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“Selamat Datang, Father!”: The Prelate in Indonesia

Highlights of the Prelate of
Opus Dei’s activities in the cities
of Surabaya and Jakarta
(Indonesia) on August 5-7, 2023.

08/13/2023

SURABAYA

5 August, Saturday

This apostolic trip of the Father (as he is fondly called) is historic as it was the first time that a prelate of

Opus Dei set foot in Indonesia, the world's largest archipelagic country with over 17,000 islands. Realizing the significance of this occasion, some faithful of Opus Dei, together with their families and friends, flocked to the airport carrying colorful banners with the words, "*Selamat Datang, Father!*" ("Welcome, Father!" in Bahasa Indonesia).

Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, the Prelate of Opus Dei, landed at Juanda International Airport in the late afternoon as the sun was setting over Surabaya, the second largest city in Indonesia. As soon as he came into sight the well wishers at the airport cheered and waved red-and-white Indonesian flags. After engaging them and posing for pictures, the Father retired for the night. It was a whole day of travel for him.

6 August, Sunday

The morning sounds of Sunday in Surabaya — the roar of motorcycles on the streets in the early hours and the call to prayer from the mosques — greeted the Father on his first full day in Indonesia, and indeed it was a full day.

After preaching a meditation and celebrating Holy Mass in the morning at Darmaria Study Center for women, the Father went to visit His Excellency Msgr. Vincentius Sutikno Wisaksono, who was confined in the hospital. Opus Dei is in Indonesia because Bishop Sutikono had requested that the Work begin in his diocese in Surabaya. (The good Bishop died a few days later, on August 10).

In the afternoon, the Father made a brief stop at the diocesan seminary to greet the seminarians and priests. Some were former students at the University of Navarre (Spain) and the

Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Rome). The Father was moved seeing a vibrant seminary in a predominantly Muslim country.

The day's highlight was the general audience with over 200 people at the Widya Mandala Catholic University Pakuwon campus. When he entered the hall, Msgr. Ocariz was met with a traditional dance from Jombang, East Java called the *Tari Remo*, performed by Maureen, a girl who attends the activities of Opus Dei in Surabaya. The dance is used to welcome guests and open an event.

The auditorium stage featured a simple but evocative Indonesian motif. The backdrop showed Mount Bromo, an iconic volcano in East Java. Inscribed on it were the words *semper fidelis, semper in laetitia* (always faithful, always joyful).

On suffering and joy

The Prelate began by speaking to them about the day's liturgical feast, the Transfiguration of the Lord. He encouraged everyone to be aware of and thankful for the blessings they receive and said that both suffering and joy are expressions of God's love and presence. "If God is with us, who can be against us?" he quoted St. Paul. Therefore, "Be not afraid." Faith will give us the strength and the happiness that will enable us to transmit the joy of the Gospel to others.

Two boys awarded the Father a Guinness World Record Certificate for being the first Prelate of Opus Dei to visit Indonesia. He was also given a "*blangkon*", a Javanese headdress, which symbolizes elegance and self-mastery.

Sanctifying work

Budiono, a civil engineer, asked the Father about how to sanctify

professional work and convert it into a service to souls.

“Seeking holiness in work,” the Prelate said, “is at the core of St. Josemaria Escriva’s teachings.” We must seek to offer our work to God, he said. He talked of ways to remind oneself of God’s presence while working, like placing a small crucifix or a picture of our Lady on one’s work table and asking for strength to accomplish well the tasks given by superiors. Through work well done, we can help people become better Christians, the Father said. And if those around are not Christians, we can help them grow in human virtues and be better persons, he said.

Shelvi, a young mother of two kids, talked about her business of selling children’s clothing in order to ‘Let Kids be Kids’. A Catholic convert from Buddhism, she now enjoys

studying the word of God and teaching her kids about the Catholic faith. The Father was happy listening to her testimony, exclaiming how God imparts His grace in thousands of ways. He encouraged the audience to always thank God for the graces and gifts that He bestows, even those we may not be aware of.

Prayer is our weapon

Felicia shared with the Father that her daughter in Portugal recently joined as an Associate of Opus Dei. The Father invited her to thank God for this gift to her family, and he reminded her that her role as mother has not ended. The Holy Mass and her prayers remain key to helping her daughter persevere in her divine calling, likewise for her own perseverance as a mother. “Prayer is our only weapon” he recalled Saint Josemaría saying.

The get-together concluded with the performance of a folk dance: *Tari Lengang Nyai*. The dance originates from an ethnic group in West Java and depicts agility and cheerfulness.

After a signature Surabaya song, the Father gave his blessing to everyone and asked them to pray for the Pope and Bishop Sutikno.

Dela and George, with their two children, had a private audience with the Father after the get-together. They are the first supernumeraries in Surabaya. The Father assured them of his prayers and reminded them to always unite their sacrifices and challenges in life to the cross of Christ. He also met with individuals who have generously helped to start the apostolic work of Opus Dei in Surabaya and expressed his sincere gratitude to them.

Komang and Louisa, recent university graduates, were the

program hosts. Both are non-Catholic and said that they saw the Father as a gentle and kind person. They found the wisdom he shared universal and applicable to them personally.

Komang, who is a Hindu, commented that the Father's messages struck him.

JAKARTA

7 August, Monday

From Surabaya, the Father flew to the capital city of Jakarta. He visited the Nuncio and prayed in the chapel of the Apostolic Nunciature.

At 3:30 in the afternoon, the Father proceeded to the Hotel Aryaduta Menteng where a general audience was organized. Families introduced themselves to him as he climbed the staircase. Some boys and girls who participate in weekly activities of Family Catechism (FamCat) displayed

handmade welcome cards as he passed.

Christ at the summit of all human activities

The people started to sing *Rasa Sayange* (“Loving Feeling”) as the Father entered. Despite being a weekday, the hall was filled. Families and friends from various provinces of Indonesia, from the Philippines, as well as from Brazil and Spain were part of the 150 in attendance.

The Father began by thanking God for his being in Indonesia. He recounted the experience of St. Josemaria that took place on this same day, August 7th, in 1931. While celebrating the Holy Mass, St. Josemaría understood in a new way the meaning of the words from Scripture: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself” [Jn 12:32]. Msgr. Ocariz explained that “putting Christ at the

summit of all human activities” means that one offers Him all one’s activities of an ordinary day. Christ then becomes the fundamental point of reference and He makes everything holy.

Erna and Sunan gave the Father a framed ceramic of the *Bapa Kami* (“Our Father”). Another family gifted the Father with an image of Our Lady of Ganjuran, venerated in Central Java. Some girls from FamCat sang to entertain the Father. One performance was that of nine-year old Ivanka, who sang *Ave Maria* with a recorded piano accompaniment by her mother.

The perfection of love

Tim hails from the ethnic group Malay Dayaks, who were formerly known as fearsome headhunters. Now, he said, he hunts for souls peacefully in his workplace. He asked the Father how he could show

his friends that pursuing holiness is worthwhile even if it entails a lifelong struggle.

The Father told him that such effort was worthwhile. He explained that holiness must not be seen as consisting of purely human perfection or having no defects. Rather, it consists of the “perfection of love.” What is important is to begin again each day in our struggle to love God. That love is a grace, he said. “We have to ask the Lord to increase our capacity to love Him and others.”

Prayer is always effective

Lucia, a cooperator of Opus Dei since 1981, expressed her gratitude to the Work and her amazement at the power of prayer. She narrated how her daughter and her fiance agreed to attend a marriage preparation course offered by a group of supernumeraries in Sydney. She

hoped that her daughter's family would also be touched by Opus Dei.

“Have faith that prayer is always effective,” the Father said. Even if we do not see results, “nothing is ever lost in prayer,” he said..

The family as a domestic Church

Chari, a supernumerary, asked the Father to pray for The Marriage Courses that she and her husband, Stefan, organize in Indonesia. The first batch of 11 couples completed the online course, and she shared that this apostolic work has been a spur for Stefan and her to strengthen their own marriage relationship.

The Father encouraged Chari to pursue this undertaking, appreciating that by helping other couples in their married life, they themselves are the first beneficiaries.

Family was likewise Priyo's concern, which he aired the previous day in Surabaya. Priyo and his wife are both university lecturers and are involved in marriage counselling. He asked the Father how families could live the call to be a "domestic church." The Father talked about the family as the place where one encounters love.

A similar concern was raised by Joseph, who together with his wife were baptized in 2018. The Father underscored the importance of fostering friendship and personal relationships between parents and children. He reiterated that the principal responsibility for the children's education and formation lies with their parents.

Gerald, an architect, asked how to deal with his non-Catholic colleagues. The Father's reply was

short, simple and clear: friendship and prayer.

After that last question, two children went up the stage to hand to the Father his *Kartu Tanda Penduduk* or KTP (Resident Identity Card) so that he could return to Indonesia any time. That gesture elicited a beaming smile from the Father. He asked the audience to continue praying for the Pope and gave them his blessing: “May the Lord be in your hearts, in your families, in your intentions, and in your joys.”

People came away from these lively gatherings with their personal experiences and insights. A husband and wife seemed to speak for all when they said: “All the things that the Father spoke in the get-together were just the right words that we ordinary people must hear.”

Departure

After greeting some families and signing their family photos, the Father boarded his car for the airport. It was late afternoon and his flight to Sydney (Australia) was on that same night. Some faithful of the Prelature, cooperators, and friends followed his convoy to the airport. The Father was visibly happy to be one last time with his spiritual children in Indonesia.

”His final messages kept echoing in my mind,” one of them recalled, “that the joy and enthusiasm of these days be converted into resolutions and real efforts of deepening one’s interior life and expanding the work of evangelization in these islands.”

“We look forward with awe,” he added, “at how much good will be coming to Indonesia following these memorable encounters with the Father.”

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