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"The sanctity of a few people can change the world"

Fadi Sarraf, who was born in Syria and worked as an engineer in Canada, was ordained a priest on May 22. He talks about his hopes and expectations in his new life as a priest.

05/25/2021

What is it like to be ordained in the midst of a pandemic?

The pandemic added a special touch to the ordination from many different perspectives. The diaconal ordination, here in Rome last November, was done without any guests being able to attend the ceremony. That made it special, because we could be united to the suffering of many people who are separated from their loved ones, who can't see them, even though sometimes they are in the same city. So even though it was difficult for us not to have our families around us, it was one way to be united to all the suffering that was happening all over the world. At the same time the pandemic shows the importance of God's place in the lives of many people. Many are going through a difficult time and their faith allows them to find meaning in this suffering, transforming this into an opportunity of serving others. There are so many nice examples of people sacrificing themselves, such as

medical staff, nurses, people working in grocery stores, pharmacies, cleaning staff, so many people who are going over and above the call of duty to help others, to make life more pleasant for others.

In a way this is the work of a priest. To serve others is the primary goal of the priest, to bring them closer to God, to help them discover God's love in their daily life. So the pandemic highlights the importance of service and also the need people have to find love, to find God, in their lives.

It's very exciting to be ordained during the pandemic because many people around us need to hear a message of hope. A part of the work of a priest is to transmit the hope that we have: to discover that God loves us, cares for us, accompanies us in every moment of our life. And things will get better because God loves us. "We know that in everything God

works for good with those who love him,” as St. Paul says (Rom. 8:28). It’s very exciting for the priest to be reminding people of that message of hope that Christ has brought.

Are there any specific intentions that you have?

Ever since I announced that I was going to be ordained a priest, many people have been writing to me asking me for prayers, assuring me of their prayers too. I actually keep a list of the different requests so that I don’t forget anyone. My primary intention is that more people in the world discover God’s love for them, and that all of us being ordained together be precisely that instrument of God’s love, a bridge between man and God, to help people discover peace and love in their lives.

I suffer a lot as I contemplate the situation in Syria and the plight of refugees all around the world. The

situation in India, with so many people suffering and dying of COVID, is very much in my prayers. A big intention of mine is that people discover the peace of Christ's love in their hearts and that many people be united with their loved ones in these times. I also have great hopes and dreams of many Canadians getting closer to God and discovering the beauty of the spirit of Opus Dei, of finding God in their daily lives.

Have you been able to greet the Pope personally? Has the Prelate told you anything that you wish to share?

Because of COVID I have not been able to greet the Pope personally, I hope I have a chance before I leave, though it's not easy -- but I did go on a number of occasions to the Sunday Angelus and other audiences with him, so I have had a chance to be close to him.

I had a beautiful conversation with the Prelate of Opus Dei a couple of weeks ago, and he said many wonderful things, but the two that struck me more are very simple messages. On the one hand he said not to forget that the sanctity of a few people can change the world, echoing the words of St. Josemaria, that 'these world crises are crises of saints'. He reminded me that our efforts to love God more, to be more intimate with him, can change the world. He said half-jokingly that if things are not worse in the world it is because so many people are praying. Without prayer the world would be in worse shape. And related to that, he recalled the power of the Mass, that every Mass has a dimension that is beyond space and time, that it reaches everyone everywhere in the world, everyone who ever existed, because it is united to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. And so he was encouraging me to go deeply into the

meaning and the importance of the Mass and because of that to celebrate Mass as well as I can. And this is my most important job, to celebrate Mass, and to help people be reconciled with God through the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Any final words?

I have already mentioned some of the characteristics of the priest, but I would like to add the attitude of openness. The priest is there to help everyone, not only Catholics, not only Christians. It's the example we see of our Lord in the Gospel. Even though his main mission was to the Jews, he was open to everyone, and the message of the priest, the Christian message, is not only for a few but for everyone. The priest should welcome everyone and try to bring anyone he comes in touch with to discover God's love and how he or she can correspond to that love.

Of course, I would like to thank all the people who have helped me throughout the years in so many ways: friends, family and all the people who are praying for me. It's really encouraging and gives a lot of consolation and strength to know that so many people are praying for me and accompanying me in my journey. I am very grateful for all the support I have received over the years but especially in the last few months.

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