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A Life Transformed

Manuel Saavedra was a barber who learned to find God in his work and among his clients. His story, marked by great hardships, took a dramatic turn when he came into contact with Opus Dei in Peru. That meeting changed not only his life, but also that of his family.

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Manuel Saavedra, who passed away in 2020, was a supernumerary of Opus Dei. As a hairdresser, he used his profession as a means to bring

many souls closer to God and the practice of the sacraments. “Working well helped me love better,” Manuel said in a 2013 interview.

Today, through the testimonies of his wife, María Luisa; his daughter, Erika; and some of his friends, we recount the spiritual and personal transformation that getting to know the spirit of Opus Dei brought about in Manuel and his family, and how they shared it with others.

Manuel’s story is part of the multimedia project created to mark the 50th anniversary of Saint Josemaría’s visit to several Latin American countries.

A difficult character and a hard life

When Manuel was young, his parents passed away, leaving him to fend for himself on the streets. For a

time, he turned to theft, breaking into homes at night. However, one day, during a robbery, his friend was killed. That tragic event left a deep mark on him, and he decided to stop stealing. His aunt took him to the Navy, where a new chapter in his life began.

At a party, he met the love of his life. It was love at first sight. They started dating, though he had to visit her in secret because her father and brother disapproved, arguing that she should not be with “a simple sailor.” Eventually, they eloped and were married in a community wedding (a collective ceremony), a practical decision for both of them.

After leaving the Navy, Manuel sought job opportunities in hairdressing. However, at home, his temperament made life difficult for María Luisa. He was jealous, controlling, and emotionally abusive,

even reacting harshly if she so much as greeted another man. This destructive cycle came to an end when he encountered God, thanks to María Luisa's brother, who invited him to a spiritual recollection led by a priest of Opus Dei.

That moment marked the beginning of his transformation. He started attending Mass regularly and actively participating in the spiritual life. He recognized God as a Father and sincerely worked to improve as a husband and as a person.

More affectionate with his wife, more Prayerful, more apostolic

"In Opus Dei, he changed completely," his wife says. He became more affectionate and attentive, helped around the house, and cared for his family with small gestures that transformed their home

into a joyful and loving place. Every morning, before heading to work, he went to Mass. He also spoke about God with his clients, using every opportunity to share his faith; offering them a prayer book or a rosary when they came in for a haircut.

“He wasn't satisfied with just doing his job; he also encouraged spiritual conversations. He spoke naturally about his experience in Opus Dei. It was really a place where you could speak openly and calmly about God,” says one of his regular clients.

His love for God and his work made an impact on those around him. He helped many people grow in their faith; some of his clients even started attending Mass, going to confession, or were baptized thanks to his example. His example showed that every aspect of daily life can be sanctified.

On one occasion, a surgeon shared his concern over a particularly difficult case. With humility, Manuel reminded him that only God is perfect, and encouraged him to pray for his patient. These simple yet profound conversations strengthened the faith of those around him, revealing his kindness and simplicity.

He also cared deeply about his family's relationship with God, as his daughter recalls. "When I started going to a center of Opus Dei, I realized that I was learning to love better. I loved my wife and my children more deeply, and I understood them better," Manuel said in an interview recorded in 2009.

Even in the most difficult moments, such as facing a serious illness, he demonstrated great strength. Despite battling cancer, he remained active

and optimistic, taking care of himself while easing the burden on those who looked after him.

His daughter's relationship with her mother, Manuel's wife, had not always been easy, but over time, she learned to appreciate her more and treat her with greater affection, realizing the importance of love within the family. Before passing away, Manuel expressed his happiness, saying he had witnessed a miracle: the transformation in the relationship between his daughter and his wife.

Saint Josemaría's help

The message of the founder of Opus Dei changed his life. He learned that through work done well, with attention to small details, he could find God. Everything he did as a hairdresser, he did with love, like he were working for God Himself. That

spirituality transformed his life and that of his family.

Life is full of small details that, though they may seem insignificant, have the power to transform our relationships with others and with God. As Saint Josemaría taught, the Lord is present in every little action, and doing things with love is what gives meaning to it all.

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