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Mariano Fazio: "We can change the world from within"

We republish 'Avvenire's interview with the Auxiliary Vicar of Opus Dei, Msgr. Mariano Fazio, in which he talks about his new book 'Changing the World from Within'.

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The pandemic has dug deep into people's lives, minds and hearts. What is the service Christians are

called to render in this time of transition and newly found hope?

Each Christian, St. Josemaría said, is called to be "another Christ, Christ himself." We must continually ask ourselves: how would our Lord have reacted in these circumstances that I am going through? I think that our Lord's reaction to our situation today would be one of compassion (*cum patire*, suffering with others), of empathy (putting oneself in the circumstances of others and understanding their reactions), of accompanying those who are alone, or who have lost a loved one, or who are in a difficult material situation. At the same time, the Christian must be a sower of hope, asking God for the grace to know how to transmit to others the closeness of Jesus. The health crisis will end, many things will change, but we will remain the same: people in need of God's help,

who gives us the strength to be very close to others.

People talk of a "return to normality." But what is "normality" for a Christian who lives as a lay person in the world?

God has given all of us a vocation to holiness. For most people, he calls them to sanctify themselves in the midst of the world. "Normality" is the ordinary circumstances in which we go about our daily existence: our family, work environment, the places or activities in which we rest. The normality of a lay person who is aware that God is calling him or her to holiness consists precisely in discovering in these apparently humdrum circumstances the place where we are called to live a coherent Christian life. There we find the space to seek union with God and service to others. If we were to seek sanctification outside of "normality"

we might fall into a spiritualistic escapism, which would prove sterile.

What has the pandemic taught Opus Dei?

The people of Opus Dei, since they are immersed in the world, have shared and continue to share with all humanity the experience of human frailty and vulnerability. In Opus Dei we have suffered the loss of many faithful -- lay people and priests -- and close relatives. We live these situations with natural human grief and with trust in the closeness of our Lord. At the same time, we have tried to be very attentive to those who, for various reasons, have been or are most vulnerable: the sick, and people who live alone. The pandemic has also taught us new ways of communicating the faith, through the digital media that have developed incredibly in these months.

In your book you stress the need to "change the world from within." How can this be done in today's society, which often seems to suggest that believers should not question its axioms of absolute freedom and individualism?

Changing the world requires that Christians be united with Jesus through a personal friendship based on the Eucharist and prayer, through the example of a life that shows consistency between what one believes and what one does, and by leading an evangelical lifestyle marked by the beatitudes. Christian joy and hope, mercy, compassion and a spirit of service will gradually change this individualistic society. It is a process that happens without violence, but with the naturalness with which the first Christians transformed the pagan world. Pope Francis has encouraged the Prelate of Opus Dei to help us follow their

example, to re-Christianize this secularized society.

What new frontiers is the Prelature encouraging its lay faithful to reach?

I just returned from a trip to Africa. It gave me great joy to see some schools started by faithful of Opus Dei that began very humbly in the 1960s, and were the first interracial schools there. In those years racial equality was a frontier to be conquered. Times change and challenges are new. The faithful of the Work, with spontaneity and initiative, seek to be where there is a need for coherent Christian witness. Our founder spoke of "drowning evil in an abundance of good." I am now thinking of so many initiatives to develop palliative care units, at a time when a pro-euthanasia mentality is spreading. This is just one example: it shows that the

frontiers change, but the apostolic spirit remains the same.

Changing the World from Within, by
Mariano Fazio (read online)

Changing the World from Within, by
Mariano Fazio (purchase from
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