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A Conversation with Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz

The auxiliary vicar of Opus Dei speaks about Bishop Javier Echevarría's last hours in the hospital, and points to some of the key features in his life.

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In these moments, on the one hand, I feel sorrow, the impression of being an orphan, because I spent 22 years

very close, continuously, to the Father. And now, realizing that he has left us, makes me feel orphaned, and sad. But also, of course, serene since, thanks be to God, the faith God has given us leads us to realize that we have an intercessor in Heaven. Someone who will watch out for us, even more than he did here on earth, which was so much.

It's a mixture of two sentiments that are apparently contradictory, but that, in the end, are quite common. Faced with the death of a person you love a lot, if you have faith, you feel sorrow, sadness, but a sadness that is compatible with serenity, even joy.

You know that he was brought to the "Campus Bio-Medico" hospital on Monday (not yesterday, but the previous Monday), because he was very weak and the doctor advised that he be hospitalized. It was

thought to be, and in fact was, a weak infection.

He was treated very well there, from both a professional and human point of view, with tremendous affection. The antibiotics treatment, as far as I understand it, went very well. But it was accompanied by a very serious respiratory insufficiency, not due directly to the infection but as a parallel complication, which is what accelerated things.

The day before yesterday he began to get worse; he was very serene but had great problems breathing. Yesterday he himself asked that I administer the Anointing of the Sick, which I did yesterday afternoon. Late in the afternoon we realized that the situation was grave, but we didn't realize that death was imminent, since the Father was responding to questions. We saw that he was tired

and breathing with difficulty, as before.

It was planned that Fr. Vicente de Castro would be with him throughout the night. Fr. Jose Andres and I came back home and ate a quick dinner; on finishing we received a call to tell us that he was dying. We went there as quickly as we could. Fr. Vicente gave him absolution (I had given it to him already beforehand). Fr. Vicente says that his passing was very serene, with great peace, thanks be to God, because this type of respiratory insufficiency, if prolonged, can lead to very painful agonies. Thanks be to God, our Lord spared him this.

Yesterday was the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which reminds all of us, and especially him, of a pilgrimage Saint Josemaria made to this Marian shrine in Mexico. In fact we asked him yesterday, because we

had a picture of our Lady there close by in his room, we asked him if he wanted us to bring it closer so he could look at it. He told us: “No, there’s no need to, since I can’t see well now, and besides I see her in my heart, always.”

The most striking fact is that he has spent so many years living alongside two saints, with Saint Josemaria and Blessed Alvaro. This has left a deep impact on his formation and spirit, shown in the great effort to be faithful, to be very faithful to the spirit of Opus Dei received so directly from the source. It’s a fidelity, moreover, that he never saw (since it isn’t such) as mere repetition, but rather as the effort to keep unchanged what is fundamental, the substance, and to adapt what can be altered (the way of doing things, etc.), keeping the spirit untouched. It’s a fidelity, a mindset, that he has always had.

Another aspect that has always impressed me greatly during these years was his capacity to love people. Specifically, to be very close to the people he was with, including unexpected encounters. How he would stop and ask questions, and take an interest in each person. He also had a great capacity to transmit ideas, to give advice. It was never simply a matter of only listening, but of being very involved with people's concerns. With true affection. This always impressed me. He was never in a hurry with people.

The Work is here to serve the Church. All his fidelity was fidelity to the Church, union with the Pope, being on the same wavelength with the whole Church. This was something permanent. A sign of this was the interest he always had, even before and especially during his 22 years as Prelate, to be in communion and deal closely with a great number

of bishops and cardinals, to truly feel part of this episcopal body.

The best suffrage, besides the Mass (which is the key suffrage) and prayer, is our work and daily life offered in suffrage. It's what he will hope for in Heaven, so that we help him to have an even higher place.

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