work well, to be apostolic and be faithful to the end.

At some point, the Father answered some questions from those who attended the get-together. A Supernumerary, who is a working mother with 6 children, asked about the up-bringing of children. Bishop Echevarría was delighted to hear that she had 6 children and praised her for her generosity. In reply, he told us about a Supernumerary who has 16 children, and whose approach was to first teach the older children

well so that these could be good leaders for the younger children. Each child was given house chores and assigned responsibilities. Bishop Echevarría advised, “You who are parents need to train the older children well and nurture their sense of responsibility so they can help you run the home well.”

On being reminded twice by the Regional Vicar, Father Ramon Lopez, that time was nearly up, the Father said with good humour, “You see how time flies! Father Ramon has been telling me it is time. My time is entirely under their control! There are other get-togethers to follow, so without further delay, let me give you my blessing.”

The Lin Family Meets Bishop Echevarría

After the get-together, I spent some time catching up with other members and taking some

photographs. At about 5 p.m., we started to make our way to the Opus Dei Centre for our meeting with the Father. The Centre was a fair distance away. On the MRT, we prayed the Rosary together and with the help of Our Lady, we arrived on time. There were already other families waiting at the Centre.

Soon Bishop Echevarría entered with Father Ramon. I stepped forward to embrace the Bishop and then he shook hands with my wife and daughter. We gave him the present we had prepared for him: a heart-shaped crystal paper weight with the engraving “Love Taiwan with all your heart”. We also showed him some photographs of the family and those taken at a Supernumeraries’ seminar we had in Taiwan earlier in the year. Bishop Echevarría blessed the photographs one by one. Then speaking in Spanish, with Father Marin interpreting, Bishop

Echevarría said, “I am sorry for being late.” Although I assured him it was not a problem, he insisted that it was his fault. I was impressed with the attention and the care he shows to details.

Then I told the Father, “Father this time you missed Taiwan, but we miss you too, and so here we are.” He answered, “I love Taiwan very much, and I would very much like to go there.” I interrupted him, replying that we love him very much too. “Next time when I visit Japan and Korea, I will definitely come by Taiwan.” We were delighted to hear that.

Bishop Echevarría continued, “St Josemaria cared very much about the apostolic work in Taiwan and China. Taiwan is like a springboard to China where members can prepare themselves for the apostolate in China. The fruit of apostolic work

among the Chinese people will be bountiful and will have much impact on the rest of the world!”

He went on to say, “You must love your family; the husband and the wife need to love each other, and you must love Maryjo (our daughter), and you must love other children generously too. You should pray fervently, be responsible and loyal, be generous in mortification and sacrifice. You must be charitable and patient, and uphold the virtue of hope by beginning again and again. You should work seriously and be very apostolic; these two things are also important.

After that conversation, we had some photos taken with the Father, and he blessed our family and gave each of us a Rosary. Before he left, he embraced me warmly again with much paternal love.

We left the Centre at 7 p.m. On our way to dinner, we contentedly recalled every move and every word from the Father. I was so grateful to my wife and daughter for their support in fulfilling my desire to see the Father, and I told them so. Although Maryjo's feet were hurting in her new shoes, she did not complain while she walked barefoot with the shoes in her hands. The glow of the evening sun sealed in the beauty of a truly blessed day.

The Get-together with Supernumeraries

Very soon it was 7:30 p.m., time for me to make my way to another get-together at 8 p.m. at Guild House in the campus of the National University of Singapore. This time I almost got lost. Fortunately I met a fellow who asked me for directions and was also lost. Together we were able to find our way to Guild House.

There were about 100 men at the get-together coming from Singapore and other Southeast Asian countries. I was happy to be able to find a seat in the first row, so I was able to hear the Father very well.

Bishop Echevarría entered the hall at 8 pm sharp. His advice was a lot more direct and powerful than in the afternoon. I remember the Father words, “You need to take care of your interior life; fulfill your daily norms well. If you do not build up your interior life, you are deceiving Opus Dei, deceiving your family and deceiving yourself.”

“You need to give importance to the Sacrament of reconciliation, to spiritual direction and the fraternal chat with your directors. You need to continually renew yourselves, beginning over and over again. You have to be faithful to your calling to sanctity, with a sense of

responsibility, persevering right up to the end.”

Towards the end, the Father said with good humour, “I know you have not yet had your dinner. If I retain you any longer, your wives will certainly have an opinion... So I will now give you my blessing.”

Grateful to God for all the grace

We all left the get-together in high spirits. That day was the second time we have been received by the Father since he visited Taiwan in 1996. I am very grateful to Father Ramon and the members in Singapore for their organization, enabling me to receive such wonderful gifts of grace.

I feel deeply about this entire experience and was reminded of these words of Jesus, “Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and the door shall be opened to you. (Matthew 7:7)” We

need to return God's love with love. We must not let Him down. I took all these gifts back to Taiwan, plus the good news about the Bishop's forthcoming visit to Taiwan. It is time that we start preparing for his visit.

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