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A Busy But Happy Mother

Françoise, who lives in France and has 7 children, talks about how her vocation to Opus Dei helps her to care for her children and husband.

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Françoise, with seven children you've chosen not to practice another profession other than being a full-time mother and housewife. What led to this decision?

To begin with, circumstances led me to make this choice of not working outside the home. Due to my husband's work we moved often and he was absent many weeks in a row. We have been blessed by the arrival of our seven children who have kept me quite busy, to say the least! Actually, I've always seen my daily work as a mother as a true profession...without monetary compensation.

One of my children, the ten-year-old, one day was asked by someone where his mother worked. He replied, in a very natural way: mom's in charge at home.... I also have a degree in education and have worked as an educator in the past.

I have other activities outside the home that keep me busy, but I can choose how I use my time. I'm more serene this way, and it's better for my husband as well. As a wife and

mother, I feel responsible for my family and therefore responsible for what my children can give back to society and the Church in the future. Deep down, I have the certitude of working for the future, even though I work at home.

You have been in Opus Dei for over twenty years. How has your vocation changed your daily life?

I asked for admission to Opus Dei three days before getting married; in a few days it will be twenty-one years. In some sense nothing has changed. At the same time my vocation to Opus Dei allows me to put myself fully into each of my activities and to see them as an opportunity to dialogue with God. When speaking with some colleagues some years back, one of them asked me if I didn't get bored at home. I had four children at the time and the oldest was six. At that moment I

understood how much my vocation enabled me to be happy and fulfilled in what I was doing. I recalled a book that was read to me when I was a child. There one could see the Virgin Mary cooking, sewing, cleaning her home in the presence of her Son, still a child. I loved those images of a very beautiful and smiling Virgin and an adorable Child Jesus. My work consists of continuing, in my own way, Mary's work at Nazareth. My vocation helps me to dedicate time each day to God, to prayer, the rosary, Holy Mass, etc. This helps me to put things into perspective with regard to my work at home, the children and my other activities, to see things with a little more detachment.

Does your vocation affect the way you work at home? Does it help you in your family life?

In Opus Dei, I've learned to put God first. By beginning my day with prayer, everything I do that morning is done in God's sight. For instance, when I tidy up the house, wash clothes or clean the kitchen, I know they are acts of love of God. This helps me to do them better. I have also come to see this work as true professional work.

The spirit of Opus Dei is also a big help in the area of education. St. Josemaria had very positive ideas on this topic. For instance, the need to teach the children with authority but also with a spirit of freedom in order to make them responsible, teaching them how to live the human and spiritual virtues with greater depth. All this can be done with great naturalness, through example and prayer. When I sew a stitch in the clothing of someone in the family I pray for that person, and this turns the sewing into apostolate. But it is

especially at Mass, which I try to attend every day, where I “recharge my batteries.” Getting to Mass each day requires the effort to be organized; this is a point where the formation I’ve received in Opus Dei has helped me a lot. It is a true and irreplaceable gift.

How do you manage to combine your life as a married couple, your family life and your intimacy with Christ?

This happens on its own, because everything is tied together. Even if sometimes one thinks that the children take up all one's energies and time so that one cannot do anything else. When I'm at home I can do everything for Christ, the Church, the Pope, and thus my family life does not keep me from God. Rather it's the opposite. When I go on a yearly retreat, it might seem I'm abandoning my post at home, but

afterwards I return rested and spiritually energized, and the home environment benefits from this, and I hope my spouse as well. My spiritual life also nourishes my love for my spouse and vice-versa. Our life as a couple helps me to draw closer to Christ.

I suppose there's a danger that the children can take up so much of your time that it would distance us from one another. But here too St. Josemaria's teaching is very helpful. He stressed the importance of safeguarding moments of intimacy each day, certainly with Christ but also between husband and wife in the evening or on the week-end. In my experience, this a good way for married couples to avoid "burnout."

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