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"Finding God restored my joy"

Joanna, the mother of four children, works as an information technology consultant in Lisbon. After going through a dark period in her life, she recovered her joy after discovering the possibility of coming close to God in her daily life.

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She studied at the French Lyceum and later at the Portuguese Catholic University. In 1998 Joanna began her

professional career as a business manager and today she works as an information technology consultant. “Life was going fine, but something was always missing. I didn’t know what it was.” Joanna says she thought her life of faith was going well: “I did everything I had to do, at the age I had to do it. I followed all the rules”.

Eventually she came to realize the need for a closer connection with God and a stronger prayer life.

“Sometimes people would ask me, Are you sad? And I answered: yes. I felt very sad.” Although she knew she had received the gift of faith: “I was upset with myself because to some extent I felt ungrateful.”

A priest cousin and a daughter

In 2010, one of her cousins, a numerary in Opus Dei, was ordained a priest in Rome. Back in Lisbon, this priest encouraged her to take part in

a monthly day of recollection, with some peaceful time for prayer. “I remember that I found there the ‘bonding time’ that I needed. This time for myself and for God helped restore my joy.”

Later, her daughter wanted to join the Youth Teams of Our Lady, and one day she confided to her parents: “We don’t have a team because there aren’t enough married couples to accompany us.” Joanna thought to herself: “If I ask another couple to accompany my daughter’s team, how can I refuse to do the same for other young people? I can’t ask for what I can’t give.”

And she accepted the challenge of helping 15 young people, friends of her daughter, to deepen in their knowledge of the faith. Finding enough time was difficult: “I took it seriously, and still do. So I began studying and growing in my own

knowledge of the faith, and I started looking for good books and material on my own.”

A friend with cancer: Fatima and Rome

Her good friend Dina had almost become part of their family. One day she was diagnosed with cancer. At first they were hopeful that she would be cured. Joana and her family tried to help her. They made a quick decision: “Let’s go to Fatima for the candlelight procession. We’ll receive an answer there, although I don’t know what it will be.” It was Dina’s first visit to Fatima: “It was truly marvelous. We who have been there so often sometimes forget the strength of our Mother Mary.”

Unfortunately, Dina’s illness worsened: “The doctors told me that she had little time left. And I decided that I could help her make a dream of hers come true: accompanying her

to Rome to see the Pope.” It was an unforgettable trip “She climbed on the chair for a better view and followed the Pope all around the square with her eyes.” She was happy and told me: “I went to Fatima and saw the Pope in Rome. I have done everything I had to do in my life.”

A month later she was admitted to the hospital and would never leave. Joana says that Dina taught her one of her most important lessons: “She showed me where happiness lies. Happiness is finding God. Happiness is accepting whatever happens to us. She was accepting the hardest thing anyone has to accept. She was coming to terms with her own death.”

God is joy for me... and for others

For Joanna, life goes on. She seeks to find God in everything she does: in demanding work, in caring for her

family, and in friendship with many people. “Sometimes I find it hard to grasp why people can’t understand this. And I tell myself that I was the first to not understand it and to criticize over many years.”

And she concludes: “For me now everything is so simple; this is the great message that the Church and Opus Dei show us and I hope to continue showing it to others as well: God is joy and He takes away all our sadness.”

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