

“Saint Josemaría's charism is a treasure that can beautify the world”

Isabel Sánchez is the central Secretary of the Advisory, the women's council that assists the Prelate in governing the Prelature. In this interview she describes the elective process that concludes with the naming of a new Prelate.

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With Lucía Bassani

What are your thoughts during these days?

Certainly Bishop Javier Echevarría continues being very present now as well, as he gave us a great example of how to assume responsibility for the government and formation in Opus Dei, with magnanimity and a spirit of service. I have had the joy of working with Don Javier for the past 18 years, and in a closer way, over the last six. His rich and multi-faceted personality impressed me from the start. He was a man of deep prayer, a *friend* of God.

One aspect in particular made a deep impression on me. The Prelate was a very determined person who struggled energetically, someone for whom "no" never meant the door was shut forever. He was always striving to discover how to do the good in new ways. This aspect of his personality was especially seen in

the final hours of his life, in the hospital where he spent that last week and where I was lucky enough to see him two days before his death. It was yet another opportunity to realize that we can love right to the end. As we pray for his soul, I am sure he will continue to be very present for us during these days, as a father and protector, and as someone who gives us renewed strength and who follows us affectionately from heaven.

How does the election of the new Prelate take place?

The process begins with the vote of the plenary session of the Central Advisory, who will present the names of the candidates that it considers most suitable for carrying out the office of Prelate. Following this, the name that is voted for by the majority of electors requires the confirmation of the Pope. This is

quite natural, since Opus Dei is simply a small portion of the Church, an element of apostolic dynamism in the heart of the universal Church.

This new Prelate will then convoke and preside over two general congresses, bringing together a larger number of participants (almost 300 people), who represent the countries where the apostolic work of the Prelature is currently carried out. They will evaluate what has been done since the previous congress and propose plans of action for the next eight years. I think the diversity of cultures and races of the participants will greatly enrich these meetings.

In your view, what will be the guiding ideas for this Congress?

Since the beginning of Opus Dei, with Saint Josemaría and then later with Blessed Alvaro and Bishop Echevarría, the path to follow has

been that of serving the Church as she needs, wants and hopes to be served. Opus Dei will seek to respond to the challenges of evangelization proposed by the Pope and bishops for the whole Church.

The Congress will map out some guidelines to make Christ more present in society today. The goal is to spread more effectively the Christian message and thus contribute to sowing peace, to valuing human life in all its states and conditions, to fostering harmonic development between the different hemispheres... As you can see, we're dealing with a such a wide panorama that only general guidelines can be offered, which are specified in each place in accord with local conditions. It is up to each of the Prelature's faithful to transform these great dreams into small but steady deeds each day, because this is

what actually changes the world, with the help of grace.

But isn't this a bit unrealistic, given the widespread de-Christianization and lack of faith today?

It is certainly a beautiful challenge. But we Christians know that, with Christ at our side, impossible dreams become reality. He asks us to employ all the means, and he is the one who produces the fruit, completely out of proportion to our efforts.

Pope Francis has asked us to go out to the peripheries and open ourselves to God's mercy. In *Opus Dei*, we try to put this into practice according to our own charism: in daily work, in the middle of one's own family, among friends and colleagues, trying despite our personal weaknesses to be a better person each day and to serve the others, with an attitude that can

make a positive impact on our surroundings. And we do so in this world of ours that God has created, for us to live in and attain happiness. When one discovers the meaning of life with the light of faith, everything changes, and even the hardest situations become more bearable.

What means does Opus Dei count on for carrying out this endeavor?

Saint Josemaria used to say that "Opus Dei is you and me." The good that we can do depends on the life of each person in the Prelature. Clearly, the first means we have is prayer. Only by being constantly in contact with God will we be able to evaluate correctly the choppy seas of this world. Without prayer, nothing good lasts, nothing worthwhile endures.

The second means we have is self-mastery: dominion over oneself to be able to give ourselves to God and to others, so that we can serve others

without succumbing to our moods, without falling sway to the constant pressure of material goods. This daily struggle to master one's own freedom is in part what Christians call "mortification": freeing ourselves from what weighs us down and is deceptive, in order to offer to God and to others a better, more intense love.

Finally, we need to open our hearts to the tenderness God offers us in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist and Confession. Then comes each one's personal initiative and creativity, collaboration with others, the civic responsibility that leads one to dig deep to find solutions that are more human and more Christian, responding to the challenges of a world full of both truly awful situations and also wonderful opportunities.

How will the new Central Advisory work with the next Prelate?

The charism that Saint Josemaría received is like a treasure full of jewels destined to adorn, enrich, and beautify the world in which we live. Among the riches contained in Saint Josemaría's message is a Christian truth that is still somewhat a novelty today: the radical equality of men and women. While taking their diversity as a starting point, this entails the conviction, not only in theory but in a real and practical way, that women are called to contribute significantly to the Church, to civil society, to culture, to science, to the family, to all the spheres of human knowledge and life.

Finding ways to highlight this message, helping each of the women to discover where and how to leave their very personal mark on the

world around them, how to humanize it and make it a fount of goodness, will be where the new Prelate will principally rely on the advice of this organ of government.

All this implies a very encouraging panorama, and I think the new Prelate will focus it in this way: as a marvelous challenge. And I have no doubt that the new Central Advisory will do everything they can to follow him and give him their full support.

Moreover, it will be a great joy to continue following Pope Francis, and together with so many other institutions in the Church, to announce the Gospel message in all environments, living together with everyone, with respect, with a desire to serve, with our noble human work.

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