

Fr. Paul Kais reflects on joy of his recent ordination

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Q. Can you give us some background details on yourself and your studies?

A. I was born on August 19, 1968 in Biloxi, MS. I was baptized and confirmed in Our Lady of Fatima parish. I went to St. John High School in Gulfport, MS, graduating in 1986, and to the University of Dallas, where I graduated with a B.A. in Political Philosophy in 1990. I then

received a M.A. in Political Philosophy at the University of Dallas in 1992.

Q. Why were you interested in political philosophy?

A. I was attracted to the study of the great thinkers and principal ideas and themes of Western civilization: in particular, how to 'make men good' or virtuous as Aristotle describes, as the end of politics.

Q. What did you do after leaving the University of Dallas?

A. I taught history for 2 years at Yeshiva Hirsh Middle and High School in Manhattan. Then I taught history and religion at Northridge Preparatory High School in Chicago for a year. For the next few years before going to Rome, I worked at several jobs in Milwaukee: Program Director at Layton Study Center, Program Director of Summit

Achievement Program, and part-time middle school teacher at Aquinas Academy.

Q. Do you think your experience as a teacher will help your apostolate as a priest?

A. It gave me a great patience - as a young teacher, one either learns patience or falls into despair. I learned to appreciate each child as an individual with his particular strengths and weaknesses, each moving at his own pace. This will undoubtedly help me as a priest, fostering the spirit of service and patience that Blessed Josemaría often described as "being a rug so that the others may walk softly."

Q. Why did you join Opus Dei?

A. I joined Opus Dei in 1989 when I was in college. I was introduced to the activities of Opus Dei by a friend, and quickly began to attend classes

and receive spiritual direction. I was struck by the idea of practically putting one's faith into all facets of one's life. I began using Escrivá's "The Way" as spiritual reading and was struck by the first point: "Don't let your life be sterile. Blaze a trail...." I kept reading, and going deeper and deeper into the spirit of Opus Dei. It was as if something I had been searching for had been found - a more complete notion of the Christian life. All are called to be saints, right where they are. It is not a question of doing anything strange, but living one's commitments and circumstances as a Christian. Such a simple idea, but at the same time its radical character led me to think this was the way to change the world. To "re-Christianize the world" through one's personal quest for holiness, and the dedication to one's friends and fellow workers which seeks to help them find true happiness by taking their Christian vocation seriously.

Another point from "The Way" struck me: "These world crises are crises of saints...." The truth of this statement, as well as the fact that the true way to change the world is the struggle to grow in the human and Christian virtues, and to take a real interest in the people God places next to one - in one's family, classes, work, etc. - seems simple, but I came to realize that it is the only effective way to channel my idealistic desires to change the world. I saw the spirit and formation provided by Opus Dei as exactly what I needed, and therefore I saw God was calling with a vocation to Opus Dei. I was struck by another point of "The Way" which considers the fact that "a life is a small thing to give to God."

Q. How did you decide to become a priest?

A. The semester I spent studying in Rome with the University of Dallas -

sophomore year in the fall of 1987 - began my thoughts. The example of the faith and the tradition of the Church which the city breathes was a real eye-opener. But even more so, the example of the Holy Father and his tireless service to the truth and to the Christian faithful. These last years I have been studying in Rome have also contributed to this. The example of the dedication of John Paul II and his graceful carrying of the Church in the post-Council years to the hope-filled third millennium has been tremendously inspiring to me. His writings on the priesthood and his personal testimony have made a great impact on me.

Q. What special significance does Josemaría Escrivá's message and his canonization have for you?

A. For me, it is a great honor to be ordained in the year of the centennial of Blessed Josemaría's

birth and merely a month before his canonization. Of course, the ordination in itself is an incredible gift of grace which is impossible for one to merit, but the coincidence of the dates has made me remember what Blessed Josemaría often said: that all of his sons and daughters of all time were the subject of his prayer, and especially the priests are fruit of his prayers. He also said on various occasions that it is the role of the priest, acting in the person of Christ, to welcome all people, always humbly presenting God, the merciful Father, who does not tire in forgiving and in bringing peace to all souls. In the wake of turbulent months for the Church in the US, I also recall that Blessed Josemaría suffered and prayed a lot for the Church. He reminded us that, although people will always be weak and fall, the Church, the spotless Bride of Christ, is always holy. As a minister of the graces of Christ, it is this positive

outlook and zeal to seek sanctity and be an apostle that I hope to facilitate. Since everything I have learned comes from the message God entrusted to Blessed Josemaría, I have constant recourse to his intercession, and count on his help in my priestly ministry. It is, of course, an immense joy to realize that his message will be brought to more people with the canonization.

Q. Anything of interest about your background that you would like to share?

A. My parents are very pious, and from an early age made great efforts to give us a solid human and Christian formation. I can certainly affirm what Blessed Josemaría often said, that 95% of one's vocation comes from one's parents. I am truly grateful for their constant support and superior example. I have one brother who is married and has 3

kids. Also, I have one sister. My father is a plant pathologist (botanist) and my mother is one of the world's greatest homemakers.

Q. What will happen after your ordination? Where will you work as a priest and what will you do?

A. I will spend some months in Pamplona, Spain. In January, I will return to the US. I don't know where I will be, but I will be taking care of the apostolate and activities organized by centers of the Opus Dei Prelature.

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