

"Many people are thirsting for God"

From his experience as parish priest in Seville, Fr. Gregorio is convinced that many people are thirsting for God.

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Fr. Gregorio is 32 years old and is the parish priest of the *Church of Our Lady of the Olives and St Joseph the Worker* in Dos Hermanas, Seville. His pastoral duties extend to the more than 40 000 parishioners who live in the 19 towns of his parish. They are simple working folks with the

natural cheerfulness characteristic of people from that part of Spain. We interviewed him in a small park nestled between apartment blocks, close to his church.

How did you discover your vocation as a priest? My parents are good Christians and they taught me from young to trust God and to be simple when talking to Him. The whole family goes to Mass on Sundays, and I served as altar boy in the Monastery of the Incarnation in Seville.

Later as a teenager, although I continued to go for Sunday Mass, I grew cold in my relationship with God. It's strange: I barely prayed but I remember that coherence was something that I appreciated as a virtue. Any behaviour that was incoherent annoyed me, with that unreasonable irritation that is sometimes seen in adolescents.

I finished high school and started to read Law. I enjoyed hanging out with my friends and we talked about everything typical of university students: the classes, the professors, career options, politics, friendships, sports, the desire to enjoy life... But in the first year, I felt a certain restlessness. The happiness that I sought was not in the nights out, neither in the parties nor in that superficiality that leaves you empty inside...

My dislike for anything incoherent, which had caused me enough headaches in my teenage days, was leading me towards God. A guy from my group of friends spoke to me about Opus Dei, the little of which I knew at that time was largely negative. Without knowing the spirit of the Work, I used to think that it was for the elite and powerful.

In my second year, I started going almost everyday to a centre of Opus Dei in Seville, the club for university guys called the *Plaza de Cuba*. I was impressed with their cheerfulness, good humour and the naturalness with which they treated everyone. My Christian life started to grow and I resolved to go for Mass daily. While talking to God in prayer, unsuspecting horizons and the desire, hidden deep in my soul, to give myself to the Lord unfolded.

I must say that I had a girlfriend then, a wonderful girl with whom I was going steady for some months. Through the conversations I had with the priest at the Centre of the Work, I was encouraged to grow in my life of piety and to live a chaste courtship.

As time went by, I saw my vocation clearly as a priest and decided to

enter the Diocesan seminary of Seville in September 1998.

What is your ordinary life in the parish like? Day by day, I perceive more clearly that many people are thirsting for God. When I started in this parish, I never dreamt of the affection that I would receive from the parishioners.

In my mind, it is clear that a priest has to be a man of God. That is why I need to pray, the Holy Mass, and to have filial recourse to the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph...

I also resolved to take very good care of the sick in the area. I try to visit them frequently, to lighten their pain wherever possible, to pray for them while leaning on their prayers, which have so much value in the eyes of God.

During the first years, I tried to send a Christmas card to everyone who

belonged to the Parish: 40 000 people. Some weeks later, a lady appeared at the church asking to return to the faith; she had not been practicing for some time. When I asked her what prompted that decision, she told me, “No one has ever sent me a Christmas card. When I received the card from the Parish, I decided to start living my faith again.”

You can see the Holy Spirit acting in the souls! Thanks be to God, two young men from the Parish are already in the diocesan seminary, and more people are coming to the Sacrament of Confession. There is so much to give thanks to God for!

Last June 2009, a relic of St Josemaría Escrivá was installed in your parish. How does the Work help you in your priestly vocation? Through the spirit of Opus Dei, I have learnt that my priestly vocation takes

on its fullest meaning when I am completely united to my Bishop, Cardinal Carlos Amigo and to the Assistant Bishop of the diocese, Fr. Juan José Asenjo; when I am very united to my brother priests of the diocese, and of course, when I try to be close to my parishioners, helping them in everything they need and praying for them. I discovered this marvel about the priestly vocation thanks to the spirit of Opus Dei. I am much indebted to St Josemaría for his spirit of sacrifice in the formation of diocesan priests. We want to honor his memory in our Parish, so that many souls would entrust themselves to his intercession.
