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Prayer for Families of the People of Opus Dei

Since 1951, on the Sunday after Christmas, in Opus Dei a special petition is made to the Holy Family of Nazareth for the families of the Prelature's faithful. Here is the story of the origin of this prayer.

12/29/2023

Since 1951, each year on the Solemnity of the Holy Family, in all the centers of Opus Dei throughout

the world a special prayer is addressed to God asking Him to bless the families of the faithful of the Work:

"O Jesus, our most lovable Redeemer, you came to light up the world with your example and doctrine, and chose to spend the greater part of your life subject to Mary and Joseph in the humble house of Nazareth, sanctifying the family that all Christian homes were to imitate. Graciously accept the consecration of the families of your children in Opus Dei that we now make to you. Take them under your protection and care, and fashion them after the divine model of your Holy Family....

"Grant them, Lord, to come to know better each day the spirit of our Opus Dei, to which you have called us for your service and our sanctification. Instill in their hearts a great love for our Work, and an ever-growing

appreciation of the beauty of our vocation, so that they may feel a holy pride in your having deigned to choose us, and learn to thank you for the honor you have bestowed upon them.

"Bless especially their cooperation in our apostolic work, and make them always share in the joy and peace that you grant us as a reward for our dedication."

The story of how this consecration to the Holy Family began is found in Andres Vasquez de Prada's biography of Saint Josemaria, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. III, pp. 136-141, which we reproduce partially below:

The saying "God writes straight with crooked lines" was one that Saint Josemaria had engraved on his heart, as a result of painful personal experiences. It expressed the fact that God's way of reasoning is sometimes very different from our

own. Another heartfelt, loving phrase that he often employed, and taught his children, was: “we owe ninety per cent of our vocation to our parents.” Charity that is practiced in the right way also leads us to love and observe the Fourth Commandment, “Honor your father and your mother,” which Saint Josemaria termed “the sweetest of all the Commandments.”[1]

Now only a few weeks had passed since the granting of the definitive approval of Opus Dei, when renewed attacks broke out that seemed to embitter even this “sweetest precept.”[2]

The tactics were the same as those that had already been used in Spain. Despite the definitive approval from the Holy See, the detractors went back to work, sowing confusion and anxiety among the families of members of Opus Dei in Italy.

Monsignor Escriva went out of his way to maintain close, cordial relations with the families of students who frequented the *Pensionato*. He wanted their parents to feel part of Opus Dei's family. Busy as he was, he passed on news about their children, and asked for their collaboration and prayers, hoping they would experience the Work as theirs—as in fact it was.

His warmth in dealing with the families of his children comes through in his letters. For instance, a letter to the mother of Mario Lantini, written a year after Mario asked to be admitted to the Work:

“My dear Mrs. Lantini,

I received your kind letter, and sincerely thank you for what you tell me, especially about your prayers, which are, without a doubt, the best gift that you and your husband could make to Opus Dei and its members.

I am truly happy with the vocation of your son Mario, and I thank God for it—he always works with the joy and enthusiasm of one who is serving the Lord. When I see your son, I can't help but think of his parents' goodness. He owes his vocation, in part, to you.

Please continue to pray to the Lord for Opus Dei.

Greetings and a blessing,

Josemaria Escriva de B.”[3]

As the apostolic trips from the *Pensionato* to the various cities of Italy began, the number of people joining the Work also increased. In April 1949, a South American student, Juan Larrea, asked for admission. His family was not pleased.[4] They may not have known what Opus Dei really was, or the decision may have interfered

with family plans and dreams. Juan himself explains what happened:

“My father was Ecuador’s ambassador to the Holy See. He told me that he was going to take up the matter with Monsignor Montini, the [Vatican’s] Undersecretary of State. I spoke with Monsignor Montini, telling him my story, and after a long and very friendly conversation, Monsignor Montini said, ‘I will have a message for your father that will put him at peace.’ Some days later he received my father and told him that he had spoken with Pope Pius XII, who said, ‘Tell the ambassador that his son could not be in a better place than Opus Dei.’

"Twenty years later, when I was bishop, I visited Monsignor Montini, now Pope Paul VI, and he affably reminded me of that audience."[5]

A painful episode

Things were different with parents who opposed their children's decision after certain people had fanned their initial unhappiness into full-fledged antagonism. The founder had hoped the decree of approval (*Primum Inter*) would put a stop to this, but that did not happen.

Also in April 1949, Umberto Farri, a young man of twenty-one who was often at Villa Tevere, requested admission to the Work. He went to Milan in 1950 at the founder's request, and returned to Rome in November of the following year. Meanwhile, his father, Francesco, had come into contact with parents of other university students who had asked for admission to Opus Dei. Everything happened with such speed that, in some homes, the damage done to the previously good relations between parents and children seemed irremediable. Acting on the advice and with the

direction of a priest, Father A. Martini, Mr. Francesco Farri addressed a formal petition of protest, dated April 25, 1951, to Pope Pius XII. In all, the fathers of five members signed.[6]

The protest took the form of an outspoken denunciation of Opus Dei's apostolate, and put pressure on the Pope, who had just granted definitive approval to Opus Dei, asking him to make the weight of his sovereign authority felt against it.

No word of blame

As he had done in similar circumstances in 1941, when Monsignor Escriva learned of this petition he asked his children to take it in silence, to pray, and to keep smiling and working.[7] They did. Thus, as Mario Lantini explains, his experiences did not come to light until, thirty years later, he testified before the tribunal for the founder's

beatification process. Even then, he said, he was reluctant to go into what happened “because Monsignor Escriva always forbade us, explicitly, to speak of this, lest we fail in charity, even when talking among ourselves; as it says in a point of *The Way* (no. 443), ‘If you can’t praise, say nothing.’ No one in Opus Dei knew what had happened except those involved, the founder, and Don Alvaro, at that time Counsellor of the Italian region.”[8] Don Alvaro affirmed that “even in the most trying moments” he had never heard the founder speak “one single word of recrimination against those who defamed him.”[9]

Saint Josemaria’s reaction was to take refuge in God with total trust. A small sheet of paper bears this handwritten note of his: “Place under the patronage of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph the families of our members, so that they’ll come to participate in the Work’s *gaudium*

cum pace [joy with peace] and obtain from the Lord affection for Opus Dei.”[10]

Summing up the episode in a letter to his children, Monsignor Escriva wrote:

“Now I would like to tell you the details about the consecration I made of the Work and the families of its members to the Holy Family on May 14 of this year. It was done in the oratory (which for this reason will in the future be called the oratory of the Holy Family), which still has no walls, amid nails and pieces of wood from the formwork that supported the cement for the beams and ceiling until it set. But some exact notes, written down at the time, have been saved, so I won’t go more into that here. I will just tell you that I could only turn to heaven when faced with the diabolical schemes (which God permitted!) of certain unscrupulous

individuals who got some fathers of families to sign a document full of falsehoods, and made sure it ended up in the Holy Father's hands. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph saw to it that the storm clouds passed over without a deluge; everything was cleared up.”[11]

The Holy Family's help was quickly forthcoming. One of the petition's signers backed out the very same week it went to the Pope,[12] and the rest soon realized how senseless their claim of a “distressing situation” was. From then on they did not try at all to hold their children back, and peace returned to their homes. The complaints to the Holy Father faded away, for lack of evidence to support them. To Monsignor Escriva's great joy the affection of the families of his children for Opus Dei grew.[13]

Notes

[1] “He taught his children,” says Bishop del Portillo, “that ‘we owe ninety percent of our vocation to our parents. They have, most often, been the ones who planted in our lives the seeds of faith and piety; and always we are indebted to them because they brought us into the world, raised and educated us, and gave us our formation as human beings’” (Alvaro del Portillo, Sum. 1340). See Alejandro Cantero, Sum. 6670; Teresa Acerbis, Sum- 5005; and Fernando Valenciano, Sum. 7146.

[2] This was one of those turbulent times that spanned the years of the three consecrations of Opus Dei (1951-1952). In 1971 there was another consecration, to the Holy Spirit; but it was made for a different reason and under different circumstances.

[3] AGP, RHF, EF90705-1.

[4] Juan Larrea was born in Buenos Aires on August 9, 1927. He joined Opus Dei as a numerary in April 1949, and worked as a lawyer before being ordained to the priesthood on August 5, 1962. On June 15, 1969, he was consecrated bishop, and served as auxiliary bishop of Quito, Ecuador, then as bishop of Ibarra. On March 26, 1988, he was appointed coadjutor archbishop of Guayaquil, Ecuador; and on December 7, 1989, archbishop.

[5] Juan Larrea, Sum. 6026.

[6] The deposition made in Rome as part of the beatification process by Umberto Farri, witness no. 3, comprising sessions 2-39 (October 1981 to May 1982), does not speak of this matter, since he knew nothing about it then. However, in the family's private archives, which he inherited in 1985, there are documents referring to it. Among

them is a photocopy of the writ of denunciation sent to the Pope, together with all the worked-up and edited drafts. There are also handwritten corrections by Father Martini, as is clear from comparing the handwriting in these notes with the originals of thirteen letters from him to Mr. Farri. The letters are signed, and some are on letterheads with the addresses of various academic centers. See file “Farri,” folder “Umberto.”

[7] See Francesco Angelicchio, Sum. 3499.

[8] Mario Lantini, Sum. 3572.

[9] Alvaro del Portillo, PR, p. 571. The founder’s attitude is illustrated by an anecdote told by Juan Udaondo (in Sum. 5034). “During those days I found out that a priest, Father Bellincampi, who was parochial vicar of the parish of St. Robert Bellarmine in Rome and a scout

leader there, felt hurt because some scouts were frequenting the house on Bruno Buozzi, and three of them—Umberto Farri, Giorgio de Filippi, and Salvatore Longo—had requested admission to Opus Dei. He was so unhappy that he did not refrain from making false and slanderous statements about the Work and the ‘bunch of Spaniards’ as he called them. One day when I was alone with the Father, I let slip a rather caustic comment about Father Bellincampi. The Father cut me short. He firmly corrected me for not living in the spirit he had always taught us—that of keeping quiet, forgiving, making reparation, and praying—and he advised me to pray for Father Bellincampi and to offer up mortifications for him.”

[10] AGP, P01 1966 (1), p. 27.

[11] Letter 24 Dec 1951, no. 260.

[12] On April 27, 1951, the man wrote to Mr. Farri, “I would appreciate it if you would count me out of all involvement and accept my withdrawal from the collaboration involved in signing of the text referring to our sons and Opus Dei.” See file “Farri,” folder “Umberto”; and AGP, RHF, D-15002.

[13] Ibid.

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