

ALWAYS AN OPEN INVITATION

When that king in the Gospel invited the guests to his son's wedding, he thought his friends and acquaintances would be delighted to share in his joy. But he was mistaken. As the parable succinctly says: *they would not come* (Mt 22:3). The monarch's first reaction was that they must have misunderstood him, so he sent the invited guests a new message, this time even more clear: *Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, Behold, I have made ready my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves are killed, and everything is ready; come to the marriage feast'* (v. 4). Nevertheless, the reply is even more painful (cf. vv. 5-6). This parable is similar to that of the vine keepers, which Saint Matthew recounts in the previous chapter (cf. Mt 21:33-40). Although in both cases our Lord was addressing the authorities of Israel, his words continue to resonate down through history. We can ask ourselves: in what sense have we too been invited to the wedding feast of the king's son or to work in his vineyard? What is Jesus trying to tell us with these words of his?

Perhaps with those stories He simply wants to remind us that our life acquires its full meaning only when we keep alive our relationship with God, realizing that we are his sons and daughters, called to transform the world in the image of his love. Thus He is encouraging us to keep alive, "with a youthful soul," the awareness of our responsibility to nurture the gift we have received.¹ Since we are not better than the people who listened to Jesus, the risk of falling into the behavior the parables describe affects us as well. Or to put it positively, the great perspectives opened to us by the possibility of living as God's children should lead us to renew our desire to respond with an ever-youthful love.

What the Work wants to remind people of

In *Gaudete et exsultate*, the Pope reminded us that "each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel."² Saint Josemaria liked to say that the message of Opus Dei is "as old as the Gospel, and like the Gospel new,"³ since it simply seeks to remind people of something that is present in our Lord's life and message. In reality, all of us Christians are called to reflect Christ, to make Him present in the world; this is the work of the Holy Spirit in each one's soul and in the Church (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). Nevertheless, the vocation of each one "can also entail reproducing in our own lives various aspects of Jesus' earthly life: his hidden life, his life in community, his closeness to the outcast,

¹ Cf. Monsignor Fernando Ocariz, *Pastoral Letter*, 28 October 2020, no. 2.

² Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Gaudete et exsultate*, no. 19.

³ Saint Josemaría, *Letter* 3, no. 91.

his poverty, and other ways in which he showed his self-sacrificing love.”⁴ Hence each saint, each authentic Christian “is a message which the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people.”⁵

What aspects of Christ’s life do the faithful of Opus Dei seek to embody in their own lives? What is the message that the Paraclete wants to remind their contemporaries of? The horizon of the centenary of the Work is a good opportunity to ask oneself these questions and to delve more deeply into what God wants to say to the world through the Work’s message, addressed also to persons and places that perhaps have not yet heard of it.

In the effort to explain the light Saint Josemaria received on October 2nd, 1928, some artistic representations have depicted the workshop in Nazareth, where Jesus and Joseph worked and spent their days. For with the message of the Work the Holy Spirit is reminding everyone that we Christians are called to union with God in ordinary life, that our Lord is seeking all men and women, and therefore that the world is a place – even more, a means – of sanctification. Just as in Bethlehem, Egypt and Nazareth, heaven and earth were joined, so too in the places where our life unfolds, we can find God and reconcile his creation with Him. As Saint Josemaria wrote in one of his letters: “We come to sanctify any honest human toil: ordinary work, precisely in the world, in a lay and secular way, in service to the Holy Church, the Roman Pontiff and all souls.”⁶

As a development of that light, our Lord over time showed Saint Josemaria other points that would be central for the life of the faithful of the Work. The call of all men and women to sanctity and the mission of enkindling the world with God’s love would have work as its hinge, the sense of divine filiation as its foundation, and the Mass as its center and root. Opus Dei was to be a “small portion” of the Church whose only desire is to serve her, in the world and through the things of the world. “More than once I have compared our mission, following our Lord’s example, to the leaven which, from within the dough, ferments the mass and converts it into good bread.”⁷ Thus the faithful of the Work realize they are called by a divine vocation to bring the world in which they live to God. The path to accomplish this is none other than that of Nazareth: work that is well done, service to others, care for the persons God has placed near us, concern for the world in which we live and which we love. With simplicity and naturalness, we realize we have received a call that embraces our entire life.

⁴ Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Gaudete et exsultate*, no. 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 21.

⁶ Saint Josemaría, *Letter 3*, no. 2a.

⁷ Saint Josemaría, *Letter 1*, no. 5b.

A call that guides our entire life.

Some of the more distinctive features of the Work can only be understood in light of the vocation it entails. Forming part of Opus Dei is not the result of human initiative, of an attractive idea, or of generous effort, but in first place of a divine calling. In various ways, and with greater depth as the years go by, we discover “this *divine calling* that enkindles in us the desire to seek holiness in the middle of the world.”⁸ We allow Jesus to take possession of our soul. With God’s grace, our desires little by little are identified with His, to the point that we can say we live only *for love*, since we realize how much God loves us, and *to love*, since we know He is relying on us to help make his love reach many other people.

The life of every faithful of the Work entails, then, a “full vocational encounter,” such that “Opus Dei is grafted onto our whole life.”⁹ Since it is a true vocation, it is different from an association, where one’s dedication is limited to a series of activities or meetings. Moreover, it is also different from what is proper to a special consecration, which brings with it a public condition in the Church distinct from that of the other ordinary faithful. Rather it requires converting our *entire life* into a continuous discovery of the One who is calling us, and into a joyful response – always creative and imbued with love – to his call.

But how does someone in love respond when he or she seeks to make the person they love happy? Or, from another angle, how does someone undertake a mission that is seen as the most important reality in their life? If their overriding concern is to respond to this person they love, to carry out this mission, they will employ all their abilities and talents, with initiative, with spontaneity. Thus it “does not mean doing more and more things, or fulfilling the task of meeting certain criteria we have set ourselves.”¹⁰ Neither does it consist “only, or even mainly, in taking part in certain tasks or in corporate apostolic activities.”¹¹ We should never lose sight of the essential point: “how we correspond to God’s love,”¹² which can take many forms and should imbue everything we do.

Saint Josemaría said that the *all-embracing* character of the vocation leads to the experience of unity of life, stemming from the source and aim of all our actions. This “unity of life has two simultaneous facets: the interior one, which makes us contemplatives; and the apostolic one, by means of our professional work, which is visible and external.”¹³ It is a question, then, of seeking our Lord in all that we do, of placing Him “as the goal of all our efforts,”¹⁴ and of trying to bring his Love to those around us, showing a concern for them and serving them in our daily

⁸ Saint Josemaría, *Letter 3*, no. 8b.

⁹ Saint Josemaría, *Letter 31*, no. 11. Cited in Fernando Ocáriz, *Pastoral Letter*, 28 October 2020, no. 8.

¹⁰ Fernando Ocáriz, *Pastoral Letter*, 28 October 2020, no. 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, no. 7.

¹³ Saint Josemaría, *Letter 3*, no. 14 to.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 15a.

circumstances. This same concern will lead us at times to undertake various type of projects, with the assistance of other faithful of the Work, other Christians and those who share our desire to transform the world in the image of Christ, perfect God and perfect man.

With the flexibility of a muscle

A distinctive characteristic of the faithful of Opus Dei is to always act with full freedom, “since it is proper to our specific divine calling to seek sanctity while working in ordinary human tasks in accord with the dictates of each one’s conscience, realizing our personal responsibility for our freely chosen activities, within the faith and morals of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ The members of the Work understood this right from the beginning, undertaking all sorts of initiatives, from the world of finance to domestic tasks, from farming to education and communications. All these initiatives find their inspiration in the message of Opus Dei, without belonging to the Work or being organized by it, but by each of the persons who run them.

“The main apostolate of the Work is the apostolate of friendship and trust that each one of us carries out personally.”¹⁶ This has certain consequences that deeply affect the way of being proper to the faithful of Opus Dei and their evangelizing efforts. In first place, all the members “live with equal dedication,” since “our vocation, and the mission that corresponds to it, encompasses our whole life.”¹⁷ Thus we are all equally relevant; we are all responsible for the common mission from our own place and job.

This reality is a continuous call to each one’s heart, with the awareness that “God asks us to fill our hearts with apostolic zeal, to forget about ourselves, in order to foster a concern – with joyful sacrifice—for all humanity.”¹⁸ And this is the greatest source of our joy, since “nothing can produce greater satisfaction than bringing so many souls to the light and warmth of Christ.”¹⁹ We will draw others to Him with our friendship, seeing in each person a son or daughter of God, even when they are not yet aware of it. We will reach those whom no one has taught the value of their ordinary life, and with our example and word we will try to help them discover “this great truth: that Christ is concerned about all of us, even the littlest, the most insignificant.”²⁰

Moreover, since the main apostolate of Opus Dei is personal, it is hard to quantify the work of evangelization in Opus Dei, or its repercussion in the Church’s overall mission. It is a silent revolution, which seeks to change the face of work environments, of cities, of whole societies, without noise or structures. Saint Josemaría expressed his great happiness when contemplating “an

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 43d.

¹⁶ Fernando Ocariz, *Pastoral Letter*, 28 October 2020, no. 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 8.

¹⁸ Saint Josemaría, *Letter 1*, no. 22a.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 22c.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 22c.

apostolate which does not attract attention, which cannot easily be expressed in statistics but which yields holiness in thousands of souls who keep on following Christ, quietly and effectively during their ordinary everyday work.”²¹

Finally, this characteristic of its apostolate necessarily makes Opus Dei an *unorganized organization*. There will, of course, be a minimum of structure, as a result of the formation needed by its faithful to keep enkindled their loving response to God and their concern for each person in the middle of the world. The emphasis on spontaneity and initiative is due to the fact that we all share in responsibility for the Work, or as the Prelate of Opus Dei reminds us in his letter last October, “we all have the Work in our hands.”²² In reality, all these characteristics, which are proper to the Work just as God entrusted it to Saint Josemaria, are for us a gift for which we should be thankful, a treasure which we can always enter into more deeply, and a mission for which we are all, through a divine calling, responsible.

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²¹ Saint Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 71.

²² Fernando Ocáriz, *Pastoral Letter*, 28 October 2020, no. 27; cf. Saint Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 19.