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“The Gospel can help us rest in God”

On 23 January 2017, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz was elected Prelate of Opus Dei. For this anniversary, we offer an interview recently published in the Italian newspaper “Avvenire.”

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Archive: Pope Francis Names
Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz Prelate
of Opus Dei (23 January 2017)

Monsignor Ocariz, the spirituality of Opus Dei consists in discovering, and helping others to discover, the “divine paths on earth,” as Saint Josemaría Escrivá used to say. In today’s society, where do we find these paths?

All the paths, the paths on earth, are divine to the extent that we discover them as paths that lead us to God. If we contemplate this world with the eyes of those who know they are children of a Father who loves us, who has put us here to love Him and our fellow men and women, to sow peace and joy, then ordinary life takes on a completely different hue. Our existence becomes an adventure of love; we can find God in the midst of the most ordinary daily realities.

The Gospel contains many references to these “paths.” I recall the road that led from Jerusalem to Jericho. The Good Samaritan discovered God in

the poor man lying by the roadside. We can all discover our Lord in the faces of those around us, in our family and social duties, in carrying out the most ordinary tasks, if we do them with love.

In your book *In the Light of the Gospel*, you share with readers your personal notes for prayer and preaching, collected since 1977. Why did you decide to publish these?

I accepted the publisher's request to give some of these notes a more "systematic" format with the hope that, with God's help, they might encourage readers to seek direct contact with Jesus, in contemplation and prayer which, as Saint Josemaría said in *The Way*, "is never a monologue."

How is intimacy with God achieved by meditating on Jesus' words?

Your book is an invitation to personal dialogue...

Certainly it is helpful for us to try to read the Gospels with a grateful love. Even if we only read a few words, they are a gift from God, a way He has chosen to be close to us and to continue speaking to us. Moreover, it is good that there is also a bit of continuity, as in human relationships: friendship grows through familiarity with others. I remember an article that the then Cardinal Ratzinger published on the occasion of Saint Josemaría's canonization. The future Benedict XVI wrote that holiness consists in "speaking with God as one speaks with a friend." Reading the Gospel with persevering love helps us to be friends of our Lord.

How can the Gospel inspire today's laity, engrossed in a life that is

often so demanding they hardly have time to breathe?

The Gospel can give us a breath of fresh air; it enables us to rest, and teaches us to live with the peace of Christ in the midst of such a demanding life. By growing in friendship with Jesus we can learn to live in the present moment loving the reality that God presents us with. Every human situation can be illumined through friendship with Jesus, which can be cultivated through the Gospel. If we are truly interested in our spiritual life, we will find the time needed for a slow and contemplative reading, from which we will be able to draw strength to face the challenges of each day with peace and serenity.

Your reflections always focus on the person of Jesus. How can we find Him in our daily life?

Sometimes, before beginning his daily work, Saint Josemaría would tell our Lord: “Jesus, the two of us are going to do this together.” This is a beautiful act of faith that enables us to realize more fully that He is truly by our side. And it is so simple...

Along with this, we can also dedicate moments throughout our day to dialogue with Jesus. And we can find Him in the people we come in contact with for family, work or other reasons. This is not simply a technique. Jesus himself has told us that He is present in the people around us. Thus our heart will be open to the needs of others. And, with God’s grace, we can turn our day into a dialogue with our Lord.

Striving for “holiness in the middle of the world,” so central to Opus Dei’s message, can almost seem like a dream, a noble goal but a bit exaggerated. Is it really possible?

It is possible, as we see in the example of lay saints in the 20th and 21st centuries. To strive for it, we need to know, at least to a certain extent, the time in which we live, its possibilities, the limitations and injustices, even serious ones, that afflict it. But above all, it requires our personal union with Jesus, letting ourselves be loved by Him in the sacraments and in prayer. This “claim” is already the patrimony of the entire Church. Saint Paul VI said that the central message of the Second Vatican Council is the universal call to holiness. Pope Francis has recently dedicated an apostolic exhortation, *Gaudete et exsultate*, precisely to the call of the laity to holiness in the contemporary world.

Young people (but also adults) are immersed in a cultural climate that seems to value every personal choice equally. How can we help

them discover the Christian values that give solid foundation to life?

More than “Christian values,” I prefer to speak about the person of Christ as the foundation of the lives of young people, and of course also of everyone else. Christianity is not primarily a set of moral principles, nor is it a system of values. It is fundamentally about falling in love with Jesus: the Way, the Truth and the Life. All of us, both young and old, want to be happy. All the decisions we make, in the end, are guided by the goal that they will make us happy and thus we will be able to contribute to the happiness of others (our family, our friends...). We often make mistakes, but we can always get back on the right track. The great challenge we Christians have is to discover that our Lord satisfies every desire we have for happiness. We need to show, with

our life and our words, that Jesus is the only one who can quench the thirst for goodness, truth and beauty that everyone, especially young people, senses in their heart.

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