

Eighth Ordinary General Congress of Opus Dei

From the 7th to the 19th of April, the Eighth Ordinary General Congress of the Prelature of Opus Dei was held. Two hundred and fifty-five persons took part from practically all the countries where the Prelature is carrying out its apostolic work.

As prescribed by the Prelature's Statutes (cf. no. 133), the Prelate convokes the ordinary congresses—which are celebrated every eight years—to take stock of the situation of its apostolic service to the Church, and to provide guidelines for the evangelizing activity of the Prelature's faithful, both priests and laity (men and women, married and single). Appointments are also renewed for the tasks on the General Council and the Central Advisory (cf. Statutes, no. 140), the two organs that assist the Prelate of Opus Dei in his work of government. In the Congress the appointment of Msgr. Fernando Ocariz as Vicar General (a position he has occupied since 1994) was renewed. In the corresponding section of this edition of Romana information is provided on the other appointments made.

The opening session of the Congress was held on the afternoon of April 7. At 8:00 in the morning, the Prelate celebrated Mass in the prelati church of Our Lady of Peace. For the women members of

the Congress, who began their work on April 17, some days after the men, there was another Eucharistic celebration, also in the prelati church, on the 17th. The balance of the eight years since the previous Congress offered many reasons for gratitude to God: among them, the holy life of the Venerable John Paul II, whose generous dedication throughout his Pontificate has left an indelible mark on countless persons, including non-Catholics and non-Christians. The Congress also expressed its profound gratitude to the Holy Father Benedict XVI for his magisterium and his untiring vigilance for the Church. “As an effective sign of our unconditional union with the Vicar of Christ on earth,” one can read in the letter written by Bishop Echevarría at the conclusion of the Congress, “we will continue making the effort, as we have up until now, to spread his teachings and to help to make the Church better known and more deeply loved” (*Letter* May 17, 2010, no. 8). The Year of the Eucharist, the Pauline Year and the recent Year for Priests have been providential occasions for fostering a deeper appreciation of the gifts granted by God to his People.

Another reason for gratitude to God, for the good of the Prelature and the whole Church, has been the spread of devotion to St. Josemaría throughout the world, especially

since his canonization in 2002. It is also a source of joy that, with God's help, Opus Dei has begun in the three countries recommended by the Seventh Congress—Croatia, Slovenia and Latvia—as well as in four others: Russia, Indonesia, Korea and Romania. A decision was made to study the possibilities of beginning apostolic activities in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Angola, and Bulgaria in the near future.

During this period, a large number of faithful of the Prelature and members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross have finished their earthly path. They have left us with their luminous example, along with that of many others who have also entrusted their souls to God in a holy way during these years. Some of them have seen their cause of canonization opened. Besides that of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, the work of preparation of the causes of other faithful has begun—men and women, priests and laity, single and married persons—who echo for us the words of the Master: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (*Mt* 5:48).

The members of the Congress reaffirmed the need to put ever greater care into the formation of all those who come close to the apostolates of Opus Dei, and first of all the Prelature's faithful themselves, especially in the spiritual, doctrinal-religious, and apostolic areas. The faithful of Opus Dei were also reminded (in accord with each one's personal circumstances and possibilities) of the great im-

portance we should give to the study of the sacred sciences.

The conclusions of the General Congress insist on the need for living Christian detachment as an indispensable condition for the development of a contemplative life in the midst of one's ordinary circumstances. Emphasis was also placed on the need to continue making manifest, with serenity and humility, the beauty and importance of the virtue of chastity in today's world.

Recalling that the principal apostolate of the faithful of Opus Dei is that of friendship and confidence with those around them, the Congress stressed once again the priority of the work of Christian formation with young people, so decisive for the Church and the future of society. It also pointed to the pressing need today to explain the greatness and fruitfulness of apostolic celibacy in the middle of the world.

The Congress renewed its hope that parents will participate actively in the high schools and youth centers entrusted to the pastoral care of the Prelature. As the Prelate wrote in his letter on the occasion of the Congress, “Let us tirelessly remind fathers and mothers—and also grandparents—that they should keep in the forefront of their minds that their first task is the family, the upbringing and education of their children or grandchildren. And they should be convinced that the most important aspect of this is passing on the faith in their own homes. They have to realize that in educating children and teenagers it is very

important to invest time and energy in cultivating the cardinal virtues, especially fortitude and temperance” (*Letter* May 17, 2010, no. 24).

Referring to certain specific apostolates, the Assembly recommended that the activities of social development already existing in the various regions be consolidated, and that the possibility of starting other educational and social initiatives aimed at the resolution of local needs be studied, which should have a cultural, social and spiritual point of reference and where catechesis is provided to those who desire it.

The Congress also reflected especially on the importance of giving new Christian life to various aspects of society in order to foster the development of “a new culture, new legislation, and new fashions, in keeping with the dignity of the human person and with its destiny to the glory of the children of God in Jesus Christ.”¹ The personal action of the Prelature’s faithful, ordinary citizens who live and work in civil society, has to lead them to infuse the charity of Christ into families and customs, into education and culture, into communications and politics, into their own professional environment, always with full freedom and personal responsibility.

In this sense it was urged that the universities and other educational centers that seek inspiration and support in the spirit of Opus Dei take great pains in the areas of research on matters that have the

greatest repercussions on the configuration of society: the relationship between science and faith, the defense of human life from conception until natural death, promotion of justice in conformity with the social doctrine of the Church, education of youth, etc.

In the public sphere, as the Congress recalled in its conclusions, Christians are called to participate actively in the debate on fundamental ethical questions, “putting forward solutions, in accordance with the natural law and the magisterium of the Church, that help defend the dignity of the person” (*Letter* May 17, 2010, no. 22). Catholics know they have been entrusted with human values grounded on the primacy of charity, which the present day world so greatly needs and which represent vital fronts that the Christian conscience cannot give in on.

In particular, the Congress pointed out the importance to society of tasks related to the care of the home. The family has as its model the home of Nazareth: promoting the dignity of work in the home is an important part of the evangelization of society.

Taking occasion of the Year for Priests convoked by Pope Benedict XVI, the Assembly expressed its gratitude to God for the gift of priesthood in the Church. It suggested intensifying prayer for priestly vocations throughout the world, for the sanctity of every

1. Bishop Javier Echevarría, *Letter* November 28, 2002, no. 11.

priest, and for the development of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, inseparably united to the Prelature.

At the end of the sessions, the Congress members noted in their conclusions the gratitude towards and unity with the Prelate that is felt by all the faithful of the Prelature and the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, and renewed the determination to pre-

serve with great care the spirit left as a heritage by St. Josemaría, which was guarded and transmitted by Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, his first successor, and by many women and men of Opus Dei who have already passed away

The Eighth Ordinary General Congress concluded with a Eucharistic celebration with the singing of the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving, on April 19th.