

Vancouver conference on sanctifying everyday life

Within the beautiful setting of the mountains of West Vancouver, BC, at the Hollyburn Country Club, Headford Cultural Group presented its first conference on the influence of Blessed Josemaria on professional life, family and education.

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The conference took place on June 15, 2002 and was attended by over 200 people. Dr. David Neima, a Vancouver ophthalmologist active in Third World health and education initiatives, acted as Master of Ceremonies. He gave a short introduction highlighting reasons why so many people turn to Blessed Josemaria in their needs and then introduced the first and keynote speakers, Cecilia and Thomas Royals of Chevy Chase, Maryland.

Cecilia and Thomas spoke on the topic of balancing professional life and family, sharing with the participants their experience in this challenging reality of modern life. Cecilia Royals, president of the National Institute of Womanhood, has participated in UN conferences in Cairo and Beijing; she has testified before the US Senate Foreign Relations and Congressional Committees on the understanding

and well-being of women and has spoken at numerous international conferences on the family, education and society. Her husband Thomas is the Assistant Headmaster of The Heights School, an independent high school for boys in Washington, DC. He discussed moving beyond mere balance of professional and family life, to an integrated framework where family life is rediscovered as something manly and strong. He spoke of the paramount importance of the role of the father in the education of children and of knowing how to be present for them, and the importance of timing, humor and order. Cecilia analyzed the work paradigm, the family paradigm and an integrated paradigm, the latter taking into account the fulfillment of a person's gifts and aspirations, the needs and obligations of family and the needs of the community. Cecilia cited the importance of being a "homemaker" versus a "housewife"

and that real homemaking involves the nurturing of all family members and extends from the family as the foundational cell of society into society at large.

Dr. Theresa Tomory gave the second lecture. She and her husband are among the founding parents of Hawthorn School, an independent school for girls in Toronto. She presented an overview of the teachings of Blessed Josemaria on the duties and responsibilities of parents in the education of their children. She stressed the fact that education starts within the family and cited Blessed Josemaria's message of marriage as a divine path. She spoke of Blessed Josemaria encouraging parents to develop their own schools, knowing that schools, after the family, are the next educating community. She concluded with a history of Hawthorn's beginnings, its goals and principles.

Kathleen and John Higgins spoke on communication in the family. Kathleen, a lawyer, and her husband John, an architect, have made presentations to Federal and Provincial governments on taxation, childcare and educational issues. In a lively and humorous presentation, they told of how Blessed Josemaria had helped them in their communications with each other, in becoming better parents and in learning from him how to care about every person with whom they come in contact. They gave examples of how to create friendships with their children while teaching them important virtues such as detachment, generosity and friendship.

Cecilia Royals gave the final lecture on the influence of Blessed Josemaria on her life. She spoke about his influence in three concrete areas: the awareness that time is a treasure, the

necessity of loving the will of God and the importance of the small details of life. She poignantly related having to explain to her seriously ill child that he could die at any moment. She was able to show the blessing of knowing that at any time he could be taken to heaven. In a premonition, before the birth of a daughter with Down's Syndrome, she felt compelled to repeat those words of Blessed Josemaria: "May the most just and most lovable will of God be done, be fulfilled, be praised and eternally exalted above all things. Amen. Amen." (The Way, 691). With these words, she was filled with peace. The importance of appreciating and giving meaning to small things is a key to understanding that in the challenges of her life, everything is a sum total of many very small achievements, in themselves not insurmountable.

A video presentation "The Joy of Holiness" and a poster display of Blessed Josemaria's life were featured during conference breaks. A book table was available for conference participants to peruse the writings of Blessed Josemaria.

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