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From the Ashes

On the Jubilee of Consolation (15 September), Chizoba shares how she and her family learned to see God's care for them when they lost their home to fire shortly after migrating to Canada.

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In August 2023, I picked up my little daughter, who had just turned four, and left my husband and three older daughters back home in Nigeria to seek better opportunities for my children in Canada. I also left my

father, a widower, and my mother-in-law, both of whom I cared for, to relocate. When I left, my heart was filled with dreams and hope for my family.

The transition was not easy. The culture shock was immense; I felt lonely, the days were too long, and the nights were lonely. However, I held tight to my faith, trusting that Holy Mary, solace of migrants, was helping me. I pressed forward, confident that God had a purpose for every part of my life, as Jeremiah says (cf. *Jer* 29:11). We were pilgrims of hope.

I tried to build a home in this new environment, and eventually my twin daughters joined me, so although I was still missing my husband and eldest daughter, I had more of my family with me.

Up in smoke

Suddenly, in March 2024, tragedy struck. Within a space of 30 or 40 minutes, we lost our home to a fire. My children and I were saved by a friendly neighbour who banged on our door in the middle of the night, screaming, “Fire!” At the sound of his warning, all I could think of was to grab my documents and my children. That’s exactly what I did. We escaped with our lives, stood outside, and watched everything else we owned go up in flames.

The loss and grief nearly overwhelmed me. I questioned many things: my decision to migrate, my faith, everything. Yet I found consolation in the assurance that I am God’s daughter, in my divine filiation, and in the conviction that nothing happens to me outside of God’s knowledge. This gave me hope and the confidence that all would be well.

My constant aspiration then was *omnia in bonum*, because I knew that all things would work together for my good and the good of my family. My children and I drew strength from the words of the founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría Escrivá, who encouraged us never to lose our supernatural outlook on life. These words carried me through sleepless nights and despair.

The reality of all we had lost hit hard. We couldn't stop counting our losses. We didn't know how to face the world after losing so much. My children often asked how we would manage without our comfortable home and belongings.

However, the Holy Spirit comforted us when we reflected on St. Josemaría's words in *The Way*: "Be content with what enables you to live a simple and sober life. Otherwise, you will never be an apostle" (no.

631). We began by emotionally detaching from material things, and even in the midst of grief, hope and consolation found us.

Indeed, God intervened through the fraternity of other women in Opus Dei, my workplace, the college where I was studying, and the city where we live. Everyone went the extra mile to wipe our tears and help us find our bearings. We were consoled by countless acts of kindness: people donated meals and clothes, and strangers became vessels of divine comfort and intervention.

A spark of hope

The fire happened during Lent, just before Holy Week. We embraced all the sacraments and journeyed with Christ during his Passion, aligning our sufferings with his and placing our hearts on the cross alongside his, casting all our burdens and anxieties on the One who truly cares for us.

We clung to God's promises when everything seemed bleak, and his mercy renewed and consoled us.

By God's grace, a few days after the fire, we were blessed with a bigger, more comfortable apartment in a beautiful part of town. It was an amazing blessing that lifted our spirits, renewed our joy, and reminded us that God's plans are always greater than ours. What seemed like an end turned out to be a new beginning, filled with hope and gratitude.

From this experience, I learned that we must never lose sight of our divine filiation. We must live consciously as children of God, with the conviction that He loves us deeply and cares for us. Our hope is in God alone.

St. Augustine, who experienced bitterness when God was unknown to him and sought happiness

elsewhere, wrote, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” And St. Josemaría comments: “There is no greater tragedy for man than the sense of disillusionment he suffers when he has corrupted or falsified his hope, by placing it in something other than the one Love which satisfies without ever satiating” (*Friends of God*, no. 208).

God is our only true source of hope and consolation. He always beckons us to come as we are, to receive help, solace, and consolation in times of need. Let us cultivate the habit of abandoning ourselves into the generous hands of our loving Father.

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