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Many Great Things Depend upon Young People

COLOGNE. Text of an interview with Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, granted to ZENIT, on August 24, 2005, regarding the recent World Youth Day.

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As Prelate of Opus Dei you know people from all over the world, since your "diocese" is not limited territorially. Do they all share the

same "hunger for God" that the archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Joachim Meisner, spoke about, or are people from the south naturally closer to God than the Germans and the northerners in general?

In the first place, I'd like to point out that Opus Dei is a personal prelature and, as such, forms part of the hierarchical structure of the Church; but it is not a diocese.

Yes, Opus Dei is indeed spread all over the world. The faithful of the prelature are from many different countries, but we all have one thing in common: the conviction that we are children of God with a "hunger to be in touch with God," which we try to foster daily.

It's fairly clear, I think, that people are different everywhere: people from the north and the south, from

the east or the west. But we all strive joyfully to live our lives close to God.

This applies everywhere, without exception, it seems to me. In Germany, for example, there's a great wealth of people who want to live close to God. Many people here, with all their German characteristics, try to bring God into their daily lives, into their family life, their work, their traveling back and forth, their social life and so on; and they try to help others discover and live this great human ideal: to live one's life close to God.

What was special about these days in Cologne, for the world and especially for Germany?

What was special for me is that the Successor of Peter was here, and that the whole Church gathered round him and, through the communion of saints, was united to the intentions of our common father, the Pope.

So, what happened in Cologne these days is very important for Germany and for the world, because it shows that the Church is alive, that the Church is young, with a youthfulness that is also true of older people, of the sick, of those less well-off. Being young at heart is what is important, and all these people are young at heart, and they bring God to others. That is what is really needed.

Do you think the visit of the Holy Father will bring about a new spiritual springtime for the Church in Germany?

Certainly. In the Church we are always in a growing situation. Although at times we may think that things seem to have come to a full stop, the truth is there are never any real full stops. Here in Germany, for example, in this wonderful country, we know that there are many, many

ordinary men and women who are people of prayer.

The Church is not made up only of what we see with our eyes; there is also the wealth of the holiness of many people. There are certainly many holy people in Germany, who are grateful to God for belonging to the Catholic Church and who want to love all the people of Germany, and of the whole world, with the love of Christ.

The Holy Father likes to point out that joy comes from being a Christian. What kind of joy is this?

The Holy Father has been saying recently that contrary to what some people want others to think, Christianity is not a burden. Rather the opposite is true. As Pope Benedict XVI says: God's precepts give us wings to fly! God's precepts enable us to fly to our Creator, to our God, who is close to each of us.

Our joy, therefore, is knowing that no matter what the situation, God is our Father and he is always looking after us, he never abandons us.

There is no lack of pain and sacrifice in our lives, as there wasn't in the life of our Lord, who is our model, or in the life of the person closest to him, his Mother, Mary. It's not that self-denial is an end in itself. Rather it is a consequence of love. There is no true love without self-giving and sacrifice. Love means giving oneself joyfully for the good of others.

Your predecessor, St. Josemaría, founded Opus Dei to teach everybody that they can be saints, without doing extraordinary things. What is holiness, then? How does one become a saint?

St. Josemaría based everything on the teachings and preaching of Jesus Christ, who "coepit facere et docere." Jesus began by doing things, and

then he preached. He started with his humble birth, being born poor, in a cave, with the love of Mary and Joseph, and of the shepherds, men who were poor but who knew how to love.

And a little later, the Wise Men came to worship him. Although the Wise Men were probably better off, yet as we see them looking for the King of the Jews we realize that they too longed for God as much as the shepherds did.

Holiness is trying to see God in whatever we are doing at each moment. Holiness is striving to be Christlike without doing extraordinary things. We don't need to do big or unusual penances, nor do we need to look for them. Though if our Lord allows them to come our way then we embrace them as best we can, with the help of his grace.

The important thing is to embrace God's will, carrying out heroically the duty of each moment, without pulling back from what Christ is asking of us, whether it is pleasant or not.

What help does Opus Dei provide on the journey toward holiness?

The task of Opus Dei is to remind everybody that holiness is not something for a few special people, but rather that all of us can come close to God right where we are. Jesus Christ said to everyone: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Opus Dei reminds us of the need to transform all our activities, even the apparently trivial ones, into a dialogue with God. And it also reminds us that we need to frequent the Sacraments, since without the Sacraments the life of grace cannot grow, given that the Sacraments are

the means that our Lord left us, to renew us and to identify ourselves with him.

The theme of World Youth Day is "We have come to worship Him" (Mt 2:2). Today we are living in radically changing times in which we can easily lose sight of what is essential in life, and recollection and silence are often considered to be unbearable. What do we need to do to adore God? What does adoration mean? How are we to talk to God?

Before answering this question, I would like to mention something that is fundamental in the life of a Christian, in the life of a child of God: being optimistic. We mustn't be pessimistic in the way we look at things or situations. Pessimism throws a cloud over people. A child of God knows he can transform everything with joy and optimism,

even situations others might see as setbacks or tragedies.

We certainly need silence and recollection if we are to talk to God. Being recollected and talking to God should not be considered as something difficult or unattractive, just as you would never think it difficult to be with a person you love, or to talk to that person. And God loves each one of us. We are his favorite people. He himself tells us in the Old Testament that his delight is to be with the children of men. If we talk to God we will enjoy the happiness God wants us to have; we will share in his love God.

How are we to talk to God? As we talk to a friend or to a brother, with all simplicity and naturalness. St. Josemaría Escrivá encouraged us to talk to God about what's happening in our life, because to pray is to talk about our soul, about our battles,

whether big or small. God welcomes us and listens to us like the most caring of Fathers, with great affection, and he is keen to help us in whatever we need. Then, as a loving Father, he occasionally allows a trial or tribulation to come, precisely so that we become more mature and rely more on the help of his grace.

The Holy Father granted all World Youth Day participants a plenary indulgence. What is the role of indulgences in the life of the Church? How do they relate to the sacrament of Penance?

Indulgences play a vital role, because they apply the infinite merits of the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ to our soul.

They enable us to share in the glorious Life to which we are all called. Indulgences make it easier for us to approach God, taking away the remaining punishment due to sins

which have already been forgiven. So, they help us to be better disposed to go to receive grace in the sacrament of Confession, and to do so with greater ease and docility.

In Confession Christ completely forgives us our mortal sins. There is no other means of having our mortal sins forgiven, except in extraordinary circumstances, though the Church does teach that an act of perfect contrition remits sins, including mortal sins. However, who can be certain that his contrition is perfect? We need to know for certain that God has forgiven us, who listens to us, who cares for us, and who takes away the sadness of our failures through the sacrament of Confession.

What message does St. Josemaría give to the young people who have been in Cologne these days?

I would summarize St. Josemaría's message in a few words he wrote as a very young priest. He was writing for everybody, adults and older people as well as young people, because any age is a good time to find God. But if he were alive today he would remind young people of what he wrote in those early years of the life of Opus Dei, when difficulties abounded. He wrote: "Upon whether you and I live our lives as God wants—don't forget it!—many great things depend."

Many great things depend on the good behavior of the young people who have been in Cologne these days: many great things for their souls and for the souls of the people who are in touch with them, and also for their countries and for souls all over the world.

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