

# **"I left drugs and found Jesus in my work"**

Bruno lived in the world of drugs. He hit rock bottom and went through a rehabilitation process. And God showed Himself to him in the sacraments, in the homeless, and in his job in a supermarket warehouse.

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"I come from a family marked by drugs." Bruno relives the past with

difficulty. He remembers the older brother who left home at the age of 14, whom he misses very much. He led a bohemian life far from God and study. "When I was 17 or 18 I just wanted to be on the street to get high. And I was not a religious person, not at all. I lived in the streets: away from family, friends and God."

In the midst of the emptiness he asked for something big: "I remember perfectly well going to God and asking for a miracle. Life could not be just that emptiness I felt inside."

## **The door of hope: a second change**

Bruno sought help. He was aware that he could not get out of drug addiction alone. At the age of 19, he discovered Vale de Acór, an institution dedicated to the social

reintegration of drug addicts since 1994.

It was then that Bruno felt the warmth of friendship again and knew that life was really worth living. He met Salvador, one of the volunteers. Moved by his experience in Vale de Acór, Salvador had founded the "More Together" Association to take volunteers to visit homeless people in Lisbon: "I met Bruno very naturally. We became friends, and one day I challenged him to come out on the street with us," Salvador says.

Bruno, who had completely given up drugs, accepted the invitation.

"Through Salvador I was able to be with people who lived on the street, people with lives identical to mine," he explains. "Helping people in situations like mine is the purpose of my life."

# I found God in the homeless and at work

Now Bruno continues to be a volunteer. He knows that in every homeless person he can find another "Bruno." And he has learned that in the poor and marginalized he can also find God. So he began a journey of conversion with the help of the Christian formation offered by Opus Dei. He participated in times of prayer and monthly recollections and discovered the importance of having a spiritual director to help him make "serious reflections on the meaning of life and the importance of work. The insistence on work touched me a lot."

Bruno now works at night in a supermarket in Lisbon, in a very solitary activity. He admits that at the beginning "I was very lazy there: I only thought about money." One day, "Salvador sent me the homily of St.

Josemaría Escrivá, Working for God. That homily really moved me by the simple fact of affirming that it is in work itself that I can find Jesus. I have the opportunity to work with my headphones on, listening to music many times. But at other times I go back to listen to this homily, and why do I do that? Because it allows me to have a dialogue with Jesus, a dialogue I wouldn't normally have."

Bruno's working days and nights are filled with friends, visits to homeless people and a great desire to help other people find their way in life.

That's what he also seeks in his songs. Bruno likes to write and sing rap songs: "I want to convey the message of what I lived through and focus on autobiographical lyrics so that people can identify themselves with my story."

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## Texts for reflection

1. *We are also children of God when we work:* "In the face of this flat, selfish and lowly vision, you and I have to remind ourselves and others that we are children of God (...) I assure you that, if we strive daily to consider our personal obligations in this way, as a divine requirement, we will learn to finish the task with the greatest human and supernatural perfection of which we are capable. (Working for God)
2. *The example of the Good Samaritan:* The Pope invites us to look at the example of the Good Samaritan. "It is a text that invites us to rekindle our vocation as citizens of our own country and of the whole world, builders of a new social bond. (...) With his gestures, the Good

Samaritan showed that "the existence of each one of us is linked to that of others: life is not a passing time, but a time of encounter." (*Fratelli tutti*)

3. *Solidarity initiatives are at the heart of the Gospel:* In Opus Dei's formative activities, "Following the constant teaching of the Church, the experience of St Josemaría and the example and words of Pope Francis, we should emphasize the spiritual and corporal works of mercy in the St Raphael and St Gabriel means of formation. Personal activities and initiatives in the area of solidarity, service to those in need, and social responsibility are not something passing or marginal, but rather are at the very heart of the Gospel." (Letter from the Prelate, February 14, 2017)

*\* Valley of Achor is the name of an area on the outskirts of Jericho (Israel), where something dramatic happened that we read in the History of Salvation: Achah and his family were stoned, as a punishment and consequence of their greed and idolatry (cfr. Book of Joshua, ch. 7). However, it will be in this same Valley of Achor that the Lord will open a "Gate of Hope" (Hos 2:17) and it is likely that this valley was the place where the Good Samaritan found the poor man lying on the road.*

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