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Why is the Prelate of Opus Dei called “Father”?

An article by Guillaume Derville on why the faithful in the Prelature of Opus Dei call the prelate "Father."

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Saint Josemaria often referred to Opus Dei as “a *little portion* of the Church,” as well as a “family with supernatural bonds.” People who belong to it share the same vocational path and Christian

mission: to contribute to the evangelizing mission of the Church, fostering among Christian faithful of all conditions a coherent life of faith in the ordinary circumstances of life, and especially by sanctifying their work.

Saint Josemaria was the head and father of this family within the Church. Since 1928, he spiritually formed and accompanied those who welcomed into their own lives the charism that he had received from God, with a spiritual accompaniment based on Christian faith, trust, and affection. “I can offer myself as an example in very few things,” the Founder said, “and yet despite all my personal failings, I think I can offer myself as an example of a man who knows how to love. Your worries, your sufferings, your anxieties are all a continual call to me. I would like, with this heart of mine of a father and mother, to carry all of this on my

shoulders.”[1]. In a natural way, the faithful of Opus Dei saw in this concern of Saint Josemaria a spiritual fatherhood, and began to call him “father.”

Today, there is a wealth of literature about everything that being a good father implies: carrying the weight of a family, educating children in freedom, helping them to grow, etc. Something similar happens with the spiritual fatherhood of the prelate of Opus Dei, who seeks to guide his flock with a firm hand and with deep understanding, also correcting – when necessary – for the good of souls.

After the Founder's death, first Blessed Alvaro del Portillo and then Bishop Javier Echevarría inherited this fatherhood. Not only did they govern Opus Dei, but they were also fathers of this portion of the Church; through the exercise of their pastoral

ministry, they sought to sustain the faithful of Opus Dei and to help them constantly grow in their vocational commitment at the service of the Church.

As a good shepherd in Christ [2], the prelate of Opus Dei is called to incarnate, for the faithful of the Prelature, the loving fatherhood that can be found in its fullness only in God. In the Prelature of Opus Dei, the father is the visible principle and foundation of its unity, in a manner analogous to what the rest of the bishops are for the portion of the People of God that they govern.[3] The Church recognizes this episcopal fatherhood in various documents, such as the decree *Christus Dominus* (no.16), of Vatican Council II, or in the directory *Apostolorum Succesores* (no. 76), published by the Congregation for Bishops in 2004. Saint John Paul II also sought to explain the fatherhood of bishops, a

topic to which he dedicated the fourth chapter of his book *Rise! Let Us Be on Our Way.*

The faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei call the Prelate *father* in as much as he is "teacher, sanctifier, and shepherd, charged with acting in the name and in the person of Christ"[4], something that Saint Augustine spoke of unhesitatingly as a mission, a service, and a duty of love.[5] In many countries, priests are likewise simply called "Father."

The prelate of Opus Dei relies on the prayer offered by the faithful for his person and intentions, to fulfill his mission as shepherd and unite them ever more closely to Christ, along with the multitude of souls who benefit from the warmth of the Work. A constant teaching of Saint Josemaria and his successors has been the need to foster filial affection for the Pope, by echoing the

magisterium of the successors of Peter, asking people to pray for the person and intentions of the Roman Pontiff, and encouraging the faithful to broaden their horizons in their service to the universal Church

Guillaume Derville

[1] Saint Josemaria, *Notes from a family gathering*, 6 October 1968 (AGP, P01 VI-1969, p. 13).

[2] Cf. Jn 10:11.

[3] Cf. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, no. 23.

[4] Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores gregis*, 16 October 2003, no. 10.

[5] Cf. Saint Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium tractatus*, 123, 5.

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