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“There are so many good people everywhere”

In the Year of Saint Joseph and the Family, Erick Díaz, a Peruvian supernumerary in Opus Dei, talks about how he migrated to the United States filled with dreams. There he met his wife, Sandy, and they now have five children.

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I think that *Patris Corde*, Pope Francis' beautiful letter for the

Jubilee Year dedicated to Saint Joseph, reminds us of all that we are capable of doing for our families when we do everything out of love.

When we look at Saint Joseph's example as father of the Holy Family and protector of the Church, he shows us that we must be that shadow of the heavenly Father for our own family, putting all our effort into bringing our family forward, but with complete trust that it is God who makes everything turn out well. Thus we can overcome any anxiety, frustration or sadness that we may encounter.

In 2005, I came to the United States to study for a master's degree for two years. I always intended to return to Peru to make use of my studies to assist in the development of my country, but love knocked on my door. I met my wife. Sandy, who is of Irish and Polish descent. We got

married at the end of 2009 and God has blessed us with five children: Carolina (11), Alexander (9), Gabriela (6), Peter (4) and Rafael (1).

Blessings brought by my children

In 2009 I traveled to the US to get married. It was a year after the 2008 financial crisis and I had to find a job. Even though my wife was working at the time (she now works from home), the savings weren't going to last for long.

When we found out that we were expecting our first daughter, Carolina, which caused us a lot of joy, I still didn't have a job despite many interviews for open positions. Some of my friends expressed concern about this. But I had faith that each baby is a blessing, a gift from God. Over time, I have learned that each child always brings a loaf of bread under its arm. My role was to not waste time and let God's grace act.

After a number of unsuccessful interviews, I finally received my first job offer, eight months after getting married. I started work two months later, after the birth of my first daughter.

My next four children were also born in somewhat precarious situations in our family, which has only strengthened my sense of divine filiation and gratitude for our marriage. As Saint Josemaría said: “What is needed to be happy is not a comfortable life, but a heart in love.” A heart in love only grows by overcoming difficulties and seeking the good of those you love.

Family and friendship in my new country

In Lima where I grew up, family and community support from neighbors and acquaintances is very strong. For example, one of my aunts or my grandmother would take care of me

and my little brother while my parents were working.

The United States has a different dynamic. People always have a lot to do (“time is money” as they say here). Many professionals are tempted to dedicate their entire lives to their work, but at the cost of sacrificing the option of starting a family, or if they have one, of having children.

My family is the greatest blessing God has given me, but it requires time and dedication. The love and trust in our family makes this effort very joyful, even when the children are making noise or arguing. Whether it's changing diapers, cooking, bathing babies, mowing the lawn or fixing the house, every day is a different adventure.

On the other hand, Sandy and I have always tried to reserve time for ourselves to go out to have fun alone

without the children, on romantic and fun dates. For example, to go dancing and enjoy a delicious dinner, just like when we were dating.

Before COVID-19 we had the goal of doing so once a month, but in reality those outings were more like once every three months. We would hire a babysitter for four hours, or my in-laws would fix the children dinner and put them to sleep while Sandy and I went out on our date.

From my time at the university in the United States, I have many friends here whom I try to keep in touch with. One thing we like to do is to send a Christmas card every year with a family photo. Christmas cards are a real success in our family. My children and my wife sign them, while we talk about these friends of our family. Then we also pray a rosary for them.

I have made and continue to make many other friends, at work and at the school where my children are studying, and many other places. And I have come to realize that making friends is an “art” that requires time and practice. When I am introduced to someone or I meet them for the first time, even in an elevator, I often start a conversation about the weather or a recent news item, always with naturalness and optimism. English is my second language, so my wife had to teach me the right intonations so that a sentence sounds positive and optimistic.

I have found that a friendship can be deepened by sharing something personal in the conversation and people respond by sharing their own concerns. This may be because I am Hispanic, since other cultures do not necessarily do the same.

As COVID-19 has shown, we all need friends and people we can trust and share our concerns and joys with, whom we can help and learn to love. Life has taught me that there are so many good people everywhere, and I will never stop being thankful for all the help I have received in my adopted country.

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