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The Prelate of Opus Dei in Seville: "Grow in friendship, grow through friendship"

From 4 to 8 May, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz greeted, visited, and encouraged several thousand people in Seville, Spain. In different gatherings, he addressed the concerns of the people before him, directing them toward God's love and deep personal friendship, which heals hearts one at a time and fosters the Church's growth in charity.

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Like many others when they first come to Seville, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, placed all the work he wanted to carry out in the Andalusian capital under the protection of Nuestro Padre Jesús del Gran Poder [Jesus of Great Power, the basilica of the city] when he arrived on 4 May. The following morning, he visited the image of Our Lady of the Kings, patron saint of the city and archdiocese, in the Seville Cathedral, before meeting with Archbishop José Ángel Saiz Meneses.

Filling ourselves with hope in the apostolate

In receptions with education, social, managerial, and family groups, as well as in three encounters with hundreds of families from Andalusia

and Extremadura in the Cartuja Center Cite auditorium in Seville, Msgr. Ocariz encouraged his listeners to be hopeful in the apostolate.

He listened attentively to stories about the personal apostolic initiatives of a group of university professors at the Colegio Mayor Alborán, including a seminar on the "Francis economy" and a course on faith and reason for university women.

He met with representatives from the Attendis Group, an educational community with twenty schools in the main cities of the south, now celebrating its fiftieth anniversary in Andalusia and Extremadura. He encouraged them to carry out the meeting's slogan: "Revisit the beginning to envision the future." They wanted to recapture the inspiration St. Josemaría gave the families who started and first ran the

schools. Msgr. Ocariz invited them to appreciate how "each person is worth all the blood of Christ and, therefore, every effort to save a soul, to help a person, is worthwhile."

In the Albaydar educational center, a corporate work of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Ocariz blessed a plaque commemorating the consecration of the altar of the oratory by St. Josemaría on 1 October 1968. St. Josemaría visited Albaydar twice, and the plaque bears a phrase from his last visit in 1972: "Love well, love him well. Treat the Lord well for me! This oratory gives me great joy. I like it. I see that you love him." After blessing the plaque, Msgr. Ocariz greeted the board of directors, management team, teaching staff, administration, and service personnel.

He encouraged Ana (a physical education teacher from Jerez) to

"really love people, without fear," Rosario (the grandmother of Pedro Ballester, a young numerary who died of cancer in Manchester in 2018) to share her wisdom and experience with her grandchildren, Beatriz (a lawyer) to cultivate deep friendships with her professional colleagues, Teresa and Antonio (a young married couple) to use the power of social media to do good, and Maria (a forensic doctor) to fight the challenges of the "culture of death" with prudence, courage, and the closeness born of friendship.

Balance means putting family first

Maria and Fran, who work in fashion, asked him how to balance work and family. The Prelate explained that "balancing work and family means putting family and charity first and establishing a flexible, orderly hierarchy of values

each person chooses to submit to, to care for their families."

Goico works in an agency in the mornings and in the executive secretary's office in a university residence in the afternoons. Msgr. Ocáriz encouraged him to seek balance too, by "making your work, at home and in your business, an opportunity to be with Christ."

Luis, the director of an educational centre, asked about setting an example at home. The Prelate told him that parents are responsible for showing their children what sobriety looks like "by moderating your expenses, leisure, and food... Not lecturing them but, through your example, showing the joy you experience and explaining why it is worthwhile."

God's will is what is best for us

Isa, an assistant numerary, asked him about vocation. After explaining that vocation is a gift from God, the Prelate insisted that it is important to understand that the vocational phenomenon in the Work is the same for everyone: "Every vocation to Opus Dei rests on the same pillars: the sanctification of work, divine filiation, the centrality of the Eucharist, love for freedom, apostolic zeal... It is the same vocation because we have the same means: prayer, the plan of life, circles, retreats... And we all have the same mission: to bring this world to God, to transform the world into something pleasing to God. We are to open the divine ways of the earth, as St. Josemaría used to say, through the capacity that God gives us to sanctify work."

Miguel, who has been a supernumerary for over thirty years, told the Prelate that seeing new ecclesial realities and movements brings him joy because they show the Church's vitality. He said that his vocation to Opus Dei fills and involves his whole life and asked how to value and make good use of the means of formation the Work offers to become saints in the middle of the world. The Prelate told him that he might not hear anything new in his means of formation: what is most important is to have an attitude of personal examination, asking the Holy Spirit for light and strength. He also noted that there are many ways to follow Jesus Christ and that each person should follow the path to which God calls him or her.

It is possible to suffer and be happy

"When it is difficult for us to see, when it is difficult for us to understand, that God is truly the way, the truth, and the life, let us realize that love is made manifest on the Cross," the Prelate said at the beginning of one of three encounters that filled the auditorium of the Isla de la Cartuja in Seville.

He added that when we notice the objective difficulties presented to us by our environment, we should think that "for just this reason, the Lord counts more and more on each of us and gives us more grace to forget about ourselves and think of others. This formula is so effective," he said, paraphrasing St. Josemaría, "that the Lord rewards it with a humility full of joy."

The Prelate of Opus Dei also highlighted the importance of being happy despite our difficulties because, although it may seem paradoxical, we are able to find happiness amid pain and suffering. "This can be seen and felt in St. Josemaría's life," he explained. "In the last years of his life, he had health issues and suffered greatly because of the crisis in the Church, and yet, those of us who were with him saw that he was happy and good-humoured. It was not because he made a special effort with us: he was happy in suffering. This is only possible in union with Jesus Christ."

Fear is not Christian

David proudly shared his joy over his children's vocations and asked Msgr. Ocariz for advice about how to explain it to other parents. "Share your experience," the Prelate encouraged him. "Respect their

freedom, and try to explain that we cannot be afraid of the Lord, because fear is not Christian."

Similarly, in a gathering with young people, he explained that "undoubtedly, celibacy means making the sacrifice of renouncing marriage, but it is important to know that marriage is not a soap opera; it is hard, and there are difficulties. For this reason, God wanted a sacrament of marriage because a holy marriage requires a lot of effort and a lot of grace from God."

He encouraged young people to be open and generous in their vocation, whether to celibacy or marriage, "because both require a lot of love, dedication, generosity and spirit of sacrifice. The important thing is for each person to follow the path to which God has called him or her, which is where he or she will be happiest."

Family atmosphere

Despite the large number of people filling the auditorium, the presence of the Prelate (familiarily called "Father") gave rise to a notable family atmosphere.

Paco and Pepe entertained several gatherings by singing the "Salve Rociera," while the group "Sones de Altair" sang while they waited for the Father to arrive and in one of the pauses during the encounter. A group of girls sang and danced sevillanas; Ana and Sofía gave Father a flamenco box drum with the Madonna of El Rocío, the logo of their youth club, and messages from families and young people; and a young girl sang a song she had written, entitled "Manejar el viento" [Ride the wind].

They played Beethoven's Sixth Symphony in that encounter with

young people. That was the song the Father heard when he decided to join the Work, and he told the young women about that moment. He was spending the summer at his brother's house in Cadiz, and he made up his mind while listening to music, although "it wasn't really because of the music..." Shortly after, he was asked to play a trivia game with questions about St Josemaría in Seville, and he asked the audience to help him respond.

Larissa told the Prelate that she has worked in various Catholic news agencies, where she saw the universality of the Church and the importance of unity with the Pope. She thanked him for counting on everyone in the preparation of the General Congress convened to adapt the Statutes of Opus Dei, at the Holy Father's request, and told him that they had been praying and would continue to pray for this intention

"until you tell us to stop, Father." She asked him to remind the Pope that we are praying for him in the Work. Knowing that Pope Francis likes to joke, "for me or against me?" when people assure him of their prayers, she asked the Father to tell him that "our prayers are always for him."

In all his public meetings, Msgr. Ocariz asked people to pray for the Pope and the Church: "We need to pray a lot for the Pope, as he asks us to, because he is the Vicar of Christ and because he carries an enormous weight on his shoulders."