

The woman who shared Christ

simply by being a friend

Guadalupe Ortiz de Landazuri, one of the first members of Opus Dei, would reflect: We have a good time with one another, since God wants us to be happy. One Sunday in early 1944, returning home from Mass, on a tram platform, Guadalupe Ortiz, a young chemistry teacher, ran into a close friend, Jesus Serrano de Pablo. Guadalupe opened her heart and told him she was looking for someone, a priest, with whom she could talk.

Her friend recommended that she speak with Father Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei. Father Josemaria is now a canonized saint, and soon, on May 18, Guadalupe herself will be beatified in Madrid.

Guadalupe would always remember how a conversation with a friend led to events that were so decisive for her life:

Through an acquaintance with whom I was united by friendship and mutual trust, Jesus Serrano de Pablo, to whom I spoke about my desire of having a spiritual director, I made contact by phone and went to the address that I was given in order to meet Father Josemaria Escriva, about whom I knew, at that point, absolutely nothing. And of course I knew nothing then about the existence of Opus Dei. That interview was a turning point in my life.

A simple question from one friend to another while waiting for a tram, followed by an exchange of telephone numbers and a phone call. That marked the beginning of a life-long journey that would take the 27-year-old chemistry teacher far from her home – to Bilbao, to Mexico, to Rome, and back to Madrid – and, lead, after her death in 1975, to her beatification, which will take place in May of this year. Thus began a vocation; thus a life was permanently transformed.

So it has always been. That simple scene on a tram platform in Madrid during World War II has something of the air of the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, where, in the space of just 10 verses, we witness how the news about Jesus Christ spread quite naturally among friends, acquaintances and colleagues: Andrew and John, who are colleagues in a fishing business on the lake of Galilee, meet Jesus, and Andrew tells his brother Peter that he must meet him too. Soon John's older brother James will also join them. Then Philip, who happens to be from the hometown of Peter and Andrew, runs into his friend Nathanael and tells him about Jesus, inviting him to "come and see" the one whom Moses wrote about. The encounter with Jesus and the apostles'

discovery of their vocation take place in this context of ordinary relationships of family, friendship and work.

Friendship played an important role not just in the beginning of Guadalupe's vocation but also in the way she lived it over the course of her life. It was inseparable from her vocation to be a saint and an apostle in Opus Dei. A few years after she joined Opus Dei, she moved to Bilbao where, in 1949, having recently arrived in the city, she got to know a young woman named Rosario Orbeagozo during a walking tour of the Basque capital that had been arranged by Rosario's brother. This little excursion led to a friendship, and before long Rosario, captivated by Guadalupe's naturalness and joy, decided that she wanted to share in her life as a member of Opus Dei. She would be the first woman there to join Opus Dei.

The same phenomenon can be seen in the life of the early Christians. One of the very first Christian writings in Latin, the dialogue *Octavius*, by Minucius Felix, written in the late 2nd century, tells the story of an excursion taken by three friends – two Christians and one pagan, all lawyers working in the forum – during the grape-harvest vacation in Rome. The three stroll along the Tiber River until they reach the Mediterranean Sea, and there on the beach in Ostia, watching children skipping stones on the waves, the friends discuss the Christian faith in a lively debate. By the end of the excursion, the one who is a pagan has decided that he wants to share the faith of his friends. There on a holiday at the beach his life had changed forever.

Guadalupe's capacity for friendship was not restricted to colleagues or professional acquaintances. Indeed, it seemed to know no bounds. After she had moved to Mexico in 1950, Guadalupe met the poet Ernestina de Champourcin, who, in exile from Franco's Spain, was living there with her husband, also a poet, who had been the personal secretary of Manuel Azana, the president of the Republic during the Spanish Civil War.

Guadalupe's father, Manuel, had been a colonel in the army and had participated in the uprising against the Republic which began the Spanish Civil War in July of 1936. After being arrested by the Republican government, he was executed in September of the same year. Despite the painful political and personal history that they shared, the two women became close friends, and Ernestina eventually decided to join Opus Dei.

The sharing of the faith – by word and by example – is an inevitable consequence of a Christian's union with Jesus Christ and friendship with others. What begins as friendship with Jesus – "I have called you friends," He told his disciples at the Last Supper – expands naturally to include more and more people. Describing this dynamic, St. John the Evangelist writes in his first

letter, “Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ,” and therefore “what we have seen and heard we also proclaim to you so you too may be in fellowship with us.”