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Ordinary People

Jemy Gatdula, in his BusinessWorld Philippines column Trade Tripper, writes about St. Josemaria Escriva's message that by simply doing the normal daily acts of one's life, out of love for God and others, one can achieve holiness.

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TO BORROW from Scott Hahn, it was the moment I "got" Opus Dei: it was while watching a video of its founder St. Josemaria Escriva in

the middle of a question-and-answer session before a large audience. A professional-looking man got up and asked St. Escriva, "can you tell me if there is any sign that would show me I am living the teachings of Opus Dei faithfully and well?" Anybody who saw that video or was actually there would never forget how St. Escriva, without missing a beat, without a second's pause, give this answer: "if your wife is happy."

That instance perfectly captured what oftentimes is difficult to convey in words when talking to someone yet to "get" Opus Dei: that by simply doing the normal daily acts of one's life, if done out of love for God and for literally everybody, one can achieve holiness. Without the need for martyrdom, miracles, or other dramatic events, just the plumber, doctor, engineer, politician, or housewife going about their ordinary

jobs in the best way they can. As St. Escriva wrote: "That work -- humble, monotonous, small -- is prayer expressed in action.

"This entails us to happily (and contemplatively) live in the present. Or as St. Escriva would urge, real love is not about "sweet words but deeds." Thus, sanctity is achieved by "doing the little duties of each moment": for the student it is being focused while in class, for the driver it is being watchful and careful on the road, for the janitor it is ensuring every spot has been cleaned, the teacher making the lesson plan, the father setting aside his work and giving himself completely to his family during dinner. This "universal call to holiness" that Opus Dei espouses is not limited to Catholics; even non-Christians can be a part of Opus Dei.

This is a radical claim, astonishingly even as recent as today. But it's a teaching that is "as old as the Gospels and yet forever new." One does not need to be a priest or a nun to be holy. That anyone, without ostentation or loud displays of piety, by living his daily life as well as he or she is able, can achieve that holiness.

Unfortunately, there's a need to correct the undeserved bad rap that the media gave Opus Dei, which is celebrating several "anniversaries" this year. The weird thing is that most people who think of Opus Dei (literally, "God's work") as sinister haven't even probably met a faithful of the Opus Dei or didn't even know that the ever-smiling, always-helpful guy in the office or neighborhood is actually one. Frankly, the most cheerful people I've met, known, or befriended are Opus Dei. And there's a profound yet simple reason for

their cheerfulness, which has little to do with PR or image-making.

The "main weapon" of Opus Dei, again as old as the Gospels and yet forever new, is "divine filiation." It's a technical theological term that essentially says: "we are God's children." This is obviously not exclusive to Opus Dei as this has always been a core teaching of the Catholic Church. But Opus Dei has placed special emphasis in this: that God is our caring father, ever-present, constantly watching out for our well-being. Oftentimes we will not understand what He wants, for what child can so fully comprehend? But He is there for us. And that is why the faithful of Opus Dei are always cheerful (and calm) because, with God as your father, what's the need for worry? Success? Failure? Not your problem. Just do your absolute best, then have the confidence to know it'll turn out the

way our Father wants it, which will always be for the good.

To close, I turn to the experiences of a far superior writer than me: popular author and apologetic Scott Hahn. On the path to becoming a Catholic (he was then a Protestant), he experienced difficulties with his wife (also then a Protestant), who wasn't exactly thrilled at his plans of conversion. So Scott Hahn did what any intellectual would do: he bombarded his wife Kimberly with all the theological arguments and writings he could think of to convince her that Catholicism was the correct way.

Unfortunately, it made Kimberly more irritated and even start drifting away.

Desperate, he turned to two friends for help, one a layman, the other a priest, both of whom happened to be members of Opus Dei. And the

advice they gave to Scott surprised him: "turn off the theology and turn on the romance."

But Scott Hahn followed their advice. Instead of trying to build the best argument, he just worked hard at becoming a "better husband, better father, better son."

With that, and with Kimberly's loving approval, he became a Catholic. Soon after, so did Kimberly.

That's it. Very ordinary. So Opus Dei.

Jemy Gatdula // BusinessWorld,
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