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Monsignor Ocáriz, in the Netherlands and Belgium

Continuing his pastoral trips to various countries in Europe, the Prelate had a chance this week to meet with faithful of Opus Dei in Belgium and the Netherlands.

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Zonnewende, The Netherlands (August 14)

On August 14, the Prelate of Opus Dei traveled to Zonnewende, a

conference center in the Netherlands. There, as in the others places he has visited on his pastoral trips this summer, he had a chance to speak with some faithful of the Prelature.

One of the ideas he stressed was God's goodness towards those who have received the gift of faith. And referring specifically to those in Opus Dei, he said: "This is a responsibility that God has placed in our hands, as he did with Saint Josemaria." If God is at the center of our life, "we can follow this advice of Saint Augustine: 'Love and do what you want.' We will do things *because we feel like it*, which is the best reason."

"When you work well," he said, "you are being faithful not only to your employer, or to the goal you have set for yourself, but above all you are being faithful to God, who wants us to work well, and to do it out of love

for Him.” Therefore “Opus Dei doesn’t exist to organize activities or construct buildings. Opus Dei is its people, each person who responds to God’s call, seeking sanctity in their work and daily life.”

He also spoke about the importance of charity: “God invites us to love those at our side, especially our brothers or sisters, our spouse and children. And to love not only their good qualities, but also their defects and limitations. Consider this carefully: everything that distances us from our brothers and sisters, also distances us from Christ.”

Monsignor Ocáriz also reminded people of the challenge of drawing our friends closer to God: “We will do so if we are good friends of our friends, if we are patient and speak with simplicity and naturalness of our faith and of the joy God has put in our life.”

One of those present asked for advice on how we can remember God while we are studying or working. “Place on your desk or where you are working a small crucifix. From time to time you can say a few words to God and then continue working. Tell him: ‘Lord, we will do this together.’”

A mother with five children, two of them twins, told him that one of her young children has hearing difficulties. These health problems have united their family even more closely. Among other things, they are trying to teach that child how to speak not only with the others, but also with God.

The Prelate also greeted a mother whose son, a faithful of the Prelature, will be ordained next May. Proud of the call that God has given her son, she said she prays “that he will be a good priest and bring many people to our Lord and his Church.”

Monsignor Ocariz also had a chance to speak in English with some of the children there. A group of young people gave him some tennis balls as a gift, with their names written on them, “so that you will play more tennis,” they told him.

People from ten different countries, including Canada and Russia, were present in the get-together with the Prelate. They are staying in Zonnewende for several weeks receiving classes and talks and resting. He gave a special greeting to Pedro, a university student from Manchester, who is fighting cancer.

Dongelberg, Belgium (August 12)

On his first visit to Belgium as Prelate, Monsignor Fernando Ocariz had two get-togethers with faithful of Opus Dei in the Dongelberg

conference center. The Prelate began by making reference to his 22 years spent working alongside Bishop Javier Echevarría, his predecessor at the head of Opus Dei, and their various pastoral trips through Europe and to Belgium.

He then highlighted one of the conclusions of Opus Dei's recent general congress: the need to place Christ at the center of our life. "All of our activities should be centered on Christ," he said. "We need to be faithful to Him in our daily life. Being faithful to a Person, to Christ, is much more inspiring than being faithful to an idea."

"God has become man for each one of us. He has called us to carry out his Work through us. He urges us to be faithful, to be generous. He also has given us the *mandatum novum*, the new commandment of love, and

we need to learn to see Jesus in the others.”

This is much more than simply an idea. Monsignor Ocariz continued: “Christ is really present in our brothers and sisters. We need to see our Lord in souls in order to then bring these same souls to Christ. It is our Lord himself who places in our heart this love for Jesus and for souls.”

Our prayer,” he said, addressing everyone present, “should be centered on the Gospel, which is the living Word of God.” He also made reference to an important legacy of Saint Josemaria: “a great love for freedom and good humor.” Freedom and joy are two closely connected realities: “We need to foster the habitual attitude of seeing things in a positive way. As the Old Testament says so eloquently: *the joy of the Lord is your strength*” (Neh 8:10).

Those present asked questions about a number of different topics: the meaning of suffering, doing apostolate with people who don't believe in God, giving Christian witness in a professional environment distant from the faith, contributing to evangelizing efforts in other countries, love for the Pope and the Church, what to do when one's children dress inappropriately...

The Prelate especially highlighted the importance of friendship: "We need to know the others well and let ourselves be known, giving testimony to the realities we bear in our heart. Our conversations should always be serene. In whatever we do, let us keep present the reality of the communion of saints: we are never alone. Let us strive to see our Lord in the others and pray a lot for the Pope, who carries on his shoulders

the weight of the Church and all souls.”

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