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Cheerful, even in the Rubble

When the earth shook in Peru on August 15th, Isabel Gamos first gathered together the 11 members of her family. Then she went to help her neighbors. That evening she decided to say the rosary in the middle of the rubble, “Because God knows what is best.”

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“I’m fine. Not a single brick fell on my head, because my house was made of adobe,” was the innocent

comment of seven-year-old Rodrigo, one of Isabel's 13 children. Her husband passed away six months before the earthquake, and she has been supporting her family with strength and courage. Isabel is also one of the rural development workers trained by the Condoray Center for the Professional Formation of Women.

“Thanks to God and to St. Josemaría we are alive and were able to get out of our house in time. We asked for help with great faith, and my daughter Diana, who was in the most dangerous area, managed to escape. Little by little the eleven children who live with me came out safe and unharmed. Little Benjamin was playing with his friend Nachito and came running to my side,” she added.

The force of the earthquake caused a large part of their house to collapse

and the rest was so damaged that it had to be leveled. Today, in what had been the front of the house, a large piece of blue plastic protects the property. “We have only a little space, but we have our lives and none of my children was hurt. We have a lot of reasons to thank God.”

“That night,” Isabel recalls, “we stayed in the street with our neighbors saying the Rosary to our Lady of Fair Love, who is the Patroness of Cañete. We were very much united and convinced of her maternal affection. It is one of the great gifts that St. Josemaría gave us, and we are sure that she protected this blessed valley. For a number of days strong tremors followed one after another. The city was filled with dirt, houses had to be demolished, and many people were left without a home. It was a moment to give consolation, hope, and a little joy to the others.”

Isabel's "army" was unmistakable: a cheerful group, with protective masks, shovels and wheelbarrows, from sunrise to sunset clearing the piles of rubble from their destroyed house. "People ask us, 'What are you going to do? Why are you so calm?' We answer that God knows best and he will not abandon us," says Odalis, one of Isabel's older daughters.

Hopes and Dreams

Odalis owns a small cart and she earns her living selling sandwiches and drinks to the truckers who pass by on the nearby Southern Panamerican Highway. She had been dreaming of selling fruit juice in her own home to help her family, but for now that project will have to wait.

Working together, Isabel's family are carrying out the household tasks and each has a job in accordance with his or her age. They get together in the evenings and tell about the little

happenings at school or among their playmates.

Isabel continues: “My family is simple. We have very little money, but we are very united, today more than ever. I have older children who are now working and contributing to the education of the younger ones. My husband José was a bricklayer and died last February. That left a very big emptiness in our home.”

In the Hands of God

“St. Josemaría taught me to be always cheerful, to find God in all circumstances, offering him not only the good things but also those things that can suddenly be a problem for me. Today, in these difficult moments, we love his holy will and put ourselves into his hands.”

“To live for others is what Christian solidarity demands of us. No one can be dispensed from this duty, not even

the poorest. We should share the little that we have with others. I know of the case of a young woman from Mala, the daughter of very poor peasants, who sent a couple of pounds of potatoes for those who had lost everything, even though she herself needed that food. I have also been moved by the gestures of so many people who have come to the door with a bag of groceries even though they hardly know us. Even a truck that was going by stopped to give us some blankets. Since we are a big family with a lot of children. . . .”

Serving the Villages as a Rural Development Worker

In addition to caring for her large family, Isabel is a rural development worker for Condoray, a corporate work of Opus Dei whose principal mission is the human, social, and spiritual development of the village women in the Valley of Cañete.

“At Condoray I discovered that I could help other women to improve, and at the age of 19 I became one of the rural development workers. What I learn, I transmit to the villages: I speak to each woman and teach them to love work, to be generous, cheerful, to overcome difficulties. In life there are many difficult circumstances and we can't let ourselves be crushed by them.

A rural development worker is a person who seeks to help other women develop, trying to help them advance, acquire better habits, more education. “We help the people to solve their problems and take a step forward.” After the earthquake she went to visit families and keep them company, to help them organize themselves, and she helped as Condoray aided almost 800 people who suffered losses from the earthquake.

As the mother of a Christian family and a rural development worker, Isabel sums up her perspective on life: “During all of these years the example of St. Josemaría has been the guide for my home and my work. I have learned that one can sanctify everyday things and that with our ordinary life we should write a beautiful story of love for God.

Condoray Center for the Professional Formation of Women

The Condoray Center for the Professional Formation of Women is helping 890 families which have suffered from the earthquake. Anyone who wishes to help in this crusade of solidarity can obtain information at www.condoray.edu.pe/ayuda/ini.htm.

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