Romana is the bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei. These pages reprint documents of the Holy See directed to the entire Church, as well as those referring specifically to Opus Dei. It also provides news about the activities of the Prelate and the Prelature in the service of the Church and the local dioceses. Brief articles are included about some of the apostolic initiatives fostered by faithful of the Prelature within their profession and in society at large in their endeavor to infuse a Christian spirit into the secular sphere.

The contents of the bulletin do not provide an entire picture of Opus Dei’s activities, since the Prelature’s fundamental apostolate is that which its faithful carry out personally, guided by the Christian formation and spiritual assistance they receive from the Prelature.

This apostolate takes place in the context of each person’s professional, social, and family setting, and its variety and creativity naturally cannot be reduced to a set of statistics.

Romana’s publication fulfills an express desire of St. Josemaría Escrivá. In choosing the title Romana for the future bulletin, St. Josemaría wished to emphasize the catholic and universal character of Opus Dei’s pastoral mission.

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A Life of Generous and Fatherly Testimony

On December 12th, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Bishop Javier Echevarría (1932-2017) passed away. This issue of Romana includes a chronicle of those days during which hundreds of people went to pray before his open casket and give their last farewell to the Prelate. The words that Pope Francis addressed to the faithful of Opus Dei in a telegram were very consoling for us then: “I unite myself to your thanksgiving to God for his generous and fatherly testimony of priestly and episcopal life. He followed the example of Saint Josemaría Escrivá and Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, whom he succeeded at the head of this entire family.” The Holy Father said that Bishop Echevarría “gave his life in a constant service of love to the Church and souls,” and assured us of his “fervent suffrages for this faithful servant.”

In the Mass for the repose of the soul of the Prelate that was celebrated in the Roman Basilica of Saint Eugene, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz—then Auxiliary Vicar—said, addressing himself especially to the faithful of the Prelature: “If the one we have called Father for twenty-two years were here with us, he would surely ask us to take advantage of these days to intensify our love for the Church and the Pope, and to remain closely united with one another and with all our brothers and sisters in Christ. And he would tell us once again those words that, especially in his final years on earth, had become a frequent refrain on his lips: ‘love one another a lot, with an ever greater love!’ And this was more than just words; it was moving to see how he loved others. I recall for example how the day before he died he told me he was worried about becoming a hindrance, since so many people were looking after him. And I told him spontaneously: ‘No, Father, it’s you who are sustaining all of us.’”

“Among the many shrines of our Lady he visited with Saint Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro, and afterwards as Prelate,” Msgr. Ocáriz continued, “was that of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. Providence has disposed that the Father was called to Heaven on December 12th, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. That same day, when his life was slipping away, a priest asked him if he wanted a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe placed close to him. The Father said no, since he could no longer see very well. But he
added that he was very close to her in his heart. Let us place our prayer for Bishop Javier Echevarría in the hands of our Lady, Spes nostra, our hope, while giving thanks to God for having given us this good and faithful shepherd.”

May the following pages also serve as an expression of our gratitude for his loving care as a shepherd during his twenty-two years as Prelate of Opus Dei.
BISHOP JAVIER ECHEVARRÍA, PRELATE OF OPUS DEI

- Bishop Javier Echevarría Passes Away
- Elective General Congress
Bishop Javier Echevarría Passes Away

Messages of Condolence

Since December 12, thousands of messages of condolence for the death of Bishop Echevarría have been received at the central offices of Opus Dei. Below, in alphabetical order, is a small selection of these expressions of gratitude, prayer, and closeness.

Cardinal Angelo Amato, S.D.B., (prefect) of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

On hearing the news and recalling his generous service as a bishop and cooperation with this dicastery, as a consultor and member, on behalf of the officials of the congregation, we invoke the Lord Jesus to welcome his faithful servant into the peace of his heavenly kingdom, in communion with the saints and blessed.

Bishop Philip Anyolo, President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Kenya

As bishops we have known Bishop Echevarría as a great Shepherd and a loyal Servant of the Church. We cherish his faith, fidelity, commitment and his great contribution to the holiness of the Church in the entire world.

Kiko Argüello, initiator of the Neocatechumenal Way

The Prelate will join Carmen, [co-initiator of the Neocatechumenal Way] in Heaven and from there he will intercede for the Work throughout the world, so that it may be faithful to the charism received from God for the benefit of the whole Church and for his greater glory.
Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations

I pray that the great and contagious hunger for holiness that characterized his whole life, will now be satiated in the presence of God, of our Lady—whom he loved so much—of St. Josemaría, of Blessed Alvaro and of the many men and women, young and old, who have been helped to live the universal call to holiness through the charism given to St. Josemaría, his successors and his spiritual sons and daughters.

 Archbishop Miguel Angel Ayuso, M.C.C.I., Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

To your Holy Dwelling Place! With heartfelt gratitude to God for the gift of the Prelate to the Universal Church.

 Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops

Together with the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, we express our condolences for the death of the Prelate, assuring our prayers for his soul and for the consolation of the members of the personal Prelature. We remember his active participation in the synod assemblies.

 Bishop Virgil Bercea of Oradea Mare, Romania

Bishop Echevarría greatly assisted our Church, helping us in the formation of our seminarians, now priests, and was always happy to meet and talk with us.

 Uxue Barkos, President of Navarra, Spain

I would like to express my deep regret at the death of the bishop prelate of Opus Dei, who has been so linked to this community with his visits as chancellor of the University of Navarra. May he rest in peace.
Cardinal Giuseppe Bertello, President of the Pontifical Commission for the State of Vatican City

I accompany you with friendship and prayer in suffrage for the venerable Prelate. I will always remember, with gratitude, his example of dedication to the Lord and of love and fidelity to the Church.

Cardinal Ricardo Blázquez, President of the Spanish Episcopal Conference

I express my condolences and those of the bishops who are members of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, which I extend to all the members of the Prelature. We offer the Lord our prayers for the eternal rest of His Excellency Bishop Echevarría. God will reward his great efforts and labors for the Church.

Don Julián Carrón, President of Communion and Liberation (in the Osservatore Romano)

Don Julián Carrón and all of Communion and Liberation share the pain of the great family of Opus Dei for the passage to heaven of the beloved Bishop Javier Echevarría. Grateful for his witness of a life united to Christ, fully identified with Him and spent in carrying out the work of God in the world, we ask Saint Josemaría and Don Giussani to intercede before our Lady of Guadalupe so that his life may reach its fulfillment in the embrace of Mercy, and so he may continue to accompany those for whom he was their father in the faith, called to be like him bearers of mercy following the path marked out by Pope Francis, whom Bishop Echevarría loved so much.

Cardinal Edward Cassidy, President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

I have known the Prelate for many years and treasure that friendship. May he now rest in peace with the Lord he loved and served so well.
Antonio Coscullela, Mayor of Barbastro, Spain

My condolences go hand in hand with recognition and gratitude for the affection that Don Javier always expressed to this city and its people, on the many occasions he visited us.

The Hebrew Community of Rome

The Hebrew Community of Rome joins in expressing condolences for the death of Bishop Javier Echevarría. Chief Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni and Community President Ruth Dureghello send their deepest condolences to Opus Dei for this sad loss.

Latin American Jewish Congress

May his work be remembered by doing good. Blessed be his memory.

Bishop Guerino De Tora, Auxiliary Bishop of Rome

I thank the Lord for the example of the Father, and express all my pain and my condolences.

Georges El Khoury, Lebanon's Ambassador to the Holy See

His name will be engraved in the memory of the Church and of posterity as a great architect of peace and good works in favor of the family, the marginalized, and the disadvantaged.

Zion Evrony, former Israeli Ambassador to the Holy See

He was a man with a good heart and much wisdom. He always welcomed us with warmth and friendship at the center of Opus Dei, and we were happy to welcome him to our home.
H.M. Philip VI, King of Spain

On receiving, with great sadness, the news of the death of Bishop Javier Echevarría, I send my most sincere condolences, which I wish to extend to his relatives and members of the Prelature. In these difficult moments, together with the Queen, we raise up our prayers for the eternal rest of his soul.

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Jesús Fonseca, journalist

He was one of those people capable of “sneaking” into the lives of others to stay in the recesses of their heart. He showed me his friendship more than anything. With the kinds of details that only true friends have and that one never forgets. Like that Mass he wanted to celebrate on his own initiative, after the death of my beloved Esther, and whose long and heartfelt homily was dedicated to her, with words that carried weight, depth, and comfort that will accompany me for the rest of my life. Only he and I, in that Roman crypt where his remains now rest, next to two friends. Nobody else.

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Sister María Soledad García, Superior General of the Servants of Jesus Institute

I thank God for the saints who have led the Prelature of Opus Dei. I have had the joy and honor to converse with Don Javier for years. I will always remember his accompaniment and the words with which he encouraged me to lead my Servant Sisters of Jesus to God.

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M. Azucena García Sánchez, religious of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites

I am sure that he will continue being close to us and intercede for all before God, and watch over, together with Saint Josemaría and Don Alvaro, all his sons and daughters in the Work, while fostering its evangelizing expansion as a leaven for a better world.

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Reverend M. Marta Garro Pérez, Superior General of the Religious Institute of the Daughters of Divine Providence

He has preceded us and we know that our prayers will be a “return trip ticket,” for Bishop Javier Echevarría will intercede in heaven for all those who personally or through the members of Opus Dei have known him and been nourished by your teachings.

Paloma Gómez Borrero, journalist

With great sadness I received news of the death of our beloved Don Javier, although, as when John Paul II left us, I am sure Bishop Echevarría “has gone to the Father’s House.” I had a sincere and filial affection for the Prelate, and I can only say to the great Opus Dei family that I share their pain, even though we know we now have him in heaven.

Emilia Guarnieri, President of the Rimini Meeting Foundation

We remember with sincere thanks our encounters with Bishop Echevarría, including his participation in the Rimini Meeting in 2014. We join in the pain and prayer of those who have had him as a father and guide. We are grateful to have been able to know and listen to him; we have been edified and encouraged by his strong missionary zeal and his fatherly and welcoming cordiality.

Sister Ana María Kalathil, Prioress of the Monastery of Santa Isabel (Augustinian Recollect), Madrid

We wish to convey to all the members of the Prelature our sentiments of pain and sorrow. May the Virgin Mary accompany him to the Kingdom reserved for those who have been faithful to the mission entrusted to them by God.

Sister Vega María López, O.A.R., Prioress of the Monastery of Saint Mary Magdalene (Augustinian Recollect), Baeza, Jaen.
Bishop Javier Echevarría is already in the place he longed for, for himself and all his children. He trusted in the prayers of the nuns and, as one would do for one’s father, we pray more intensely that he may enjoy the glory already possessed by Saint Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro.

Mother Julia of the Mother of God I.C.D., Prioress of the Convent of Saint Joseph of Avila (Discalced Carmelites)

We pray for all the members of the Work so that this blow—still hard to accept although he has left behind the peace of his holy life—may be a spur for fidelity, for inner renewal, for greater union with God. We treasure the pleasant memory of his visit.

Archbishop Juan José Omella, Archbishop of Barcelona

I unite myself to the pain of the whole family of Opus Dei for the loss of Bishop Javier Echevarría. I pray for his eternal rest. May the Lord grant him the prize reserved for good shepherds in his Church.

Cardinal Sean Patrick O’Malley, O.F.M., Archbishop of Boston

We have a very significant presence of Opus Dei in the Archdiocese of Boston, where they do such important work, particularly with university students, as well as at Montrose School and their retreat house in Pembroke, Arnold Hall. So, I wanted to be in Our Lady of Peace to express my condolences and to assure them of my prayers during this time of transition.

Cardinal Carlos Osoro, Archbishop of Madrid

I thank God for these years of work and service to the Church that Bishop Echevarría has offered through the Work, as well as for his friendship and closeness, which he showed me in visits he made to the dioceses where I have been, and in various encounters with him. In the name of the Archdiocese of Madrid, to all those who are part of Opus Dei,
I offer my prayer for the eternal rest of the Prelate. And with all of you, we give thanks for what Don Javier, with his intense, serene, discrete and firm work, has offered to the Church.

Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops

In the name of the whole Congregation, I wish to express my sentiments of condolence, assuring prayers of suffrage for this beloved bishop as we remember with gratitude his faithful service to the Church.

Mons. Paolo Pezzi, Metropolitan Archbishop of the Archdiocese of the Mother of God (Moscow)

This news filled my heart with the assurance that he has faithfully completed a life lived for God and in service to his Church.

Virginia Raggi, Mayor of Rome

We join in the pain caused by the death of Bishop Javier Echevarría, so as to remember his example of priestly life and to learn from his loving service to the Church.

Andrea Riccardi, Founder of the Community of Sant'Egidio

Bishop Echevarría led the Work following the “furrow” left by its founder; he sought new languages to reach the disoriented people of our time, and set forth anew for everyone a path to holiness in the life of the laity.

Fr. Eduardo Robles Gil, L.C., General Director of the Legionaries of Christ

We trust that Divine Mercy has allowed Bishop Echevarría to experience what Saint Josemaría said: “Death is a door that opens to Love, to Love with a capital letter, to happiness, to rest, to joy.” We thank the
Lord for so many blessings He has given to the Church through the ministry and service of this good father to the faithful of the Prelature.

Cardinal José Francisco Robles Ortega, President of the Mexican Episcopal Conference

We want to express our closeness with the passing to eternal life of Bishop Javier Echevarría. We are sure that the evangelical service of this Work will continue growing and its participation in the Church, in benefit of the world, will be ever greater.

Cardinal Franc Rodé, Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

He made the decision to open a new front for the apostolate and presence of Opus Dei in Slovenia, which is already proving a blessing for our Church and the promise of a future rich in spiritual fruits for our people.

Sergio Rodríguez López-Ros, Director of the Cervantes Institute in Rome

I keep in my memory his warm character, his intellectual keenness and his evangelizing zeal. I remember my last meeting with him for the recent consistory of Cardinals, where I was able to witness his pastoral charity with the staff who served us dinner that night, taking an interest in their work and their families.

Cardinal Camillo Ruini, Vicar General Emeritus for the Diocese of Rome

I take part with all my heart in the condolences for the death of the Prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarría, and I join you in praying for him and for the whole prelature.
Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for Eastern Churches

I entrust him to the Risen Lord with a special remembrance in the celebration of the Divine Sacrifice, and I raise up a prayer of intercession to Our Lady of Guadalupe, to Saint Josemaría and to Blessed Alvaro del Portillo.

Alfonso Sánchez Tabernero, Rector of the University of Navarra

With immense affection from the whole University of Navarra to our beloved Grand Chancellor, who from now on will be helping us from heaven.

José San José Prisco, Rector of the Pontifical Spanish College of Rome

You can count on our prayers so that God will reward so much service and dedication to the mission of the Church from the Prelature.

Abbess of the Convent of Saint Claire (Poor Clares) of Borja

We were notified of his death: Christmas with the Risen One! For you it will be very hard without his presence, kindness and strength, but from the bosom of God he will help you together with Saint Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. We are praying.

Daughters of Holy Mary of the Heart of Jesus

Together with our Mother Foundress, Mother Mary of Jesus, we thank him for his dedication, affection and prayer. We entrust ourselves to his intercession.

Cardinal Angelo Scola, Archbishop of Milan

Following the footsteps of Saint Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro, he has guided the Work with clear direction, with an intelligent grasp of the signs
of the times and with creative prudence. I thank the Lord for the relationship we have had all these years, and through his person, with the whole Work.

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Sister Teodora, O.C.D., Monastery of San José (Discalced Carmelites), Bari, Italy

The Holy Child wanted to welcome to heaven the unforgettable Father Echevarría, to give a deserved reward to this faithful and brave servant. He now contemplates what he gave witness to in his life, with his example and faith.

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Bishop Fausto Trávez, OFM, Archbishop of Quito and President of the Ecuadorian Episcopal Conference

The bishops of Ecuador wish to express our deep regret for such an irreparable loss. We include in our prayers the family of Opus Dei in Ecuador, and especially the auxiliary vicar, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, and the vicar general, Monsignor Mariano Fazio. Bishop Javier Echevarría is sure to enjoy eternal rest with Saint Josemaría and Don Alvaro del Portillo.

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Archbishop José Domingo Ulloa Mendieta, O.S.A., President of the Episcopal Conference of Panama

The Catholic Church in Panama wants to express its solidarity in these moments of pain to all the members of the Prelature, and to encourage them with the hope of our faith that death is a necessary step for enjoying Eternal Glory.

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Bishop Rosario Vella, S.D.B., Ambanja (Madagascar)

I had the joy and grace to meet him personally at the Synod for the New Evangelization and at a meeting in Rome: a man of God in his
gestures, in his words, in his life. His gaze saw right into your heart, purified you, and loved you very much.

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Archbishop Joan-Enric Vives Sicilia, Archbishop of Urgell and co-Prince of Andorra

It was always a joy to talk with him and enjoy his capacity for discernment in confronting problems, and the sharpness of his observations.

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Maria Voce, President of the Focolare Movement

He has returned to the House of the Father, along with his predecessors Saint Josemaría Escrivá and Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. He leaves behind an edifying example of self-giving to God and to his brothers and sisters.

Masses for Bishop Echevarría Throughout the World

Below we highlight some of the Masses celebrated in various countries for the eternal rest of Bishop Javier Echevarría.

Madrid: “I always sensed his paternal concern”

Cardinal Carlos Osoro, Archbishop of Madrid, was the principal celebrant at the Mass for the eternal repose of the soul of Bishop Javier Echevarría, which took place on Friday, December 16 in the Cathedral of the Almudena. Other ecclesiastical authorities also took part including the Archbishop Emeritus of Madrid, Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco; the Archbishop Emeritus of Seville, Cardinal Carlos Amigo; the military ordinary Archbishop Juan del Rio; Archbishop Emeritus Antonio Algora of Ciudad Real; and the Nuncio of His Holiness in Spain, Archbishop Renzo Fratini.
“I was blessed to know him and count on his closeness and friendship,” Archbishop Osoro said in his homily. “I can say that I always sensed his paternal concern. The last time I saw him was in the Consistory in which Pope Francis made me a Cardinal and, afterwards, in a meal I invited him to in the Spanish College. His last words when saying good-bye to me were always the same: ‘You can count on my prayer. I’m praying for you and for your ministry.’”

Besides this memorial Mass in Madrid, the city where the Prelate was born, more than fifty Masses were celebrated in various cities in Spain, with about thirty bishops taking part.

Guatemala: “Let us imitate Bishop Echevarría in loving others”

The Archbishop of Guatemala City, Oscar Julio Vian, S.D.B., presided over a Eucharistic concelebration in the metropolitan cathedral, on Thursday December 15. Concelebrating were Auxiliary Bishop Raúl Antonio Martínez; Msgr. Francis Wurmser, Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in Guatemala, and other priests. In his homily, Msgr. Wurmser stressed Bishop Echevarría’s devotion to the Passion of our Lord, recalling some of his trips to Guatemala: “We saw him venerate the image of Christ of Esquipulas in this cathedral, on two occasions. He was also moved when contemplating the image of the Crucified in the Istmo University oratory, and said that it was a very realistic image that vividly reflected the sufferings of Jesus in his Passion. On seeing it he gave it a kiss while asking Jesus: ‘why did you want to suffer so much?’ And he told us that our Lord had made him understand the answer: ‘because Love is proven with sacrifice.’”

Before the final benediction, the Archbishop of Guatemala City directed some words to those present: “Let us do everything each day well, striving for holiness as he did, as he showed us with his life. Loving others, serving so many people who need us. So, my beloved brethren: take heart! Forward! Let us not grow tired! We have to become saints, imitating these great men and women who are showing us the path to eternal life.”

Monterrey, Mexico: “A simple and cordial man”

On December 13, Archbishop Rogelio Cabrera celebrated Holy Mass for the eternal repose of the Prelate of Opus Dei in the Basilica of Our
Lady of the Oak. In his homily, he said that Bishop Javier Echevarría was a simple and cordial man who won the hearts of people with his rich personality and deep spirituality, leaving a mark on those who knew him. Archbishop Cabrera encouraged the faithful to make these features their own and to strengthen their desire to be saints in the midst of their daily activities.

**Milan, Italy: “He never stopped living as a son”**

Cardinal Angelo Scola presided over a Eucharistic celebration in the Cathedral of Milan for the eternal repose of Bishop Echevarría. “The fatherhood we saw in Don Javier’s life, both in his episcopal ministry and in his work as Prelate of Opus Dei, was fruitful because he never stopped considering himself and living as a son, from the time he was called to follow Jesus in 1948, at the age of only 16. A son of God, a son of the Church through his experience of being a son of St. Josemaría and of Blessed Alvaro,” the Cardinal said in his homily. “The priestly ministry of Bishop Javier Echevarría,” he added, “was a response to our Lord’s moving invitation: ‘Go and proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Mt 10:7). His ministry was deeply rooted in the real world, in ordinary realities illumined by faith.”

**Beirut, Lebanon: “Affection and friendship”**

Cardinal Bechara Boutros Rai, Patriarch of Antioch and Metropolitan of the Maronite Rite, celebrated a Mass for the repose of the soul of Bishop Echevarría on Wednesday, December 21, in the church of Bkerké, seat of the Patriarchate. He was accompanied by several Lebanese bishops, as well as by Fr. Jesús González Gaitano, Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in that country.

The Patriarch expressed his gratitude for the affection and friendship that united him to the deceased Prelate. He recalled the three trips that the Prelate made to Lebanon since the beginning of stable apostolic work of Opus Dei there in 1996. He also expressed his gratitude for the service that the faithful of the Prelature are trying to offer to the Church and society in this country in the Middle East.

**Pamplona, Spain: “A promoter of priestly vocations”**
Some 3,500 people took part in the memorial Mass for Bishop Javier Echevarría celebrated at the University of Navarra, of which he was Chancellor. Archbishop Francisco Pérez of Pamplona presided at the ceremony. “Certainly our prayer, especially at this moment, unites us to the one who is now no longer among us, in our earthly homeland, since he has passed on to the eternal one,” he said. “You affectionately called our beloved don Javier Echevarría ‘father’ because, as St. Paul said, paternity seeks to generate souls for God and for heaven. So many of you are grateful for his heart of a good shepherd. He was also a fosterer and promoter of priestly vocations. I have already included him as an intercessor for this purpose,” said the Archbishop, who also recalled some of his personal encounters with the Prelate of Opus Dei: “I always had the impression of seeing in him a man who lived his priesthood intensely, who believed in Christ with all his heart, and in His Spouse the Church, which he loved with a generous heart.”

Nairobi, Kenya: “A duty of justice and charity”


In his homily, Fr. Silvano asked people to give thanks to God for the example of Bishop Echevarría’s life, and to pray for his eternal rest, fulfilling a joyful debt of justice and charity. At the end of the Mass he passed on the condolences of Cardinal Njue of Nairobi, who expressed his closeness to all the faithful of Opus Dei. He also mentioned many other bishops who had sent messages of condolence.

Valencia, Spain: “Watch over all of us affectionately from heaven”

Several thousand people took part in the Mass for the repose of the soul of the Prelate of Opus Dei that Cardinal Antonio Cañizares, Archbishop of Valencia, celebrated in the Cathedral. “What my heart asks of me now for my brother don Javier,” said the Cardinal, “is not to pray for him, but to speak with him, to go to him for advice, to tell him so many things, to recall the hours we shared and ask him to watch over all of us affectionately from heaven.”
Archbishop Cañizares pointed to his “simplicity and warm and affectionate welcome” as features that stood out in Bishop Echevarría. He also stressed his love for the Church, “which was his great passion, through his dedication to the Work that God brought forth to serve the Church. God endowed him with great wisdom and ardor to guide Opus Dei in the service of the Church and mankind.” Concelebrating with the Cardinal were, among others, Archbishop emeritus Manuel Ureña of Saragossa, and Bishop emeritus Joan Piris, of Lérida.

Jerusalem: “As in Gethsemane”

In Jerusalem, the Mass for the eternal repose of Bishop Echevarría was held in the Basilica of Gethsemane, the Holy Place that most impressed the Prelate on the several visits he made to Israel. The Regional Vicar of Opus Dei, Rev. Joaquín Paniello, recalled that the Prelate’s personal prayer about Jesus in the Garden of Olives can be found in the book he wrote entitled Getsemani. “Hours of human bitterness for Jesus,” Bishop Echevarría wrote in the prologue, “but hours of ineffable peace in the depths of his Spirit, because he was fulfilling the holy Will of his Father. They are hours, those of Jesus’ prayer in the garden, that reach right to the depths of a Christian’s heart.”

December 15. Solemn Mass for Bishop Echevarría, Basilica of St. Eugene

At 7:00 pm on Thursday, December 15, a solemn Mass for the repose of the soul of Bishop Javier Echevarría was celebrated in the Basilica of St. Eugene. Concelebrating with Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Auxiliary Vicar of Opus Dei, were Msgr. Mariano Fazio, Vicar General; Msgr. José Javier Marcos, Secretary Vicar; Msgr. Guillaume Derville, Spiritual Director of the Prelature; Rev. José Velaz, Delegate of Opus Dei for Cameroon, Ivory Coast, and the Congo; Rev. Matteo Fabri, Regional Vicar of Italy; Msgr. Ramón Herrando, Regional Vicar of Spain; Rev. Albert Marianetti,
Regional Vicar of India and Sri Lanka; and Msgr. José Andrés Carvajal who, together with Msgr. Ocáriz, accompanied the Prelate in his daily life.

A great number of people took part, moved by sentiments of gratitude and affection towards the Prelate. Among them were some relatives of Bishop Echevarría, well-known people from the secular world, cardinals, archbishops, bishops and religious.

In his homily Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz spoke the following words:

In the words of Jesus that we have just heard, He opens his heart to us in a marvelous way. Our Lord speaks to his Father and to his disciples; and likewise we Christians are called to speak with God and with our brothers and sisters. Evangelization, apostolate, stems from our intimacy with God. As Saint Josemaría wrote: “Your apostolate must be the overflow of your life ‘within.’”[1]

In this Eucharistic celebration for the repose of the soul of the Prelate of Opus Dei, the Gospel reminds me of the naturalness with which Bishop Javier Echevarría strove to teach us to love Christ and our fellow men and women. No day went by in which he failed to comment on some passage from the Liturgy of the Word or from the other texts at Mass. He did so, of course, in meditations and spiritual talks, but also in the midst of the simplicity of daily life. Thus he would pause to pray and invite those around him to pray for a trip of the Pope, for peace in Syria, for the victims of natural disasters, for refugees, for the unemployed, for the sick (for whom he always had a special predilection that he learned from Saint Josemaría). On returning from a long trip, before coming home, he would sometimes stop at the hospital to visit a person who was sick. Everyone had a place in his heart.

He had learned from the Founder of Opus Dei to “love the world passionately” because, as the saint said, “it is in the world that we meet God. God shows himself, he reveals himself to us in the happenings and events of this world.”[2] Bishop Echevarría loved real life, the events, the beautiful and true stories of God’s mercy.

He faced a great challenge: being the successor of two saints, Saint Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. He was convinced he wasn’t up to the task. But at the same time he had the spiritual strength and courage
to go forward, to never lose hope, since he was one of the “little ones” to whom our Lord had revealed the mystery of his love (cf. Mt 11:29).

He came to know the love of Christ in his youth. First, in his family home. Then, with the great light brought into his life by his encounter with Saint Josemaría, he discovered more deeply the beauty of Christ’s love. He used to recall how, a few days after first meeting Saint Josemaría, he went with him and several others in a car. There he heard him sing a popular song about human love, which Saint Josemaría raised to the divine plane: 

*Tengo un amor que me llena de alegría, y es este amor la ilusión de cada día.* “I have a love that fills me with joy, a love that enkindles my heart with hope each day.” He understood that this love was God's Love for us, and that the Holy Spirit infuses in our heart the love we need to love God and others. “My yoke is easy, and my burden light” (Mt 11:30), Jesus says, because his yoke is love. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12).

Although Javier Echevarría was still very young when he was ordained a priest, the Mass became the center and root of his life, since the Eucharist is the “source and summit of all evangelization,”[3] as the Second Vatican Council teaches. Over the course of more than sixty years, while putting on the chasuble to celebrate the holy mysteries, he liked to pray in his heart a prayer of the Church about the attractiveness of our Lord’s yoke, about the immensity of his charity and mercy, revealed in an exalted way in Jesus, who died on the Cross and rose for us.

Following Saint Josemaría’s example and teachings, Javier Echevarría was a man with a big heart, able to forgive and ask for forgiveness. He was a great lover of the sacrament of Reconciliation and Penance, where we let Jesus enter our soul, and we experience “the full freedom of the love with which God enters into the life of every person,”[4] as our Holy Father Francis writes.

Bishop Echevarría, as vicar general of the Prelature, never had any other goal than that of assisting Blessed Alvaro del Portillo in his mission of guiding this small part of the People of God. Afterwards, upon being named Prelate by John Paul II, his most ardent concern and desire was to help those who had become his spiritual sons and daughters to truly seek
the sanctity that God wants to give us; to spread around us God’s love, especially through the search for holiness in the work and activities of daily life: in the family, with friends, in society. Indeed, when he left us for heaven he was praying for the fidelity of everyone.

I think we can discover the secret of all this in the reading from the gospel that we have just heard. It is prayer—faith in God’s loving presence—that makes us children of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children (Mt 11:25). For sanctity is simply the fullness of charity in us. It is making the talents God gives us bear fruit, and getting out of ourselves to serve others; it is sharing in Christ’s life, that is, in the increase of our adoptive filiation in the one and eternal Son of the Father. We could say that Bishop Echevarría’s heart was filled with the impatient longing for the revelation of the children of God, which Saint Paul refers to in his Letter to the Romans (cf. Rom 8:19).

I would like to thank the cardinals, archbishops and bishops, my brothers in the priesthood, the men and women religious, as well as the civil authorities, and so many other faithful who have wanted to unite themselves to our prayer for Bishop Echevarría and to give thanks with us for his life dedicated to the service of others.

Now I would like to add some words addressed especially to the faithful of the Prelature. If the one we have called Father for twenty-two years were here with us, he would surely ask us to take advantage of these days to intensify our love for the Church and the Pope, and to remain closely united with one another and with all our brothers and sisters in Christ. And he would tell us once again those words that, especially in his final years on earth, had become a frequent refrain on his lips: “love one another a lot, with an ever greater love!” And this was more than just words; it was moving to see how he loved others. I recall for example how the day before he died he told me he was worried about becoming a hindrance, since so many people were looking after him. And I told him spontaneously: “No, Father, it’s you who are sustaining all of us.”
My dear brothers and sisters, all graces reach us through the mediation of Mary. The Father loved our Lady very much. Among the many shrines of our Lady he visited with Saint Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro, and afterwards as Prelate, was that of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. Providence has disposed that the Father was called to heaven on the 12th of December, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. That same day, when his life was slipping away, a priest asked him if he wanted a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe placed close to him. The Father said no, since he could no longer see very well. But he added that he was very close to her in his heart. Let us place our prayer for Bishop Javier Echevarría in the hands of our Lady, Spes Nostra, our hope, while giving thanks to God for having given us this good and faithful shepherd.


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December 14. Funeral and Interment in the Crypt of the Prelatic Church

The casket with the body of Bishop Javier Echevarría was closed at 3:45 pm. His body was dressed in violet priestly vestments, along with his bishop’s ring and pectoral cross. The casket was closed in the presence of members of the General Council and the Central Advisory, the councils that assist the Prelate in governing the Prelature. The cover of the casket bears a silver crucifix and a plaque with the Prelate’s name and the dates 1932 - 2016.

At 5 pm the burial Mass was celebrated. In his homily, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz said that “his faith led Bishop Javier Echevarría to realize deeply that he was a son of God and this helped him to overcome difficulties and
suffering, including physical. He lived the virtue of charity very well and urged us to always live fraternity. ‘May you love one another!’ he always told us. And like us, he hoped in the promise of Heaven. When a person has faith, hope and charity, the greatest suffering becomes bearable, because Jesus carries it."

“We need to thank him,” Msgr. Ocáriz added, “for his life of service to the Church, first alongside Saint Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro, and then during the 22 years that he was at the head of Opus Dei. He followed our Lord’s example, who came not to be served but to serve.”

Following the Mass, eight priests carried the coffin in procession to the crypt of the Prelatic Church, where it was interred. The burial site of Bishop Echevarría is located beside the tomb of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. Msgr. Ocáriz prayed a response and the coffin was lowered in the tomb and covered with a tombstone.

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December 13 and 14. The Wake

The wake of Bishop Echevarría began shortly after his death, in the chapel of the hospital of the Campus Bio-Medico. The Auxiliary and General Vicar, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, celebrated the first Mass corpore insepulto, which was followed by others, celebrated by the Vicar General, Msgr. Mariano Fazio, and the Vicar of the delegation of Opus Dei in Rome, Fr. Carlo De Marchi and other priests. Throughout the night, doctors and nurses at the hospital complex, as well as faithful of the Prelature and friends, came to pray before the mortal remains of the Prelate.

On the 13th of December, at 10:30 am, the coffin left the hospital amidst the applause of those who wished to give their final farewell. The mortal remains of Bishop Echevarría were transferred to the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace. There the wake continued from noon until the moment of burial on the afternoon of the 14th. During those hours, thousands of people came to pray before the coffin: people from Italian
public life and the media, academics and married couples, workers and students, religious and members of various institutions in the Church. A large number of churchmen also came including Cardinal Agostino Vallini, Vicar for the Diocese of Rome; Cardinals Jean-Louis-Pierre Tauran, Darío Castrillón Hoyos, Mauro Piacenza, Sean Patrick O’Malley, Robert Sarah, Archbishop Virenzo Paglia and other Bishops. During the time that the wake was held, Masses for the eternal rest of Bishop Echevarría followed one after another.

Telegram from the Holy Father

At 8:15 on the morning of December 13, Pope Francis called the Vicar General of Opus Dei to express his closeness on the occasion of the death of Bishop Echevarría. The Holy Father assured him of his prayers for the Prelate during his celebration of the Eucharist and sent his blessing for all the faithful and friends of the Prelature. Some hours later he sent the telegram reproduced above.

Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz Braña
Auxiliary Vicar of Opus Dei
Rome

Having just received the sad news of the unexpected death of Bishop Javier Echevarría Rodríguez, Prelate of Opus Dei, I wish to express to you and all the members of this Prelature my heartfelt condolences, while also uniting myself to your thanksgiving to God for his generous and fatherly testimony of priestly and episcopal life. He followed the example of Saint Josemaría Escrivá and Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, whom he succeeded at the head of this entire family, giving his life in a constant service of love to the Church and souls.

I raise up to our Lord fervent suffrages for this faithful servant of his so that He may welcome him to eternal joy, and I lovingly entrust him to the protection of our Mother, our Lady of Guadalupe, on whose feast day he surrendered his soul to God. With these sentiments, and as a sign of faith
and hope in the Risen Christ, I impart to all the consoling apostolic blessing.

The Vatican, 13 December 2016.

Francis

A Biographical Sketch

Bishop Javier Echevarría was born in Madrid on June 14, 1932, the youngest of eight children. He attended a primary school run by the Marianist Fathers in San Sebastian and continued his education in Madrid at a Marist Brothers school.

In 1948, at a student residence, he met some young members of Opus Dei. Sensing that he was called by God to seek holiness in ordinary life, he asked to be admitted to Opus Dei on September 8 of that year.

He began studies in law at the University of Madrid and continued in Rome where he received a doctorate in canon law in 1953 at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas (also known as the Angelicum), and a doctorate in civil law at the Pontifical Lateran University in 1955.

He received priestly ordination on August 7, 1955, and worked closely with St. Josemaría Escrivá as his secretary from 1953 until the founder’s death in 1975.

In 1975, when Alvaro del Portillo succeeded St. Josemaría, Msgr. Echevarría was appointed Secretary General of Opus Dei. In 1982 he was appointed Vicar General.

After the death of Blessed Alvaro in 1994, he was elected Prelate of Opus Dei, and on January 6 of the following year he was ordained a bishop by St. John Paul II in St. Peter’s Basilica.

From the beginning of his ministry as Prelate, his priorities were evangelization in the areas of the family, youth, and culture. He oversaw the beginning of the Prelature’s stable formational activities in sixteen
countries, including Russia, Kazakhstan, South Africa, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. He traveled to all the continents to give impetus to the evangelizing work carried out by the faithful and the cooperators of Opus Dei. He encouraged the founding of numerous institutions dedicated to immigrants, the sick and the marginalized, and he gave special attention to a number of centers for the care of the terminally ill.

Recurring themes in his catechetical trips and in his pastoral ministry were love for Jesus Christ, fraternal love, service to those around us, the importance of grace and the Word of God, family life, and union with the Pope. In his last pastoral letter, in fact, besides expressing thanks for the audience he had with Pope Francis on November 7, he asked—as always—that the members and friends of Opus Dei accompany the Pope with prayers for his person and intentions.

He wrote many pastoral letters and a number of spiritual books, such as Paths to God: Building a Christian Life in the 21st Century, Para Servir a la Iglesia; Getsemaní; Eucaristía y vida cristiana; Vivir la Santa Misa; and Creo, creemos (I Believe, We Believe). His last book is a collection of meditations about the works of mercy, entitled Misericordia y vida cotidiana.


December 12. Bishop Javier Echevarría Passes Away

At 9:08 pm on December 12, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Bishop Javier Echevarría passed away at the age of 84. As Prelate of Opus Dei, he was the second successor to St. Josemaría Escrivá. He died comforted by the last sacraments, administered to him by the Auxiliary Vicar of the Prelature, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, a few hours before his death.

Bishop Echevarría had been hospitalized on Monday, December 5, at
the Campus Bio-Medico University Hospital in Rome with a lung infection, and was receiving antibiotics to combat it. In the last hours of Monday, December 12, complications arose that caused difficulty in his breathing and ultimately led to his death.

In the early hours of the night the hospital chapel was set up for the wake, and throughout the night Requiem Masses were celebrated there corpore insepulto. On Tuesday, February 13, the body of Bishop Echevarría was transferred to the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace. Many people came to pray for his soul and to say their last farewells.

Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Auxiliary and General Vicar of the Prelature of Opus Dei, said that it was a time for “prayer, serenity, and unity.” And he added: “our sadness at the loss of a father is united to thanksgiving for the affection and good example he has given us during these 22 years as Prelate.”

The Auxiliary Vicar mentioned that on the past December 3rd, his saint’s day, Bishop Echevarría told the people of Opus Dei who were with him: “I want to lean on your support. I need you. I’m finishing my stay with you. The Prelature of Opus Dei is in your hands. Support the Prelate, whoever he may be.” Msgr. Ocáriz also said that in his final moments, the Prelate “prayed to our Lady of Guadalupe” for the fidelity of everyone.

 elective General Congress

Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz Convokes the Elective General Council

On December 20, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Auxiliary Vicar of the Prelature of Opus Dei, convoked the General Elective Congress to choose the next Prelate, to be held in Rome starting on January 23. 2017.
“We are trying to foster during this time a spirit of prayer,” said Msgr. Ocáriz, “going especially to the intercession of the Holy Spirit.” And he added: “We are living these days closely united to the Holy Father Francis and the whole Church, of which Opus Dei is a small part. Naturally, we also have a strong sense of gratitude for the pastoral guidance and good example Bishop Echevarría left us.”

Only a priest can be elected as the Prelate. He must be at least forty years old and a member of the Congress of electors, and incorporated in the Prelature for at least ten years and a priest for five years. When the Congress was convoked, the number of priests who fulfilled these requirements was 94, coming from 45 countries.

Among them were found many regional vicars (representing the Prelate in each country or circumscription) as well as other priests who work or have worked in tasks of pastoral government in Rome or in the 49 circumscriptions that currently make up the Prelature.

The statutes of the Prelature describe the various human, spiritual and juridical qualities the Prelate must possess to ensure that this responsibility is carried out suitably. In summary, he has to stand out for the way he lives the virtues of charity and prudence, for his life of piety, love for the Church and her Magisterium, and fidelity to the spirit of Opus Dei. He also needs to possess a deep culture, both in ecclesiastical and civil studies, and the requisite gifts for pastoral government.

In the electoral process women as well as men take part, culminating with the confirmation of the election by the Pope.

The elective process began on January 21, with a plenary meeting of the women’s Council of the Prelature, called the Central Advisory. 194 faithful of Opus Dei took part in the election, priests and lay people, all at least 32 years of age and members of the Prelature for at least nine years. They have been appointed from among the faithful in the various countries in which Opus Dei carries out its pastoral work.

In the Advisory, each member submits a list with the name or names of the priests seen as best suited for the position of Prelate. The members of the Congress, keeping these suggestions in mind, then proceed to the voting process. Once the election has been concluded and the person
chosen has accepted, he—in person or through someone else—asks the Holy Father for confirmation, as the Pope is the one who appoints the Prelate of Opus Dei.

Once the Prelate is elected, the members of the congress gather for several days for the naming of those who will make up the central councils that assist the Prelate in governing the Prelature.

Finally, the members of the congress examine the state of the Prelature and its apostolic activities throughout the world. The proposals are studied in plenary sessions that set guidelines for the government of the Prelature during the next eight years until the following ordinary General Congress.
HOLY SEE

• The Roman Pontiff
• The Roman Curia
The Roman Pontiff

Apostolic Letter Misericordia et Misera (November 20, 2016)

To all who read this Apostolic Letter

mercy and peace

_Misericordia et misera_ is a phrase used by Saint Augustine in recounting the story of Jesus’ meeting with the woman taken in adultery (cf. _Jn_ 8:1-11). It would be difficult to imagine a more beautiful or apt way of expressing the mystery of God’s love when it touches the sinner: “the two of them alone remained: _mercy with misery._”[1] What great mercy and divine justice shine forth in this narrative! Its teaching serves not only to throw light on the conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, but also to point out the path that we are called to follow in the future.

1. This page of the Gospel could easily serve as an icon of what we have celebrated during the Holy Year, a time rich in mercy, which must continue to be celebrated and lived out in our communities. Mercy cannot become a mere parenthesis in the life of the Church; it constitutes her very existence, through which the profound truths of the Gospel are made manifest and tangible. Everything is revealed in mercy; everything is resolved in the merciful love of the Father.

A woman and Jesus meet. She is an adulteress and, in the eyes of the Law, liable to be stoned. Jesus, through his preaching and the total gift of himself that would lead him to the Cross, returned the Mosaic Law to its true and original intent. Here what is central is not the law or legal justice, but the love of God, which is capable of looking into the heart of each person and seeing the deepest desire hidden there; God’s love must take primacy over all else. This Gospel account, however, is not an encounter of sin and judgement in the abstract, but of a sinner and her Savior. Jesus looked that woman in the eye and read in her heart a desire to be understood, forgiven and set free. The misery of sin was clothed with the mercy of love. Jesus’ only judgement is one filled with mercy and
compassion for the condition of this sinner. To those who wished to judge and condemn her to death, Jesus replies with a lengthy silence. His purpose was to let God’s voice be heard in the consciences not only of the woman, but also in those of her accusers, who drop their stones and one by one leave the scene (cf. Jn 8:9). Jesus then says: “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?... Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and from now on do not sin again” (vv. 10-11). Jesus helps the woman to look to the future with hope and to make a new start in life. Henceforth, if she so desires, she can “walk in charity” (Eph 5:2). Once clothed in mercy, even if the inclination to sin remains, it is overcome by the love that makes it possible for her to look ahead and to live her life differently.

2. Jesus had taught this clearly on another occasion, when he had been invited to dine at the home of a Pharisee and a woman, known by everyone to be a sinner, approached him (cf. Lk 7:36-50). She poured perfume over his feet, bathed them with her tears and dried them with her hair (cf. vv. 37-38). To the scandalized reaction of the Pharisee, Jesus replied: “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little” (v. 47).

Forgiveness is the most visible sign of the Father’s love, which Jesus sought to reveal by his entire life. Every page of the Gospel is marked by this imperative of a love that loves to the point of forgiveness. Even at the last moment of his earthly life, as he was being nailed to the cross, Jesus spoke words of forgiveness: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34).

Nothing of what a repentant sinner places before God’s mercy can be excluded from the embrace of his forgiveness. For this reason, none of us has the right to make forgiveness conditional.

Mercy is always a gratuitous act of our heavenly Father, an unconditional and unmerited act of love. Consequently, we cannot risk opposing the full freedom of the love with which God enters into the life of every person. Mercy is this concrete action of love that, by forgiving, transforms and changes our lives. In this way, the divine mystery of mercy is made manifest. God is merciful (cf. Ex 34:6); his mercy lasts for ever (cf.
Ps 136). From generation to generation, it embraces all those who trust in him and it changes them, by bestowing a share in his very life.

3. What great joy welled up in the heart of these two women: the adulteress and the sinner! Forgiveness made them feel free at last and happy as never before. Their tears of shame and pain turned into the smile of a person who knows that he or she is loved. Mercy gives rise to joy, because our hearts are opened to the hope of a new life. The joy of forgiveness is inexpressible, yet it radiates all around us whenever we experience forgiveness. Its source is in the love with which God comes to meet us, breaking through walls of selfishness that surround us, in order to make us in turn instruments of mercy.

How meaningful in this regard for us too are the ancient words which guided the first Christians: “Clothe yourselves in joy, which always is agreeable and acceptable to God, and rejoice in it. For all who are joyful do what is good, think what is good, and despise sadness... All who put aside sadness and put on joy will live in God.”[2] The experience of mercy brings joy. May we never allow this joy to be robbed from us by our troubles and concerns. May it remain rooted in our hearts and enable us to approach with serenity the events of our daily lives.

In a culture often dominated by technology, sadness and loneliness appear to be on the rise, not least among young people. The future seems prey to an uncertainty that does not make for stability. This often gives rise to depression, sadness and boredom, which can gradually lead to despair. We need witnesses to hope and true joy if we are to dispel the illusions that promise quick and easy happiness through artificial paradises. The profound sense of emptiness felt by so many people can be overcome by the hope we bear in our hearts and by the joy that it gives. We need to acknowledge the joy that rises up in a heart touched by mercy. Let us keep in mind, then, the words of the Apostle: “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil 4:4; cf. 1 Thess 5:16)

4. We have celebrated an intense Jubilee Year in which we have received the grace of mercy in abundance. Like a gusting but wholesome wind, the Lord’s goodness and mercy have been poured out upon the entire
world. Because each of us has experienced at length this loving gaze of God, we cannot remain unaffected, for it changes our lives.

We feel the need above all to thank the Lord and to tell him: “Lord, you have been favorable to your land... You have forgiven the iniquity of your people” (Ps 85:1-2). So it is. God has subdued our iniquities and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea (cf. Mic 7:19). He no longer remembers them, since he has cast them behind his back (cf. Is 38:17). As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (cf. Ps 103:12).

In this Holy Year, the Church listened attentively and experienced intensely the presence and closeness of the Father, who with the Holy Spirit has enabled her to see with greater clarity the gift and mandate of Jesus Christ regarding forgiveness. It has truly been like a new visitation of the Lord among us. We have felt his life-giving breath poured out upon the Church and, once again, his words have pointed out our mission: “Receive the Holy Spirit: if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn 20:22-23).

5. Now, at the conclusion of this Jubilee, it is time to look to the future and to understand how best to continue, with joy, fidelity and enthusiasm, experiencing the richness of divine mercy. Our communities can remain alive and active in the work of the new evangelization in the measure that the “pastoral conversion” to which we are called [3] will be shaped daily by the renewing force of mercy. Let us not limit its action; let us not sadden the Spirit, who constantly points out new paths to take in bringing to everyone the Gospel of salvation.

First, we are called to celebrate mercy. What great richness is present in the Church’s prayer when she invokes God as the Father of mercies! In the liturgy, mercy is not only repeatedly evoked, but is truly received and experienced. From the beginning to the end of the Eucharistic celebration, mercy constantly appears in the dialogue between the assembly at prayer and the heart of the Father, who rejoices to bestow his merciful love. After first pleading for forgiveness with the invocation “Lord have mercy,” we are immediately reassured: “May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life.” With this confidence, the
community gathers in the presence of the Lord, particularly on the holy day of the resurrection. Many of the “Collect” prayers are meant to remind us of the great gift of mercy. In Lent, for example, we pray: “O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness, who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving have shown us a remedy for sin, look graciously on this confession of our lowliness, that we, who are bowed down by our conscience, may always be lifted up by your mercy.”[4] We are then immersed in the great Eucharistic Prayer with the Preface that proclaims: “For you so loved the world that in your mercy you sent us the Redeemer, to live like us in all things but sin.”[5] The Fourth Eucharistic Prayer is a hymn to God’s mercy: “For you came in mercy to the aid of all, so that those who seek might find you.” “Have mercy on us all”[6] is the insistent plea made by the priest in the Eucharistic Prayer to implore a share in eternal life. After the Our Father, the priest continues the prayer by invoking peace and liberation from sin by the “help of your mercy.” And before the sign of peace, exchanged as an expression of fraternity and mutual love in the light of forgiveness received, the priest prays: “Look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church.”[7] By these words, with humble trust we beseech the gift of unity and peace for Holy Mother Church. The celebration of divine mercy culminates in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the memorial of Christ’s paschal mystery, the source of salvation for every human being, for history and for the whole world. In a word, each moment of the Eucharistic celebration refers to God’s mercy.

In the sacramental life, mercy is granted us in abundance. It is not without significance that the Church mentions mercy explicitly in the formulae of the two “sacraments of healing,” namely, the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. In the first, the formula of absolution reads: “God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace.”[8] In the second, the formula of anointing reads:

“Through this holy anointing, may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.”[9] In the Church’s prayer, then, references to mercy, far from being merely exhortative, are highly
performative, which is to say that as we invoke mercy with faith, it is granted to us, and as we confess it to be vital and real, it truly transforms us. This is a fundamental element of our faith, and we must keep it constantly in mind. Even before the revelation of sin, there is the revelation of the love by which God created the world and mankind. Love is the first act whereby God makes himself known to us and comes to meet us. So let us open our hearts and trust in God’s love for us. His love always precedes us, accompanies us and remains with us, despite our sin.

6. In this context, hearing the word of God takes on particular significance. Each Sunday, God’s word is proclaimed in the Christian community so that the Lord’s Day may be illuminated by the paschal mystery.[10] In the Eucharistic celebration, we seem to witness a true dialogue between God and his people. In the biblical readings, we retrace the history of our salvation through the proclamation of God’s tireless work of mercy. The Lord continues to speak to us today as to friends; he dwells in our midst,[11] in order to accompany us and show us the path of life. His word gives a voice to our inmost needs and worries, and offers a fruitful response, so that we can concretely experience his closeness to us. Hence the importance of the homily, in which “truth goes hand in hand with beauty and goodness”[12] so that the hearts of believers may thrill before the grandeur of mercy! I strongly encourage that great care be given to preparing the homily and to preaching in general. A priest’s preaching will be fruitful to the extent that he himself has experienced the merciful goodness of the Lord. Communicating the certainty that God loves us is not an exercise in rhetoric, but a condition for the credibility of one’s priesthood. The personal experience of mercy is the best way to make it a true message of consolation and conversion in the pastoral ministry. Both homiletics and catechesis need to be sustained by this pulsing heart of the Christian life.

7. The Bible is the great story of the marvels of God’s mercy. Every one of its pages is steeped in the love of the Father who from the moment of creation wished to impress the signs of his love on the universe. Through the words of the prophets and the wisdom writings, the Holy Spirit shaped the history of Israel as a recognition of God’s tenderness and closeness, despite the people’s infidelity. Jesus’ life and preaching decisively marked
the history of the Christian community, which has viewed its mission in terms of Christ’s command to be a permanent instrument of his mercy and forgiveness (cf. Jn 20:23). Through Sacred Scripture, kept alive by the faith of the Church, the Lord continues to speak to his Bride, showing her the path she must take to enable the Gospel of salvation to reach everyone. I greatly desire that God’s word be increasingly celebrated, known and disseminated, so that the mystery of love streaming from this font of mercy may be ever better understood. As the Apostle tells us clearly: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

It would be beneficial if every Christian community, on one Sunday of the liturgical year, could renew its efforts to make the Sacred Scriptures better known and more widely diffused. It would be a Sunday given over entirely to the word of God, so as to appreciate the inexhaustible riches contained in that constant dialogue between the Lord and his people. Creative initiatives can help make this an opportunity for the faithful to become living vessels for the transmission of God’s word. Initiatives of this sort would certainly include the practice of lectio divina, so that the prayerful reading of the sacred text will help support and strengthen the spiritual life. Such a reading, centered on themes relating to mercy, will enable a personal experience of the great fruitfulness of the biblical text — read in the light of the Church’s spiritual tradition — and thus give rise to concrete gestures and works of charity.\[13\]

8. The celebration of mercy takes place in a very particular way in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Here we feel the embrace of the Father, who comes forth to meet us and grant us the grace of being once more his sons and daughters. We are sinners and we bear the burden of contradiction between what we wish to do and what we do in fact (cf. Rom 7:14-21). Yet grace always precedes us and takes on the face of the mercy that effects our reconciliation and pardon. God makes us understand his great love for us precisely when we recognize that we are sinners. Grace is stronger than sin: it overcomes every possible form of resistance, because love conquers all (cf. 1 Cor 13:7).

In the sacrament of Forgiveness God shows us the way to turn back to him and invites us to experience his closeness anew. This pardon can be
obtained by beginning, first of all, to live in charity. The Apostle Peter tells us this when he writes that “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8). Only God forgives sins, but he asks that we be ready to forgive others even as he forgives us: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Mt 6:12). How sad it is when our hearts are closed and unable to forgive! Resentment, anger and revenge gain the upper hand, making our lives miserable and blocking a joyful commitment to mercy.

9. An experience of grace lived out by the Church with great effectiveness in the Jubilee Year has certainly been the service of the Missionaries of Mercy. Their pastoral activity sought to emphasize that God places no obstacles in the way of those who seek him with a contrite heart, because he goes out to meet everyone like a father. I have received many testimonies of joy from those who encountered the Lord once more in the sacrament of Confession. Let us not miss the opportunity to live our faith also as an experience of reconciliation. Today too, the Apostle urges us: “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20), so that all who believe can discover the power of love which makes us “a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17).

I thank every Missionary of Mercy for this valuable service aimed at rendering effective the grace of forgiveness. This extraordinary ministry does not end with the closing of the Holy Door. I wish it to continue until further notice as a concrete sign that the grace of the Jubilee remains alive and effective the world over. As a direct expression of my concern and closeness to the Missionaries of Mercy in this period, the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization will supervise them and find the most suitable forms for the exercise of this valuable ministry.

10. I invite priests once more to prepare carefully for the ministry of Confession, which is a true priestly mission. I thank all of you from the heart for your ministry, and I ask you to be welcoming to all, witnesses of fatherly tenderness whatever the gravity of the sin involved, attentive in helping penitents to reflect on the wrong they have done, clear in presenting moral principles, willing to walk patiently beside the faithful on their penitential journey, far-sighted in discerning individual cases and generous in dispensing God’s forgiveness. Just as Jesus chose to remain silent in order to save the woman caught in adultery from the sentence of death, so every priest in the confessional should be open-hearted, since
every penitent is a reminder that he himself is a sinner, but also a minister of mercy.

11. I would like us all to meditate upon the words of the Apostle, written towards the end of his life, when he confesses to Timothy that he was the greatest of sinners, “but for this reason I received mercy” (1 Tim 1:16). Paul’s words, powerful as they are, make us reflect on our lives and see God’s mercy at work in changing, converting and transforming our hearts. “I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy” (1 Tim 1:12-13).

Let us recall with renewed pastoral zeal another saying of the Apostle: “God has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18). We were the first to be forgiven in view of this ministry, made witnesses at first hand of the universality of God’s forgiveness. No law or precept can prevent God from once more embracing the son who returns to him, admitting that he has done wrong but intending to start his life anew. Remaining only at the level of the law is equivalent to thwarting faith and divine mercy. The law has an educational value (cf. Gal 3:24) with charity as its goal (cf. 1 Tim 1:5). Nonetheless, Christians are called to experience the newness of the Gospel, the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2). Even in the most complex cases, where there is a temptation to apply a form of justice derived from rules alone, we must believe in the power flowing from divine grace.

We confessors have experienced many conversions that took place before our very eyes. We feel responsible, then, for actions and words that can touch the heart of penitents and enable them to discover the closeness and tenderness of the Father who forgives. Let us not lose such occasions by acting in a way that can contradict the experience of mercy that the penitent seeks. Rather, let us help light up the space of personal conscience with God’s infinite love (cf. 1 Jn 3:20).

The Sacrament of Reconciliation must regain its central place in the Christian life. This requires priests capable of putting their lives at the
service of the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18), in such a way that, while no sincerely repentant sinner is prevented from drawing near to the love of the Father who awaits his return, everyone is afforded the opportunity of experiencing the liberating power of forgiveness.

A favorable occasion for this could be the 24 Hours for the Lord, a celebration held in proximity to the Fourth Sunday of Lent. This initiative, already in place in many dioceses, has great pastoral value in encouraging a more fervent experience of the sacrament of Confession.

12. Given this need, lest any obstacle arise between the request for reconciliation and God’s forgiveness, I henceforth grant to all priests, in virtue of their ministry, the faculty to absolve those who have committed the sin of procured abortion. The provision I had made in this regard, limited to the duration of the Extraordinary Holy Year,[14] is hereby extended, notwithstanding anything to the contrary. I wish to restate as firmly as I can that abortion is a grave sin, since it puts an end to an innocent life. In the same way, however, I can and must state that there is no sin that God’s mercy cannot reach and wipe away when it finds a repentant heart seeking to be reconciled with the Father. May every priest, therefore, be a guide, support and comfort to penitents on this journey of special reconciliation.

For the Jubilee Year I had also granted that those faithful who, for various reasons, attend churches officiated by the priests of the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X, can validly and licitly receive the sacramental absolution of their sins.[15] For the pastoral benefit of these faithful, and trusting in the good will of their priests to strive with God’s help for the recovery of full communion in the Catholic Church, I have personally decided to extend this faculty beyond the Jubilee Year, until further provisions are made, lest anyone ever be deprived of the sacramental sign of reconciliation through the Church’s pardon.

13. Another face of mercy is consolation. “Comfort, comfort my people” (Is 40:1) is the heartfelt plea that the prophet continues to make today, so that a word of hope may come to all those who experience suffering and pain. Let us never allow ourselves to be robbed of the hope born of faith in the Risen Lord. True, we are often sorely tested, but we must never lose
our certainty of the Lord’s love for us. His mercy finds expression also in the closeness, affection and support that many of our brothers and sisters can offer us at times of sadness and affliction. The drying of tears is one way to break the vicious circle of solitude in which we often find ourselves trapped.

All of us need consolation because no one is spared suffering, pain and misunderstanding. How much pain can be caused by a spiteful remark born of envy, jealousy or anger! What great suffering is caused by the experience of betrayal, violence and abandonment! How much sorrow in the face of the death of a loved one! And yet God is never far from us at these moments of sadness and trouble. A reassuring word, an embrace that makes us feel understood, a caress that makes us experience love, a prayer that makes us stronger… all these things express God’s closeness through the consolation offered by our brothers and sisters.

Sometimes too, silence can be helpful, especially when we cannot find words in response to the questions of those who suffer. A lack of words, however, can be made up for by the compassion of a person who stays at our side, who loves us and who holds out a hand. It is not true that silence is an act of surrender; on the contrary, it is a moment of strength and love. Silence too belongs to our language of consolation, because it becomes a concrete way of sharing in the suffering of a brother or sister.

14. At a time like our own, marked by many crises, including that of the family, it is important to offer a word of comfort and strength to our families. The gift of matrimony is a great calling to which spouses, by the grace of Christ, respond with a love that is generous, faithful and patient. The beauty of the family endures unchanged, despite so many problems and alternative proposals: “The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church.”[16] The journey of life that leads a man and a woman to meet one other, to love one another and to promise mutual fidelity before God, is often interrupted by suffering, betrayal and loneliness. Joy at the gift of children is accompanied by concern about their growth and education, and their prospects for happiness and fulfilment in life.
The grace of the sacrament of Matrimony not only strengthens the family to be a privileged place for practicing mercy, but also commits the Christian community and all its pastoral activity to uphold the great positive value of the family. This Jubilee Year cannot overlook the complexity of the current realities of family life. The experience of mercy enables us to regard all human problems from the standpoint of God’s love, which never tires of welcoming and accompanying.\[17\]

We have to remember each of us carries the richness and the burdens of our personal history; this is what makes us different from everyone else. Our life, with its joys and sorrows, is something unique and unrepeatable that takes place under the merciful gaze of God. This demands, especially of priests, a careful, profound and far-sighted spiritual discernment, so that everyone, none excluded, no matter the situation a person is living in, can feel accepted by God, participate actively in the life of the community and be part of that People of God which journeys tirelessly towards the fullness of his kingdom of justice, love, forgiveness and mercy.

15. Here too, we see the particular importance of the moment of death. The Church has always experienced this dramatic passage in the light of Christ’s resurrection, which opened the way to the certainty of the life to come. We have a great challenge to face, especially in contemporary culture, which often tends to trivialize death to the point of treating it as an illusion or hiding it from sight. Yet death must be faced and prepared for as a painful and inescapable passage, yet one charged with immense meaning, for it is the ultimate act of love towards those we leave behind and towards God whom we go forth to meet. In all religions, the moment of death, like that of birth, is accompanied by a religious presence. As Christians, we celebrate the funeral liturgy as a hope-filled prayer for the soul of the deceased and for the consolation of those who suffer the loss of their loved one.

I am convinced that our faith-filled pastoral activity should lead to a direct experience of how the liturgical signs and our prayers are an expression of the Lord’s mercy. It is the Lord himself who offers words of hope, since nothing and no one can ever separate us from his love (cf. Rom 8:35). The priest’s sharing in this moment is an important form of pastoral
care, for it enables the closeness of the Christian community at a moment of helplessness, solitude, uncertainty and grief.

16. The Jubilee now ends and the Holy Door is closed. But the door of mercy of our heart continues to remain wide open. We have learned that God bends down to us (cf. *Hos* 11:4) so that we may imitate him in bending down to our brothers and sisters. The yearning of so many people to turn back to the house of the Father, who awaits their return, has also been awakened by heartfelt and generous testimonies to God’s tenderness. The Holy Door that we have crossed in this Jubilee Year has set us on *the path of charity*, which we are called to travel daily with fidelity and joy. It is the road of mercy, on which we meet so many of our brothers and sisters who reach out for someone to take their hand and become a companion on the way.

The desire for closeness to Christ requires us to draw near to our brothers and sisters, for nothing is more pleasing to the Father than a true sign of mercy. By its very nature, mercy becomes visible and tangible in specific and powerful acts. Once mercy has been truly experienced, it is impossible to turn back. It grows constantly and it changes our lives. It is an authentic new creation: it brings about a new heart, capable of loving to the full, and it purifies our eyes to perceive hidden needs. How true are the words of the Church’s prayer at the Easter Vigil, after the reading of the creation account: “O God, who wonderfully created human nature and still more wonderfully redeemed it.”[18]

Mercy *renews and redeems* because it is the meeting of two hearts: the heart of God who comes to meet the human heart. The latter is warmed and healed by the former. Our hearts of stone become hearts of flesh (cf. *Ezek* 36:26) capable of love despite our sinfulness. I come to realize that I am truly a “new creation” (*Gal* 6:15): I am loved, therefore I exist; I am forgiven, therefore I am reborn; I have been shown mercy, therefore I have become a vessel of mercy.

17. During the Holy Year, especially on the “Fridays of Mercy,” I was able to experience in a tangible way the goodness present in our world. Often it remains hidden, since it is daily expressed in discreet and quiet gestures. Even if rarely publicized, many concrete acts of goodness and
tenderness are shown to the weak and the vulnerable, to those most lonely and abandoned. There are true champions of charity who show constant solidarity with the poor and the unhappy. Let us thank the Lord for these precious gifts that invite us to discover the joy of drawing near to the woundedness of human weakness. I also think with gratitude of the many volunteers who daily devote their time and efforts to showing God’s presence and closeness. Their service is a genuine work of mercy, one that helps many people draw closer to the Church.

18. Now is the time to unleash the creativity of mercy, to bring about new undertakings, the fruit of grace. The Church today needs to tell of those “many other signs” that Jesus worked, which “are not written” (Jn 20:30), so that they too may be an eloquent expression of the fruitfulness of the love of Christ and of the community that draws its life from him. Two thousand years have passed, yet works of mercy continue to make God’s goodness visible.

In our own day, whole peoples suffer hunger and thirst, and we are haunted by pictures of children with nothing to eat. Throngs of people continue to migrate from one country to another in search of food, work, shelter and peace. Disease in its various forms is a constant cause of suffering that cries out for assistance, comfort and support. Prisons are often places where confinement is accompanied by serious hardships due to inhumane living conditions. Illiteracy remains widespread, preventing children from developing their potential and exposing them to new forms of slavery. The culture of extreme individualism, especially in the West, has led to a loss of a sense of solidarity with and responsibility for others. Today many people have no experience of God himself, and this represents the greatest poverty and the major obstacle to recognizing the inviolable dignity of human life.

To conclude, the corporal and spiritual works of mercy continue in our own day to be proof of mercy’s immense positive influence as a social value. Mercy impels us to roll up our sleeves and set about restoring dignity to millions of people; they are our brothers and sisters who, with us, are called to build a “city which is reliable.”[19]
19. Many concrete signs of mercy have been performed during this Holy Year. Communities, families and individuals have rediscovered the joy of sharing and the beauty of solidarity. But this is not enough. Our world continues to promote new forms of spiritual and material poverty that assault human dignity. For this reason, the Church must always be vigilant and ready to identify new works of mercy and to practice them with generosity and enthusiasm.

Let us make every effort, then, to devise specific and insightful ways of practicing charity and the works of mercy. Mercy is inclusive and tends to spread like wildfire in a way that knows no limits. Hence we are called to give new expression to the traditional works of mercy. For mercy overflows, keeps moving forward, bears rich fruit. It is like the leaven that makes the dough rise (cf. Mt 13:33), or the mustard seed that grows into a tree (cf. Lk 13:19).

We need but think of one corporal work of mercy: “to clothe the naked” (cf. Mt 25:36, 38, 43, 44). This takes us back to the beginning, to the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve realized that they were naked and, hearing the Lord approaching, felt shame and hid themselves (Gen 3:7-8). We know that God punished them, yet he also “made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them” (Gen 3:21). He covered their shame and restored their dignity.

Let us think too of Jesus on Golgotha. The Son of God hangs naked on the cross; the soldiers took his tunic and cast lots for it (cf. Jn 19:23-24). He has nothing left. The cross is the extreme revelation of Jesus’ sharing the lot of those who have lost their dignity for lack of the necessities of life. Just as the Church is called to be the “tunic of Christ”[20] and to clothe her Lord once more, so She is committed to solidarity with the naked of the world, to help them recover the dignity of which they have been stripped. Jesus’ words, “I was naked and you clothed me” (Mt 25:36), oblige us not to turn our backs on the new forms of poverty and marginalization that prevent people from living a life of dignity.

Being unemployed or not receiving a sufficient salary; not being able to have a home or a land in which to live; experiencing discrimination on account of one’s faith, race or social status: these are just a few examples of
many situations that attack the dignity of the person. In the face of such attacks, Christian mercy responds above all with vigilance and solidarity. How many situations exist today where we can restore dignity to individuals and make possible a truly humane life! Let us think only about the many children who suffer from forms of violence that rob them of the joy of life. I keep thinking of their sorrowful and bewildered faces. They are pleading for our help to be set free from the slavery of the contemporary world. These children are the young adults of tomorrow. How are we preparing them to live with dignity and responsibility? With what hope can they face their present or their future?

The social character of mercy demands that we not simply stand by and do nothing. It requires us to banish indifference and hypocrisy, lest our plans and projects remain a dead letter. May the Holy Spirit help us to contribute actively and selflessly to making justice and a dignified life not simply clichés but a concrete commitment of those who seek to bear witness to the presence of God’s Kingdom.

20. We are called to promote a culture of mercy based on the rediscovery of encounter with others, a culture in which no one looks at another with indifference or turns away from the suffering of our brothers and sisters. The works of mercy are “handcrafted,” in the sense that none of them is alike. Our hands can craft them in a thousand different ways, and even though the one God inspires them, and they are all fashioned from the same “material,” mercy itself, each one takes on a different form.

The works of mercy affect a person’s entire life. For this reason, we can set in motion a real cultural revolution, beginning with simple gestures capable of reaching body and spirit, people’s very lives. This is a commitment that the Christian community should take up, in the knowledge that God’s word constantly calls us to leave behind the temptation to hide behind indifference and individualism in order to lead a comfortable life free of problems. Jesus tells his disciples: “The poor you always have with you” (Jn 12:8). There is no alibi to justify not engaging with the poor when Jesus has identified himself with each of them.

The culture of mercy is shaped in assiduous prayer, in docility to the working of the Holy Spirit, in knowing the lives of the saints and in being
close to the poor. It urges us not to overlook situations that call for our involvement. The temptation to theorize “about” mercy can be overcome to the extent that our daily life becomes one of participation and sharing. Nor should we ever forget what the Apostle Paul tells us about his meeting with Peter, James and John after his conversion. His words highlight an essential aspect of his own mission and of the Christian life as a whole: “Only they would have us remember the poor, which very thing I was eager to do” (Gal 2:10). We cannot forget the poor: this is an injunction as relevant today as ever, and one that compels by its evangelical warrant.

21. The Jubilee impresses upon us the words of the Apostle Peter: “Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Pet 2:10). Let us not hold on jealously to what we have received, but share it with our suffering brothers and sisters, so that they can be sustained by the power of the Father’s mercy. May our communities reach out to all who live in their midst, so that God’s caress may reach everyone through the witness of believers.

This is the time of mercy. Each day of our journey is marked by God’s presence. He guides our steps with the power of the grace that the Spirit pours into our hearts to make them capable of loving. It is the time of mercy for each and all, since no one can think that he or she is cut off from God’s closeness and the power of his tender love. It is the time of mercy because those who are weak and vulnerable, distant and alone, ought to feel the presence of brothers and sisters who can help them in their need. It is the time of mercy because the poor should feel that they are regarded with respect and concern by others who have overcome indifference and discovered what is essential in life. It is the time of mercy because no sinner can ever tire of asking forgiveness and all can feel the welcoming embrace of the Father.

During the “Jubilee for Socially Excluded People,” as the Holy Doors of Mercy were being closed in all the cathedrals and shrines of the world, I had the idea that, as yet another tangible sign of this Extraordinary Holy Year, the entire Church might celebrate, on the Thirty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, the World Day of the Poor. This would be the worthiest way to prepare for the celebration of the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, who identified with the little ones and the poor and
who will judge us on our works of mercy (cf. Mt 25:31-46). It would be a day to help communities and each of the baptized to reflect on how poverty is at the very heart of the Gospel and that, as long as Lazarus lies at the door of our homes (cf. Lk 16:19-21), there can be no justice or social peace. This Day will also represent a genuine form of new evangelization (cf. Mt 11:5) which can renew the face of the Church as She perseveres in her perennial activity of pastoral conversion and witness to mercy.

22. The Holy Mother of God always looks upon us with her eyes of mercy. She is the first to show us the way and to accompany us in our witness of love. As she is often shown in works of art, the Mother of Mercy gathers us all under the protection of her mantle. Let us trust in her maternal assistance and follow her perennial counsel to look to Jesus, the radiant face of God’s mercy.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s Basilica, on 20 November, the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, in the year 2016, the fourth of my Pontificate.

FRANCISCUS

[5] Ibid., Preface for Sundays in Ordinary Time VII.
[6] Ibid., Eucharistic Prayer II.
[7] Ibid., Communion Rite.
[8] Rite of Penance, No. 46.
[9] Sacrament of Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick, No. 76.
Vigil of Prayer at the 31st World Youth Day at the Campus Misericordiae, Krakow (July 30, 2016)

Dear Young Friends, good evening!

It is good to be here with you at this Prayer Vigil!

At the end of her powerful and moving witness, Rand asked something of us. She said: “I earnestly ask you to pray for my beloved country”. Her story, involving war, grief and loss, ended with a request for prayers. Is there a better way for us to begin our vigil than by praying?

We have come here from different parts of the world, from different continents, countries, languages, cultures and peoples. Some of us are sons and daughters of nations that may be at odds and engaged in various conflicts or even open war. Others of us come from countries that may be at “peace”, free of war and conflict, where most of the terrible things occurring in our world are simply a story on the evening news. But think about it. For us, here, today, coming from different parts of the world, the suffering and the wars that many young people experience are no longer
anonymous, something we read about in the papers. They have a name, they have a face, they have a story, they are close at hand. Today the war in Syria has caused pain and suffering for so many people, for so many young people like our brave friend Rand, who has come here and asked us to pray for her beloved country.

Some situations seem distant until in some way we touch them. We don’t appreciate certain things because we only see them on the screen of a cell phone or a computer. But when we come into contact with life, with people’s lives, not just images on a screen, something powerful happens. We all feel the need to get involved. To see that there are no more “forgotten cities”, to use Rand’s words, or brothers and sisters of ours “surrounded by death and killing”, completely helpless. Dear friends, I ask that we join in prayer for the sufferings of all the victims of war, of this war today in the world. Once and for all, may we realize that nothing justifies shedding the blood of a brother or sister; that nothing is more precious than the person next to us. In asking you to pray for this, I would also like to thank Natalia and Miguel for sharing their own battles and inner conflicts. You told us about your struggles, and about how you succeeded in overcoming them. Both of you are a living sign of what God’s mercy wants to accomplish in us.

This is no time for denouncing anyone or fighting. We do not want to tear down, we do not want to give insult. We have no desire to conquer hatred with more hatred, violence with more violence, terror with more terror. We are here today because the Lord has called us together. Our response to a world at war has a name: its name is fraternity, its name is brotherhood, its name is communion, its name is family. We celebrate the fact that coming from different cultures, we have come together to pray. Let our best word, our best argument, be our unity in prayer. Let us take a moment of silence and pray. Let us place before the Lord these testimonies of our friends, and let us identify with those for whom “the family is a meaningless concept, the home only a place to sleep and eat”, and with those who live with the fear that their mistakes and sins have made them outcasts. Let us also place before the Lord your own “battles”, our “battles”, the interior struggles that each carries in his or her heart. And so, to live as
a family, in fraternity, I invite all of you together to stand, to take each other's hand and to pray in silence. All of us.

(SILENCE)

As we were praying, I thought of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost. Picturing them can help us come to appreciate all that God dreams of accomplishing in our lives, in us and with us. That day, the disciples were together behind locked doors, out of fear. They felt threatened, surrounded by an atmosphere of persecution that had cornered them in a little room and left them silent and paralyzed. Fear had taken hold of them. Then, in that situation, something spectacular, something grandiose, occurred. The Holy Spirit and tongues as of fire came to rest upon each of them, propelling them towards an undreamt-of adventure. This brings about a total change!

We have heard three testimonies. Our hearts were touched by their stories, their lives. We have seen how, like the disciples, they experienced similar moments, living through times of great fear, when it seemed like everything was falling apart. The fear and anguish born of knowing that leaving home might mean never again seeing their loved ones, the fear of not feeling appreciated or loved, the fear of having no choices. They shared with us the same experience the disciples had; they felt the kind of fear that only leads to one thing. Where does fear lead us? The feeling of being closed in on oneself, trapped. Once we feel that way, our fear starts to fester and is inevitably joined by its “twin sister”, paralysis: the feeling of being paralyzed. Thinking that in this world, in our cities and our communities, there is no longer any room to grow, to dream, to create, to gaze at new horizons — in a word to live — is one of the worst things that can happen to us in life, and especially at a younger age. When we are paralyzed, we miss the magic of encountering others, making friends, sharing dreams, walking at the side of others. This paralysis distances us from others, it prevents us from taking each other's hand, as we saw [on the stage], all closed within the small rooms of glass.

But in life there is another, even more dangerous, kind of paralysis. It is not easy to put our finger on it. I like to describe it as the paralysis that comes from confusing happiness with a sofa. In other words, to think that
in order to be happy all we need is a good sofa. A sofa that makes us feel comfortable, calm, safe. A sofa like one of those we have nowadays with a built-in massage unit to put us to sleep. A sofa that promises us hours of comfort so we can escape to the world of videogames and spend all kinds of time in front of a computer screen. A sofa that keeps us safe from any kind of pain and fear. A sofa that allows us to stay home without needing to work at, or worry about, anything. “Sofa-happiness”! That is probably the most harmful and insidious form of paralysis, which can cause the greatest harm to young people. And why does this happen Father? Because, little by little, without even realizing it, we start to nod off, to grow drowsy and dull. The other day, I spoke about young people who go into retirement at the age of 20; today I speak about young persons who nod off, grow drowsy and dull, while others — perhaps more alert than we are, but not necessarily better — decide our future for us. For many people in fact, it is much easier and better to have drowsy and dull kids who confuse happiness with a sofa. For many people, that is more convenient than having young people who are alert and searching, trying to respond to God’s dream and to all the restlessness present in the human heart. I ask you: do you want to be young people who nod off, who are drowsy and dull? [No!] Do you want others to decide your future for you? [No!] Do you want to be free? [Yes!] Do you want to be alert? [Yes!] Do you want to work hard for your future? [Yes!] You don’t seem very convinced… Do you want to work hard for your future? [Yes!]

The truth, though, is something else. Dear young people, we didn’t come into this work to “vegetate”, to take it easy, to make our lives a comfortable sofa to fall asleep on. No, we came for another reason: to leave a mark. It is very sad to pass through life without leaving a mark. But when we opt for ease and convenience, for confusing happiness with consumption, then we end up paying a high price indeed: we lose our freedom. We are not free to leave a mark. We lose our freedom. This is the high price we pay. There are so many people who do not want the young to be free; there are so many people who do not wish you well, who want you to be drowsy and dull, and never free! No, this must not be so! We must defend our freedom!
This is itself a great form of paralysis, whenever we start thinking that happiness is the same as comfort and convenience, that being happy means going through life asleep or on tranquillizers, that the only way to be happy is to live in a haze. Certainly, drugs are bad, but there are plenty of other socially acceptable drugs, that can end up enslaving us just the same. One way or the other, they rob us of our greatest treasure: our freedom. They strip us of our freedom.

My friends, Jesus is the Lord of risk, he is the Lord of the eternal “more”. Jesus is not the Lord of comfort, security and ease. Following Jesus demands a good dose of courage, a readiness to trade in the sofa for a pair of walking shoes and to set out on new and uncharted paths. To blaze trails that open up new horizons capable of spreading joy, the joy that is born of God’s love and wells up in your hearts with every act of mercy. To take the path of the “craziness” of our God, who teaches us to encounter him in the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the friend in trouble, the prisoner, the refugee and the migrant, and our neighbours who feel abandoned. To take the path of our God, who encourages us to be politicians, thinkers, social activists. The God who encourages us to devise an economy marked by greater solidarity than our own. In all the settings in which you find yourselves, God’s love invites you bring the Good News, making of your own lives a gift to him and to others. This means being courageous, this means being free!

You might say to me: Father, that is not for everybody, but just for a chosen few. True, and those chosen are all who are ready to share their lives with others. Just as the Holy Spirit transformed the hearts of the disciples on the day of Pentecost, and they were paralyzed, so he did with our friends who shared their testimonies. I will use your own words, Miguel. You told us that in the “Facenda” on the day they entrusted you with the responsibility for helping make the house run better, you began to understand that God was asking something of you. That is when things began to change.

That is the secret, dear friends, and all of us are called to share in it. God expects something from you. Have you understood this? God expects something from you, God wants something from you. God hopes in you. God comes to break down all our fences. He comes to open the doors of
our lives, our dreams, our ways of seeing things. God comes to break open everything that keeps you closed in. He is encouraging you to dream. He wants to make you see that, with you, the world can be different. For the fact is, unless you offer the best of yourselves, the world will never be different. This is the challenge.

The times we live in do not call for young “couch potatoes”, but for young people with shoes, or better, boots laced. The times we live in require only active players on the field, and there is no room for those who sit on the bench. Today’s world demands that you be a protagonist of history because life is always beautiful when we choose to live it fully, when we choose to leave a mark. History today calls us to defend our dignity and not to let others decide our future. No! We must decide our future, you must decide your future! As he did on Pentecost, the Lord wants to work one of the greatest miracles we can experience; he wants to turn your hands, my hands, our hands, into signs of reconciliation, of communion, of creation. He wants your hands to continue building the world of today. And he wants to build that world with you. And what is your response? Yes or no? [Yes!]

You might say to me: Father, but I have my limits, I am a sinner, what can I do? When the Lord calls us, he doesn’t worry about what we are, what we have been, or what we have done or not done. Quite the opposite. When he calls us, he is thinking about everything we have to give, all the love we are capable of spreading. His bets are on the future, on tomorrow. Jesus is pointing you to the future, and never to the museum.

So today, my friends, Jesus is inviting you, calling you, to leave your mark on life, to leave a mark on history, your own and that of many others as well.

Life nowadays tells us that it is much easier to concentrate on what divides us, what keeps us apart. People try to make us believe that being closed in on ourselves is the best way to keep safe from harm. Today, we adults need you to teach us, as you are doing today, how to live in diversity, in dialogue, to experience multiculturalism not as a threat but an opportunity. You are an opportunity for the future. Have the courage to teach us, have the courage to show us that it is easier to build bridges than
walls! We need to learn this. Together we ask that you challenge us to take the path of fraternity. May you point the finger at us, if we choose the path of walls, the path of enmity, the path of war. To build bridges… Do you know the first bridge that has to be built? It is a bridge that we can build here and now — by reaching out and taking each other’s hand. Come on, build it now. Build this human bridge, take each other’s hand, all of you: it is the first of bridges, it is the human bridge, it is the first, it is the model. There is always a risk, as I said the other day, of offering your hand and no one taking it. But in life we need to take a risk, for the person who does not take a risk never wins. With this bridge we can move forwards. Here, this is the primordial bridge: take each other’s hand. Thank you. This is a great bridge of brotherhood, and would that the powers of this world might learn to build it… not for pictures and ulterior motives, but for building ever bigger bridges. May this human bridge be the beginning of many, many others; in that way, it will leave a mark.

Today Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life, is calling you, you, and you to leave your mark on history. He, who is life, is asking each of you to leave a mark that brings life to your own history and that of many others. He, who is truth, is asking you to abandon the paths of rejection, division and emptiness. Are you up to this? [Yes!] Are you up to this? [Yes!] What answer will you give, and I’d like to see it, with your hands and with your feet, to the Lord, who is the way, the truth and the life? Are you up to this? [Yes!] May the Lord bless your dreams. Thank you!

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The Roman Curia
Decree of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints by which are recognized the heroic virtues and the reputation for sanctity of the Servant of God Isidoro Zorzano Ledesma (December 21, 2016)

CONGREGATIO DE CAUSIS SANCTORUM
MATRITENSIS
BEATIFICATIONIS ET CANONIZATIONIS
SERVI DEI
ISIDORI ZORZANO LEDESMA
CHRISTIFIDELIS LAICI
PRAELATURAE PERSONALIS SANCTAE CRUCIS ET
OPERIS DEI
(1902-1943)

DECRETUM SUPER VIRTUTIBUS


Domini Nostri Iesu Christi verba haec bene applicari possunt Servo Dei Isidoro Zorzano Ledesma, qui fuit servus bonus ac fidelis equidem super pauca: Deum enim hominesque dilexit in ordinariae vitae adiunctis.

Tertius ex quinque filiis Hispanicorum migrantium, Servus Dei natus est Bono Aëre in Argentina die 13 mensis Septembris anni 1902 et baptismum recepit die 5 mensis Aprilis anni 1905. Impenso labore per annos protracto, parentes eius modice locupletes effecti erant et voluerunt ut proles in Hispania institueretur, quapropter illuc profecti sunt mense Maio anni 1905 et domicilium Lucronii constituerunt cum intentione tamen redeundi in Argentinam. Isidorus scholam frequentavit Fratrum Maristarum, qui eum paraverunt ad primam Communionem, quam annis nondum novem expletis recepit. Paucis post mensibus, anno scilicet 1912,
Isidori pater mortuus est et eis mater consilium cepit in Argentinam non redeundi.

Mense Octobri anni 1915 Dei Servus novum condiscipulum cognovit, qui hodie est Sanctus Iosephmaria Escrivá. Iusta intellegentia at magna constantia praeditus, Isidorus studiorum curriculum instructionis mediae et superioris complevit et anno 1919 in Schola Speciali matritensi studia inceptum de re machinaria civili. Mortuo Ferdinando, fratre eius primogenito, Dei Servus Lucronium rediit ut matrem comitaretur, paratus quoque ad studia derelinquenda, quae tamen prosequi potuit, quia tota familia Matritum sese transtulit.

Anno 1924 condicio oeconomica familae grave passa est detrimentum. Iterum Isidorus de studiis derelinquendis cogitavit, ut suo labore familiam sustentaret, at vero instante matre prosecutus est donec anno 1927 titulum obtinuit doctoris machinarii. Professionalem actuositatem exercere in navalibus loci dicti Matagorda prope Gades sed paulo post Malacam sese transtulit ut operam suam praestaret in Viis Ferratis Baeticis utque simul in schola technica doceret.


Propter suum agendi modum cum fide christiana congruentem, anno 1932 impugnationes passus est quas instigabat ephemeris quaedam manifeste antichristiana. Dein vero, anno 1936, adunatio syndicalis decrevit
eius mortem, quia catholicus erat. Hac de causa Isidorus Matritum fugere coactus est. Paulo post bellum civile exarit et religiosa persecutio — iam in actu ab anno 1931 — ad violentiae apicem pervenit.

Per totum belli tempus Isidorus Matriti permansit. Tesseram recognitionis valde precariam habens et ideo vitam in discrimine ponens, curam gessit membrorum Operis Dei aliarumque personarum quae in carcere vel in refugiis clandestinis versabantur: eos frequenter invisebat, cibaria eis deferebat et in spiritualibus eos adiuvabat.

Mense Iulio anni 1939, expleto bello civili, Isidorus ad laborem suum professionalem in viis ferreis redire potuit, et habitavit qua administrator in domo Universitatis alumnis hospitio recipiendis quam Sanctus Iosephmaria promoverat.

Isidorus Zorzano vir fuit aequabilis, non nimis loquax et charactere praeditus potius reflexivo, in laborando indefessus. Qui eum noverunt commemorant eius affabilitatem ac iucunditatem haud quidem exuberantes eiusque animum ad aliorum necessitates sublevandas semper paratum.

Quod ad virtutes attinet Servi Dei, maximum habet momentum colloquium eius cum Sancto Iosephmaria Escrivá, die 24 mensis Augusti anni 1930, eiusque petitio ut ipsa hac die in Opus Dei admitteretur. Inde incepit continua progressio in vita spirituali Isidori, quae passim pervenit ad unionem usque intimiorem cum Deo atque ad augescentem amorem erga Sanctam Ecclesiam. Isidorus perseveranter sanctitatem quae sit in mundo manens, qua laicus fidelis, in laeta adimpletione officiorum cuiusque diei, in labore professionali et in multiplicibus adiunctis suae vitae cotidianae.

Fuit ipse in labore summe diligens, in omnibus fidelis, paratus semper ad serviendum collegis, iustitiam inconcusse servans in inceptis indigentibus sublevandis, fidem et caritatem quoque exercitavit in lectionibus catecheseos et multimoda institutionis pro iis qui in civili societate magis erant derelicti.

In universis suis operibus Isidorus Zorzano et Dei gloriam et proximi bonum quaerebat. Assiduum exercuit apostolatum cum amicis et iuvenibus. Profunda conscientia suae filiationis divinae ductus, perseveranter ac fideliter coluit varia pietatis exercitia ab Ecclesia commendata. Sacrosanctum Missae Sacrificium centrum ac radix fuit vitae eius

Anno 1941 Dei Servus signa dedit infirmae valetudinis. Post aliquos menses, medici causam morbi statuerunt esse linfogranulomatosim, propter quam mortuus est die 15 mensis Iulii anni 1943, quadraginta annos natus.


Facta de hisce omnibus Summo Pontifici Francisco accurata relatione ab infrascripto Cardinali Praefecto, Beatissimus Pater, accipiens rataque habens Congregationis de Causis Sanctorum vota, hodierna die sollemniter declaravit: *Constare de virtutibus theologicis Fide, Spe et Caritate tum in Deum tum in proximum, necnon de cardinalibus Prudentia, Iustitia, Temperantia, Fortitudine, iisque adnexis in gradu heroico, Servi Dei Isidori Zorzano Ledesma, Christifidelis Laici Praelaturae Personalis Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei, in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur.*

Hoc autem decretum publici iuris fieri et in acta Congregationis de Causis Sanctorum Summus Pontifex referri mandavit.


ANGELUS Card. AMATO, S.D.B.
The following is our translation of the Decree.

Isidoro
Decree on Virtues
THE CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSES
OF SAINTS
MADRID
BEATIFICATION AND CANONIZATION
of the Servant of God
ISIDORO ZORZANO LEDESMA
A Lay Faithful
of the Personal Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei
(1902 — 1943)
DECREE ON HIS VIRTUES

“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master” (Mt 25:21).

These words of Jesus Christ can be applied to Isidoro Zorzano, who was a good and faithful servant precisely in little things. He loved God and neighbor in the circumstances of ordinary life.

He was the third of five children of Spanish immigrants. He was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on September 13, 1902, and was baptized on
April 5, 1905. After years of hard work, his parents had attained a comfortable financial position and wanted their children to be educated in Spain. They moved there in May 1905 and settled in Logroño, with the intention of returning to Argentina. Isidoro studied in the high school run by the Marist Brothers, who prepared him for First Holy Communion, which he received just before reaching the age of nine. A few months later, in 1912, his father died, and his mother decided not to return to Argentina.

In October 1915 the Servant of God met a new classmate, St. Josemaría Escrivá. Endowed with good intelligence and great tenacity, Isidoro completed his middle and high school studies without difficulty, and in 1919 he began studying industrial engineering in a special school in Madrid. After the death of Fernando, his oldest brother, the Servant of God returned to Logroño, to be close to his mother. He was ready to abandon his studies if need be, but he was able to continue with them thanks to the whole family moving to Madrid.

In 1924, the Zorzano family found themselves in a difficult financial situation. Once again Isidoro thought about leaving the university in order to take a job to support his family. But encouraged by his mother, he continued his studies until he received his engineering degree in 1927. He then began his working career in the shipyards at Matagorda, Cádiz, and shortly thereafter moved to Malaga, to work in the Andalusian Railroad Company, while teaching in a technical school.

August 24, 1930 marked a milestone in the life of Isidoro. On a trip to Madrid he met his old classmate and friend, St. Josemaría Escrivá, who had become a priest five years earlier. He told St.Josemaría he wanted to strengthen his Christian life. St. Josemaría spoke to him about Opus Dei, founded less than two years earlier, and explained that it was a path of holiness and apostolate in one's own state and condition of life, in professional work and the fulfillment of ordinary occupations. The Servant of God, moved by divine grace, immediately asked to be admitted to Opus Dei. He returned to Malaga where he continued with his normal activities, his work on the railroad, his teaching in the technical school and his intense participation in various diocesan activities. He helped out in the school of the Adoration Sisters and in the House of the Child Jesus, and also took part in Catholic Action.
Because of his principled Christian life, in 1932 the Servant of God was the target of a defamation campaign by an openly anti-Christian newspaper. Later, in 1936, a union meeting decided to put him to death simply because he was Catholic. Therefore Isidoro had to flee to Madrid. Shortly afterwards the civil war broke out, and the religious persecution, which had begun in 1931, reached its most violent stage.

He remained in Madrid during the entire time of the war. With precarious documentation and placing his life in danger, he dedicated himself to helping the members of Opus Dei and many other people who were in jail or in hiding. He visited them frequently and brought them food and other supplies, and he helped them spiritually.

When the war ended, in July 1939, Isidoro was able to take up his work in the railroad again and lived in a student residence opened by St. Josemaría, in which he carried out the role of financial administrator.

Isidoro Zorzano was a well-balanced person, with a reflective and reserved character, and a tireless worker. Those who knew him remember his quiet friendliness and warmth, and his openness to the needs of others.

Regarding the virtues of the Servant of God, a key moment was his meeting with St. Josemaría Escrivá, on 24 August 1930, and his request to be admitted to Opus Dei that same day. This led to a continuous growth in his spiritual life, shown in an ever closer union with our Lord and a strengthening love for the Church. Isidoro strove untiringly for holiness in the world, as a lay faithful, in the loving fulfillment of his daily duties, in his professional work, and in all the circumstances of ordinary life.

He showed exemplary diligence in his work, loyalty and spirit of service towards his colleagues, love for justice in promoting initiatives in favor of the most needy, and faith and charity through catechesis and education for the most neglected sectors of society.

Isidoro Zozano sought in all of his actions the glory of God and the spiritual good of those around him. He carried out an assiduous apostolic work with his friends and with young people. Moved by a deep awareness of his divine filiation, he strove diligently to faithfully fulfill practices of
piety recommended by the Church. His interior life was centered and rooted in the Holy Mass; he had a deep devotion to the Eucharist and received the sacrament of penance frequently. He also had a strong devotion to our Lady. He gave special importance to mental and vocal prayer, and practiced the spirit of penance and mortification above all in the fulfillment of daily duties and in accepting joyfully difficulties and setbacks.

In 1941 the Servant of God began to show signs of weakness. After several months the doctors diagnosed malignant lymphoma, which led to his death on July 15, 1943, at the age of 40.

The informative process on the reputation for holiness, virtues and miracles took place in Madrid from 1948 to 1961. When new legislation on the Causes of Saints was promulgated in 1993-1994, an additional diocesan process was carried out in the archdiocese of Madrid. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints decreed the validity of this process on October 15, 1994. The special meeting of theological consultors on November 17, 2015 gave a positive response to the question of the heroic exercise of the virtues by the Servant of God. The ordinary session of the cardinals and bishops confirmed this judgment on December 13, 2016, presided over by myself, Cardinal Angelo Amato.

The undersigned, Cardinal Prefect, presented to the Supreme Pontiff Francis a detailed report of all the phases described above. The Holy Father, receiving and ratifying the view of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, on today’s date has solemnly declared: It has been shown that the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, both with God and neighbor, as well as the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude, with their related virtues, were practiced in a heroic degree by the Servant of God Isidoro Zorzano Ledesma, a lay faithful of the Personal Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, in the present case and for the purposes now being considered.

The Holy Father has instructed that this decree be published and transcribed in the acts of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Given in Rome, on the 21st day of the month of December, in the year of our Lord 2016.
Angelo Card. Amato, S.D.B.
Prefect
L. and S.
+Marcello Bartolucci
Titular Archbishop of Bevagna
Secretary
FROM THE PRELATE

- Appointments
- Activities
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Activities

Closing of the Jubilee Year of Mercy in Our Lady of Peace (November 13, 2016)

On Sunday, November 13, Bishop Javier Echevarría celebrated the Mass for the conclusion of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace. In the ceremony the Holy Door that had been opened on December 13, 2015 was closed.

In his homily, the Prelate reflected on the parable of the prodigal son, “which St. Josemaría so often remarked on, because it perfectly expresses the Father’s mercy.” “Consider,” invited the Prelate, “this father who waits outside his house each morning to watch for his son’s return. The moment he catches sight of him, he runs to cover him in kisses.”

Throughout this year, said Bishop Echevarría, “our Lord has helped us see where we need to improve. We’ve come to understand that mercy is not only compassion, but love, a love that is shown in service.” And he posed the following questions for each one’s personal reflection: “What have I done in this year of mercy? Have I served those in my family? Have I helped my colleagues at work? Have I forgiven my friends? Imagine the look of the father when he catches sight of the prodigal son. With that
same look—filled with joy, understanding, affection—we need to look at the others.”

“Let us fill the streets with God’s love,” he concluded. "When you make your way through the city, pray for the people you see, also for those you don’t know. This attitude will help us to be ready, in every circumstance, to serve others better. And our Lady, who looked at her Son dying on the Cross, will teach us to be merciful with others.”

Audience with the Pope (November 7, 2016)

On November 7, the Holy Father Francis received Bishop Echevarría in audience. The Prelate thanked the Pope for the many initiatives and abundant fruit in the Jubilee Year of Mercy that is about to end, and informed him of the ongoing apostolic work of the Prelature.

Bishop Echevarría assured the Holy Father, once again, of the union of the faithful of Opus Dei to his intentions and the daily prayer of each and every one of them for him, as he had a chance to see on his recent trip to Finland and Estonia.

The Holy Father encouraged the Prelature’s faithful to continue working apostolically in all environments and imparted wholeheartedly his blessing to all who take part in the Prelature’s activities.

Diaconal Ordinations (October 29, 2016)

On October 29th, Bishop Echevarría conferred diaconal ordination on 31 faithful of Opus Dei. The ceremony took place in the Roman Basilica of St. Eugene. In his homily, the Prelate said that “Jesus’ words in the Gospel of the Mass are addressed in a special way to sacred ministers: ‘You are my friends, if you do what I command you.’” And he added: “How marvelous
is this divine promise, addressed to everyone and addressed to you! With his assistance and with the prayer of so many people, you will be worthy of this friendship, fulfilling the promise of Jesus: ‘I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.’”

The deacons are from 16 different countries. They will be ordained as priests in Rome, on the upcoming 29th of April.

Priestly Ordinations (September 4, 2016)

On Sunday, September 4th, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Echevarría, conferred priestly ordination on six faithful of the Prelature, Alejandro Jesús Arenas, from Peru; Eduardo Ares, Miguel Angel Correas, Pablo López, and Carlos Rodríguez, from Spain; and Irineo Pallares, from Mexico. The ceremony took place in the Shrine of Torreciudad in northern Spain.

Bishop Echevarría asked the new priests to be “good shepherds who each day seek out all of their sheep, who care for the needy and give their lives generously for their flock.”

Pastoral Trips

Krakow, July 28 to August 1

Bishop Javier Echevarría traveled to Krakow, Poland, for the World Youth Day, which Pope Francis attended. He made the pastoral trip from Pamplona, Spain, taking advantage of various stops to meet with faithful of Opus Dei and people who take part in the activities of Christian formation offered by the Prelature in Lyon, France; Prague, Czech Republic; Vienna, Austria; and Marseille, France.

The Prelate was in Krakow from July 28 to August 1. He stayed at the Osrodek Akademicki Barbakan student residence. During these days he
received families and groups from various parts of the world, particularly young people from countries where Catholics are a minority. On Friday the 29th of July, he had two catechetical gatherings with thousands of young people attending World Youth Day in the Krakow ICE Congress Centre. He encouraged them to pray every day for the Pope and to reflect personally on his teachings, in order to respond to the needs of the Church and society.

On Saturday he went to the Campus of Misericordia for the prayer vigil with Pope Francis. Before the ceremony he had the opportunity to greet the Primate of Poland, Archbishop Wojciech Polak, the Secretary of the Polish Bishops’ Conference, Bishop Artur Mizinski, as well as numerous Polish bishops and bishops from around the world. On Sunday, after the closing Mass for WYD, he visited the Shrine of St. John Paul II in Krakow, where he prayed before a replica of the image of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska (Our Lady of Calvary), especially venerated by St. John Paul II, and before the tomb of Cardinal Andrzej Deskur, with whom he was linked by close friendship over many years.

On Monday August 1, before leaving, the Prelate celebrated Holy Mass in Barbakan for a number of Polish World Youth Day volunteers.

_Estonia and Finland, from October 14 to 17_

The Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Echevarría, and the Auxiliary and General Vicar of the Prelature, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, carried out a pastoral trip to Estonia and Finland from October 14 to 17. On Friday the 14th, the Prelate had a get-together in Tallin, Estonia, with several hundred families. He encouraged them to carry out through their life and example an intense evangelizing apostolate, especially among those who have not had the opportunity to hear about Jesus Christ. Bishop Echevarría encouraged them to entrust to our Lady the work of evangelization in Estonia, a land that Pope Innocent III declared a “Marian land” in 1215.

On Sunday October 16, some 200 people gathered with Bishop Echevarría in a hotel in the center of Helsinki, Finland. The conversation with the Prelate centered on the importance of prayer and love for neighbor, in the context of the Year of Mercy. He encouraged those present to struggle against the temptation of individualism and to launch
out in service of others, with deeds of charity in daily life: visiting the sick, accompanying the aged who are alone, and helping the poor and neglected.

During his stay in Finland, Bishop Echevarría visited Tavasttähti and Silta-Klubi, two student residences where Opus Dei offers means of Christian formation. On Monday the 17th, just before returning to Rome, he was received by the Bishop of Helsinki, Teemu Sippo. This trip was his sixth to this country as Prelate of Opus Dei.

**New Circumscriptions**

Decree of September 7, 2016 by which the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, erected the delegation of Finland and Estonia, until then both territories made up the delegation of the Baltic countries together with Latvia and Lithuania.

*Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA*

*Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia*

*Prælatus*

*DECRETO*

*Presentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Mauricium Bravo Díaz, nominamus atque constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Delegatione Finniæ et Esthoniæ, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexit.*

*Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriæm et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.*

*Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatitiae, die 7 mense septembri*
Homilies

At the Diaconal Ordination of Faithful of the Prelature, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (October 29, 2016)

My dear sons who are about to receive the diaconate.

Dear brothers and sisters:

1. I am reminded of Saint Josemaría’s immense joy on the occasion of these ordinations, and of others all over the world, and I would like that we too unite ourselves to his joyful prayer. With firm faith and loving gratitude we have listened again to the words of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you (Jer 1:5). These revelations are addressed to each of us Christians, because God has chosen us before the creation of the world; he has called to be configured to Christ in Baptism and to follow in his footsteps, in response to his great love.

Over the course of the years, in the Prelature of Opus Dei, this universal call to holiness and apostolate has been constantly present in the work of its faithful, both men and women. In the words of Saint Paul, we all form within the Church “one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call” (Eph 4:4).
Whether in apostolic celibacy, in the priesthood, or in marriage, we Christians share in the one and same vocation, personalized for each of us according to God’s plan. And we are all equally called to holiness. Today, moreover, I would like to recall that the diaconal ordination of these faithful of the Prelature—and, within six months, their priestly ordination—does not change their affiliation with Opus Dei. Holy Orders certainly confers a new state upon them through the character and grace of the sacrament. But the call to identification with Christ, within the path of Opus Dei, is the same both for priests and lay people, maintaining, of course, the difference between the clerical and lay states.

2. Saint Josemaría repeated tirelessly that the faithful of the Prelature who receive ordination do so not with the idea that they will thus be able to strive more effectively for holiness. They know perfectly well that the lay vocation is full and complete in itself—that it is a very clear way to achieve Christian holiness, to serve the Church and souls.

Therefore, addressing myself to those of you who in a few moments will become deacons, I remind you of the advice of the Apostle to the Gentiles: “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love” (Eph 4:1-2). In each of you, charity—the soul of all the other Christian virtues—takes on the form of pastoral, ministerial charity. Your specific responsibilities—preaching the word of God, administering the Eucharist and taking part in liturgical celebrations, serving the others—should be a generous and joyful dedication to everyone in the Church, Christ’s Mystical Body.

I recommend to you the advice of Pope Francis: “Diligently read and meditate on the Word of the Lord, that you may believe what you read, teach what you have learned in faith, and practice what you teach” (Homily, April 17, 2016). Do so with joy. Strive, as Saint Paul says, to always resolve in your heart “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).

3. Don’t forget that the words of Jesus read in the Gospel of today’s Mass are addressed in a special way to sacred ministers, “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (Jn 15:14). How marvelous is this
divine promise addressed to everyone and to you! With his help and the prayers of so many people, you will be worthy of this friendship and make a reality of Jesus’s promise: “I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” (Jn 15:16).

I also want to express my warm thanks and sincere affection to the parents and brothers and sisters of the newly ordained, for the important role you have played in the response of your sons to our Lord’s call. Continue to pray for them. And I ask all of you who are taking part in this celebration to do likewise.

Let us have recourse especially to the intercession of our Lady in these remaining weeks of the Year of Mercy, so that Mary may raise up many priestly vocations in the Church. Let us also ask that during this year very many people all over the world will approach the Sacrament of Confession. May our Mother also obtain abundant graces from her Son for the Pope, for the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, for the bishops, for all sacred ministers as they carry out their daily ministry, and for all of us. Amen.

Praised be Jesus Christ.

At the Inauguration of the Academic Year, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (October 3, 2016)

“Ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem saeculi (Mt 28:20): Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” Jesus’ voice resounds in the world and will continue doing so until his final coming, when all things—in heaven and on earth—will be united in him (see Eph 1:10). The promise of our Lord is very timely and encourages all Christians to announce the presence of the Word incarnate among mankind. It is Jesus himself who guarantees the authenticity of his salvific presence through the sending of the Paraclete, who lives in the Church and in our hearts.
We sense the need to entrust the academic year to the Holy Spirit, to have a sure guide for our path. Invoking him does not mean asking for help that is foreign to our condition as Christians and as members of a university dedicated to study and research. From our heart—where he dwells—from the depths of our being, as from the spring of life-giving water promised by Jesus (see *Jn* 4:14), the Holy Spirit “purifies us, illuminates us, renews us, transforms us, because he makes us participants in the very life of God that is Love... This is the precious gift that the Holy Spirit brings to our hearts: the very life of God, the life of true children, a relationship of confidence, freedom and trust in the love and mercy of God. It also gives us a new perception of others, close and far, seen always as brothers and sisters in Jesus to be respected and loved,” as Pope Francis said (*General audience*, May 8, 2013).

Therefore, none of us views the academic year as an exclusively individual project, centered on satisfying purely human expectations. Certainly, human expectations are legitimate and form part of the professional vocation of the student, the researcher, the teacher, those in charge of the technical, administrative and business tasks. But the Christian vocation—and with it the living water, the light-giving and impetuous force of the Holy Spirit—leads us to look higher, with an active attitude and the desire to correspond to the gifts he has prepared for each one of us throughout this year.

Now, a few weeks before the conclusion of the Jubilee Year, is a good moment to reflect on the fruit that the Holy Spirit has brought forth in us. We have seen our faith strengthened in Jesus, the face of the Father’s Mercy, and in his Church, where his divine presence dwells. But have we made a resolution to let ourselves be guided by the Spirit to go out to all nations, aware that each person harbors, even though not fully realizing it, a thirst for God?

To understand better the mission that has been entrusted to us, we should consider more closely the works of mercy—particularly the spiritual ones, since these give us in profile the program of integral formation, inspired in the figure of Jesus, that the Church seeks to impart also in academic and educational institutions, which today are beginning a new school year.
The Gospel reminds us that when the disciples found themselves with Jesus just before being sent out as missionaries “they worshipped him” (Mt 28:17). Let us ask the Holy Spirit that our work in the coming months, closely united to Jesus’ Sacrifice on the Altar, may be an act of adoration of the Father; and let us also ask that our work may never lose sight of the Church’s universal mission.

With this Catholic outlook, St. Josemaría spoke about the work of the university: “University people should be responsible citizens with a healthy concern for the problems of other people and a generous spirit which brings them to face these problems and to resolve them in the best possible way. It is the task of universities to foster these attitudes in their students” (Conversations, no. 74).

The Blessed Sacrament chapel in this church is the heart of all the University’s life. Here Our Lady of Apollinaris is venerated. Let us ask her to intercede for us, so that all the gifts that our Lord wants to grant us in this academic year may bear fruit. Amen. Praised be Jesus Christ.

At the Priestly Ordination of Faithful of the Prelature, Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain (September 4, 2016)

Dear brothers and sisters, dear ordinands:

In this magnificent sanctuary, planned in all its essentials by St. Josemaría, we are celebrating this great feast for the Church. We want to give heartfelt thanks to you, Lord God of the Universe, for the priestly ordination of these six deacons of the Prelature of Opus Dei. In your goodness and mercy, you make us all, both men and women, sharers in your priesthood: both ordained priests and—in an essentially different way—the others, with the common or royal priesthood. We realize that, despite our personal limitations, we can help carry out your marvelous mandate to go out into the whole world to spread your teachings of salvation and happiness.
St. Josemaría, the founder of Opus Dei, is helping us today in a special way with his intercession from heaven. And he is telling us—with the insistence he recalled it to us in his conversations on earth—that we have to live the new commandment Christ specified at the Last Supper: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34).

On this day, although we have a permanent duty to do so, let us be more generous in our prayer for the Pope, for the bishops, for the priests of the whole world, for these men who are receiving, in this liturgical celebration, the very great gift of the priesthood. At the same time, let us feel the obligation to pray and offer sacrifices for everyone else, with a joyful, active prayer, which leads us to serve joyfully our families, our colleagues and friends, the aged, the poor and the rich, the sick. With the clear idea that each and every one of us has to follow in the footsteps of the Master, who came to serve and not to be served (see Mt 20:28), let us consider how we are opening our soul, our being, to this Christian spirit of generous self-giving, in everything and in every moment, for others.

The Pope never stops insisting that we go forth, and even more so in this Year of Mercy, to meet the sick, the needy, the poor. And each and every one can see ourselves among these needy people; therefore, let us beg our Lord earnestly that his charity may shine forth in our conduct, practicing what the founder of Opus Dei preached: that “we have to get to know Christ, make him known, and bring him everywhere,” because this is a duty for all the baptized.

I would like to direct myself now to these sons who are receiving today the great sacrament of the priesthood. In first place, may you realize that the Trinity is giving you the greatest gift a man can receive, and that we are obliged to be at every moment, as St. Josemaría desired, “one hundred percent priests.” To attain this, have a great love for the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the Holy Mass, in which Christ is both the Victim and the Offerer, the one who makes sacramentally present through his words the Sacrifice of Calvary, the Holy Cross. As the prophet Ezekiel proclaimed, realize that you have been anointed by the Holy Spirit, and are daily urged to transmit to souls the universal call to holiness, which Jesus proclaimed.
Ardently love the Sacrament of Confession, both when you receive it and when you administer it. I beseech our Lord that, as the Church teaches, you may love the confessional, so that there the faithful may encounter forgiveness—God’s merciful Love—and peace for their own conscience. If we all have to be apostles of this sacrament, which so greatly facilitates friendship and union with our Heavenly Father, to you falls the task—at times even physically difficult—of spending hours in the confessional, transmitting the loving forgiveness that Christ won for us on the Cross.

My sons, be dispensers of good doctrine; love the Gospel, and also the daily study of Theology, the Magisterium and the Fathers of the Church. Follow the example of St. Josemaría, a great pastor of souls, whose only desire was to speak about God and exalt him in all noble human realities. Have a deep filial trust in God, so that, as we heard St. Paul assuring us in his letter to the Ephesians, our Lord will always provide for our personal effort (we are well aware of our little worth) his grace, to add the increment for souls. You should also be aware that you are making present the only priesthood: that of Christ. Therefore you have to be good shepherds who each day seek out all of their sheep, who care for the needy and give their lives generously for their flock.

I would also like to congratulate your parents and brothers and sisters and relatives; your friends and colleagues, and so many other souls who are praying for each of you, asking that you may learn, with all priests, to spend your lives for the faithful, for all mankind.

Let us pray for the Pope, for my dear brother the bishop of Barbastro-Monzón, for the other bishops and for all the priests in the Church.

We also unite ourselves today to the joy in Rome, in the Catholic world, for the canonization of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. Those of us in the Prelature recall her affection for the Prelature of Opus Dei, and her gratitude for the service that the priests of the Prelature offered in caring for her spiritual daughters.

My final wish is that we all, each and every one of us, may decide to go with greater determination and perseverance to our Mother, the Blessed Virgin. In this shrine, and in the most varied places, the founder of
Opus Dei directed himself to the Mother of the Eternal High Priest, considering deeply how, with refined and total fidelity, and by God’s singular plan, Mary stayed—as the Second Vatican Council proclaimed—“juxta crucem Iesu” (Jn 19:25). Our Lady was internally and externally united to the Redeemer. Next to the Cross Mary received us as her children, each and every one of us; and next to the Holy Wood, intimately united to Jesus’ prayer, she begged the Trinity that the efficacy of the saving Sacrifice may fully imbue our Christian path. Some words of St. Josemaría spoken on the feast of the Assumption in 1961 are especially significant here: “Christ wishes to become incarnate in our daily activities, to vivify from within even our most insignificant actions” (Christ Is Passing By, no. 174).

Holy Mother, Queen of the Angels, Our Lady of Torreciudad, help us to correspond with complete generosity to God’s love for us. Amen.

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Articles and Interviews

The Auxiliary Vicar: “In Memory of Bishop Javier Echevarría,” in Palabra (no. 647), Spain

As is only natural, I have felt and continue to feel a deep sorrow—like all the faithful of the Work and many other people—for the unexpected death of the one who for 22 years directed Opus Dei as Prelate and who we called, with full right, Father. At the same time, our Lord has given us serenity, because thanks to our faith we know that, with death, life is not lost but rather changes into a better one: into the happiness in heaven that Jesus promised to those who love him. And Bishop Echevarría’s love for our Lord, and through Him for all men and women, was very strong and sincere, and filled with practical consequences.
Dynamic fidelity

In this brief memorial I want to highlight only two fundamental features of his life. The first was his concern for fidelity: an unblemished fidelity to the Church, to the Pope, to Opus Dei, to the faithful of the Prelature, to his friends. This fidelity was a consequence, or an expression, of his fidelity to Jesus Christ, our God and our Lord. His whole life, since asking for admission to Opus Dei in that now distant year 1948, was marked by this human and supernatural virtue, which kept growing thanks to his close relationship first with St. Josemaría, and then with Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, whom he assisted for many years in governing the Prelature. As I remarked a few hours after his death, his having lived for so many years at the side of these two saints, left an indelible imprint on Bishop Echevarría’s soul, which helps explain, at least in part, his deep sense of fidelity.

His was a dynamic fidelity that conserving intact the substance, the spirit, sought to discern God’s will in the face of the changing needs of times and persons.

A few minutes before his death, he left us this concern as a legacy. As the person looking after him most closely in those moments attests, he was praying to our Lord for the fidelity of each and every one of us.

A special manifestation of fidelity was his prayer for the Roman Pontiff. Following the exhortations of his predecessors, he constantly urged people to pray more for the Vicar of Christ on earth. In this way too he made a reality of the founder of the Work’s aspiration: to serve the Church as the Church wants to be served, within the guidelines that God himself communicated to St. Josemaría. A manifestation of that communion with the entire Mystical Body of Christ was his ordination of more than 600 priests in the years of his service as Prelate of Opus Dei.

In this context, I would like to point out the generosity with which Bishop Echevarría accepted the petitions of the bishops from many different places that some of the priests incardinated in the Prelature might collaborate directly in diocesan offices or activities. And he did so despite the fact that the number of priests of the Prelature, although high, was not enough to provide for all the needs of its ordinary pastoral work.
Concern for each person

The second characteristic I would like to stress was his generous dedication to each person who asked for his advice or guidance, or made a request, or simply greeted him or made a comment on passing him in a hallway. He didn’t limit himself to just listening; he gave that person all his attention, and was never in a hurry, with an interest whose authenticity was evident.

His pastoral zeal was not limited to caring for the small part of the People of God that the Prelature comprises. His heart was expanding ever more and more. As a priest and as a bishop, he felt the weight of souls, above all the most needy. How much he prayed! For the victims of natural calamities and terrorism; for refugees; for the sick; for peace in Syria, in Iraq, in Venezuela, and in whatever country was going through difficult moments; for people who were out of work or undergoing family difficulties of any kind... Each week in Rome he received groups of people coming from all over the world, who asked him to pray for their spiritual and material needs. All found a place in his heart, as he had learned from St. Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro del Portillo.

Another sign of his concern for others: the day before his death, Bishop Echevarría told me that it hurt him to see so many people taking care of him, looking after his needs. And I replied spontaneously: “No, Father! It is you who are sustaining all of us.” In this new stage that is opening before us, I would like to repeat these words to him and ask him, through his intercession, to sustain us, and help us to be good children of the Church, with the help of St. Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro.

Bishop Echevarría brought all these intentions to Holy Mass each day. The Sacrifice of the Altar is, as it were, the “mold” where human aspirations and works acquire their true meaning, through their union with the sacrifice of the Cross. I am consoled to think that now, from Heaven, his “Mass” has become eternal: now no longer beneath the sacramental veils, but in the face-to-face vision of the divine glory, with his priestly intercession for everyone. This is what I ask our Lord through the maternal mediation of our Lady, Mother of God and our Mother.
The Auxiliary Vicar: “We Await the Election of the New Prelate in an Attitude of Prayer to the Holy Spirit” Opusdei.org (December 30, 2016)

We reproduce here an interview in which Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz speaks about the elective Congress of Opus Dei, which will take place this coming month of January in Rome.

By Rodrigo Ayude

On December 22, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, auxiliary vicar of Opus Dei, publically convoked the Congress that will elect Bishop Javier Echevarría’s successor as head of the Prelature. On January 21, a plenary session of the Council for women in the Prelature will be held in Rome, which will present to the Congress a list of suggestions for candidates. The voting of the elective Congress will begin on January 23.

How are the people in the Prelature of Opus Dei living this period of preparation for the election of the new Prelate. As auxiliary vicar, what are your sentiments during these days?

I think that all of us, both men and women, in the Prelature are trying to foster during this period a spirit of prayer, going especially to the Holy Spirit. In fact, the elective Congress will begin with the votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, to ask for guidance in all our steps. Faith gives us the certainty that our Lord is leading his Church, and therefore also this portion of his people.

Moreover, this time of Christmas will help us prepare our heart for the elective Congress, by directing our eyes to what is essential: to Jesus, the Child-God, the face of the Father’s Mercy. In contemplating the mystery at Bethlehem, we will also find our Lady, Mother of the Church, and we will have recourse to her intercession.
We are living these days closely united to the Holy Father Francis and the whole Church, of which Opus Dei is a small part. Naturally, we also have a great sense of gratitude for the pastoral guidance and good example Bishop Javier Echevarría left us.

Following Saint Josemaría’s footsteps and the witness of his first two successors, we are pondering in our heart on the inheritance we have received, which we need to pass on as light and consolation for today’s world, just as Christ’s disciples have tried to do over the centuries. I am certain that we will unite ourselves wholeheartedly to the Prelate who is elected, to help him guide the Prelature in current-day society.

In the two previous elections, the “number 2” in Opus Dei was chosen as Prelate. In 1975, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, who for many years had been the Founder’s main assistant. Then, with Bishop Del Portillo’s death, the vicar general, Bishop Javier Echevarría, was elected. Do you think this trend might repeat itself in future elections?

It’s true that this was the case in the previous elections. I think this was due to the special situation of the first two successors, who were formed directly by Saint Josemaría. The electors voted in conscience for these persons. It wasn’t an automatic process. It seemed best to them to elect those who had worked most closely with the Founder.

Now circumstances have changed somewhat. The new Prelate won’t be someone who worked so directly with the Founder as Blessed Alvaro del Portillo and Bishop Javier Echevarría did, although they may have known and interacted with him.

In my opinion, the elective Congress has before it many worthy candidates, who have the virtues and prudence needed to take on this responsibility. The electors have the responsibility to vote, in conscience, for the person they consider best suited. The name of the person chosen will be sent right away to Pope Francis, since the confirmation of the Roman Pontiff is required.

When an election takes place, public opinion tends to view things in political terms, speaking often about “currents,” “trends” etc. What is your reaction when things are focused in this way?
These interpretations are far removed from how those who experience this election as a spiritual and ecclesial reality view it. Those who have the responsibility for an election like this, place their trust in the “current” of the Holy Spirit, as Pope Francis encouraged us to do a few days ago, when speaking about the immediate future of Opus Dei.

It’s true, as you said, that sometimes partial interpretations are made, from an overly human or political point of view. In placing the accent on these features, variety comes to be viewed as a problem. In my opinion, pluralism and variety are a great treasure. The electors of Opus Dei, like the other faithful in the Prelature, come from countries all over the world, and have quite different ways of being and cultural trends, with tastes and styles typical of their homeland and family. This diversity, so strongly fostered by Saint Josemaría, is compatible with what is essential: fidelity to the charism received by the Founder and recognized by the Church. Being faithful to this spiritual inheritance (with some clear features such as the sense of divine filiation, the search for sanctity in the ordinary circumstances of each day, a lay mentality and priestly soul, etc.) assures an underlying unity among everyone.

The two previous Prelates worked directly with the Founder. Does the election of the third Prelate open up a new epoch in Opus Dei?

There come to mind some words that Bishop Echevarría often told us: “Opus Dei is in your hands, in the hands of each person in the Work.” This is a reality that now takes on new force. The current circumstances are a call to responsibility, since each of us has to strive more diligently to incarnate the legacy of Saint Josemaría in the world as it is now, for people today.

Certainly, whoever is elected Prelate will be able to rely on the prayer of the faithful of Opus Dei and of so many other people. He will also have the support of the team he assembles, and work alongside others. Collegiality is another key feature of Saint Josemaría’s legacy.

What do you see as the main challenges that the new Prelate of Opus Dei will face?

The principal challenge is helping each person in Opus Dei to learn to build up the Church in their own place of work and professional
environment, in the world of culture and the family. By their Christian witness, the Prelature’s faithful can help people today to find Christ in “the middle of the street,” in a society that each day is becoming more varied. Thus the need exists to carry out a catechesis that is up to date in the world of the professions, right where people today find themselves.

Another challenge is giving joy and hope to today’s world. Not to an ideal world but to this complex world of ours, riven with wounds and so in need of charity. In other words, sanctifying ordinary life today, bringing Christ to all the existential peripheries, as Pope Francis reminds us.

With God’s grace, it will be possible to teach people to strive to live with their heart placed in Christ and their feet on the ground, aware of their own limitations. The joy of living the Christian message, embodied in their own life, will be spread among those alongside them: from mechanic to mechanic, from nurse to nurse, from businessman to businessman, from journalist to journalist…

There will also be the need to strengthen the personal initiative of thousands of people who, spurred by love for Christ and other men and women, will be able to begin initiatives that respond to the great challenges of our day and age: fostering professional honor and ethics, the struggle against poverty, help for refugees, the fight against unemployment, strengthening the family, etc. In summary, hopefully we can contribute to building up the Church as the “world reconciled with God,” as Saint Augustine said.
was 84 years old. In a telegram of condolence, Pope Francis expressed his spiritual closeness to the members of Opus Dei and recalled Bishop Echevarría’s service of love to the Church, following the example of St. Josemaría Escrivá and of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. The Pope pointed out the paternal and generous witness of Bishop Javier’s life as a priest and as a bishop, a faithful servant of God.

Born in Madrid in 1932, where he met St. Josemaría, he was his secretary from 1953 to 1975. In 1994 he was elected Prelate of Opus Dei. He was ordained as a bishop by St. John Paul II, on January 6, 1995 in St. Peter’s Basilica. His funeral will take place in the Roman Church of St. Eugene, next Thursday at 7:00 pm. Bishop Echevarría was also Chancellor of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. The auxiliary vicar and vicar general of Opus Dei, Msgr, Fernando Ocáriz, was able to administer the last sacraments to him shortly before his death. Msgr. Ocáriz speaks about the last moments of the Prelate of Opus Dei and highlights some features of his personality:

—Fernando Ocáriz. I was able to give him the Anointing of the Sick, and he received it joyfully. He died soon afterwards: serenely, just as his life had always been, a life of service, of self-giving to others. Our hearts are filled with sorrow but also with serenity, because we know he will be helping us from Heaven. As you know, he lived with two saints: with Saint Josemaría, for many years, and then with Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. And he learned from them to be very faithful to the Church, to love the Church, the Pope and souls. I was always impressed by his ability to be attentive to everyone, to listen, to not be in a rush when speaking with this person or that one, even someone who came up to him unexpectedly. He was a good and faithful priest and bishop, close to everyone.

He has been at the head of Opus Dei for over 20 years. What legacy does he leave to Opus Dei and also to the Church?

Fidelity to the spirit received from Saint Josemaría. He was his second successor and always was aware of the need to be faithful to the spirit he had received. This fidelity isn’t a matter of mechanical repetition because, as the founder himself used to say, the important thing is to preserve the nucleus, the spirit. Ways of speaking and doing change over time, but
fidelity to the spirit is preserved. Reflected in him one saw the truth of the imperative that all of us Christians have received to be faithful to the Spirit while always being open to new possibilities.

**Bishop Echevarría knew Saint John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis quite well. What can you tell us about his relationship with these Popes?**

He had a deep affection for the Pope—for all of them!—and a deep sense of fidelity, since the faithfulness that all Catholics should have for Christ and the Church is inseparable from fidelity to the Vicar of Christ, to the supreme Pastor of the Church, the Pope. When he was received by the Pope, he was always deeply moved and joyful.

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**Monthly Meditations on the Works of Mercy**

**July: Correcting those in error**

The history of salvation shows us the continuous interaction between God’s merciful love and mankind's weakness. As a mother follows her youngest child closely to keep him from danger or harm, so God has guided mankind throughout the centuries. Each of us has experienced in our own lives this close guidance, the hand of Divine Providence. And therefore, how many falls or mistakes on our daily path have become opportunities for an encounter with our Lord!

*Correcting those who err* [or “admonishing the sinner”] is a work of mercy that we see God carrying out constantly in the biblical narratives, whenever men have been determined (and we can also say, when we are determined) to choose the path of evil. The history of the Chosen People is a clear manifestation of this divine care. In many situations, Yahweh could have let go his guiding hand, but He always (sometimes also with punishments and other warnings from the prophets) leads his People back, putting them once again on the way to salvation.
With the Incarnation of the Word, God’s mercy takes on a human face: that of Jesus. God has become our Brother to look for us one by one: in our present circumstances, with our personal qualities, with the few or many talents that we have. In the Gospel, we see that Christ does not hold back from reprimanding, from correcting those he wants to lead by the straight path, not only the Pharisees who reject his message, but also his friends. He reprimands Peter, even sternly, when he suggests that our Lord should flee from the Passion; and Martha in Bethany, gently, for worrying excessively about her housework. Our Lord knew what tone and language was best suited for each occasion.

Following our Lord’s example, we recall that fraternal correction practiced with rectitude, without humiliating others, has been a help in the Church right from the beginning. “Brothers,” writes St. Paul to the Galatians, “in case someone is found to be at fault, you who are spiritual, correct him gently, taking care of yourself, lest thou also be tempted.” The Apostle is simply repeating Jesus’ command: “If your brother sins against you, go and correct him, just between the two of you. If he listens, you have won your brother.”

Therefore, fraternal correction is the duty of all Christians. When someone gives us a warning for our own good, we should see it as an expression of divine mercy, which uses human instruments to guide us along the right path. At first, we might find it distasteful and unpleasant. Pride may lead us to rebel, and to seek excuses that are always easy to find. However, if we consider this correction in God’s presence, a sincere sense of gratitude will arise, because someone has taken the trouble to make us aware of an error that we had not perceived.

Let us not underestimate the power of mercy, since a fraternal correction accepted humbly can build up a relationship, strengthen a friendship, avoid future complications and be the starting point of a new stage in one’s life.

Some years ago now, Pope Benedict XVI (to whom we should be very grateful) made ample reference to this manifestation of charity. “Today we are generally very sensitive to care and charity with regard to the physical and material good of others, but we are almost completely silent regarding
spiritual responsibility towards each other.” And he added: “When faced with evil, we cannot be silent. I’m thinking here of the attitude of those Christians,” the Pope continued, “who out of human respect or convenience conform themselves to the prevailing mentality instead of advising their brothers or sisters about certain ways of thinking and acting that contradict the truth and do not follow the right path.”[1]

Therefore, I tell all of you and I tell myself, when helping someone by a fraternal correction, we need to be guided by charity and prudence, looking for the right time and the right words so as not to hurt our sister or brother unnecessarily. Paul himself encouraged the Galatians to correct “with gentleness.” So the best thing to do is to think about the correction in God’s presence, asking the Holy Spirit to put the right words in our mouth, with complete rectitude of intention.

The temptation may arise to think that our correction will fall on deaf ears, or that the person won’t struggle to change, or that their problems don’t affect us.... And that’s not the case. Those of us in the Church form a united body, and the mistakes of the others must awaken in us (without becoming scandalized and without critical spirit) feelings of compassion and the need to help them with charity.

When we correct, we also need to count on time. Grace is always effective, but people need time—we need time—to make the changes required. Let us recall that the Apostle Peter didn’t want to accept that Christ was going to be put to death, even though the Master had announced it to him clearly and firmly. He needed the time he spent in prison confined in chains in order to fully understand that this sacrifice was God’s will.

Perhaps it also happens to us that, after having corrected someone, their attitude doesn’t change and they persist in their error. In such cases, let us pray, which is the first way to help. Once the seed of mercy has been planted, it has to be watered with prayer, patience and human affection, so that the seed will germinate and bear fruit.

With the practice of fraternal correction, we can effectively resist the temptation to gossip and make ironic comments, which causes so much damage to family and social relationships. This can be a good resolution for
the Jubilee of Mercy: to avoid even the slightest criticism of our relatives or friends, of our superiors or those who depend on us, of people we know and people we don’t know. This may seem like no easy task, since numerous frictions and misunderstandings arise every day. But if we persist with God’s help and strength, we will be sowers of the serenity that comes from avoiding confrontations and trying to suggest positive solutions.

Let us help one another with this balm of mercy. No one can find happiness when they seek it alone. Let us not be oblivious to the struggles of the others, and let us ask God for the simplicity of heart needed to accept corrections with humility and gratitude; and to help others by correcting them with affection and understanding when necessary.

 Aphgs: Forgiving offenses

One of the works of mercy that the world most needs, now and always, is forgiving offenses. “At times how hard it seems to forgive!” the Holy Father said. “And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully.”[2]

Living joyfully is a desire harbored by all men and women. But no one can attain happiness on their own, turning their back on God and others. Not infrequently, we could have the impression that those around us are an obstacle for us: because they offend us; because they mistreat us; because they cause us physical or moral pain—evils that Christ himself experienced, crucified by those He had come to save.

Our Lord, the visible face of the Father’s mercy, forgave without giving way to resentment. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,” he prayed as he hung from the wood of the Cross. Thus he decisively broke the vicious circle of hate that only generates more hate, the circle of vengeance and resentment. And He brought it about that from that Cross there would flow forth a stream of mercy, able to change the history of every woman and man.

Our Lord’s Cross helps us understand that we are all in need of forgiveness: to forgive and to be forgiven. Whoever does not accept this reality becomes unable to fathom the marvelous depth of the love that unites us to another person and to God.
Let’s review the parable of the prodigal son. The young man, blinded by inexperience and pride, turns away from his father’s house and squanders everything he had received. If he returns home, it’s due to the fact that he had experienced closely, on previous occasions, his father’s mercy, his understanding, and knew very well that he wouldn’t be rejected. He returns to his father, who with his embrace gives his greatest gift: his forgiveness. And his father not does so without humiliating him, without any reminder of his previous warnings and advice. Only then does the young man come to understand the real treasure of his father’s love that he had ignored and left behind, and that fortunately, upon coming back contritely, he recovered.

Each of us also needs to go to the sacrament of forgiveness frequently, to understand in some way the depth of divine love. “God never tires of forgiving,” the Pope reminds us. “We are the ones who tire of asking for forgiveness.” Indeed, unfortunately sometimes we are even determined to grow accustomed to the coldness of sin. So if we already benefit from this sacrament, let’s receive it with the best dispositions we can foster, going more often or preparing better. To achieve this, let us throw ourselves into the merciful arms of God, and radically uproot the prejudices and excuses that can prevent us from perceiving in our soul the caress of our Lord’s understanding. Perhaps we fail to remember the happiness we experienced the last time we reconciled with another person. Isn’t asking for forgiveness a human gesture capable of “giving a face” to this God of ours, whom so often we separate from our lives and whose goodness we have forgotten?

Many Christians are unaware of the beauty of Confession. Let’s have the conviction that this sacrament has gone out of style and never will. It has and will always have an ever-present power. Moreover, it is a sacrament that opens our lives to the future, because it restores hope to us. Therefore let us pray that the Jubilee Year of Mercy will allow many Christians to rediscover the path back to the father’s house.

Perhaps someone might think that in order to confess, a very complex preparation beforehand is required, and this is not the case. It’s enough to desire grace, to make a good examination of conscience (perhaps with the help of a written guide or someone who can provide assistance), and then going trustingly to the priest. Let’s not overlook the fact that it was his
interior and exterior sufferings, knowledge of his personal misery and the memory of his father’s love that interiorly moved the prodigal son to set out for home. Many people around us are in a similar situation. They just need someone to accompany them on the journey back to the Father’s house.

Moreover, just as God forgives so should we forgive others as many times as necessary in our daily life. Perhaps because of misunderstandings, personality differences, political or cultural divergences or other issues, some people hold on for years to the memory of the offenses caused by friends or third parties. Unfortunately, with a disposition like this in the soul, conflicts can last much longer, with each side refusing to budge.

Fully immersed as we are in the Year of Mercy, have we discovered this time as a great opportunity to offer reconciliation, including when we are the offended ones? Our Lord always takes the first step to forgive, even when we do not deserve his grace. Have we truly decided to follow the Master’s example? “Force yourself, if necessary,” wrote St. Josemaría, “always to forgive those who offend you, from the very first moment. For the greatest injury or offence that you can suffer from them is as nothing compared with what God has pardoned you.”[4]

May we have a strong desire that the decision to forgive and to ask for forgiveness become our habitual attitude, in each family and among friends. Let us realize that without the willingness to forgive, all the different settings of our lives, including our own family, turn into desolate and selfish environments that poison and sadden souls. Christ’s lesson is very clear: to love untiringly, including those who hurt us.

Therefore, if the others respond to our offer of forgiveness, let us give thanks to God. But when we do not get the response that we would have liked, let us not get discouraged, because mercy is free and does not expect anything in return. Jesus died praying for those who crucified and offended him. His redemptive death was what caused the veil of hatred to fall from the eyes of souls. And only then, in contemplating Christ’s death, did the centurion standing at the foot of the Cross utter this beautiful act of faith: “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mk 15:39).

If Christians readily forgive offenses received, with joy and simplicity of heart, many people will be attracted by the love of the children of God, and
they will encounter the good Father who wants to embrace everyone with his mercy.

*September: Comforting the sorrowful*

The day after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene went with great sorrow and love to our Lord’s tomb, to anoint the Crucified. When we read about this event in the Gospels we experience true joy, because we know that there, beside the tomb, she will find Jesus Himself now resurrected, with his glorious Body. Our Lord wanted to reveal Himself in that encounter, so he calls Mary Magdalene by her name: “Mary!” She recognizes Him right away and exclaims, “Rabboni!, Teacher!” Mary neither can nor wants to suppress that cry of joy at the certainty that our Lord is alive. At that moment, the darkness in this woman’s soul disappears; sadness gives way to an irrepressible joy. Our Lord lets Himself be recognized by a woman of faith.

I wanted to recall this episode so we may realize that the very first action carried out by the Risen Christ was the work of mercy we are reflecting on today: *comforting the sorrowful*.

We children of God have been created to rejoice in the Good. But we can encounter on our path through life sorrow and pain, because we freely and sadly choose sin or because God’s Providence allows suffering so that we may unite ourselves to his Cross, as the Gospel tells us. The daily coexistence with evil forms part of the human mystery. This reality shouldn’t discourage us, but rather lead us to redouble our hope in God and our desire to turn to Him, confident that sorrow and suffering do not escape his loving designs, just as the invitation to repent and begin again when we have erred is part of his Providence.

It may happen that those who experience evil could tend to isolate themselves, thinking they are able to cope with this burden without anyone’s help. By this ruse, the devil tries to separate us from God and our brothers and sisters, making us see around us only misunderstanding and hostility, and offering us in exchange false consolations that, in the end, leave behind a residue of bitterness. Eve was alone in Paradise when she dared to dialogue with the Tempter, as was Judas when he despaired on the
night of the Passion. How rightly Saint Paul states in his letter to the Corinthians: “worldly grief produces death.”

Setbacks and suffering are part of life, but how much wrong we would do if we were to confront them solely on our own! Faced with this struggle, sadness could arise, and sadness brings with it pessimism, distancing us from God and from our brothers and sisters. “Abyss calls to abyss,” says Scripture. At such times, we need someone’s help to keep us from falling further.

To those who go through this bad patch in their lives, Saint Josemaría advised them to first seek comfort in prayer and in the tabernacle, since from God comes all mercy. “You ask me to suggest a cure for your sadness,” he writes in The Way. “I’ll give you a prescription from an expert adviser, the Apostle Saint James: Tristatur aliquis vestrum, are you sad, my son? Oret! Pray! Try it and you will see.”[5]

The founder of Opus Dei would appeal to Heaven when it was hard to accept a tough situation, such as the death of someone close, a relative or a friend. Although he suffered the natural sorrow of a father — of a son, a brother, a friend — he didn’t give in to sadness, but instead prayed: “May the most just and lovable will of God be done, be fulfilled, be praised and eternally exalted above all things. Amen, Amen.”[6] He repeated the word “amen” twice, to cling tightly to the Divine Will, even when it was hard for him or he didn’t understand it. I remember very vividly how Saint Josemaría found great comfort in that prayer in order to keep going.

At the same time, God’s help so often reaches us through other people: friends, colleagues, relatives or even strangers. They will console us or we will offer them comfort, thus opening a way for God, in his mercy, to mitigate the difficulties and sorrows we all face on our earthly journey.

Consoling others isn’t easy, since it requires a lot of tact; the soul of a person who is suffering is, so to speak, “raw to the touch,” with a deep unease. One word more or less can cure or can cause even more damage. In that case, our presence will often be enough; at other times, it will be necessary to say something that conveys hope and helps that person to consider the situation from another perspective.

I advise you, when trying to console others correctly, to call on the
guardian angels for help. God the Father sent an angel to comfort Jesus in
the Garden of Olives, during that time of such intense suffering in our
Savior's life. My daughters and sons, sisters and brothers, in this scene,
which so often could nourish our prayer, we see clearly that to console
someone is a divine action. This consoling presence amid Christ’s agony
reveals God’s Love, the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the great Comforter.

You will recall that Saint Josemaría — following the Church’s tradition
— said that when we men and women are in God’s grace, we are Temples of
the Trinity. Therefore when we carry out or receive an act of mercy, we are
manifesting to the world the stream of love that stems from the Father,
embraces the Son, and reveals the Holy Spirit. And yet something so
important can, out of God’s goodness, be carried out with gestures as
ordinary as a caress, some words of comfort, some minutes of patient
listening, accompanying in silence or with our prayer a person who is
suffering.

In that same scene in the garden of Gethsemane, we see one of the
difficulties this work of mercy involves: that of not being able to discover
our neighbor’s suffering. Just a stone’s throw from our Lord, the Apostles
slept oblivious to the sorrow overwhelming their Master. Let us see
ourselves reflected in their drowsiness. We fall asleep when we are absorbed
in our own problems, when rushing around prevents us from stopping to
listen, when we don’t give importance to the signs of sadness in a relative or
a friend, when we offer advice without having listened beforehand, when
we pour out reproaches on those who have done wrong, putting a limit on
our patience...

I close with a beautiful prayer of praise that Saint Paul sends to his
brothers and sisters in Corinth and that sums up the heart of the work of
mercy that we are considering here: “Blessed be the God and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who
comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those
who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are
comforted by God.” Amen.

October: Bearing others’ defects patiently
Throughout this year, we are trying to let God’s mercy leave its mark on our interior life and be shown in deeds. As Saint Josemaría would say, it is in ordinary situations that we find the best place to make God’s goodness present; we either find Him there, or we will never find Him.

Thus, living alongside others in the workplace or in the family offers opportunities to identify ourselves with Him and, with this “lever of love,” to raise the world to God. Therefore it is very timely to examine how we are practicing the work of mercy we are considering this month: patiently suffering and loving our neighbor’s defects.

Love and suffering are two realities difficult to separate. Who has not suffered for love of a spouse, a child or a friend? Sometimes this odd combination may seem mysterious, but from the Cross Jesus shows us that this was the path taken by God himself. Aware that our Lord knows best, when we face this mystery in our daily life, let us look at the Cross that will be a source of peace.

The founder of Opus Dei always advised that we carry a crucifix in our pocket, or that we have one on our desk, next to the photograph of our loved ones. Then, by kissing the crucifix or praying a few words to Jesus Crucified, it becomes easier to accept the day’s annoyances, to confront our defects without being discouraged, or to overcome the inevitable frictions with others. Saint Josemaría would add that we aren’t being asked to “put up with” our neighbor, but rather to love each person and accompany them on their daily journey.

Losing our fear for the Cross, loving it and embracing it when it appears in ordinary or extraordinary situations, will enlarge our heart and help us welcome others when they need it most. Thus we will prepare ourselves to appear before our God, who understands us and awaits us in Heaven, ready to pour out superabundantly in our poor soul his infinite Love.

Saint Paul describes the characteristics of a purified love with these words: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.”

My friends, if we seriously seek the good of others, we will understand
why a weak brother or sister is no excuse for haste, criticism or impatience. Although we may try to shape our neighbor to our own liking, and are easily irritated by their persisting in the same defects, isn’t it true that God has had and continues to have even more patience with us?

During the Transfiguration, while our Lord rejoiced with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the nine disciples waiting for Him at the foot of the mountain tried in vain to heal an epileptic boy. Their lack of faith rendered them unable to cure the boy, who threw himself into water and fire trying to inflict self-harm. When informed about the failure of his disciples, Jesus reacts with a certain note of disillusionment, in which perhaps we recognize our own disappointment or distancing ourselves from the faults of others. “How long must I be with you?” the Redeemer exclaims. “How long must I bear with you?”

However, as Jesus came to earth to redeem mankind, to show great patience towards all, he heals the boy and tells his disciples the source of their failure: “If you had faith,” he tells them, “nothing would be impossible for you.” Our Lord’s deep love for mankind — for you, for me — is the strength that spurs Him to save us, to offer us his forgiveness again and again, to see in us the dignity of God’s children, which He has won for us and which is hidden under the cloak of our miseries.

Following in the footsteps of Christ, let us not turn our backs on the faults of others; and, without seeing oneself as a victim, let us strive to understand that it is not a question of “putting up with” other people but of welcoming them with humility. Let us look at others with the kind eyes with which God sees them and us, instead of with our own. If internal criticism easily arises in us, or we think ourselves unable to cope any longer with the temperament of this or that person, let us take better care of our personal examination of conscience. A person who does not know himself well, who does not seek humility, tends to be intransient with others. On this topic, Saint Augustine wrote that “a humble sinner is better than a proud righteous person.”[7]

I remember how Saint Josemaría used to recollect himself before the Tabernacle for a few minutes, also at the end of the day, before retiring, to draw up a balance for his day. Those moments before our Lord helped him
remember the times when he could have given himself more to others, and he would ask God for forgiveness and help to better tackle the next day. Only a person who knows his own weakness, and has laughed at himself a bit, discovers how much he needs God and the understanding of his brothers.

Only a patient and humble soul, aware of its own shortcomings, is capable of being available when needed to those seeking a hand to hold on to, some apt advice or a smile that expresses sincere understanding. Little is accomplished, in contrast, by confrontations or phrases filled with cynicism or spite.

Saint Josemaría told married couples, “Try to be ever youthful, and to keep yourselves completely for one another. You have to love each other so much that you love even the defects of your spouse, so long as they don't offend God.” Loving the defects of one’s spouse, or a friend, is possible when love is mature. And this attitude does not imply stoically accepting the shortcomings of others. We want the good of others, and therefore we try to help them get rid of their faults, such as their angry or apathetic character, lack of order, sensuality, laziness or activism, tardiness, wastefulness, and so on.

These imperfections are crosses that each of us carries for many years, and perhaps permanently. Let us not add more weight to the cross that each one bears; our patience towards others will be for many people the Simon of Cyrene that soothes their daily struggle, and that helps us identify ourselves with Christ on his way to Calvary, carrying the Cross for us.

Let us ask our Lady to teach us to be patient. She was quick to welcome the Apostles who had abandoned her Son, and with her motherly presence accompanied the Church in its early stages. We can be sure that Mary walks with us, helping us to imbue all human relationships with merciful understanding.

November: Praying for the living and the dead

“Without me you can do nothing.” These words of Jesus to his disciples — and to you and to me — make clear that without our Father God, without his help, our efforts to be merciful would be in vain. But Jesus also
assures us that his concern for all men and women leads Him to want to accompany us always, if we act uprightly. So as we approach the end of this Jubilee Year, we put ourselves once again in his hands and entrust to Him the resolutions that will make our ordinary life a “time of mercy.”

The last work of mercy for us to consider is that of praying for the living and the dead. By our prayer for our neighbor, in first place we humbly acknowledge that all good comes from God alone, and so we turn to Him; also we gain divine protection for souls; and finally we reinforce the supernatural ties that unite us to others, including those who already enjoy God’s presence.

The need to support one another with our prayer — both for the living and for those who have already left this world, but who continue being part of the Christian family — has the savor of the early Church. “Pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful.” says the Apostle James. “We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers, unceasingly,” Paul writes to the Thessalonians. “If anyone sees his brother sinning, if the sin is not deadly, he should pray to God and He will give him life,” says Saint John. After hearing these words, we can ask ourselves, dear friends, if we are supporting with our prayer our colleagues at work, our family, our neighbors, the people in our parish…. If someone is having a hard time, do we help that person with our prayers, even though he or she may never come to know about it?

Helping one another through prayer is a work of mercy that God has wanted to be abundantly present in the history of the Church, from its origins right up to today. Recently the Pope is asking us to pray intensely for persecuted Christians, brothers and sisters of ours willing to give up everything to preserve the faith. Similarly, he has invited us to pray for immigrants who risk their lives seeking a future in other countries, for those who are unemployed, for the elderly living alone, and also for many others in need of the warmth of the Communion of Saints.

Praying for others will help us escape from the selfish individualism that leads so many people to withdraw into a comfortable and apparently secure life, attentive only to personal needs, but insensitive to the suffering
of others. As Saint Josemaría said: “We must learn to recognize Christ when he comes out to meet us in our brothers and sisters, the people around us. No human life is ever isolated. It is bound up with other lives. No man or woman is a single verse; we all make up one divine poem.”[9] Therefore, in a society that seems to be gradually ridding itself of the ties that bind it together (this isn't meant to be pessimism), daily prayer will be a powerful source of unity and strength.

Besides the great human problems I mentioned above, there are also the difficulties and opportunities each one confronts in their personal or family life. That’s why it is so in accord with the Gospel to bear generously in our soul the joys and sorrows of others! And since we Christians want to live in solidarity with those around us, let us be convinced that when one of the baptized prays, he or she is already doing so. When we seek God’s intercession, He hears us and intervenes. He does not remain indifferent. Let us firmly believe that we can change the history of our neighbor, of a family or a community, by the strength of our own prayer. Sometimes we may not see results, or things may not turn out the way we had imagined, since we are well aware that God has his own ways, ever merciful, and ever surprising. But let us dream! Let us pray for those who do not seem to offer any hope; let us ask for what is beyond our own possibilities; and let us never put a limit on God’s mercy.

In an earlier reflection on another work of mercy, “Burying the dead,” we considered with confidence how mercy can cross the barrier of death, and benefit even those who await their eternal reward. Praying for the dead enables our love to reach those who have rendered their souls to God. Saint Josemaría stressed how moved Jesus was by the death of the son of the widow at Nain, and how he reacted by bringing him back to life. As Saint Josemaría wrote: “Saint Luke says, misericordia motus super eam, [Jesus] was moved by compassion, by mercy for that woman.”[10] Let us learn from that scene: can’t our prayer also move our Lord anew so that, out of his mercy, He grants true Life to those who have gone before us?
The Jubilee Year that is coming to a close should not be just one more event on the calendar, but rather should spur us forward and renew our firm desire for holiness. I ask myself and I ask you, with trust and as a friend: has this time of the Holy Year left its mark on your soul? Have you discovered God as a merciful Father? Have you come to know our Lord’s merciful heart more deeply, his interest for each and every one of us?

Let us recall, as the Holy Father said, that “it is not enough to experience God’s mercy in one’s life; whoever receives it must also become a sign and instrument for others, through small, specific gestures.”[11] Therefore, the fourteen works on which we have meditated together during these months invite us to constantly plant the seed of the “first evangelization” in so many hearts that still do not know Christ or that have fallen away from him. With the warmth of our affection and with the help of grace, many souls perhaps hardened by indifference will open again to God’s love, and there will awaken in them the hunger to know the good Father who awaits their return.

We place our resolutions and intentions in our Lady’s hands, and pray: Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope … turn thine eyes of mercy towards us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!

[6] Ibid., no. 691.
“Mercy is Love That Is Turned Into Service,” in Avvenire, Italy (November 20, 2016)

At the close of the Holy Year of Mercy, a strong sense of gratitude unites the whole Church. In first place, filial gratitude to the Blessed Trinity, whose abundant gifts have enabled us to experience God’s infinite love for each man and woman, for each of us. And also union with the intentions of Pope Francis, who has convoked this Jubilee to highlight more fully this fundamental aspect of the faith—that God is an immensely good Father—and to remind us that the path of our happiness passes through being *dispensers of mercy*.

For our gratitude to be fully sincere, it needs to be united to the deep desire to improve personally. A person who has experienced mercy—by having recourse to the sacrament of confession, spending time in prayer, passing through a holy door or accepting the help of a brother or sister—is called to communicate it to others through their own life.

This Jubilee should leave a deep imprint on our soul. And it will do so if we grow in our desire for holiness, if we have more frequent recourse to the sacraments, if we strive to improve our way of being. In short, it is an opportunity to help us embody more fully the image of Christ that others should be able to see in our life.

In the many places in today’s world where the echo of the Gospel is no longer heard, we Christians face the challenge of the “first evangelization.” “Where is your God,” these people might ask us. And they will discover him in our prayer for those who offended us, in our care for the destitute, in our sympathy for those who are trapped in their vices, in the consolation we offer those who live alone, in the forgiveness we extend where society only speaks about justice, in the Christian coherence of our daily lives, in our work and family... By acting in this way, we too will grow in our
intimacy with God, because by acting in his name we will come to know him better and identify ourselves with him.

“If you wish to find God, seek him where he is hidden: in the needy, in the sick, in the hungry, in the imprisoned,” Pope Francis recently advised. We would impoverish our inner world if we were to refuse to deal with those who displease us, who are different, who could cost us time... Each person is “Christ passing by” our side, as Saint Josemaría, the founder of Opus Dei, liked to say.

Our daily life offers us many opportunities to be merciful: our home, our profession, and our friends, making our way through the city, dealing with strangers... Saint Josemaría never tired of advising us to pray also for the people we see on the street; thus we will always be ready to provide others with the care they need.

Mercy is Love that reaches out to the needs of the others. And it invites us to turn our eyes to our Lady, who will teach us to be merciful and to welcome the Father’s mercy into our own lives. Then we will experience more fully that we are brothers and sisters of all our fellow men and women.

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“Understanding Mother Teresa,” in La Vanguardia, Spain (September 4, 2016)

“I vividly remember her diminutive figure, bent over by a lifetime at the service of the poorest of the poor, but always filled with an inexhaustible interior energy. The energy of love for Christ.” These moving words were spoken John Paul II shortly after the death of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. He knew her very well.

We all felt the impact of that diminutive figure, bent over by the years, but with a surprising spirit and a moving mission of serving the most helpless. She described herself in this way: “By blood I am Albanian. By citizenship, Indian. In what refers to faith, I am a Catholic nun. By my vocation, I belong to the world. In what refers to my heart, I belong totally
to the Heart of Jesus.”

When she began, she could not have suspected that she would become world famous. She never intended this. But in her person, we saw very clearly an essential aspect of the Christian message: concern for the most neglected. And thus she moved many people. Also, at the end, she had a few critics, who thought that serving the poor out of love for Christ was to deform that service, with the intention to evangelize.

Certainly one can work for others, and many do so, without a religious motive, through a philanthropic conviction or through feelings of compassion. These are very good and deeply human intentions and concerns. But the tie between love for God and love for our neighbor reveals something more: a keynote of the Christian message that, by canonizing Mother Teresa, the Church wants to remind mankind of.

Confronted with Jesus’ invitation—to give one’s life for others, loving everyone, including one’s enemies—we come face to face with our human limitations: lack of energy and strength and talents, but also the resistance of laziness and selfishness. And our heart can end up saying: it seems very beautiful, but I don’t see myself as capable of it.

Christian faith and our experience in life teach us that, if we really want to undertake this dedication and ask God for it, his help doesn’t fail us. Therefore the hearts of the saints always have that curious combination of deep humility: sensing both one’s own incapacity and the strength of God’s love.

The Christian saints are not supermen or superwomen who achieve everything by their overwhelming personality, relentless will power, overflowing energy and irresistible drive. Neither do they usually stand out for their economic or technical expertise. The explanation of their strength and their importance for other Christians resides not in their being exceptions to nature, but rather in their letting God’s love work in them.

On the same occasion that we recalled at the beginning of this article, Pope John Paul II pointed out the key to understanding this small and at the same time gigantic woman: “Her mission began each day, before dawn, in front of the Eucharist. In the silence of contemplation, Mother Teresa of Calcutta felt resonating in her heart Jesus’ cry on the Cross: ‘I thirst.’
That cry sensed in the depth of her heart impelled her through the streets of Calcutta and through all the slum areas of the world, in search of Jesus in the poor, in the abandoned and in the dying.” And I would like to add: in orphans and those not wanted by their parents.

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“Mercy, The Work of God,” in Niedziela, Poland (September 2016)

By Pawel Zuchniewicz

The Prelate of Opus Dei, Javier Echevarría, was among the one thousand bishops who were present for World Youth Day in Krakow. During those days he met with several thousand young people taking part in the activities of spiritual formation the Prelature offers.

Opus Dei was founded by St. Josemaría Escrivá on October 2, 1928. As the founder said, he had then “26 years of age, God’s grace, and good humor.” Today that apostolic work counts on more than 90,000 faithful (some 2,000 are priests), and is present in sixty countries, including Poland. The initiatives that many people of Opus Dei carry out include numerous works of charity. One example, among others, is Harambee Africa, an international organization that promotes social and educational programs in sub-Saharan Africa. This initiative was begun to commemorate the canonization of Josemaría Escrivá in 2002.

We held this interview with the second successor to St. Josemaría (after Blessed Alvaro del Portillo) on Friday, July 29. It took place right after the Way of the Cross that Pope Francis presided over in the Parque Jordan de Blonia in Krakow.

What are your first reflections after the Way of the Cross?

The Way of the Cross is always an encounter with Christ’s love. A painful encounter but at the same time hopeful and purifying. Recalling the moments of the Passion always helps me to realize that Christ continues loving mankind, each one of us. And seeing so many boys and girls
following behind the Cross led me to consider that young people today continue seeking him. They aren’t satisfied with substitutes for love.

Besides, here the Way of the Cross has especially brought to mind the memory of St. John Paul II, the inspirer of these World Youth Days and Archbishop of Krakow before his election as Pope. His life, and not only the final stage, when his face became an icon of suffering, was a determined effort to carry joyfully the cross of each day, with Christ, for the salvation of mankind.

*St. John Paul II began the World Youth Days and Benedict XVI continued them. Pope Francis has taken up the baton in coming to Krakow, the City of Mercy. How do you see these three pontiffs in their eagerness to seek out young people?*

I see continuity in the effort to address themselves to young people. On the one hand, because the Church is always beautiful, capable of reaching young people as well as the aged. And also because both St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and now Pope Francis have only sought to make Christ present. They are his vicars, and thus have never tried to shine with their own light. They have tried to lead young people to look at Christ, and Christ always attracts.

*In the months leading up to World Youth Day we saw a growing risk of terroristic attacks in Western Europe, also owing to the crisis of migration… How can the fear that arises in people for this reason be overcome?*

Immigration and terrorism are distinct problems. Terrorism should not be used as an excuse to shut the doors to those who see themselves forced to abandon their place of origin.

I do not have political formulas—that is not my mission—to solve these problems. But the most human and most Christian solution always passes through a dialogue with God, in prayer, and a dialogue among men and women. In the face of those news reports or fears we should pray, for prayer is the beginning of the path that leads to peace.

St. Josemaría, the founder of Opus Dei, encouraged us to contemplate Christ on the Cross with his arms open for everyone: those on the right, those in the center, those on the left; those above and those below. Christ’s
Cross—he told us—is like the plus sign in addition, a sign of union and not division. That is the essential Christian attitude: to bring Christ’s charity to every corner of the world, and now especially to those thousands of refugees who are arriving in our countries. Logically, this needs to be done in a responsible way, and for this dialogue is also important and studying which solutions are most suitable in each case.

Recently, mercy is the most used word in the Church and in the world. Isn’t it being abused somewhat?

God is mercy, and if the Church’s mission is to speak about God, logically it has to speak about his mercy. Certainly, it’s not enough just to speak about mercy; we also need to live it with our neighbor. Mercy is much more than just a nice word.

One of the acts during the Jubilee of Mercy will be the canonization of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who is another extraordinary example of dedication to others. She put prayer at the foundation of her work, and especially Eucharistic adoration. As she once said: “Without my prayer I wouldn’t be able to work for even a half hour.”

I would also like to recall that this eagerness to care for the needy was habitual in St. Josemaría Escrivá. He saw Christ in the poor, and he did all he could to let patients and the poor sense God’s mercy made present through their brothers and sisters in the faith. Therefore he always recommended that the faithful of the Work draw close with joy to Christ suffering in the sick and the poor. And, thanks be to God, we can see this concern today in many different countries.

Opus Dei, which you preside over, carries out a broad apostolic work with young people. How do you help those who are young to draw spiritual fruit from this period in their life?

We need to remind young people that our Lord is counting on them, and also realize this ourselves. He asks the boys and girls to learn how to give themselves by loving their parents, and also by their study, by their integral and clean life, by their positive rebellion, which refuses to give in to the blackmail of a false freedom. He also counts on their capacity to give themselves to a noble cause. In his messages for the World Youth Days, St. John Paul II used to encourage young people to give their lives to God, if
they sense this call; and now Pope Francis has mentioned it again.

I pray that this exceptional encounter that we have experienced in this land of Krakow may also be an occasion for many decisions of self-giving to living the faith in a joyful and consistent way. In most cases, this will mean a lay Christian dedication specified in marriage or in apostolic celibacy, but without excluding, of course, the call to the priesthood or to the consecrated life. And I want to make a comment here regarding the consecrated life. I would like to thank Sister Tobiana and her community for the respect and good humor with which they took care of St. John Paul II.

*The message during these days in Krakow has been a call to generosity, to daring, to a form of rebellion against injustice. How can a young person respond to this call?*

In Krakow, the city of St. Faustina Kowalska, the message of mercy has deep roots. It is my firm hope that the decisions of generosity that this world youth meeting can awaken in the hearts of young people, in this city and in this Jubilee Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis, will also include going forth to meet the needs of peace and justice of the men and women of our time. I am thinking, above all, of so many cases, I repeat, of material need, and also spiritual need, that require the response of the “new imagination of charity” St. John Paul II spoke about.

*World Youth Day is not only a meeting of hundreds of thousands of young people; there are almost a thousand bishops here. This is perhaps the largest gathering of bishops since the Second Vatican Council. What does this event mean for you, as a bishop and prelate of Opus Dei? These are days in which one feels very deeply the communion of the whole Church. For me it has been wonderful to see once again our beloved Cardinal Dziwisz, and to recall—on seeing him—all the help and accompaniment he provided the holy Polish pontiff. And with him, to pray for each other during these days of fraternity, which are made more intense by tangibly sensing the Church’s universality.*

*It was also wonderful to see the unity between the young people and the pastors, and to ask these young people many times—now and in the future of the Church—to pray for us, so that we pastors be entirely Christ’s,
in such a way that, following closely in his footsteps, we may spend ourselves in our mission of serving and loving all men and women.

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“Open the Doors To Mercy,” In El Tiempo, Colombia (July 21, 2016)

Once again, hundreds of thousands of young people from around the world will gather around the Holy Father. For a few days, they will leave behind their homes, their studies and their daily routines to celebrate together the beauty of the Christian faith and of the Holy Church.

The insight of St. John Paul II, who proposed the idea for these youth gatherings 30 years ago, has become strongly rooted in the lives of girls and boys, Catholics or not, from all over the world.

This time, World Youth Day 2016 returns to the geographical and spiritual roots of this holy Polish Pontiff; there, mercy will once again be the “spark” that ignites many desires of giving oneself to God, and of living in the service of others. Ringing in the ears of those who will cross through Europe on their way to Krakow will echo those words that stunned the world and that still prevail: *Do not be afraid! Open the doors to Christ!*

Following in the footsteps of Saints John Paul II and Faustina Kowalska — each of whom speaks to us of God’s Mercy — these days will be an invitation for young people to open the doors of their souls so as to *discover mercy*. Indeed, we need to avoid running the risk that mercy be only a beautiful word, able to fill speeches, clichés or songs, but that does not affect our being or our actions. This is why Pope Francis is offering us many opportunities — this World Youth Day being yet another example — to experience and incarnate mercy.

God’s mercy is identical to Himself, which is why it springs forth from his very mystery. To unveil what mercy contains, one must accept it, and the best way to do this — the most direct and joyful path — passes through the confession of our sins in the Sacrament of Penance. Leaving our trespasses in his hands allows us to know how much the Creator loves
“Jesus,” St. Josemaría said, “is always waiting for us to return to him, because he knows our weakness.” Hopefully many young people will return from Krakow with a cleaner outlook and a more cheerful soul after placing themselves in the hands of divine grace, having felt the embrace of this Divine Father who waits for our return. Do not be afraid! Open the doors to God’s mercy! This attitude leads us back to the good path if we have lost it, and renews our desires to love.

Mercy also becomes stronger in us when we practice it. It is so powerful, and it has the capacity to fill an entire lifetime, to transform a gray existence into the potent, positive and peaceful strength that our society needs. A healthy non-conformism characterizes the young soul. St. Josemaría said: “As a young man I was rebellious and I still am now. Because I'm not into a lot of protesting that doesn't offer a positive solution, nor do I feel like filling life with disorder. I rebel against all that! I want to be a child of God, to get to know God, behave like a man who knows he has an eternal destiny and at the same time goes through life doing the good that he can, understanding, excusing, forgiving, living alongside others…”

These days in Poland will offer numerous opportunities for us to practice mercy, with a spirit of service. Situations such as living with strangers, long waits, heat and cold, lack of sleep and other discomforts provide us with opportunities to meet and help others as Christ would do. Hopefully with this experience, each one will return home with a resolution — something specific and personal — that will help spread the power of God’s tenderness to every corner of this world.

If we convert these days into a “school of mercy,” each pilgrim will go home with their backpack full of hope, capable of imparting the inexhaustible treasure possessed by a soul that lets itself be embraced by God.
Throughout the course of the year, the liturgy invites Christians to call to mind some of the people who followed Christ closely. Remembering the saints is an incentive to strengthen our own Christian life, by looking at the men and women who, through their example and intercession, invite the People of God to confront the future with a sure hope.

Pope Francis, in this Year of Mercy, has wanted to highlight the relevance of a great follower of Christ, Mary Magdalene, by elevating her liturgical memorial to the category of a feast day. With this decision, the Holy Father shows his desire that the example of this holy disciple of Jesus may play a greater role in the Church’s life of piety.

The Gospel shows us Mary Magdalene as a woman who loved greatly and who wanted to love ever more deeply. The text tells us that Jesus had cast out of her seven devils, which can be seen as referring to painful situations, whether physical or moral. In any case, her suffering led her to Christ, and once she met him she never looked back. She realized that her life now only had meaning if she spent it serving God and her brothers and sisters. Freed from her evils, Mary becomes a great and generous figure before our eyes when, close to the Cross, she offers us a lesson in fortitude. And later, when she goes to the tomb of the Crucified One, she refuses to let hope die in the world. What a marvelous disciple of Christ Mary Magdalene was!

“Without Jesus we aren’t well”

“Woman, why are you weeping?” Christ asks her when she comes to the tomb to seek him and anoint his cadaver. Mary Magdalene sought him with a holy passion, with perseverance. As the founder of Opus Dei often insisted, “without Jesus we aren’t well.” On the liturgical memorial of this holy woman in 1964, Saint Josemaría, while praying out loud in front of the Tabernacle, said: “The tomb is empty! Mary Magdalene cries, her face bathed in tears. She needs the Master. She has gone there to be consoled a little by being near Him, to keep Him company, because without our Lord nothing is worthwhile. Mary perseveres in prayer; she looks for Him everywhere; she has no other thought but of Him. My children, God lets himself be overcome by such fidelity, so that you and I draw the consequences; so that we learn to truly hope and love.”
At first, Mary doesn’t recognize the Master. But she perseveres in her eagerness to find him. When she hears her name spoken with the very personal tone that Jesus uses for each of his followers, she recognizes the Saviour. And to her is entrusted, the first of the disciples to see the Risen Christ, the first announcement of the resurrection: a message that since then has never ceased to resound in the world. This marvelous responsibility is now passed on to each one of us. How often our Lord uses other people, to call each of us by our name and to communicate also to us the mission of making him known to others!

*Contribution of women to the Church*

The holy women in the Gospel (Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary of Bethany, Joanna, Susanna and Salomé) served Christ with a loyalty the other disciples didn’t always show. They accompanied the Master along the roads of Palestine and gave him lodging in their homes. They cried on seeing him on the way of the Cross, and accompanied his Mother Mary to the place of execution. And they sought to honor the Body of Jesus after his burial.

Today as then, women are called to contribute to the Church’s mission with their intelligence, their sensitivity and strength, their piety, their apostolic zeal and spirit of service, their initiative and generosity. But above all, they are asked to contribute, like all the Christian faithful, through their personal sanctity. This is the key teaching of Mary Magdalene’s life. Whoever truly seeks to serve the Church needs to look first at Christ and follow him closely, with a complete fidelity, along the paths of the earth, even when others flee in the face of the apparent victory of evil.

The upcoming July 22nd is an opportunity to call to mind the life of Mary Magdalene, who presents us with the summary of each Christian’s biography: to begin and begin again, with humility; to love Christ; to trust in him despite the shadows that sometimes may darken the path; to serve others with ever greater effort, in the place where our life unfolds. Mankind needs women and men like this, capable of having untiring recourse to divine mercy, loyal at the foot of the Cross, attentive to hearing ourselves addressed by our own name, amid the ordinary tasks of each day, by the Risen Christ.
Addresses and Other Statements

At the Inauguration of the Academic Year, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (October 3, 2016)

Your Eminences, Most Reverend Bishops,

Your Excellencies, Professors, Collaborators, Students, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the academic year that we are inaugurating we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of a magisterial document of particular interest, especially if it is read from the historical perspective of the present time. I refer to the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* of Blessed Paul VI, published on March 26, 1967. The Pope’s voice invited the Church and the world to an authentic conversion, grounded on a new appreciation for the social dimension of the Christian faith, and therefore of the human being.

The encyclical ends with an urgent series of calls. Among them one is of special interest for us to consider now. The Supreme Pontiff directs himself to men and women thinkers in the following terms: “men very often find themselves in a sad state because they do not give enough thought and consideration to these things. So We call upon men of deep thought and wisdom—Catholics and other Christians, believers in God and devotees of truth and justice, all men of good will—to take as their own Christ’s injunction, ‘Seek and you shall find’ (Lk 11:9). Blaze the trails to mutual cooperation among men, to deeper knowledge and more widespread charity, to a way of life marked by true brotherhood, to a human society based on mutual harmony.”[1]

Fifty years later, we can see in these words the foundation for St. John Paul II’s plea at the beginning of his pontificate: “Open the doors wide to
Christ.” The timeliness and the urgency of this citation from Blessed Paul VI also appears in *Caritas in Veritate*. Commenting on Paul VI’s statement that the world is suffering because of a lack of thought, Benedict XVI writes: “A new trajectory of thinking is needed in order to arrive at a better understanding of the implications of our being one family; interaction among the peoples of the world calls us to embark upon this new trajectory, so that integration can signify solidarity rather than marginalization. Thinking of this kind requires a deeper critical evaluation of the category of relation.”[2]

From *Populorum Progressio* to Pope Francis, passing through the words of *Caritas in Veritate*, one can see in the Magisterium a connecting thread encouraging men and women of science and culture to develop relationships with one another to jointly reflect on the social dimension of the human beings and human perfection, that is to say, on the path to happiness.

In academic work, this challenge requires a triple openness, in function of the three levels on which relationships are developed within the University and from the University.

Openness to reciprocal communication of the studies and research that each professor carries out within the university;

Openness to external relationships with other scientific spheres of civil disciplines in general, and particularly with those that study the human and social sciences;

Openness to the concrete reality of the human being today and to the needs of the societies and nations to which each of us belongs.

Carrying out that work requires a close collaboration between the various faculties, especially in those milieus where the Magisterium invites us to develop a metaphysical vision of human relationships. It also requires the wisdom needed to recognize that true human communion never violates the dignity of the person, but rather ennobles men and women and frees them.

The family is a privileged place for this concern. Therefore it should always be the perspective for undertaking academic work. As a doctor
undertakes research with the desire to cure patients—although perhaps only a few can be treated directly—so a professor who wants to take seriously the invitation of the Magisterium, starting with Pope Paul VI, should always take into account the needs of the family, both in the marriage union and in its universal repercussions.

The University of Santa Croce seeks to respond to this invitation, with people from a wide variety of disciplines striving to put into practice, with the help of the Holy Spirit, this invitation—more timely than ever—of the Second Vatican Council: “With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word, so that revealed Truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage.”[3]

The triple openness to which I referred earlier, can then lead to research and teaching that helps to bring the faith integrally to the man of today, who lives immersed in the world, “in the public square.” It is a matter of listening and being listened to, so that the faith can illuminate the questions and aspirations of the hearts of people today, and of the various peoples who here are really meeting one another, given the diversity of the places from which students and professors come.

To make this openness more practical, each professor needs to be interested in the efforts of the research and teaching of the other professors. This is the foundation for ensuring that academic activity is imbued with an authentic spirit of service to the truth and to society.

This attitude can also extend to the collaboration among teachers, both in their research and teaching work. But even more, this disposition of listening and collaboration should animate the life of the whole University, with a dialogue that embraces all who work here. All of us—the administrative personnel, the teachers and students, the technical employees, and those who occupy the organs of government—together carry out this wonderful enterprise. As St. Josemaría taught, no task is superior to another; rather the value of each activity depends on the care and the love with which it is carried out.
This is foundation for truly grasping the world’s needs and bringing the light of the faith to all the peoples of the world. As Pope Francis said: “The present crisis is centered on the inability of people to believe in anything beyond themselves. The individual conscience has become the measure of all things. This causes a crack in personal and social identities. This new situation provokes a whole process of alienation due to the lack of a past and therefore a future.”[4]

There will be no answer to this crisis if our work does not start with the treasure of the Church’s Tradition, the memory of our Christian identity, which everyone is yearning for, although perhaps unconsciously. God is our Father, and in Christ we are brothers and sisters of all mankind. Therefore all the activity of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross should be at the service of the proclamation and study of what it means to be children of God.

Let us consider the foundation of the relational openness that I alluded to before: the capacity to think about the world in the light of our conversation with God, with the risen Christ, present among us. With words of St. Josemaría, I assure you: “it is not difficult to convert work into a prayerful dialogue. As soon as you offer it up and then set to work, God is already listening and giving encouragement. We acquire the style of contemplative souls, in the midst of our daily work! Because we become certain that he is watching us, while he asks us to conquer ourselves anew: a little sacrifice here, a smile there for someone who bothers us, beginning the least pleasant but most urgent job first, carefulness in little details of order, perseverance in the fulfillment of our duty when it would be so easy to abandon it, not leaving for tomorrow what should be finished today: and all this, to please him, Our Father God!”[5]

I would like this University to be a home for all who want to bring Christ to every member of the human family in the world, in the middle of the world: so that those who believe can follow Him with greater gratitude, and those who do not believe can find an answer to their questions and the deepest desires of their heart.

With this hope, we entrust to our Lady, Queen of the Church and the world, the academic year 2016-2017, which I hereby declare inaugurated.
Words Regarding the Canonization of Mother Teresa of Calcutta (September 2, 2016)

The canonization of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta is a joyful feast for the Church and all mankind. Since her death, the spiritual stature of this extraordinary woman has been becoming ever clearer to the benefit of so many souls.

In 2003, Saint John Paul II invited all of us to reflect on her message of service and charity. How much good comes from getting to know her biography, her writings and thoughts. The untiring generosity of Mother Teresa of Calcutta is a strong spur to learn to live for others.

During the times I had a chance to be with Mother Teresa, I saw how she was becoming more and more bent over as time went by, as can happen to us when we get older. Her particular vocation as a missionary of God’s charity led her to continuously bend over spiritually to welcome an abandoned person or cure wounds of body or soul. It was as though her spiritual “bending over” the poor and sick was also becoming physical.

It was contemplation of the Eucharist that led Teresa of Calcutta to recognize Christ in those who were poor, sick or alone, since she had
deeply assimilated those words of our Lord: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).

This explains why, along with the required physical assistance, she poured out so much affection for the most needy, and showed such great compassion for orphans and the unborn. We can recall here her defense of life (which we too are all engaged in), when on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 she made reference to the drama of abortion, and offered to look after unwanted children who are born.

All of this Christian way of acting provides a lot of light for overcoming the short-sightedness of human calculations and personal interests. She saw in humanity a family, and in the world a common home that any upright person needs to be concerned about.

After receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, Mother Teresa was asked what an ordinary person can do to further peace in the world. She replied: “Go home and love your family.” The challenge, for many Christians, will be to bring Saint Teresa of Calcutta’s apostolic eagerness into the ambit of their ordinary activities: to “lean over,” to place themselves at the service of the others and thus to spread the Gospel and Christ’s charity to all environments. In short, as Pope Francis said, to realize we are instruments of God’s charity for all the creatures on this earth (cf. Laudato Si’, no. 246).

Prelate’s Words About the Earthquake in Central Italy (August 24, 2016)

On receiving news of the earthquake that early on August 24 struck areas in central Italy and caused numerous deaths and injuries, among them many women and children, Bishop Javier Echevarría has asked the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei to unite themselves to Pope Francis’ intentions: “asking God to console the hearts of those who are suffering; to grant them peace!”

“During these painful moments,” the Prelate said, “let us pray for those who have lost their lives, for the injured and those experiencing material
damages, and for their families. May our human and spiritual concern reach each and every one of them.”

The Prelate added: “I especially ask the faithful and friends of the Prelature who live close to these areas to do all they can to assist efforts to bring aid to those affected by the quake.”

Pastoral Letters

Pastoral Letter of December 1, 2016

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

After the close of the Year of Mercy, which has impacted the whole world, we are beginning Advent and a new liturgical year. The Church encourages us to quicken our pace towards our Lord. This advice is always timely, but now, in preparing for Christmas, it becomes if possible even more urgent.

We all have engraved on our hearts some words that, in the upcoming weeks, should leave their imprint on everything we do: *veni, Domine, et noli tardare*[^1]; come Lord, and do not delay. We are invited to turn our eyes to Christ, while recalling his terrestrial birth in Bethlehem and awaiting, also with joy and peace, his glorious coming at the end of time. If we were to fail to make this effort, our daily occupations, the monotonous succession of days almost always the same, could perhaps make our daily path seem tedious and uninteresting, and undermine the expectation of an encounter with the Saviour.

Hence this marvelous cry of the Church: come, Lord Jesus! As Saint Bernard said, between the first and final advent comes an *adventus medius*, an intermediary coming of Christ, which marks the entire course of our existence. “This intermediary coming is, one could say, a path leading from..."
the first to the last: in the first, Christ was our redemption; in the last, he will appear as our life; in this intermediary one he is our rest and our consolation.”[2]

In preparing ourselves for the imminent commemoration of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, these weeks spur us to realize how God draws close to us at each moment; he awaits us in the sacraments, especially Penance and the Eucharist, and equally in prayer, in the works of mercy. “Awaken! Remember that God comes! Not yesterday, not tomorrow, but today, now! The one true God, ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,’ is not a God who is there in Heaven, unconcerned about us and our history, but he is the-God-who-comes.”[3]

Each day of this waiting places us very close to Mary and Joseph, also with Simeon and Anna, and all the just of the Old Covenant who longed for the Messiah’s coming. Let us ponder on the yearnings in God’s heart—for his delight is to be with the children of men (See Prov 8:31 [Vulg.])—revealed in salvation history. How are we striving to respond? Let us turn our eyes more frequently to our Lady and the holy Patriarch, meditating on how they awaited, each day with greater eagerness, the birth of the Son of God. We can also reflect on how, during the months preceding this celestial event, their conversations would have revolved around Jesus. Our Father’s words are very timely here: “Joyfully keep Joseph and Mary company… and you will hear the traditions of the House of David. You will hear about Elizabeth and Zachary; you will be moved by Joseph’s pure love, and your heart will pound whenever they mention the Child who will be born in Bethlehem.”[4] I suggest that we try to put more love and affection into praying the Angelus.

In today’s world, both complex and exciting, the danger exists that the hustle and bustle around us will lead us, almost without noticing it, to lose our focus: to forget that our Lord is very close to us. Jesus gives himself to us completely, and it’s only natural that he asks a lot of us. Not understanding this reality means not understanding, not truly grasping the Love of God.

But let us not imagine unusual or extraordinary situations. Our Lord is waiting for us to make a more refined effort in carrying out the ordinary
duties proper to a Christian. Therefore I suggest that these weeks (which in so many countries are marked by a crescendo of external preparations for Christmas) should lead to a crescendo of recollection in your closeness to God and in your generous and cheerful service to others. Amid the rushing around, the shopping (or the financial hardships, perhaps tied to a certain lack of social stability), amid wars or natural catastrophes, we have to remember that God is watching over us. Thus we will find peace of heart. Let us turn our eyes to Christ who is arriving, as the Pope said a few weeks ago, citing a well-known phrase of Saint Augustine: “I fear that the Lord will pass by” without my recognizing him; I fear that the Lord may pass before me in one of these small needy persons, and I will not realize that it is Jesus.\[5\]

In particular, let us take greater care of the small gestures of piety that make our relationship with God warmer and more intimate, and that prepare for the Child Jesus a welcoming inn. For example, making the sign of the cross slowly, knowing we are welcomed by the Trinity and saved by the Cross; recollecting ourselves, with naturalness but with devotion, when saying the blessing or giving thanks at meals for our nourishment; showing by our genuflections before the “perennial Nativity scene of the Tabernacle”\[6\] the firmness of a real and living faith; accompanying almsgiving with a smile; greeting our Mother with affection in her images, and preparing during these first days of December for the solemnity of her Immaculate Conception... Amid the dryness of certain days, our Lady will place on our path fragrant flowers, filled with the bonus odor Christi (2 Cor 2:15), the “good aroma of Christ,” as happened in the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Saint Juan Diego, which we will commemorate on the 12th of this month.

From December 17 on, the wait for Jesus takes on a holy impatience: He who is to come will come and will not delay, and now there will be no fear within our land, for he is our Saviour.\[7\] “When we hear tell of the birth of Christ, let us be silent and let the Child speak. Let us take his words to heart in rapt contemplation of his face. If we take him in our arms and let ourselves be embraced by him, he will bring us unending peace of heart. This Child teaches us what is truly essential in our lives. He was born into the poverty of this world; there was no room in the inn for him and his
family. He found shelter and support in a stable and was laid in a manger for animals. And yet, from this nothingness, the light of God’s glory shines forth.”[8]

When our relationship with God takes on this serene and joyful air so proper to the stable at Bethlehem, there spreads around us, as its ripe fruit, a more intense family atmosphere overflowing with joy, so closely united to these dates. Therefore the Church urges us to better prepare our heart during Advent, and to set aside unimportant matters, distractions that lead us astray, the superficiality of the immediate… Perhaps we have in hand many concerns, and we lack peace in our relationship with God. If we strive to maintain our peace and calm with God, we will also offer it to others. The closer family life over the days of Christmas will not be marked by arguments, anger, impatience or frivolity, and we will enjoy relaxing and praying together, nourishing good times together as a family, and ironing out prejudices and small grudges that perhaps our heart may harbor.

Don’t be concerned if, despite our good will, we are sometimes attacked by distractions in our practices of piety. But let us struggle to acquire the supernatural and human fortitude needed to reject them. Let us renew perseveringly our eagerness to construct within ourselves a “living crèche” to welcome Jesus, spending time praying before the Nativity scene, although we may sometimes have the impression that our head is in the clouds. Recall then that Saint Josemaría was not discouraged to see himself like this in some of his moments spent before our Lord. In 1931 he wrote down: “I know a donkey of such poor character that, if he had been in Bethlehem next to the ox, instead of humbly adoring the Creator, he would have eaten the hay in the crib.”[9] Therefore, I am filled with joy to see that in many countries the Christian custom of setting up a Nativity scene is spreading.

Don’t forget to remember during these days people who are alone or in need, and whom we can assist in one way or another, knowing that we ourselves are the first beneficiaries. Try to spread this concern that is so Christian to relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues. What a deeply Christian gesture, among many others, is the practice of some faithful of the Work who during some nights go to offer something to eat and drink
to homeless persons, and also to those who are engaged in watching over
the rest of the other citizens.

Before ending these lines, I would like to thank the Holy Father once
again for the affection he showed me in the audience on November 7, and
the blessing he imparted to the faithful and apostolates of the Prelature.
Continue to pray for him and his intentions, with the firm hope that
Christ, in the upcoming Christmas, will pour out his gifts abundantly on
the Church, the Roman Pontiff, and the whole world.

And let us go with filial trust to our Lady during the days of the novena
to the Immaculate Conception. Let us feel the holy pride of being children
of such a good Mother, who places us face to face with Jesus, as Saint
Josemaría told us. This will also spur us to joyfully increase our closeness to
those who are sick. Don't fail to meditate on the fatherly affection and
closeness with which our Founder accompanied us already in the first
Christmas celebrations in the history of the Work: alone with God, with
Mary and Joseph; and with each of his daughters and sons who would
come to Opus Dei.

With all my affection, I bless you, and ask you for more prayers, more
fidelity.

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, December 1, 2016


[2] Saint Bernard, *Discourse 5 on Advent*, 1 (Liturgy of the Hours,
Wednesday of the First Week of Advent, second reading).


[5] Pope Francis, Address to a general audience, October 12, 2016 (see
Saint Augustine, Sermon 88, 14, 13).

Scepter (U.K.) 2009. Commentary on point 998.


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ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Other New Publications

Books by St. Josemaría

*Camino (The Way)*, Mexico City, Minos, 2016, 68th and 69th Mexican printings.

*Camino*, Lima, Infobrax, 2016, 11th Peruvian printing.

*Camino*, Madrid, Rialp, 2016, 87th printing.

*Caminho*, Lisbon, Encontros de Escrita, 2016, 23rd Portuguese printing of *The Way*.

*Caminho: Edição comentada por Pedro Rodriguez*, Sao Paulo, Quadrante, 1st Brazilian edition.

*Via Crucis*, Mexico City, Minos, 2016, 27th Mexican printing.

*Kui Kristus on möödumas*, Tallin, Gallus, 2016, first Estonian edition of *Christ Is Passing By*.

*Entrevistas com Mons. Josemaria Escrivá*, São Paulo, Quadrante, first Brazilian printing [by this company] of *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*.

Books about Josemaría

*40 Years With A Saint: Blessed Alvaro del Portillo on Saint Josemaría*.


*Cara y cruz: Josemaría Escrivá*, Cejas Arroyo, José Miguel; Madrid, San Pablo, 2016, 702 pages.


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Translation of The Way into Kikuyu

On October 3, in Kenya, the first edition of The Way in Kikuyu, entitled Njira, was formally presented. It is the first work of St. Josemaría translated into this African language. The ceremony took place at Strathmore University, on the occasion of a conference on the life and message of the founder of Opus Dei. Bishop Anthony Muheria of Kitui, Kenya, expressed the hope that the translation of this work will help spread the seed of the Gospel to the furthest corner of Africa.

Critical-historical edition of La Abadesa de las Huelgas

The Instituto Histórico San Josemaría Escrivá has published a critical-historical edition of La Abadesa de las Huelgas (Madrid, Rialp, 2016, 867 pages). This work was first published by the founder of Opus Dei in 1944. The research was carried out by María Blanco, professor of Ecclesiastical State Law at the University of Navarra, and María del Mar Martín, professor of the same subject at the University of Almería. This is the fifth volume in the collection “Obras Completas de san Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer” (The Complete Works of St. Josemaría Escrivá).

The La Abadesa de las Huelgas contains the results of St. Josemaría’s research on the unusual canonical jurisdiction exercised, until 1874, by the abbess of the Royal Monastery of Las Huelgas, in Burgos, Spain, and its canonical legitimacy. Among other powers and faculties granted to the abbess, the specific focus of the book is her quasi-episcopal or nullius dioecesis power.

“With the perspective provided by the passage of time,” Bishop Javier Echevarría writes in the prologue, “the study that Escrivá carried out at the end of the ’30’s and beginning of the’40’s of the last century, reveals some of his characteristic concerns as a university man and as a priest. What stands out is his love for the Church’s law, his historical mentality, his
appreciation for university research, and his interest in everything that concerns the Church, including the cloistered religious.”

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Devotion Throughout the World

A relic in Jaen

On Thursday, October 6, a relic of St. Josemaría was placed in the parish of Santa María Madre de la Iglesia (Our Lady, Mother of the Church), in the diocese of Jaen, Spain. During the Mass, the pastor, Fr. José López Chica, expressed thanks for the relic and asked the faithful to approach and venerate it, so that the desire to seek holiness in ordinary life may spread to everyone. The relic was placed next to a bas-relief of St. Josemaría that was already in the Church.

St. Josemaría and Holy Scripture

In August, Professor Francisco Varo gave a conference in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, entitled Saints and the Interpretation of Scripture. The presentation dealt with the use of the Scriptures in the oral preaching and the writings of St. Josemaría.

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Prelate Blesses a Painting of St. Josemaría in Our Lady of Guadalupe, Spain

Among the saints who have been pilgrims to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, located in the Las Villuercas sierra in the province of Cáceres in Spain, was St. Josemaría. He went there on June 27-28, in 1942, with Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. On July 9, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, blessed a new painting commemorating that pilgrimage. It is the work of the Sevillian artist Ignacio Valdés, done at the behest of Father Antonio Arévalo, the father-guardian of the community of Franciscans that has been in charge of the shrine since 1908.
The blessing of the painting and its placement in the shrine was followed by a Mass concelebrated by Bishop Celso Morga, along with the Prelate of Opus Dei and other priests. Father Antonio Arévalo expressed his thanks for the Prelate’s visit, “a permanent reminder of the visit in 1942 by St. Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro.” In his homily, Bishop Echevarría recalled that he had often heard St. Josemaría speak about that visit, and he invited his listeners “to have recourse to our Lady’s powerful intercession before God with the awareness that we always go and ‘return’ to Jesus through Mary.”

The Prelate thanked the father-guardian for his initiative in installing the new portrait in the basilica and the warm welcome of the Franciscan community, while also asking for prayers for new vocations, for Pope Francis and for all needy persons. The ceremony took place during the Guadalupe Holy Year (September 2015 to September 2016).
NEWS
Other Publications of Interest

Fernando Ocáriz, Die Welt ist in der Kirche versöhnt: Ein Gespräch mit Rafael Serrano, Vienna, Verlag Fassbaender, 2016, first German edition of Sobre Dios, la Iglesia y el mundo.


José Miguel Cejas, MontseGrases: biografía breve, Mexico City, Minos Tercer Milenio, 2016, First Mexican edition, 280 pages.


Documentary “Ernesto Cofiño, All Can Be Saints”

_Ernesto Cofiño — Todos pueden ser santos_ is a documentary produced by _Digite Identidad_ for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the transit to heaven of the servant of God, Ernesto Cofiño Ubico. In 26 minutes, the film presents the life of Dr. Cofiño based on historical documents and the testimony and memories of family members, colleagues, disciples and friends of the servant of God.

Directed by the Argentinian Juan Martín Ezratty, the documentary was screened on October 26 in the Ciudad Vieja University Center in Guatemala City, and on the following day in the auditorium of the Balanyá University Center. Later on it was presented in many other places both in Guatemala City and in the interior of the country, and was shown on a channel of the national television network.

Dr. Ernesto Cofiño was born in Guatemala City on June 5, 1899. He left for Paris as a youth to study medicine, and obtained his medical degree as a surgeon in 1929 with a specialization in pediatrics. On returning to Guatemala, he married Clemencia Samayoa and started a family that over time would have five children.

He devoted himself wholeheartedly to his work as a doctor. Besides looking after the physical health of his patients, he tried to assist them in their personal and family difficulties as well. He joined the faculty of the University of San Carlos and founded the Chair of Pediatrics at that university. He was also the head of Children's Medicine at the General Hospital of St. John of God (1939), and created the Anti-tuberculosis Children’s Sanitarium (1942) and the San Juan Sacatepéquez Medical Clinic (1946). From 1940-1946 he was the medical director of the Society for the Protection of Children and from 1945—1946 of the National Struggle against Tuberculosis. In recognition of his personal, academic and professional merits, the University of San Carlos awarded him the University Medal in 1969.
In 1956 he joined Opus Dei. From that date on he intensified his daily contact with God. He had a special devotion to the daily recitation of the Rosary, of which he was a great promoter. He also put great effort into deepening his doctrinal-religious formation.

With supernatural outlook and strong human concern, he fostered the right to life and love for human life. With great charity he supported and carried out many initiatives for the benefit of future mothers, homeless children, and orphans, and tried to find solutions to social problems.

He died of cancer on October 17, 1991, after a long and painful illness borne with fortitude. Private devotion to Dr. Cofiño has spread among thousands of people, who go to his intercession in their material and spiritual needs, and often entrust to him health problems.

Sixty Years of Apostolic Work in Uruguay

October 20, 2016 marked the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the apostolic work of Opus Dei in Uruguay. To commemorate this milestone, Cardinal Daniel Sturla celebrated a Thanksgiving Mass in the metropolitan cathedral of Montevideo. Concelebrating, among others, were Bishop Alberto Sanguinetti of Canelones; the Vicar of Opus Dei in Uruguay, Msgr. Carlos Maria González Saracho; and the pastor of the cathedral, Rev. Juan González. About a thousand people took part in the Eucharistic celebration. Also present were the two priests to whom St. Josemaría entrusted the task of beginning the apostolic work of Opus Dei in Uruguay: Rev. Agustín Falceto and Rev. Gonzalo Bueno.

“The Work has helped to spread in Uruguay the conflagration of the fire of love for God, of strong Christian life,” the Cardinal Archbishop of Montevideo said in his homily. “We can see the material works that show the fruitfulness of Opus Dei in our land... but the point is not to draw up a list of works. What matters is the interior fire, the spirituality focused on the call to holiness. All of us children of God are called to strive for sanctity in the varied settings of our own life: our family, studies, work, occupations,
when resting, in contact with nature; but in a special way by giving value to human work. There we are called to holiness, not *in spite of* but precisely in that work itself, which thus becomes a path of Christian life,” Cardinal Sturla said.

“Therefore belonging to Opus Dei, a path of holiness, of Christian life,” the Cardinal said, “is not a hat put on and taken off on entering a church; it is not a Catholic ‘patch’ put on a secular life. Rather it is a reality affecting intimate personal decisions in one’s life as well as the most external one. It is a vocation for the family, for the generosity of having a large family, which is a hallmark of the Work among us, with all the challenges that this brings with it.”

The archbishop of Montevideo expressed his joy at being able to celebrate this anniversary in “a key moment of the new evangelization. We want to be, as Pope Francis says using a graphic phrase, a *field hospital* that urgently treats so many wounded persons, because this is not the moment for aesthetic surgery but for carrying out the treatment required to obtain effective results. For we know in the end that it is not a question of being successful in the eyes of the world, but of being fruitful in accord with the Gospel.”

Finally the Cardinal made specific reference to the faithful of the Prelature: “We love Opus Dei with all its apostolic ardor and the richness of its specific contribution, in the happily varied framework of the Church, in full harmony with this particular Church, sharing in its projects and evangelizing programs.”

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**The University of Navarra Bible Goes Digital**

In October, the School of Theology at the University of Navarra launched the digital version of the *Navarre Bible*, published by EUNSA, the publishing arm of the University of Navarra. The digital version includes the 6,600 pages that comprise the printed edition, and offers an
extensive body of notes that seek to highlight the spiritual meaning of the sacred text, and to help make the reading of the Word of God come alive.

The University of Navarra Bible was born under the encouragement of the founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría. Professors in the School of Theology sought to offer the sacred text in a careful translation, accompanied by notes and introductions that explain its spiritual and theological message. The project was carried out over a 30 year period, until its completion in 2004.

Investigative Phase of Dora Del Hoyo’s Cause of Canonization Concluded

On October 24, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, presided over the closure of the investigative phase the cause of canonization of Dora del Hoyo, a faithful of the Prelature. The ceremony was held at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome.

Bishop Echevarría stressed that the servant of God spread “serenity and peace” around her and that “she helped others to be faithful on their path of following our Lord.” He also made reference to her “professionalism, respect and attentiveness to everyone, and the way in which she approached all the different problems that came her way, with a lot of naturalness.”

In the last four years, the life, the virtues and the reputation for holiness of Dora del Hoyo (1914—2004) were the object of study on the part of the tribunal of the Prelature of Opus Dei, which interrogated numerous witnesses who had known her. The documentation gathered was presented to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Dora del Hoyo was already devoting herself professionally to household tasks when she discovered the message of sanctifying ordinary work preached by St. Josemaría Escrivá. She joined Opus Dei in 1946, and with her professional competence,
cheerfulness, and generous self-giving, she contributed to spreading the value of work done well for love of God and neighbor, among young people all over the world.

Interview with Msgr. José Luis Gutiérrez Gómez, Postulator for the Cause of Isidoro Zorzano

Who was Isidoro Zorzano?

Isidoro Zorzano was an engineer who worked diligently in an exemplary way, with loyalty and a spirit of service towards his colleagues. He promoted initiatives to help the needy, and demonstrated great faith and charity in his life as a Christian. Those who knew him remember his serenity, equanimity, optimism, and his reflective and thoughtful manner. One witness testifies that during Isidoro’s years at the university, his companions “would go to him as a ‘peacemaker’ to resolve the arguments they sometimes had.”

He was born on September 13, 1902, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, of Spanish parents. In 1905 the family moved to Spain, where Isidoro earned the title of industrial engineer. He worked in the Railway Company, first in Malaga and afterwards in Madrid. He also gave classes in the Industrial School in Malaga. In 1930 he met with St. Josemaría Escrivá, a former high school classmate, and after a long conversation with him, Isidoro asked to join Opus Dei, which had been founded in 1928. In this path of the Church, Isidoro discovered the possibility of fulfilling his desire to give himself to God in the midst of the world.

His unwavering fidelity was always a great support to the founder of Opus Dei, in both the difficult years of the Spanish Civil War (1936 - 1939) and also in the development of Opus Dei’s apostolic works in the early 1940s. In January 1943 he was diagnosed as having malignant lymphoma. It was an extremely painful illness, which had begun months before and which he had bravely borne with abandonment to the will of
God. He died with a reputation for sanctity on July 15 of the same year, at the age of 40. One of his colleagues in the railway offices in Madrid remembers: “When we talked about our bosses, it was common for someone to say: ‘Don Isidoro is a saint.’” Another person who worked with him declared: “We felt his loss in an extraordinary way, because his passing was for us like losing a father.”

Pope Francis has approved the publication of a decree about the virtues Isidoro lived to a heroic degree. Can you speak to us about some of them?

Isidoro’s perseverance in ordinary things was outstanding, an expression of his loyalty. He always fulfilled the commitments he had taken on, right up to last moment of his life on earth. This might appear easy because of a mistaken idea of what “heroism” means. This word is not synonymous with extraordinary deeds or surprising accomplishments. Heroism means practicing the virtues constantly and during a sufficiently long period of time, right where one happens to be, in everyday realities, in the fulfilment of one’s obligations as a worker, citizen, friend, member of a family, etc. This is what Isidoro did.

He loved his profession, and he knew that God called him to seek holiness in his work. His love for God, for example, spurred him to be the first to get to work in his office in the morning; he accepted with good humor and supernatural outlook the occasional annoyances and injustices of his bosses; he sought to do everything with professional competence and tried to be pleasant in his dealings with others. He was well-known for his sense of justice and closeness to the people who worked for him. They knew that “with Don Isidoro shabby work wouldn’t do,” because he always made sure personally that the job had been done conscientiously. Isidoro also gave classes in the Industrial School of Malaga. His pupils recall his great patience, and that they could approach him to ask questions, even going to his home. Among the students “it was frequently said that he was a saint.”

He made his work compatible with an intense life of prayer. He had a great love for the Eucharist, and got up early every day to go to Mass and receive Holy Communion. He helped out in social works and tried to lead his friends and colleagues closer to God.
How can Isidoro help a worker in our day and age?

From the examples I've just given, Isidoro can be held up as a model for the worker of our day, whether an engineer or a laborer, or a mother of a family who cheerfully “multitasks” every day. Blessed Alvaro del Portillo knew Isidoro quite well and left a written testimony that he had learned from him to “sanctify the work of each day, with order and perseverance; to carry out with perfection, with Love, the little things of each moment. Isidoro was always working. I don’t think anyone can say that they ever saw him wasting time. But even more, he combined this industrious spirit with an exceptional spirit of humility. Isidoro never got in anybody’s way; he worked silently and humbly, trying not to draw attention to himself.”

I think Isidoro also gives us an example of Christian integrity; he was not bothered by what other people thought or said, even though this might bring problems or difficulties. One of his sisters tells us that he had a boss who opposed Isidoro’s promotion at work saying: “What kind of engineer is someone who goes to Mass every day!”

Do people today have a devotion to Isidoro? How did they get to know about him?

Isidoro died 73 years ago. There is hardly anyone alive today who knew him personally. Nevertheless, even before his death, those who knew him spoke about Isidoro’s reputation for sanctity. And this reputation has been growing, spreading rapidly among people in many countries of all ages and social conditions. For example, a friar who knew him quite well, Fray José López Ortiz, on being named bishop asked for a piece of the ring Isidoro wore so it could be melted as a relic into his own Episcopal ring.

Many people go to Isidoro’s intercession to obtain graces and favors from God, and sometimes true miracles. In the office of the postulator we have received more than 5,000 accounts of favors attributed to his intercession. They vary a great deal, touching on the thousands of events that come up in the ordinary life of any person. There are, of course, lots of engineers and people of related professions who address Isidoro as a colleague, to ask him to help solve problems in their specialty. Many have recourse to him as “their engineer” whenever they encounter a technical difficulty, for example, getting a computer to work that refuses to start. But
Isidoro’s intercession isn’t confined to the technical world; he is ready to help wherever necessary.

Besides, in the last ten years, some 390,000 prayer cards for private devotion to him have been printed — not only in languages of the western world, but also in Arabic, Cebuano, Chinese, Japanese and Tagalog, as well as 300,000 copies of his newsletter.

So there are lots of people who are confident that Isidoro is in heaven and who make him known to those around them as a model and intercessor to obtain help from God.

*For the Church to declare a person as blessed, it is necessary to establish that through his intercession a miracle has been obtained. Have there been any miraculous favors attributed to Isidoro?*

The office of the postulator has received accounts of several possible miracles attributed to the intercession of Isidoro. One example is the cure of a young priest who after a series of coughing attacks, accompanied by expectorating blood, was taken to the hospital urgently, where they diagnosed a possible cancer. They suggested immediate surgery to determine the nature of the tumor, and if possible to proceed with its removal. The priest entrusted himself to Isidoro, asking for a cure. At the same time, several people began to pray for him, through Isidoro's intercession. During the operation, after exploring the right lung and examining the mediastinum (the space between the membranes of the heart and the lungs and other organs in the thorax), the surgeon found no lesion or alteration. There was no sign of the nodular mass. The priest was completely cured.

I invite people who have a devotion to Isidoro, and those who find out about him now thanks to the news of this new step towards his beatification, to ask for favors and miracles through his intercession.
Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the decree on the heroic virtues of Isidoro Zorzano (1902—1943), an engineer who joined Opus Dei in 1930.

Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, auxiliary vicar and vicar general of Opus Dei, who became the acting head of the prelature upon the death of Bishop Javier Echevarría, made the following statement upon learning of the news from the Holy See: “This is a moment of special joy and gratitude towards Pope Francis, coming at the same time that we mourn the loss of our beloved Prelate.”

He also stated, “Isidoro Zorzano was an example of industriousness and spirit of service in professional work, commitment to social justice (shown in attentiveness and respect towards his colleagues), love for the Eucharist, great faith in God and sensitivity towards people in need. United to all the faithful and friends of the Prelature, and to the many people with devotion to Isidoro, I ask our Lord that Isidoro’s example will help us to grow in these features so important in the life of a Christian, and to be good sons and daughters of the Church.”

In an interview, the postulator of the cause, Monsignor José Luis Gutiérrez, stressed Isidoro’s loyalty and proposed him as a model for workers. Monsignor Gutiérrez noted that Isidoro’s reputation for sanctity is widespread (over 5,000 accounts of favors attributed to his intercession have been received), and suggested taking advantage of this new step towards his beatification to ask for favors and miracles through Isidoro’s intercession.

_A biographical sketch_

Isidoro Zorzano was born in Buenos Aires (Argentina) on September 13, 1902. Three years later his family emigrated to Spain and settled in Logroño. During his high school years he became friends with a classmate, Josemaría Escrivá. As an adolescent, Isidoro began to live his faith more seriously, and he looked for a priest who could advise him on living a strong Christian life. Isidoro carried out works of mercy, and always sought to help those around him. After obtaining a degree in industrial engineering, in 1927, he worked in a shipyard in Cadiz. Later he moved to Malaga and began working in the Andalusian Railway Company. There he
also gave classes in the local Industrial School. During this period he began to feel a growing spiritual restlessness.

In 1930, Josemaría Escrivá (who had been ordained a priest five years earlier) explained to him the message of Opus Dei: to seek holiness and do apostolate in the midst of one’s daily work and duties. Isidoro recognized that this ideal corresponded to his own aspirations in life and decided to join Opus Dei. He deepened his life of prayer, woke early to attend daily Mass and receive Communion, and collaborated in works of assistance to the needy. He was known for his sense of justice, his spirit of service, and his closeness to those who worked under his direction.

During the Spanish Civil War he assisted many people, providing them with provisions, food, and spiritual support. He helped to foster unity with St. Josemaría and the members of Opus Dei. He had a great love for the Eucharist. Despite all the restrictions, he brought St. Josemaría and some other priests the bread and wine they needed to celebrate Mass secretly. He also kept the sacred hosts in his room so that those in hiding could receive Communion, and informed those he knew of the possibility of attending the Eucharistic celebration in certain apartments. To help all these people, he relied upon his status as a foreigner, using his birth certificate from Buenos Aires. But this provided little protection against being arrested and executed at any time.

After the war, Isidoro worked at the Western National Railway Company. In addition, St. Josemaría appointed him administrator of the apostolic instruments of Opus Dei, a task he carried out generously and humbly, never losing his peace in confronting the constant financial difficulties in the apostolic initiatives. Isidoro knew and loved Christ’s life in its every detail, and had recourse to our Lady with filial affection. His great love for God was shown in his service to others and his care for little things.

Early in 1943 he was diagnosed with malignant lymphoma. He accepted this painful illness with fortitude and abandonment to God’s will. He died with a reputation for sanctity on July 15 of that same year, at the age of 40, and was buried in the cemetery of La Almudena. In 2009 his
mortal remains were transferred to the St. Albert the Great parish in Madrid, where they repose today.

**Itinerary of his Cause of Canonization**

The informative process on Isidoro Zorzano took place in Madrid between 1948 and 1961. In total 71 witnesses testified, including St. Josemaría Escrivá. Later Blessed Paul VI and St. John Paul II modified the norms for causes of canonization. As a result, an additional process for Isidoro’s cause was conducted between 1993 and 1994. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints decreed the validity of both the informative and the additional processes in 1994.

On March 25, 2006, the “positio” on the life and virtues of the servant of God was presented in the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. On November 17, 2015, a special meeting of the theological consultors gave a positive response to the question of the heroic exercise of the virtues by Isidoro Zorzano. On December 13, 2016, the ordinary session of the cardinals and bishops confirmed this judgement.

On Wednesday, December 21, 2016, Pope Francis received from Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, a detailed report of the phases of the cause. The Holy Father ratified the vote of the Congregation and authorized that a decree be published declaring the servant of God Isidoro Zorzano venerable.

**Some Diocesan Assignments Entrusted to Priests of Opus Dei**

*With the permission of the ordinary of the Prelature, the following appointments have been made by the respective authorities of the local Churches:*

Rev. Michael J. Barrett,

*Pastor of St. Agnes Parish, archdiocese of New York;*

Rev. Robert J. Brisson,
Parochial Vicar of St. Agnes Parish, archdiocese of New York;
Rev. Manuel Bodes García,
Supplementary member of the priests’ council for the diocese of Tui-Vigo, Spain;
Rev. Benito Calahorra Moreno de la Santa,
Member of the priests’ council for the diocese of Tui-Vigo, Spain;
Rev. Ignacio Carriazo Hernández,
Judge for the diocesan tribunal of Huelva, Spain;
Rev. Eduardo Castro Ramírez,
Confessor for the community of women religious at the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, in the archdiocese de Monterrey, Mexico;
Rev. Tristan de Chomereau,
Director of the Catholic Archives, archdiocese of Rennes, France;
Rev. Alberto Clavell,
Assistant pastor of San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Archdiocese of Lima, Peru;
Rev. Alejandro Espinós Bonmatí,
Parochial vicar of San Nicolás, diocese of Palma de Mallorca, Spain;
Rev. Manuel Esteruelas Arenas,
Parochial vicar of Sant Mateu i Sant Rafael, archdiocese of Barcelona;
Rev. Bernardo Estrada,
Spiritual director of the Collegio Capranica, diocese of Rome;
Rev. Jesús Galindo Bustos,
Professor for the Diocesan Institute of Theology (at Algeciras), diocese of Cádiz and Ceuta (Spain);
Rev. Miguel Moya Ortiz,
Professor for the Seminary of San Luis Potosí, archdiocese of San Luis Potosí, Mexico;
Rev. Carlos Pagán Santamaria,
Assistant pastor of Nossa Senhora da Porta do Céu, Patriarchate of Lisbon, Portugal;
Rev. João Paulo Pimentel,
Pastor of Nossa Senhora da Porta do Céu, Patriarchate of Lisbon, Portugal;
Rev. Rafael Sevilla,
Pastor of San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, archdiocese of Lima, Peru;
Rev. Juan Francisco Torres Salcedo,
Defender of the Bond in the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Hermosillo, archdiocese of Hermosillo, Mexico.

Establishment of New Centers of the Prelature

The respective vicars have established new centers of the Prelature in the following cities: Lima, Peru; Abidjan and Bouake, Ivory Coast; and Budapest, Hungary.

Pontifical Appointment

On November 12, Pope Francis appointed Rev. Antón Pazos, currently assistant director of the Instituto de Estudios Gallegos Padre Sarmiento, CSIC (Spain), as a member of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences.
INITIATIVES

• In Brief
Cultural Activities Begin In Saxum

From November 6 to 12, in Abu Ghosh (about ten miles from Jerusalem), the first cultural initiative of the Saxum Foundation was held, with 450 people from all over the world taking part. Entitled “Dialogues on the Holy Land,” the program included conferences, visits to the holy places and round tables aimed at fostering knowledge and mutual respect among people from different religions. Among the speakers were Yariv Levin, Israeli Minister of Tourism, Andrew Briggs from Oxford University, and Eric Cohen, director of the Tikvah Fund.

On November 11, a Mass of Thanksgiving for the beginning of activities was celebrated, presided over by Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, apostolic administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, who was accompanied by representatives of other institutions of the Church present in the Holy Land.

*Saxum, a project with several initiatives*

The Saxum project arose to help pilgrims to the Holy Land deepen in knowledge of the sources of their faith, and to foster intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Saxum had its origin in 1994 when Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, then Prelate of Opus Dei, visited the Holy Places. In accord with a desire of St. Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, Bishop Del Portillo encouraged the setting up of this center.

The project includes a center for meeting the needs of pilgrims and a residential area for activities of spiritual formation.

The Saxum Visitor Center will offer pilgrims an instructional tour of the Holy Land. Through advanced projection technology, personal explanations, audiovisuals and digital re-creations, pilgrims will learn about its geography, the holy places, the Bible and the central events of salvation history. Thousands of people will thus be able to prepare themselves better for a more profitable experience of their visit to the Holy Land.

The center includes a small church where groups can attend Mass and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. An auditorium will also be available for presentations and conferences. Part of its activity will be providing courses for the tour guides in Israel who accompany thousands of
pilgrims each year.

As its director, Almudena Romero, explains, this Center is intended for every type of visitor: whether groups, families or individual pilgrims. “We think Christians from the various denominations will find it especially useful,” she said. “But we also have great hopes that people from other religions will want to make use of these resources out of cultural interest.”

The Activities Center (Saxum Conference Center) will organize retreats preached by priests of Opus Dei. Antonio Quintana, secretary general of the Saxum Foundation, says that “we want this initiative to help many Christians to encounter Christ anew and thus to strengthen the roots of their faith.” The residential area, which will open its doors in June 2017, has fifty guest rooms, a chapel, a dining room and various classrooms and common areas.

Saxum is close to the village of Emmaus, where Jesus walked to with two of his disciples after the resurrection.

With the help of so many people

Saxum has been able to open its doors thanks to the assistance of a great number of donors from fifty countries. As the secretary general points out, “the raising of the required funds led us all over the world.” And he added: “I can assure you that this project in the Holy Land is felt as something of their own by Christians all over the world, who help out with the desire of leaving a small personal legacy in the land of Jesus.”

The web page www.saxum.org has been providing information on the progress of the various aspects of the project, including the Conference Center and Visitor Center, the donations that have been coming in, the groups of people visiting the installations, and other initiatives such as “The Road to Emmaus” and meetings with tourist guides.

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Some Apostolic Activities Organized by the Faithful of the Prelature
The initiatives described in this section are educational, social, and cultural activities brought forward by faithful of the Prelature and cooperators together with many other people, both Catholics and non-Catholics. Those who undertake and direct these activities (taking on full responsibility for them, including their financial aspects) are trying to respond to specific local needs without any discrimination regarding race, religion, or social condition.

The Prelature of Opus Dei, through agreements with the organizers, or through the guidelines established by the statutes of each entity, contributes to the development of these social initiatives by providing Christian doctrinal and moral orientation, and priestly service, always with full respect for the freedom of people’s consciences.

In Brief

Montevideo, Uruguay

Charity Night

“Charity Night” is an initiative of the high school and university students who come to the Miradores Study Center in Uruguay. They collect non-perishable food items, which are distributed once a month to homeless people sleeping on the streets of Montevideo. This provides the young fellows with an opportunity to make contact with these people, learn about their hardships, and pass on to them some encouragement and advice.

Poland

Activities of Harambee
Harambee Polska (Harembee in Poland) presented in Rome the project *Leczymy z misją* (“we try to cure with a spirit of mission”), a volunteer initiative involving medical students. As part of this program a group of 18 students collected and sent to Africa more than eleven tons of hospital equipment: beds to help women giving birth, apparatus for providing echograms, sterilization equipment, etc., as well as over a thousand pairs of shoes for children at an orphanage. The medical students traveled to Africa to help out in three missionary hospitals and an orphanage. They gave courses on sanitation, helped provide medical services, and consulted the more difficult cases with doctors in Poland. *Harambee Polska* also helped finance a water pump for one of the hospitals.

**São Paulo, Brazil**

*In the Year of Mercy*

“Love, after all, can never be an abstract word. By its very nature it is concrete: intentions, attitudes, behaviors…” These and other words of Pope Francis have served as a stimulus for the young people who receive spiritual formation in the centers of the Prelature in São Paulo, spurring them to put into operation various service initiatives throughout the Holy Year of Mercy. These included regular visits to hospitals to provide affection and small acts of service to the sick; responses to humanitarian crises, such as the group of volunteers who traveled to a city in the country’s interior to help repair buildings damaged by a violent storm; and study sessions on the works of mercy.

**Bogotá, Colombia**

*My Home, a Place of Peace*

During September, the Family Institute at the Sabana University organized in Bogotá the Eighth International Congress on the Family: *My Home, a Place of Peace*. The aim of the Congress was to reflect on the pillars that make possible harmonious and peaceful life in the home and to share experiences on trying to solve family conflicts in various scenarios of daily life. More than 650 people took part.

**Rome**

*Eschatology: Analysis and Perspectives*
From November 24 to 26, in collaboration with the Joseph Ratzinger—Benedict XVI Foundation, the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross hosted an International Symposium on “Eschatology: Analysis and Perspectives.” The sessions were inaugurated by Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

On the 24th, presentations were given by Professors Paul O’Callaghan, Thoma Söding, and Romano Penna, and by the Rabbi of Rome, Riccardo Di Segni. A workshop was also held on eschatological perspectives in Judaism, with the rabbi of Genoa, Giuseppe Momigliano, and Professor Moshe Idel from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem taking part.

The session on Friday the 25th was opened with a presentation by Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. Following this, Professors Bernardo Estrada and Maurizio Marcheselli offered reflections on the place of eschatology in the Gospels of St. Luke and St. John. Professors Santiago del Cura, Riccardo Battochio, and Robert Wozniak then offered a seminar on the study of eschatology in the theological formation of students.

On November 26, in the Clementine Hall at the Vatican, Pope Francis presented the Ratzinger Prize to the researchers Inos Biffi and Ioannis Kourempeles.

Madiun, Indonesia

A Work Camp

In the framework of the Year of Mercy, Japanese students from Seido Cultural Center in Ashiya and Yoshida Student Center in Kyoto, together with Indonesian students from Griya Semeru Study Center in Surabaya, took part in a work camp in Madiun during August. The work involved restoring several classrooms and constructing a septic tank at Santo Realino, a high school attached to the local Catholic parish. The school has about 100 students, both Catholics and Muslims. Those taking part organized catechism classes and recreational activities for the children in the village. Upon returning, some of them formed a committee to begin preparing a social assistance project for the following year.

Montevideo, Uruguay
Cardinal Sturla visits CADI

On November 4, the Archbishop of Montevideo, Cardinal Daniel Sturla, visited the Center for Integral Development (called CADI, after its initials in Spanish), an institution that promotes the social development of people in a poor outlying district of Montevideo. The Cardinal spent time at the Los Rosales School (one of the programs offered by CADI), and spoke with the girls studying there and prayed with them for those who are sick. Cardinal Sturla also celebrated a Mass at which those working at the Center took part.

Valencia, Spain

“Viva la Vida”

The parish of St. Josemaría Escrivá in Valencia celebrated a week in support of life from October 17 to 23. Activities included the projection of the film “A los más pequeños” (“To the smallest ones”). This was followed by a round table with Pablo Siegrist, director of the Spanish delegation of the Jerome Lejeune Foundation; Julio Tudela, director of the Bioethics program at the Catholic University of Valencia; and Patricia Lorenzo, President of the Red Madre (Network for Mothers) Foundation.

On Wednesday the 19th, the first conference in the “Training Course for the Defense of Life” took place. Ana Capa, who teaches at the John Paul II Institute and has a master’s degree in Bioethics, was in charge of the session, entitled “Human Dignity and Prenatal Life.” A round table on euthanasia was held on Friday the 21st, with María Victoria Espinar, medical internist in the Palliative Care Unit of the Doctor Miliner Hospital; Elena de Paz, nurse in the Intensive Care Unit of the Doctor Peset Hospital; and Jaime Vilarroig, professor of Bioethics and Anthropology in the School of Medicine and Nursing at the Cardinal Herrera University.

On Sunday the 23rd, Mass was celebrated for the participants preceded by the praying of a rosary for life. A “prayer for life” was then read that won a children’s competition organized by the parish. During the entire week, items useful for newborns were collected, which were later distributed to various solidarity associations.
Nairobi, Kenya

Community Outreach Program

Students from Stathmore University in Kenya took part in a new edition of the Community Outreach Program, an educational project directed to the inmates in Naivasha Main Prison. The students donated study materials and gave courses in accounting to help the prisoners find work on their release. Over 1,500 students contributed to this effort. According to the director of the prison, Bonaventure Mukhwana Mutali, “this program is providing a big help in reducing illiteracy and criminal activity in the country.”

Guadalajara, Mexico

Knowing in order to Love

From December 15 to 17, the Panamerican University (Guadalajara campus) hosted the International Seminar on Teaching the Faith. Through theoretical and practical sessions and workshops, a number of education professionals, chaplains, pastoral directors and catechists from ten countries reflected in depth on the aims, methods, and effectiveness of religion classes. Topics discussed included the tie between theological knowledge and educational practice, and practical teaching strategies aimed at passing on the faith.

Kumamoto, Japan

After an Earthquake

A group of Japanese university students who take part in the activities at Seido Cultural Center and Yoshida Student Center went in September to Kumamoto, a city in the south of Japan affected by a major earthquake five months ago. They worked in cooperation with local authorities and other people coming from all over the country, to try to restore stability to the affected areas. Despite the time that had passed since the natural disaster, the destructive effects of the earthquake were still evident, as were the needs of many people affected by it. Besides their volunteer work, those who so wished were offered the possibility of receiving talks about human and Christian formation.
IN PACE
Suffrages

In the second half of 2016, a total of 473 faithful of the Prelature died and, besides the priests incardinated in it, 18 members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. Suffrages have been offered for all of these deceased. As we continue to pray for them, let us thank God for the example they left us through their fidelity in striving to transform their professional work—their pastoral ministry in the case of the priests—and the ordinary circumstances of their lives into an occasion for loving God and serving the Church and all souls. Their love for God and neighbor constitutes the meaning and value of their lives, whether outstanding in the eyes of others, or whether quite ordinary, as was true in most cases.

In addition to the names of all who have died during this period, we have gathered a few biographical details about some of the deceased, which give an idea of the variety of circumstances and situations in which the faithful of Opus Dei live. For reasons of space, we are not including this data in the other cases, but we must not forget that we have a debt of gratitude towards all of them for the example of fidelity they have left us. These brief sketches will help us live the Communion of Saints better with those who have preceded us to heaven.

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.

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A study
Learning at Mass How to Draw Close to God. Reflections on the Liturgy of the Mass in Light of St. Josemaría’s Writings

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“The Blessed Trinity has fallen in Love with man, raised to the level of grace and made ‘to God’s image and likeness’ (Gen 1:26). God has redeemed mankind from sin—from the sin of Adam, inherited by all his descendants, as well as from each one’s personal sins—and desires ardently to dwell in our soul: ‘If anyone love me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him’ (Jn 14:23).”[1] These words from a homily of St. Josemaría given on Holy Thursday in 1960, reflect his deep understanding of the Eucharistic mystery as an outpouring of the love of our triune God, who wants to draw close to mankind.

Each of us is called to be a dwelling place of God. This dream can become reality if we are transformed into Christ, if we live his life[2] and are made one with him. This identification is brought about in a singular way thanks to the Eucharist.[3] In St. Josemaría’s life and teachings we see a clear perception of the transforming power of the Eucharist, of the transcendent importance of the Mass for our Christian life. As we read in the same homily: “We may have asked ourselves, at one time or another, how we can correspond to the greatness of God’s love. We may have wanted to see a program for Christian living clearly explained. The answer is easy, and within reach of all the faithful: to participate lovingly in the Holy Mass, to learn how to draw close to God, since this Sacrifice summarizes all that He asks of us.”[4]

To learn at Mass how to draw close to God. The liturgical rites in the Eucharistic celebration have a special pedagogical value for believers.[5] This shouldn’t surprise us, since “it is in the Mass where we see so clearly that our response to God’s self-giving has to be a total love, with all our heart, with all our strength, to the point of giving our life.”[6]
In this article we will try to highlight St. Josemaría’s deep conviction of the transforming power of the liturgy of the Mass for the ordinary faithful. His teachings on this topic are widespread and frequent throughout his writings. Therefore here we have chosen to center our attention especially on the homily The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love. Following the thread of the different parts of the Eucharistic celebration, St. Josemaría sets forth in this homily a number of practical consequences for the spiritual life of Catholics.

1. Pedagogical Value of the Rites

The founder of Opus Dei suggests a specific way of benefiting from the lessons in the school of life that is the Eucharist: “Let me remind you of what you have seen on so many occasions: the succession of prayers and action as they unfold before our eyes at Mass. As we follow them, step by step, our Lord may show us aspects of our lives in which each one of us must improve, vices we must conquer, and the fraternal attitude we should foster with all mankind.”

In a certain sense one can say that St. Josemaría prefers to speak about the Mass not “discursively,” but in a way that liturgists sometimes call “mystagogical,” based on the rites themselves. This shouldn’t surprise us, since the deep and broad spiritual effects of the Mass shouldn’t be considered independently of the texts and rites of the celebration itself.

Close attention to the meaning of the rites was frequently found in the teachings of the Church’s Magisterium during the twentieth century. Pope Pius XII said in this regard: “The Liturgy is not just an external and physical part of divine worship or a ceremonial decoration; nor are those less mistaken who consider it as a mere collection of laws and precepts with which the ecclesiastical hierarchy arranges the fulfillment of the rites.” On the contrary, as Vatican II’s Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium recalls, in the liturgy “Christ always associates the Church with himself in this great work wherein God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified. The Church is his beloved Bride who calls to her Lord, and through Him offers worship to the Eternal Father. Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy, the sanctification of man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and
is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members."[12] St. Josemaría too emphasized, right from the beginning of his preaching, the sanctifying potential of the mystery of Christian worship.[13]

The liturgy is, therefore, “the privileged place of our encounter with God and with the one whom he sent, Jesus Christ.”[14] It is an encounter that “takes the form of a dialogue, through actions and words,”[15] under the visible signs used in the sacred liturgy, chosen by Christ or by the Church, which signify invisible divine realities.[16]

Thus the words and gestures of the liturgy have a special importance that requires the faithful’s interior participation. As no. 543 in The Way says: “You saw me celebrate the holy Mass on a plain altar, without any decoration behind it. Both Crucifix and candlesticks were large and solid, with wax-candles of graded height, sloping up towards the Cross. The frontal, of the liturgical color of the day. A sweeping chasuble. The chalice, rich, simple in line, with a broad cup. No electric light, nor did we miss it. And you found it difficult to leave the oratory: you felt at home there. Do you see how we are led to God, brought closer to him, by the rigor of the liturgy?”[17] Felix María Arocena comments on this point: “The text reflects the ‘mystagogical’ sensitivity of the author: the signs of Christ’s mystery lead us to Him. Lived with authenticity, the celebration becomes the mediation and, at the same time, the most eloquent catechesis of his mystery.”[18]

2. The Mass, a filial encounter of love

The Mass, like any encounter, requires two sides: Christ truly present, and the participants in the celebration who, “Christified” by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, recognize ourselves to be children of God, sons and daughters in the Son, with the right and duty of offering ourselves with Christ to the Father. It is a very special encounter: an encounter of love. Thus St. Josemaría describes the Mass as a “Trinitarian current of love,”[19] to which we strive to unite ourselves with “a filial love imbued with a priestly spirit.”[20]

Indeed, in the Eucharist “there is contained, truly and substantially, the
Body and Blood, together with the Soul and Divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore the whole Christ.”[21] “Faith demands that we approach the Eucharist fully aware that we are approaching Christ himself. It is precisely his presence which gives the other aspects of the Eucharist—as meal, as memorial of the Paschal Mystery, as eschatological anticipation—a significance which goes far beyond mere symbolism. The Eucharist is a mystery of presence, the perfect fulfilment of Jesus’ promise to remain with us until the end of the world.”[22]

This marvelous reality shows us how close God is to us, his concern and love for all men and women. As the Prelate of Opus Dei said, St. Josemaría “taught us to put our whole heart into our faith in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, so that our Lord will truly enter into our life and we into his. Thus we will look at him and contemplate him, with eyes of faith, as a person who is really present. He sees us, he hears us, he awaits us, he speaks to us, he draws close to us and seeks us out; he immolates himself for us in the Holy Mass.”[23]

Truly, in the Eucharist our Lord shows us a love that goes right “to the end” (Jn 13:1), a love that knows no bounds.[24] Thus the founder of Opus Dei understood it as a madness of love, and even made use of a daring comparison: “No one in love says that they have no time to be together with the loved one, or that they are in too much of a hurry. Our parents didn’t have problems of time to be always together, because they were in love.”[25] And he advised: “Please don’t take exception to my applying to the things of God the example of noble and clean human love. If we love God with our heart of flesh—and we have no other—we will not be in a hurry to finish this meeting, this loving appointment with him.”[26]

3. Approaching the loving encounter with God

If the Eucharist is a loving encounter, then our interior preparation is essential. And exterior as well, as the founder of Opus Dei recalled when presenting scenes from his childhood: “I remember how people used to prepare to go to communion. Everything had to be just right, body and soul: the best clothes, hair well-combed—even physical cleanliness was important—maybe even a few drops of cologne... These were
manifestations of love, full of finesse and refinement, on the part of manly souls who knew how to repay Love with love.”[27]

In The Forge, this external preparation becomes an image of what happens in the spiritual realm: “We should receive our Lord in the Eucharist as we would prepare to receive the great ones of the earth, or even better: with decorations, with lights, with new clothes... And if you ask me what sort of cleanliness I mean, what decorations and what lights you should bring, I will answer you: cleanliness in each one of your senses, decoration in each of your powers, light in all your soul.”[28]

On beginning the Mass, the awareness of being in the presence of the Blessed Trinity stirred up in St. Josemaría a love and awe that led him to put himself intensely into the liturgy. Each detail took on a particular significance for him. He went up to the altar with joy, “because God is here. It is the joy that is shown, together with love and gratitude, as the priest kisses the altar, symbol of Christ and reminder of the saints—a small surface, sanctified, because this is where the Sacrament of infinite worth is made present to us.”[29] And he said: “I kiss the altar passionately. I realize that there the Sacrifice of Calvary is renewed; and there, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit pour out on mankind their gifts. Fill yourselves with desires for love, for reparation, for sacrifice. He has given us his Love, and love is repaid with love. Let no one tell me that God is far off. He is deep inside each of us.”[30]

When approaching in the liturgy the encounter with God’s immensity and infinite goodness, St. John Paul II stressed that “the only appropriate attitude is one imbued with reverence and a sense of awe, which springs from knowing that we are in the presence of God’s majesty.”[31] We stand face to face with God, called to be his sons and daughters, convoked into his presence to be transformed in the Son through the action of the Holy Spirit. Isn’t it only right that we experience a desire to examine our own life, to ask for the gift of continual conversion?

The praying of the Confiteor, St. Josemaría says, “makes us aware of our unworthiness, not an abstract reminder of guilt, but the actual presence of our sins and weaknesses. That is why we repeat: Kyrie, eleison, Christe, eleison: Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy. If the forgiveness we need
had to be won by our own merits, we would only be capable of a bitter sadness. But, because of God’s goodness, forgiveness comes from his mercy, and we praise him—Gloria!—‘for you alone are the Holy One, you alone O Jesus Christ are the most high, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father.’”[32]

4. A dialogue of love

The collect prayer ends with words that St. Josemaría liked to savor since they reminded him that the whole Trinity is acting in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: “Through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord,” we say to the Father, “who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever.” Then the Liturgy of the Word begins, in a true discourse that expects and demands a response. This part of the celebration has a tone of both proclamation and dialogue. God speaks to his people, and they make their own this “divine word” through silence, and also song; they adhere to it by professing their faith in the Creed, and filled with trust present their petitions to God.[33]

“It was very impressive,” recalled the Prelate of Opus Dei, a frequent witness of so many of the founder’s Eucharistic celebrations, “to hear the tone with which he read the liturgical texts, with the clarity of someone saying them with both his lips and his heart. He put himself so fully into those texts, and specifically into the readings, that—if there were other people present—he couldn’t contain himself and on finishing the Gospel he would give voice to his feelings in a homily.”[34]

He really lived, then, his own words on this part of the Mass: “We now listen to the Word of Scripture, the Epistle and the Gospel—light from the Paraclete, who speaks through human voices so as to make our intellect come to know and contemplate, to strengthen our will and make our desire for action effective.”[35] Here we see the “performative dimension of the celebrated Word: the liturgy brings about the perfect actualization of the Biblical texts, and what the Word proclaims is carried out by the Sacrament.”[36]

“The first requirement for a good celebration,” Benedict XVI teaches, “is that the priest truly enter into this dialogue. In proclaiming the Word, he knows he is dialoguing with God. He is a listener to the Word and a
preacher of the Word, in the sense that he makes himself an instrument of the Lord and seeks to understand the Word of God, which he must then transmit to the people. He is in a dialogue with God because the texts at Mass are not theatrical scripts or anything similar, but prayers, thanks to which, together with the assembly, we speak with God.”[37]

Thus *ruminatio* (repeating the words of Scripture in our heart and considering and reconsidering them) is connatural to St. Josemaría’s understanding of the liturgical texts, and especially of the Word of God proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word, which becomes prayer and spills over into our life. “It shouldn't surprise us then that his homilies and writings include abundant commentaries on the *lex orandi*, the liturgical prayer of the Church in her worship. The lively and vigorous nature of these commentaries stems from the depth of his personal experience as celebrant of the liturgy. In some passages, his style evokes the *mystagogia* of the Fathers of the Church, delving ever deeper into the meaning of the words read.”[38]

5. Encounter of love between Christ and his Church

“Because we are one people, gathered together in the unity of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we recite the Creed, affirming the unity of our faith.”[39] Identification with the sentiments of Christ’s heart brings about a progressive transformation in him through prayer. But how do we learn to pray? The answer is clear: by praying with others. In reality, we can never separate God the Father from his People: “Every time, then, that we cry out and say Abba! Father!, it is the Church, the whole communion of people in prayer, that sustains our invocation, and our invocation is an invocation of the Church.”[40] Only Jesus can say “my Father.” While all the rest of us, when we address God as Father, always do so in communion with the “we” that Jesus inaugurated, making it possible for us through Baptism to become, in Him, God’s children.

The liturgy makes this clear to us in a very tangible way. When the priest leaves the pulpit or his seat and takes his place at the altar—the center of the Eucharistic liturgy,[41]—everyone’s attention is directed to the common prayer that the priest and people address to the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit.[42] In this part of the celebration, the
priest speaks with the people only in the dialogues from the altar, since the sacrificial action that takes place in the Eucharistic liturgy is not principally directed to the community. The priest and people do not pray to one another, but to the one Lord and God. Indeed, the spiritual and interior orientation of everyone, of the priest (as representative of the whole Church) and of the faithful, is versus Deum per Iesum Christum. Thus we can better understand the exclamation of the ancient Church: “Conversi ad Dominum.”

Specifically, the placing of the cross in the center of the altar points to the centrality of the crucifix in the Eucharistic celebration and the orientation of the whole assembly during the Eucharistic liturgy: we don’t look at one another, but rather at the One who was born, died and rose for us, our Saviour. As St. Josemaría wrote at the beginning of 1935: “The Holy Cross and the altar stone—completely isolated from the table of the altar—occupy the place of honor.”

We all have to turn our eyes to Christ, the Rising Sun from whom all salvation comes, and from whom we receive the gift of grace. As Pope Francis points out with simplicity: “On the table there is a cross to indicate that on this altar what is offered is the sacrifice of Christ: he is the spiritual food that we receive there, under the species of bread and wine.”

To the extent that we take to heart the words of the liturgy, we are united with the Church in a dialogue with God. The priest speaks with Christ and through him with the Triune God, and thus prays with and for the others. As St. Josemaría stresses: “Our overriding desire when we celebrate Mass is the same as Christ’s when he offered himself on Calvary: to bring mankind to eternal glory in the love of God.”

While Christians, through the communion of saints, can never be said to be alone, in the liturgy this is made especially clear. “Orate, fratres, the priest invites the people to pray, because this sacrifice is yours and mine, it is the sacrifice of the whole Church. Pray, brethren, although there may not be many present, although materially there may be only one person there, although the celebrant may find himself alone; because every Mass is a universal sacrifice, the redemption of every tribe and tongue, and people and nation (see Rev 5:9).”
In the Eucharistic Prayer, this universality acquires its true breadth: “Heaven and earth join with the angels of the Lord to sing: Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus… I adore and praise with the angels—it is not difficult, because I know that as I celebrate the Holy Mass they surround me, adoring the Blessed Trinity. And I know that in some way our Lady is there, because of her intimate relationship with the most Blessed Trinity, and because she is the Mother of Christ, of his flesh and blood: the Mother of Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect Man.” [50]

We can’t pray to God in an authentic way if we are spiritually isolated from others, if we fail to open our heart to them. “The Christian faith is never a merely subjective or personal-private relationship with Christ and his word, but rather it is totally objective and ecclesial.” [51] Hence no Christian prays alone. The Holy Spirit always accompanies us. Our prayer is always two-sided and in chorus, united to the Church’s constant invocation of the Holy Spirit. Therefore “to live the Holy Mass means to pray continually, and to be convinced that, for each one of us, this is a personal meeting with God. We adore him, we praise him, we give thanks to him, we atone for our sins, we are purified, we feel ourselves united to Christ with all Christians.” [52]

The entire life of each of the faithful needs to be imbued with an awareness of this unity: “We must develop our interior life and the Christian virtues with our eyes upon the good of the whole Church.” [53] The Eucharistic Prayer is an eloquent opening of our heart to the intentions of Christ’s Spouse present throughout the world: “Thus we begin the canon, with the confidence of God’s children, calling him our most loving Father: clementissime. We pray for the Church and for all those who are a part of the Church—the Pope, our families, our friends and companions. And a Catholic, with a universal heart, prays for all mankind, since no one can be excluded from our ardent zeal.” [54]

Throughout the Eucharistic Prayer we return at various moments to petitions and to the intercession of the saints. “We ask God to hear our petitions. We call on the memory of the glorious ever-Virgin Mary and of a handful of men who were among the first to follow Christ and to die for him, and we recall our union with them.” [55] And then come “more petitions, because we human beings almost always feel the need to ask for
things—prayers for our deceased brothers and sisters, for ourselves. We have brought all of our weaknesses, our lack of faithfulness. The weight is heavy, but he wants to bear it for us, and with us.”[56]

The moment for the Consecration draws near, where once again there takes place “the infinite divine madness of Love.”[57] We are at the summit of the Eucharistic Prayer, as the General Instruction on the Roman Missal specifies: “By means of words and actions of Christ, the Sacrifice is carried out which Christ himself instituted at the Last Supper, when he offered his Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine, gave them to his Apostles to eat and drink, and left them the command to perpetuate this same mystery.”[58]

The priest joins his hands and clearly pronounces the words of our Lord, as this sublime moment demands.[59] It is especially at this moment that the priest acts in persona Christi, which “means more than offering ‘in the name of’ or ‘in place of’ Christ. In persona means in specific sacramental identification with ‘the eternal High Priest’ who is the author and principal subject of this sacrifice of his, a sacrifice in which, in truth, nobody can take his place.”[60] Saint Josemaría saw this with noonday clarity: “I am on the one hand a member of the faithful like the others; but above all, I am Christ at the Altar! I am renewing in an unbloody manner the divine Sacrifice of Calvary and I am consecrating in persona Christi, in the person of Christ. I really represent Jesus Christ, for I am lending Him my body, my voice, my hands, and my poor heart, so often stained, which I want Him to purify.”[61]

“The canon ends with another invocation to the Blessed Trinity: *Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso, et in Ipso*… Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ, who is all our love, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever.”[62] 62 We realize once more that we are immersed in the Trinitarian current of God’s love for all men and women that is the Eucharist. The canon concludes by directing to the Trinity a prayer of praise: “the form of prayer which recognizes most immediately that God is God. It lauds God for his own sake and gives him glory, quite beyond what he does, but simply because HE IS. It shares in the blessed happiness of the pure of heart who love God in faith before seeing him in glory.”[63] While certainly the whole Eucharistic celebration
is a great act of thanksgiving addressed to the Blessed Trinity, nevertheless the final doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer sums up and concentrates all of this praise.

The priest then elevates the paten and the chalice to offer to the Father the great immolated Victim: Christ, the supreme expression of the honor and glory due to God. Indeed, the formula of the final doxology makes clear that all prayer of praise “is possible only through Christ: he unites the faithful to his person, to his praise, and to his intercession, so that the sacrifice of praise to the Father is offered through Christ and with him, to be accepted in him.”[64]

As Saint Josemaría said: “In the Holy Sacrifice of the altar, the priest takes up the Body of our God, and the Chalice containing his Blood, and raises them above all the things of the earth, saying: Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso, et in Ipso—through My Love, with My Love, in My Love! Unite yourself to the action of the priest. Or rather, make that reality a part of your life.”[65] We are encouraged to make this a reality in our daily life,[66] since “corresponding to so much love demands of us a total self-giving, of body and of soul.”[67]

6. Communion: when our encounter becomes adoration and union

Communion is an essential part of the Mass. Saint Josemaría frequently advised this practice in his preaching.[68] As early as 1931, when pointing out the practices to be followed by faithful of Opus Dei, he wrote that they “will ordinarily receive Holy Communion within the Mass, because this is the meaning of the liturgy.”[69] From the same period come also these words: “Communion in the Mass is the rule, not the exception. Intra Missam, with hosts offered and consecrated in the Mass. What God has united we men should not separate. Sacrifice united to the Sacrament. Why separate it without a reasonable cause?”[70]

The rite of Communion has as its aim that the faithful, properly disposed, receive the Bread of Heaven and the Chalice of Salvation, the Body and Blood of Christ, who offered Himself for the life of the world.[71] The Our Father, the sign of peace, and the symbolic action of breaking of the bread are all meant to prepare us for Communion with Christ.

In the homily we have been considering, Saint Josemaria speaks about
our drawing close to God the Father: “Jesus is the Way, the Mediator. In him are all things; outside of him is nothing. In Christ, taught by him, we dare to call God our Father—he is the Almighty who created Heaven and earth, and he is a loving Father who waits for us to come back to him again and again, as the story of the prodigal son repeats itself in our lives.” Communion increases or union with Christ, unites us to him by separating us from sin, and builds up the Church. We are united to Christ and through Him to all of our brothers and sister. Filiation in Christ and fraternity: we encounter these sentiments throughout the entire Eucharistic celebration.

“Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” This prayer preceding Communion is a sign of contrition, of a love-filled sorrow that offers our Lord adoration and throws light on what is happening at that moment: “We do not merely receive something in the Eucharist. It is the encounter and unification of persons; the person, however, who comes to meet us and desires to unite himself to us, is the Son of God. Such unification can only be brought about by means of adoration. Receiving the Eucharist means adoring the One whom we receive. Precisely in this way and only in this way do we become one with Him.” As the Founder of Opus Dei said, employing a graphic image: “On this earth, when we receive an important person, we bring out the best—lights, music, formal dress. How should we prepare to receive Christ into our soul? Have we ever thought about how we would behave if we could only receive him once in a lifetime?”

The Holy Mass draws to a conclusion: “With Christ in our soul... the blessing of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit accompanies us all day long, as we go about our simple and normal task of making holy all honest human activity.” The editor of the historical-critical edition of this homily comments: “In a natural and spontaneous way, the author stresses once and again his fundamental teaching, stemming from the foundational gifts impressed by God on his soul: the call of all the Christian faithful to holiness in their own state and circumstances of life, and in particular the mission-vocation of the lay faithful to make holy all honest human activity. He calls this a simple and normal task, since it does
not go beyond the boundaries of ordinary professional and social life, and has to be carried out within the duties and obligations of each person.”[77]

The Holy Mass is meant to influence the entire life of the faithful. “Closely united to Jesus in the Eucharist, we will attain a continual presence of God, in the midst of the ordinary occupations proper to the situation of each person on our earthly pilgrimage, seeking God at all times and in all things.”[78] As Pope Francis said: “Celebrating true spiritual worship means to surrender oneself as a living, holy and acceptable sacrifice to God (see Rom 12:1). A liturgy separated from spiritual worship runs the risk of emptying itself, losing its Christian originality and falling into a generic sacred sense, almost magical, and into an empty estheticism. Being the action of Christ, the liturgy provides the interior impulse to take on the same sentiments as Christ, and in this dynamism the whole of reality is transfigured.”[79]

This brief overview of the liturgy of the Holy Mass led by the hand of St. Josemaría helps us understand why he said: “As you attend Mass, you will learn to deepen your friendship with each of the three divine Persons.”[80] The faithful learn to draw close to the Father, in Christ, through the action of the Holy Spirit, and in this dialogue with the divine Persons their Christian life is strengthened. Each gesture and word of the rites invites us to enter into this dialogue, and therefore we feel the interior impulse to put great care into them, striving to follow eagerly this path of love: “A person who fails to love the Mass fails to love Christ. We must make an effort to live the Mass with calm and serenity, with devotion and affection. Those who love acquire a finesse, a sensitivity of soul that makes them notice details that are sometimes very small, but that are important because they express the love of a passionate heart.”[81]

[1] St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, no. 84d
[3] In regard to how St. Josemaría understood this identification through the Eucharist, see Ángel García Ibáñez, “Eucaristía” in José Luis


[5] We see here the basic harmony between St. Josemaría’s thought and the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI: “What does celebrating the Eucharist properly mean? It is an encounter with the Lord, who strips himself of his divine glory for our sake, allows himself be humiliated to the point of death on the Cross and thus gives himself to each one of us. The daily Eucharist is very important for the priest. In it he confronts ever anew this mystery; ever anew he puts himself in God’s hands, experiencing at the same time the joy of knowing that He is present, receives me, ever anew raises and supports me, gives me his hand, gives himself. The Eucharist must become for us a school of life in which we learn to give our lives.” Benedict XVI, Homily at a priestly ordination, May 7, 2006.


[12] Vatican II, Const. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 7, The same idea has been included in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1070, 1089. It is
interesting to note that the Latin text say: *Merito igitur Liturgia habetur veluti Iesu Christi sacerdotalis muneris exercitatio, in qua per signa sensibilia significatur et modo singulis proprio efficitur.* The antecedent of *qua* is *exercitatio*, and thus it is clear that liturgical actions are the exercise of Christ’s priesthood by means of sensible signs.


[21] Council of Trent, Decree *De SS. Eucharistia*, can. 1: DH, 1651; see ch. 3: DH, 1641.


St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no 91c.


St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no 88d.


St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no 88d.

See *Roman Missal*, “General Instruction for the Roman Missal, no. 55. Cited as GIRM below.


Benedict XVI, Address at a meeting with priests from the Albano diocese, August 31, 2006.


See *Roman Missal*, GIRM, no. 73.

See *Roman Missal*, GIRM, no. 78.


“In the early Church there was a custom whereby the Bishop or the priest, after the homily, would cry out to the faithful: ‘*Conversi ad Dominum*’ — turn now towards the Lord. This meant in the first place that they would turn towards the East, towards the rising sun, the sign of Christ
returning, whom we go to meet when we celebrate the Eucharist. Where this was not possible, for some reason, they would at least turn towards the image of Christ in the apse, or towards the Cross, so as to orient themselves inwardly towards the Lord. Fundamentally, this involved an interior event; conversion, the turning of our soul towards Jesus Christ and thus towards the living God, towards the true light.” Benedict XVI, Homily at the Easter Vigil, March 22, 2008.


[46] Benedict XVI insisted on this point. In 2002, the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said that “the representation of the priest is realized in the sacramental act, in which with respect and trembling one can speak and act in the name of Christ. But this does not mean that one should look at the priest as if he were physically an icon of Christ. He should be striving to become an image of Christ by his life, but it is precisely as part of this effort that he, together with the faithful, looks to Christ in order to be able to imitate him. The transfer of the representation of Christ to the physical form of the priest, which Fr. Farnés and others offer us, leads to a false divinization of the priest, from which we should free ourselves as soon as possible. The essential characer of the Church as a process, as a praying movement towards our Lord, is thus unfortunately obscured.” Joseph Ratzinger, “Response of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to Pere Farnés,”Phase 252 (2002) 511-512.


[48] St. Josemaría, “A Priest Forever,” in In Love with the Church, no. 47.

[49] St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, no. 89d.

[50] Ibid. He made a similar consideration elsewhere: “When I celebrate Mass with just one person to serve it, the people are present also. I feel that there, with me, are all Catholics, all believers, and also all those who do not believe. All God's creatures are there—the earth and the sea and the sky, and the animals and plants—the whole of creation giving glory to the Lord.
And especially I will say, using the words of the Second Vatican Council (Lumen gentium no. 50), that we are most closely united to the worshipping church in heaven as we join with and venerate first of all the memory of the glorious ever Virgin Mary, of Saint Joseph and the blessed apostles and martyrs, and of all the saints.” St. Josemaría, “A Priest Forever,” in In Love with the Church, no. 45.


[54] St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, no. 90a. This prayer of intercession, Pope Francis insisted, “moves us particularly to take up the task of evangelization and to seek the good of others.... intercessory prayer does not divert us from true contemplation, since authentic contemplation always has a place for others.” Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, November 24, 2013, no. 281.


[56] St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, no. 90c.

[57] St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, no.90b.

[58] Roman Missal, GIRM, no. 79d).

[59] Pope Paul VI suggested, on January 22, 1968, this rubric when pronouncing Christ’s words (see Annibale Bugnini, La reforma de la liturgia (1948–1975), 408, note 15). Thus “the transcendence of the moment of the Consecration is emphasized, the special meaning and difference of these words from the rest, as the summit of the whole Eucharistic Prayer and indeed of the whole Eucharistic celebration.” Félix María Arocena, En el corazón de la liturgia. La celebración Eucarística, Palabra, Madrid, 1999, p. 178.


[61] St. Josemaría, “A Priest Forever,” in In Love with the Church, no. 44.
[63] Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2639.
[64] Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1361.
[67] St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, no. 87c.
[70] Ibid.
[71] See Roman Missal, GIRM, no. 80.
[73] “Those who receive the Eucharist are more closely united to Christ. Through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body—the Church.” Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1396.
[75] St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, no. 91b.
[76] Ibid., no. 91d.
[77] St. Josemaría, Es Cristo que pasa. Edición crítico-histórica, commentary on no. 91d, p. 512.
[79] Pope Francis, Message to the participants in the Symposium “Sacrosanctum Concilium, Gratitude and Commitment for a great ecclesial
movement,” February 18, 2014.

[80] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 91e.

[81] Ibid., no 92a.

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