

## **“Nunc coepi! Now I begin!”**

Whenever my strength fails me, with God's help I get up and begin again, just like St Josemaría said: “Nunc coepi! Now I begin!”

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I am a doctor in a private hospital in Nairobi. I am married and have four children, aged twenty-four, twenty-three, twenty, and eleven and a half.

I was born and brought up in a rural setting in Machakos District in

Kenya. My father had a low-grade job in Nairobi and most of the time my seven sisters and I lived with our mother. My mother worked hard as an agricultural worker to supplement my father's income, in a semi-arid zone. They taught my sisters and me to work hard and to value family life, because we had a very happy family.

My father was unusual in the sense of being happy to raise daughters in a place and at a time when daughters were not highly valued. When my father died I was 18, and my mother had a very hard time keeping my younger sisters in school, against opposition from some family members.

I got married young, while in my first year as a medic. Following my parents' example I worked hard at my studies and at the same time managed to look after our growing

family. Curiously, it was while I was at University that I was lucky enough to get hold of a prayer-card of St Josemaría Escrivá. I don't remember whether anyone told me about him or not, but I was attracted by his teachings: the prayer-card said that he founded Opus Dei, a way to reach holiness by fulfilling life's ordinary duties. I prayed that prayer-card faithfully for years, because I found the prayer's message very moving.

At some stage I bought *The Way* and read a bit, but I wasn't that interested. It was when our third son started at Strathmore Primary School that I learnt more about this path to holiness by doing ordinary things. I admired the way they looked after the boys, and the trouble the teachers took to get us to share in our kids' education. It was amazing: the parents' meetings were after their working day – and they didn't charge us a cent!

When I heard the news of a trip to attend St Josemaría's beatification I decided on the spot to go to Rome as a friend of Opus Dei, and from that point on, my life changed completely. Just before going to Rome I went to a spiritual retreat for the first time. It moved me deeply and opened up new spiritual horizons. In time I acquired several books by St Josemaría and about his life, and read them with interest.

My perspective on life has changed. The effort involved in holding down a full-time job as well as looking after my husband and children and the rest of the family doesn't make me feel frustrated as it used to. I have discovered that joy is compatible with suffering.

Knowing that we are all sons and daughters of God, and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, helps me to treat my patients with respect,

attending to their needs patiently. I see the sick as the treasure that St Josemaría called them, and I try to teach them to offer up their suffering to our Lord, at the same time as doing all I can to alleviate it. During the day's work I try to keep in mind that I am working for God, not just for money or ambition.

Right from the start I realized that St Josemaría loved the institution of marriage and taught that the family is the basic unit of society, and if the family is destroyed, society falls apart. For that reason, I organized my day shift so as to have time for my husband and children.

I have had to do without various things to keep to that principle. At one point I turned down a job as a university lecturer, as I would not be able to do it well and at the same time look after my children, since my husband was then working outside

Nairobi. Whenever I felt tempted to regret my decision I told myself: If God asks me to be concerned for souls, my commitment has to start with my own family.

Now I wouldn't accept a job a long way from home unless I could move there with my family while ensuring that their well-being did not suffer – however well-paid the job was. We spend Sundays at home, have our meals together and try to go to Mass together.

As we are not rich, for holidays we go to our home town where we spend time with my parents-in-law, and visit my mother and other relations. As often as we can, we organize a family gathering for everyone: parents, brothers and sisters and their families. That means a lot of work, but I'm motivated by learning how St Josemaría cared about family life. He showed us how to learn from

the example of the Holy Family, who led a simple life that was full of hope and joy.

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