

# **Vao and Pilar: With God, Every Difficulty Can Be Overcome**

“It hit me like a bucket of cold water,” Vao confides. Her daughter Pilar was born with Down Syndrome. And later on her young son drowned in the pool. “But each day I give thanks to God and know my life is worthwhile,” she says with a serene smile.

05/05/2021

Vao lives in Lisbon and has a degree in public relations. She always dreamed of forming a happy family. But her dreams seemed to be crumbling when her first daughter, Pilar, was born with Down Syndrome. The difficulties at first were daunting: trying to raise a daughter with developmental challenges, finding a suitable school, and helping Pilar with great naturalness to form good friendships.

The family never flinched before the difficulties. With other parents, Vao helped begin a course of higher education in the Santarem Polytechnic Institute for Pilar and other students with Trisomy 21, so they can study for a university degree.

“It wasn’t easy to set up,” Vao says, “but with a lot of prayer and help from heaven we managed it.” Even

so, she is still concerned about the future, above all when she and her husband are no longer there.

Today Pilar is the pride of the family, and is now finishing her studies at the Polytechnic Institute. In the video above she imparts a message of hope for all the people with Down Syndrome.

Vao finds the strength to confront the painful situations in her life and to try to make sense of them through her faith in God. “Each little event in our life,” she says, “even all the painful ones and the uncertainties, why can’t they be a path of sanctification for me and my family? If I didn’t have faith, it would be very different.”

Vao is a supernumerary of Opus Dei. Her family has suffered a lot. Probably the worst moment was when their 3-year-old son Lourenco drowned in the pool. “I remember

that I immediately went with my other children to a small oratory in a center of the Work and we asked God for strength to accept all this, and to continue on. Because when a child dies, the mother also somehow dies.”

---

pdf | document generated  
automatically from [https://opusdei.org/  
en/article/vao-and-pilar-with-god-every-  
difficult-can-be-overcome/](https://opusdei.org/en/article/vao-and-pilar-with-god-every-difficult-can-be-overcome/) (02/04/2026)