



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

[Home](#) - [Documentation](#) - [Accounts](#) - [The Sanctity of Human Love](#)

The Sanctity of Human Love

Salvador Bernal

The Founder of Opus Dei taught people all over the world to love the family. At a time when sanctity seemed to have become more or less the preserve of the religious and priests, God made use of him to make many married couples see that married life is a true path to sanctity on earth.

Juan Caldés Lizana met him during a retreat in September 1948. He wrote later, “A marvellous world was opened to me when I contemplated matrimony (a great Sacrament) as a real vocation, a new divine way on earth.” It was an utterly novel panorama: everyone called to the same sanctity, the plenitude of Christian life; the family, a **bright and cheerful home**, and an appropriate starting point from which to **turn the prose of every day into heroic verse**; parents, **sowers of peace and joy**, and children, “**my crown and my joy**”. This last phrase was the one that the founder of Opus Dei wrote on the back of a photograph of Juan’s ten children. The ideas which Juan heard in 1948 marked a deep innovation in the role of the laity in the Church.

Saint Josemaría urged each and every person, whether single, engaged, married, or priest, to explore the depths of love, warning them against the great temptation of selfishness, which rendered the problems created by that very passion insoluble. He encouraged them to flee from sensuality because, as he often repeated, sensuality cuts back the wings of love, and debases the great ideals of which the human heart is capable.

He taught young people what he had written in *The Way* and what he repeated in other words in 1974 to a large group of young men in Sao Paulo, Brazil: **I pray to Saint Raphael the Archangel that, as with Tobias, he may lead those of you who are to form a family, to find a good and clean love on earth. I bless this earthly love of yours, and I bless your future home. And I ask John the Apostle, who fell so deeply in love with Jesus Christ and who was courageous at the foot of Christ’s Cross - the only man: the others fled - when the Redeemer was conquering and seemed conquered; I ask that**

young but strong disciple, to help you, if Our Lord is asking more of you.

A few days earlier, also in Sao Paulo, he encouraged married people, as he had always done throughout his life, to take the affection of courtship as a model for their own love: **Love one another very much. The love of Christian spouses - especially if they are children of God in Opus Dei - is like good wine. It improves with time, and appreciates in value... Well, your love is far more important than the best wine in the world. It is a splendid treasure that Our Lord has wished to grant you. Keep it carefully. Don't throw it away! Look after it!**

Human love was his point of departure for helping others understand the sanctifying treasure buried in the thousand details of daily life which a soul in love knows how to unearth. It is not surprising, therefore, that in explaining the meaning of marriage, he stressed aspects which might appear trivial.

A conversation which took place in Sao Paulo reflects exactly the tone with which Msgr. Escrivá used to address all who were called to sanctify their married life. It was a very lively dialogue and practically impossible to reproduce in writing. The woman who was asking the questions was so moved that her emotion once or twice got the better of her. The first interruption came from the Founder of Opus Dei, when he heard her saying that she was twenty-three years married and had five children...

Really? You can't be telling the truth! Twenty-three years! So young and so pretty!

She had asked how she could maintain and increase in her daily life the enthusiasm of the early days of her marriage.

Sit down, my daughter, sit down. You will be... How do you say sweetheart in Portuguese?

Namorada, they answered him.

... enamoured for ever, always. You have to win over your husband each day, and he you.

(...) You will be able to do this if you see your husband as he really is: a great part of your heart, all your heart! If you bear in mind that he belongs to you and you to him; if you remember that you have an obligation to make

him happy, to share in his joys and his sorrows, his sickness and his health...

And Msgr. Escrivá, as if addressing all the wives who were in the packed hall of the Palace of Conventions in the Anhembi Park, Sao Paulo, continued:

You know more than anyone in the world, because love is most wise. When your husband comes back from work, from his job, from his professional tasks, don't let him find you in a temper. Do yourself up, look pretty, and, as the years go by, decorate the facade even more, as they do with old buildings. He'll be so grateful to you! Very often, when he's been annoyed at work, he will have thought about God and about you, and he will have said: "I'll be going home, and... what a relief! There I will find a haven of peace, of happiness, of affection and beauty." For in his eyes there is nothing in the world more beautiful than you. (...) The day he comes in tired, and you notice it, or foresee it, you remember that dish he so likes: "That's what I'll prepare for him." And you don't tell him, so as not to make him feel embarrassed. You give him a surprise, and he looks at you with such affection... And that's the way! That's the way!

Msgr. Escrivá helped parents understand that their mutual affection is strengthened by the sorrows and difficulties of life. This is what he had to say to the editor of the Spanish women's magazine *Telva* in February 1968:

Anyone who thinks that love ends when the worries and difficulties that life brings with it begin, has a poor idea of marriage, which is a Sacrament and an ideal and a vocation. It is precisely then that love grows strong. Torrents of worries and difficulties are incapable of drowning true love, because people who sacrifice themselves generously together are brought closer by their sacrifice. As Scripture says, *aquae multae* - a host of difficulties, physical and moral - *non potuerunt extinguere caritatem* (Cant. 8:7) - cannot extinguish love.

***Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, Salvador Bernal, Dublin: Veritas, 1977, pp. 47-53.**