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# **I have learned from St Josemaría to serve the Church**

Msgr. Philippe Jourdan is a priest of Opus Dei and Apostolic Administrator of Estonia. He is the second Catholic bishop to be ordained in Estonia in the last 500 years.

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On 23rd March 2005, Msgr. Philippe Jourdan was appointed Apostolic Administrator of Estonia by Pope John Paul II, becoming the second

Catholic bishop to be ordained in Estonia in the last 500 years since the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Msgr. Jourdan's predecessor Eduard Profittlich (S.J.) died in 1942 as a martyr in the Soviet concentration camp of Kirov.

## **In honour of Pope John Paul II**

For the Catholic Church in Estonia, it was a historical moment. On Saturday, 10th September 2005, for the first time since the Second World War, a bishop was ordained in the country. Msgr Jourdan said, “It is a big step for the life of this portion of the Church, and a sign of the Pope’s confidence in us: we have come of age!”

The fact that one of the last pastoral decisions of John Paul II, a few days before his death in 2nd April 2005, had been the nomination of a bishop for Estonia has moved many Estonians. “That is why I wanted the

Ordination to take place on 10th September, anniversary of his visit to Estonia twelve years ago,” Msgr. Jourdan mentioned. “That way, we were better able to honour his memory.”

The Episcopal Ordination took place in St Olaf’s Church, thanks to the graciousness of the Baptist Community, as the Catholic cathedral of Sts Peter and Paul was too small for the occasion. St. Olaf’s church in Tallinn is believed to have been built in the 12th century and to have been the centre for Tallinn’s Scandinavian community prior to its conquest by Denmark in 1219. It is dedicated to King St. Olaf II of Norway (995-1030). In spite of the fact that Catholics are a minority in Estonia, it continues to proudly call itself the “Land of Mary”, thanks to a decree of Pope Innocent III given in 1215.

The ordination and installation of the new bishop was presided by Archbishop Peter Zurbriggen, Apostolic Nuncio to the Baltic countries. Two others, Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz of Moscow and Bishop Javier Echevarría, prelate of Opus Dei, were the co-consecrating bishops. Aside from the lay faithful and Church dignitaries, the President, the ex-President and some ministers of the Republic were also present.

## **Serving the Church in Estonia**

“The situation in Estonia is challenging for the Church,” Msgr Jourdan said. After the lifting of prohibitions, the Catholic Church started to resume her activities in the 1920s, only to be completely repressed with the Soviet invasion until 1990. And in the last 15 years, the wave of materialism has left only 30% of Estonians with any faith, of

whom a small percentage are Catholics.

“But this is can also be considered as an opportunity. Christianity in the Baltic Countries has always suffered from being considered as something imposed, especially by the occupying power, be it German, Swedish or Russian. (...) It is up to us to show that Christianity does not impose itself with the sword and fire, but with love and peace.”

In a land where there are few Catholics, Msgr. Jourdan tells us how he sees his mission: “I have learnt from St Josemaría to serve the Church as she wants to be served, to love her with my whole heart in all her Roman and universal dimensions. My experience in Estonia has strengthened this conviction and has taught me to love our brethren who are not yet united to the Church. In this country of

Lutheran and Orthodox traditions, I think my Episcopal motto “*Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam: All with Peter to Jesus through Mary*” – which I also owe to the Founder of Opus Dei – highlights the love that should unite us: the search for Christ, the recourse to Mary and the desire that we become one flock of the same Shepherd.”

### **His parents**

Referring to his French heritage and his parents, he said, “I am very grateful to country of my birth. I always maintain a special union with the Church in France as she has nurtured me in the Faith.”

“And as for the education that I have received from my parents, I can find no words to thank their selflessness. To them, firstly, I owe my vocation. Of the three in the family, two of us are priests. This is without doubt a gift that God desires for many

families. At the same time, it requires a generous response on the part of parents who are profoundly Christian.”

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Msgr. Philippe Jourdan was born in Dax, France. While studying mathematics and engineering at the *Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées* in Paris, he became a member of Opus Dei. Subsequently in 1988, he was ordained a priest in the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. In 1996, he was appointed Vicar General of the Apostolic Administration of Estonia, the highest Church official in residence in Estonia. During that time, he was also the Parish Vicar of the Cathedral of Sts Peter and Paul in Tallinn.

Msgr. Philippe Jourdan speaks in addition to French, fluent Estonian, Russian, English, Italian, Spanish and German.

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