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The Sweetest Precept of the Decalogue

Gabriel Robledillo Amezcua is an associate of Opus Dei. Following the advice of St. Josemaría, he is doing the most important thing he can do at present: to take care of his parents.

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At times, two things come to my mind: the first has to do with St. Josemaría and his words about the fourth commandment “Honor your

father and your mother”, which he called the sweetest precept.

The second was a radio phone-in programme in which I participated in the 1980's. Those invited to the discussion did not perhaps have very clear ideas about Opus Dei. I phoned in and asked a series of questions that seemed interesting to me. One of the participants in that radio discussion told me at one point of the conversation: “All the members of Opus Dei have a university degree...”

Well, I worked in a slaughterhouse. My job was to remove the flesh from the left wing of the chicken, I answered him.

The conversation continued until someone remarked that the members of the Work separate themselves from their parents. At that moment, my mother, who was listening to the radio and who is pleasantly decisive, grabbed the

phone from me and said: “I am the mother of this person in Opus Dei. Is there a problem?”

So the years have passed since that radio programme ... some 25 years. Life has changed and my parents, thanks to God, continue living with me. I say ‘with me’, because until four years ago, I lived ‘with them’.

In 2002, I went to Pamplona to do a doctorate. Because of this, I stopped living with my parents after 42 years with them. I have a degree in Spanish Philology and I was working then in a high school in Jaén.

My mother was a little delicate in health but the family doctor told me that her symptoms were those typical of elderly persons. After discussing with my parents, it was decided that I should go to Navarre to complete my studies. My parents then were 78 and 79 years old.

When I had lived in Pamplona for two and a half years, my father suffered a stroke, which left the right half of his body paralysed. My mother, after being examined by a specialist, was diagnosed with an advanced stage of Alzheimer.

In view those events, I left off my studies in Pamplona and returned to my native city to take care of my parents. I returned to my work as a teacher in the school *Altocastillo*, but worked only in the mornings. I have asked for fewer hours at work to take care of my parents. When I am at school in the mornings, a hired-lady is with them and I take over when I return from school.

My father, thanks to St. Josemaría, has recovered in a miraculous way. He can move and is independent. The doctors still don't believe it because they told me that he would be bed-ridden. Now, he doesn't need

help in anything, though he can't help much around the house.

My mother is losing her faculties little by little. She needs to be watched 24 hours a day and everything needs to be done for her: to sit up, to get dressed, to be fed, etc. She does not recognize anyone and at times, she doesn't know where she is and gets very nervous. I try to calm her and bring her out for a stroll in the wheelchair. There was a time when we could not sleep at all at night because she would go out into the streets, regardless if it were raining or cold or hot.

In the afternoons, those who suffer from Alzheimer are more restless; the specialists do not know why. I have to be very, very patient and to try to accompany her and to distract her because there is no medicine that can calm her down. The doctors told me that the best way to distract her is

to do what one would do with a 3-year old child. That is how I cope.

Following the advice of St. Josemaría, the most important thing that I can do now is to take care of my parents, in the same way that they took care of me when I was little. By doing this, I am doing Opus Dei, because I see Jesus Christ in my parents. When I am tired or feel burdened, I look at the Cross of the Lord and remember that passage from St. Mathew: “He who wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” (Mt. 16, 24).

As time passes and I get older, and from what I see at school and from what my friends and acquaintances who themselves are advanced in age tell me, I see that I am not a martyr, because there are people in worse situations than me. I try to encourage these people, helping them to see the Cross of the Lord in their situations.

In the town where I live, there are 13,000 inhabitants and nearly everybody knows everybody. We have put up an association of Alzheimer's. The municipal government is giving us all kinds of aid to push the association forward. We have been in contact with the priests of the town so that they can attend spiritually to our sick people.

When I go out in the streets, the other people in town stop me and ask me about my parents. At the same time, they encourage me and congratulate me on the work that I am doing with them. I can help recalling the sweetest precept of the Decalogue that St. Josemaría used to talk about and that time when I took part in a radio phone-in programme...

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