

FAMILY LIFE IN THE WORK

1. The family is a community whose members are united by love. The unity among the members of a family, and all the more so if they are children of God through baptism, manifests the unity of God, their Creator. “The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.”¹

Relations of paternity, filiation and fraternity characterize the human family and the Church, which is the “the house of God in which dwells his family”.² God the Father loves all human beings because they are called to be children in his only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. For their part, human beings participate in the paternity of God, *the Father, from whom every family is named*.³ They do so by cooperating in bodily human generation, the soul being infused directly by God, in spiritual regeneration, as well as in the education of children. In the community of the baptized, the common father is the Pope, to whom is given the title “Holy Father”. He exercises the power of sanctifying, governing and teaching, through his loving service of everyone.

If we look at the child-parent relationship from the point of view of the child, something similar may be said to occur, in that each human being is a child of God for having been loved, created and saved by God. At the same time, each human being is a child of its parents, being the fruit of their human love. He or she is also a child of our Mother, the Church, in which we have been regenerated.

Having been baptized in Jesus Christ, who is *the firstborn among many brethren*,⁴ all Christians are brothers of one another, members of the same Church. Christ prayed for them all to live in union with one another: *That they may all be one, even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us*.⁵

2. Opus Dei is a family Christ’s Church. Right from Opus Dei’s foundation, on the 2nd October 1928, there was established a reciprocal relationship of fatherhood (a fatherhood which St Josemaría lived, and after his death, his successors have also lived) and filiation, along with fraternity among the members of the Work.

The faithful of Opus Dei, in words of the Founder, belong to *a family bound by supernatural ties*.⁶ These ties or bonds of supernatural fraternity are derived from the fact that all the members of the Work have received the very same Christian vocation (to be saints in Opus Dei) and the very same Christian mission (to do Opus Dei in their lives), in the Church. In the Work, the words of Jesus Christ are fulfilled, words that apply to the whole Church: *“Here are my mother and my brethren! For everyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.”*⁷

St Josemaría frequently explained that the model for family life in Opus Dei should be

¹ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 2205.

² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dog. Const. *Lumen gentium*, 6.

³ *Eph* 3:15.

⁴ *Rom* 8:29.

⁵ *Jn* 17:21.

⁶ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Letter 29 September 1957*, 76, quoted in P. RODRIGUEZ-F. OCARIZ-J.L. ILLANES`, *Opus Dei in the Church*, p. 296.

⁷ *Mt* 12:49.50.

sought in the Holy Family of Nazareth. So much did he love to imagine the close, personal relationships that Jesus, Mary and Joseph had with one another, that he used to say to his spiritual sons and daughters: *We belong to that family.*⁸

3. The awareness of his being the Father in Opus Dei was present to St Josemaría from its very foundation, and it became tangible in his life when God began to send men and women to the Work. And the same thing happened to the faithful of Opus Dei as they came to understand the meaning of paternity, filiation and fraternity through their relationship with their Founder and among themselves.

In this sense, right from the beginning of the history of the Work, certain outstanding aspects which have been maintained as key factors shaping its family spirit can be seen:

- In the places of formation of the faithful of Opus Dei, such as the Centres, or conference centres, an effort is made for there to be a tabernacle as soon as possible, so that Jesus Christ – truly present in the Eucharist – may be the centre and axis around which family life revolves;
- St Josemaría found it necessary to gather his sons and daughters, so as to form them in the spirit of Opus Dei, and particularly in family life. For this reason, as well as for other reasons of an apostolic nature, he quickly established a Centre of Opus Dei, followed by others, in the measure of the growth of apostolic activities. In this sense, the Centres of Opus Dei are places of formation imbued with the climate of a Christian family, which is lived by the members in accordance with their circumstances.
- As the fruit of his prayer and personal experience, St Josemaría understood that his own natural family would have to play an active role in shaping the spirit of Opus Dei. It would do so by impressing upon the Work the homely warmth and atmosphere of the family hearth. So the family lifestyle of the Escrivás – his mother, Doña Dolores, his sister Carmen and brother Santiago – spilled over into the family life of the members of the Work. The first members of Opus Dei, not only the men, but also the women, were able to learn from the *Grandmother* and *Aunt Carmen* how to exercise many Christian virtues, beginning with the true affection and joy that are shown in a thousand details of daily concern for the others;
- As is the case in any family, all the members of Opus Dei try to “make a family”, to make a contribution to family life. In a particular way, the dedication of some women Numeraries and Assistant Numeraries who work in the domestic service of the Centres of Opus Dei, shapes family life.

4. Unity in Opus Dei has its origin in a single vocational path to becoming identified with Jesus Christ through love. It is manifested in the Communion of Saints, in the eagerness for holiness and apostolate which the faithful of the Work try to live together with the Father and among themselves, and in constant union with the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops. At the same time, the variety of members of the Prelature, Numeraries, Associates and Supernumeraries, and the fact that only some live in centres of the Work for reasons of apostolate, formation and governance, not only does not make difficult what is proper to the way that family life is lived in Opus Dei, but rather expresses it. St Josemaría used to explain that each of the faithful of Opus Dei had received the very same calling to bring the warmth of the charity of Jesus Christ to the environment in which their family life developed, both in the Centres of the Work, and also in each one’s natural family.

Each of the faithful of the Prelature contributes to unity by being part of the same body. At the same time, this task is particularly incumbent upon those who have been entrusted with tasks of formation, such as Directors, Coordinators of groups of Associates and of Supernumeraries, and priests.

⁸ ST JOSEMARÍA, quoted in ANDRES VAZQUEZ, *Como en las manos de Dios: matrimonio y familia en las enseñanzas de Josemaría Escrivá*, Palabra, p. 342.

5. “The relationships within the family bring an affinity of feelings, affections and interests, arising above all from the members’ respect for one another.”⁹ In the Church, in which Opus Dei has been born and develops, the supernatural virtue of charity is the foundation of true human affection. A tender love for the human and supernatural good of others has many facets. Without trying to be exhaustive, among the more important are the following:

- Prayer for the physical and spiritual health of the others. Praying is the first and best way of helping each person to be holy and happy. *Prayer is the foundation of any supernatural endeavour. With prayer we are all-powerful; without it, if we were to neglect it, we would accomplish nothing;*¹⁰
- Good example, often given in a quiet way, facing God.¹¹ Example expresses a spirit of service that God always rewards: the person who tries to make life pleasant for others through “a sincere gift of himself”¹² receives a full dose of joy and peace from the Holy Spirit;
- Saint Josemaría considered sick people the treasure of the Work. The joyful acceptance of their pain puts sick people into a particularly close union with the Passion of our Lord, and their prayer has great value before God. The sick people are remembered in a heartfelt way; prayer is offered for them and everything possible is done so that they may be calm and contented, well looked after spiritually and materially. St Josemaría expressed it graphically when he said: *At a pinch, we would rob a little piece of Heaven for them and our Lord would let us off;*¹³
- Refinement in mutual dealings. As happens in any good family, in Opus Dei each person feels loved and is treated in keeping with their character, age and personal traits. Refinement goes beyond good manners, and good taste in dressing and speaking. It shows through in simple and friendly behaviour towards everyone, which at the same time avoids any kind of unnatural affectation. St Josemaría always pointed out that when one truly loves God, there is no need to be afraid of loving one another very much, with human and supernatural affection and without familiarities. In this sense, particular care is taken in showing respect for the elderly, behaviour which is so often praised by God in Sacred Scripture.
- Seeking to be with people during meals, at times of rest and in conversation. Get-togethers are family gatherings where each one’s daily experiences and anecdotes are related in a natural way. A pleasant get-together affords to others moments of rest and allows those attending to commend to God matters spoken about.
- Feast days, such as liturgical celebrations of the Church, public holidays or particular anniversaries and birthdays, are celebrated in keeping with their importance.

6. The Centres and residences express the spirit and life of Opus Dei. They are Christian homes, where people can breathe in *the good aroma of Christ*,¹⁴ the efforts of ordinary men and women to be saints.

The centres of Opus Dei are set up as any Christian family of the place would be. This feature reflects the secular and lay nature of the spirit of Opus Dei. St Josemaría used to say: *The homes of Opus Dei are welcoming and clean, never luxurious, although they do have that modicum of well-being which is essential to serving God, to practising Christian virtues, to being in a fit state for working and to developing personalities in a calm, non-disruptive and dignified way. Our houses have the simplicity of the home of Nazareth, which saw the*

⁹ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 2206.

¹⁰ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Friends of God*, 238.

¹¹ Cf. ST JOSEMARÍA, *The Way*, 795.

¹² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 24.

¹³ ST JOSEMARÍA, quoted in M. A. MONGE, *San Josemaría y los enfermos. Sus enseñanzas sobre el dolor, los enfermos y el trabajo de los profesionales de la salud*, Palabra, p. 111.

¹⁴ 2 Cor 2:15.

*unfolding of the hidden life of Jesus and the human and divine warmth of the home of Bethany, which our Lord sanctified, seeking in it, as he did, true friendship, closeness to others and understanding.*¹⁵

There are many details of care underlying any Christian home: cleanliness; attractive presentation of meals; orderliness; and small repairs. Due attention to material things, such as closing a door without slamming it, airing a room, arranging work instruments, is a concrete way ‘to materialise’ the spiritual life.¹⁶ In this way, as St Josemaría put it: *Each of our houses will be the home which I saw, the home I want – that God wants! – there to be in every place where we live. That way each of your brothers and sisters will feel a holy hunger to get home, after the day’s work; and will then be eager to go out again, to this holy war, this war of peace.*¹⁷

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¹⁵ ST JOSEMARÍA, quoted in S. BERNAL, *Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá, A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, Scepter, 1976.

¹⁶ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Conversations*, 114.

¹⁷ ST JOSEMARÍA, Notes from a meditation, 29 March 1956, quoted in A. SASTRE, *Tiempo de caminar*, Rialp, p. 183.