

In a Security Agency

Ray Santos

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My name is Ray Santos, and I am a full-blooded Filipino. But my name is a combination of English and Spanish. 'Ray' means 'a beam of light' in English, and 'Santos' means 'Saints' in Spanish. My name is just an ordinary Filipino name, but I discovered the real meaning of my name when I got to know the message of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, the Founder of Opus Dei. Let me explain as I proceed.

I am married to a wonderful wife and blessed with one lovely daughter. I have spent most of my life working as a security guard for various security agencies in the Philippines for medium and large scale companies. To give an idea of how far the salary of a security guard can go, based on the conditions of my country, I cannot even afford to rent a small room, so I have no choice but to stay in a 30 square meter house in a 'squatter area' in the heart of Metro Manila. My monthly salary is just enough to cover the daily food, minimum clothing and basic education needed for a decent standard of living. Most of my neighbors do not even have regular jobs. If they do have jobs, they cannot be considered 'noble' to say the least. More than thirty per cent of our population lives below the poverty line. Our squatter neighborhood is just one of a hundred similar places in various parts of Metro Manila. Those who have visited our country know that squatters and street children are a common site.

My first encounter with Opus Dei was when I worked in a big multinational company, which produces wires and cables. The President happened to be in Opus Dei. His surname is also Santos. His dream was that his employees could get to know the message and teachings of Blessed Josemaría. For this to happen, the company offered as part of its corporate-wide human resource

development program, classes of Christian formation, retreats and seminars. In fact, it was considered at that time to be one of the best benefit packages offered by a company in the Philippines.

To increase my income, I also needed to work as security guard/driver for the officers and employees attending these seminars. Mr. Santos, the President, trusted me enough to let me work as the security guard/driver not because we have the same surname, but rather because he noticed the way I worked and he was proud of me, another hardworking Santos in the company.

By simply attending and listening to some of these talks, classes and retreats, I started to see my life in a new light. My name Ray, which means 'beam of light', started to mean something new. I realized that I had to start changing my way of dealing with my fellow security guards, my neighbors and especially my wife. At the start, they were a bit surprised. The first lesson I learned is that Opus Dei is not simply for the rich and for managers, as some say, but for everyone.

The first thing I had to forego was too much drinking. Well, I could still drink, but only a little with my fellow security guards, and not just anywhere. Second, I had to remember that an 'idle mind is a devil's playground', so I had to find ways of making good use of my time and living in the presence of God when on duty as a security guard. Third, instead of habitually going home early in the morning, I started to go home early in the evening. I realized that I needed to help in the household chores, even though I am the breadwinner of the family, and that I should be the one fetching water from the common neighborhood pump and not my wife. I saw that I should help my wife wash clothes. And most especially, I realized that I had to make up in my marital life by loving my wife to the full. We had been separated for one year due to intense and frequent quarrels. Now I have to make up for lost time.

To struggle to live as a Christian in the environment where I come from is not easy. It took me some time to overcome myself. I needed extra strength, so I started to seriously follow a certain plan of life fit to my job as security guard. For example, I would attend daily mass during my lunch break or when a reliever was available, offer the rosary for all the people I was guarding as I roamed around the 4.5 hectare company property, and call on Blessed Josemaría during hold-ups or robberies so that everyone would be safe.

I was promoted to be the Supervisor of the Security Guards not because I had the same surname of the President, but rather because of my dedication and performance. I had an edge over the other security guards because of the influence on my life of the teachings of Blessed Josemaría, and the help I received to put it into practice. This has been one of the greatest gifts I have received from God in my life. Now I realize that I have to be true to my surname *Santos*. Ray Santos acquired a new dimension in his life when he discovered that: "Opus Dei

was born to help those Christians, who through their family, their friendships, their ordinary work, their aspirations form part of the very texture of civil society, to understand that their life, just as it is, can be an opportunity for meeting Christ: that is a way of holiness and apostolate. Christ is present in any honest human activity”¹. And most especially, I am a living proof in the Philippines that the message of Opus Dei is also for the poor and blue-collar workers.

Eventually, my former company closed down its Manila plant to transfer to a province of Tarlac, 150 kilometers away from the city, as part of its streamlining plans. After that, I accepted a job as take-charge guy of one of the biggest construction barracks in Metro Manila. Now I have to deal with 600 all-male construction workers, masons, carpenters, security guards, laborers, steel men and helpers. The families of these workers are located in far flung areas. These people all too often spend part of their meager income drinking wine and entertaining themselves in beerhouses and even sometimes getting themselves involved with prostitutes. Those who care for their families would rather stay in the barracks doing nothing at all.

Now, I am the only one trying to live in accordance with my Christian vocation in a hostile environment. I have to do my part to ‘re-christianize’ the environment despite the odds. I have been inspired by the words of the Blessed Josemaría: “Lay people have their own way of contributing to the holiness and apostolate of the Church. They do so by their free and responsible action within the temporal sphere, to which they bring the leaven of Christianity”². I also give classes of Christian doctrine and organize Sunday Mass. I love to organize sports and fund-raising activities, and credit cooperatives for the sick, injured and financially needy employees. So far, the results have been positive. I was again promoted. God rewards the laborers in his field.

For me, coming to Italy to speak at this Congress has been another of God’s rewards. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever even think of going outside of my country. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think of having the chance to share the stories of my life with such a wonderful audience. It really pays to be a ‘Santos’, struggling to be a saint in the middle of the world. God takes care of the rest.

¹ *Conversations*, 60.

² *Ibidem*, 59.