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"Read the Pope's encouraging words on the family"

From an interview with the Prelate of Opus Dei published in "Paraula" on the Synod on the Family, challenges facing families today and the current state of the priesthood.

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Opus Dei is celebrating a Marian year for the family. On convoking it, you asked the members of the Work to pray to our Lady for

families, thus uniting themselves to the intentions of Pope Francis. What is the present situation of the family, what are its principal challenges? And in relation to the Pope, what do you hope for from the upcoming Synod on the Family?

The celebration of this Marian year seemed to me to be a way of seconding the Pope, who is insistently asking all Christians for prayers for the fruit of the Synod on the Family. It is a cause of joy to see that many families feel loved by God and are a reflection of Trinitarian love. Through the efforts of fathers and mothers, often heroic, they become "bright and cheerful homes," as Saint Josemaria used to say. They pour out their affection on the society around them. But there are also many other families that are going through grave difficulties, or in which coldness and selfishness hold

sway. Uniting myself to the Pope's intentions, I would like to see the Synod become an acknowledgement and expression of gratitude for the first, and a strong point of support for a positive transformation of the second group of families. I would also like it to be an opportunity for families to realize that they are the Church and that the entire Church accompanies them in their daily efforts.

If in this year of grace, between the two Synods, we can manage with God's help to focus people's attention on the families in greatest need and reduce, although only by a small proportion, the number of families with serious difficulties, we will have achieved something very important for the Church, for society as a whole and for the good of many people. Therefore I advise families to read the Pope's encouraging catecheses on fathers and mothers, on

grandparents and relatives, on brothers and sisters and children.

How would you evaluate the results of the Marian year for the family up to now?

Drawing up a balance sheet in spiritual matters is always difficult. But our Lady will certainly present to our Lord the continuous and incalculable prayer, the generous and abundant offering of suffering on the part of so many sick people, so many hardships and shortages offered up by people all over the world for the same intention, the thousands and thousands of visits to Marian shrines...., and also so many hours of catechesis and reflection on the family, from every aspect: anthropological, philosophical, theological, pastoral. I ask the faithful and Cooperators of Opus Dei to draw up their own personal balance sheet: to examine how their

deeper grasp of the Gospel reality of the family is leading them to love marital fidelity and to be generous; and also to assist so many married couples who are undergoing special difficulties, often heightened (we should never forget it) by the global financial crisis.

Your address in Valencia for the “Almudi Theological Dialogues” centered on the figure of your predecessor at the head of Opus Dei, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, in his role as secretary for the Council's Commission on the Clergy. What memories do you hold of him, what stands out in his way of being?

Two words with Don Alvaro were enough for one to be filled with peace. He was a man, a priest, a bishop of great humanity, with a smile and goodness that, from the first moment, broke down barriers. It

was impossible not to feel loved, respected, understood.... I think his natural way of being had a certain predisposition for this special empathy, but above all it was clear that his welcoming attitude reflected the style of the Gospel, which he had learned from Jesus through the example of Saint Josemaria.

Many of the Council Fathers who got to know him or interacted with him during the sessions of Vatican II have given testimony to Blessed Alvaro's way of being and acting....

The "Almudi Theological Dialogues" center this year on the Second Vatican Council and the priesthood, on the 50th anniversary of the decree "Presbyterorum ordinis." How do you view the current state of the priesthood, especially in Europe, where problems such as the decline in the number of priestly vocations are

evident. How can we re-energize the calling to the priesthood?

Certainly problems exist, but I think the Council documents and the magisterium of the Popes and of many bishops are helping the new generations to take up the calling to be a priest with an eagerness for holiness and for service, although we would all like to see greater fruit. Thanks be to God and to people of good will, quite a few countries are seeing an increase in the number of priests and seminarians.

Saint Josemaria used to ask: "Do we want to be more?" And right away he responded: "Then let us be better!" If we bishops and priests strive more zealously for sanctity; if Catholics pray more for us and for vocations; if we have the nobility and courage to challenge many souls with following Christ; if families, schools and those engaged in pastoral work with young

people carry out a deep work of Christian formation... then despite all the problems, despite the reigning atmosphere of relativism and hedonism, the materialism that is afflicting the world, the Lord of the harvest will not fail to send workers for his fields. He himself has promised it, as long as we ask him sincerely and with our deeds....

Entire interview with Bishop Javier Eschevarria as published in "Paraula"

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