

Treasure of Children with Special Needs

Elizabeth Varghese, married and with two children, is a teacher in India. She was born and brought up in Indore, before moving to Delhi where she now lives and teaches children with special educational needs.

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After my marriage I moved with my husband to the North, to Delhi, and found myself in a very different culture and environment altogether,

far from my birthplace. As it happens to many people in similar circumstances, at the beginning it was not easy for me to adjust to the new life in a new city. Soon our first child was born and we were full of joy for being blessed with a child. But, at the same time, my husband and I found ourselves in desperate need for guidance in parenting. As always God had it all in his plans, as I now realize.

At that time I became friends with a colleague of mine in the school I was teaching. She was the person who introduced me to the message of Opus Dei and the teachings of its founder, St. Josemaría Escrivá. His explanation on the doctrine of the Catholic Church on the greatness of marriage and family life helped me so much. Practicing what I was reading and learning from my friend helped me progressively to see some change in my perspective about

bringing up my child and in my relationship with my husband and relatives, at home, as well as in my dealings with my students and their parents, in my work place.

Now with two children, my husband and I along with some of our neighbors and friends are trying to help other young couples starting out in their married journey. We really enjoy gathering our friends and their children and spending some useful time together sharing our experience.

Something that I learned and now try to pass on to others is that at times we give too much importance to big things in our life and we forget that it is the small pieces of a puzzle that put together make a big picture. St. Josemaría in his writings, homilies and talks had always emphasized the value of little things in our daily life: to give thanks, to be orderly in the

material things in the house, to forgive, to apologize, to be punctual, to smile...

In my profession I am happy to work with children with special needs and their parents. While teaching and dealing with them I am also learning from them. I personally find the following words of Pope Francis very meaningful and encouraging:

“Families who lovingly accept the difficult trial of a child with special needs are greatly to be admired . . . If the family, in the light of the faith, accepts the presence of persons with special needs, they will be able to recognize and ensure the quality and values of every human life, with its proper needs, rights and opportunities. This approach will promote care and services on behalf of these disadvantaged persons and will encourage people to draw near to them and provide affection at every

stage of their life” (Amoris Laetitia, no. 47)

As a teacher I have to help and train the children to be part of the mainstream society, to make other people around them be sensitive and not just be sympathetic, to help parents accept their children’s condition and be hopeful rather than fearful. All of this needs dedication, patience and love. And for these to be in my heart, as St. Josemaría teaches, we need to be close to God in prayer and rely on His help in all the situations. I seek his intercession to help me put it into practice, with a smile!