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A God of surprises

In a recent interview with Olga Marlin, author of *To Africa with a Dream* and *Our lives in his Hands*, she started off by saying that “God, is a God of Surprises!”. Below is an excerpt of that interview.

06/12/2020

The first of God’s surprises in Olga Marlin’s life was her encounter with Opus Dei while still a university student in Dublin, Ireland. She said yes to God, fulfilling a yearning she had had to give her life entirely to

Him, at the same time without changing the circumstances of her life. She was studying to become a teacher. The second came in 1960, when, at the request of Saint Josemaría, she left all she knew and travelled to Kenya, where he had said teachers were needed. “I immediately said yes, but I had to look for a map to find where Kenya was.” June 13, 2020 marks 60 years since she and four others set foot on Kenyan soil, setting out on an adventure that has influenced the lives of many women in East Africa.

What was the impact on your life of meeting Saint Josemaria in person?

The first impact was realizing that Saint Josemaría was really a Father. Each one of his daughters mattered to him. I first met him in Rome while studying at the Roman College. One day in a get-together, he looked at me

penetratingly and asked, “Are you going to be faithful for me, my daughter?” I answered with all my heart: “Yes, Father!”. That has stayed with me all my life.

If he would have had the chance to visit Kenya, what do you think he would have been most happy with?

It would have made Saint Josemaría deeply happy to see how the spirit of Opus Dei has taken root in Africa. On 2nd October 1928 he “saw” Opus Dei as universal, for people of all nations, races and cultures – but here in Kenya he would experience it.

In a letter he wrote to us on June 26, 1972, he said: “How many hopes I have placed in my African daughters and all the work they have before them, on that continent and all over the world. May this contribute to make you more faithful every day and more serenely responsibly. May our Lord and His Mother bless you.”

How has being in Kenya changed you as a person? And what do you like most about being in Kenya?

I guess I have become Kenyan! What I like most is having so many good friends.

What advice would you give a person who has just begun their vocation journey?

Always say “Yes” to God: in the little things and in the big ones. His plan for us is much greater than we can imagine, but it needs our cooperation.

What can we do to reach to young people and instill in them the need for God even when the environment they are in is difficult?

It is very important to teach doctrine – the Catechism of the Catholic Church - so that they are able to

know God and to fall in love with Him. You can't love what you don't know.

Last year the Bishops of Kenya launched a campaign to help fight the scourge of corruption. How does one keep close to God in this environment?

We have to “overcome evil with an abundance of good”. We keep close to God by having a daily plan of life and keeping to it. When we were coming to Kenya in 1960, the last thing Saint Josemaría told us was: “Fulfil the norms (the plan of life), fulfil the norms for me!” If we kept close to God every day, the rest would follow.

What apostolic dreams do you have for the region?

Dreams for the East African Region - that all the “ignition points” (towns where apostolic work is underway

sporadically) may soon have Centres and many people of the Work to staff them!

How are you spending this period of the pandemic?

The coronavirus shutdown has helped me spend time learning how to run Zoom Meetings and give online classes...

How would you describe these last 60 years?

I would describe them in the same terms that Saint Josemaría used when looking back over fifty years, he saw all that God had done “with a handful of good-for-nothings!” We were all young and inexperienced; everything we did was by trial and error... but we never neglected the norms, and God blessed our work beyond our wildest dreams.

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(03/05/2026)