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Giving Oneself in Family Life

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What does society need? What are the reliable values to guide each person in terms of citizenship, fulfillment, world development and

peace? Can it be said that everyone can do something? “Don’t wish to be like the gilded weather-cock on top of a great building: however much it shines, and however high it stands, it adds nothing to the solidity of the building. Rather be like an old stone block hidden in the foundations, underground, where no one can see you: because of you the house will not fall” (The Way, 590). Fame, glory, money and lust often have a strong influence in our world. But as human beings we only fulfill ourselves when we dedicate our lives to others, to the tremendous reality that surrounds us, rather than to ourselves.

This “surrounding reality” means our family, our friends, our work environment, our leisure, our neighborhood, our university and all the circumstances of our daily life. The founder of Opus Dei taught that our daily duties can be converted into occasions to give greater

meaning to our lives and for each individual to make important, effective and real steps towards developing society.

Society needs good citizens. But does it need citizens who work only so that they can become richer, and if possible, famous too? The founder of Opus Dei talked about making our personal lives fruitful in order to serve our families, our friends, our cities and the world more effectively; living lives that produce the fruits of conscientious, careful and productive work, peaceful and joyful human relationships; fruits that can motivate many individuals in their lives.

Sometimes our temperaments and the disordered aspects of our personalities can hinder the development of these fruits. These “huge mountains that appear” – outside and inside us – are valuable

opportunities to develop patience, simplicity, sympathy, responsibility, loyalty, sincerity, generosity, joy, humility, charity, naturalness, patriotism, firmness, attention, and every human virtue; all of which, when practiced daily, build a strong and solid character. Josemaria Escriva emphasized the importance of being a better citizen, a better Christian, and of practicing the above-mentioned human virtues while working, studying, walking, helping people, dating, in family life, doing voluntary work, and driving a car at rush hour.

Poverty is another human virtue that does not mean being penniless, but rather making use of material possessions in the right way.

Consumerism does not improve a person but rather makes him or her dependent on material possessions. A drastic social consequence of this is also the deprivation of those who do

not have enough to provide for themselves.

Through the teachings of the founder of Opus Dei, I have grasped an important idea related to virtues and living together: we can only be really useful to others if we have self-discipline, control of our actions and reactions; in other words, if we are acquiring human virtues. Society needs people who think seriously about all of the issues and problems that arise, people who are attentive and helpful to every need of their own environment: family, school, university, company, sports club, whatever.

Citizenship requires one to practice several virtues in the personal “micro-cosmos” which can then be projected onto the “macro-cosmos” of society. And what can we say about technology? All honest professions – important elements in

society – are based mainly on human virtues, and technical improvement is only of service to society when accompanied by human virtues.

Our society can be viewed as the sum of all of the actions – or omissions – of every citizen. Some have immediate consequences, while others do not. But all of them, without exception, are really important and do not affect only one human being but many – as the smallest stone which falls in a lake creates ripples far away.

Building an airplane or a car involves a very large number of work hours and workers. Behind a store counter many people work daily preparing to offer the different services we are used to receiving. These simple actions move our world; this simple daily life has tremendous value and fulfils human existence. Each and every citizen

must discover this value in his or her own life and find a noble reason for this “hidden world” which only he or she and God can see. “Think, for example, of your activity as citizens. A man who knows that the world, and not just the church, is the place where he finds Christ, loves that world. He endeavors to become properly formed, intellectually and professionally. He makes up his own mind with complete freedom about the problems of the environment in which he moves, and then he makes his own decisions. Being the decisions of a Christian, they result from personal reflection, in which he endeavors, in all humility, to grasp the will of God in both the unimportant and the important events of his life” (In Love with the Church, “Passionately Loving the World”, 54)

And what about disease, pain and moral sufferings? Do they also have

meaning too? Rush hour, talking with a grumpy person, and even a car accident can have a meaning. They can have the same meaning as all our actions must have, that of guiding us towards the main aim of life which is eternal happiness together with our Father God. Most of our daily activities are fairly repetitive; there is a good deal of monotony, and this repetition must be a “laboratory” to enlarge our heart, to help us to stop seeking ourselves, to forget ourselves; that is, to develop love. The founder of Opus Dei used to say that each moment of our lives, each deed, each detail – without exception – has an enormous importance to God, who is a very kind and concerned Father. “‘My enthusiasm is gone’, you write. You have to work not out of enthusiasm but out of Love: conscious of duty, which means self-denial” (The Way, 994).

Finally, I would like to talk about the school of friendship: “I advised you to inject a great deal of supernatural outlook into every detail of your ordinary life. And I added immediately that living with other people provided you with ample opportunity throughout the day” (Furrow, 756). Friendship is a treasure to be discovered and explored in each one’s ordinary life. Everyone needs support, someone to exchange experiences with, to share sufferings and joys. The founder of Opus Dei helped me to understand that friendship is also a special occasion to serve and to think of others, to practice all the “social virtues”, to make life cheerful – smiling a lot! – to love and participate in other people’s worlds. Concepts such as love, dedication and sacrifice can be learned and practiced with friends, parents and neighbors in order to bring joy and harmony to relationships.

The home environment has tremendous importance in terms of friendship and citizenship, because it is – or at least it should be – the first “school” of thinking of others and of serving others. Sociability is a direct reflex and consequence of that environment. “Charity does not consist so much in ‘giving’ as in ‘understanding’. Therefore, seek an excuse for your neighbor – there is always one to be found – if it is your duty to judge” (The Way, 463).

Through the founder of Opus Dei’s teachings, I learned that I have many opportunities, with my parents, girlfriend and friends, to accept and understand different ideas, to forgive, to respect different ways of doing certain tasks and other points of view, to spend time thinking about them. Friendship is extremely formative for one’s character; it requires qualities and deeds. By our human nature we need this relationship in order to develop our

capability of serving – to build up our character. Love, in our family and social life, must be translated into these “social virtues”, and not based only on feelings.

The founder of Opus Dei loved all nations, all people without preconceptions or distinctions; he loved the word “universal”. He was so happy that he strongly desired this same happiness for everyone. He was open to everyone who came to him. From him I also learned about social conscience, that a Christian citizen ought to attend – with the skills and the means within his or her reach – to social needs and problems relating to education, morals, and health.

Josemaria Escriva said that Christians ought to be sowers of peace and joy. One thing that he often emphasized about human relationships was understanding:

that we must be people who know how to forgive, and to accept different personalities, upbringings, every individual's environment, circumstances, problems and difficulties, and all cultural differences.

Mauricio Grade Ballarotti

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