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"Where God Wants Us": Creating Unity of Life (II)

The second part of a two-part article on the importance of attaining unity between our daily lives and the truths of the faith.

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God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil 2:13), St Paul wrote to the Philippians. It is our Lord who unifies our life. We come from Him

and are going towards Him, and He accompanies us very closely on our earthly pilgrimage *per agrum*, through the great field of the world (cf. *Mt* 13:38). Our Lord Jesus Christ is “*via et veritas et vita*”: *the way, the truth and the life* (*Jn* 14:6). St Augustine explains that He is truth and life because He is God, and He is the way because He is man.[1] This reality fills us with peace. In our life, the way is sometimes smooth, but it can also be challenging and hard going. However, it is never very far from the goal, because the goal itself is already present *in spe*, in hope, at every step. “He himself,” St Thomas Aquinas says, “is at once both the way and the goal. In his human nature He is the way, and in his divine nature He is the goal.”[2]

By his Incarnation, the Word of God “himself traversed the desert of our humanity and, passing beyond death, He rose from the dead and now

draws all humanity with Himself towards God. Jesus is no longer confined to a particular place and time. His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, flows forth from Him, enters our hearts and thus joins us to Him, and with Him to the Father – to the God who is one and three.”[3]

Unity of life is the raising up of what is human to the supernatural order, so that what is divine is incarnated in what is human. Hence “if we accept the responsibility of being children of God, we will realise that God wants us to be very human. The price of living as Christians is not that of ceasing to be human or of abandoning the effort to acquire those virtues which some have, even without knowing Christ. The price paid for each Christian is the redeeming Blood of Our Lord, and he, I insist, wants us to be both very human and very divine, struggling each day to imitate him who is

perfectus Deus, perfectus homo – perfect God and perfect Man.”[4]

If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you “give me a drink,” you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water (Jn 4:10). Our Lord shows the Samaritan woman his humanity in his thirst, and his divinity in his promise of living water. Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, replies the woman, who is beginning to realise that the man talking to her is not just another Galilean. The Samaritan woman’s self-sufficient attitude of thinking she can do as she chooses with her life, is transformed into an eager request for God’s gift. Only God can quench our heart’s thirst. We can never reach God on our own, but only through the Holy Spirit who brings Christ to life in us.

Being where God wants us to be

“These great horizons of our Christian vocation, this unity of life built on the presence of God our Father, can and ought to be a daily reality.”[5] In the first years of the Work, St Josemaria would often advise people “to often call to mind God’s presence, when speaking with a specific person, in general conversations, and always.”[6] And he encouraged a young student in a letter written in 1931: “Forward, then, in the presence of God. It is very good to acquire the habit of referring everything to Him and thanking Him for everything.”[7]

Along with the conviction that “God is always near us,”[8] to fulfil our duties in ordinary life we need the humility to be in our place, where God has put us. We each need to be in our place, perhaps going unnoticed, doing the job expected of us. Continuity, perseverance and

obedience mould us into strong, mature people.

With his own experience of God's call to found the Work "in spite of himself," St Josemaría insisted on the need to be humble enough to want to serve others, with no other ambition than to follow the promptings of grace. In contrast, he described the way certain clerics were always wanting to move around, a desire very different from the true self-giving of the religious life that is so necessary for the life of the Church: "Such is my horror of anything that smacks of human ambition, however irreproachable, that if God in his mercy has wanted to use me, a sinner, to found the Work, it has been in spite of myself. You know how averse I have always been to the efforts of some people – when not based on very supernatural reasons, which the Church judges – to create new foundations. It seemed, and

seems, to me that there were far too many foundations and founders. I thought there was a risk of a ‘mania’ for founding new things, which led people to create unnecessary things for purposes I considered ridiculous. I thought, maybe with a lack of charity, that on some occasions the purpose was the least important thing – that what such people really wanted was to create something new and be called a founder.”[9]

Consistency in daily life

Vocation gives us a horizon and at the same time marks out a sure path, built up throughout life, day after day. At the start we didn’t know what our Lord would ask of us, but we want to always say yes, renewing the self-giving of the first day, when we gave everything for love and forever, *for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable (Rom 11:29)*. The vocation, the seed God has placed in

our hearts, needs to grow in order to give light and warmth to many souls and become a flourishing tree. This is a reality that encompasses all our being, all our life, and unifies it: giving it meaning, certainty, and harmony.

We need unity of life wherever God has placed us, among the people around us, and can't daydream about other activities that might detract from what we are and should be. St Paul invites the Thessalonians to work for their living, and to help others to do the same (cf. *2 Thess* 3:6-15). This consistency in our life ensures that, with prayer and by studying the teachings of the Church, we each fulfil our obligations: keeping an appointment even though a better option seems to arise, paying our bus fare when no-one is checking, paying just taxes....

To live like this is to live according to our Lord's command: *Let what you say be simply "Yes" or "No"; anything more than this comes from evil* (Mt 5:37). Christ teaches us a way of speaking, a Christian style of life that we put into practice when we live in God's presence, with a "respectful awareness of his presence, which all our assertions either witness to or mock." [10] This awareness of God's presence means never lying, even though at a given moment it could get us out of a difficulty; it means behaving well even when no-one can see us; it means not losing control of our temper when driving or playing sports, unlike those who consider it normal to become a different person at such times. The Second Vatican Council exhorted the baptised "to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit ... By the faith itself they are more obliged than ever to measure up to these

duties, each according to his proper vocation.”[11]

Being apostles

We have just lived in the Church a year of mercy, close to the Holy Father. Mercy not only shows God’s omnipotence, but also our faith in Him. Only on the basis of mercy can we build up “harmony between faith and life,”[12] as St James taught in his epistle: *if a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead (Jas 2:15-17).*

“Every day, my dear children, should witness our desire to fulfil the divine mission given to us by our Lord in his mercy. Our Lord’s heart is merciful, and He has pity on mankind and draws close to us. Our self-giving in the service of souls is a

manifestation of this mercy of our Lord, not only towards ourselves, but also towards the whole of mankind. For He has called us to seek holiness in ordinary life, each day; and to teach others (*providentes, non coactes, sed spontanee secundum Deum* (1 Pet 5:2) – prudently, without coercion; spontaneously, according to God's will) the path to holiness, each in their own place in the middle of the world.”[13]

Mercy leads us to want the best for others and hence to strengthen each person's human and Christian development, so that as far as possible they avoid the pitfalls that can ruin so many people's lives: drug addiction, divorce, abortion, euthanasia.... Moreover, supernatural optimism helps us to value the good in every soul, rather than dwelling on their defects. “I don't like to talk about bad people and good people. I don't divide

people into good and bad.”[14] This outlook stems from the love the Holy Spirit places in our souls.

Commenting on the *Mandatum Novum*, the New Commandment, St Josemaria told us: “You, my children, should obey it always, joyfully bearing the defects of the people you live with. Don’t behave like the dung beetle, which rolls a piece of dung into a ball with its legs and then carries it around the place. Behave like the bee, which goes from flower to flower seeking the goodness hidden within, and then turns it into the sweetest honey, a delicious food, which in our brothers and sisters is made manifest as the good aroma of holiness. In a word, love one another, love one another a lot!”[15]

We Christians are aware of having a mission: to transform the world for the glory of God. “Now is the time to unleash the creativity of mercy, to bring about new undertakings, the

fruit of grace. The Church today needs to tell of those ‘many other signs’ that Jesus worked, which ‘are not written’ (*Jn 20:30*), so that they too may be an eloquent expression of the fruitfulness of the love of Christ and of the community that draws its life from him.”[16] This apostolic zeal that unites us is not something external to us; St Josemaria “usually spoke not so much in terms of ‘doing apostolate,’ but rather of ‘being apostles.’”[17] And he used to add that the apostolate is “a permanent disposition of one’s soul ... a feature of one’s spirit that tends, by its very nature, to imbue every aspect of one’s life.”[18] Authentic apostolate cannot be reduced to a series of specific tasks, nor does it turn people into mere goals: it is the Love of God that fills our life with the awareness that each person has to follow their own calling and attain their full potential, through a free and cheerful self-giving.

Integral Christian Formation

In the Work formation is given with an integrated view of the Christian message, and hence helps us to attain a true unity of life in Christ, welcoming God's grace joyfully. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a good reference point for this unified vision. "The four parts are related one to another: the Christian mystery is the object of faith (first part); it is celebrated and communicated in liturgical actions (second part); it is present to enlighten and sustain the children of God in their actions (third part); it is the basis for our prayer, the privileged expression of which is the *Our Father*, and it represents the object of our supplication, our praise and our intercession (fourth part)."[19] Doctrine, liturgical life, spiritual life and moral life are inseparable. Jesus Christ is *via et veritas et vita* – the way, truth and life (Jn 14:6). Hence the truth not only

gives us light, but also spurs and guides us: it is nourishment (cf. *Ps* 23) and the doctrine of salvation.

God chose St Josemaría to found Opus Dei in the heart of the Church, [20] and there he embodied it with his life. The spirit of the Work, which belongs to God, now grows among his People through St Josemaría's sons and daughters. Hence our formation is imparted within this unified framework: Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition (the Fathers of the Church), the Church's Magisterium (especially the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the teachings of the Holy Father), liturgy (the Sacraments), prayer, and the lives of the saints. Also, by getting to know and meditating on St Josemaría's life and teachings, the formation that we receive helps us to connect together the various aspects of our faith and our vocation, and to understand and explain the spirit of

the Work in light of Sacred Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium. Thus its message is passed on in a clear and harmonious way, growing from the same “humus,” the same fertile soil in which St Josemaria “saw” and understood the Work.

Our formation is open, because it arises from our prayer and our daily life made up of struggles, accompanied by God’s grace, in a great variety of incidents and situations. “The Decalogue brings man’s religious and social life into unity.”[21] For example, “The chaste person maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love placed in him. This integrity ensures the unity of the person; it is opposed to any behaviour that would impair it. It tolerates neither a double life nor duplicity in speech.”[22] The same applies to the other virtues that make up Christian life. The whole of our Lady’s existence was marked by this

unity of life; at the foot of the Cross Mary repeated the same *fiat*, “let it be done,” as at the Annunciation.

The Work was born and is spreading to serve the Church and to help build it up. We want to make Christ present among men and women. Everything leads towards Jesus: in our work of evangelisation “it is Christ we must talk about, not ourselves.”[23] Thus we will bring people to Christ, sustained by our plan of life, the loving presence of our triune God. *He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing (Jn 15:5).*

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[1] Cf. St Augustine, *Sermo* 341, 1,1: PL 39, p. 1493.

[2] St Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on St John's Gospel* (ch. 14, lec. 21. Liturgy of the Hours, Saturday, 9th week in ordinary time.

[3] Pope Benedict XVI, Speech, 21 March 2009.

[4] St Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 75.

[5] St Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 11..

[6] St Josemaria, *Personal notes*, no. 1160, dated 16 March 1934, in González Gullón, *op. cit.*, p. 478.

[7] St Josemaria, Letter to Luis de Azua, dated 5 August 1931, quoted in González Gullón, *DYA: la Academia y Residencia en la historia del Opus Dei (1933-1939)*, 2016, p. 242.

[8] St Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 267.

[9] St Josemaria, *Letter*, 9 January 1932, no. 84.

[10] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2153.

[11] Vatican Council II, Enc. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43.

[12] St John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 26.

[13] St Josemaria, *Letter*, 24 March 1930, no. 1.

[14] St Josemaria, *Instruction*, 8 December 1941, no. 35.

[15] St Josemaria, *While He Spoke to us on the Way*, p. 291.

[16] Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et Misera*, 20 November 2016, no. 18.

[17] “Trabajo, santificación del,” in *Diccionario de san Josemaría*, 2013, p. 1206.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 1202.

[19] St John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum*, promulgating the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 11 December 1992.

[20] Cf. Collect of the Mass of St Josemaría.

[21] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2069.

[22] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2338.

[23] *Christ is Passing By*, no. 163.