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Highlights of Prelate's Pastoral Visit to Brazil

Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz has returned to Rome, after two weeks in Brazil during which he had the opportunity to get to know and speak with many people in the Prelature and their friends, in São Paulo and Río de Janeiro.

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3 February

The Prelate's final get-together in Brazil was with a large group of young people who take part in the formative activities offered by Opus Dei. One of those present mentioned the visit made by Saint Josemaria to Brazil in 1974 and the blessing he imparted to the Brazilians: "May you multiply like the sand of your beaches, the trees of your mountains, the flowers of your fields, and the grains of your coffee."

Looking around the full auditorium, the young woman said: "We've already grown quite a bit... And now that you are returning to Rome, Father, what message would you like to leave us Brazilians?"

Monsignor Ocariz replied: "I can't leave you any better message than Saint Josemaria's: every Christian has the vocation to be an apostle. You need to bring Christ's Word to the whole country, filling it with love for

Jesus, and thus with peace and joy. But this desire must be born from your personal union with Christ.”

Gabriella, who is studying Odontology, told the Prelate how the day before she had participated in a work of volunteering in the center of the city, and she asked how they could contribute towards improving society, according to each one's personal circumstances. Monsignor Ocariz cited some words from a homily by Saint Josemaría entitled *Finding peace in the Heart of Christ*: “A man or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ's heart.”

He also explained how, when a person seeks to know and love Jesus, He in turn transmits to that person His love for souls and His concern for the world. “This concern includes

people's suffering, poverty and loneliness. These are problems that we should consider our own. The way to contribute to improve these situations will depend upon the circumstances of each person." He finished by encouraging them all to do everything possible to better the well-being of society, "since each of us can do more than we think we can."

Monsignor Ocariz thanked them for all the signs of affection they had shown him during his stay, and he asked them to pray for him, and in a special way for Pope Francis.

2 February

At Jacamar, a center of studies for university students, the Prelate preached about the texts for the liturgical feast of the Presentation of the Lord, and encouraged those present to truly contemplate Jesus

when praying, as this is the goal of our entire spiritual life.

Recalling the words of the apostle Philip to Jesus (“Show us the Father and that will be enough for us”), the Prelate spoke about how Jesus, with an affectionate look and probably with a smile, replied: “Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

“Let us be contemplative souls. Let us think about Christ: let us look at Him and get to know Him a bit better every day,” he suggested. With words of Saint Josemaría taken from the book *Christ is Passing By*, he said, “Everything Christ did has a transcendental value; it shows us the nature of God.” And the Prelate continued: “Jesus makes it possible for us to know who God is and how God is. And who is God? God is Love.”

In the middle of the afternoon, a gathering with the Prelate was held in the auditorium of the University Extension Center with some women who look after the domestic care of the centers of Opus Dei. “Your work sustains all the apostolates of the Work,” he told them. Questions ensued from many of those present about devotion to the Eucharist, cheerfulness, charity, freedom, Saint Josemaría, etc. One person spoke about Ascensión, one of the first numerary assistants who came to help start the Work in Brazil, and who passed away recently. Although her illness caused her a lot of suffering, she placed herself in God’s hands. Monsignor Ocáriz said that “humanly speaking, suffering and difficulties tend to take away our joy, but if we make an effort, with God’s help, we can be happy even amidst suffering.” The way to find meaning in suffering is to offer it to our Lord, uniting ourselves to the Cross.

The day ended with a large and lively get-together with women from more than 10 cities all over the country.

The Prelate at the beginning recalled the day's feast of the Presentation of the Lord, and made special reference to the Gospel text in which Luke narrates how the child Jesus "grew and became strong." And he added, "Jesus should grow in us. We should identify ourselves ever more closely with Him. Not by seeking a merely human perfection, but with the desire to love God."

Akemi, from Campinas, asked about how she could help her friends to grow closer to God. Recalling advice that Saint Josemaria used to give, the Prelate replied that "when there is true friendship, we can communicate the good we have inside. When it is accompanied by affection, friendship moves people's hearts."

Another person asked about how to avoid criticizing others. “We need to ask our Lord for the grace of charity. The most divine gift in our life as God’s children is the capacity to forgive whoever has done us harm.” When we see something that separates us from someone, the Prelate advised, we can ask our Lord to teach us to love.

1 February

In his morning meditation, Monsignor Ocariz considered the gospel of the day, in which Jesus invites his disciples to accompany Him to a deserted place to rest a while (*Mk 6: 31*). The Prelate said that “we should rest from everything that can take away our peace.” To do this, it is important “to always seek our rest in God; true rest is always fruit of the interior life.”

“When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved

with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd.” Taking his cue from this Gospel passage, the Prelate encouraged those present to share in Christ’s zeal. “In moments that, humanly speaking, were very trying, Saint Josemaría kept alive what he called the ‘sureness of the impossible.’ We too need to be sure of achieving impossible things: holiness, and the joy of redirecting the world towards God.”

Later in the morning, Monsignor Ocariz met with a big group of supernumeraries and cooperators of Opus Dei from São Paulo and other nearby regions. They asked questions on a variety of topics, including charity, apostolate, divine filiation, marriage, etc.

Cristiane asked for advice on how to respect the freedom of one’s children, without failing to exert the authority proper to parents. The

Prelate stressed the importance of listening to one's children, and he encouraged parents "to respect their freedom, which is a very important manifestation of charity. Freedom is a great gift from God."

When Leticia, from Porto Alegre, started to ask a question, the Prelate told her that the people from her city have a special obligation to be cheerful ("Alegre" means "cheerful" in Portuguese). She replied that, since her name is Leticia (which means "joy"), she must be under a double obligation then. Continuing with the play on words, she expressed her desire to bring many people to God, the source of true joy.

Cristina spoke about the good progress underway at the Veleros Center for Professional Training, a special initiative of formation that she is involved in: "We notice how the girls improve in many small

ways: learning to resolve a conflict peacefully; improving their grade in Math little-by-little; one girl who is slowly learning to have more self-control, etc.” The Prelate encouraged them to put their heart into these apostolic efforts: “These are your initiatives, because Opus Dei is yours, just as much as it is mine.”

Finally, Flávia, from Campinas, asked for advice regarding family life. The Prelate recalled how Saint Josemaria would advise couples to love each other more every day: “You should truly love one another, accepting each other’s defects.”

31 January

In his get-together with priests from various Brazilian dioceses, the

Prelate reminded them of Saint Josemaria's advice to place the Eucharist at the center of each one's Christian life. Priests have a special reason for doing so, since they have received the mission of making their parishes truly the Body of Christ: "The Church is a People that lives as the Body of Christ, a People that become the Body of Christ in the Eucharist."

He also stressed the importance for priests to always be united to their bishop and to love their brother priests. This communion with the bishop is lived "first of all, through prayer; then, by being available for whatever we are asked to do; and finally, by a filial spirit, with human warmth. The bishop isn't a boss, but a father."

He also invited the priests to deepen their knowledge of theology. "This formation isn't simply a matter of

information, since it helps us to identify ourselves more closely with Christ.” He also reminded them of the responsibility priests have to foster new vocations to the priesthood. “The pastoral work of seeking new vocations principally involves praying and asking others to pray for this intention. We can’t be afraid to raise the question of a vocation with people who seem to have the required qualities, asking them ‘And you, have you thought of becoming a priest?’”

At the end of the get-together, one of those present thanked Monsignor Ocariz, in the name of everyone there, for the help the Work offers priests, especially “the encouragement to be united to the Pope, to have affection for him and pray for him.”

In the afternoon, at the bishop’s residence, Cardinal Odilo Scherer

received the Prelate, whom he has known for a number of years. Their friendly conversation included exchanging commemorative medallions of the diocese of Saint Paul and the Prelature of Opus Dei. At the end, they prayed together for the upcoming archdiocesan synod.

30 January

Monsignor Ocariz began the day by celebrating Holy Mass at Opus Dei's Regional Advisory, the council that governs the women's section in Brazil.

In his brief homily, he commented on the day's Gospel and, among other things, encouraged those present to be people of faith in their daily lives, and not to get discouraged by little setbacks: "What should be most important for us aren't the difficulties or our limitations, but God's love for us."

“Let us ask our Lord to always give us a strong faith with the assurance that He is accompanying us, that He loves us and has everything planned out for us. He counts on our freedom, for that is how we can respond to his love.”

In the afternoon, Monsignor Ocariz met with a group of young people at the Rebouças Conference Center. Many of the questions revolved around the use of digital technologies. The Father reminded his listeners of the great potential these tools possess and how, like all instruments, they can be used for good or for evil.

“We cannot let ourselves be dominated by the means we use. We have to be the ones who dominate them, so that they are a true help for us.” He also suggested having a set time for cell phone and computer use, so that these means contribute

to our human growth and give us the space and freedom to be able to serve others.

Rodrigo, 16 years old, shared with the Prelate his joy at having recently received Baptism, the Eucharist and Confirmation: “My life changed a lot when I began to attend catechism classes offered through the Work. How can I repay this help?”

Monsignor Ocariz stressed that we will never be able to repay God for all the gifts we have received. “And even if we could, the gifts that we can give Him have been received from Him in the first place. These gifts should help us get to know Christ better and bring Him to all places and people.”

At the end of the afternoon, in an encounter with faithful of the Prelature, he recalled some words of Saint Josemaria: “When God our Lord plans some endeavor for the

good of men, He first thinks of the people He will use as instruments.” And he went on to say that, for people in the Work, the same could be said in this way: “When God thought of each one of us, he also thought of Opus Dei as a gift for our happiness.”

29 January

After a week of sun and heat, the day began with rain. The Prelate of Opus Dei traveled to São Paulo late in the afternoon. Before bidding farewell to Río de Janeiro, he was able to spend time with some families and faithful of the Prelature.

Soon before leaving, he stressed the importance of staying united through the Communion of Saints: “The same Jesus, the same God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is in the heart of each one of us, is the same who is in me. We live united in God.”

He also said that, despite the distance, we Christians remain united through devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist: “When you are in the oratory, reflect on the fact that the Lord who is there in the tabernacle is the same Jesus the Prelate prays to. It is a unity that is real, not imagined. That’s why we aren’t really saying good bye, because we always live united to one another.”

28 January

In the morning, Monsignor Ocariz preached a meditation to some of the faithful of Opus Dei: “We are in God’s hands,” he told them. “When we are convinced of this reality, there is no difficulty that our Lord cannot overcome.” He also stressed that Jesus is the manifestation of the most important truth of all: God’s infinite love for us.

The Prelate had various get-togethers and meetings with members of Opus

Dei, together with those who had traveled from Argentina and Uruguay to be there. “Everything that is most precious in the Christian life of a person in the Work – the Eucharist and Sacred Scripture – comes from the Church, it is the Church,” he said

One of those present at the morning get-together asked about how to harmonize freedom with prudence when it comes to raising one’s children. “Friendship with them is fundamental. You parents need to know how to make compatible the exercise of authority with a sincere interest in your children.”

He also advised people to avoid becoming discouraged on seeing one’s own defects. “We cannot give up when faced with our own failings, because our Lord is the one who guides us and gives us the strength to overcome them.” We need to thank

God for all the graces he grants us. “It is good to feel responsible for the talents that each one has received and make them bear fruit.” The Prelate insisted on the need to be cheerful, so as to better transmit the message of Christ to those around us.

In the afternoon, some of the faithful of the Prelature and cooperators who take part in the activities of Christian formation that Opus Dei offers in Petropolis shared news from their city and asked for prayers. The Prelate told them that they had a “special obligation to pray for the Pope, since Petropolis is the 'City of Peter' and the Pope is the successor of Saint Peter.”

One of those present asked how to better prepare for the 90th anniversary of Opus Dei, coming up in October this year. Monsignor Ocáriz suggested that they make many acts of thanksgiving to God

over the year, knowing that they are accompanied by the prayer of thousands of people.

At the end of the day, there was a get-together with young people who participate in the means of formation in different cities throughout Brazil. One student from Brasilia asked the Prelate how it felt to be the “Father” of such a big family. He said that it gives him a lot of peace to realize “he is accompanied by the prayer of thousands of people.”

27 January

On Saturday morning, Monsignor Fernando Ocariz commented on the Gospel from the day’s Mass when preaching to a group of women. “The calming of the Sea of Galilee, besides recounting a true event, is a symbol of the life of each person and of the Church. At times it can seem that our Lord is sleeping and it’s not always easy to perceive his presence, but He

is with us.” The Prelate of Opus Dei added that, along with God’s presence, we need to ask our Lord to increase in us the virtues of faith, hope and charity.

Afterwards, Monsignor Ocáriz met with a large group of faithful of the Prelature coming from various cities in Brazil and Paraguay. Topics brought up in the get-together included personal responsibility, sanctifying work and accepting suffering. Responding to a question about the role of feelings in our life, the Prelate said that having strong sentiments is good and that a Christian can’t be a person without a heart. But we should strive to put our feelings at the service of our Lord, asking Him how to act in each case.

In the afternoon, the Prelate met with professionals and students who attend activities of formation offered by Opus Dei in Rio de Janeiro. He

reminded people of Benedict XVI's words: "Nothing is more beautiful than being surprised by the Gospel," by the encounter with Christ, and helping others to come to know Him. And he added: "Our personal encounter with Christ will be what spurs us to be generous in our apostolate, in our desire to bring our friends to God."

One of the questions was about respecting others' freedom, a topic he dealt with in his recent pastoral letter. "In matters open to opinion," he reminded people while citing Saint Josemaria, "it is good that there be pluralism and that we Christians have different points of view."

Later in the day, in a get-together with young people, he was asked how to be more generous with God. Saint Josemaria's successor said that God usually doesn't show us with complete clarity what He wants from

us. “While giving us a series of guidelines to see what path we should follow, God always leaves us with a certain degree of incertitude, because He wants us to trust in Him and to make our decisions freely.”

In the evening, in a family get-together after dinner, some Brazilian songs were sung, including “Romeria,” a song that Bishop Javier Echevarría liked a lot.

26 January

Minercina came from Montes Claros with her husband and several of her children. In Rio de Janeiro, she met up with other daughters of hers and some cousins who came from Brasilia and São Paulo. The youngest of them, Maria Cristina, has Down Syndrome; she gave the Prelate a box of the special soap made in her city and a poster with photos of the relatives who couldn't come to see him.

Nazaret came from São Paulo to be with her sister Andrea. Andrea and her husband Daniel have five children, two of whom are adopted. They told the Prelate that they are now expecting their sixth child.

In the family get-together after dinner, Monsignor Ocariz heard some stories about the life of Rafael Llano Cifuentes, bishop emeritus of Nova Friburgo, who died recently, and who helped begin the apostolic work of Opus Dei in Rio de Janeiro.

The Prelate stressed how important it is to show people the joy that comes from leading a Christian life. Often this witness will be more convincing than rational explanations and arguments.

22 January

He was met at the airport of Galeão by Monsignor Vicente Ancona Lopez, regional vicar of Opus Dei in Brazil,

and a small group of faithful of the Prelature. They went from the airport to Icatu, the center of the delegation of Opus Dei in Rio, where he greeted a number of people.

Regarding the reason for his trip, he said that a year-and-a-half ago he was invited by the bishops to give a cycle of classes in Brazil. Although he thought that his abundant work in Rome made the trip inadvisable, the then Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, encouraged him to accept the invitation. “So you owe my visit here to Don Javier,” he said.

Later, after listening to a song being sung, he remarked: “The time for loving is brief. We need to take advantage of time. And taking advantage of time means filling it with love for God and, as a result, service to others.”

In the afternoon, after greeting several families, Monsignor Ocariz

made his way to the Sumaré Center of Studies, where the Course for bishops is taking place and where he will be giving some classes until Friday the 26th of January.

Course for bishops, a decades-long tradition

The Prelate was invited by Cardinal Dom Orani Tempesta to take part in the 27th course for bishops. The topic this year is: “Atheism. Current-day forms and challenges for evangelization.” Along with the Prelate, others giving classes include Father Rafael José Stanziona de Moraes, Professor Francesco Botturi and Fray Francisco Patton, OFM. At the end of the course, the Prelate will spend time with the faithful of Opus Dei in Rio de Janeiro (26-30 January) and São Paulo (30 January to 4 February).

The archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro has been organizing the course for

bishops in Brazil since 1990. The inaugural address was given by then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. The annual gathering aims to offer bishops the opportunity to share a week of study, prayer and rest in a fraternal atmosphere.

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