

Bishop Javier Echevarria has passed away

Bishop Javier Echevarria, the Prelate of Opus Dei, passed away at 9:20 p.m. Rome time, on December 12th, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

13/12/2016

Bishop Javier Echevarría, the prelate of Opus Dei, died yesterday (12 December) on the feast of our Lady of Guadalupe, at 9:20 p.m., Rome time. He was 84. He was the second

successor of St. Josemaría Escrivá, Opus Dei's founder.

After Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Escrivá's closest collaborator and first successor at the head of Opus Dei, who died in 1994 and was beatified in 2014, Echevarría was the closest person to St Josemaría and the one who most carried on his legacy. His death marks the end of an era for the Prelature, and its next head will be the first one not to have had a personal relationship with the founder.

Those who knew Bishop Javier remember him as a man of deep faith, both strong and very affectionate, with a teasing sense of humour and a great sense of fun. His time as prelate of Opus Dei was characterised by fidelity to the spirit of St Josemaría, apostolic expansion, and close union with all the Popes who reigned during his time of

office, namely John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis, whom he loved and served loyally.

Born in Madrid, Spain, in 1932, Echevarría first went to a centre of Opus Dei after a friend persuaded him to do so, even though it meant missing going to the cinema, a fact Bishop Javier often recalled with affection. He met Josemaría when he was aged 16 and soon after decided to commit his life to Opus Dei. He was the saint's personal secretary from 1953 to 1975. Under Blessed Alvaro del Portillo he was Opus Dei's Secretary General and then Vicar General and on the death of the Blessed in 1994 was elected prelate. On January 6, 1995, he was ordained bishop by St. John Paul II in St. Peter's Basilica.

Opus Dei's auxiliary vicar of Monsignor Fernando Ocariz, administered the sacrament of the

sick to Echevarría a few hours before the latter's death.

Bishop Javier had been hospitalized on Dec. 5th at the Campus Bio-Medico University Hospital in Rome because of an infection in his lungs.

He was receiving antibiotics to combat the infection. In the last hours complications arose which caused difficulty in his breathing and resulted in his death.

As is provided for in the statutes of the Prelature, the ordinary governance of the Prelature now falls to the auxiliary vicar, Monsignor Fernando Ocariz. In accord with the statutes, it falls to him to convoke an elective congress which will elect the new prelate. The congress has to take place within three months, and after the election occurs it must be confirmed by the pope.

Biography of Bishop Javier Echevarría

Bishop Javier Echevarría was born in Madrid on June 14, 1932, the youngest of eight children. His attended a primary school of the Marianist Fathers in San Sebastian and continued his education in Madrid at a school run by the Marist Brothers.

In 1948, at a student residence, he met some young members of Opus Dei. Feeling that he was called by God to seek holiness in ordinary life, he asked to be admitted to Opus Dei on Sept. 8 of that year.

He began studies in law at the University of Madrid and continued in Rome where he received a doctorate in canon law in 1953 at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas (also known as the Angelicum), and a

doctorate in civil law at the Pontifical Lateran University in 1955.

Echevarría received priestly ordination on August 7, 1955. He worked closely with St. Josemaría Escrivá and was his secretary from 1953 until the founder's death in 1975.

In 1975, when Alvaro del Portillo succeeded St. Josemaría, Monsignor Echevarría was appointed secretary general of Opus Dei. In 1982 he was appointed vicar general.

After the death of Blessed Alvaro in 1994, Echevarría was elected prelate of Opus Dei, and on January 6 of the following year he was ordained bishop by St. John Paul II in St. Peter's Basilica.

From the beginning of his ministry as prelate, his priorities were evangelization in the areas of the family, youth and culture. He

oversaw the beginning of the Prelature's stable formational activities in sixteen countries, including Russia, Kazakhstan, South Africa, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. He traveled to all the continents to stimulate the evangelizing work carried out by the faithful and the cooperators of Opus Dei. He encouraged the founding of numerous institutions dedicated to immigrants, the sick and the marginalized, and he gave especial attention to a number of centers for the care of the terminally ill.

Recurring themes in his catechetical trips and in his pastoral ministry were the love of Jesus Christ on the cross, fraternal love, service to those around us, the importance of grace and the Word of God, family life, and union with the Pope. In his last pastoral letter, in fact, besides expressing thanks for the audience he had with Pope Francis on

November 7, he asked — as always — that the members and friends of Opus Dei accompany the Pope with prayers for his person and intentions.

He wrote many pastoral letters and a number of books about spirituality, such as *Itinerarios de vida cristiana* (*Paths of Christian Life*), *Para servir a la Iglesia* (*Serving the Church*), *Getsemaní* (*Gethsemane*), *Eucaristía y vida cristiana* (*The Eucharist and Christian Life*), *Vivir la Santa Misa* (*Living the Mass*) y *Creo, creemos* (*I Believe, We Believe*). His last book is a collection of meditations about the works of mercy, which is entitled *Misericordia y vida cotidiana* (*Mercy and Daily Life*).

He was a member of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints and of the Apostolic Signatura. He took part in Synods of Bishops in 2001, 2005, 2012 and in the Synods

dedicated to the Americas (1997) and to Europe (1999).

He died in Rome on December 12, 2016.

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