

## **"What problems, mom?"**

"Everyone can reach God. God is there for everyone, and not just for people with more intelligence or aptitudes."

Rosa's eldest child Leyre was born with a congenital malformation and needs to use a wheelchair, while two of her other children are autistic. Her strong faith has given Rosa strength to help her children confront life with joy.

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Rosa is an anesthesiologist who works at the Lebrija High Resolution Hospital in Seville, Spain. Her daughter Leyre was born with a congenital malformation, which forces her to use a wheelchair to get around. But that hasn't prevented Leyre from dancing sevillanas, playing sports and achieving many other goals. Nor will it prevent her from finishing her degree in medicine like her mother, as she is now in year 5 of her university studies.

Her mother, who is her model, has helped her overcome all the obstacles life has presented. Like her, Leyre wants to be a physician who will serve others. She has even decided to open an Instagram account, so that other young people will be encouraged by her own testimony.

But Leyre is not the only object of her mother's concern. After her, four more children would come into the world, two of whom were born with autism spectrum disorders. Rosa's life became quite complicated then: "I didn't understand how this could happen to us. It wasn't the family we had planned. God has upset our plans time and time again," she said.

But all this hasn't stopped her from being happy and striving to make her whole family happy. "People often ask me if I can be happy given my circumstances," she confides. "And of course I can be happy. The only thing is that you have to 'work at it' a bit harder, and be ready for anything and never lose your sense of humor. And of course, you need faith, because without it everything is more difficult. It's there that I seek light and strength to go forward. In prayer absolutely everything can be put in its right place."

Faith can move mountains, and for Rosa, who receives spiritual help as a supernumerary member of Opus Dei, it helped her look after her children as they grew up, take good care of everyone and continue her own professional work.

The path wasn't easy. Sometimes she grew tired and moments of discouragement arose. On one of those occasions, her son asked her what was wrong. Rosa told him: "What's going to happen to us, with all the problems we have?" The simplicity of her son's reply brought her joy: "What problems, mom?"

Rosa also found much needed support in the Seville Autism Association, where she met professionals and other parents ready to share in her concerns and help one another to raise children with these special problems. There her two children learned to play

various sports and have made great friends.

A few years ago, Rosa met Rosario, the mother of three children, one of whom has Down Syndrome.

Rosario's husband also has a physical disability. All of this has led to many comments from people who are amazed at how she puts up with her situation.

Over time, however, these circumstances have become "a treasure," Rosario insists. Her son Juan "is the joy of our house, who likes to play sports and to surf. Now he is learning to dance the rumba," she says excitedly. "He brings us a lot of happiness; he is a treasure God has placed in our hands and the happiness of our home."

## **Give them their own place**

Rosa and Rosario have become great friends. And soon they realized that

they had to give something more to their children, besides sports and the possibility of studying for a profession.

“They are capable of knowing and loving God, and that capacity has to be filled,” insists Rosa, remembering how she and Rosario immediately connected on this issue. The Pope’s encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* fell into her hands one day, and a sentence from it struck her deeply. “The Pope said that people with disabilities should not only be cared for, but need to have a place in civil and ecclesial society. I kept reflecting on these words and realized that although I was striving hard to give them a place in civil society, what was I doing on a spiritual level? So I started looking around the diocese for something that could help them.”

But she didn’t find anything suitable so she went to her parish priest to

propose forming a catechism class for young people with “functional diversity.” Rosa and Rosario themselves began to teach it, but they were soon joined by Gonzalo, Antonio and Alejandra, a young woman catechist who has become the heart and soul of their group. They began in October with five members and by May had more than twice as many people helping out.

“We meet every Monday,” says Rosa. “First, we pray for some minutes before our Lord in the Tabernacle. We all pray together, the families, the children and the catechists. I think that God, who is infinite Intelligence, must see little difference between one and the other of us.”

One of the mothers decided to give the initiative a name: Bethany. “Our Lord can rest with us for a while,” Rosa says, “and then we go to the parish hall and the catechists adapt

the contents of the faith to a language the children can understand better.”

The group has already been divided into two sections, for older and younger children. Alejandra describes the method she uses.

“Everything visual is very helpful for them. Between all of us we have been constructing a mural with a conceptual map, using continuous paper glued to the wall. There we write key words: the sacraments, and what they are for... All very simple. Every Monday, one of the children reads these words and we review each sacrament using the mural.” The various liturgical times of year also help to emphasize different aspects of the faith. In Advent, for example, everyone wrote down three goals to try to achieve during those weeks: make their bed, give our Lady kiss...

In the case of younger children, the method used to make the truths of faith more accessible are “pictograms,” employing drawings instead of words. Alejandra spurs the children’s imagination with drawings that represent what sin means and how grace acts. The catechists have also taught the children to tell God, every Monday, something good that has happened to them over the weekend, to thank Him, and also ask Him for something they need. And if anyone has a special need, everyone is asked to pray for it. “We teach them to address our Lady as our ‘beautiful Mother.’ It’s not a question of teaching them to memorize prayers, but rather nurturing their inner connection with God,” she explains. According to Alejandra, the results are very positive. “They really seem to enjoy it. At first they protested, but they keep coming back each Monday and seem very happy now with the classes.”

## Yes, you can

It has been a school year filled with many discoveries for each of them. The key discovery is that everyone has the capacity to know and love God. “Everyone can reach God. God is there for everyone, and not just for people with more intelligence or aptitudes. Here we teach the children to draw close to Him, to pray, with tools and explanations that help them discover who God is, how much He loves them, and what the Church is.”

Leyre, Rosa’s daughter, soon joined the group to help teach catechism from her wheelchair. Every Monday she arrives on time for her appointment with her students. She encourages them: “Yes, you can,” breaking down stereotypes with a message of hope: “One can choose to stop trying and say: I can’t, I’m going to be bitter all my life, I’m not going

to achieve anything. What a horrible mistake! You have to say: well, it's what I have, it's what I've received in life; it's my path and my way to get to Heaven. So I'm going for it, I'm going to be happy and enjoy the journey; that's what we're here for, to enjoy it."

*In the video below (in Spanish), Rosa tells us more about her family and talks with her good friend Rosario:*

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