

The gift of a child with Down Syndrome

"I feel very lucky and I want to make the most of this opportunity", says Anna Oromi of Lerida, Spain.

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On January 9, three years ago, on the anniversary of the birth of St. Josemaría, you had your first son.

Actually, before Marc, I had a first pregnancy which unfortunately did not come to term. Because of that

miscarriage, the whole family was praying a lot to St. Josemaría for a new baby to come. We have devotion to this saintly priest, and I wanted to create “a bright and cheerful home” as he used to say. And so, thank God, Marc arrived, precisely on January 9.

This wasn't the only gift you and your husband received.

Indeed not. After Marc, Alex arrived and he is a real gift. At the beginning of my third pregnancy, the doctors told us it was very likely that the child would have Down Syndrome and heart problems. **How did you react?**

At the time, we were not ready for the news. What should we do? My husband and I prayed a lot. Each of us spoke with God about what seemed, at first, to be a misfortune. But in his presence one sees things clearly.

We never considered not having Alex. I prayed and prayed that whatever God wanted would happen, and that he would help me to be generous. At the same time, I asked for help to make the right decision about the doctors' suggestions. The most important thing was that Alex would be born.

Why did you pray? Wouldn't it have been more natural to rebel?

Prayer helped me to face each day calmly, not to get anxious about future problems, and to do what had to be done at each moment. I learned this from the founder of Opus Dei: when facing a difficult situation, go to God and ask him how to act.

I also sought the intercession of Don Alvaro del Portillo, St. Josemaría's first successor, to whom I have a special devotion. I asked them to help me and they were close to me at every moment. He definitely helped

me have fortitude to face these circumstances.

And so Alex was born last September 5, and since then I haven't stopped thanking God.

Does everyone understand your decision?

Unfortunately, in recent years it's not a very common decision. The easy thing is to have an abortion – they make it easy for you – and thus avoid the problem. As for us, when we told my gynecologist that we wanted to have the baby, she was happy because she knew this child would arrive in a home where he would be welcomed.

People often say to us: “How brave you are to have a child with Down Syndrome.” But it's not a question of courage: the dignity of each child is more important than its characteristics. You can't choose a

child “a la carte”! You simply accept it and love it as it is. My husband said that Alex will have friends who will love him for himself, and I have the same opinion.

And this idea that he is a gift, I’m not the only one who thinks so. The young lady who helps me with my housework mentioned to her husband that I have a book entitled “In Conversation with God” (I read it when I pray). He said: “That’s why they have this child, because he’s something sent by God.”

You don’t accept him then with resignation?

No! I really believe that life is a very great thing. I don’t feel that way just because I have certain religious beliefs, as some people tell me. The faith helps, it is fundamental, but love for life is something universal that we should all share.

I feel very lucky and I want to make the most of this opportunity. I can learn a lot from Alex. The truth is that children with Down Syndrome are special people, full of light. He has a special smile.

I imagine it's an opportunity to speak with many people.

Someone from a Down Syndrome group told me: "People don't know how to react when they see you have a child like that. So the best thing is to take the initiative."

And this is what I do when I meet someone who doesn't know it already: I introduce them to Alex and say that he has Down Syndrome and that we knew it before he was born. This let's me speak with many people and opens a door to be able to reflect on something so important as everyone's right to life. And in Down Syndrome parents' groups, I have

met marvelous people who move me by their dedication and joy.

In my dining room I have a very beautiful book by one of these groups, full of testimonials. In one a child with Down Syndrome thanks his parents for having him, and tells them that this is not a punishment and that he will repay them with a lot of love. I was very moved reading those words.

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