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Montserrat Grases: Teenager

Montserrat Grases died in Barcelona of bone cancer at 17 years of age. Throughout her illness, Montse, as she was known to her family and friends, maintained a contagious cheerfulness and a focus on her friends and family rather than on herself. In a 2016 decree, Pope Francis confirmed that Montse had lived a life of heroic virtue and named her as venerable.

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Montserrat Grases had been a member of Opus Dei for a little over a year when she died of bone cancer at age 17. During that brief time, she gave a stunning example of love for God and others and of accepting joyfully the suffering God sent her. Three short prayers which she prayed frequently sum up her spiritual life: “I am a daughter of God.” “Whatever you want. When you want. As you want it.” And “Omnia in bonum” (Everything is for the good).

Childhood

Montse was born in 1941, the second child of a middle-class Barcelona family. She was the oldest girl in the family, which eventually grew to include nine children. Her parents,

both of whom belonged to Opus Dei, strove to create what St. Josemaría described as “a bright and cheerful Christian home,” where the children learned to pray and to love God in an atmosphere of freedom and trust. Montse’s father frequently said to the children, “Tell me what happened. I don’t mind your having broken something. I do want you to always be sincere and to tell the truth, no matter what.”

Montse was an average student but quite athletic. During summers spent with the family in Seva, a small town in the mountains about forty miles north of Barcelona, she bicycled, swam in the river, and went on hikes with friends. She loved dancing the traditional Catalan Sardana and was a vigorous tennis player.

Especially as a young girl, Montse was easily provoked and her older brother enjoyed getting a rise out of

her. As time went by, she gradually overcame her tendency to be annoyed. She was a natural leader and organizer, but she preferred doing things she knew her friends enjoyed rather than things she personally liked. Several of her friends noticed that “she gave way easily.”

One of her closest friends describes her as “very spontaneous and open.” “Everyone,” she says, “found her attractive. Her simplicity and joy attracted people. She was very optimistic, and therefore she was pleasant to be with.” The same friend found that “she was attentive to the smallest things that interested others. She was concerned about the problems of others.” Another person who knew her well recalls that:

Her defining characteristic was knowing how to live for others. She was one of those generous people

who always offered to help you with everything. Did something need to be carried? Montse carried it. Did someone need to be helped? Montse helped them. You could count on her for everything...She was generous, very generous. She helped you in everything she could and she did it ... without making herself noticed. She knew how to do and disappear... This attitude might seem natural in an older person, but I was struck by finding it in a girl as young as she was. She was attentive to the big things and little things. For example, if there weren't enough chairs in the room for everyone, she went out, got a chair, put it in place, and then sat down.

First Contact with Opus Dei

When Montse was thirteen, her mother took her for the first time to Llar, a center of the women's branch of Opus Dei which offered girls

training in household skills like sewing, ironing, and cooking as well as classes in French, English, and piano. Montse was one of the youngest girls at the center, but she quickly made friends and fit in easily. In addition to the classes she attended, she looked forward to informal get-togethers in which she spent time with the other girls. On weekends and holidays the girls often went on short excursions. Montse especially enjoyed hiking in the nearby mountains.

The chaplain of the center preached meditations on Saturday evenings, and from time to time the director of the center or one of the staff members gave a talk on virtues and practical Christian life. According to one of her best friends, Montse “made the spirit of Opus Dei her own, and soon became enthusiastic with the idea of being holy in the midst of the world, of sanctifying

work and helping others along the path to sanctity.” She joined a group of girls who taught catechism classes to children in a shantytown.

Montse invited many of her friends to attend activities at Llar. In the fall of 1956, she attended a retreat preached by a priest of Opus Dei. During the retreat, a friend asked her if she had ever thought she might have a vocation to Opus Dei. Montse was startled and annoyed and stopped going to Llar. Both her mother and the girls at the center respected her decision and refrained from calling her or inviting her to activities. After a few days, however, she decided to return.

Her older brother Enrique’s decision to enter the seminary and begin studying for the priesthood made a deep impression on Montse. She began to think more about how she could come closer to God. With the

help of the meditations and talks at Llar, and with the personal guidance she received there, she began to develop an interior life of prayer and mortification in small things. For example, one day, she said to her friend Rosa Maria, “I like to look at everything. I walk down the street, and I look. I pass in front of a bookstore, and I look. I see a dress store, and I look. I’ve been told that I could mortify myself in these little things.” A week later she said to Rosa Maria that she was meeting with some success in not looking at so many things. At about the same time, her knee began to hurt. She mentioned it to her parents, but neither she nor they thought it was anything serious. She thought of it as one more thing she could offer to our Lord.

In November 1957, she again attended a retreat preached by a priest of Opus Dei. When she came

back from the retreat, her younger brother noticed a change in her:

She tried to avoid quarreling. She no longer got so upset about the ridiculous little things that used to really get to her. And if we still fought, she tried to put a quick end to it. She even began to act as a peacemaker among the children when some conflict arose. At roughly the same time I also began to notice new ways in which she lived charity. She began to serve as a volunteer nurse at the Red Cross hospital and to visit and console a friend of hers who was very ill. Montse had always been cheerful but now her cheerfulness was more noticeable and above all more constant.

She stopped losing her temper and simply remained quiet when one of her brothers or sisters called her a name or pulled some other prank to get her upset.

Joining Opus Dei

During the November 1957 retreat, her friend Rosa, who was crippled by polio, suggested once again that she consider in her prayer whether God might be calling her to Opus Dei.

After praying about it for some time, a few days before Christmas, Montse told her mother that she thought she had a vocation to Opus Dei. To respect her freedom and that of their other children, neither her mother nor her father had said that they belonged to Opus Dei. Even now when Montse was considering her vocation, they said nothing about their own vocation so as not to influence her decision.

Her mother suggested that she talk it over with the priest she normally saw for confession and that she tell her father. Montse was not anxious to tell him but eventually did. He responded: "Look, Montse, the only

thing I can say is that a vocation is a marvelous gift that God gives us. It supposes a decision that we have to meditate on very carefully in the presence of God. The only thing your mother and I can do in this case is to pray. Since we are so close to Christmas, all three of us can pray to the Child Jesus so that he makes you see clearly what your vocation is. What do you think?”

Montse's main objection to joining Opus Dei was the fear that she might not persevere. Her friend agreed that she could not know for sure but urged her to put her trust in God. If he was calling her, he would give her the grace she needed to persevere. After thinking and praying about it a bit more, Montse told the director of Llar that she wanted to join the Work. Opus Dei's statutes provided that from a legal point of view Montse would not be able to become a member until she was at least

eighteen years old, but now she could begin to live its spirit with a sense that she was responding to God's call. Despite her youth, the director was convinced that her decision was mature, carefully thought out in the presence of God, and free, so she told her to go ahead and write a letter to the head of Opus Dei, telling him of her desire to join. Her letter was very brief and to the point:

Father, My name is Montse Grases. I am still very young, but I have been coming to Llar for a long time, and little by little I have gotten to know the Work which has ended up filling me with enthusiasm. Not long ago, I made a retreat in Casteldaura which was decisive for me.

I ask you, Father, to admit me as a numerary member of Opus Dei. My parents know [what I am doing] and are very content.

Your daughter asks your blessing.
Montse Grases.

As soon as she got home, she told her parents that she had joined Opus Dei. “Well, we too are members of the Work,” they responded. Montse, her mother recalls, was exploding with joy and gratitude to God. Her father offered a toast to his daughter and the three of them sang a song: “The fields have been opened up. Love opened a furrow, and the world became a path for the sower’s desires. Be faithful. It’s worthwhile to follow the sower down his clear path through the fields, sowing love.”

A Normal Teenager

Montse’s life continued much as before. Mass at Llar in the morning, classes, homework, helping her mother around the house, basketball, excursions. Her knee continued to hurt, but at the time neither she nor her parents thought it was anything

serious. Her mother recalls:

“Everything about her life was always very small because the love of God is full of little things done for love. Everything was very small, like that pain in her knee that wouldn’t go away and that couldn’t be localized. Sometimes it was higher up, other times lower.” Montse didn’t let the knee problem interfere with playing sports, although it hurt. “I may be lame,” she said, “but I’ll continue playing.”

During Montse’s first months of life as a member of Opus Dei, she did not stand out from the other young members of the Work in her center. In the diary of the center, she is rarely mentioned, and then only in passing. Looking back, however, the director of Llar concluded that from the moment Montse asked to be admitted, “the Work was her entire life.” She adds: “Her life in the Work during the first months developed

peacefully. Like everyone else, she had her struggles, her small failures and difficulties. But she was always someone of great interior beauty, sincere and transparent. She understood everything very easily. Her happiness and her love for the vocation were a joy to see.”

Montse invited many of her friends to Llar and prayed that they might come closer to God and possibly receive a vocation to Opus Dei. As one of the other members of Opus Dei at Llar observed: “From the very first moment, she showed desires to do apostolate. Later, [these desires] grew enormously. She felt a great desire to help all of her friends ... She took pleasure in giving herself to others, and she was happy when she saw that her friends were content, especially when they grew in the interior life and discovered the possibility of greater generosity with God.”

Her knee did not improve with time, and the specialist her family took her to see was unable to diagnose her condition. By Easter, she had lost her appetite and was having trouble sleeping because of the pain, but she continued to get up on time and to live a normal life. She found it difficult to accept the limitations her condition imposed on her. When the doctor suggested that she get up later, she was unhappy because this makes it hard for her to help her mother with household chores. In May, she went with some other young women from Llar to visit a shrine of Our Lady. They were going to walk, but the director of the center suggested that Montse go in the car with her friend Rosa, who was crippled by polio. Montse kept insisting that she could walk. At one point she said: "I can go walking like everyone else. I'm not a cripple!" She immediately realized that she might have hurt Rosa's feelings, got into the

car without further protest, and said: "Pardon me, Rosa. I said something stupid because the important thing is not to be physically crippled but to be interiorly crippled, to have little charity and to say things that hurt others."

In late June 1958, she went to the hospital for a biopsy. She told her mother that she was afraid of being alone in the operating room. Her mother responded that once when she had an operation she had felt very alone until she began to pray but then she felt great certainty that God was at her side giving her courage and strength. She urged Montse to pray. When Montse was recovering from the anesthesia she kept repeating, "You were right, Mama. You were right."

Bone Cancer

The biopsy revealed that Montse had Ewing sarcoma, a rare form of bone

cancer that mostly affects people between the age of ten and twenty. Today treatment is quite effective, but in the late 1950s Ewing sarcoma was incurable. Radiation was used to reduce swelling and pain but did nothing to cure the disease.

Montse's parents decided to tell her at first only that she had a tumor, but not to talk about cancer and not to hint that there was no cure. Her mother wrote to St. Josemaría asking him to pray that the Lord might “make her see and accept God's will.”

In the summer of 1958, thirty sessions of radiation therapy temporarily reduced the swelling and pain in her leg and permitted her to enjoy the summer in Seva with the rest of the family. She continued to swim and bicycle and took part in a play put on by the children of the families summering in the area. She kept asking her parents and the

director of Llar what exactly was wrong with her. They hinted at the potential seriousness of her condition but did not tell her openly that she had incurable cancer. One day, the director of Llar mentioned that some tumors degenerate into cancer. Montse continued to be serene, and asked, "But if it is the Lord who gave me a vocation, why wouldn't He give me health?" "Certainly," the director responded, "but you are ready for everything, aren't you?" "Yes, of course," Montse replied, "although I'm very afraid of suffering and the doctors frighten me. But if God sends me more suffering, as you say, God will help me very much, as you all will." The director of Llar noticed that "she was growing in interior life. She asked me how to live better little things, grew in her devotion to the Virgin, and showed great sincerity in everything. She always spoke with great simplicity."

Eventually, Montse's parents told her that they would talk with her at the end of the summer when they returned to Barcelona. The evening they returned, Montse insisted that they talk immediately without putting things off to the next morning. Her parents told her clearly that she had cancer. Her first response was to say that perhaps they could amputate her leg. When her father replied that the doctors said that would not help, for a moment she put on a face as if to say "What a shame." Then, without saying anything, she went to her room, knelt before a picture of Our Lady of Montserrat, and prayed briefly saying, "Whatever you want." Then she sat down and examined her conscience.

Her mother decided to spend the night with her, fearing that she would not be able to sleep after receiving such terrible news. She

poked her to move over and make room. Montse asked what she was doing. "I'm going to sleep with you." "What luck!" Montse commented in a jovial tone of voice. She rested her head on her mother's shoulder, and in a few seconds fell asleep.

The witnesses differ on how clearly she understood her condition at first. Both her parents think that from the beginning she understood clearly that she was going to die. Others who were close to her think that at first she still expected to recover. At minimum, she understood that she had cancer and that it was very serious. As her mother comments, that makes her initial reaction all the more remarkable:

I recall perfectly her expression. Just pursing her lips. Her eyes did not fill with tears or anything else. Nothing! Nothing! How supernatural!
Supernatural. I thought about it

before employing that word, but it is the appropriate one. What could I say otherwise? How unnatural? Or how abnormal? No. She always acted normally and naturally.

It was evident that God was comforting her. Because suddenly all her dreams were taken away. Everything.... From that moment on she couldn't convert any of her dreams into realities.

The next morning, Montse went to confession with a priest of Opus Dei. One person who saw her right afterward recalls noticing that she had cried, but the priest recalls that she reacted "with the deep joy of someone who has abandoned herself entirely in the Lords hands." After confession, she went to Llar. Seeing that Lía, the director was busy she said that she would like to talk to her when she was free and asked what she would like her to do in the

meantime Lía asked her to iron some oratory linens. While ironing, Montse sang a Mexican song: "When I was living happily without thinking about your affection, you wanted me to love you, and I loved you madly. And I will continue loving you even after death. Because I love you with my soul, and the soul never dies. I love you with my soul and the soul never dies.

Hearing her sing so cheerfully, Lía thought that perhaps she had not understood what her parents had told her. But seeing that Lía had been crying, Montse asked her, "Have you been crying Lía? Well, you know that I know everything including that I have to die soon, because Papa told me yesterday."

"Then what, Montse?"

"I am ready. I went to confession and I am very content. The priest told me that I am lucky because soon I am

going to enjoy God. At the beginning, I didn't see it that way, but now yes and I am very tranquil and very content. I have great peace, and I love the will of God. Remind me about that in case I forget. I want to do the will of God. This is the second time that I give myself to God.

“Mama tells me to ask Isidoro for a cure,” Montse continued. “But what do you think? I get very mixed up. Sometimes I think that I want to be cured. Other times I think that if the Lord wants this, it is because it is his will. When I find myself mixed up like that . . . I tell the Virgin that she should arrange everything as she wants. Don't you think that's the best?”

After telling Lía about her conversation with her parents she said, “Mama thought that I would say something to her, but I couldn't think of anything. I felt a lump in my

throat, and I could only think that I had to be strong.

Lía recalls that Montse said she had a hard time coming to grips with the idea of dying because she said she wasn't in any pain. She added that she accepted pain as a "purification for going to Heaven," and if God wanted to take her to heaven, "I am ready," she continued.

"Now what are you praying for?" Lía asked her.

"I pray that the Will of God be done. That way I will also be much more tranquil," Montse responded.

Montse and Lía talked about the death of St. Josemaría's sister Carmen, who had died of cancer two years earlier. Lía said that she had suffered a great deal and that she had been a very holy woman. Montse asked Lía for help from all the

members of the Work. “I want to be as courageous as she was,” she said.

When Lía asked her what she had thought when her father explained things to her, “she told me that she had picked up a crucifix, kissed it, and said “*Serviam*” I will serve you Lord. I will be faithful.”

Montse said that the next day she was going to write to the Father asking him to pray for her and telling him that she was going to offer everything for Opus Dei. But then her eyes filled with tears as she asked, “So now I can no longer be a numerary member of the Work?” Her face lit up when Lía told her that of course she could be a numerary. Lía comments “I saw that she had great peace. As if she had suddenly matured. I even told her that we had been thinking about her going to Paris to start Opus Dei there. ‘But look, Montse,’ I said to her, ‘from

now on we are going to pray for that undertaking although you're not going to be able to go.”

After being told that she had cancer, Montse registered for classes and began attending them. She avoided talking about her illness and tried to live a normal life without becoming the center of attention. One day when her mother saw her spending a lot of time trying to choose between two new dresses, she began to think that Montse must not realize she wasn't going to wear the new dress for long. She commented to her, “Your father is convinced that you will be cured. I sometimes think so also. What about you?” Montse answered with a peaceful smile, “I never think about it.” Her mother took this to mean that Montse had abandoned herself entirely in God's hands.

On October 2, the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of Opus Dei, she went to the anniversary party at Llar, but soon began to suffer serious pain and felt ill. Not wanting to upset anyone, she left quietly and made her way home. She knew her parents were planning on going to a movie and didn't want to them stay home to take care of her. She smiled as she came in the door and began to set the table but soon had to ask her sister to take over for her. When her mother found her lying down in her room, Montse tried to assure her that she was fine and that there was no reason for them not to go to the movies, but soon the pain became so bad that she could not contain her tears. Naturally, her parents stayed home with her.

As her health deteriorated, Montse struggled to come closer to God. Of course, she had her ups and downs

because, as St. Josemaría wrote, the interior life is “to begin . . . and to begin again.” For Montse, an ongoing struggle was to pray well during the two half-hour periods she dedicated to mental prayer each day. She noted in her examination of conscience one day in October 1958, “I find it hard to be united to God.” A few days later: Prayer: Better in the morning, but I lost about ten minutes with distractions.” Toward the end of the month: “Prayer: I find it very difficult because I don’t know what to say to Him.” Sometimes she was able to say, “Prayer. I made more of an effort and it went better.” But then, “Prayer: Quite bad. I was distracted.”

Meeting St. Josemaría

In November 1958, Montse made a short trip to Rome fundamentally to see the Father. Her family decided that she should go alone because if her mother accompanied her the

natural thing would be for her to stay with her mother in the hotel. If she went alone, she would stay in a center of the Work. Montse decided to bring high heels for meeting the Father, although she could barely get them on because of swelling.

On the way to Rome, the plane encountered thunderstorms and bounced around a great deal. Montse prayed many Acts of Contrition, thinking she might die at any moment. Members of the Work met her at the airport and took her to a center near Opus Dei's central house, Villa Tevere. In preparation for her visit, they had turned a ground-floor sitting room into a bedroom so that she would not need to go up and down stairs. The next morning, Encarnita Ortega, the worldwide head of Opus Dei's women's branch came to see her and take her to St. Peter's Basilica.

The following day, Montse met the Father. He asked her about her family, and about what she had seen both in Opus Dei's central house and in Rome. He also urged her to pray for health and to promise God that if he granted it she would always be faithful. At the same time, the Father said, she should tell God that she fully accepted his will. He added that he wanted her to recover and would pray that she did, but that he accepted God's will. He gave her a rosary, a holy card, and a medal. Before the visit ended, he asked someone to take a picture of Montse with him, Don Álvaro del Portillo, and several other members.

During her brief tours of the city, Montse was very impressed with the beauty and grandeur of Rome, but she kept a sharp eye out for bottle caps to bring to her younger brother for his collection and bought small presents for the other members of

the family. She attended an informal after-lunch get-together with young women of the Work from many different countries who were studying in Rome. A number of them sang songs from their countries, and Montse joined in singing a Catalan song.

Both during the get-together and during the rest of her stay, Montse tried to cover up her pain, but when Encarnita asked her if she was in much pain she answered simply, “Yes. It’s as if a furious dog was biting me all the time.” She added that she was terrified of pain but was convinced “that if I am faithful in what God asks of me every day, he will give me his grace.” The young woman in the room next to hers had told her that if she couldn’t sleep she should come and talk, but she didn’t want to wake her up, so after tossing and turning for a long time, she got up, danced a bit in front of the

picture of Our Lady in her room, lay down again and promptly went to sleep.

Visiting Rome and meeting St. Josemaría were highlights of Montse's life. In later days when she was suffering a great deal and alone with her mother in her room, she would often say, "What a wonderful thing, Mama, those days."

Concern for Other People

The day after returning home she was supposed to stay in bed, but when a visitor came she got up to show her all the things she had brought from Rome. Her visitor commented later, "This happened to her a lot. At times, she was very tired, but when charity required something, she reacted as if she didn't find it hard at all." When friends from Llar and other friends came to visit, she talked, sang, played cards, and prayed with them. She

tried to encourage everyone, including older people who came to visit her, to be close to God and to try to bring others close to him.

According to one of her best friends, “she took great pleasure in giving herself to others, and she was happy when she saw that her friends were content, especially when they grew in interior life and discovered the possibility of greater generosity with God.”

Often when people came to visit, she was in pain and felt sick, but despite the effort it cost her, she kept a smile on her face. When she knew friends were coming she tried to fix herself up. If they commented on how pretty she looked, she responded, “that’s because I fixed myself up to look pretty when you came.” One day some cousins and friends came to visit. Montse’s mother suspected that she would find their visit exhausting. When another girl who was a close

friend dropped by to visit, Montse's mother suggested she ask the other visitors to leave if it seemed Montse was in a lot of pain. But Montse seemed so cheerful and upbeat that the girl didn't say anything until the visitors finally left on their own. As soon as they had closed the door, Montse exclaimed, "I can't take it anymore! I can't take it anymore! I can't take it anymore!" and threw off the blankets that were weighing on her leg. On another occasion when her mother asked her if she felt like seeing two girls who wanted to visit, she responded "Mama, we're not here to do what we feel like. Tell them to come in."

Her doctor recalls: "I never saw her sad or bitter or depressed. All of my visits were lively, cheerful, upbeat, without any trace of sadness, despite the seriousness of the illness she suffered." When someone suggested she stop telling the doctor that she

was well she responded, “He’s doing all that he can. There’s nothing more he can do. And telling him I’m having a bad time just makes him suffer.” She resisted asking for painkillers because they made her too sleepy to spend time with her friends. She didn’t want to lose the opportunity to enjoy their company and occasionally encourage them to go to Llar or to pray more.

In Llar, as in many other centers of Opus Dei, they celebrated a novena in preparation for the feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8. Montse attended the novena every day, although she had to lie down for a while after arriving at the center. After the novena, she stayed on for a while talking to the girls who had come. As Christmas approached, she decided to ask for a coat to wear outside, because she thought that would signal to her parents that she was still hopeful

about being able to go out again. At the same time, she was careful to choose something that one of her siblings would be able to use when she was gone.

One of the members of the Work who spent most time with Montse was Rosa Pantaleoni who had been crippled by polio. Looking back on the many hours she spent with Montse, she says:

I'm a very sensitive person. Seeing others suffer makes a deep impression on me. But Montse carried the cross in such a way that I never felt sorry for her. I never left her house sad. I recall that my parents said they couldn't understand how I could spend entire afternoons with her and return so cheerful. It was very difficult to explain the atmosphere that Montse created around her, and that her family fostered: an atmosphere of

detachment, of the gift of self, the love of God, and of human affection such that all the negative aspects of pain were not noticed.

It was very difficult to explain the joy that was found in that room. No one will be able to understand how we were happy. I still do not understand the joy with which I went to that house and the joy with which I left it, considering how horrible all that was from a human point of view. At the time, I couldn't tell anybody about these things because no one would understand. No one would understand that there could be an environment of so much joy. Now when I think about it, all of that seems impossible to me. I don't understand how I could spend so many hard moments at her side and yet the two of us be happy. Perhaps it is that at her side I learned, with the example of her life, what our Founder taught us: that what truly

makes a person unfortunate is attempting to take the cross out of life, and that encountering the cross is to encounter Christ, to encounter Love. . . At her side, I learned to... Love. I don't know if that's quite the right word but I don't find another. I learned to love her illness and my own.

Her Final Months

Gradually the swelling in her leg grew worse and she developed open sores. Changing bandages became a long, painful process, but she managed not to complain. On one occasion when her father was holding her up outside of bed so that the bandages could be changed, she asked him to dance with her. She was anxious not to have her illness throw a pall of sadness over the family. From time to time she asked her family to sing. One day, while other family members were singing,

her father pretended to be reading the paper so she wouldn't notice his tears. Seeing that he was not singing, she said "Papa, I can't hear you. I want you all to be happy."

As the months went past, Montse was filled with a desire for heaven and began to ask people to talk to her about it. Her mother liked to talk with her about heaven, because when she did Montse smiled. One day she told her mother she wanted to go soon. Her mother responded, "Yes, but when God wants it." Montse remained silent for a moment and then said simply, "Fine." That was a condensed version of a prayer she said often, "Lord, whatever you want. When you want. As you want it." On another occasion when her mother told her that she thought she might fall asleep and wake up in heaven, she said, "But if it's like that, we won't have time to say goodbye!"

Her mother knelt beside her bed, and they embraced.

After receiving the anointing of the sick, she said, "I have such desires to go. When will it end?" Her parents responded that perhaps the Lord wanted her to help him by suffering some more. "In that case," she said, "a few days more don't matter. Or what the Lord wants." Three or four days before her death she said to the director of Llar, "Lía, how slowly all this is going. I would never have thought that it was so difficult to die. But in any case, you know I'm very content. Apparently, the Lord still needs me."

Shortly before Montse's death, her parents told her that she might die the next day. She exclaimed, "Is that true, Mama, that I'm going to go now? Do you understand? Heaven forever! Do you understand? To Heaven! I'm going to Heaven!" "Yes,

my daughter, you are going and you will be very happy. But how we will miss you when your little brother Rafita grows up or when Enrique is ordained!” “But, Papa! I will see it all from heaven, and from there I will pray for all of you.”

Still, at times Montse experienced fear and doubts about whether she would go to heaven, a trial that God permits in the lives of many holy people. A week and a half before her death, she made her last note from her daily examination of conscience: “Lack of peace and anxiety. As if I were alone.” She asked Lía, the director of Llar “Do you really think the Lord wants me in heaven? Sometimes I suffer a great deal from temptations that come and go. But if you tell me I will go to heaven, I believe you. I believe you. ... Tell me! Repeat it again and again! ‘I will go to heaven. I will go to heaven. I will go to heaven.’”

Even during the intense suffering of her final days, she continued to focus on others and be concerned about their spiritual well-being. Just two or three days before her death, she talked with a visitor in detail about his family. When two friends came to visit, she urged them to go to Llar. One of them wrote in her diary that day "At that moment life had full sense. You Lord were there. It was necessary to live for You, much more directed toward you, completely for you. With you, life had a real meaning, without you it lost all sense. It's strange to find the sense of life through death."

A nonbelieving friend who visited her in her final days was disconcerted by Montse's ability to take an interest in him and his family in such difficult moments: "I was very moved by her sentiments. I faced a reality that was disconcerting for someone incapable of seeing

things from the supernatural point of view. That young girl was behaving with the naturalness that always characterized her as if she was not a prisoner of what I knew she had and that was making her suffer so much. I went away disconcerted ‘This girl is dying’ I thought, ‘and the only thing that interests her is how I am doing and how my family is doing, how things are going for us.’ Turning toward home I thought ‘I don’t understand it. She has a rotten leg and she knows it perfectly well, and yet she continues to act as she always has, without becoming sad. I really don’t understand it.’” This was the beginning of his conversion.

Montse struggled not only to smile and appear cheerful but to really be happy. In her examination of conscience she took note of days when she was “a little down.” Other days she was able to say “I have struggled a great deal to be happy

and content,” or “Joy despite everything, yes.” Joy did not come easily. One day she noted, “In the morning, dejection. Then I overcame it with joy.” A few weeks before her death, she observed, “Joy, good, but need for still more.”

Montse’s final words were, “I’m so happy, so happy. I am so content.”

The cause for Montse’s beatification began in 1962. In 2016, Pope Francis approved a decree confirming that she had lived the virtues to a heroic degree.

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This sketch of Montserrat Grases is from John Coverdale's book and podcast "Encounters: Finding God in All Walks of Life." *Encounters* presents profiles of people living Saint Josemaria's message of finding God in everyday life.

The profiles have been released as an audio podcast series, available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your podcasts. You can also purchase the entire book from Amazon or Scepter Publishers.

John Coverdale

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