



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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## The Paradise of those in Love

*Marta Brancatisano*

Marta Brancatisano, writer, develops a few ideas of Saint Josemaria about marriage and love of God in "The paradise of those in love," an article published in *L'Osservatore Romano*. "The teachings of Josemaria Escriva - explains - are an invitation to rediscover love in its entirety, as a complete and vital human experience that involves the entire person."

If every saint has a distinctive feature, I think that the most remarkable characteristic of Josemaria Escriva's personality would be "the need to spread a message" which is reflected in his life and teachings. His mission consisted in communicating a message - that holiness is for everyone and that this holiness can be found in the midst of worldly activities. He explained this by making it understandable and accessible to those who wished to follow it. As a result of this, his teachings are communicative and not merely comprised of a series of systematic rules. For this reason, he used all types of media: letters, conversations, trips and even film, thanks to which we still have a lively image of him.

In relation to marriage, for example, his theological wisdom is not enclosed in books of an encyclopedic nature. On the contrary, his writings appear in the form of homilies, interviews and documented memories of countless individuals who had the privilege of knowing him. I also, personally had this privilege.

When referring to a married man, Josemaria Escriva would say, "your way to heaven is your wife." A simple sentence like this one was frequently directed towards young married couples and parents. Although it might seem romantic in tone, there is a depth and newness that needs further reflection. With this affirmation, Josemaria Escriva goes beyond the idea that the responsibilities in marriage are not related to one's responsibilities towards God. These words permit further understanding of the systematic relationship between God and married individuals, in the sense that it is impossible to make a hypothesis that a

full Christian life is out of reach in married life. Therefore, a parallelism can be seen in God and the spouse: both expect their partner to live in marriage.

This outlook deepens one's understanding of marriage, of human love and of the transmission of life. New norms are not needed but rather a new spirit of living and understanding the value of marriage. It endows each spouse with personal responsibility, as each one is called to be an actor in an irreplaceable drama in God's providential plan. It means bringing forth a cell of love and life in which the face of the Creator may be reflected.

To consider marriage as a primary and fundamental relationship, and at the same time, as a way to unite us with God, also helps to comprehend the meaning of virginity, marked by Christ as a privileged condition in the plan of salvation. Matrimony enlightens the significance of virginity, and vice versa. Far from opposing the "sacred" love of God, human love is the bridge, the way that naturally leads us to God. By taking a mortal leap over the ontological structure, virginity is also a love song of a human being that finds love by embracing God directly.

Referring to women, Josemaria Escriva made the following observation, "You are psychologists, and that is why it is your fault when things do not go well." Initially, this remark might seem difficult to accept, however, this deliberate paradox underlines the special position that women hold in the dynamics of a relationship. Similarly, John Paul II in his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988) gave an anthropological and scientific explanation of the importance of the woman.

With a deeper understanding of the psychological abilities of women, Josemaria Escriva tries to identify an ontological connection between God, the Creator and the woman. She is the creature that holds within herself another human being (man and son). She feels and knows of this reality within herself. She is intimately related with the other because she has him in her arms. She works with her own life in a very direct and natural way.

Unfortunately, the woman of our times has tried to cancel out this aspect of her being, with a denial which is more psychological than real. She frequently relates to men in a typically masculine manner, with a cold aggressive attitude. Within a personal relationship, her refusal of maternity is reflected in her refusal of men.

In this context, the words of this new saint resound as an authentic challenge to women. By acknowledging the true feminine condition, women are invited to delve deeper into the true meaning of femininity. In this way, they are not carrying out a

private endeavor, but rather a task of true universal interest.

Josemaria Escriva frequently asked married couples: "Do you love your wife? Do you love your husband? Do you also love their defects?" He seems to tease affectionately and ironically. But behind these questions lies a profoundly anthropological consideration which reveals the greatness of a couples' relationship in the salvation economy. It also shows that mutual help is a primary dimension of a human being's existence and relation with others.

When feelings are the only ingredient for love, it would be very easy and in many ways "justifiable" in this present era, to regard love as something beautiful only when this beauty lasts. It would also be very easy to consider something to be good only when it is gratifying, and to see it disposable when it does not. When love becomes "difficult", it is therefore not love and can be changed. However, in relation to Creation and Redemption, the human being is not something that can be thrown away because the Creator loves this being as his son or daughter.

To continuously and truly live this love does not depend on luck, but rather it means acknowledging that the love of another is sometimes difficult and it is necessary to accept this willingly. It is as if Josemaria Escriva's words were a natural reflection of the difficulties that arise: "Now, I definitely love you, now that you are ugly and grouchy, now that hurt me, now that you leave me alone...." It is as if these words help us to decipher in some way the true identity of the mystery of love.

Love is feeling and sentiment, but it is also involves reason; it is instinct but also fortitude; it is an immense joy, even in the midst of pain. The teachings of Josemaria Escriva are an invitation to rediscover the entire complexity of love, as a complete and vital human experience that involves the whole person.

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