

The Adventure Begins in Korea

Mercé is a nurse, although at present her full-time occupation is learning Korean. Along with other women of Opus Dei, she recently moved to Korea to help begin the apostolic work there.

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Eighty years ago St. Josemaría unfolded a piece of paper and showed it to the first women of Opus Dei. It contained examples of the projects they would soon be

beginning throughout the world: university residences, fashion courses, centers for professional formation....

Today that dream is becoming a reality also in Korea.

A few months ago, I came to help start Opus Dei in Daejeon, one of the Korean cities where the Christian presence is strongest. The first Korean-born priest, St. Andrew Kim Dae Gon, who died a martyr for his faith in 1846, came from Daejeon.

Four other women arrived with me, from Brazil, the Philippines, Argentina, and Australia. Two of them are from Korean families, something very helpful for the rest of us, since they have an acquaintance with the traditions and culture of a country none of us had been to before.

Thankfully, we haven't had to start from scratch, for a member of the Work has been making occasional trips ever since 1988 to begin spreading the message about sanctifying ordinary life.

LEARNING KOREAN...WITH OUR NEIGHBORS' HELP

With the assistance of a cooperator who met Opus Dei in Peru, we acquired an apartment in September 2009 and began to set up the oratory and find the furnishings we needed. To pay for all this, one of us is now working, and we also received contributions from people in several countries.

Most of us are devoting ourselves full-time to learning Korean because we want to speak it as soon as possible and begin to share in the concerns, interests and joys of the people we are getting to know.

We have received quite a warm welcome here. Someone always seems ready to lend a hand: to find a bookstore, a dentist, or a store that sells goods at a reasonable price.

I must especially thank our neighbors for their help. Among other favors, this past week they came over every day to help me practice my spoken Korean. Thanks to the help of so many people, I am amazed that after only five months I can now read and understand what a short time ago was nothing but an indecipherable puzzle.

Korea is said to resemble a small village that all of a sudden became a large country. Maybe that's why I feel at home, even though I'm immersed in a new culture with customs and ways of doing things so different from what I've previously known. It's easy to start a conversation with anyone. More than once people have

stopped us on the street to ask us if we were speaking Russian!

I'm learning a lot besides the language: to eat "kimchi" with chopsticks, to bow respectfully, to set the table Korean style, to find my way out of the Metro among the eight possible exits.... It's all a great adventure!

We arrived in Korea in time for the snowiest winter in a century. For some of us, it's the first time we've seen snow. We've learned how to unblock the washing machine when the pipes freeze. And how loudly we laughed when a sweater that had been put outside to dry ended up frozen like cardboard: a true work of art!

SOLVING A PUZZLE

Korea is a land of religious diversity, where it's common to talk about topics of faith. It's wonderful to see

people who are sincerely seeking the truth. In a short time a sizeable group of women has begun attending the classes we give on Catholic doctrine. They take note of points of special interest to pass along to their families and friends. One woman told me: "Faith is like a big puzzle that I'm finally starting to figure out."

Some of these women are beginning to appreciate the spirit of Opus Dei—offering up their work and doing it for love of God. For example, a voice teacher told me that even before hearing of the Work she had already discovered that teaching singing to her students could be a path to God. She had "understood" Opus Dei without having met it.

A few days ago I spoke with a student of English literature while on the bus to the university. When I explained to her that an hour of study well done is, as St. Josemaría taught, an

hour of prayer, her eyes opened wide and she kept repeating: "Chincha? Chincha?" (which means, Really? Is that so?)

We go often to Seoul, the capital, where some women have begun helping out in various ways in the Christian activities the Work is organizing, and who attend the means of formation. In December we had a retreat that some of them attended with their friends.

On our way to Korea we stopped in Hong Kong. There I met one of the first three women who brought the Work to the Philippines. Among other things, she told us: "You'll see that God is the one who will do it all." And that's already becoming a reality!

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