

The Virtues of Healing

The keynote address at the Toronto conference "Sowers of Peace and Joy" was presented by Mrs. Margaret Ogola. She is the well-known author of "The River and The Source", a Kenyan epic that traces the lives three of generations of African women. She is currently director of the Cottolengo Hospice for Children Living with AIDS. This article published in University of Toronto paper, "The Mike", summarises her talk.

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“Children...the sick...as you write these words don’t you feel tempted to write them with capitals? The reason is that in little children and in the sick, a soul in love sees Him.”

-St. Josemaria Escriva (The Way, n. 419)

Dr. Margaret Ogola is a pediatrician and the medical director of the Cottolengo Hospice for Children Living with AIDS in Nairobi, Kenya.

On October 15, 2004, she delivered a talk entitled “Seeing Christ in Children and the Sick” at the Sam Sorbara Auditorium of St. Michael’s College. It was about how the message of St. Josemaria, the founder of Opus Dei, transformed her professional vocation as a doctor

treating children whose immune systems have been ravaged by the HIV virus. Most of Dr. Ogola's patients are also orphans because their parents have previously succumbed to AIDS.

Pervasive poverty, the lack of retro-viral drugs, and inadequate medical facilities make it more challenging to sustain their already fragile health.

She begins by narrating some poignant episodes about the struggles faced by her patients and their families. Perhaps the most shocking story she narrated was about a mother of nine children, seven of whom have already died from AIDS. Of the two living one is infected. She also has four grandchildren who also suffer from the disease.

What is inspiring about this woman, Dr. Ogola tells us, is her cheerfulness, her self-forgetfulness and her

dedication to keep her remaining loved ones alive in the midst of her destitution.

Dr. Ogola encounters death frequently in her work.

Approached from a merely human perspective, what could be a drearier job than watching many of your patients die every day, afflicted by a disease you cannot cure?

St. Josemaria's message has given Dr Ogola the means to view her profession from a supernatural perspective. St. Josemaria believed that Christian laypersons living in the midst of the world, whether they are doctors, carpenters, or students, are called by Christ to become holy through the sanctification of their ordinary work.

This means doing one's work well and as perfectly as possible, taking care of the little details, offering it up

as a prayer to God. This means living perpetually in the presence of God, seeing the divine significance of the ordinary events that comprise most of our day and being in continuous conversation through prayer with our Lord. This means becoming *Alter Christus, Other Christs*, through the practice of the human and supernatural virtues, the struggle to overcome our personal defects, and the apostolate of friendship, spreading the warmth of Christ's love to others through our deeds and our words. This means seeing Him in others, treating them with respect, loving and serving them with the heart of Christ.

St. Josemaria's teachings concerning the sanctification of work are convictions held by those who follow the spirit of Opus Dei, which means "the Work of God".

Opus Dei is an organization of the Catholic Church that helps laypersons sanctify their work through means of personal formation such as spiritual direction, doctrinal classes, retreats, and workshops.

Dr. Ogola tells us that sanctifying her work enables her to see the merciful providence of God, the incomparable beauty of the gift of life, and her true place in the order of things. She says that she is at her most prayerful when called to the side of a seriously ill patient. She gets the keen eye, the steady hand, and the presence of mind to act quickly and decisively through her prayer. She is convinced that even holding the hand of a dying child with simple kindness has a transcendental meaning. After all, God is present at the threshold between life and death, waiting to embrace this child's soul.

She now sees sickness as a blessing from the God. She believes that for most of us, we are most human when we are sick: the mask slips, hatred slackens and we get as close to innocence as we ever can. She believes that sickness is an opportunity to grow in fortitude, and a space in time for true repentance and the grace of final perseverance.

Finally, she says that sickness is an arrangement of divine providence that ensures that we have the strength we need to cross the valley of the shadow of death with confidence in God.

It is no doubt why Dr. Ogola never gives up on her patients, using every trick in the book to keep them alive, even though they have only a little time to live. St. Josemaria's message of sanctifying one's work has given her the means to convert her

ordinary medical occupation into a supernatural Christian vocation.

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By Ryan Gonzales

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