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New Video Series: "The Richness of Ordinary Life"

In this series of videos "The Richness of Ordinary Life" Prof. Regina Eya explains how the message of St. Josemaría about seeking holiness in ordinary life can be lived in the family, at work and in social life from the perspective of being a child of God.

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This is the first of the Series of videos presented by Prof. Regina Eya who explains how the message of St. Josemaría of seeking holiness in ordinary life, the life we live from morning till night, made up of simple, routine things, like waking up in the morning, going to work, or to church, cooking, visiting friends, etc. Most people do not achieve spectacular success but make do with whatever they achieve. For everyone the new but old teaching of St. Josemaría has changed everything: The divine paths of the earth have been opened. He says that "There is something holy, something divine hidden in the most ordinary situations and it is up to everyone of us to find it."

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TEXT

In the year 2002, October 6th, to be precise, a crowd of hundreds of thousands of people gathered at St. Peter's Square in Rome to witness an event the world had prayed for since 1975. It was the canonization of St. Josemaría Escrivá, a Spanish priest, who was born in January 1902, and died in 1975. He founded Opus Dei, a personal prelature in the Catholic Church, on October 2, 1928, an organization through which he taught that we can achieve holiness and become saints by doing ordinary things. By the time he died, Opus Dei had spread to all the continents of the world and had over 60,000 members of 80 nations, including Nigeria. Because Josemaría had emphasized the importance of ordinary things in our salvation and because this had won the attention of thousands of people, the Pope, John Paul II, on the occasion of this canonization called St. Josemaría the

saint of ordinary life. The Pope concluded by saying

“May the example and teaching of St. Josemaría be an incentive to us so that at the end of the earthly pilgrimage, we too may be able to share in the blessed inheritance of heaven.”

Josemaría’s teaching has certainly served and is still serving as incentive to thousands of people who have now learned to go through life in a spiritually victorious way just through our ordinary life—ordinary things, like we do in Nigeria in good times and in bad, in tough times and at easy times.

What is ordinary life?

To most people, ordinary life is what it says—ordinary. It is the life ordinary people live. The kind of life we live from morning till night doing ordinary things. Not like astronauts

when they go to the moon, or scientists when they make great inventions; not like the nuns who live a holy life in their convents, or the bishop of the diocese as he confers the sacrament of confirmation; not like generals when they fight a war, nor like the President of the United States as he addresses Congress or the Queen of England as she visits a foreign country, nor even the Pope at beatification ceremonies. Of course when these great men and women are not at these important posts they may be doing ordinary things like eating their meals, receiving their guests or taking their families on holiday etc. Ordinary life is the life of the people who do ordinary things—simple, routine things, like waking up in the morning, going to school or to work (in the farm or the office), feeding your family, taking your children to school, going to Church, visiting your friends, going to

weddings, christening ceremonies and even attending funerals of friends or loved ones. It includes cooking, attending meetings, eating and drinking, settling a quarrel between neighbours, resting or reading, perhaps even fishing and other leisure time activities.

Sometimes in the course of doing these things people may achieve spectacular success in their career or in society by doing their ordinary work very well, with a lot of effort and skill.

Most people do not actually achieve spectacular success but make do with whatever results they achieve. Yet both for those who achieve great heights and those who do not, a new (yet old), teaching has changed everything. This is the teaching of St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei. He teaches that:

“There is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to every one of us to find it.”¹

When we find this divine side of ordinary things, he says, then they take on new meanings that urge us on in a new way of life that opens before us. Embracing this new way of life prompts us to continually live in the presence of God, working for Him, making whatever we do pleasing to Him and attracting others to do the same as we go along. Thus, according to St. Josemaría, it does not matter whether we are pounding yam or roasting plantain in the kitchen, teaching a class of undergraduates in the university or nursing a sick person; whether we are on holiday at a resort, cutting firewood in the forest or trimming the bushes in the garden. Anybody could do just that. But the person who sees the supernatural side of all

these things is doing something more: he/she is seeking God, finding God and loving God. Such a person begins the work with God, sustains the work by the grace of God and ends the work in God and for God. Since most of us live ordinary lives, it is mainly through these ordinary things that we meet God. It is in them that we fulfil the will of God and through them that we gain heaven, our eternal destination after this short stay on earth. St Paul has said “This is the will of God: your sanctification!” (Ephesians 1:4-5). St. Josemaría, building on this declaration by St. Paul, teaches that sanctification for most people, because they are living an ordinary life in the world, is obtained by meeting God in those ordinary things. This we do by bringing Christ into everything we do at all times. He says that

“Today’s Christian does not need to reform anything or ignore contemporary affairs going on around him. He has only to act as the first Christians did, giving life to his environment, putting Christ on top of every human activity.”²

Making a case for the supernatural outlook

Any Christian who takes his/her faith seriously quickly realizes the need to live this life in a way that earns heaven. Therefore we realize the need to fulfil God’s will, as this is the only way to achieve our goal.

Discovering that, for the greater majority, this way consists in doing ordinary things, going about our daily business, becomes a thing of joy that one embraces with gratitude.

For we read in the Gospel “If anyone wants to come my way, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Mark, 8:34). We often

wonder where the hideous cross is and how to take it up. We think that the cross must be big and ugly and heavy. And our Lord says “Strive to enter by the narrow door....” (Luke, 13:24). And we often imagine this means that we need some kind of self-torture to qualify for heaven. But then He says “In the world you will find tribulations; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John, 16:33). And then we look up with hope having been invited to be of good cheer! If He has overcome the world, how did He do so? By “doing all things well” in spite of difficulties and obstacles, always focusing on His goal of “fulfilling His father’s wish”. He was born in simple, even poor, quarters; he lived an ordinary life for thirty years. When the time for His public ministry arrived he preached repentance, healed the sick, and cast out devils. He associated with the rich and the poor, with saints and

sinner. With whatever person he associated, it was always with the aim of bringing that person closer to God. Through this, He overcame all pains and tribulations, putting them under His feet. And He invites us to do the same, to follow him, telling us “I am the way the truth and the Life.”

St. Josemaría teaches us that to follow Christ, to be like Him, we should simply do all things well, wherever we are in the middle of the world. This will lead us to be His “brother, and His sister and His mother” (Mark, 3:34). So like the early Christians we should simply light up everything, everywhere with the light of the love of Christ, put the light of Christ on top of everything, every ordinary little thing we do and that is the trick! Learning this trick is like “discovering a pearl of great value and selling everything in order to purchase it.” (Matthew, 13:46). The rest of this booklet looks at practical

ways to Christianize our environment, to bring Christ into all human activities especially in Africa, with the difficulties, joys, sorrows and triumphs that this entails.

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