

“It is worthwhile!” (IV): From Generation to Generation

The Lord thwarts the plans of nations and frustrates the designs of peoples (Ps 33:10). This verse from the psalmist could seem a bit harsh to us at first. But if we pay attention, this psalm is referring to the fragility of what is built without God, with its foundations “set on sand” (cf. *Mt 7:26*). Therefore the psalmist continues: *The plan of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart from generation to generation (Ps 33:11).* Sacred Scripture reminds us in many ways of the weakness of what is merely human, however strong it may seem, compared with the immense solidity of what God initiates in history, despite its apparent fragility. And Opus Dei is precisely one of the plans in God’s heart that, over time, unfolds from generation to generation.

With the freshness of 2 October 1928

If we had to sum up in a single sentence the great “plan” in God’s heart that is Opus Dei, we could probably do so with those words of Jesus that resonated in the heart of Saint Josemaría on 7 August 1931: *and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself (Jn 12:32).* In reality, this plan of God is much older than the Work. It is a plan that has been unfolding for more than two thousand years, which explains the reason for the life of the entire Church; a plan to which men and women of all races, languages, times and conditions are convoked to form a single people. Nevertheless, on 2 October 1928, God wanted to give a new impetus to this plan, creating a new family in the heart of his Church. This is how Saint Josemaría summed up what he intuited at that moment: “so that in every place in the world there will be Christians with a dedication that is personal and totally free – Christians who will be other Christs.”¹

The Work is very young compared to the Church and to so many institutions that have risen up throughout its history. Even so, as we approach its first centenary, and perceive how historical circumstances have changed with respect to when its founding took place, it is only logical that we ask ourselves how we can continue being faithful to that divine charism. “The centenary will be a time of reflection on our identity, our history and our mission,”² the Prelate of Opus Dei wrote. The endeavor to reflect, under the Church’s protection, on this need to be ever more faithful fills us with peace. The Holy Spirit has helped make his Church a faithful people amid so many vicissitudes in history, encouraging it so it never loses its freshness and fruitfulness. Hence it is precisely deep in the heart of the Church that we will be able to transmit Opus Dei to future generations, “with the same vigor and freshness of spirit that our Father had on 2 October 1928.”³ Contributing to this faithful continuity is also part of our own journey.

¹ Cf. Andres Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 1, p. 287.

² Fernando Ocariz, Letter, 10 June 2021.

³ Fernando Ocariz, Pastoral Letter 19 March 2022, no. 12.

In order to be a militia, caring for the family

Saint Josemaría frequently used the double expression “family and militia” to describe the intimate nature of the new reality God had asked him to found. Therefore this faithful continuity has a lot to do with ensuring that this description still holds true, with keeping these two “lungs” well oxygenated. Remembering that the Work has been willed by God as a family will help us, first of all, to keep in mind that the ties uniting us are not primarily the result of our free choice, but of the acceptance of a gift received, just as we do not choose our parents or siblings. The importance of affinities of character, age, etc. is secondary: this isn’t decisive when it comes to offering our affection. That is why Don Javier, Saint Josemaría’s second successor, so often repeated: “May you love one another.” It is an invitation to rediscover the life of our brothers or sisters, to not exclude anyone from our friendship.

This family character of Opus Dei also has, right from the beginning, two fundamental traits that we could summarize as follows: we are a *home* and we have the same *family atmosphere*. The home is the space that allows for intimacy and growth in a pleasant atmosphere of mutual appreciation. Hence the importance of the work of the Administration in the centers of Opus Dei (which Saint Josemaría called the “apostolate of apostolates”) for ensuring faithful continuity, and the need for each one’s effort to “create a home.”

At the same time, as happens in all homes, we also have our own family atmosphere that is unique and recognizable everywhere, but that also reflects all the variety of the countries where the Work is present. This atmosphere is marked by secularity (we are Christians in the middle of the world, just like the others), by the refinement of those who value good manners in their daily interactions, and by our own history. The customs and traditions of our family life, which link us with our origin, help us to realize that we are part of something that transcends us; they give us the key to find our right place in the world: not as isolated individuals, but as members of a family. Moreover, the centers of Opus Dei have always been homes open to all who wish to take part in the activities offered there. “They should be places where many people find sincere love and learn to be true friends.”⁴

On the other hand, remembering that Opus Dei is a militia means understanding our life in the same terms as that of Jesus. Just as “it is impossible to separate Christ as the God-Man from his role as Redeemer,”⁵ so we Christians cannot understand the apostolate as a mere external activity. Rather it constitutes our very life: “We do not do apostolate, we are apostles.”⁶ In this sense, Pope Francis has stressed that “the new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in

⁴ Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 1 November 2019, no. 6.

⁵ Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 122.

⁶ Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 14 February 2017, no. 9.

evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love.”⁷ The Work has been and is a militia because it exists to bring the happiness of living close to God to all men and women.

From being dazzled to being in love

The first chapter of *The Forge* contains many reflections of Saint Josemaría on the topic of vocation. This chapter is entitled “Dazzled” because a call from God, when it is authentic, brings with it an astonishing broadening of one’s horizons, a revelation of God’s very personal love for each one. The luminous center of this dazzling light can only be Jesus, who is the one who calls us and whom we respond to. Nevertheless, we have all experienced how Christ makes use of the attraction exercised by Christians to make Himself known: the Church shares in his dazzling beauty (cf. *Eph* 5:27). Hence, Christ’s call to follow Him in Opus Dei goes hand in hand with being dazzled by the life of this family: in one way or another, we have all sensed that this was “our right place” to live close to God.

If we consider our vocation to Opus Dei in light of the analogous experience of human love, we can find some guidance for our path. In love between spouses, the passage of time enables one to progress from *infatuation* to *love*. This is a deepening in love in which a certain enthusiasm can wane, and the weaknesses of the loved one are seen more clearly. But it is precisely this grounding in truth, this contact with reality, that allows true love to arise. It is a love in which one is capable of giving oneself to someone who is not perfect, with the conviction that he or she is the person who gives meaning to one’s life. In this progress, both will find ever more reasons to love one another, and their life together takes on a solidity it didn’t have at first. But if, instead, they allow themselves to be overcome by lukewarmness and disenchantment, their love will recede; the necessary advance from infatuation to love won’t take place. Lukewarmness, in its root, is a disease of the will, which seems unable to function once the initial enthusiasm has passed. Disenchantment, on the other hand, is a defect of the intellect, which is incapable of adequately accepting one’s own imperfection and that of others. Hence these are two enemies that need to be unmasked in order to live with our heart in love throughout our whole life.

We will realize, in first place, that “being dazzled” by the Work, as a path of union with Jesus, is a sign of vocation that cannot be dispensed with in the work of discernment. And we will come to see the positive value of advancing from this initial “dazzlement” to a more serene consideration of reality, to a deeper, more mature view of ourselves and others. Finally, we will be able to “read” our own life in that of our brothers and sisters “who have preceded us on the path and who have left us a precious testimony of that *worthwhile* life.”⁸

⁷ Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 120.

⁸ Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 19 Mach 2022, no. 5.

Increasing the inheritance

Most families seek to leave an inheritance, often a material one, to the next generation. In fact, throughout history the act of disinheriting a child has been considered one of the most devastating punishments a parent can inflict. At the same time, the desire to increase the inheritance received is also characteristic of the family, in order to pass it on, in an improved condition, to successive generations. Over the years, the men and women who join Opus Dei receive an inheritance that has been “increased” by those who preceded them. Thus the spirit that God gave to Saint Josemaría is an essential inheritance that we in the Work can never allow to “depreciate,” to which have been added specific ways of living our spirit suited to each time period, as well as some corporate works of apostolate, fruit of the magnanimity of those who have preceded us. The task of each generation is to pass on the spirit of the Work alive and brimming with fruit, taking on the accidental specifications suited to each epoch, and renewing the impulse required by the various corporate apostolic works.

This endeavor to increase the inheritance of Opus Dei requires, first of all, a diligent personal effort to form ourselves in the spirit of the Work and to delve ever deeper into the life of Saint Josemaría, aware that he was the transmitter of a divine charism. It is the works of God that produce lasting fruit, and not human undertakings, no matter how impressive they may seem at first sight. Therefore, it will be increasingly important for us to deepen our understanding of what God wanted on October 2nd, 1928.

Secondly, we need to incorporate in our own life a conviction of Saint Josemaría that will help us “to be Opus Dei” in our own day and setting: the radical “modernity” of the Gospel, and of the spirit of the Work, with respect to contemporary cultures, since it is the first that gives life to whatever is of value in the latter. Thus what is truly new – the Gospel, read in the light of the charism of Opus Dei – will shed light on the shadows of some contemporary cultural manifestations, apparently modern, that actually stem from the confusion and lies of sin. This requires distinguishing with wisdom and care what belongs to the spirit from what is a specification that can change, and that has indeed changed over time. In this area, the Pope encourages all Christians not to take refuge in saying that “it has always been done this way,” because this attitude “kills freedom, kills joy, kills fidelity to the Holy Spirit who always spurs us forward, leading the Church forward.”⁹

Saint Josemaría summed up the perennial novelty of the spirit of the Work in a pithy phrase: it is “as old as the Gospel and like the Gospel new.”¹⁰ The serene awareness of this modernity guides us towards a free and responsible apostolate, which adapts to each one “like a glove to the hand,” in order to bring the Gospel to our world. “Christ especially loves those who seek to have

⁹ Francis, Homily, 8 May 2017.

¹⁰ Saint Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 24.

the life that He has wanted and preached,” the founder wrote. “And Opus Dei, without rigid accidental norms, so as not to hinder with outdated provisions the adaptability of the Work to each age, creates an organization of well-educated and consistent Catholics, marked by unity, peace and charity, who are prepared to act in society.”¹¹

Finally, increasing the inheritance of Opus Dei also requires – God and the Work are counting on it – the creativity needed, when appropriate, to revitalize existing works of apostolate, and to give rise to so many new ones, of very different types. Institutional fidelity will sometimes lead us to strive to maintain works that others started, giving them the vigor that each epoch requires. Improving what others started is a sign of maturity in those who are part of an institution that advances in time.

A fatherhood that continues

Although some voices in the current cultural debate have postulated the “death of the father” as a requirement for the emancipation of mankind, the consequences of this proposal are visible to all: people find themselves ever more alone, and therefore ever more vulnerable. What was meant to lead to freedom has led to a deeper slavery. For the father is not, in the family, an obstacle to freedom, but rather an essential element for the family itself to exist and fulfill its mission: enabling us to love, offering us a safe place to grow up in a healthy way.

In Opus Dei, the fatherhood entrusted to our Father continues in the figure of his successors. This fatherhood reminds us that we are beloved children of the Heavenly Father, encourages our love for God and others, sustains us in fidelity to God’s inspirations and to the family inheritance – the spirit of the Work – that everyone is called to care for. The fact that it is ultimately the responsibility of the Prelate of Opus Dei, along with the Councils that help him in his task of government, to discern what belongs to the spirit of the Work and what is changeable,¹² is not simply the result of criteria regarding institutional organization. Rather it stems from the family nature of Opus Dei within the Church. Fatherhood in the Work is, therefore, one more proof of God’s mercy towards us; it is a sign that “heaven is determined that it be carried out.”¹³

“When I think about the Work I am left ‘dumbfounded.’”¹⁴ These words of Saint Josemaría do not reflect the passing emotion of an adolescent love, incapable of perceiving difficulties, and that annuls the ability to improve. Rather, they reflect the living love of one who allows God’s grace to work in his heart, year after year. To be links in this chain, in the history that began in 1928, we need a heart like this.

¹¹ Saint Josemaría, *Instruction on the Work of Saint Gabriel*, no. 14.

¹² Cf. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 19 March 2022, no. 11.

¹³ Saint Josemaría, *Instruction*, 19 March 1934, no. 47.

¹⁴ Cf. Bishop Javier Echevarría, Pastoral Letter, August 2014.