

IROTO:"There is joy in making others happy and helping them enjoy themselves"

Ezinne Ukagwu is the director of the Iroto Rural Development Centre. In a brief encounter she speaks about Iroto, their work there, what motivates them and the constant joy they derive from their work of service. She is an Accountant by training.

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Ezinne studied accountancy from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. That first degree in “numbers and figures” prepared her very well for her next professional job involving Management of persons and organisations. She has been at Iroto since 1997.

“The work is tough and the load is heavy, because there are so many things to do, and yet working with people is so enjoyable. Although this place started only as a Rural Centre, we have as you have seen begun other projects such as the Health Centre, different activities of the Rural Development Centre and the Catering School.

“When work multiplies and one is tired - there is the natural tendency to be tired and we often are - one quickly reminds oneself that this is after all what service is all about. You are on your feet all day,

“We are always busy, always have something worthwhile to do, being of service to others but that precisely is the way we want it to be; after all, you cannot sit down and serve! You’re always busy, always having something to do but there is the satisfaction that you’re doing things for the others, changing the lives of so very many people.

“There is the joy that you are making other people happy and helping them enjoy themselves. That is good to see! I also tell this to some of the girls who work here, that even though the people they serve cannot personally thank them, they have been made happy. They realize this too and are content.”

Since we know that the founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría Escrivá had an influence in the beginning of such social projects, the question was thrown to Ezinne as to whether the

saint has any influence on her understanding of these aforementioned realities. Her immediate exclamation was answer enough:

“For me? Ah, a lot! You know, it’s exactly like what St. Josemaría said about getting to the end of a typical day without having thought about oneself... you ended the day working, working, working... but you’re completely, totally happy. At first you marvel at the source of this strength, but the answer soon comes. God Himself, who is the *raison d’être* of this self giving (and here I am speaking for the many wonderful women who work here, and not just myself), rewards it with not only strength, but joy... a joy of course which is a foretaste of Heaven!

“St. Josemaría says that though you could have been somewhere else taking care of your own little world,

putting yourself at the service of others somehow multiplies your time and joy. That's the way I see it".

When asked if she could put her finger on a single aspect of either the life or teaching of St. Josemaría that has made the greatest impact on her, the reply was immediate:

"His self-giving. He was a person that was always there for everybody, always and seemed never to be tired. He was never upset by anything because he believed himself to be a child of God. He was always there for everybody at all times. I mean, sometimes you wake up in the morning and thinking of all the projects waiting to be executed, you do not feel like getting out of bed, you remember models like this and the grace of God, and up you go!

"From St. Josemaría I have learnt (and I try to teach the others around me too), the value of taking care of

little details. From him too I have learnt that beyond the physical work, I must be concerned about the persons with whom I work: their persons (joys, concerns, hopes); their health and of course their holiness. It is true that the entire place might be looking good and sparkling and the Conference Centre is running like clock-work. The bigger question is: Are the workers happy? Are they in good health? Are they sanctifying themselves, becoming holy through these encounters with God in their daily work? What about their families? And here I speak also of the men who work in the gardening and maintenance of the Conference Centre. It is not enough to supervise their work and pay their salaries at the end of the month. For them too, one has the concern that they be happy and their families too. That is why our workers enjoy the free medical facilities at the Health Centre.

“When you visit the villages, the people greet you warmly with such open smiles and you realise they have learnt something from us to give their lives more joy and hope.”

Iloti Village, Ogun State
(NIGERIA)

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