

Mass in Manchester for the repose of the soul of the Prelate of Opus Dei

The church of St Joseph's, Longsight (south Manchester), was packed on Saturday 17 December for a Mass for the repose of the soul of the man known in life affectionately as “the Father”, Bishop Javier Echevarría, who was the head of Opus Dei for over two decades, from his appointment by Pope St John Paul II in 1994, to his death on 12 December 2016. Delegates will meet to

elect a new Prelate later this month.

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Fr Peter Haverty preached the homily. He had met the slightly older Fr Echevarría when they were both in their twenties and living in Rome. He said:

“We are gathered here today to celebrate Mass for the repose of the soul of Bishop Javier Echevarría. But you might say – I thought we had given up praying for people – don’t we just celebrate people’s lives? Well, there is no doubt that we should indeed make lots of acts of thanksgiving for such a marvellous person who has done such a wonderful job as the second successor after St Josemaría and Don Álvaro. Nevertheless, even St Francis

de Sales said, *Don't canonise me too soon, I want your prayers.* So we will of course pray for Bishop Javier realising that anyone who is the Prelate of Opus Dei has a massive responsibility – looking after thousands of souls.”

Javier Echevarría was born in Madrid on 14 June 1932. He visited a centre of Opus Dei with a group of other youngsters, to find out more about it, and joined. That was in 1948, when he was sixteen years old (the minimum age for making the commitment was later raised). Two years later, at the age of eighteen, Javier went to Rome to study for the priesthood.

Fr Peter explained, “Saying Rome gives the impression that he entered a well-appointed College with libraries and all the facilities for training men for priesthood, but in reality he had to live in what became

known as the *Pensionato*, which was a kind of lodge house because the Hungarian staff of the former embassy to the Holy See were still living in the Villa. They all – about thirty-five persons – lived in very cramped quarters – there was only one bed, reserved for anyone who fell ill. The Father lived there too. He obviously could not help noticing one of the young students called Javier, and made him his Secretary at the age of twenty-one (which would be in 1953). Javier became Don Javier, a priest of Opus Dei, in 1955, August 15.”

Fr Peter remembered that one day at this time Javier was asked to prepare a formational talk to give to the other students, and Blessed Álvaro, who worked alongside St Josemaría (both men have since been raised to the altars) told him, “Make sure you say to everyone that the only reason we

are here is to be saints and to know that God is our Father.”

As Father he was always very attentive to his spiritual daughters and sons in Opus Dei. Not long after he became Prelate in 1994, said Fr Peter, “He beckoned to me and said, *Oh, I remember to tell you that when you wrote to the Father in 1972 to tell him of your mother’s death he prayed very much for her. He was always making gestures of this kind as an expression of his fatherly concern.*”

Fr Peter finished his homily with some words of Bishops Javier himself, written in February 2016: *Ask our Lord if it is his will for many years of life, so that when he calls us to Himself we may arrive “squeezed out like a lemon”, as the Father used to say. In such a way that having given Him all the moments of our life, He will not be our own judge, but our Love. A God full of mercy who will say*

*to us, “Come, good and faithful
servant, enter into the joy of your
Lord!”*

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