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Cardinal hails modern prophet's call to holiness in family

Matrimony and the family: way of holiness. Symposium organized by the Liepkiemis Cultural Center in Vilnius, Lithuania on October 7, 2001.

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Being a good parent in today's world is just as sure a way to sanctity as martyrdom or life in a monastery, and just as valuable for the Church

and the world, Cardinal Archbishop Audrys Juozas Backis told an Oct. 7 conference in Vilnius.

The event, entitled Marriage and the Family - A Path to Sanctity, commemorated the centenary of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, founder of the Catholic institution Opus Dei.

'Blessed Josemaría Escrivá was a true prophet, one of those God sends in every age to wake up the Church and society," Backis said.

He said Escrivá's teachings on holiness in ordinary life were urgently needed now that the family, society's fundamental institution, was in a deep crisis.

"He saw that sanctity doesn't require becoming a monk or a cleric, but that everyone is called to be holy in their work, family life and social activity," Backis said.

Family issues are one of Lithuania's biggest problems, the Cardinal noted. "And the need is precisely to show that it is possible to live married life in accord with God's plan and the needs of the human person."

As the day's other speakers explained from their personal experience, this is not an easy task, but an extremely important and rewarding one.

Selfishness has to be rejected in a total gift of self to one's spouse and to all the children God may send, said the well-known Lithuanian-American Linas Sidrys, an eye surgeon and father of eight.

"Often we parents speak of the material welfare of our children, but really we are thinking of the house or car that we would like for ourselves," he added.

Sidrys called on husbands to help their wives in the work of raising

children, recalling how many months of pregnancy his own wife had endured and how many diapers had been changed.

Nijole Liobikiene, director of the Lithuanian Family Center, spoke of the "immaturity" that is so often presented as "love" in popular culture, leaving young people incapable of forming happy families. "The vicious circle we now see is the fruit of our immaturity and lack of love," she said.

Liobikiene noted that during Soviet times, she and many other people in Lithuania had drawn inspiration from illegal copies of Blessed Josemaría's writings on the family.

"For us who wanted to love and be loved it was wonderful to discover that there was a vocation to family, that marriage was a real way to holiness," she said.

Former parliamentarian Vilija Aleknaite-Abramikiene also addressed the 200 persons attending the forum, mostly young parents and university students.

"Just the size of this audience shows there is hope for the family," said the politician and mother of two.

Josemaría Escrivá, a Spanish priest who died in 1975, spent his life teaching that God can be found in the ordinary circumstances of life. He is credited with having founded Opus Dei by divine inspiration on Oct. 2, 1928.

Opus Dei is a personal prelature of the Catholic Church with some 84,000 members around the world, mostly married and single laypersons plus secular priests, who seek to live the fullness of Christian life in the middle of the world.

The idea of a "universal call to holiness" was controversial when Escrivá began to spread it but has since become a cornerstone of the Catholic Church's teachings. In 1992 Pope John Paul II declared Father Escrivá "blessed", the last step before sainthood.

Conferences about the impact of Blessed Josemaría's life and teachings on many fields of contemporary life are being organized in 80 countries to mark the centenary of his birth. On the actual 100th anniversary of his birth, Jan. 9, a solemn Mass will be held in the Vilnius Cathedral.

Bryan Bradley // The Baltic Times (Vilnius)

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