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The Riches of the Faith

An article by Saint Josemaria published in ABC, a Madrid daily, on November 2, 1969. In this article, the Opus Dei founder spoke of love for freedom as one of the treasures of the Christian faith.

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In his Letter to the Galatians – a hymn to the riches of the faith – St Paul tells us that Christians should

live in the freedom that Christ has won for us.(1) That was the proclamation that Jesus made to the first Christians, and that he continues to make down through the centuries: our liberation from wretchedness and anguish.

History is not the plaything of blind forces and is not the result of mere chance. It is the manifestation in time of the mercies of God our Father. God's thoughts are above our thoughts, says Scripture,(2) so trusting God means believing in spite of everything, going beyond appearances. The love of God, who loves us eternally, is behind every happening, although in a way that is sometimes hidden from us.

When Christians live by faith – a faith that is not just a word but real personal prayer – the conviction of God's love shows in their joy and inner freedom. The knots that

sometimes tie the heart down, the burdens that weigh down and crush the soul, break up and melt away. "If God is for us, who is against us?"(3) And we find a smile coming to our lips. Those who are children of God, Christians, who live by faith, can suffer and cry; they can have reasons for sorrow; but they cannot have any reason to be sad.

Christian freedom is born on the inside, in the heart, from our faith. But it isn't something merely private. It shows on the outside. One of its most characteristic signs is something that was a keynote of the early Christians: fraternity. Faith in the great gift of God's love has made all differences and barriers dwindle away. "There is no longer any distinction between Jew and Greek, between slave and free man, between man and woman, because you are all one thing in Christ Jesus."(4) Knowing that we are all

brothers and sisters, and loving each other as such, over and above all differences in race, social background, education and ideology, is essential to Christianity.

It is not my mission to talk about politics. Nor is it the mission of Opus Dei, whose only aim is spiritual. Opus Dei has never entered into party politics or factions and never will, and it is not tied to any one person or ideology. That way of acting is not an apostolic stratagem, nor is it merely a praiseworthy way to behave. It is an essential need for Opus Dei to be like that, stemming from its very nature, and it has a clear stamp: love for freedom, confidence in one's own position as an ordinary Christian in the world, acting with complete independence and personal responsibility.

There are no dogmas in temporal matters. It is contrary to human

dignity to try and lay down absolute truths in things that are necessary matters of opinion, on which people will have different viewpoints depending on their interests, cultural preferences and personal experience. Trying to impose dogmas in temporal affairs leads one inevitably to do violence to other people's consciences, to fail to respect one's neighbor.

I don't for a moment want to suggest that Christians should be indifferent or apathetic about temporal matters. But I do think that Christians have to combine their passion for civic and social progress with an awareness that their own opinions are limited, and hence they have to respect other people's opinions and love legitimate pluralism. Someone who cannot do this has not understood the message of Christianity in all its depth. It's not easy to understand it fully and in a sense, we never will, because our

tendency to selfishness and pride never leave us. This means we are all obliged to examine our conduct constantly, comparing our actions with Christ's, to recognize that we are sinners and begin over again. It's not easy, but we need to do our best.

When God created us he ran the risk and adventure of our freedom. He wanted history to be real, made of genuine decisions, not a fiction or a game. Each individual has to experience his or her personal autonomy, with the hazard, experimentation and uncertainty that it involves. Let's not forget that although God has given us the security of our faith, he hasn't revealed to us the meaning of all human events. Together with things that Christians find clear and certain, there are very many others which are open to opinion, i.e. a certain degree of knowledge of what may be true or right, with no absolute

certainty. In such cases, it's possible that I'm mistaken, but even if I am right, other people may be right too. An object that looks concave to me looks convex to people seeing it from a different standpoint.

An awareness of the limitations of human judgments leads us to recognize freedom as a necessarily condition for living in harmony with others. But it isn't everything, and it isn't even the most important thing. Respect for freedom is rooted in love. If other people think differently from me, is that any reason for us to be enemies? The only reason for that would be selfishness, or the narrow-mindedness of thinking that there are no values other than politics and business. But Christians know this is not so, because every human being has an infinite value and an eternal destiny in God: Jesus Christ died for every single one of us.

We are Christians when we can love not just “mankind” in the abstract, but each of the people around us. It is a sign of maturity to feel responsible for the well-being of future generations, but that mustn’t lead us to neglect opportunities to give ourselves and serve others in ordinary things: an act of kindness to those who work with us, genuine friendship shown in deeds, compassion for someone who is suffering or in need, even when their unhappiness seems slight in comparison with the great ideals we are pursuing.

Speaking of freedom, love for freedom, raises a difficult ideal which is one of the greatest riches of our faith. Because – let’s not kid ourselves – life isn’t a trashy novel. Christian fraternity isn’t something that comes down from heaven once and for all, but something that has to be built up day after day. It has to be

built up in a life that keeps all its harshness, with clashes of interests, friction, struggles, in daily contact with people who seem unfair, and with unfairness on our part too.

But if that prospect discourages us, if we let our selfishness get the upper hand, or if we merely shrug our shoulders skeptically, that will be a sign that we need to go deeper into our faith, to contemplate Christ more. Because only in his school can we Christians learn to know ourselves and understand others, and live in such a way that we are Christ present among the people around us.

Josemaria Escriva

(1) Cf. Gal 4:31 (vulgate.); Gal 5:1 (neo-vulgate).

(2) Cf. Isaiah 55:8; Rom 11:33.

(3) Rm 8:31.

(4) Gal 3:28.

Josemaria Escriva

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