

My Encounter with "The Way"

After about thirty years of his first encounter, Fr. Idahosa still relishes the short sayings of "The Way". Recently he read the 999 points afresh, during 87 days, with an online group on WhatsApp called Cell Word Sharing. The group which has up to 673 members promotes the reading of spiritual books. Their final challenge was: What is your 1000th point from your overall study of the book?

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I first came in contact with *The Way* as a teenager in secondary school. I found the small pocket-sized edition on the floor of our students' dormitory. I later discovered that it was brought in by one of our fellow students whose dad was in the Work. When I picked it up and began to read, the book made a deep impression on me. It had a way of stirring up a high ideal. This was at a time of my youthful exuberance when much energy was spent on dreams about lofty ideas. *The Way* became a fitting companion for me.

I still relish the short sayings that gave no room for compromise and invited me to explore the horizons: "Don't let your life be barren. Be useful. Make yourself felt. Shine forth with the torch of your faith and

your love” (*The Way*, no. 1). Before then I had not heard much about the author. But the words of *The Way* were loud and clear. I found them useful for my daily meditation and also for counsel. They have a way of saying there is a way in every situation. They went to the heart of the Christian faith and brought out the essence of it in a most ordinary and relatable manner.

When I first read *The Way*, I knew practically nothing about St. Josemaría and his teachings. But getting to know the teachings of the founder of Opus Dei, especially his insistence on our universal call to sanctity, helped to appreciate the background of *The Way* better. The naturalness with which he spoke about our call to be saints as not something meant for a few, but for all, was most impressive. ‘We are all called to be saints, saints that can be canonised.’ These teachings found a

practical counterpart in the short sayings of *The Way*. They show us the ‘how’ of being a Saint. We are to be saints in the middle of the world by converting our joys and misfortunes into moments to encounter God in love. “These world crises are crises of saints” (*The Way*, no. 301).

I recently had the opportunity to read *The Way* afresh with an online *Whatsapp* group of friends called Cell Word Sharing that I assist to coordinate. The Cell is tailored towards aiding everyone, especially the very busy person, to do some spiritual reading daily. A portion of the spiritual book being read is posted daily together with an audio version of the post. The text could be read in less than ten mins and the audio version can be listened to in an even shorter. After reading members are encouraged to mark ‘done’ and share any reflection from the text or ask questions if they have any.

After we finished a series of books, we decided to survey members on the next set of books to read. *The Way* was one of ten shortlisted books. But the first book earmarked to be read was the “*Imitation of Christ*” by Thomas à Kempis. Our study of this work from the Middle Ages proved enriching as the author always invited his reader, which was basically a monastic setting, to take radical steps in the Christian way of life. Some persons in the cell, which is made up of mostly lay persons, had difficulties with some of the challenges posed by the book. While they appreciated its depth, they felt it did not speak to their situation, even when there were daily reflections that tried to reinterpret the book within our present-day context. What book can we read to serve as a counterbalance to the *Imitation*, that is, say the same thing within a different context, the context of the Christian in the middle of the world?

The choice was a clear one: St. Josemaría's *The Way* – a book written to encourage Christians in the midst of the world to embrace the life of holiness.

In 87 days, we set out to read the 999 points. But some persons in the group wondered how it could serve as a spiritual reading. Was it not more appropriate as a book for meditation? How can one read through the short sayings that some could take a day to ponder a point? In going ahead, we resolved we need not assimilate the intricacies of the number of points posted each day before we can have a conclusive daily spiritual reading. It is enough to dwell on any point that strikes us and from there make our 1000th point to complete the 999 points of *The Way*.

For me, reading *The Way* in the cell has been a time to remember those

sayings that have been pivotal to my fundamental intuitions. They remind me that the call to sanctity is possible. Grace is available for it. All I need to do is to ask for it.: “Don't let your life be barren. Be useful”; “These world crises are crises of saints!”.

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