



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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A shared life

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Our life, whether considered in its purely natural aspect or in its supernaturally oriented spiritual dimension, that is, particularly our Christian life, is by definition a shared life.

I think we need to be reminded of this fundamental truth about ourselves, since there are now many tricky factors around us that tend to undermine this important character of our life. They make us think our life is just our own.

In fact, I would say that we need to develop the skills not only to protect and keep this property of our life, but also to continually reinforce and enhance it. That's because our life is always a dynamic affair, with new challenges and changing circumstances.

We cannot remain naïve and think that our life more or less would just automatically be a shared life. Some people say so, because they claim we cannot avoid sharing our life with others.

To a certain extent, that assertion is true. But neither can we be blind to the fact that we and the world in general have ways, often subtle and deceptive, that effectively annul this shared characteristic of our life.

We can appear to share our life with others, but in the end, we actually are maneuvering things so they play to our own advantage, if not nourish our own selfishness.

This is not to mention that there are now a good number of people who openly think our life is not a shared life. They even have developed philosophies and ideologies that praise and adore the “goodness” of greed, egoism and practical isolationism.

But first, let's clarify why our life is a shared life.

Firstly, because that's how we are made, how we have been hard-wired. That we have intelligence and will, that we have feelings, memory, imagination, etc., can only show we are meant to be with others, we are meant to go out of our own world. They are not there just for our own private enjoyment.

But more importantly, especially for those with Christian faith, it's because God created us that way. We are the image and likeness of God, elevated through grace to be nothing less than children of his.

And since God is love, is self-giving, we therefore cannot be other than that—that is, we are meant to love also and to give ourselves to others. Thus, God's commandments to us always exhort us to love, first Him, and then everybody else.

We actually are sharers of God's divine life. Of course, with the misuse of our freedom, we can lose that most sublime privilege. But there is no doubt, through faith, that we are meant to share in God's life.

Our sharing in God's life takes a very dramatic turn with the Son of God becoming man, Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate on Christmas.

The Incarnation, God becoming man, means that in Jesus Christ, God enters into our own life, assumes everything that is human except sin, such that what is His is also ours, and what is ours is also His.

The Catechism expresses this truth in this way: "Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us...the Son of God has in a certain way united himself with each man..." (521)

This means that we don't have to look far to find Christ. Even the most ordinary thing in our life has Christ in the middle of it. St. Josemaria Escriva described this well when he said:

"Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it."

It's this teaching that has recovered the often neglected truth that holiness, especially for the ordinary believers immersed in earthly affairs, can be achieved by everyone as it is meant to be.

The lay believers should not feel like second-rate citizens in the Church, inferior to the priests and religious. Everyone is on the same footing insofar as the duty to be holy is concerned.

Christ shares our life, and our life cannot be any other than a life shared with Christ, and through Christ, with everybody else.

The crucial thing to remember though is that we have to develop that shared life according to Christ's will, not the reverse. Whatever situation we find ourselves in, Christ always has something to say, and we have to follow it.

That's why he said, we have to love one another as He has loved us.

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