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Relentlessly loved: My vocation and journey to Opus Dei.

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In the 15 or so years that I have been a member of the Opus Dei or the Work as it is commonly known, I could say, in looking back that I, like

all members, have been relentlessly loved.

Contrary to what one might think, to be loved is not an easy thing, and to be loved greatly – beyond what we believe we are worth, can be a very difficult thing indeed.

When no one loves us, very little is expected of us and so we can collapse into a heap, in the midst of all our miseries and failings – with a whimper of self-pity. Not to be loved gives a cast-iron excuse for failing.

Any daughter or son who is much loved by his parents will most likely admit his desire to please them trying harder than he or she might ordinarily have done.

Any member of Opus Dei is considered a first rate person and citizen of both heaven and the world. Young and old, married, single or celibate for apostolic reasons –

everybody is expected to try hard – or die trying.

In Opus Dei, there is no holiness for priests and another for lay persons. Everyone is supposed to strive for sanctity as hard as possible according to their state in life, whether married or single, a professional artist, housewife, matatu driver or tout.

Once a person is exhorted to strive for holiness in the midst of the world, one is supported with formation and the prayers of all members. Indeed all members are asked to say a *Memorare* (a prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary) daily for whoever is in most need at any particular time, whether the person is facing moral or physical danger, but particularly danger that may cause the person to separate himself from God.

I have on several occasions felt and benefited from these constant

prayers of the tens of thousands of members all over the world. I believe that this constant support with prayer and this relentless love – being loved as a matter of principle – regardless of personal failings and obvious shortcomings, gives one an incredible impetus in the struggle for sanctity in the midst of the world.

To struggle for holiness in the midst of the world is not rocket science, nor is it a feat of endurance by extraordinary persons.

Its challenge lies precisely in its very simplicity: ordinary persons doing ordinary things extraordinarily well – without fanfare, without show, without a victim complex. Thus it may be very difficult to jump in front of a car and save someone from being run over; but in reward one will be mentioned in the papers or the Guinness Book of Records or will receive other acclaim for that

moment of adrenaline-driven courage. On the other hand, one will receive no acclaim whatsoever – and might even be considered challenged in some way – intellectually or otherwise – for being there for one's family, being kind and attentive to a spouse, trying to teach some pretty ordinary children to the best of one's ability, typing a letter to perfection, being punctual and such like things – but every day. Of course one fails often – and when this happens, she is encouraged to have the courage to get up again; and again – and again.

I think this willingness to try again and again is the only thing that may point out a member of the Work. Otherwise one must pass unnoticed.

Various persons who have left the Work for whatever reason – and one is always free to leave though encouraged and supported to stay – have accused the Work of being

intrusive or of curbing their freedom. On the contrary, one enjoys such complete freedom that it may be mistaken for lack of freedom. No one does the thinking for you in Opus Dei. You think for yourself, you act for yourself and you are responsible for your thought and action. If you ask you will be advised within reason – but that's it. However, making decisions is one of the hardest things in life. It is so much easier to blame others.

The only thing that is not left to chance is the formation of conscience and the knowledge of doctrine – so that the eye of the mind can see clearly – both shortcomings and strengths – and then act in the light of reason and faith.

There are no vows of any kind in Opus Dei. One commits oneself to struggle to be holy and to avail oneself for formation. Opus Dei on

the other hand commits itself to providing formation and spiritual support – including spiritual direction and the above mentioned support with prayers. The Founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaria Escriva, made it clear that the word of any son or daughter of his was enough. If you say you will try hard – it is expected and taken in good faith that you will.

Opus Dei on its part takes its commitment to give formation so seriously that even when a member moves away to a country without a centre of the Work, every attempt is made to visit that person regularly to provide spiritual direction and moral support – even at a great cost. Money in Opus Dei is for apostolate despite the many stories one hears.

For some reason this trust that Opus Dei has in its members, and the heartfelt desire of its members to at

least try hard seems to puzzle so many people. How can ordinary men and women aspire to such things? What is done to them to make them want to go to Mass daily and confession regularly – weekly, if possible?

Nothing is done. Nothing at all. They are just loved relentlessly – which is God's way of loving, really. The least a person can do is to try hard. There is no mystery to it. I hope this demystifies Opus Dei a little and allays fears of those who think that something extraordinary is happening. But again the love of God for us is extraordinary – endlessly so. This is the secret drama that has been taking place in people from all continents over these eighty years of the life of Opus Dei – since that 2nd October 1928 when St Josemaria **saw** Opus Dei, as God wanted it!

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