

Learning to Build a Family Atmosphere

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Lynda Maree O'Farrell was born in Kurri Kurri, New South Wales, Australia. She obtained her Tourism and Hospitality Management Diploma at Kenvale College in Sydney. She has since exercised her profession in institutions such as the Kenthurst Study Centre and the Warrane Household Administration (Australia).

1. INTRODUCTION

I first came into contact with the teachings of Blessed Josemaría during the three years in which I studied Tourism and Hospitality Management at Kenvale College in Sydney, Australia, a college which owes its inspiration to Blessed Josemaría. It was at Kenvale that I discovered that we can become saints through ordinary work, well done, and offered to God.

As Blessed Josemaría wrote, “work is not just a matter of fulfilling a duty — it is love, to excel oneself gladly in duty and in sacrifice”¹. This consideration alone helped me to realise that there is more to work than just a job that has to be done; it helped me to see that one has to put one’s heart into one’s work and do it with affection. I discovered that when one begins to do one’s work with love — for others, and above all for God — rather than merely for the sake of getting it done, it becomes much easier to work well.

2. PROFESSIONALISM

More than through the things that I read or heard, I learned what the teachings of Blessed Josemaría on work really meant through the example that I

¹ *Furrow*, 527.

saw in the way that the people at Kenvale carried out their work. At first, I thought it was all a bit exaggerated. What difference does it make — I asked myself — if you do not mop the floor at the end of the day, especially when you are already running into overtime? But gradually I came to discover that when one works for a higher motive, and makes the effort to think about other people, to take care of little things, to do extra details, to finish things off to the end, and the like, work in general becomes easier to do, and such things no longer seem exaggerated.

Blessed Josemaría had a great love for the work of the home and it was thanks to him that I learned the importance of my profession — hospitality. He insisted that those of us who carry out these tasks have to have a holy pride in serving the others, and in paying attention to the little things that can make such a difference². Such considerations allowed me to see my profession in a new light. My work was not just a matter of providing services; it meant creating a home.

3. CREATING A HOME

After I left Kenvale, I spent a number of years working in the catering department of a conference centre called Kenthurst, which hosts activities organised by faithful of Opus Dei. Over the years, guests have commented that although they had enjoyed the same types of service, with the same level of professionalism in similar establishments, they had noticed something different at Kenthurst; they had felt the warmth of a home. Little things such as the decorative flower arrangements, the extra details on special occasions, and the neatness and cleanliness of the house, all attested to the fact that the house was taken care of with affection. A visitor did not feel like he or she was *just* another person there. As Blessed Josemaría said, people should be able to tell that we have done our work with love, for the love of God and for love of them, and this in turn will bring them closer to God³.

For my part, by trying to work in the way that Blessed Josemaría taught, I discovered the difference between merely providing a ‘service for a customer’ and making someone feel at home, making a person feel that someone cared for them *personally*. I realized as Blessed Josemaría said, that I could not act as if I were simply “fulfilling a duty”. I learned that exercising my profession means working with the heart of a mother, who is able to discover the needs of each person.

² *Conversations*, 109.

³ Cfr. *Christ is passing by*, 128, 166.

When I first entered the Hospitality industry, I already knew that if I wanted to succeed and to advance in my career, I had to work well. Many of the ideas that Blessed Josemaría taught about my profession were new for me and they made me begin to see a more ‘fundamental’ reason for doing my job well.

Now I still try to maintain a high level of professionalism in my work, but at the same time I also put my heart into it, trying to be genuinely concerned about each person I serve. Putting my heart into my work does not impede me from striving for professionalism. Rather, it encourages me to keep improving so as not to lower the standard, because my sanctity and that of others is at stake.

4. A FAMILY ATMOSPHERE AS A SCHOOL OF LEARNING

The teachings of Blessed Josemaría also helped me to come to another important discovery, which is that without a family atmosphere, there is no ‘home’. It is in the family that human and Christian values are formed. It is in the family that we learn to give ourselves to others without counting the cost and to think about other people. If people are educated well at home — and this is a process which continues beyond the childhood years — this will inevitably affect society. Our working environment also needs to have a family atmosphere, a sense of human refinement in carrying out our tasks and in dealing with others. I also see the particular importance of my profession in this field.

I believe that those of us who work in the hospitality industry, including those who work in the home, can and should contribute to forming the people whom we serve with our personal example and with our work. As Blessed Josemaría said, those who work in this field “are an influence for good, not only in their family, but also among their many friends and acquaintances, among people with whom they come in contact, in one way or another [...] they teach others to run a home, and become educators who are more effective, I would say, than many university professors”⁴. With this influence, those we serve may in their turn begin to improve the quality of their own work and consequently raise the tone of society. It is from this perspective that I can see that, in my own way, I am contributing to creating a more Christian and therefore more human society.

⁴ *Conversations*, 88.