

SHARING IN GOD'S DREAMS

In recent years many people have become interested in viewing the stars. Expeditions are often organized to sunny places—free also from artificial light—to observe the heavenly bodies with the greatest possible clarity. Surely during the era when Abraham lived (cf. *Gen* 13:18), in Hebron in southern Palestine, this nocturnal spectacle would have been quite impressive, even more so than today. It was there, Sacred Scripture tells us, that God brought Abraham outside at night and told him: *Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them (Gen 15:5)*

“Shoulder to shoulder” with God

The challenge God offered Abraham to count the stars was clearly impossible. Why does He address Abraham in this way late at night? We find the answer in the same verse: *So shall your descendants be*. The Lord could have passed on the message in a simpler way. In fact, He had done so on two previous occasions (cf. *Gen* 12:2-3; 13:15-16); it was not the first time He had made his promise known. Nevertheless, on this third occasion He wants to take Abraham outside at night under the star-filled sky and invite him to dream: *number the stars, if you are able*—imagine, if you can, what I have prepared for you.

Looking at our lives “shoulder to shoulder” with God is the best way of broadening our horizons, of living beyond our limits. Dreaming of our future at God’s side, considering all the new challenges that can arise when we unite ourselves to his plans, is the most ambitious planning to which we can aspire. When we employ all our talents in working close beside God, “we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation.”¹ To accept God’s invitation to imagine the future together with Him can help us to set out eagerly on paths of prayer.

Dreaming is also prayer

That is what all the saints have done. They employed all their talents, whether many or few, to carry out God’s loving plan. Saint Josemaria Escriva, for example, with only a handful of acquaintances in Madrid, a city he had just moved to, dreamed of reminding all the baptized in the world that they were called to be saints. The same happened in the case of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, his faithful successor,

¹ Benedict XVI, Homily at the beginning of his pontificate, 24 April 2005.

and of Blessed Guadalupe Ortiz de Landazuri, who made the dream of the founder of Opus Dei their own, and strove to embody in their lives the beauty of sanctity in daily life.

The example of the saints may sometimes seem difficult for us to imitate. We can think that our dreams are not so ambitious or so apostolically daring. But as the Prelate of Opus Dei recently reminded a group of young people in Torreciudad: “there is no one—neither you, nor I, nor anyone else—whom God is not concerned about.”² No one falls outside of his plans, which are always great, despite sometimes mistakenly thinking that our tasks are too ordinary to be of much value. We are all invited to dream about our lives “shoulder to shoulder” with God.

One day during Christmas time in 1967 in Rome, Saint Josemaria was with a group of his sons from many different countries. As a new year was about to begin, he invited the young students around him to imagine so many possible ways of spreading Christ’s message throughout the world: in prestigious universities, in centers where Christian formation could be offered to young people, in technical schools... We too can imagine now all the good that God wants to accomplish today through our own lives: by being a source of unity and joy in our family, bringing the true freedom of Christ to our profession or surrounding, accompanying our friends closely... Back in 1967, in that Roman living room, after challenging the students to dream about the future of working closely alongside God, Saint Josemaria ended by saying: “Dream, for it is also prayer, it is working for God.”³

God founded his Work

Certainly, our first job is to discover what God’s dreams are for us and for our world. In what specific way can we collaborate with Him? Once more, the Book of Genesis can help us. During spring in 1981, Cardinal Ratzinger preached in the cathedral of Munich on the passage of Genesis about Creation, saying that “God has created the Universe in order to begin a love story with us. He has created it so that love may exist.”⁴ We are well aware that our lives are not the result of blind chance, and that each of us has a place in the Creator’s heart. God wants to count on us to care for all the good things He has seen come forth from his hand: *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it (Gen 2:15)*. God has wished to entrust to us the world He created out of love, to leave his master work to us as an inheritance. He has entrusted to us not only the care of the natural world but also of all his sons and daughters and the society in which they live. And thus He dreams that each day we may make this world He has created a more loving home for everyone.

God’s creativity is also shown in new paths He has dreamed of for society and for the Church. One of these divine initiatives began when Saint Josemaria, still a young priest only 26 years old, was putting some notes in order during the days of a spiritual retreat. Suddenly, without having imagined even its possibility before, he saw clearly that God was asking him to set out on a new adventure: that day “God

² Fernando Ocariz, Meeting with young people in Torreciudad, 30 August 2019.

³ Saint Josemaría, *Notes from a family get-together*, 24 December 1967, in *Cronica* 1968, p. 38.

⁴ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Creación y pecado*, EUNSA, 2005, p. 54.

founded his Work.”⁵ Years later he would write: “God our Lord, on that 2nd of October 1928, feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, raised up Opus Dei.”⁶ And some years later he admits: “It would never have entered my mind, before that moment, that I should bring forth a new mission among men.”⁷

Like so many other institutions the Holy Spirit inspires in the heart of the Church, Opus Dei is also God’s dream. A dream in which He seeks to awaken many Christians to the reality that, amid their daily life, they can transmit Christ’s life to others. Despite many obstacles, Saint Josemaria knew that it was God himself who was determined to see it carried out. His life was a constant witness to those words of Saint Paul: *for I know whom I have believed (2 Tim 1: 12)*. When his confessor one day referred to this dream as “that Work of God,”⁸ the founder knew that he had found a specific name for it. Amid his early efforts to make that dream a reality, as though revealing his own experience, he wrote: “This supernatural conviction of the divine nature of the enterprise will eventually give you such an intense enthusiasm and love for the Work that you will be happy to sacrifice yourselves to bring it to fulfillment.”⁹

Helping make the world modern

On Saturday, April 15, 1967 a correspondent for a well-known magazine was in Rome to speak with Saint Josemaria.¹⁰ The journalist’s first question dealt with the relationship of Opus Dei and the modern world. The founder replied: “It is perfectly natural for the members to be up to date with modern developments and to understand the world. Together with their fellow citizens, who are their peers, they are part of the contemporary world and make it modern.”¹¹

In the book of Proverbs, a good and wise wife is described in these terms: *strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come (Prov 31:25)*. A Christian “laughs at the time to come” because he or she knows that the true “modernity” of our world are all the new things that God wants to bring about in every era. To laugh at the future is to strive, by opening one’s heart to Christ’s love, to discover these “new things,” hidden in the concerns and problems of the people around us, who often lack even the right words to express them clearly. It means learning how to be in harmony with the sensitivities of our time in order to bring there the balm of Jesus’ friendship. True modernity consists in “a deepening in Christian faith which, precisely because it is deep and authentic, is able to grasp and make use of all the positive aspects of the modern world.”¹²

In the final book of Sacred Scripture our Lord assures us: *Behold, I make all things new (Rev 21:5)*. God promises that He himself will bring about the true newness. All those striving to live the spirit of

⁵ Saint Josemaría, *Intimate Notes*, no. 306.

⁶ Saint Josemaría, *Letter*, 14 February 1950, no. 3.

⁷ Saint Josemaría, *Notes from a meditation*, 2 February 1962.

⁸ Saint Josemaría, *Intimate Notes*, no. 1868.

⁹ Saint Josemaría, *Instruction*, 19 March 1934, no. 49.

¹⁰ Saint Josemaría, *Conversaciones con Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer, edición crítico-histórica*, Rialp, Madrid, 2012, p. 35.

¹¹ *Conversations*, no. 26.

¹² A. de Fuenmayor, V. Gómez-Iglesia, J. L. Illanes, *El itinerario jurídico del Opus Dei*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 1989, p. 53.

Opus Dei are called to cooperate in this endeavor: to travel the paths of prayer with such eagerness that we help make the world modern—seeking to make it more human and divine, with Christ’s help. And as God did with Abraham, He invites us to raise our eyes to heaven and says to us: imagine, if you can, what I have prepared for you.

When it becomes difficult to dream

But it is not always easy to dream. The first obstacle we may confront is the comfort of giving in to routine. This has nothing to do with creating good habits or ways of doing things that help us work better. On the contrary, “bad routine” is the caricature of true experience; it is convincing ourselves that we know the way too well, its broad resting places and dark alleys, so that at this phase of life no one—not even God—can surprise us. But God’s horizons require a vision open to his surprises, which we can find in Sacred Scripture, in prayer, and in the persons and events around us. It is true that we may have experienced in our lives disappointments or projects that, even when we tried to carry them out together with our Lord, didn’t turn out as we had hoped. When this occurs, like Jesus on the Cross, we should seek out the consolation of our Father God, turning our perplexity into a dialogue with Him (cf. *Mt 27:46*). Only thus will we be able, with his protection, to once again look at the future without fear or regrets.

Another obstacle to helping our Lord carry out his plans is the excessive search for security. All of the saints, in one way or another, have had to risk their lives in striving to solve the spiritual and material needs before them, trusting always in God’s help. We find a graphic example (mentioned at times by Pope Francis) in King David. When Saul wanted to protect him in his fight against the enemy by providing him with a bronze helmet and heavy armor, the young man David could not even take a single step. So he entered the battle only with the weapons he knew well: his sling, five stones, and above all his effort placed at the service of the divine plans (cf. *1 Sam 17:40-45*). Faced with the battle to strive to help cure the wounds of our time, we must do the same.

In the pages of the Gospel we also find another person who experienced difficulties when he first met God’s dream—that young man who came up to Jesus and knelt before Him, and asked the most important question: How can I truly be happy? We know that he was a person who tried to fulfill the commandments, who was sincere and showed respect to his parents and was kind to others. But he sensed he lacked something, and longed to help carry out a divine project. The Gospel tells us that *Jesus looking upon him loved him (Mk 10:21)*. That was the moment he came face to face with God’s dream. Christ saw all the good things that the hands and heart of that young man could accomplish—as numerous as the stars in the Hebron desert—and told him: *Come follow me*. But we also know from the Gospel that *he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions (Mk 10:22)*. Thus our Lord warns us of another danger that could be an obstacle to God’s dreams: setting our heart, perhaps even without realizing it, on something that is not Himself. We may even think that Jesus comes into our life in order to take things away from us and not to give us, abundantly (cf. *Jn 10:10*), the happiness the young man was seeking.

On August 11 last year, when night was falling and the summer heat was finally letting up, Pope Francis had a meeting with young people from all over Italy. It took place in the Circus Maximus, alongside the Tiber River between two Roman hills. The Holy Father began by encouraging them to dream about great plans in their lives together with God: “Dreams are important. They keep our view broad; they help us to embrace the horizon, to cultivate hope in every daily action ... Dreams awaken you; they sweep you away; they are the most luminous stars, those that indicate a different path for humanity. So, dear young people, you have these brilliant stars, which are your dreams, in your heart: they are your responsibility and your treasure. Make them also be your future!”¹³

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¹³ Francis, *Meeting with Young Italians*, 11 August 2018.